FINDING JUSTICE IN THE ME-TOO ERA

Falsely accused Navy SEAL Keith Barry spent 2½ years in prison

Rise of neo-paganism
Venezuela on the brink
Harvard young-earther
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— Ginger & Tony, Samaritan members since 2014

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*ON THE COVER: Photo by Greg Schneider/Genesis*
Notes from the CEO

Very soon, WORLD Members should be receiving in the mail a request to support the World Journalism Institute (WJI). Donations from WORLD Members have provided nearly all of the funding for WJI since its inception more than 20 years ago.

Please be looking for that request. I hope you’ll give it serious consideration.

When I first came to WORLD, I sometimes wondered why subscribers to a news magazine would contribute to a journalism training program that didn’t directly benefit the magazine.

Here are two things I learned:

First, of course, I discovered that WJI does directly benefit WORLD Magazine as well as WORLD Digital and WORLD Radio. Since WJI launched, at least a dozen graduates have come to work full-time for WORLD, and many more have helped us out through short-term internships.

So even though most of WJI’s alumni currently work in non-WORLD newsrooms, WJI has provided WORLD with some of our best reporters and editors over the years.

The second thing I learned is that WORLD members get behind solid journalism from a Biblical perspective regardless of where it’s published, viewed, or heard. WJI has placed young Christian reporters in over 250 newsrooms, thanks to the enduring support of WORLD’s members.

I initially was surprised by that second finding, but I shouldn’t have been. WORLD’s mission encourages Biblically objective journalism wherever it can make space for itself. And WORLD Members have been supporting that broad mission, and the specific mission of WJI, for much longer than I’ve been around.

The WJI funding appeal you’ll be receiving in the mail contains more information about some of the Institute’s programs and new initiatives. You can also learn more about WJI, and donate online at worldji.com (and worldji.com/donate to make an online contribution).
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It may have been only 20 weeks since Election Day, but we’re already hard at it again. So may I remind you, as I have before in this space, of a lesson that seems hard for us to learn: Government isn’t the problem.

You’d never know it from the way we allocate our time, our energy, and our dollars. “I can’t remember,” I’ve already heard a variety of folks say with all sincerity, “when there has ever been a more important election.” They’re talking, believe it or not, about 2020.

But in fact, our government—big and influential as it may be—is not so much a shaper of its people as it is shaped by those people. Two other players in the culture of American society do much more to influence our citizens’ thinking. They are the mainstream media and the massive educational establishments.

I mean “media” in the big sense—including both information and entertainment. There’s almost no such thing as a straight news program on TV anymore; if TV news isn’t also vividly entertaining, it doesn’t last. The same influences affect the print media as well—probably including WORLD. We print people are also scrambling to compete for your attention. Information, by itself, just doesn’t cut it anymore.

And I mean “education” in the big sense. Certainly that includes government education on the preschool, elementary, secondary, university, and graduate levels—a 22-year monopoly, from age 3 to 25, on the thinking of at least 75 percent of all citizens. But even when private education steps in with a substitute, it is typically private education of the sort offered by the nation’s Stanfords, Dukes, and Notre Dames—an ideological substitute that really isn’t any different. And sadly, even much of what goes by the name of Christian education is little more than warmed-over secularism.

So structurally, the deck is stacked. Coming into any election cycle, the mind-shapers are all wearing pretty much the same uniform. We should hardly be surprised then when we also find a monolithic ideological worldview stamped all over the system’s products. As numerous and diverse as all those media and educational forces may seem, on almost all the basic issues of life, they speak with a common point of view. For example, in our nation’s media and educational establishment:

> Naturalism almost always trumps supernaturalism. Darwinism’s dominance over the last century hasn’t ultimately had to do only with science. Darwinism’s true impact has been on everything else. For if God isn’t the Creator of all that exists—if He isn’t the first mover—then He really doesn’t matter much. Now He can be marginalized. That is the implicit assumption of the media and the educational establishment throughout our society.

> The “out-of-adjustment” explanation always trumps the “sin” explanation. No behaviors anymore (with the exceptions, of course, of intolerance and hate crimes) are always and positively wrong. When something does seem out of kilter with society’s norms, it’s probably traceable to a bad childhood or some other kind of maladjustment. But even then, the problem is seen as minor. For if we saw our problems to be major, then we would need major outside help. And just as we resist the idea of an outside first mover, our pride forces us to resist the idea of an outside helper.

> Pluralism always trumps truth. If you can fudge the truth about origins and pull off a huge cover-up on the nature of what’s gone wrong since then, probably it won’t matter much if you start questioning the essence of truth itself. So it’s part and parcel of today’s media and educational scene to argue strenuously that no one has a corner on the truth. For Jesus to claim, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” is too arrogant and exclusivist for today’s mindset.

Indeed, so pervasive has such thinking been within the media and educational establishments that you might consider it a miracle that anyone takes even minor exception to such non-Christian assertions.

Soon, we’ll be exploring whether a few new faces in Washington and several state capitals might make a difference. It’s a good exercise. But the people who want to monopolize your mind are pretty much everywhere.
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Our major political parties are like cracker boxes covered with as many endorsements as the shirts of NASCAR drivers. Democrats claim to be non-GMO and gluten-free. Republicans claim to be nutrient-dense and filled with protein. But both parties have “tells” like the ones poker players discern. Since some WORLD readers think I’ve been tough on President Trump, I’ll focus on two Democratic “tells” of the past two weeks.

Tell #1 comes via Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., who has served in the House of Representatives since 1992 and now chairs its Judiciary Committee. He once displayed 338 pounds on his 5-foot-4 frame, but stomach surgery lost him half of the poundage. He’s apparently trying to make up for lost weight by ordering 81 individuals to produce tons of documents for potential use in Trump impeachment proceedings.

The committee’s ranking Republican, Doug Collins of Georgia, said Nadler’s demand runs “afoul of nearly 150 years of Supreme Court precedent and over 200 years of oversight conducted by this committee.” That’s true concerning Judiciary, but Congress for four decades had a
committee with procedures that Nadler seems to be imitating.

The name of that committee became infamous among liberals: the House Un-American Activities Committee. HUAC’s famous question was: “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” Many Democrats didn’t like that, since in the 1930s and ’40s some of them had agitated alongside those further to the left. In 1959 former President Harry S. Truman called HUAC the “most un-American thing in the country today.”

A decade later HUAC investigated the farcical left-wing group known as the yippies. Its co-leader, Jerry Rubin, once testified while dressed as a Revolutionary War soldier, but he mixed his metaphors by blowing massive gum bubbles while his colleagues offered Nazi salutes. At other times Rubin appeared before HUAC in a Viet Cong flag shirt and a Santa Claus costume.

The House finally killed HUAC in 1975. Now, though, Nadler is acting like former HUAC chairmen Martin Dies and Parnell Thomas. That’s Tell #1: The liberal complaint was and is not so much about HUAC’s search-and-destroy style but about who the searchers were and what they destroyed. Hint to Republicans forced to testify: Rent the uniforms of 1776 from a costume store and pass out copies of the Declaration of Independence.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue state: Tell #2 comes through new Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn. She matched the tons of free publicity handed to another newbie, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-NY, by issuing anti-Semitic remarks such as “It’s all about the Benjamins baby.” (Translation: Jewish-Americans only care about $100 bills.)

Nancy Pelosi and other House Democrats knew Omar’s crude comments were a problem, so their wordsmiths developed a resolution that started out condemning anti-Semitism, but mutated into a vague pro-harmony, anti-hate declaration with just about every group thrown in, including Pacific Islanders. The only thing missing was a declaration that “we love our grand old flag.”

Politico Magazine then profiled Omar and quoted her criticism of not only Trump but his predecessors, apparently including Barack Obama: Trump’s “policies are bad, but many of the people who came before him also had really bad policies. They just were more polished than he was, [but] we don’t want anyone to get away with murder because they are polished. We want to recognize the actual policies that are behind the pretty face and the smile.”

Here’s a 30-second timeout for some free instruction in journalism. WORLD trains its young reporters to stay low on the “ladder of abstraction” by emphasizing human interest and specific detail rather than grand theoretical concepts. Say “he drove a gray 2015 Ford Fiesta,” not “he drove an automobile” or “he arrived via locomotion.” Say “third-trimester baby,” not “fetus” or “product of conception.” Report at street level, not suite level.

By that common journalistic goal, Politico should not have merely quoted Omar speechifying about those who “struggle with our broken infrastructure, they struggle with having an economy that brings them into the 21st
century." Politico should have pushed for specifics: If Omar was talking about roads, was she saying we should fill potholes? By bringing us into modern times, was she saying we should all tweet more? That’s Tell #2: Not only the Democratic Party but its media allies are slouching toward socialism. Don’t expect liberal reporters to ask hard questions about the new Democratic radicalism.

Well, I’m trying to enter the 21st century. During the 14 days that concluded on March 12 I tweeted the good, the bad, and the odd. On the good side, a teenager saved for two years to buy his friend an electric wheelchair. Also, when a student at Morehouse College couldn’t find a baby sitter for his 5-month-old daughter, he brought her to his algebra class. Professor Nathan Alexander offered to hold little Assata so the student could take notes. Alexander (who should be nicknamed the Great) taught the rest of the class with Assata strapped to his chest.

On the bad side: For the past 15 years not only the feds but New Jersey, Illinois, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, California, and Delaware have all run deficits, using debt and deferred payments to spend beyond their means. The Socialist Party claims “Socialism will have no leaders or ruling class at all.” Tell that to Chinese Christians who now have bad “social credit” scores: They can’t travel via plane or train, but they get free tickets to prison.

Tweets about the odd: Girls younger than 17 can get an abortion without parental consent in some states, but they won’t be allowed to watch the pro-life movie Unplanned in theaters because movie czars gave it an R rating. And an Australian paraglider landed safely, only to face a kangaroo attack. Video included.

My possibly life-changing tweet was this: “If you’re a college student hoping to improve your journalism skills, the World Journalism Institute’s course in the last half of May will help. To learn more and apply, go to www.wji.world. Application deadline is MARCH 29.”

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

9.45 ounces

The birth weight of a tiny baby boy born in a Tokyo hospital last August and discharged in February. Now healthy, he is thought to be the smallest male baby ever successfully treated and sent home. (A few girls have been smaller.)

18,000

The reported number of new businesses opening every day in China last year, according to Bloomberg.

414,582

The number of Catholic priests in the world in 2017, according to the Vatican’s most recent figures. For the first time since 2010, the number was a decrease from the previous year.

6,227

The estimated number of pedestrians killed in traffic in the United States last year, the most since 1990.

116

The age of Kane Tanaka, a Japanese woman that Guinness World Records recognized in March as the world’s oldest living person.
On the second Sunday in March, as millions of Venezuelans were waking up to the fourth day of the biggest blackout in the nation’s history, Pastor Samuel Olson was thinking about morning worship at his Caracas church. “We hope to have one service,” he wrote in a text. “That will depend on the conditions.”

In a country already collapsing, conditions were dire.

A major malfunction at a massive hydroelectric dam in eastern Venezuela plunged the nation into darkness on March 7 and revealed the longtime decay of the nation’s power grid after years of neglect under Venezuela’s colossal economic and political crisis.

The blackout brought chaos: Without electricity, debit machines went down and cut off many Venezuelans from a critical form of financial transactions, since hard currency is worthless. Others wondered how to keep already-scarce food supplies from spoiling.

Physicians warned that dialysis patients would die if power wasn’t restored. A Caracas hospital without electricity or water turned away pregnant mothers in labor. In the city of Maracay, a physician told The Wall Street Journal hospital staff were taking turns using hand respirators for children on artificial respiration.

The country’s dictator, Nicolás Maduro, accused the United States of causing the power outage to force him out of office. In January, opposition leader Juan Guaidó took the oath of presidency, declaring Maduro’s power illegitimate after fraudulent elections last year. At least 50 nations—including the United States—have supported the constitutionally based move.

On Feb. 23, violent clashes erupted on the Colombian border, as Guaidó ordered an attempt to transport much-needed aid into Venezuela. In a bloody scene, Venezuelan forces and groups of armed civilians used rubber bullets and tear gas to repel aid trucks and thousands of demonstrators on two major bridges in the city of Cúcuta.

Meanwhile, a Colombian pastor from Cúcuta quietly delivered food and medicine to Venezuelan families living just across the border. (WORLD agreed to withhold the pastor’s name to protect him and the Venezuelans he helps.)

Hours before the violent clashes began, the pastor crossed the Simón Bolívar International Bridge into Venezuela with a few friends. Shortly after delivering relief supplies to families in need, the men heard gunshots. Villagers scattered, as civilians reportedly armed by the Venezuelan government shot into the air. The pastor and his friends sheltered in a stranger’s home. He says one of the men glanced out a window and saw an armed man shoot a passerby: “We were very scared.” (Multiple news agencies reported on armed militias firing guns in the border town.)

Authorities soon closed the bridge where clashes had begun unfolding, and the pastor and his friends hunkered down with an acquaintance in town for the next two days, waiting for the danger to abate: “We didn’t eat much because no one wants to take food from Venezuelans.”

On the third day, the men crossed back into Colombia, walking across the shallow river under the international bridge. (Many Venezuelans make a similar trek to try to cross into Colombia, despite the border closing.)

If the pastor was frightened, he also remained determined: On the morning we spoke, he was preparing to return to the border. A group of 10 Venezuelan ministers planned to cross the river and meet him on the Colombian side.

The pastor planned to give them small parcels of food and medicine to take back to families in Venezuela. “It is
dangerous,” he said. “But we must have faith for the small things.”

For Venezuelans who make it into Cúcuta, more help is available. Catholic agencies have organized soup kitchens and medical help, and the evangelical aid organization Samaritan’s Purse has provided meals, medical care, and temporary shelter to thousands crossing into Colombia since last fall.

About 18 miles outside of Cúcuta, Samaritan’s Purse operates another shelter for Venezuelans trekking by foot into the Colombian mountains or making their way toward other cities. Some migrants stop for a few hours. Some stay for the night. They can take a shower, receive toiletry kits, eat a hot meal, and hear a gospel-based message.

Far more Venezuelans remain in their home country, where Maduro has refused formal offers of outside aid, but local churches find ways to help their communities. Samuel Olson, the Caracas pastor, says his church has been able to distribute food supplies through the help of Christians from other countries: “This has been virtually indispensable for our survival.”

The church members have also focused since last year on providing food for a group of undernourished elementary school students and are tracking their grades to observe how proper nutrition correlates with academic gains.

Olson’s congregation, Las Acacias Evangelical Pentecostal Church, is the largest church in Caracas, but it still faces the same trials and tribulations as small congregations and communities around the country hoping the protracted crisis will ease.

“We will go through this trying time and come out the better for it, as His people, as a nation,” Olson wrote. “We must go through this trial.... Then we will come down from Moriah worshiping Him.”

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(1) A man carries supplies he bought in Colombia back to Venezuela. (2) People cross through the low waters near the Simón Bolívar International Bridge in Cúcuta, Colombia. (3) A charred truck that was part of a humanitarian aid convoy attempting to cross into Venezuela. (4) A view of the power outage in Caracas.
Grounded
Airlines and nations around the world are grounding the Boeing 737 Max 8 jet after the March 10 crash in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that killed all 157 people on board. Britain, Germany, Oman, Norwegian Air Shuttle, and South Korean Eastar Jet have joined airlines in China and Indonesia, Aeroméxico, Brazil’s Gol Airlines, India’s Jet Airways, and other countries and airlines in grounding the plane, with some citing worried customers as the reason for the action. U.S., Israeli, Kenyan, and other aviation experts are investigating the crash, led by Ethiopian authorities. Victims of the crash came from 35 countries and included dozens of humanitarian workers.

Ended
The state of Colorado and Masterpiece Cakeshop agreed to end the litigation over the bakery owner’s right to refuse service for certain events. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission had begun state administrative action against the shop and its owner, Jack Phillips, after Phillips refused to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. Phillips successfully appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but Phillips received another cake request to celebrate a gender transition. Phillips refused. The state commission filed a probable cause determination, and Phillips sued the state, claiming it was on a “crusade to crush” him. The commission and Phillips agreed on March 5 to end both cases. The Alliance Defending Freedom, which represented Phillips, said the dismissal came after they found proof the state is adverse toward religious freedom.

Challenged
A federal magistrate has agreed to lift part of Tampa, Fla.’s ban on conversion therapy for minors. The decision came after a Christian legal group, Liberty Counsel, challenged the ban in court, saying it infringes on the freedoms of speech and religion of Christian therapists and clients who wish to participate in such therapy. Liberty is representing two Christian therapists in the city. U.S. Magistrate Judge Amanda Arnold Sansone agreed with Liberty Counsel that the ban does endanger the free speech of these counselors and damages the right of minor clients to receive information. Sansone has permitted Liberty Counsel to move forward with their challenge to the constitutionality of Tampa’s ban.

Compelled
A Utah elementary teacher has apologized after forcing a student to wipe the Ash Wednesday cross off his forehead. Fourth-grader William McLeod had received the ash marking from a priest to begin the Lenten season. He told Fox News that he was the only student in his class wearing the cross and that he explained to other students that he did it because he is Catholic. Later in the day, McLeod’s teacher told him to clean the cross off. The boy attempted to explain and defend himself, but the teacher was firm. McLeod told his grandmother, who complained to the school. The two have received an apology from the Davis School District’s spokesman Chris Williams and the teacher.

Criminalized
Russia’s parliament is proposing new laws permitting the government to punish anyone who spreads fake news or insults government officials online. According to CNN, this means anyone who spreads “disrespect for society, the state, state symbols of the Russian Federation” could go to jail for up to 15 days. This includes any insults directed at President Vladimir Putin. Also, anyone who posts fake news, which the law defines as anything untested that could be dangerous to individuals, the public, or state infrastructure, could face fines of $45 to $75. For corporations, the fines can be up to $15,000. The new policies have not yet passed the presidential review and signature, and Russian citizens are rallying in protest.

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‘Say thank you to God.’
ANTONIS MAVROPOULOS, recounting what security staff told him after learning the flight he was supposed to be on, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, crashed. The accident killed all 157 people on board. Mavropoulos had arrived just after boarding closed and was the only passenger who didn’t make the flight. He said he had been angry about it: “I screamed to put me in but they didn’t allow it.”

‘We found strong evidence of impaired performance.’
NEIL MCLATCHIE of Lancaster University on a study he co-authored that found background music, even without lyrics, “significantly impaired” a person’s verbal creativity. The study found that “steady state” noise, such as background noise at a library, did not impair creativity.

‘There will not be a separate admissions system for the wealthy. And there will not be a separate criminal justice system either.’
U.S. Attorney ANDREW LELLING on indictments of more than 40 high-profile parents and coaches for cheating and bribery to get children into elite universities. Among those indicted were actresses Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin.

‘People underestimate human ability to be able to come together.’
Salem, Ala., resident SHANE SMITH on local volunteer efforts after the deadliest tornado in six years killed 23 people in southeast Alabama. “People always focus on the things that divide us,” Smith said. “But when it comes down to it, you see people at their finest in the midst of turmoil.”

‘It seems that the Chinese government is at war with faith. It’s a war they will not win.’
SAM BROWNBACK, U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, during a visit to Hong Kong, on China’s detention of an estimated 1 million Uighur Muslims and campaign against unregistered Christian churches.
**Field of vultures**

You can’t blame Alice Sthurghill for not liking the symbolism. The 80-year-old resident of DeSoto County, Miss., says that since January dozens of vultures have overrun her property. Feeling too uneasy to go outside, Sthurghill called sheriff’s deputies, but officers said they weren’t allowed to remove them because vultures are a protected species. “It looked like I was being invaded,” Sthurghill told WMC. “I felt like they would pick me up by my shirt and carry me away.” Sthurghill believes the scavenger birds are actually interested in a neighboring property where chickens and goats are raised.

**Going nuclear**

Neighbors of a Memphis, Tenn., teenager may want to order some lead smocks. According to an independent analysis, Jackson Oswalt has become the youngest American ever to construct a nuclear fusion reactor, and he did it at home. Jackson flipped the switch in his homemade lab in January 2018, just hours before his 13th birthday. The boy smashed two molecules of deuterium gas in his reactor and was able to coax the molecules to eject an electron. Just over a year later, Richard Hull, a 72-year-old retired electronics engineer and a verifier with the Open Source Fusor Research Consortium, was able to confirm that the experiment met the technical definition of a fusion reaction. Now 14, Jackson hopes to become a nuclear engineer someday.

**Graveyard politics**

Charles Lamb is headed to a runoff in the Edmond, Okla., mayoral race, but he won’t be actively campaigning for the job. Lamb, the incumbent, died suddenly in December at age 72—after he had filed the paperwork to challenge former Mayor Dan O’Neil. Despite his death, Lamb finished second in a three-man primary race on Feb. 12, qualifying him to participate in the April 2 general election. Spokesman Casey Moore explained that at the time of Lamb’s death, it was too late for the campaign to put forward another name. He’s urging voters in the city of nearly 90,000 to vote for Lamb so the City Council will be able to pick a successor.
Top of their classes

A school district in Wyoming is planning to operate two schools next year at a cost of $150,000. That may seem thrifty, except that each school will have exactly one student. The Albany County School District already operates one of the one-student schools, and it will open the second in the fall when a single kindergarten student begins classes at the Cozy Hollow School. The schools are not far apart, but roads in the area are impassible during winter months, making a combined two-student school impractical.

A case of mistaken identity

Back in April, Norwalk, Conn., police stopped driver Jason Stiber and ticketed him for violating a law against distracted driving. The alleged distraction: either a cell phone or a fast-food hash brown. Officer Shawn Wong Won testified at trial on Feb. 22 that Stiber was holding an illuminated cell phone in front of his face when he stopped the driver. But according to Stiber, the police officer confused his McDonald’s hash brown for his phone. Stiber has paid nearly $1,000 in legal fees to fight the $300 ticket.

Down the wrong pipe

A public utility in the United Kingdom has asked local residents to stop flushing food down toilets. Officials with Anglian Water located north of London posted pictures of a sewer drain clogged with Yorkshire pudding on Feb. 15. While working to clear a backed-up pipe in Ipswich, employees discovered someone had flushed enough of the popular doughy dinner to cause the clog. “Yorkshire puddings are for Sunday dinners, not sewer dinners,” an official tweeted. British water utilities have recently been working to train the public to use the nation’s Victorian-era drainpipes responsibly. In January, utility workers in Devon discovered a 210-foot “fatberg” composed of fats and wet wipes.

Rush to judgment

A Hawaiian man’s scheme to avoid his civic duty backfired when his temper tantrum led to him spending the night in jail. Authorities say Jacob Maldonado began yelling, “He is guilty, he is guilty,” outside a courtroom on Feb. 26 despite the fact he had been called to serve on a jury for an assault case. The judge, believing Maldonado was attempting to be dismissed from the case, cited the man with contempt of court, ordered him jailed, and set his bail at $10,000. The next morning, the judge allowed the man to go free without charges.

Bridge suspension

First baseball, then cycling, now the competitive bridge world. The World Bridge Federation suspended bridge world champion Geir Helgemo on March 1 after he tested positive for synthetic testosterone and a female fertility drug at a professional event in Orlando, Fla., in September. Helgemo, 49, was born in Norway but now competes on the world stage for Monaco. A spokesman for the Norwegian Bridge Federation defended Helgemo, claiming the drugs he tested positive for were not performance enhancing. Nevertheless, the WBF revoked his accomplishments in 2018 and banned him from competition for a year.
Us against ourselves
A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALIENATION

Alienated America, by Tim Carney, is the latest book (following Bowling Alone in 2000 and Coming Apart in 2013) about our culture’s loss of community bonds. That loss could be the endgame of one of the great conflicts in human history. The conflict has taken many forms: the one and the many (philosophical), the pluribus and the unam (political), the id and the other (psychological).

We need to be ourselves. We need to belong. We stage revolts to be free and then mourn our loneliness. We chafe at limits and drift aimlessly without them. At the most extreme, we create our own realities and go crazy.

“No man is an island,” wrote John Donne. “I am the master of my fate,” wrote William Henley. Who was right? Could it be both, or neither?

Ever since the Garden, when a man and woman decided to assert themselves, separation fell like a knife blade: first between the humans and God, then between man and woman, brother and brother, king and nation. Community existed because it had to; without family or tribe, an individual could not survive on the cursed ground. But never without conflict. The I has always pushed against them. Humanity can be oppressed, but only individuals can be alienated.

Self against tradition. The Protestant Reformation signaled a break with a thousand years of encrusted church doctrine and central authority, creating the greatest impulse toward individual freedom the world had known since Jesus declared, “The truth shall set you free.” The truth rediscovered by the Reformation set not only individuals free but entire cultures, leading to 1776 and another milestone of separation:

Self against absolute rule. George III was probably the least absolute ruler in Europe at the time, but restrictions set from 3,000 miles away chafed the Protestant-born, liberty-nurturing colonists beyond endurance. Individual freedom, the linchpin of their new nation, did not equal individualism, or not yet. The voluntary associations that impressed Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited in 1831 indicated mutual dependence in meeting individual goals. In Europe, another spirit was stirring, pitting...

Self against society. The Romanticism that forever changed music, art, and literature also led to revolutions against all that hindered free expression and personal choice. This was the age of new religions, free-love communes, and wildly romantic poets who died young—perhaps too impractical to last, leading to...

Self against family. The Industrial Revolution would eventually create wealth beyond the wildest dreams of Louis XIV, but not before taking fathers out of homes and villages and putting them in factories. Splitting families was not the aim of industrialization, but socialism answered the abuses of the machine age by taking huge chunks of responsibility from the family and giving it to the state. At first government only picked up the slack. But then it created the slack, as the sexual revolution pitted...

Self against the other. With the most intimate family relationship, the one that creates family in the first place, freed from responsibility, why feel an obligation to spouse or child—especially with personal happiness at stake? Abortion on demand followed logically on no-fault divorce; if legal bonds no longer held, bonds of blood were vulnerable too. Still, it wasn’t obvious that extreme liberty would lead to...

Self against self. But that’s where we are. What is transgenderism but individuals at war with themselves? And what is identity politics but retreating from the self in order to shelter in the group? An obsession with “identity” turns people into political causes, and false solidarity robs us all of what makes human personality so rich and varied and fascinating.

How far can alienation go? It could be that the widespread despair of people without hope and without God in the world will drive us back to a more tradition-based or rule-based culture. Back where we started, in other words—but what tradition? Whose rules?
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There’s a moment in *Captain Marvel* where the girl-power pandering is so over the top it makes the rest of the movie pointless.

Carol Danvers, aka “Vers,” finally discovers the full range of her superpowers and, to the never-so-subtle strains of Gwen Stefani’s “Just a Girl,” proceeds to pummel a battalion of alien bad guys single-handedly. Her abilities prove so dominant that she can seemingly do anything, be it fly to farthest reaches of space without protective gear or destroy intergalactic warheads with a single blow. Thus does the cause of female empowerment lay waste to old-fashioned storytelling notions like tension and surprise, otherwise known as... reasons for the audience to stay interested in what’s happening on the screen.

You almost wonder why Nick Fury bothered assembling all those other Avengers over the years. Why not just keep paging the one-woman wrecking crew?

Clumsily draped around this one-note moralizing is a backstory that’s equally sanctimonious and dull. Played by a wooden Brie Larson, our heroine starts out as a strong, valiant Kree warrior who keeps having flashbacks to another life on another planet. When the Kree’s ancient enemies, the Skrulls, take Vers captive and start digging around in her memories, Vers begins to realize she once had a different identity. It turns out, before becoming a tough-as-nails fighter pilot in outer space, she was a tough-as-nails fighter pilot on Earth. Thankfully, the experience teaches her the importance of being a woman who’s tough as nails.

Beyond Carol Danvers’ lack of even elementary-level depth or growth, *Captain Marvel* (rated PG-13 for sequences of sci-fi violence and action, and brief suggestive language) fails on basic plotting as well. Anyone who saw *Guardians of the Galaxy* is going to see the major twist
coming in the first few scenes. There is a bit of fun to be had once we enter Earth’s atmosphere, but this is in spite of the movie’s titular character, not because of her. We get a thrill seeing the early days of S.H.I.E.L.D., we get some laughs from seeing how Nick Fury lost that eye, and a Blockbuster Video cameo coupled with a few 1990s songs provides some pleasant nostalgia. Beyond that, the story is almost solely a hectoring reminder to hear women roar. Which would be a lot easier to do if not for the fact that every character in the film is able to upstage Carol on the personality meter, including the cat.

To be blunt, it’s insulting that Marvel felt simply making its first leading woman “one tough chick” would be enough to placate female fans. All the male Avengers’ origin stories feature character flaws, physical weaknesses, and romantic interests who complicate their missions. Captain Marvel has none of these things. It’s impossible not to compare her to DC’s leading lady, Wonder Woman, who proved so winsome, warm, and witty she alone breathed life into the flailing Justice League franchise.

Diana Prince’s Amazonian strength and agility, combined with her traditionally idealized feminine traits like innocence and beauty, create a nicely complex mix. Her chaste romance with self-sacrificing soldier Steve Trevor only compliments her loveliness. Over the course of the story, Steve helps her learn some hard lessons about her own naiveté that ultimately make both of their heroics more meaningful.

Captain Marvel, in contrast, has nothing to learn beyond discovering that even those supposed flaws some man-mentor kept yammering at her to restrain are really strengths. Every challenge she faces is because someone with an XY chromosome is trying to box her in. She overcomes them by throwing off her male-forged shackles. So Wonder Woman willingly leaves the Eden-like perfection of Themyscira to grapple with humanity’s capacity for evil and weigh whether their fallenness still makes them worthy of her sacrifices. Captain Marvel returns to Earth on a journey of self-actualization to struggle with the idea that she’s even more awesome than she thinks she is. Which one sounds like a real role model for girls?

Jane Austen wrote novels of manners providing a sketch of societal rules in the 19th century. In the new documentary Social Animals, coming soon to Netflix, teenager Humza Deas explains the social customs of the digital world: “The rules are unspoken. But they will be spoken to you if you break them.” The smartphone habits of youngsters are a mystery to some of their parents and even to many millennials who went through the formative years of middle school and high school without social media. Social Animals pulls back the curtain by following three teenagers around in their social media lives. It seems like such a simple concept for a documentary, but this film feels revelatory and fresh.

Two of the film’s subjects are teenagers who rose to social media stardom: first Kaylyn, who goes to a Christian school, lives in a Calabasas mansion, and says she has wanted to be a Victoria’s Secret model since she was little (yep!). Then there’s Humza, a skateboarder and daredevil photographer in New York. The final subject, Emma, is a teenager launched him from humble beginnings where he couldn’t afford a camera into a business where he can show his vertigo-inducing talents, taking pictures on forbidden bridges and skyscrapers. Interspersed through the three teens’ narratives are entertaining interviews with an assortment of other teens about the new cloud-based society of social media—for example, one girl explains that people don’t date anymore, they just send direct messages. The film shows a yawning isolation that may have noticed in the age of hyper-connectivity. Humza, for his hundreds of thousands of followers, mentions that in real life “I’m usually just by myself.” —by EMILY BELZ

**BOX OFFICE TOP 10 FOR THE WEEKEND OF MARCH 8-10 according to Box Office Mojo**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Movie</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Captain Marvel* PG-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World PG-13</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Tyler Perry’s A Madea Family Funeral PG-13</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Lego Movie 2* PG-13</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Alita: Battle Angel* PG-13</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Green Book* PG-13</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Isn’t It Romantic PG-13</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Greta R</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Fighting With My Family* PG-13</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Apollo 11</td>
<td>not rated</td>
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*Reviewed by WORLD

**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

**Social Animals**

Jane Austen wrote novels of manners providing a sketch of societal rules in the 19th century. In the new documentary Social Animals, coming soon to Netflix, teenager Humza Deas explains the social customs of the digital world: “The rules are unspoken. But they will be spoken to you if you break them.”

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Proven Innocent

Critics are panning Fox’s new drama Proven Innocent for its bland, one-dimensional characters and seeming identity crisis. Is it a courtroom drama? A detective show? A comedy?

The show centers on Madeline Scott (Rachelle Lefevre), an attorney at a firm dedicated to overturning wrongful convictions. Madeline’s quest to prove her clients innocent is partly because of her own past—she and her brother spent 10 years in prison for the murder of their best friend—and partly because she’s on a mission to stop Chicago’s seemingly corrupt city prosecutor from becoming state attorney general.

Madeline’s law team is a posse of caricatures: Lawyer Easy Boudreau (Russell Hornsby) took Madeline’s case because he felt the “Lord’s guidance” calling him to it. Violet (Nikki M. James) is the woman wingman whose podcast frames the show and allows the scriptwriters to sermonize about hot-button issues. Investigator Bodie (Vincent Kartheiser) provides comic relief with his absurd undercover antics, such as joining the fire department to investigate an arson case.

Each character seems to belong to a different show: It feels as if the writers couldn’t pick a genre.

Prosecutor Gore Bellows (Kelsey Grammer) is the most intriguing character so far. Every time Bellows goes head to head with Madeline, he defends himself: After all, he’s a prosecutor and it’s his job to take dangerous people off the streets. But while he says and does good things, his body language—smirking, standing too close to a female aid—provokes unease and suggests Bellows will come to a bad end.

Initial episodes of Proven Innocent (rated TV-14) included some mildly raw language and a disturbing image of suicide. The show promises to explore interesting questions: How will Madeline’s high-profile life affect her family, especially her brother, who got into drugs in prison? To what extent will her desire for revenge against Bellows overrule her desire to help innocent people? What good is it to be set free if people still think you’re guilty?

And of course, who did commit the original murder?

—by VICTORIA JOHNSON

Abducted in Plain Sight

Thanks to the trail podcasts have blazed, true-crime tales have become a major trend in entertainment. One of the most buzzed-about current examples is Abducted in Plain Sight, a documentary that debuted on Netflix in January. Though Netflix rarely releases ratings information, media coverage suggests the film is drawing plenty of viewers.

Drawing on interviews, old recordings, and court and FBI records, director Skye Borgman recounts the 1974 kidnapping and sexual assault of 12-year-old Jan Broberg by 40-year-old family friend Bob Berchtold.

Though it steers clear of profanity and salacious images, the film doesn’t make for pleasant viewing, and parents should take the TV-14 rating seriously. Not only does the now-adult Jan Broberg describe the rapes she suffered with clinical specificity, we also hear from both of her parents about their individual sexual encounters with Berchtold.

While prurient interest in such shocking twists no doubt accounts for some of the movie’s viral status, Borgman handles these confessions responsibly. A lot of painful truth—about the escalating nature of sin, for example—comes from watching Bob and Mary Ann Broberg crumble into tears as they recount their guilt.

After the Brobergs betray their marriage vows, Berchtold has an easy job manipulating their shame to gain further access to Jan. While their first responsibility should be protecting their children, again and again the Brobergs make the cowardly choice to instead prioritize their own reputations as good churchgoing Mormons.

As do other pedophilia scandals in the Catholic Church and the entertainment industry, Abducted in Plain Sight sounds strong warning notes about grooming tactics. Long before he committed his crimes, Berchtold ingratiated himself to the entire Broberg family. It’s easy to scream in outrage at Bob and Mary Ann Broberg’s negligent naivété, but then we remember how many similar stories are still playing out today. A friend you see every week at church, a trusted pastor—the wolves know the best places to hide among the sheep. Especially when the sheep are so often willing to cover their tracks for them.

—by MEGAN BASHAM
John Adams once wrote, “Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself.” In **Why Culture Matters Most** (Oxford, 2018) David Rose shows what happens when trust within a democracy evaporates. He notes the constitutional mandate for the federal government to “promote the general welfare,” and argues well that “the only way to promote the general welfare is never to promote the welfare of any individual or group.” Now that special interest welfare abounds, deficits in both dollars and trust surround us.

Isabel Sawhill’s **The Forgotten Americans: An Economic Agenda for a Divided Nation** (Yale, 2018) tries to walk the tightrope connecting general welfare and special interests: Our divided Congress could spend on “more vocational education and adjustment assistance for workers adversely affected by new developments in technology and trade ... a broad-based tax credit that bumps up wages for those who are currently working hard.” She also wants to encourage later retirement for most workers and “shift the emphasis from everyone going to college to a much stronger focus on investing in helping everyone train for and find work.”

Salena Zito and Brad Todd’s **The Great Revolt** (Crown, 2018) explains how Donald Trump rode a wave of distrust to election in 2016. **The Fifth Risk** by Michael Lewis (Norton, 2018) shows disorder in the Trump administration and suggests that we trust federal bureaucrats to make things right: Lewis is a much better writer when he dishes up a story rather than a political screed. René Breuel’s **The Paradox of Happiness** (Kirkdale, 2018) shows how we become trusted and happier not by fulfilling our desires but by helping to fill up the lives of others.

Bernard Fraga’s **The Turnout Gap** (Cambridge University Press, 2018) documents that Latinos and African-Americans vote less often than non-Hispanic whites, but knocks down the contention that the reason is voter identification laws or other legal restrictions. Fraga says minority voters in largely white areas tend to think their votes do not matter, since they have often lost electoral contests.

While we often hear that reforms (such as early voting) will reduce turnout disparities, Fraga reports evidence that the opposite is true, since the most engaged citizens (often conservative) tend to use those opportunities. One study finds Republicans do better when early voting is allowed: Hyper-partisan GOP legislators who try to limit that may be shooting themselves in the foot.

Michael Tomasky’s **If We Can Keep It** (Liveright, 2019) reminds me of how the New Math that arrived a half-century ago left more children numerically illiterate—and the Newer Math concerning national elections may spread even more political confusion. The left views both George W. Bush and Donald Trump as illegitimate presidents because in 2000 and 2016 their Democratic opponents won more votes. Now, anti-Electoral College bias has expanded to anti-constitutional bias.

Immigrants applying for citizenship learn that the Constitution gives each state two senators, but Tomasky says that’s not fair, since Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh was “confirmed by a majority of senators who collectively won fewer votes in their last election than did the senators who voted against that justice’s confirmation.” Tomasky’s Newer Math shows that Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito gained Supreme Court confirmation with the votes of senators who won only 48 percent of the popular vote. Ironically, Tomasky’s subtitle is **How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved**—but he calls for direct democracy that would kill it.

Sociologist Jonathan Metzl offers florid prose in **Dying of Whiteness** (Basic, 2019). He claims that lower- or middle-income whites went against their “existential self-interests” in voting for Trump. When “white privilege” leads a woman to buy a gun, she accidentally shoots herself. Her jolting ride to a hospital that is “hemorrhaging vitality” comes because she wanted lower taxes, so “roads potholed.” Metzl calls whiteness “a castle under siege” with “plagues that arise from within the castle walls.”
Four books offering Christian encouragement
reviewed by Caleb Nelson

APologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness
Joshua D. Chatraw & Mark D. Allen

The Apostle Peter instructed Christians to defend the faith with gentleness, respect, a clear conscience, and good behavior. Therefore, Chatraw and Allen reject “intellectual knockout punches for Jesus.” Believers shouldn’t stick to any one method, they say, because the Bible and church history record many good ones. They also emphasize corporate witness: Unbelievers can’t deny a church community demonstrating gospel reconciliation. Thus, most of the book focuses on the apologist’s attitude, not on scripted FAQs: It’s a comprehensive overview of apologetics history, current debates, and a Biblical way forward.

Why People Stop Believing
Paul Chamberlain

Chamberlain is concerned about ex-Christians—people who walked away for various reasons: evil’s existence, textual variants in the Bible, and the “irrationality” of miracles. Why People Stop Believing provides concise, layperson-level responses to the challenges that former believers mount against the faith they once held dear. These critics know, and are prepared to demolish, Christians’ typical talking points. But Chamberlain, a veteran of in-person debates with former Christians, provides solid evidence that respectfully but meticulously refutes the alleged problems with the faith. This book supplies counterarguments to unbelief for readers who are confronted with a doubter or have doubts themselves.

The Wholeness Imperative: How Christ Unifies Our Desires, Identity and Impact in the World
Scott Redd

Scott Redd’s love for Christ shines through in The Wholeness Imperative. His book encourages Christians to strive for “whole” living through Christ. Each chapter lies somewhere on the spectrum between sermon and blog post. Redd, an Old Testament professor who majored in English in college, presents a Biblical text, then expounds and applies it with such literary artistry that readers will be caught up in the freshness of his sentences. But, mostly, Redd strikes me as a preacher who enjoys encouraging others with truths about his beloved Jesus.

Strength for the Weary
Derek W.H. Thomas

Strength for the Weary strengthens weary readers by leading them through the second half of Isaiah. “Isaiah’s prescription for [the] withering sickness of unbelief is a dose of God’s magnificent majesty, power, and glory,” writes Thomas. He also presents readers with copious quotes from Scripture and some carefully chosen words of exposition. God is the only ruler. God bears His people’s burdens. God’s Servant will take away sin. And God calls us His bride and promises us new heavens and a new earth. The 127-page volume supplies encouragement much larger than its size.

AFTERWORD

Doing Philosophy (Oxford, 2018) by Timothy Williamson is a slim book with a conversational tone (think Malcolm Gladwell) about a heady subject. Williamson wants to return philosophy to its place among the natural sciences. He contends that instead of seeking ultimate truth, philosophers balance multiple commonsense beliefs (hypotheses) through dialogue, thought experiments, and logic until over time they arrive at commonsense knowledge (theses). Williamson’s unabashedly secular worldview—he calls Descartes’ proof of God “dodgy”—pervades all the real-life examples, making it hard to enjoy what could otherwise be an intriguing book. —Victoria Johnson

In The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections From Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays (Plough Publishing House, 2018), Carole Vanderhoof highlights Sayers’ thinking on themes like pride, belief, and envy. Each chapter starts with a long passage from one of the detective novels. Vanderhoof then chooses excerpts from essays or letters in which Sayers addresses the theme more directly. With bracing wit, Sayers continues to entertain and challenge. —Susan Olasky

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March 30, 2019 • WORLD Magazine
Stories for the heart
FOUR BOOKS FROM CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS
reviewed by Kristin Chapman

THE VERY BEST STORY EVER TOLD: THE GOSPEL WITH AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE Robin Currie
The Very Best Story Ever Told teaches children how to share the gospel story using basic American Sign Language. With each turn of the page, Currie introduces children to a new sign that is then repeated along with a rhythmic summary as the story of Jesus’ birth, life, and death builds to a climax. Each of the 13 signs has an illustration with directions showing how to sign the word correctly, and each is simple enough for even young children to master. One disappointment: The story does not clearly explain why Jesus came to earth and later died on the cross. (Ages 4-8)

GOD MADE ME AND YOU Shai Linne
In this book, Linne celebrates God’s design for ethnic diversity by focusing on how the gospel transforms our view of race. To help children understand the root of racism and bigotry, Linne goes back to the Garden of Eden, where sin distorted what was meant to glorify God. But Linne then points to our hope in Jesus: “At the cross, we see what God’s love is about. / There’s no type of person that Jesus left out.” Although the book’s rhyming text at times feels awkward, in other places it shines. The endnotes offer parents ideas to help their children appreciate God’s design for ethnic diversity. (Ages 4-8)

GOODBYE TO GOODBYES Lauren Chandler
In Goodbye to Goodbyes, Chandler uses the story of Lazarus’ death and resurrection to help children understand death in light of the gospel. In tender terms Chandler explains that Jesus knows how sad it is when someone we love gets sick or dies, but thankfully we have hope and a promise: Jesus came to give His followers new life after death, and that means one day we can say goodbye to goodbyes forever. This seventh book in the Tales That Tell the Truth series again features Catalina Echeverri’s illustrations, which overflow with vibrancy and detail to enhance the story’s message. (Ages 4-8)

FREEDOM AT THE FALLS Marianne Hering & Sheila Seifert
Cousins Beth and Patrick team up again in this Imagination Station adventure No. 22. This time Mr. Whittaker’s time travel machine sends them back to 1861 so they can board Abraham Lincoln’s inaugural train as it rumbles east to northern New York. While they help Mrs. Lincoln watch over Willie and Tad, they must also hide a runaway slave girl from a slave catcher. When things take a dangerous turn, Beth and Patrick’s personal convictions lead them to make a courageous choice. The story concludes with a cliffhanger that Hering and Seifert will continue in book No. 23, Terror in the Tunnel. (Ages 7-12)

AFTERWORD
In Lies Girls Believe (Moody, 2019) Dannah Gresh outlines strategies tween girls can use to counter the lies of the world with Biblical truth. The book’s appealing format features color-ful graphics and interactive chapters aimed at preparing girls to navigate the temptations they will encounter. The companion A Mom’s Guide to Lies Girls Believe helps moms learn about the challenges girls face today while offering useful suggestions for deeper conversations with their daughters.

In Choose Greatness (Northfield, 2019) Gary Chapman and Clarence Shuler counsel tween and teen boys to make 11 wise decisions that lay a strong foundation for a great life. Using personal stories, statistics, and Biblical wisdom, the book addresses timely topics for young men today, including respect for women, diversity in friendships, sexual responsibility, and drug and alcohol avoidance. Each chapter concludes with questions to ponder and encouragement to seek out a trusted adult for further discussion. –K.C.
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*Results of a double-blind study conducted by Olive View UCLA Medical Center.
NATHANIEL JEANSON

The pursuit of discovery

HARVARD PH.D. PUSHES BACK AGAINST EVOLUTION

by Julie Borg

Since many leading universities are steeped in scientism and evolutionary theory, some Christian students shy away from pursuing a science degree at a secular school. Nathaniel Jeanson was not one of those students. Jeanson, homeschooled through the eighth grade, gained a Ph.D. in cell and developmental biology at Harvard in 2009. A husband and father of four, he now serves as a research biologist with the creationist organization Answers in Genesis and has authored Replacing Darwin: The New Origin of Species.

Jeanson entered Harvard with a burning desire to find a cure for cancer. He emerged with a determination to push back against evolution and help people struggling with science-religion tension find their way back to Biblical truth. Here are edited excerpts of our interview.

You majored in science at the University of Wisconsin–Parkside. Was that hard to do as a Christian? It really wasn’t. Nerd that I was, I took my chemistry book home in high school to read over the summer, but I also read Christian science and intelligent design materials. By the time I entered college I had heard the evolutionary arguments before and nothing took me by surprise or caused me to doubt. Also, I had a strong support base praying for me, and a strong local church.

The cell and developmental biology Ph.D. program at Harvard accepted you. What was that like for you as a Christian? The biggest issue, because I went into medical research, was that one of the main tools in human disease research is a cell line taken from an aborted fetus roughly 50 years ago. It is a useful tool that produces viruses very well, but I didn’t feel like I could use it in good conscience. So the hurdle I faced was to design an experiment without having to engage those cells.

What did you do? For the experiment I was working on I needed to genetically alter mouse cells, and that would typically be done with viruses produced in those fetal cells. I found a different way to alter the mouse cells.

Was there ever a time, with so much saturation in secular science, that you started to question your faith? No, it was more the opposite. Growing up in a Christian home, I took the gospel for granted. I had heard it my whole life, so for me it became the old news rather than the good news. But the process of reading and investigating these questions during my years at Harvard sent me diving into Scripture. Suddenly the gospel became good news for me for the first time.

You worked hard at Harvard to achieve a Ph.D. so you could pursue a career in medical research. But you ultimately chose a different path. Why? During my time of spiritual searching at Harvard I began to rethink my career. I realized that what I really wanted was to discover the cure for cancer and win the Nobel Prize. In theory that’s a noble goal, but it can easily be contaminated by selfish ambition. That was true in my case, so I started asking myself what I could do differently. After I graduated, I accepted a position with the Institute for Creation Research because it allowed me to use my education but to use it for Bible-based research.

You have said evolution is a cultural Goliath that keeps the people of God cowering in fear—how so? Many secular professors try to convince students that faith is for the ignorant. I remember sitting in a calculus class and the professor drew a graph on the wall with a curve going up. He was trying to demonstrate how our knowledge has increased over time. And then he turned and smiled at the class and said, “See, we don’t need God!” I thought, How does that follow from discussing calculus? But if this is what professors are doing in math classes, how much more so in fields of science that directly relate to the Bible?

But scientists overwhelmingly accept evolution. Interviewers often say, “Ninety-seven percent of the scientific community disagrees with you. Do you think there is a scientific conspiracy or do we just need to throw out science altogether?” They are insinuating that no reasonable person would disagree with 97 percent of scientists. That can be intimidating.

Do the 97 percent want to discuss this? Many evolutionists now refuse to engage in serious discussions with creationists. I just did a debate with an evolutionary biology professor who was extremely condescending and didn’t even try to engage in the actual arguments. I discovered, after the fact, that he had written a blog post called, “In Praise of Ridicule.” The point of the post was that to debate with creationists makes creationism look like a legitimate idea, so it’s better to just ridicule than to debate. Who wants to face that? This isn’t just a dry scientific issue: This is a spiritual battle, and there is great pressure to conform.
At the same time, as we learn more about genetics, we are finding that many of the predictions based on evolution don’t work.

**Which ones don’t work?**
Predictions based on genetic mutations are the driving force of evolution. But time and again, when we measure the rates at which various mutations take place, it contradicts evolutionary expectations.

**What is the focus of your current research?**
The major focus these days is not so much on undermining evolution, but on exploring the scientific strength of the creation model. We ask questions like: What allows new species to form and what also limits that? What stops a dog from becoming a cat? And, opposite of the origins question, what causes species to go extinct?

**So you would encourage young people who are interested in science not to be afraid to pursue a career in the field?** Oh, absolutely. There is still so much we don’t know about the world. Scripture is the absolute truth. It provides very explicit statements about the natural world. There are things in which Scripture is very clear. It is clear that the origin of the universe and the first creatures were by divine creation, not natural selection. But there are also all sorts of open questions. And what’s exciting is you discover new answers along the way that you never anticipated.
Insofar as contemporary drama and Black History Month coincided this year, the films BlacKkKlansman and Black Panther sucked much of the air out of the room. But a richer, more challenging, and more universal “black history” story can be found in the Sanaa Opera Project’s just-released recording of The Mask in the Mirror (Navona), a three-act opera by the Scottish-born third-stream composer and jazz pianist Richard Thompson.

Subtitled The Tragic Romance of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the First Black Poet, & Alice Ruth Moore, Thompson’s libretto draws upon excerpts from several of Dunbar’s poems (most notably “Sympathy,” the source of his best-known line, “I know why the caged bird sings”) and the many letters exchanged between Dunbar and Moore during their semi-clandestine, 19th-century courtship and marriage. This focus requires Thompson to begin in medias res and therefore to telescope the background against which Dunbar and Moore’s relationship took place: namely, Dunbar’s odds-defying rise to success at a time during which a black poet had a next-to-zero chance of being taken seriously. So some background may be in order.

Dunbar was not the West’s “first black poet.” The freed slave Phillis Wheatley beat him to that distinction by over a century. But he was the only black author (he also wrote novels, short stories, and the lyrics of two Will Marion Cook productions) with a sizable audience during his time. When he died in 1906 at 33, the Harlem Renaissance was still a dozen years away. His poetry has not aged well. The two styles in which he wrote—black-dialect dramatic monologues and formally intricate, “literary English” poems that echo Tennyson and Wordsworth (or, as Act 2, Scene 1, of The Mask in the Mirror has it, Byron and Longfellow)—have long been considered off-puttingly passé. His emotionally direct letters to Moore, however, and hers to him, will still strike a chord in anyone who has ever plunged headlong into a great passion only to discover too late that that way lies madness.

Moore, dazzled by Dunbar’s talent and fame, ignored numerous warning signs. Not only was Dunbar an alcoholic, a womanizer, and a “mama’s boy,” but he also nourished a sense of entitlement based on his self-perception as a “great poet” and a “genius” (at least one of which, to be fair, he was).

The libretto homes in on the turbulence inevitable in such a combustible situation, a turbulence that Thompson’s largely recitative-based vocal melodies and the voices of his classically trained cast bring to a life both tender and terrifying. Whether proud, angry, self-pitying, or pleading, the tenor Cameo Humes and the soprano Angela Owens are resplendent as Dunbar and Moore respectively. And the supporting cast—especially John Polhamus (as the well-meaning but racially blinkered critic William Dean Howells) and Roland Mills (doubling as a Dodd, Mead & Co. sales representative and Dunbar’s “drinking buddy”)—is no less so.

Meanwhile, the music as played by a Stephen Tucker–conducted chamber orchestra gives voice to the inchoate elements of Dunbar’s and Moore’s internal and external conflicts, connecting them with a moody, at times almost melodramatic tension. Even the relief provided by the ragtime syncopations of Act 2, Scene 2 (“Paul in a Harlem Bar”), feels portentous.

What it portends is Moore’s inability to save Dunbar from himself, Dunbar’s unwillingness to abandon his self-destructive course, and the crashing failure of their marriage. In that sense, The Mask in the Mirror is a richer, more challenging, and more universal work than A Star Is Born as well.
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

FYAH Theon Cross
The busy rhythms established by the drummer Moses Boyd justify the references on Cross’ Bandcamp page to “modern grime and trap” as surely as the tightly coiled honking of the saxophonists Nubya Garcia and Wayne Francis justify the references to “stretching and re-shaping the boundaries” of jazz. But what’s really doing the stretching and reshaping is Cross’ tuba. Usurping the role normally assigned to the bass, it fattens the music’s bottom with meaningful oompahs and blats. On the skittering “Candace of Meroe,” it beggars description.

TAKE COVER Hot 8 Brass Band
One can learn a lot (and have a lot of fun doing so) about the indomitability of spirit that’s unique to New Orleanians from this high-spirited, just-in-time-for-Mardi-Gras EP. Call it the refusal to let tragedy have the final word. Frankly, it’s hard to say which is more audacious: unleashing brass-and-chant versions of three Michael Jackson songs on the eve of Leaving Neverland or exploring the latent marching-band potential of Joy Division’s dirge-pop classic “Love Will Tear Us Apart.”

THE SCOPE Manu Katché
The dues that Katché paid drumming for other artists yield their biggest dividends to date. Never quite jazz, never quite funk, never quite art-rock or even pop, the songs evince genre fermentation at a remarkably high and enjoyable level of refinement. Not that nothing stands out. There’s the reggae into which “Vice” shifts during its coda. And Alexandre Tassel’s elegant flugelhorn evokes nighttimes of the rich and famous. Whether Katché qualifies as either is beside the point. The dreamy Jonatha Brooke–sung “Let Love Rule” is not.

NOVA Steve Reid Featuring the Legendary Master Brotherhood
Recorded and initially released in 1976, five years after the jazz drummer Steve Reid’s release from jail (for conscientiously objecting to the Vietnam War), this five-cut, 31-minute document of Reid’s response to the possibilities latent in On the Corner–era Miles Davis (among other catalysts) still sounds edgily alive. It also sounds spacious, thanks as much to the mix’s stereo separation as to the nimble intensity of the Brotherhood’s playing. Yes, playing. How else to characterize Les Walker’s searing, organ-driven games of hide-and-seek?

ENCORE James Ingram
died on Jan. 29 at age 66, a victim of Parkinson’s and early-onset Alzheimer’s. So pervasive was his lustrous voice on pop, R&B, and adult-contemporary radio from 1981 to 1990 that it was easy to take him for granted as he went about racking up eight Top 40 hits and winning two of the 14 Grammys for which he was nominated. And although he specialized in duets, his sole No. 1, “I Don’t Have the Heart,” was a solo job.

He released his final album, Stand (In the Light), in 2008. A mostly gospel affair, he promoted it on The 700 Club, discussing not only his Christian faith but also the Biblical underpinnings of his 1983 hit “Yah Mo Be There.” Stand didn’t sell, but it should’ve. Like everything else Ingram recorded, it blended class and sincerity so consistently that it was impossible to tell—and pointless to wonder—where one ended and the other began. —A.O.
New York City’s metropolitan area became the world’s first megacity in the 1930s, when its population passed the 10 million mark. By 2015 New York City had fallen to No. 9 in a rapidly urbanizing world with 30 megacities. By 2018 there were 33 such cities, and forecasters anticipate 15 more megacities by 2035—perhaps six within the next decade. A World Bank report of a decade ago was right to pronounce urban growth “one of the most important challenges of the 21st century.”

China is expected to continue to lead the world in urbanization and population growth, but Jakarta may overtake Tokyo-Yokohama as the world’s largest metropolis in the next decade. For the English-speaking West, London will be the only emerging megacity (though some forecasters add Chicago). The rest show how the world’s center of gravity continues to shift east and south, with Dar es Salaam in Africa; Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and Surat in India; Kuala Lumpur; and Seoul.

The world’s megacities most likely will be dominated by adherents to Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, led by governments that restrict religious and other freedoms. Cities can highlight the sinful grit of the world, the very physical breakdown of humans living close together without God. But because cities are full of human potential, life created in the image of God, they can become places of potential. This helps us think differently about the urbanizing planet we live on.

Le Corbusier saw modern cities as “machines for living” and imagined metropolises streamlined for production and consumption. But humans with souls long for meaning and purpose. They gravitate to cities in ever greater numbers—despite Tokyo’s gridlock and Baghdad’s power outages—not simply because they will find roads, hospitals, and restaurants. They go because they will find other people. Living in the city should also mean building community.

A friend moving to Washington, D.C., is teaching me about this. She, her husband, and two young children could be seeking a nice house near good schools, but they feel called to foster-parenting. So they are looking for a racially mixed neighborhood near ministries helping broken families where, as she says, “We can be humble and learn how to be part of a community we want to help but don’t understand very well.”

An eye toward community-building has application for megacities far away. When we look at U.S. trade policy, for example, we should be mindful not only of what trade barriers mean for our GDP or the cost of a new automobile, but also of what they mean for the trade in ideas. Countries that consistently rank most free and prosperous on any index (try the Index of Economic Freedom put out by the Heritage Foundation/ Wall Street Journal) have somewhere in their history Christian foundations, however imperfect. For those of us living in the post-Christian West, business and trade can be a conversation starter where other forms of evangelism fail.

Chinese authorities understand business evangelism very well, underwriting major projects in Africa to gain access to the continent’s mineral wealth. We can have similar zeal but show a better way, something many American businesses and nonprofits already are doing in overseas partnerships.

How do we spread the aroma of Christ in urban settings dominated by other religions? By being creative, learning to spread the gospel not only through traditional missions and church planting, but “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

In an emerging megacity like Baghdad, churches have turned a refugee crisis into outreach simply by welcoming Muslims and other nonbelievers into church-based medical clinics, schools, and handcraft workshops.

Coffeehouse ministries, places where students from all religious walks come to study and talk, is another way tent-making enterprises become culture-shaping, heart-changing opportunities. Especially in the melting pot of the world’s megacities, these and other small steps may mean discipling the nations.
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Dreams are crushed on this sunny patch of sand just north of Mexico. Dreams also come true, and the 20 or so young men tackling the beachfront obstacle course at Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado, Calif., hope theirs will. Today is Saturday. On Monday, they will begin Basic Underwater Demolition School, or BUDS, the most demanding mental and physical training in the Navy and, many would argue, the world. These men, some still teenagers, hope to emerge at the end of 24 weeks having earned the right to pin on a gold trident, the iconic emblem of the U.S. Navy SEALs. Looking on, Special Warfare Operator Senior Chief Keith Barry says some of them will quit on Day One.

That’s why he’s out here on the obstacle course, coaching three fit, square-jawed ensigns on how to handle these high-climbing, rope-swinging, rib-breaking apparatus. When Barry first attempted this course, he was like these men—22 and hungry, yearning to pass BUDS and fulfill his dream of joining the best of the best. Back then, Barry thought SEAL training was tough. Now, though, he’s 44 and, until recently, a convicted felon. And nothing the BUDS instructors could dish out, he says—in fact, nothing al-Qaeda or the Taliban could dish out—compares with the hell he endured after being accused of rape.

FEATURES

False rape accusations may be statistically ‘rare,’ but they happen every day in the United States

Editor’s note: This story includes frank discussion of a sexual relationship.

By Lynn Vincent in Coronado, Calif.

Photo by Greg Schneider/Genesis
Sexual violence has been in the news month after month, each time with debate about whether to trust the woman or the man she says raped her. Some say, always trust the woman. Others point to some allegations proven false. I have been on both sides of this issue. My mother in the 1970s turned our Hawaii rental house into a flophouse for drug dealers. There, I was raped three times between the ages of 13 and 14, and sexually assaulted once by a regular visitor. Had I felt empowered to report those crimes, I knew it would have been my word against the perpetrators.

And yet, it was the same for a young friend of our family in 2016. I’ll call him Josh. Foolishly, Josh, a Navy man, had consensual sex with a married woman. She then attempted to conceal the adultery by accusing Josh of rape. Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents quickly plastered wanted posters in the public areas of Josh’s apartment building. Protesting his innocence, Josh turned himself in. NCIS agents interrogated him. He likely would have become a statistic except for a text Josh produced for the cops in which the woman revealed her plan to accuse him of rape.

As both a rape survivor and the friend of a man falsely accused, I watched the 2018 clash of Justice Brett Kavanaugh and his accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, with interest. Many journalists commenting on false rape accusations invoked the words “rare” and “myth.” The truth is, false rape allegations happen every day.

By 2012, Keith Barry had been an active duty SEAL for more than 18 years. A veteran of multiple combat deployments, he landed a job as a SEAL instructor at the mother ship, the prestigious “wet side” of Naval Amphibious Base Coronado that the SEALs call home. Diagnosed with combat-related traumatic brain injury, Barry knew he couldn’t deploy to the forward areas any longer. So, this full-circle assignment was to be his last, his “twilight tour” before retirement.

Two hours north of Coronado, a civilian woman—we’ll call her CW—was also busy with her career. CW was 33, single, and a businesswoman. In her leisure time, she hung out with a group of close girlfriends she referred to alternately as the “Vaginas” and the “Wifeys.” “Wifeys” was a reference to the women’s status as the love interests of Navy SEALs. “Vaginas” was a reference to the group’s interest in The Vagina Monologues, the Eve Ensler play that, in part, seeks to “raise awareness” about rape.

One of the Wifeys was CW’s cousin. In November 2012, the cousin’s fiancé, also a SEAL, showed CW a photo of Keith Barry. CW later said Barry was “hot,” “a Navy SEAL,” and she “of course, wanted to meet him.” After exchanging text messages, the two arranged a date for Dec. 8 in San Diego, the first of what would be just four encounters. That evening, Barry told CW he’d just moved to California, hadn’t even picked out a place to live, and wanted only a casual relationship. CW agreed. She wasn’t looking for commitment, either, she said.

When the first date ended, CW demurred from Barry’s proffered goodnight kiss. She found him charming and considerate, but she wasn’t “going to rush into anything” and also didn’t want him to think she was a “floozey.” However, the relationship quickly accelerated.

On dates two through four, CW and Barry engaged in sex between 10 and 15 times. Explicit texting punctuated the intervals between dates, and it seemed to Barry that nothing sexual was off the table. In her texts with the Wifeys, CW began referring to Barry as “my Navy SEAL.” As the New Year rolled around, she told friends it was “love for me in 2013.”

Barry says now he once regarded casual, unmarried sex as harmless as long as it took place between consenting adults. Today, he acknowledges the deceptiveness of such thinking. He now warns that sex outside marriage has consequences far beyond quotidian troubles like venereal disease or unwanted pregnancy, all the way to the unthinkable.

Both contemporary research and ancient literature examine unthinkable acts, including false allegations of rape. A 2017 Dutch study of 57 proven false allegations revealed eight different motives: material gain, alibi, sympathy, attention, regret, a disturbed mental state, relabeling, and revenge.

That last motive applies to the first recorded instance of a false rape accusation, the one leveled against Joseph, son of Jacob, in the book of Genesis. Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh’s palace guard, looked on Joseph with great favor and put him in charge of his household. Joseph was handsome, and Potiphar’s wife wanted him. Day after day, she tried to seduce him, but he declined her advances. Spurned, she accused Joseph of attempted rape, and Potiphar had him thrown in prison.

In slaveholding America, black slaves sometimes were lynched or wound up in prison after white women accused them
of rape to cover up illicit but consensual sex. Fast-forward to the Jim Crow era and two infamous cases: the Scottsboro Boys of Alabama and the Groveland Boys of Florida. In each case, white women fabricated allegations of rape, alleging multiple black male attackers.

In the 21st century, female liars flipped the script: At Duke University in 2006, a black female college student accused three white lacrosse players of gang rape. The rape allegations proved false, and the Durham, N.C., district attorney was disbarred for false: reporter. In 2014, another famous false charge: In her widely read and reprinted story, “A Rape on Campus,” Rolling Stone writer Sabrina Rubin Erdely alleged the gang rape of an unidentified female student at the University of Virginia. Erdely’s story soon unraveled. A female university dean whom Erdely had cast as chief villain sued her for “libel with actual malice” and won.

In 2018, during the Kavanaugh-Ford battle, some journalists said only 2 percent of rape allegations are false. A 2006 study of 812 rape cases supported this number. But criminologist Brent E. Turvey and his co-authors, in their 2017 book, False Allegations: Investigative and Forensic Issues in Fraudulent Reports of Crime, said the 2 percent stat “has no basis in reality. Reporting it publicly as a valid frequency rate with any empirical basis is either scientifically negligent or fraudulent.”

In the 1990s, the FBI clocked the rate of specious allegations at 8 percent, according to Turvey. A 2016 meta-analysis of seven studies found an average false reporting rate of 5 percent. In the mid-2000s, the Making a Difference (MAD) project crunched stats on 2,059 rapes and sexual assaults specifically reported to U.S. law enforcement, the only study to do so. MAD found a false allegation rate of 7 percent.

How many is that? According to the FBI, law enforcement agencies received 116,645 reports of rapes or sexual assaults in 2014, the most recent year for which comprehensive law enforcement statistics are available. Applying MAD’s 7 percent false reporting rate, that’s a total of 8,165 false reports—or about 22 every day of the year.

This figure does not count accusations not reported to law enforcement, like those made against Brett Kavanaugh. It also does not include false allegations not yet known to be false. This is the irony of the Kavanaugh reporting: While opinion-makers busily cited the 2 percent stat, they failed to mention the cases of at least five men—and one boy—exonerated of rape in the months leading up to and during the Kavanaugh hearing.

Malcolm Alexander, a Louisiana resident, served 38 years in prison before DNA evidence in January 2018 proved him innocent. Four months later, in May 2018, a New York court vacated the 1992 rape, sodomy, and kidnapping convictions of VanDyke Perry and Gregory Counts after DNA evidence forced their accuser to admit the rape never happened. Perry had served 11 years in prison, and Counts, 26.

Then in June 2018, DNA evidence cleared Christopher Miller, an Ohio resident who had served 16 years for rape. In October 2018, five Pennsylvania high school girls admitted to targeting a boy with false sexual assault allegations. The reason: They didn’t like him. By the time of the girls’ confession, though, the boy had been fired from his job, endured multiple court appearances, and been placed in juvenile detention and on house arrest.

The fifth man exonerated in the run-up to the Kavanaugh clash was Keith Barry.

In January 2013, while much of the nation shivered, the weather in Coronado, Calif., was the kind that makes Southern California famous: fair skies and temperatures that hit the 70s by midafternoon. After another week of sexual text banter, Barry’s accuser, CW, arrived in the island city on Friday, Jan. 11, to spend the weekend with Barry.

As they sat in a wine bar, CW smiled and asked Barry, “Where is this going?”

“This. Us.”

“It’s not going anywhere,” he said. It was the discussion they’d had before. Barry explained he wasn’t ready for a committed relationship.

Here, their stories diverge. According to Barry’s May 2013 statement to investigators, CW then asked him if he would
Then came two minutes that would alter the trajectory of Barry’s life. He performed on CW an act they’d never tried together. At the commencement of that act, both parties agree, CW said, “No, no, no, please go slow.” Both parties say Barry complied.

However, their interpretations of the entire episode were very different. Barry interpreted CW’s words, “please go slow,” as consent. CW later testified she uttered those words only because she knew Barry wouldn’t stop.

This may be true. However, attorney Neal Puckett, a former Marine Corps trial judge, says differing views of events are a common theme in rape cases in which one party claims the encounter was consensual while the other claims it wasn’t: “It’s like one person is held responsible for not being able to read the other’s mind.”

CW conceded she did not yell or scream, “No, no, no.” Nor did she raise her voice or struggle. Instead, she finished by saying, “Please go slow.” Barry thought she meant it.

Afterward, CW showered. Then she tried to kiss him, but he had once again turned cool. Later that morning, CW asked Barry whether she would see him the following weekend. He said no, he had plans to go climbing with friends. Hurt, CW climbed into her car and drove home. On the way, she sent her cousin a chirpy text full of exclamation points about her most recent adventure in bed.

The next day, CW told her cousin the whole story. When the cousin learned CW had said to Barry, “No, no, no,” the cousin said, “So he raped you.” A week later, CW accused Barry of rape.

During the Obama administration, Congress instituted a crackdown on sexual assault in the military. U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat now running for president, led the charge. In May 2013, at the exact moment Keith Barry was fighting accusations of rape, media outlets hyped a Pentagon report that showed an increase in service members reporting sexual abuse. That was a good thing. The military had new programs emphasizing victim support and discouraging reprisals against service members who reported sexual crimes.

However, another section of the Pentagon report received little notice: It showed false allegations rising at an even faster pace than reports of rape and sexual assault overall. During this period, the Pentagon faced congressional pressure not just to investigate more thoroughly alleged assaults, but to prosecute more service members who had been accused. That’s how Barry, in the heat of a highly sexual relationship, found himself accused of performing a single act that CW alleged was against her will.

At trial, Barry’s attorney noted that CW didn’t act like a victim of sexual violence. Right after the alleged rape, she asked to see Barry the following weekend. In a videotaped statement to investigators, she gushed like a slumber-party teenager about her time in bed with Barry. The attorney also pointed out CW’s chirpy post-coital text to her cousin, and that CW only decided she’d been raped after her cousin suggested it.

The prosecution, meanwhile, built a methodical case against Barry, calling witness after witness, all of whom repeated what CW had told them. Their cumulative testimony became the only side of the story the trial judge heard. Barry’s attorney was so confident the judge, Capt. Beth Payton-O’Brien, would rule in favor of his client that he didn’t see the need to put Barry on the witness stand to defend himself.

At the end of a three-day court-martial, Payton-O’Brien found Barry guilty of rape. After 19 years of service, the Navy busted him down from senior chief to seaman. Days later, on Halloween 2014, the gates of the Naval Consolidated Brig—the military prison at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego—slammed shut behind him.

In April 2015, Rear Adm. Patrick Lorge, the officer who had convened Barry’s court-martial, reviewed the proceedings as well as Payton-O’Brien’s findings. Never had a case given him greater pause. He did not feel the prosecution had proved its case, or even that Barry received a fair trial: Lorge believed Barry was not only “not guilty” but probably actually innocent. Lorge was about to disapprove the court-martial.
findings when he says a pair of powerful Navy judge advocates (military lawyers), both admirals, told him that to do so would mean bad public relations for the Navy, and would also hurt Lorge’s career. Feeling he would have “a target on his back,” Lorge let the guilty verdict stand.

At the Miramar brig, officials demanded that Barry attend remedial training for prisoners convicted of sex crimes. Barry complied, but repeatedly refused to sign forms requiring him to declare himself a sex offender. In retaliation, prison officials put him in solitary and withheld the medication he’d been taking for his traumatic brain injury. He remembers that time as the darkest of his life. Barry served 2½ years in prison, all the while maintaining his innocence and filing appeals.

Released on April 1, 2017—April Fools’ Day—Barry then commenced life in the black pit located at the bottom of the long fall from decorated Navy SEAL to convicted felon. He was forced to register as a sex offender. He couldn’t get a job, not even driving an Uber, because of the background check. Before prison, Barry owned a Virginia rental property and had a sizable retirement account, but he liquidated it all for his failed defense. After prison, he survived on credit cards and loans from friends and family.

Then, 16 months later, vindication.

For three years, Rear Adm. Lorge’s decision in the case had plagued him, and to his credit, he came forward on Barry’s behalf. In September 2018, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces overturned Barry’s conviction, calling the Navy judge advocates’ influence in the case “unlawful” and a “manipulation of the criminal justice process.” The court overturned Barry’s conviction “with prejudice,” which means he can never be retried.

At the height of the Kavanaugh hearings and even now, #MeToo activists seemed to regard men like Barry as acceptable collateral damage, sacrificial lambs whose blood is just payment for what they see as millennia of male violence against women. However, the Bible says “bearing false witness” is a crime, precisely because of the harm it does to the innocent—and to true victims, like me, whose testimony lies in the shadow of doubt created by unaccountable false accusers.

Even as he faced trial in 2014, Barry had faith in the American justice system. There was no way, he thought, that military lawyers would convict an innocent man. But the guilty verdict and his torment shattered the core principles around which Barry had built his life. He now feels that the American government, for whom he laid his life on the line for nearly two decades, betrayed him.

Barry isn’t sure what he’ll do now. After first resisting the appeals court’s findings, the Navy reinstated Barry as a senior chief and restored his pay. But he’s still fighting for five years of back pay and not making much progress. Sometimes, he just wants to get out of America, he says, away from the politics that destroyed his life.

“Maybe I’ll go down to South America or Mexico,” he says, “just get away from here and work with people who need help.”

On the other hand, Barry suspects that’s exactly what the Navy would like, for him to go away. But the same Navy taught him never to quit.
Maha Rose, a crystal shop and reiki healing center in Brooklyn, asks clients to remove their shoes when they enter, so on a Tuesday afternoon Brooklynnites were quietly padding around tables of crystals in their socks. The crystals, priced from $6 to $40, each have descriptions of what they do: Citrine “raises self esteem,” black moonstone “enhances fertility,” and labradorite “calms overactive minds.” For tangerine quartz, “singing to it while it is in your pocket cultivates a more positive future.”

Sadie Kadlec, the resident crystal guru who does crystal-healing sessions, came out from the back. “What’s twinkling to you?” she asked me, meaning that I should point out what crystals I was drawn to. She’s worked at Maha Rose for five years, and the place has doubled in size over that time.

Throw rugs led the way through hallways piled with large rose quartz crystals, back to healing rooms where Kadlec works, placing crystals on different parts of people’s bodies to send particular spiritual “energies” to heal them. Kadlec comes from a Christian background and went to a Christian school but said she has been spiritually drawn to crystals from a young age.

As we talked in an open area near Maha Rose’s temple in low voices, a woman all in flowing white clothes came to shush us. But soon after, children poured in from the street, laughing loudly and running around. “The fairy school,” Kadlec explained.

Americans have a returning appetite for New Age beliefs and practices. Tarot card sales have been steadily climbing, according to distributor U.S. Game Systems, and over the last five years adults’ use of meditation tripled while it also increased tenfold among children ages 4 to 17, according to the National Institutes of Health.

“New Age” refers to a 1970s movement that incorporated occult and metaphysical beliefs and practices, including meditation, medium readings, astrology, and alternative medicines as the means to personal and social transformation.

New Age is also chic now: Dior featured tarot card designs from a 1970s deck on its clothes in a 2017 fashion show—sending sales of that particular deck rocketing. Gwyneth Paltrow’s lifestyle brand Goop employed an in-house “crystal healer” and shaman and has an online section to shop “cosmic health.” On Goop’s website one crystal healer sells $27 “psychic vampire repellent.” (Instructions: “Spray around the aura to protect from psychic attack.”)

A recent Pew Research Center survey showed that 62 percent of Americans hold at least one New Age belief, whether that be in the power of crystals or astrology or reincarnation. What’s more surprising is that about half of those whom the Pew survey categorized as “Sunday Stalwarts” (most of whom go to church weekly and describe their faith as the single most important source of meaning in their life) also hold at
least one New Age belief. The Pew survey questions were straightforward, asking whether the subject believes in psychics, astrology, and so on, with definitions for each.

For self-described evangelicals, 19 percent said they believe in reincarnation, and 33 percent said they believe in psychics. About 30 percent of Sunday Stalwarts responded to the Pew survey saying they believe spiritual energy is focused in physical objects like crystals and mountains. That number was much higher among Catholics (47 percent) than evangelicals (24 percent).

Stepping into mediums’ offices and crystal healing centers and talking to those who burn sage or use tarot cards reveals vastly different approaches and levels of commitment to these practices. Some burn sage to have a relaxing smell in their home. Others dig more deeply into the troubling spiritual side of New Age, seeking out crystals for “spiritual energy” or trying to channel the spirit of a dead friend through a medium.

Dónal O’Mathúna, a bioethics professor at the Ohio State University College of Nursing, finds anecdotally that most Christians who engage in New Age practices like crystal healing often get into it by a friend’s word of mouth, without doing extensive research on either the scientific benefit or the theological roots of the practice.

“The first thing is that you have to go beyond the anecdotal report, that my cousin tried this or my sister tried this and they felt better,” said O’Mathúna.

O’Mathúna and Dr. Walt Larimore, both members of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations, wrote *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*, a book that looks at some of these practices. They aren’t universally dismissive of every-thing New Age–related. Having a beautiful rock or the scent of burning sage that helps you relax is not a problem, O’Mathúna said.

“Paul’s teaching on meat sacrificed to idols is the closest I think we can get to guidance on this,” said O’Mathúna. “There’s nothing in the meat itself that is bad, but if you understand the spiritual aspects behind it, at times it can be good to stay away from it. When someone understands the roots of it, they may not want to be involved in those practices even if someone else may say there’s no problem with it.”

So, for example, he cautions against the Japanese energy healing called reiki, which he says is in its essence a practice to connect to the spirit world: “We’re given clear teaching in the Bible that there are spiritual beings out there, and they’re not all good.” He also recommends going to health practitioners in one’s church to talk about evidence-based practices. He finds there is a slice of Christians that is often suspicious of mainstream medical studies.

Studies have debunked crystals’ healing power, except to show a placebo effect. But clients come to Kadlec, the crystal healer, who have “tried a lot of other things,” she said, including “Western medicine,” without success. Kadlec personally says certain crystals help her with muscle or back pain.

Kadlec carries a pouch of stones everywhere with her and, depending on the day, carries one or two larger stones. Every morning she does a crystal meditation, to “reflect on the energy properties.”

When Kadlec does a crystal healing session, she lays out stones, then has the client close her eyes, and guides her through a meditation. Then the client opens her eyes and picks stones. Then the client lies down, and Kadlec places the stones on the person’s body, before guiding the client through another meditation.

“I don’t say this will cure you,” she said. “But it’s a great tool to supplement emotionally what you’re going through healthwise. A lot of time when people get colds, they’re over-extending themselves.”

Kadlec was not surprised at the Pew results showing an overlap of belief in the spiritual power of crystals and Christianity. She cited the special priestly breastplate in Exodus 28 that had 12 different gems for the 12 tribes of Israel, as evidence of the historic “creation power” of stones.
Though she doesn’t call herself a Christian, Kadlec said her Christian family has become more open to her crystal practice. She’ll post images of crystals on her Instagram account, and family members will comment on which ones speak to them.

One woman, Janet McKnight, wrote to me on Twitter about Christian households getting into essential oils and crystals and said: “When we’re ill, our frequency drops. The sicker we are, the lower our frequency. ... Using things like oils & crystals to help raise our frequency is just 1 mode of healing... not all EO [essential oil] use is New Age, same with crystals. The creation glorifies the Creator.”

Back in Manhattan, a “Certified Psychic Medium & Tarot Advisor” showed a New Age practice that appeals to mainstream professionals. Dressed all in black, with black fingernails and sleek cherry-red hair, Marina Margulis caters to New York’s highly educated class. She thinks crystal healing is goofy and better left to doctors. She doesn’t advertise anywhere, but her business is thriving.

Margulis’ office by Lincoln Center has no candles or crystal balls or incense, but instead is sunlight-filled with a leather couch and several vases of tulips, like a therapist’s. That’s how Margulis fashions herself, with the side specialty of talking to the dead. Looking for help getting pregnant? Go to a gynecologist, she says. Predicting the future? Forget about it.

Margulis is Jewish but not observant, has a Brooklyn accent, and brings up Albert Einstein and Carl Jung more than any Eastern philosopher. Her chow chow, Loki, whom she refers to as her “assistant,” shuffles around behind her at her office. Her day was booked solid with tarot and mediumistic readings, with appointments until 7:30 p.m., which seemed pre-emptively exhausting to Loki, who was soon curled up and snoring through our interview.

Clients come to Margulis about two things: their careers and their love lives. She says she can help clients “fulfill their destiny” by tuning “into the World of Spirit to connect to your loved ones that have passed over” and, in some cases, by using tarot cards. For Christians, her business is clearly at odds with Leviticus 19:31 (“do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists”) and 20:6, just for starters.

But some things she won’t do. Several times a week she will get a phone call from someone wanting her to remove a curse or spell, which she rebuffs; she doesn’t think spells and curses are real. In some ways she is less astrally minded than many in New York’s professional class who come to her.

“Logical people need to find a source of why things don’t go your way,” she said. “It’s easier to believe that you’re cursed, rather than turning a finger at yourself: Where did I go wrong?”

One woman came to her for a second opinion after visiting a fortuneteller in Hell’s Kitchen in order to remove a curse. The fortuneteller had told the woman she had to do 10 sessions, at $400 a session, to remove the curse.

Margulis was in disbelief. “This is an educated woman I am talking to!” she said. “People cling to this glimmer of hope that their problems will go away because of magic. That to me is scary.”

O’Mathúna said there is research that supports the idea that “better-educated people” want to direct their own healthcare—a potentially good thing—and so tend to get into alternative medicine, which often leads to New Age practices.

Ben Jacobs was one of those who took a path of alternative healthcare. Ten years ago, Jacobs had a 16-hour surgery to remove a tumor at the base of his brain. His neurosurgeon wasn’t sure he would make it through the surgery, and when he did wake up, the doctor told him simply to rest and heal. But for two years after that Jacobs was in misery, at 40 percent of his mental capacity and having gained over 50 pounds from his limited physical capacity.

The neurosurgeon who took his case post-surgery only physically touched him once in that recovery period, he said, to check his scar, and then simply had him fill out a pain journal so she could prescribe him more pills. Jacobs ran into a friend from high school, who recommended he try an energy healer she knew.

“At that point if you had said, ’Here is some bat blood,’ ... I would have knocked a small child over to get it,” Jacobs said. He went to the energy healer and got treatment he describes as deep tissue massage that finds “energy blocks” in the body, and he began feeling better within two weeks.

Since then he has continued going to an energy healer and after some research added acupuncture, meditation, and eating a more organic diet. Jacobs, now 40, grew up in the church and reads Scripture every day, but he has now incorporated these more Eastern practices into his life.

Jacobs’ frustrating experience with traditional doctors is not a surprise to O’Mathúna, who said alternative therapists often have a better bedside manner than traditional doctors, taking time to listen to people about their stresses.

“That’s where the placebo effect can be much more powerful, when you trust the practitioner who takes a half hour with you, versus the doctor who takes two minutes with you. Whatever they suggest to you, you might have more trust in,” said O’Mathúna. “But the question shouldn’t just be, ‘Does it help me feel better?’ What is the power or the energy behind this thing? What’s the evidence that this is a benefit? ... Just critically examine things.” @
TURNAROUND
When Pat Kelley was growing up in the 1960s, Chattanooga was still a bustling industrial town. Textile factories, chemical plants, and steam boiler manufacturers employed men and women by the thousands. As a boy, Kelley caught glimpses of fire flashing in the foundries and watched as steel mills hurled atomized carbon into the humid Southern air.

The Western and Atlantic Railroad first put Chattanooga on the map in 1850, ultimately fueling a post–Civil War economic boom that turned the sleepy Tennessee town into a manufacturing powerhouse and transportation hub. “The Dynamo of Dixie” reached its commercial peak in the early 1960s, but with prosperity came pollution.

“The story went that [when] men wore white shirts to work downtown, between the foundries and the industries, they would go home and their shirts would be blackened,” Kelley said. “There was a lot of smoke.”

Making matters worse, the surrounding mountains trapped the growing smog under a lid of warm air—a phenomenon known as “atmospheric inversion.” In 1969, a federal air quality report declared Chattanooga the most polluted city in the United States. In the 1970s new EPA regulations, economic downturn, and foreign competition wreaked havoc on industrial towns across America: Chattanooga was not spared.

“There was no growth,” Kelley said. “The industrial market that was there, all of a sudden wasn’t.”

After graduating high school, he moved to Knoxville to study engineering at the University of Tennessee, returning to his hometown in 1975 to take a job with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Even in a bum economy, nuclear power plants need engineers. From his downtown office, Kelley
watched the city die: “From Fourth Street down to the [Tennessee] River was just decrepit no man’s land.”

One by one, factories closed, passenger trains stopped, and foundries fell silent. Blue-collar jobs disappeared and the jobless fled toward brighter horizons. The interstate highway redirected traffic (and the business it brought) away from downtown. Warehouses, once full of goods and bustling with activity, emptied—their bare skeletons remained behind as towering testaments to a bygone era. “The Dynamo of Dixie” deteriorated to a 20th-century environmental and economic wasteland.

In the 1980s, though, Chattanooga began reinventing itself. It is now home to a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem of tech startups, logistics hubs, and small businesses of all kinds. A 2017 American Lung Association report declared the city’s air quality, once the worst in America, to be among the best in the country, and Chattanooga has earned a reputation as an outdoor adventure mecca.

Formerly crumbling neighborhoods are filled with the sounds of construction and moving trucks as businesses and people flock in, drawn by the low cost of living and high quality of life—yet in this city of 179,000, many Chattanoogans are still in poverty.

Chattanooga’s story of rebirth began in the early ’80s when civic leaders, philanthropic foundations, and nonprofits launched initiatives aimed at reimagining what Chattanooga could be. An alphabet soup of projects and partnerships organized conversations with the community, drew up plans and proposals, and sent civic leaders across the country to study other struggling cities that had turned themselves around.

River City Company, an economic development nonprofit born from those dialogues and dreams, spearheaded a long-term city revitalization program centered around downtown and the waterfront. River City built and opened in 1992 the Tennessee Aquarium on the banks of the river, the same area Kelley described as a “no man’s land.” The aquarium attracted tourists, changed the city’s image, and kicked off Chattanooga’s renaissance.

For the next two decades, the city’s public-private alliance continued to craft public spaces, building parks, plazas, apartments, and theaters. As the downtown area transformed, people moved back and businesses revived. Artists painted murals and installed other public artworks, bringing character and color to previously drab buildings and streets, celebrating local history, and “rebranding” struggling neighborhoods to stimulate economic growth. Increasingly, the city was a destination, rather than a place to avoid or escape.

Yet, even as the city developed, some continued to suffer. “When the foundries closed, almost all of the blue-collar jobs went away,” remembered Randy Nabors, who pastored New City Fellowship in Chattanooga for more than 35 years. “It was great for our health, [but] devastating for the black workers. Some people left. Some people took what retirement they could. But the real problem came for the next generation because there were no jobs for them to go into.”

White flight and a bevy of prestigious private school options took resources away from inner-city public schools, ultimately contributing to inner-city struggles.

“That’s one of the great embarrassments of Chattanooga,” said Nabors. “Some of the [public] schools are doing really well…but there are others that are constantly and consistently failures. And so the cycle continues: broken families, terrible public schools, functionally illiterate kids who graduate without a good education.”

New City Fellowship, Nabors’ church, decided to take the brokenness head-on, embracing holistic inner-city ministry. New City helped find six nonprofits, all dedicated to caring for and empowering the city’s poor and vulnerable. They worked with local youth, trained people in basic job skills, tutored school kids, ministered to widows, and set up a clinic for undocumented children.

Other churches and Christian nonprofits in Chattanooga paid attention to their city’s needs. Nabors cited a revival that took place at Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church in the early ’70s: “All of a sudden, people got saved—and these were people who really owned Chattanooga. … They began to wake up and say: ‘We need to invest in our city.’”

Prominent members of that church gave money and pursued relationships with struggling communities. The Maclellan Foundation, a Christian philanthropic organization, began to focus grants locally.

In 2010, Chattanooga’s publicly owned Electric Power Board (EPB) launched a public fiber-optic network known as “the Gig,” offering affordable internet at blistering speeds of up to
1 gigabyte per second—the fastest in America at the time. By 2015, EPB’s internet capabilities reached 10 gigabytes per second. Chattanooga began branding itself as “the Gig City,” a rising Silicon Valley of the South. Suddenly, Chattanooga was a tech town.

The Gig positioned Chattanooga as a city on the cutting edge and kicked off a culture of entrepreneurship. Since the fiber network’s advent, the city has demarcated an official “Innovation District,” outside investors have ponied up more than $50 million in venture capital, and entrepreneurs have founded dozens of new businesses from microbreweries to freight logistics firms.

Not just the startup economy is booming. In 2011, Volkswagen inaugurated a new assembly plant just outside the city, bringing thousands of manufacturing jobs. An Amazon fulfillment center brought thousands more. Unemployment is at an 18-year low, hovering around 3.1 percent in December 2018.

Yet, as in many rapidly developing cities, economic success for some can mean rising costs for all. When rent and property taxes go up, many of the elderly or poor can no longer afford the houses they have occupied for decades (1 in 5 Chattanoogans lives on poverty-level income). Jobs may be relatively plentiful, but wages are often low or stagnant. A 2012 report by The Business Journals, a media company, listed Chattanooga as one of the Top 10 U.S. markets with “very pronounced inequality.”

Marco Perez, vice president of operations for Launch Cha, asks, “Is there an inclusive opportunity for everybody? ... The answer is no.” Launch Cha is teaching entrepreneurship to members of groups underrepresented in the startup world: minorities, women, people from low-wealth communities. It’s considering extending its training to the elderly.

“When I started doing this work, people would tell me: ‘That’s great, but what we’re really looking for in Chattanooga is home run hitters,’” Perez said. “If you want home run hitters, you don’t look at a person and say: ‘You look like the type of guy that could hit home runs.’ You don’t look at an industry (tech), or a demographic (young, white, male). You teach everybody to bat.... Then you put extra resources around people with skill to actually scale up their idea.... I see this as part of the healthy economic development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.”

Launch is one of several organizations working to extend the fruits of Chattanooga’s success to underrepresented communities. Tech Goes Home, a nonprofit, works to bridge the digital divide by teaching basic internet skills and providing affordable laptops to program participants. Hope for the Inner City, a nonprofit founded by New City Fellowship, runs various economic development and community revitalization programs, including soft-skills jobs training.

Chattanooga’s continued success may depend on how well opportunities extend to the whole community. “Across the board, we’ve been really blessed as a city,” Nabors said. “There is no comparison to [how it was] when I first got here. It’s a wonderful place to raise a family—except for those trapped in the inner city.... As they say: ‘A rising tide floats all boats.’ But boats with holes in them don’t float well.”

“Chattanooga is a great self-promoter,” Perez said. “I actually don’t mean that negatively.... It functions very much in the mentality that a developer does. A developer will say... ‘Look, I know this [piece of land] looks like a swamp to you, but dream with me about what it could become.’”

Perez sees this ability to cast a vision for the future as Chattanooga’s greatest strength. Urban design, environmental cleanup, philanthropy, public art, the outdoor economy, the Gig, the entrepreneurial ecosystem, engaged churches—they’re all pieces to the puzzle, chapters in the story of a scrappy Southern town. But Chattanooga’s real secret sauce is the ability of its leaders and its citizens to adapt constantly.

Can the city improve for all its citizens? “This is a good city,” said Perez: “A lot of promise and potential, and the vision’s been cast. [But] we’ve got a long way to go.”

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mailbag@wng.org @WORLD_mag
Walking along the long narrow stretch of Ochheuteal Beach on the Cambodian coast of Sihanoukville is like walking between two worlds. On one side, a small boy runs gleefully into the waves as the golden sun dips down to the ocean, the sky awash in purples and pinks. On the other, trash piles up on construction sites as the skeletons of buildings and tower cranes stretch to the sky.

At the center of town, the garish statues of two golden lions in the middle of a roundabout watch over what once was a quiet beach town popular among Western backpackers, expats, and local Cambodians. Yet today, large cement trucks rumble past high-rise Chinese hotels and casinos, the ocean air is polluted with dust, and the noise of construction continues day and night. Restaurant signs prominently feature simplified Chinese rather than Khmer or English and advertise food from different regions of China: Sichuan, Shanxi, Beijing. Walking down the street in Sihanoukville feels more like being in China than in Cambodia.

Although gambling is illegal for Cambodians, the city currently boasts about 30 casinos for Chinese tourists, with
Chinese wealth is transforming the formerly sleepy beach town of Sihanoukville, Cambodia, into a tourist and gambling hot spot—and many locals aren’t happy about it

By Angela Lu Fulton in Sihanoukville, Cambodia

Second in a series on changing cities

70 more currently under construction. The largest is Jin Bei Casino & Hotel, lit up at night with multicolored lights and decorated with a 3D model of playing cards and dice in a clamshell above the entrance. Inside, patrons walk through a metal detector into a bright, spacious casino with a patterned carpet. Past rows of electronic slot machines, chain-smoking Chinese men place bets at green-felted baccarat tables as Cambodians deal the cards.

Chinese investors hope to turn Sihanoukville, named after the late Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, into a gambling and vacation destination for Chinese tourists.

But more than the promise of a new Macao, Sihanoukville is also the only deep-water port in Cambodia and an important part of China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to create a network of transportation, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure across Asia, Europe, and Africa.

In the tax-free Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone, which spans 4 square miles, Chinese companies run most of the existing factories. The goal is to open 300 factories and
employ 70,000 workers to make garments and consumer goods at low costs. China is Cambodia’s closest ally and largest foreign investor, funneling $5.3 billion into the country between 2013 and 2017. At the same time, Cambodia’s reliance on China is growing: The West cut off aid after Prime Minister Hun Sen dissolved opposition parties and jailed political leaders ahead of last July’s elections.

While Sihanoukville’s construction boom has created more jobs for Cambodians, resentment toward the Chinese newcomers is also growing. The massive overdevelopment has destroyed beaches, priced locals out of the area, and increased crime as the casinos attract money laundering and Chinese gangs. Cambodians complain that Chinese money ends up back in Chinese pockets: Tourists stay in Chinese-run hotels, eat at Chinese-run restaurants, and hire Chinese drivers, putting locals out of business.

On one side of the roundabout, Western and Chinese tourists enjoy fresh-baked pizzas, flatbread dipped in hummus, and large bowls of spaghetti bolognese at Olive & Olive Mediterranean Restaurant. Ethnically Turkish owner Fahrettin Korhan opened the restaurant seven years ago when the town was still small. At the time, he felt frustrated that he couldn’t find any restaurants in the area with good food and good hygiene, so he opened his own, hiring local employees and cooking with imported ingredients. Since then Olive & Olive has become one of the most popular restaurants in town.

When Chinese workers came to town three years ago, Korhan was prepared. Olive & Olive was the first restaurant to feature a Chinese-language menu, and he was excited that the Chinese wanted to invest in Cambodia and its people. He had grown tired of unambitious Western expats who staffed their restaurants and guesthouses with backpackers (Western, low-budget travelers) in exchange for food and shelter rather than hire locals. Korhan even had some of his employees learn Mandarin in order to interact with their new customers.

But after the Chinese arrived, Korhan’s tune changed: “We realized these people are invading the country and not even employing Khmer staff or buying construction material from this country.” While Cambodians could earn low-paying jobs at the casinos or construction sites, the Chinese brought over their own materials and workers. Other enterprising Chinese businessmen opened up their own restaurants, grocery stores, and taxi companies. While Chinese money has reached the hands of Sihanoukville landowners, laborers can no longer afford to live in the city.

The nonstop construction has also cost Korhan, as workers are building a giant hotel on a plot of land next to the guesthouse he owns. Day and night, construction workers dig into the ground with jackhammers, cracking the walls of his guesthouse. He’s recently filed a petition for the construction to stop since he’s no longer able to rent out the rooms due to the racket next door.

“The problem here is there’s no infrastructure, no control over the construction,” Korhan said. “They just come and do as they wish. They think money can buy everything.”

As Chinese swoop in with suitcases full of cash, rent has skyrocketed: In the past, Olive & Olive staff could rent an apartment to share between two or three people for $50 a month. Today, the same apartment costs $800. The high rent has forced thousands to move and shut down hundreds of Cambodian-owned businesses. Bars, nightclubs, and restaurants once lined the beachfront, but most have been forced to close as backpackers—their main clientele—have stopped coming. One- and two-star reviews fill the TripAdvisor page for Ochheuteal Beach, with tourists complaining about broken glass, trash, and even dead rats found in the sand.

The crime rate also has increased as the casino business naturally attracts other vices: money laundering, prostitution, kidnappings, drunk driving, and fights. Police are easily swayed by bribes, so many of the perpetrators are not caught. Last July, a Chinese gangster shot four men from a rival gang in the legs during a drunken brawl at a Chinese restaurant. Shortly afterward, five Chinese tourists kidnapped another five tourists and held them for ransom to cover gambling losses.

The tensions between local Cambodians and the influx of Chinese prompted provincial Gov. Yun Min to write in a report to the Ministry of the Interior in January 2018 that the large number of foreigners in the city “gives opportunity to the Chinese mafia to commit crimes and kidnap Chinese investors due to increased insecurity in the province.” He added that “some foreigners do not respect the traffic laws; they drink alcohol, get drunk, yell, have arguments, and are fighting each other at restaurants and in public places.”

Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has forged close ties with China, reassured Sihanoukville residents that the rough-edged
Quid pro quos

Beijing’s model of giving out loans with a promise of nonintervention has been a boon to Cambodia’s strongman, Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has remained in power for the past 34 years. While the West had always given funds on the condition Cambodia move toward democracy, Beijing writes blank checks regardless of Hun Sen’s crackdowns on political opponents. In exchange, Hun Sen has supported China’s South China Sea territorial claims and has banned Taiwan’s flag from Cambodia, treating the island as a province of China.

Yet Chinese loans have higher interest rates than those of other countries and typically require countries to hire state-owned Chinese companies to build the infrastructure. Cambodia also owes half of its $6 billion in public foreign debt to China, with $3.5 billion more in the Belt and Road Initiative lending pipeline. It’s one of 23 countries at high risk of debt distress due to Belt and Road loans, according to a report by the Center for Global Development. But Hun Sen is upbeat, announcing after a recent meeting with China’s President Xi Jinping, “The President said the relationship between China and Cambodia is very special, compared to other countries.”

Chinese tourists are now Cambodia’s largest source of foreign visitors, making up 32 percent of international arrivals. More than 1.27 million Chinese tourists visited Cambodia during the first eight months of 2018, up 72 percent from the same period in 2017. At the popular tourist destination of Angkor Wat, a temple complex built in the 12th century, Chinese tour groups swarm the grounds. Chinese women in flowing dresses and heels snap selfies in front of intricate carvings on the sandstone walls. One woman spent 10 minutes throwing her willowy scarf into the air again and again, hoping her friend could capture the moment in a perfect portrait. –A.L.F.

Chinese workers were only in the country temporarily because of the shortage of skilled Cambodians. Once all the construction is finished, he suggested, a different sort of Chinese tourist would be coming to the country. China promises to send 2 million visitors a year by 2020.

Only a few Chinese families came to the Sihanoukville beach during the Chinese New Year holiday in February. Even at Jin Bei Casino, just a few tables were occupied. Korhan noted that this was because the casinos in Sihanoukville make most of their money from live-dealing online gaming. This means the casino has a separate pit or room where dealers pass out cards with a high-definition camera pointed at the table. Players can place bets and make moves from the comfort of their own homes. These online gambling sites share the gaming license of the brick-and-mortar casino. Because Cambodia does not yet have strict gaming rules in place, it’s easy for gamblers to launder money or skirt currency controls, especially through online gaming. Money-laundering watchdog Financial Action Task Force announced in February that it had placed Cambodia back on its gray list of “jurisdictions with strategic deficiencies” as the country had never prosecuted a money-laundering case and its judicial system had “high levels of corruption.”

Olive & Olive is considered lucky: While business has dropped by 30 percent, Korhan’s preparation for the influx of Chinese nationals and the fact that he’s locked into a nine-year lease on the building means that he may be the last non-Chinese restaurant to remain standing. In order to attract more customers, he asks his Chinese customers to rate and review his restaurant on Chinese social media platforms.

Across the street from Olive & Olive, Western tourists wait outside the Koh Rong Dive Center for a bus to take them to a ferry that will speed them away from Sihanoukville construction to the tranquil islands off the Cambodian coast. Inside the dive shop, Katerina Zelenova sits behind a table reminiscing about what life in Sihanoukville was like when she arrived from Russia in 2013: “It was a sleepy, slow, and very friendly town.” Now the town is polluted, the old expat haunts are gone, and she feels like a stranger in her own home.

She remembers when finding a place to live was as easy as biking around and looking for “room for rent” signs, but now it’s impossible to find any available rooms. The landlord of the dive shop is also tripling the shop’s rent, and she believes it’s only a matter of time before they have to move. “I love the company I work for and I make good money, but if I got a chance to leave, I would take it,” Zelenova said.

Further from town, Otres Beach has managed to stay relatively clean and quiet. Only a few Chinese-backed hotels are under construction there, but the beachfront restaurants say that business is bad because the Chinese influx has scared away their usual Western clientele. At the Ren Hotel’s restaurant, Cambodian manager Reach Heng noted that since the Chinese came, the price of seafood has increased while the number of customers has decreased.

He complains that Westerners have stopped coming to Sihanoukville because the Chinese tourists are loud, they smoke, and they get into drunken fights. Locals like him are vexed because the Chinese seem to look down on Cambodians. “They don’t want to learn about our culture,” Reach Heng said. “They only want to come here to look rich.”
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VISIT PHC.EDU/WORLD2019 TO SAVE $50 ON REGISTRATION
On an August Sunday afternoon, the streets of central Munich, Germany, showed signs of approaching Oktoberfest: Huge beer tents filled the festival grounds and hundreds of temporary cell towers were in place to support the two-week influx of 7 million visitors.

Two streets away, at the Freie Evangelische Gemeinde (Free Evangelical Church, or FEG), there were signs of another influx to Germany: refugees. As I walked upstairs, the bustle and aroma of coffee from the fellowship hour gave way to quiet in a room where Afghan refugees meet each week to study the Bible in Farsi.

Welcoming 1.6 million asylum-seekers since 2015 has strained the German social system, but it has also been a God-delivered opportunity for FEG to reach part of the refugee population.

In 2015, as the first wave of refugees arrived, two Afghan men came looking for a Persian church that had once met in the building. That community had left, but theology student Jonathan Case, 30, offered to read the Bible with the men. They explained how they had converted to Christianity, left home because of...
attacks from family members, and ended up as refugees. Now they wanted to learn more about their new faith. With one man translating for the other, they read the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

Each Sunday, the men returned. Soon they brought other Afghans. “The first time we had visitors, we read Matthew 23, when Jesus calms the storm and the disciples say, ‘Who is this man who can do this?’” recounted Thomas Giebel, 50, an IT professional who co-leads the study with Case. “The Muslims said the same: ‘We also want to know, who is this man?’ I said, ‘Come next week, and we’ll talk about who Jesus is.’”

The study bore fruit: One by one, the men professed faith in Jesus. Giebel said converts described a typical progression: “The first time I came, I was Muslim. After a few visits, between Muslim and Christian. Now, I’m a Christian, and I want to keep coming back to study more.”

Vincent Mohammad arrived in Germany in 2015, already a convert and looking forward to living in a “Christian nation.” But as he walked the streets of Munich, he was disappointed to find most churches empty. (WORLD has changed Mohammad’s name: He could face danger back in Afghanistan if he loses his asylum case in Germany.) Mohammad, 34, grew up in Iran, where his family moved to flee conflict in Afghanistan. At the café where he worked in Tehran, he met a man who gave him a Bible. He read and believed. Rising persecution of ethnic Afghans in Iran forced Mohammad to Turkey. There he registered his religion as a Christian, not knowing that this status of convert put him in greater danger. When he was able, he boarded a boat for Europe.

When I asked how he found the FEG group, Mohammad typed Farsi script into a phone app. A moment later, eyes shining, he held up the translation: Miracle. An outing with other refugees had gone awry; he rode the wrong bus, ended up in front of the FEG, and learned there was a Bible study in Farsi.

The Sunday I visited, 17 men and one woman attended, ranging in age from teens to mid-50s. Case and Giebel have contact information for 70 attendees. After opening with prayer, Giebel updated the group: Two members were recently deported and were now back in Kabul, Afghanistan, rejected by their families for their conversion and without means of support. Another man’s asylum plea, initially denied, was in appeal; another’s court date was in a few weeks.

The group studied 1 Thessalonians 5. Giebel explained each verse in German, and Mohammad translated into Farsi. “We try to prepare those who will return to Afghanistan,” said Giebel. “We chose 1 Thessalonians because it is a letter to the persecuted church. Afghanistan is a dangerous place to be a Christian. We stress that our security is not in Germany but in Christ.”

Some passages go against cultural norms. Before explaining 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22, Giebel stressed that Christians do good works not to earn salvation, but out of gratitude to God. A lively discussion followed in Farsi, and faces registered perplexity, then wonder, as they explained it to each other.

The group also wrestled with Paul’s admonitions to “Rejoice always” and seek no revenge. Refugee life is hard, and Afghans from different tribes brought their discord with them. Case said Biblical instructions to love one another are vital: “We encourage them to help each other in basic ways: to meet someone at the train station, or call each other during the week. Most of the refugees live alone and don’t know other Christians in the refugee centers. We want to help them build community.”

Before leaving, we prayed for the men in Kabul, and Giebel took a small offering to send to them. Mohammad’s prayer request was for his family in Iran: He hasn’t seen them in six years.
In 2017, WORLD named as its “Series of the Year” the Reformed Expository Commentary from P&R Publishing. Various Reformed pastor-scholars authored the volumes in the series, drawing from their own sermons, and P&R plans for the series eventually to cover every book of the Bible. We praised it because we found that good editing brought out the best in the sermons without being too academic.

P&R has now withdrawn from publication the series’ commentary on the book of Acts, written by Derek W.H. Thomas, the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, S.C., part of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Thomas, 66, is also a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Atlanta, a teacher at Ligonier Ministries, and author of more than a dozen books.

Last October an anonymous source sent research to P&R showing Thomas’ commentary had many instances of plagiarism. The Acts commentary was based on Thomas’ sermons, which contained some word-for-word plagiarism from talks by theologian Sinclair Ferguson. Ferguson preceded Thomas as senior minister at First Presbyterian, and the two are friends.

P&R, which investigated and confirmed the plagiarism, said in a statement the problem was a result of “unclear note-taking more than a decade before the commentary on Acts was written, and we believe it does not reflect intentional misuse on the part of the author.”

P&R Vice President Ian Thompson elaborated: He said that as soon as P&R had informed Thomas of the plagiarism charge and sent him documents for a response, Thomas “immediately called back and said he did not at that time know how it had happened but that he would comply with anything that we did—in effect he threw himself on our mercy. We were impressed by the humility and contrition expressed by Derek in response to our enquiries.”

Still, because of the plagiarism, the publisher removed the book from print.

Thomas did not address the plagiarism publicly and did not return a request for comment. According to RTS Chancellor Ligon Duncan, Thomas called Ferguson as soon as he learned of the plagiarism. Ferguson read the commentary that night and “noted that he is one of the most frequently cited modern authors,” Duncan said, adding that Ferguson remains “fiercely supportive” of Thomas.

The session at First Presbyterian backed Thomas strongly in a statement of support, saying he would be exonerated from outside “attacks.” The matter is before the presbytery.

Shane Anderson, who runs the blog The Daily Genevan and is an elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, spotlighted the Acts incident in a series of blog posts in December. He called on Reformed circles not to give their own authors an easy pass on plagiarism, and asked for P&R to explain how it determined the Acts plagiarism was unintentional.

Anderson later deleted the posts, but one read: “Instead of a concern that the plagiarism was unintentional, Thomas was involved in, was critical of pastor Mark Driscoll, whose 1 and 2 Peter study guide was found to contain plagiarism in 2013. “We have to hold ourselves to the same standard.”

In February, Duncan sent an email to the First Presbyterian session and the local presbytery, reporting that an RTS committee reviewing the Acts incident had cleared Thomas of “any knowing and intentional plagiarism.” He added that Thomas will continue to teach.

“From the standpoint of RTS,” Duncan wrote, “the case is now closed.”
At a breakfast gathering in St. Louis on the first morning of a special meeting of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in February, Jerry Kulah set the table for the events of the next few days.

The UMC delegate had traveled all the way from Liberia to participate in the international meeting that would decide whether Methodists insist their clergy uphold Biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality or allow churches to decide for themselves.

Kulah put it simply: African Methodists are “grounded in God’s Word and the gracious and clear teachings of our church. ... We would warmly welcome you as our traveling companions, but if you choose another road, we Africans cannot go with you.”

This wasn’t an idle threat. While the 12-million-member denomination has lost nearly 100,000 members annually in America, it has gained more than 100,000 each year in Africa. (The UMC has nearly 7 million members in the United States and 5.6 million members in Africa, Asia, and Europe.)

Africans constituted a third of the 864 delegates gathered for the UMC’s General Conference.

In the end, 53 percent of the UMC delegates voted to uphold the church’s formal teaching on sexuality, and it strengthened penalties for church leaders that perform same-sex marriages or ordain actively gay clergy.

But the process was contentious.

During the debate, UMC Pastor Tom Berlin likened the traditional plan to “putting a virus into the American church that will make it very sick.” He asked delegates who favored upholding traditional teaching to abstain from voting, and he noted how Africans had stopped the spread of Ebola by washing their hands: “I’m asking you to wash your hands of this traditional plan today, because it will bring that illness into our house.”

If it was alarming for conservatives to hear Biblical fidelity labeled “a virus,” delegate Chris Ritter from Illinois was also aghast to hear such language directed in part toward African pastors who had risked their lives to minister the gospel to fellow Liberians during the spread of the deadly Ebola virus.

When another American pastor encouraged all the delegates in favor of letting churches decide their own doctrine to stand, Ritter said he had “never been so proud” to stay seated with his African friends.

Ritter wrote on his People Need Jesus blog: “First World temper tantrums about the sexual expression of financially kept clergy ran into the patient ferment of God-fearing servants who know what it means to suffer for Christ.”

Though the meeting was contentious, the General Conference passed a measure to allow churches to leave the UMC with their church buildings and property intact. That decision stands in stark contrast with the policies of bodies like the Episcopal Church USA that have waged years of litigation against local congregations trying to retain their property after leaving their denomination over issues of Biblical fidelity.

The policy details may have to be reviewed by the UMC’s judicial council—or perhaps at the next global conference in 2020—but Mark Tooley, a member of the UMC and the head of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, said he hadn’t heard any fellow conservatives express a desire to take property away from congregations that decide to leave.

For now, it’s unclear how many might go. In the days after the conference, Adam Hamilton, pastor of the largest UMC congregation in the United States, suggested those dissatisfied with the vote might pursue other avenues for trying to stay in the UMC. He called starting a new denomination a last resort.

Some church leaders may continue violating church teaching and force the UMC to discipline them. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli is pastor of Foundry UMC, a high-profile Washington, D.C., congregation that has hired gay clergy and performed same-sex weddings. She told The New York Times: “We’re not going anywhere. If someone wants to come for me, for us, then bring it.”

A protracted fight could lead weary conservative churches to leave, but Tooley says he’s hopeful they’ll stay and work to strengthen the denomination: “If the church becomes more orthodox...then we have the possibility to grow again.”

Protesters chant during the UMC’s Special Session of the General Conference.
Harass, assault, repeat

CHINA STEPS UP PERSECUTION OF EARLY RAIN COVENANT CHURCH by June Cheng

On Feb. 24 in China, members of Chengdu’s Early Rain Covenant Church gathered inside living rooms for worship as they’ve done since the Chinese government shut down the church and arrested its leaders in December. But on that Sunday, police showed up at two homes, forcing everyone—children, the elderly, and pregnant women—into police buses and taking them to the local station.

Police detained a total of 44 people, the youngest of which was only 2 months old, according to Early Rain’s Feb. 25 update. Police placed 11 people in administrative detention and released the rest that day or early the next morning. Inside the station, police hit a man and his wife in the face and withheld food from some of the parishioners, according to the update.

Early Rain Covenant Church has faced continued persecution since Dec. 9, when police detained more than 100 church members and leaders. Pastor Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong, the church’s four elders, and six others remain in prison, unable to meet with their lawyers.

On the same day as the raids, police assaulted Wang’s mother, who is in her 70s, as she withdrew money from a bank ATM. A police officer who had been tailing her tried to peek from the side as she typed in her PIN number. She asked him not to look, and in response, he insulted her and pulled her hair, according to an account by Wang’s niece.

When a bank security guard tried to stop him, the officer yelled, “I’m enforcing the law!” and the frightened guard walked away. The officer continued to kick the elderly woman in the legs while a second officer restrained her. When Wang’s mother later reported the abuse, the director of the local police station said he would deal with the officer.

Early Rain deacon and journalist Zhang Guoqing published an article condemning the attack on Wang’s mother and her four children have also faced constant harassment since her husband’s detention began. Twice police have pressured their landlords to evict them, forcing them to find a new apartment. Police told Xu that her family members were illegal residents because her husband’s doctoral degree isn’t connected to his registered residence in Chengdu and their children don’t have hukou (household registration).

Their most recent eviction was on Feb. 22, when their landlord tore up the contract they had just signed. A photo from that night shows Xu hugging and comforting two of her sons as they cry about losing their home again. The landlord had earlier promised Xu that she would not comply with the police eviction request.

A week earlier, on Feb. 14, Xu and the wives of three other imprisoned Early Rain members met with representatives of the German Consulate in Chengdu to talk about their situation. The next day, local police detained and interrogated each of them about what they said in the meeting, whom they met, and what type of assistance the diplomats offered, according to the Texas-based China Aid.

During that interrogation, according to a church update, a national security officer said, “Too bad we can’t go back in time 40 years and put dunce hats on them and behead them.” He added that they would kill them sooner or later. The women were released the next morning.

A Feb. 21 church update ended with a passage from the book of Revelation describing the heavenly picture of a multitude of people in white robes who have experienced great tribulation. The update read, “Even though we are struggling with the unbearable weight of harassments, surveillance, threats, and humiliation, as soon as we remember that this is a way of being imprisoned with those in prison, heavenly joy rises up within us.”

Xu Miaozhuang, the wife of imprisoned elder Matthew Bingsen Su, and her four children have also faced constant harassment since her husband’s detention began. Twice police have pressured their landlords to evict them, forcing them to find a new apartment. Police told Xu that her family members were illegal residents because her husband’s doctoral degree isn’t connected to his registered residence in Chengdu and their children don’t have hukou (household registration).

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One well-publicized case ended this month in a slight win for religious liberty and freedom of speech. The City of Bloomington, Minn., gave up on its case against Ramin Parsa and agreed not to pursue prosecution further—and the resolution offers some lessons for others hit by clampdowns.

The legal battle began on Aug. 25 when Parsa, a pastor from Los Angeles, was strolling The Mall of America, a huge enterprise that bills itself as a tourist destination for 40 million people annually from around the world. Enrique Flores, a Minnesota church elder, and Flores’s 14-year-old son were with him.

Parsa, 33, says two Somali women approached the threesome at 8:30 p.m., struck up a conversation, and asked if Parsa was a Muslim. When he said he used to be but was now a Christian, the women asked him to explain. So Parsa told them how he converted to Christianity in Iran, survived stabbing by a Muslim, escaped to Turkey, and in 2008 gained admission to the United States as a Christian refugee. He is now a U.S. citizen.

Parsa and Flores both say the women were eager to talk, but a third woman overheard the conversation and asked Parsa to shut up. When he said he was just answering questions, the third woman shouted that he was harassing them and left to find a security guard, who arrived and told Parsa he couldn’t solicit at the mall. Parsa said he was merely answering questions during a private conversation.

The guard walked away. Parsa and his friends went to a nearby Starbucks. When they left the coffee shop, three security guards stopped them. According to the police report, mall security asked a family at Starbucks what Parsa had been talking about with them, and the family members said: religion. The guards told Parsa the mall is private property and told him to leave. Parsa said he had a right to be there. The guards said Parsa remarked, “It’s a free country,” and threatened to sue the mall. Two more guards arrived.

Flores says “the guards bullied us and tried to intimidate us.” He watched them force Parsa’s hands behind his back and handcuff him. Two guards escorted Flores and his son out of the mall. Other guards brought Parsa to a basement holding area. Parsa says they kept him tied to a chair for more than three hours, not allowing him food, drink, or a phone. Police then arrived and charged him with criminal trespass. He bailed himself out around 2 a.m.

Anthony Bushnell, Parsa’s attorney, says mall security guards singled out Parsa for discussing religion: Such discrimination violates public accommodation laws and the First Amendment. Parsa and his advisors decided not to keep quiet about the arrest: He told his story to Christian publications and on Christian radio.

Last month Mike Hartley, deputy chief of Bloomington police, told me “Parsa was approaching people to talk about his religion, forcing dialogue, and those people complained.” He said Parsa would not stop and stated that this incident is no different than if Parsa were preaching on a megaphone in a private space.

The case was scheduled to go to trial on April 29, but on March 7 Bloomington officials came to their senses and dropped the charges. It’s not really a victory for religious liberty: The court documents say Parsa may not go to the mall for a probationary period of one year, and Parsa may pursue legal action against the mall.

The question is still open: Can visitors to a mall discuss religion in a venue touting “America” in its name? 🎟

—Sharon Dierberger is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute’s mid-career course
Hazards in the lab
RISKY VIRAL RESEARCH GETS A GOVERNMENT GREEN LIGHT by Julie Borg

The United States government has quietly resumed funding for certain high-risk viral experiments that regulators had blocked for four years, according to a February report by Science magazine.

The experiments, known as gain-of-function studies, involve scientists modifying a dangerous virus to make it even more potent and contagious and conducting experiments aimed at finding a vaccine or cure. These experiments often produce highly contagious pathogens potentially capable of wide and uncontrolled spread in human populations. Many scientists fear these deadly viruses could ignite a pandemic if they somehow escaped from the lab or fell into the hands of bioterrorists, and some believe they should be banned.

In 2011 two researchers, Ron Fouchier of Erasmus University Medical Center in the Netherlands and Yoshihiro Kawaoka of the University of Wisconsin in Madison and the University of Tokyo, alarmed the scientific world by revealing they had separately modified the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus so that it spread between ferrets. Many scientists warned the modification might mean the potent virus could also jump to humans.

After a voluntary moratorium by the two researchers’ labs, the experiments resumed in 2013 under new U.S. oversight rules. But concerns reignited after more scientists conducted gain-of-function studies and a series of accidents occurred at federal biocontainment labs. In 2014, U.S. officials announced a pause on federal funding for 18 gain-of-function studies involving influenza, the Middle East respiratory syndrome, and severe acute respiratory syndrome viruses.

In December 2017, the National Institutes of Health lifted the funding pause and invited new gain-of-function research proposals that a safety committee would review. Last year, the committee approved resuming the same type of work in the Fouchier and Kawaoka labs that started the whole debate eight years ago.

Kawaoka told Science he’s glad the government developed new oversight mechanisms and that he can resume his experiments: “We know that it does carry risks. We also believe it is important work to protect human health.”

NOTEBOOK
Science

PREEMIE PREDICTOR
Fifteen million babies are born prematurely each year, but it isn’t always clear whether a particular woman is at risk of delivering early. Now researchers have discovered a blood test that could help predict which pregnant women are at a high risk of spontaneous preterm delivery.

In a study published in January by the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology, the researchers tested blood samples from 87 women who delivered before 36 weeks of gestation.

They found that a subset of five proteins circulating in the mother’s blood during the first trimester signaled a risk of premature delivery. The researchers plan to confirm their findings with a larger study that will incorporate other preterm birth risk factors. —J.B.

SKIN ON DEMAND
Scientists at the Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine have designed a portable medical device that can print skin onto a large wound or burn. The bioprinter, filled with a patient’s own cells, prints new skin by depositing those cells layer by layer directly onto the patient. A Feb. 12 study in Nature described how the device scans the wound and delivers cells exactly where needed to replicate and accelerate the formation of normal skin.

“The technology has the potential to eliminate the need for painful skin grafts,” said co-author Anthony Atala. —J.B.
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Pressure to conform

[ Feb. 16, p. 34 ] Thank you for the excellent article on gender dysphoria. As a family physician, I am distressed by how quickly the medical community has embraced gender dysphoria and encouraged doctors to do the same. Children and adolescents are being seduced into having barbaric procedures without any thought of God’s design and will for their lives.

—KRISTOFER SANDLUND / Zanesville, Ohio

There is a war on our children, especially our male children.

—T.K. WALLACE on wng.org

President Obama’s departments of Education and Justice articulated the transgender dogma in their 2016 “Dear Colleague” letter. It mandated that all public schools allow access to bathrooms and locker rooms based on self-proclaimed gender identity rather than biological sex. Was this based on science or ideology?

—JOHN L. WIESTER / Buellton, Calif.

I know someone who went from a functioning male, college graduate, and manager at a book distribution company to a middle-aged lesbian who struggles to take care of herself. What a mess! It breaks my heart.

—KRISTINE BARBER on Facebook

Targets of hate

[ Feb. 16, p. 7 ] As a young person during World War II, I couldn’t understand how Nazis could torture and murder innocent people at work and then go home to embrace their wives, love their children, and pet the dog. Then I read about New York lawmakers cheering after passing a brutal law that permits unborn babies to be torn limb from limb. I still don’t understand.

—DAVID M. CLARK / Mansfield, Pa.

Jesus is the cure for the heartsickness that leads us to believe it is right to kill our children. How curious that God can only cover my own bloodletting sin with His own blood.

—SAM LOCHINGER on wng.org

Thank you for WORLD, which actually seeks out news to report instead of the latest gossip or outrage.

—MOLLY CROCKER on Facebook

Leftist journalists who dismiss Christianity as so much nonsense don’t understand history or Scripture. The freedoms that Christianity ushered in allowed the development of the Christian heresy we know today as modern liberalism.

—GREG BROWNING on wng.org

No guarantees

[ Feb. 16, p. 18 ] I often fall into the trap of parenting for a guaranteed outcome. It never works. I want the little stinkers to do what I want, and I’m not above throwing a fit to get it. What a great example, right? We must entrust the outcome of our parenting choices to Him.

—AMY BLOYER on Facebook

I still wonder and worry if I hovered and obsessed or smothered and sheltered our children during their homeschooling years. If I did, I can do nothing except to ask forgiveness from God and my children.

—ELIZABETH EDGREN / Albuquerque, N.M.

My wife and I quickly realized that we needed to help our kids recognize the benefits of choosing God for themselves. We see so many young people from Christian homes launch out into the world with no real connection to God personally, totally unprepared to defend a hope that is not yet theirs.

—DON PARFET on wng.org

Command and control

[ Feb. 16, p. 57 ] My heart is sick. I discovered James MacDonald’s preaching recently, and it has been wonderful. Now that powerful word is not going out! Satan is surely interfering.

—CHRISTINE DENNING / Tulare, Calif.

These megachurch operations look a lot like corporate setups with all the power in the top elders. There are even church takeovers.

—WILMA RITTINGER on Facebook

I live in Naples, where I belong to Harvest and have had extensive access to the church’s leaders. Leaving aside one’s opinions of MacDonald and the merger, John Secrest’s inappropriate communication disgraced the church.

—DOUG BARTHOLOMEW on wng.org

Scooters at your service

[ Feb. 16, p. 48 ] Two minutes into my first scooter ride I mistakenly slammed on the brakes and face-planted onto the concrete. I busted my lip and front tooth. Never again.

—MARIA KRAUSE WHITTLE on Facebook

Out with a bang

[ Feb. 16, p. 21 ] I tried to like The Big Bang Theory, but didn’t feel like wasting my time as it mocked creationism and evangelical Christianity through Sheldon’s mother. The scrap of feeling recognized while being scorned doesn’t make a show worth watching.

—JOHN HALE on wng.org
Back to the future  
[ Feb. 16, p. 28 ] Bob Woodson observed that we need to find allies among those suffering most from the agony that the left is pouring into the culture: fatherless homes and destructive drugs and sexual practices. Poor minority families who display traditional values should know that there is a better way than the destructive lifestyles Democrats so fiercely proclaim.

—CHARLES ROBBINS on wng.org

Woodson is a remarkable man. And what a great interview!

—P.V. COLEMAN / Houston, Texas

Expelled from China  
[ Feb. 16, p. 44 ] Chinese Christians have persisted and will persist through persecution. We need not fear or worry as conflicts continue. We should pray. As you concluded, God is raising up Chinese people to be missionaries. They have just as much reason for alarm looking at our country as we do at theirs!

—WILLIAM DUNCAN / Pacifica, Calif.

Man-made notions  
[ Feb. 16, p. 24 ] I spent many years as a university professor myself, and Marvin Olasky’s comment that “more education often leaves us with higher degrees but also higher levels of foolishness” struck home. All too often, more education just helps us better defend our prejudices.

—GEORGE KREM / Holdrege, Neb.

Quick Takes  
[ Feb. 16, p. 16 ] A family in San Jose rented an apartment for their cats at $1,500 per month. The cover story in your previous issue (“Nowhere to live,” Feb. 2, p. 30) described a teacher in the same town who cannot find a decent rental at a reasonable price. Irony, or what? If I were that teacher, I would find a city that needs me and move there in a New York minute.

—TOM OLSON / Woodville, Wis.

Correction

The p. 38 photo of Feryal, a Yazidi woman who escaped ISIS, shows her with her son (“Survivors in a great war,” March 16).

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VOICES

Mailbag

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On the last day of the year in A.D. 406, aided by a land bridge of frozen ice, a band of barbarians crossed from the east to the west bank of the Rhine and into the territory of a doomed Roman Empire. No one knew the empire was doomed that day. The sun still rose over Mainz on Jan. 1 as it always had; peasants of the manor still ate potage and colewort in drafty cruck houses, mended tools and fences, and for a pastime may have skated on a horse shin bone.

It was just in hindsight that it could be seen how that day’s penetration of Rome’s most secure limites was the prelude to the sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths in 410, and far beyond that to the incremental and ignominious decline of a far-flung empire.

Sometimes people living through history do not know they are living through history. Their lives are changed forever, but they see it not. “People should know when they’re conquered,” snarled Quintus to his commander Maximus. Pity that they don’t.

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon nobody knew he’d “crossed the Rubicon,” so to speak. Nobody knew as we now know the long-term implications of this gesture in which Caesar and the 13th Legion stepped over the line from Cisalpine Gaul to Italy. The Rubicon was a humble river, little more than a stream, but great was its breaching in the annals of history. Mark Jan. 10, 49 B.C., as the beginning of the ending of the Roman Republic, and the first salvo of an Imperial Rome.

On Jan. 20, 1942, 15 men convened in a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee at the summons of Reinhard Heydrich, their purpose to discuss a final solution to the so-called Jewish “storage” problem. Nazi persecution of the Jews had started in 1933, but another decade was needed for the locomotive of hate to reach full steam in their systematic wholesale genocide. The aproned servants at the mansion, busily trimming flowers and setting out the best china, afterward cleared tables, bid one another goodnight, and went home for supper. As did the ministers of the Interior, Justice, the Four-Year Plan, and Propaganda; the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories; and the SS representatives, to their respective posts.

What were you doing on Feb. 25, 2019? That’s the day the Senate of the United States of America, greatest nation on earth, voted to block consideration of a Republican infanticide ban bill that would impose criminal penalties on healthcare practitioners who do not provide life-saving care to children born alive during an aborted abortion. All Democrats except three voted against a procedural motion on the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.

Infuriated abortion supporters called the bill misogynistic, shaming of women, an attack on abortion rights, and unnecessary inasmuch as infanticide is already illegal. Illegal, but in my own hearing an abortionist at the hospital a mile from where I sit admitted under cross-examination by Kermit Gosnell’s lawyer Jack McMahon to placing accidentally born babies on a table under a warm blanket until they expire.

God gave ancient Canaan lots of chances. Israel was not allowed to set foot back in their Promised Land until its present occupants—the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hitites, Perizzites, Amorites, Girgashites, and Jebusites—had reached the full measure of their evil ways. “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). That iniquity was “complete,” we surmise from Scripture, when the Canaanites went all the way to infanticide:

“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:31).

The day after Feb. 25, 2019, there were no marches in the street. No conversation I overheard departed from the normal banter. No sermon series I know of was suspended. No indication was there in the town that any Rubicon was crossed, or filling up of measures had been reached. But children’s blood cried out to God from in the ground (Genesis 4:10).
Stimulating simulations

EVIDENCE FOR GOD, NOT HACKERS

The observable universe contains more than 100 billion galaxies. Our galaxy alone, popularly known as the Milky Way, has more than 100 billion stars. Does that make you yearn for those days of yesteryear when many followed the thought of Aristotle and Ptolemy: Five planets plus the sun and the moon circling Earth? Was it easier to evangelize before people thought of Earth as a little sphere circling a fifth-rate star on a minor galaxy’s periphery—so why should God care about us?

A century ago scientists of course knew the Earth moved, but many still thought we were near the center of things. British naturalist/biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, who co-developed (with Charles Darwin) the theory of evolution through natural selection, wrote this in Man’s Place in the Universe (1903): “An overwhelming consensus among the astronomers establishes the fact of our nearly central position in the stellar universe. They all agree that the Milky Way is nearly circular in form. They all agree that our sun is situated almost exactly in its medial plane.”

But astronomers did not agree with that for long. As telescope improvements allowed them to see further out, they saw the vastness of space. They asked a truncated version of Psalm 8’s question—“When I look at your heavens... what is man that you are mindful of him?” Many answered: There’s no God and He’s not mindful. Humans are merely the result of chance plus eons of time, and thus of no importance.

Now, though, I can tell you about a great reversal: A trendy theory among scientists means those billions and billions of galaxies should make belief in a godlike creator-of-sorts more likely, not less. The theory, taken very seriously by establishment evolutionists like Neil deGrasse Tyson, is that we are living in a simulation probably designed by aliens of a far-advanced civilization. As Scientific American

It takes omniscience and omnipotence to create a universe almost unimaginably huge, with billions and billions of stars.

reports, Tyson puts the odds at 50-50 that “our entire existence is a program on someone else’s hard drive.” Reasons why this could be so: “The more we learn about the universe, the more it appears to be based on mathematical laws.”

Of course, Isaac Newton and others saw such laws as proofs of the existence of God, but we are too sophisticated to believe in Him, aren’t we? Maybe not, as long as this “god” appears to be merely human. Scientific American quotes NYU philosophy professor David Chalmers: “We in this universe can create simulated worlds and there’s nothing remotely spooky about that. Our creator isn’t especially spooky, it’s just some teenage hacker in the next universe up.”

Tyson adds, “We don’t think of ourselves as deities when we program Mario, even though we have power over how high Mario jumps. There’s no reason to think they’re all-powerful just because they control everything we do.” Oxford University philosophy professor Nick Bostrom speculates that our descendants with super-powerful computers may have simulated us, and estimates how much computing power that would take: “Simulating the entire universe down to the quantum universe is obviously infeasible, unless radically new physics is discovered.”

Bostrom adds, “In order to get a realistic simulation of human experience, much less [computer power] is needed—only whatever is required to ensure that the simulated humans, interacting in normal human ways with their simulated environment, don’t notice any irregularities.” For example, “The microscopic structure of the inside of the earth can be safely omitted. Distant astronomical objects can have highly compressed representations.”

What should Christians do with such speculation? We can chastise it as one more nutty, atheistic attempt to find a way of explaining creation apart from the Creator—or we can see that such speculation, if true, just produces one more proof of God’s existence. Say a super-advanced hacker in his garage wants to simulate a universe so he can have some bedtime entertainment each evening. Wouldn’t he go for something relatively easy to create, like a small, Earth-centered universe? A new come-on for the video game The Sims FreePlay offers “the ability to build A-frame roofing,” not “the ability to create billions of galaxies.”

A super-advanced hacker could conceivably create a solar system. It takes omniscience and omnipotence to create a universe almost unimaginably huge, with billions and billions of stars. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. ©
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