Overcoming drugs and guerrillas in Colombia

AMERICA’S OVERDOSE
From opioids to benzos, drug anxiety intensifies

A HEROIC CHINESE DISSIDENT FIGHTING MISSIONARY PTSD
JAPAN LOVES GOSPEL MUSIC
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ON THE COVER: Paramedics respond to a call of a heroin overdose in Portland, Maine; photo by Derek Davis/Portland Press Herald via Getty Images
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Every year about this time we encourage you to consider giving WORLD gift memberships to friends or family members.

Some of you have told me your stories—and I’d like to hear more—of how you use WORLD as a gift. Many of you give a membership to each of your adult children. Others flip that and give WORLD to your parents. Family members of all sorts—siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, in-laws—account for more than half of our gift memberships.

Then there’s the “friends” category, which (I’ve heard) includes work colleagues, people in a Bible study, small group, or Sunday school class, friends in your book club. Several of you send it to missionary friends or other expats so they can keep up with what’s going on in the world.

If you have a unique way of sharing WORLD with a friend, I’d like to hear about it.

Compared to some of you, my approach to gift memberships is pretty boring: If I have a friend who I think would benefit from what WORLD does, I generally just get it for them. Sometimes I count on them to renew their own membership after a year. If I have reason to believe that they can’t afford it for themselves, I may just keep getting it for them. If they tell me to stop it, I stop it. But there’s nothing too special or creative about it.

Whether you’re creative or boring (like I am), we want it to be easy to give WORLD to a friend or family member. You may have noticed (I’ve brought it up a few times!) that we lowered the price of our gift memberships. The lower price just barely covers our costs, but that’s not really the point. The point is to encourage you to share WORLD with as many people as you can.

You’ll see several opportunities to give a gift of WORLD in coming weeks, but you can always call our Member Services people at (828) 435-2981 or give online at wng.org/giveworld.
More with less
CAN'T WE MAKE EDUCATION MORE EFFICIENT?

At least when it comes to the task of education, the historical record suggests that Johannes Gutenberg and Henry Ford probably had little in common. In fact, you might well have rejected either of them as a candidate for secretary of education.

But maybe we should look again. On one aspect of the educational enterprise, they operated from much the same philosophy. If there was something good and valuable for the population at large (books for Gutenberg, autos for Ford), there had to be a way to make it available to the masses at a decent cost.

Gutenberg’s movable type produced an explosion in publishing that ended wealthy people’s monopoly on books. Ford’s assembly lines put cars in the driveways of tens of thousands of families, opening doors of opportunity and adventure for them all.

Similar quantum leaps have occurred in dozens of other fields. In case after case, things that used to be luxuries became easily available to the masses.

But not in education. If over the last century we had applied to food production (for example) the strategies we’ve used with schooling, cornflakes would be $20 a box, eggs would be $10 a dozen, and a steak at a restaurant would take a $100 bill. And with those prices would come no guarantee that the food would be edible.

Instead, farmers, processors, and distributors—following the pattern of Gutenberg and Ford—persistently found ways to do more with less. The result: A typical American family today spends less than 15 percent of its income on food, compared with 40 to 50 percent spent by families in some other countries.

Education, meanwhile—both public and private, and at every level—gobbles higher and higher proportions of our wealth, while in many cases delivering less and less. Why?

It’s too easy to blame big government. For indeed, the rise in the cost of education has paralleled the huge jump in the cost of government itself and the simultaneous growth in government’s involvement in education at every level. Government’s typically heavy and wasteful hand is of course part of the issue.

But the ultimate problem lies elsewhere—as I have stressed in this column before. Professional educators, by and large, have resisted the application of the Gutenberg-Ford style of thinking to education. The result is that few families, except those with significant wealth, can afford on their own to get a good education. If it weren’t for the largesse of government (with our money), public schools would never survive. If it weren’t for the largesse of committed teachers who accept substandard salaries, and of similarly committed donors, private schools would soon go out of business.

The great challenge is to increase the productivity of education, just as has been done for books, cars, and groceries. Teachers, administrators, and board members will have to get over the idea that there is some magic in low student-teacher ratios. Imagine Johannes Gutenberg rejecting the concept of movable type because of some maxim that a good printer could produce no more than 10 or 15 finished pages a month!

God has put at the disposal of humans in this generation incredible tools for learning and discovery. The opportunity to discover great teachers, and then through appropriate use of the media to multiply their effectiveness, has never been more profound. But the goal should be to increase—not decrease—student-teacher ratios.

Granted, there are times in education when nothing can match a one-on-one or small-group exchange. But just because those situations are sometimes desirable doesn’t excuse our insistence that we always use such expensive formulas. The future in education, at least in part, belongs to those with the wisdom to employ a significantly large student-teacher ratio when they can, preserving precious resources for the richer ratio required when a loving arm must be wrapped around the shoulders of a struggling or lagging student. Only when we make wisest use of the former will we genuinely be able to afford the latter.

Midterm elections are just a few days away—which means that mailbox fliers, posters, yard signs, and even a few digital devices will be advertising political candidates. Almost all of them, Democrats and Republicans alike, are promising to spend more money than ever before on education.

But it’s a foolish promise. Indeed, it’s a promise I hope most of them break.
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Edmund Burke was a Whig member of the House of Commons between 1766 and 1794, when Great Britain became less great. He thought the American colonies had right on their side and Warren Hastings, the Trump-like governor-general of Bengal (India), deserved impeachment. (The House of Commons did impeach Hastings, but the House of Lords acquitted him.)

In short, given the political context of the time, many saw Burke as a progressive.

But that view changed when Burke came out strongly against the French Revolution: He wrote in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), “In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows.”

Nearly two centuries later, Republicans won big in America’s 1980 election because 1 in 10 Democrats was so upset by Jimmy Carter’s support of abortion and appeasement that he or she voted for Ronald Reagan. This year, the middle two weeks of October made it appear that the 2018 election will hang on whether 1 in 10 anti-Trump voters fears the prospect of Democratic extremism enough to vote for Republicans.
Those Edmund Burke independents early in October watched desperate Democrats go too far in trying to stop a fifth conservative from joining the Supreme Court. One of Karl Marx’s few sensible statements—that history repeats itself, with new developments coming “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce”—gained backing as Julie Swetnick’s extreme accusations of gang rape followed Christine Blasey Ford’s tragic memories of assault. 

Polls since then suggest that Democratic recklessness lit a fire under independent voters worried that some day they might also be declared guilty until proven innocent. Obama attorney general Eric Holder didn’t help on Oct. 7 when he dismissed the rule of law and said regarding Republicans, “When they go low, we kick them. That’s what this new Democratic Party’s about.”

The New York Times’ Tom Friedman, probably newspaperdom’s most influential pundit, led one of his October columns this way: “I began my journalism career covering a civil war in Lebanon. I never thought I’d end my career covering a civil war in America. We may not be there yet, but if we don’t turn around now, we will surely get where we’re going.”

I tend to see our current battles as smoke but not fire. Smoke is stealing opponents’ political yard signs, which happens in every election. Republicans and Democrats were both culpable, judging by reports from north, south, east, and west (Minnesota, Texas, North Carolina, and California). In the latter state, Fullerton City Council candidate Paullette Marshall Chaffee, the wife of the mayor, suspended her campaign after bloggers posted two videos of her allegedly removing opposition signs.

But what about The Fire Next Time, to steal a book title from James Baldwin, who wrote, “There are too many things we do not wish to know about ourselves.” On Oct. 12 Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., described two of them: “ever more ferocious political tribalism and mutual hatred.”

He’s right to say we create fire-prone underbrush as we lose contact with people who don’t share our socio-economic background. … The only way out is to rebuild our communities and launch new ones—one person-to-person relationship and one local institution at a time.”

Some fire this time was visible. Police in Minnesota arrested two people for allegedly stealing political yard signs and setting them on fire. On Oct. 15 other Minnesota police sought a man who allegedly attacked state Rep. Sarah Anderson when she found him kicking down several of her yard signs. A GOP candidate for the Minnesota Legislature, Shane Mekeland, reported an attack on him by a “much bigger person” who left him with a concussion.

In Portland, Ore., once known as “the Rose City” and now nicknamed “Little Beirut,” right-wing marchers calling themselves “Patriot Prayer” faced off against left-wing protesters calling themselves anti-fascists. Some of the battlers wore Boba Fett helmets and body armor. Others wore black clothing and ski masks. This was the 15th confrontation in the past year and a half: Police now use explosive devices and chemical irritants to keep the militants from killing each other.

Happily, Nov. 6 brings one of our solemn traditions, as millions peacefully go to the polls. I’m not writing about specific political contests here, because while most WORLD members should receive this issue before the Nov. 6 election, others may receive it afterward. By the way, WORLD will have real-time vote-total tracking at wng.org/election: That page goes live on Election Day.

Christians will watch those results eagerly, while realizing that politics will not save us. As we vote, perhaps against some candidates rather than enthusiastically for others, it’s good and right to keep in mind these hopeful words from singer-songwriter Sandra McCracken: “We will feast in the house of Zion / We will sing with our hearts restored / He has done great things, we will say together / We will feast and weep no more.”
**Imperiled**

Leah Sharibu, 15, of Nigeria is in danger of losing her life after she refused to give up her Christian faith under threat from her Boko Haram captors. Sharibu is the last Dapchi schoolgirl left in captivity under the Muslim terrorist group. The Nigerian government negotiated the freedom of the 104 girls that had been with her, but Boko Haram refused to let Sharibu go because she would not renounce Christianity. The prisoners who returned home told stories of Sharibu’s determined stand for her faith. Recently, the group laid down an ultimatum: Sharibu had one month to choose to become a Muslim or they would kill her. The Nigerian government has promised to do all it can to rescue the girl, and local churches are praying for her release. Many pastors say she has been an inspiration.

**Died**

Officials expect the death toll from Hurricane Michael to continue to rise as rescue crews search along the Florida coast. There have been at least 39 deaths confirmed across the four states hit by the storm, 29 dead in Florida, six in Virginia, three in North Carolina, and one in Georgia. Authorities gave inhabitants of Mexico Beach, Fla., a mandatory evacuation order as the storm approached, but rescue officials believe about 100 people stayed. Three of them were still missing in mid-October. The state had brought in more than 1,700 rescue workers complete with heavy equipment and dogs to search the destroyed buildings. The search extended to Panama City farther up the coast.

**Imperiled**

According to the United Nations, 13 million people in Yemen are in danger of starvation in what could be the “worst famine in the world in 100 years.” A 3-year-old civil war has torn Yemen as the Houthi rebel group, backed by Iran, has taken large sections of the country. Saudi Arabia has been fighting the rebels with the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, using airstrikes and a blockade. The BBC reports that the conflict has displaced millions, and at least 10,000 people have died.

**Released**

A three-judge panel in Turkey found American Pastor Andrew Brunson guilty on charges of terrorism and espionage but released him. Turkey had held Brunson, 50, for two years on the made-up charges as part of the Muslim country’s “hostage diplomacy.” Returning to the United States the day after his release, Brunson met with President Trump and said he and his wife planned to go home, pray, and “see what God wants for the next part of our lives.”

**Admitted**

A priest, accused of child sexual assault, pleaded guilty to felony charges before a grand jury Oct. 17. David Poulson was a priest in a Pennsylvania diocese for 40 years. He was brought into court after the state issued a report with credible accusations of sexual abuse against more than 300 priests. Most of these cases had to be dismissed due to statute limitations, but Poulson was one of two priests to be charged with crimes. He admitted to assaulting one boy multiple times and trying to assault another. The two victims were 8 and 15 when Poulson targeted them. Authorities dropped remaining charges after his confession. The judge in the case, John Foradora, has yet to hand down a sentence.
The rising tide of drug-impaired driving did not begin with this driver, and it will not end with him.

ROBERT L. SUMWALT, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, on a report that a vehicle crash in Texas that killed 13 people on a church bus involved a driver who was under the influence of marijuana and a sedative. The report found states that have legalized marijuana have seen an increase in traffic accidents.

An hour into legality, and something illegal.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, policeman GORD SPADO on a ticket issued to a driver at 1:00 a.m. for “consuming cannabis” in a car the morning Canada’s new marijuana law took effect on Oct. 17.

I’m writing for my three sisters. They are not lawyers, they don’t live in D.C.

U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice JOHN ROBERTS on the court’s duty to write “accessible” opinions and not ones meant only for lawyers to read. “We write for the public,” he said.

It’s definitely NOT fair.

JENNIFER WAGNER, third-place finisher in a world championship cycling event, on a man identifying as a woman winning the event. She eventually apologized to the winner, Rachel McKinnon, for the remark but said she would work to change the rules that allow men who say they are transgender women to compete in women’s cycling events. McKinnon would not accept Wagner’s apology.

Impossible.

Dr. SAM GANDY, a head trauma expert, on the likelihood that damage to former NFL tight end Aaron Hernandez’s brain did not affect his behavior. Hernandez, 27, hanged himself in a jail cell in 2017 after being convicted of murder. Hernandez had the most advanced case of “CTE”—a progressive degenerative condition commonly found in football players—on record for someone of his age.
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IT WAS ALL MONICA LEWINSKY'S FAULT.

DEMS

KANYE SLAMMED

DEMS
A heavy hit

Doug Unkrey can't find his hammer, but it shouldn't be too hard to spot. It's 21 feet long and weighs 800 pounds. Thieves apparently stole the enormous work of art from the lawn of the Healdsburg (Calif.) Community Center sometime during the night of Oct. 5. Unkrey reportedly loaned the work of art to the community center about a year ago. Its estimated value: $15,000.

One man's doorstop ...

A Michigan man has discovered his doorstop is worth a fortune. Dave Mazurek has been using a 23-pound rock he found in a barn ever since he bought a farm in Edmore, Mich., in 1988. The farm's previous owner told him the rock was a meteorite composed of iron and nickel and landed on the property in the 1930s. In January, Mazurek said, he saw a story about how meteorites could be worth money to scientists and collectors. So eventually he had his rock checked out by scientists at Central Michigan University and the Smithsonian Museum. Months later, the experts told him his meteorite is worth about $100,000. “I’m done using it as a doorstop,” Mazurek told the Chicago Tribune. “Let’s get a buyer.”

Cut and tried

A St. Louis–area woman who recently dropped a state lawsuit now says she plans on filing a federal civil rights complaint against her son’s school for failing to place him on the varsity soccer team. The complaint arose from a coach’s decision at Ladue Horton Watkins High School that the woman’s son wasn’t good enough to make the varsity soccer team. School policy made the student ineligible to play junior varsity soccer as an 11th-grader. Coaches for the school argued that her son simply wasn’t good enough. The woman forwarded her complaint to the Office of Civil Rights, claiming the school’s policy of securing junior varsity spots for younger players amounted to age discrimination.

Stripped of their money

It may be a while before Ben Belknap pays back his parents the money they borrowed for football season tickets. Ben and his wife Jackee had been saving money in an envelope for the season tickets to University of Utah football games but recently discovered that the cash envelope with more than $1,000 was missing. After questioning their toddler son, the couple discovered the boy had run the cash through the family’s paper shredder. Belknap says he plans to return the strips of cash to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, which works to verify and replace mutilated money.
Flying under the influence

Birds in Gilbert, Minn., have been acting odd lately, reportedly flying into windows and otherwise seeming confused. The explanation: They’re drunk. Authorities say an early frost caused the berries the birds eat to ferment earlier than usual. “Drunk birds,” National Parks Service ranger Sharon Stiteler told KMSP-TV, “are totally a thing.”

Crunchy trail

How do you get a big pig back in his pen? A deputy from the San Bernardino County (Calif.) Sheriff’s Office used Doritos. The sheriff’s office reportedly received calls on Oct. 14 about a pig running around a neighborhood. A deputy nearby had Doritos in her lunch bag and left a trail of the chips to guide the hungry pig back to its home and into its pen. The pig was reportedly “the size of a mini horse.”

A squirrely incident

Police in Orlando, Fla., ejected a woman from a Frontier Airlines plane after she attempted to board an Oct. 9 flight with a squirrel. The woman claimed the rodent was her emotional support animal. But Frontier officials at Orlando International Airport had other ideas. When the woman refused to get off her Cleveland-bound flight, the airline deplaned the entire group of passengers and allowed local police to remove the woman. Frontier’s emotional support animals policy specifically prohibits “rodents, reptiles, insects, hedgehogs,” and other non-traditional service animals.

Limber lizard

A gecko is to blame for a “bazillion” prank calls made on Oct. 3 that sent patrons of a veterinary hospital into a tizzy. Marine mammal veterinarian and hospital director Claire Simeone said she received 10 calls in quick succession from Ke Kai Ola, a hospital devoted to seals on Hawaii’s Big Island. Believing there was some emergency at her hospital, Simeone hurried back and found the phone lines busy with confused callers who had received phone calls from the hospital. While talking to the phone company, Simeone discovered a gecko perched on one of the hospital phones with its legs perfectly positioned on the touchscreen. According to Simeone, one of the animal’s legs was pressing the recent call history and another was positioned to place a call. Simeone said she caught the gecko and put it outside on a plant.

Scary laws

This Halloween, older children in Chesapeake, Va., may want to reconsider their plans. According to a city ordinance, anyone over age 12 attempting to trick-or-treat is committing a misdemeanor punishable with up to a $100 fine and six months in jail. The Chesapeake ordinance also prohibits any trick-or-treating after 8 p.m. Violations of the 8 p.m. limit could result in a $100 fine and 30 days in jail.
A big bright side
GOOD NEWS TRAVELS SLOWLY, BUT A LOT OF IT IS OUT THERE

Have you heard any good news lately? In the clamor of furious partisans, furious weather, and furious rhetoric, it doesn’t seem like it. Random conversations on the bus or in the checkout line, if they go beyond cute shoes or that book I’m holding, often end with sighs and head-shaking. Prices going up, kids don’t listen, can’t afford my mortgage, worried about my health coverage. Wall Street banksters, rotten Republicans, demon Democrats—the world’s a mess.

A few sunny forecasters, like psychologist Steven Pinker, insist there’s lots of good news just a few clicks away on your browser. They trot out charts and stats to show a dramatic decline worldwide in extreme poverty, HIV deaths, infant mortality rates, unsafe drinking water, and child labor. (See p. 20 for more on Pinker.)

On the domestic front, Morris Fiorina of the Hoover Institute counsels against alarm. In spite of partisan noise and disturbing threats, most Americans are going about their business with friendly nods. The “tribes” are on the edges; the center holds. A widely reported study of 8,000 Americans by an organization called More in Common shows that a sizable majority dislike “Political Correctness” and wonder why we can’t just get along.

That sounds encouraging, but if the cyber landscape still looks gray, click on over to more encouraging fare. Even USA Today and the Huffington Post have Good News sections on their websites. Or go even more positive with Happy News (for a cute-puppy fix), South Africa—The Good News (a beautiful respite in a troubled nation), Sunny Skyz, Gimundo, ZooBorns, or 1000 Awesome Things. Be prepared for animal babies, animal rescues (both for and by), helpful neighbors, and miracle cures.

Sappy as some of those headlines are, they point up an important truth that the funereal drumbeat of an average 24-hour news cycle drowns out. Bad news is wide-screen. It manifests itself in trends, factions, wars, rising rates of… (drug abuse, dropouts, STDs, etc.). It wears big clumsy boots that stomp all over reasonable argument and heartfelt protest. The effects of bad news are immediate and obvious, even if we disagree about causes. Often enough, it hits us in the solar plexus.

Good news is personal, small scale, and easy to overlook. The effects are slow and cumulative. Even on the global scene, those shrinking poverty rates and improved nutrition are mostly due to small steps and changed attitudes. Good news may be lurking under our very noses while the smell of the bad overpowers us. It may take years for the effects of tough love to bear fruit in an out-of-control, screaming teenager. Heavy hearts tread down the first green shoots poking up from a devastated house after a hurricane.

But this is how the Holy Spirit usually works, by quietly stirring individual hearts, one by one. Massive revivals throughout history have brought about changes for the better, but only after years of individual Christians laying the groundwork: teaching, praying, and trimming their lamps in anticipation of the bridegroom. Even in the midst of massive revivals, souls are not awakened en masse but one by one. And after the tide of awakening recedes, as it always does, the beach may look bare and barren. You have to look close to see the life stirring under the sand: little bubbles, the breath of each tiny clam.

Any good news? Philanthropy isn’t dead—check out the candidates for WORLD’s Hope Awards for Effective Compassion every year for just a few examples. Underneath distressing tales of Islamic terrorism, especially now from Africa, mission organizations tell us of unprecedented openness to the gospel throughout the Muslim world. Alongside more young people identifying themselves as atheist or agnostic is a growing hunger for meaning that only Christ can supply. The church is reforming, the truth is refining, and souls are being saved, one by one.

Christian faith doesn’t deny bad news—it’s built on bad news. But from the wreckage of the world rises the cross, with a shout of triumph: Take heart!
“For I have overcome the world.”

For more on Pinker, see p. 20.

Even on the global scene, those shrinking poverty rates and improved nutrition are mostly due to small steps and changed attitudes.
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American Christians have long wrestled over how to respond to LGBT members of their communities. Some Christians have responded graciously, with a healthy mix of truth and love. Others, sadly, have responded poorly, either ignoring truth or treating LGBT persons with anything but love.

*Boy Erased*, based on the memoir by Garrard Conley, depicts an abusive Christian ministry to same-sex attracted individuals, but presents only the poor side of the Christian response.

The film, directed and written by Joel Edgerton, follows Jared (Lucas Hedges), the son of a Baptist minister. When a male college friend rapes Jared and then accuses him of being gay, he confesses to his parents that he's had homosexual thoughts for a long time. Jared's parents (played by Russell Crowe and Nicole Kidman) threaten to kick him out of their home unless he enrolls in a gay conversion therapy program. Jared spirals into anger and depression as he interacts with a physically and emotionally abusive teacher named Victor Sykes (Edgerton plays the role), who tells his patients that their leanings are the result of family sin and can be resolved through outwardly masculine behavior, public confession, and willpower. The film, rated R, contains obscenities, frank discussions of sexual behavior, violence, and a depiction of rape.

Jared's story is in many places heartbreaking. The film's conversion therapy leaders push an unloving and works-based program, saying
homosexuals can save themselves. Christ’s forgiveness and grace get little mention behind the compound’s chain-link fences and locked doors.

In another scene, program staffers quite literally Bible-bash a young gay man, hitting him with a Bible. “God will not love you the way that you are right now,” Sykes tells him.

Boy Erased manages to be boring and disconcerting at the same time. Boring because the script lacks nuanced character development: The Christian characters are for the most part hypocritical and narrow-minded, while a kind doctor and a gay friend question faith. Jared doesn’t demonstrate much personal agency, spending most of the film listening to other characters’ advice and contemplating his past.

The film is disconcerting because those who watch it may come to believe that all Christian therapy that explores sexuality through a Biblical lens is as abusive as what is depicted here.

Conley, who was involved in the film from the beginning, hopes it will end conversion therapy and encourage lawmakers to pass laws against the practice. “We really wanted this film to be a great piece of activism,” he said.

The abusive practices the film depicts, whether portrayed accurately or not, are by no means universal, though. A new generation of Christian individuals and ministries, such as the UK-based Living Out, are seeking to embrace LGBT individuals wherever they are and lead them to wholeness in Christ through prayer and community-building.

During the political battle over AB 2943, the California bill that would have banned any therapy meant to help people change their sexual orientation, dozens of formerly LGBT individuals told of how compassionate Christian counselors helped them overcome emotional pain and even avoid suicide. (The author of AB 2943 shelved the bill in August.)

Near the beginning of Boy Erased, when Jared confesses to his parents that he has homosexual desires, his words hang in the air for a few moments. Viewers hope that Jared’s Christian parents will embrace him and promise to walk alongside him as he pursues answers. Instead, a crushed Jared meets only his parents’ shock, anger, and condemnation.

That, in the end, is the real tragedy of Boy Erased.®

Breivik surrenders once the real police arrive, but the terrible damage is done. Dozens of young people are dead. Hundreds of others are left to deal with physical injuries and psychological scars.

One of the injured, Viljar, recovers slowly from his wounds, learning to walk again after months in a hospital. Asked to testify in court against Breivik, Viljar vacillates between fear of the criminal and anger at what he’s done.

In court, Breivik smirks at the outraged public, and he remains full of hate toward immigration sympathizers. But the Norwegian justice system treats him amazingly well. When judges finally sentence him to solitary confinement in prison, it is only for “as long as he remains a danger to society.”

The movie ends with a glimmer of hope, but the hope is that Norway’s sons and daughters will somehow prevail against the dark forces of hatred that Breivik represents. Christian viewers will look in vain for any appeal to the God of justice and mercy. Without knowledge of true redemption from sin and evil, life for both the killer and survivors is bleak.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL
Movie

Change in the Air

Change in the Air couldn’t possibly be more different from the shows on which Rachel Brosnahan last gave two unforgettable performances, House of Cards and The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

Here, Brosnahan portrays Wren Miller, a mysterious, angel-like character who intrigues the nosy neighbors on her new block with her mounds of mail and eerie omniscience. The more other characters try to figure Wren out, the more they reveal about their own personal tragedies. But the character of Wren is one-dimensional and doesn’t actually interact with others on the block very much: Unfortunately for viewers, Brosnahan gets to show more range in a single scene of House of Cards than she does in this entire movie.

Grief and hope—represented by obvious symbols like a coffin and a rare bird—permeate the film as the neighbors’ dark secrets and disappointments, like addiction and its effect on one family, slowly surface. Elderly characters fight the inevitable march of time, and for some of them, memory loss threatens to erase sad and happy memories alike. The neighbors desperately want to understand Wren. It’s clear she doesn’t want them to, preferring to be left alone during the day to conduct her mysterious business. We never really learn why.

But the script muses on these themes without ever making a clear point about them, leaving the viewer to wonder how anyone offscreen might set their own burdens free without the help of a character like Wren. As Variety put it, “It’s clear the filmmakers are aiming for the faith-based market. However, the film has about as much resonance as a ‘Coexist’ bumper sticker.”

Somewhat inspirational and squeaky clean, the film leaves plenty of unanswered questions, both in plot (why is Wren always running from police?) and casting (why on earth did Macy Gray and Olympia Dukakis agree to be in this project?).

Change in the Air may be different enough to warrant brief notice, but I’d be shocked if it got any attention at the award shows this winter.

—by LAURA FINCH

Documentary

Making a Murderer

It’s been three years since Netflix released the true crime docuseries that sparked nationwide debate over corruption in the criminal justice system. Now Season 2 of Making a Murderer finds Steven Avery and his nephew, Brendan Dassey, still behind bars serving life sentences for the 2005 murder of Theresa Halbach.

Wisconsin authorities argued Making a Murderer’s first season was one-sided and left out key information. The most important information being that Avery’s sweat was found beneath the hood latch of Halbach’s car. Making a Murderer’s Season 2 sets out to answer that question and others by once again combing through the evidence as Avery and Dassey’s lawyers appeal their convictions.

Leading the charge is Steven Avery’s new defense attorney, Kathleen Zellner, a lawyer famous for overturning wrongful convictions. Zellner wants to prove that Avery and Dassey didn’t kill Halbach, but she also wants to find who did.

Throughout Season 2, Zellner becomes more private investigator than attorney and replaces Steven Avery as the protagonist. Zellner’s team re-creates multiple crime scenes and consults forensic experts on every piece of evidence used to convict Avery and Dassey: the blood samples found in Halbach’s car, Halbach’s cremated body, that DNA under the hood latch, and more.

The extensive time spent on this science makes the 10 new episodes feel like 10 CSI episodes and less like a documentary. Since the Halbach family still understandably refused to participate in Making a Murderer’s Season 2, calling the show “crass entertainment,” the episodes feel more one-sided than the last and seem focused on proving Avery and Dassey’s innocence rather than questioning the criminal justice system.

Still, the series can provide valuable insight into the criminal justice system and the minds of defense attorneys and prosecutors. Whatever audiences conclude about the guilt or innocence of Avery and Dassey, the series shows that the consequences of sin are vast and far-reaching. Whoever took Theresa Halbach’s life also left a wake of other victims.

—by SARAH SCHWEINSBERG
Several readers have asked me what I think of Steven Pinker’s best-selling *Enlightenment Now* (Viking, 2018). They could have asked Bill Gates, who called it his “new favorite book of all time.” They could have asked *The New York Times* (“a terrific book”) or *Publishers Weekly* (“heartening”). But they asked me, so I’ll give them my opinion: It’s partly true materially, and nuts spiritually.

Super-optimist Pinker is part of a long tradition. Voltaire, the Enlightenment *philosophe*, had fun in 1759 with his satire *Candide*. It starred Professor Pangloss, “the greatest philosopher of the Holy Roman Empire,” who believes this is the best of all possible worlds. Pangloss contracts syphilis and is being hanged in Lisbon when an earthquake intervenes.

*Pollyanna*, a best-selling novel published 105 years ago at a time when war seemed extinct and prosperity established 105 years ago at a time when an earthquake intervenes. *Pollyanna*’s ability to be content in every circumstance was certainly a Christian virtue, but after misery-multiplying World War I began in 1914, a “Pollyanna” became someone excessively and naïvely optimistic. Nevertheless, 12 sequels known as “Glad Books” followed the first.

Harvard psychology prof Pinker, 64, is a member of the Luxuriant Flowing Hair Club for Scientists, sponsored by the Annals of Improbable Research. He published in 2011 *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, which claimed violence is decreasing. This year’s *Enlightenment Now* contends that just about everything bad is decreasing, and a few of his facts are true. A smaller percentage of the world’s population sits in extreme poverty than ever before (except in the Garden of Eden, where the poverty percentage was zero). More children than ever before survive childhood (although more die in abortions). Literacy and other good things are more common.

Pinker’s dislike for Christianity distorts his analysis. He refuses to recognize that hostility to Christ among some Enlightenment thinkers led to the flashing guillotine of the French Revolution and its progeny: Paris Commune, Russian Revolution, China’s Great Leap Backward, and so forth. The enlightened 20th century became, as great novelist Walker Percy put it, “the most scientifically advanced, savage, democratic, inhuman, sentimental, murderous century in human history.” It’s too early in the 21st to see whether we’ll top that record.
Recent novels from Christian publishers
reviewed by Sandy Barwick

**CHOSEN PEOPLE**  *Robert Whitlow*
Atlanta attorney Jakob Brodsky wants justice for an American man: Terrorists murdered the man’s wife when she was visiting Jerusalem. Brodsky partners with Arab-Israeli lawyer Hana Abboud, who speaks Hebrew and Arabic. To bring a lawsuit, the pair must find a connection to an organization financing the terrorists’ activities. They enlist the help of a private investigator in Israel, but can they trust him? A dizzying cast of characters and lots of legal maneuvering combine for a challenging read, but the ongoing suspense and a satisfying conclusion make it well worth the effort.

**ON MAGNOLIA LANE**  *Denise Hunter*
Daisy often seeks out Pastor Jack for advice or a listening ear. When a stranger arrives in their small town with the potential to cause trouble, Daisy confides in her pastor: He accommodates her, but is frustrated that she doesn’t see him as boyfriend material. When Jack creates an online dating profile using the initials T.J., Daisy and “T.J.” quickly hit it off. When she discovers Jack and T.J. are the same person, she feels betrayed and he feels guilty. Can their relationship recover? The subplots keep it from being too sugary sweet, but the story still ends happily ever after.

**LETHAL TARGET**  *Janice Cantore*
An Oregon teenager’s death looks like an apparent drug overdose; but when the evidence doesn’t add up, it becomes a murder case. Police Chief Tess O’Rourke suspects workers at a nearby pot farm are doing more than growing marijuana and are somehow involved in the boy’s death. At the same time, she fights to keep her job when someone tries to besmirch her reputation. She finds friendship and support in the local pastor, who helps her overcome long-held resentment against God. Well-drawn characters and steady action make for a fun read.

**AUSCHWITZ LULLABY**  *Mario Escobar*
Set in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, this historical fiction novel is inspired by real people. Dr. Josef Mengele asks Helene Hannemann, held there with her five children, to oversee a day care for the youngest prisoners. Superb writing conveys the horrific conditions: brutal guards, extreme weather, repulsive odors, and Mengele conducting sadistic experiments on children. Despite the fine writing, this bleak tale lacks any uplifting element, and the plot has nowhere to go. As the prisoners wait their turn to die, God rarely receives mention as a source of hope.

**AFTERWORD**
*Patti Callahan’s lyrical novel* Becoming Mrs. Lewis (Thomas Nelson, 2018) details American author Joy Davidman’s unconventional friendship-turned-romance with famed author and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. Joy and Jack (as Lewis’ friends called him) forge an instant bond through letter writing before her eventual move to England. Told in first person, the story displays Joy’s insecurities and doubts: “Who was this needy false self who believed that a man could fix the gaping wound inside my soul?” She endures hardships—a cruel, alcoholic husband, a messy divorce, persistent money problems, and significant health issues—but Jack’s companionship sustains and inspires her: “Jack smiled as that golden English sunlight crested from behind a pleated cloud, resting gently on his face as if the light desired to touch him.” The thoughtful narrative reads more like a memoir than fiction. —S.B.
Athletes in action

RECENT SPORTS-THEMED BOOKS reviewed by Mary Jackson

**THE BIG GAME** **Tim Green**

Danny Owens plans to follow in the footsteps of his Super Bowl champion father, and his upcoming seventh-grade football season might earn him a spot on the high-school varsity team. His father’s unexpected death gives him new determination, but it also leads to violent outbursts and incomprehensible grief. Then Danny’s English teacher catches him cheating on a test and discovers he can’t read. Danny reaches a tipping point when he must choose between his image and his future. Green, a former NFL player, leaves out any mention of God but provides compelling sports writing and a picture of common grace. (Ages 12-15)

**POWER FORWARD** **Hena Khan**

Fourth-grader Zayd Saleem is small for his age, but that’s only one of the obstacles keeping him from playing basketball on the Gold Team. His Pakistani-American parents would rather he play violin, but with tryouts looming, he decides to skip rehearsals and practice basketball—without their knowledge. Zayd learns his lesson as punishment ensues and his basketball aspirations seem squelched. Khan’s series opener portrays a likable sports-loving protagonist and a traditional, tight-knit Muslim family that values honesty, tough love, and generational perspective. Aside from its unique cultural viewpoint, parents should know this book contains two misuses of God’s name. (Ages 7-10)

**SOCCER SCHOOL SEASON 1** **Alex Bellos and Ben Lyttleton**

Soccer enthusiasts will enjoy this humorous take on the sport’s parallels with a range of educational subjects. “Every class here is about soccer,” the book begins, and Chapter 1 covers biology with details about a soccer player’s diet and digestive system (including some toilet humor). First published in Britain, Soccer School contains some “subjects” that are more believable than others, with fun facts about goat mascots and soccer on Mars. Reluctant readers will enjoy the authors’ vast soccer knowledge coupled with comic-style drawings—but end-of-chapter quizzes contain undiscussed trivia that is confusing. (Ages 8-12)

**REBOUND** **Kwame Alexander**

Charlie “Chuck” Bell grieves the premature death of his father and struggles alongside his mother to face life without him. When Chuck starts acting out, his mother sends him to spend the summer with his grandparents in Washington, D.C. Here he finds healing through his grandfather’s tough love, his grandmother’s cooking, and his cousin Roxie’s cajoling on the basketball court. Set in 1988, this prequel to Alexander’s Newbery Medal winner, The Crossover, provides the backstory of Jordan and Josh’s father and similar parallels between adolescent struggles and sports. Bursts of graphic-novel-style panels enhance Alexander’s nonrhyming poetry. (Ages 10-12)

**AFTERWORD**

Young athletes can fall victim to sports idolatry, and Joshua Cooley’s new book, The Biggest Win (New Growth, 2018), seeks to combat this with a compelling message about finding our identity in Christ. The book highlights six Christian NFL players from the 2017 Super Bowl–winning Philadelphia Eagles team. Each speaks about his commitment to Christian discipleship amid the pressure, trials, and fame that come with professional sports. Cooley, a sports writer and children’s minister, intersperses interviews with players and good storytelling with Scripture verses and Biblical insight.

Another book for budding athletes: C.J. Mahaney’s pocket-sized Don’t Waste Your Sports (Crossway, 2011). It provides a concise Scriptural framework on sports that is digestible. Mahaney writes, “Sports are a gift from God. But as soon as you introduce them to the human heart, things get complicated.”

—M.J.
Here’s a memorable beach moment: You’re basking in the warm sun, toes in the sand, letting the gentle turn of the foam-capped waves lull you into a state of complete relaxation. As your eyes scan the endless horizon of blue on blue, you’re rewarded with a school of dolphins making their way across the sea. There’s no denying their signature shape as they leap from the water. If you don’t see anything else extraordinary the rest of the day, you can take solace knowing you’ve witnessed one of nature’s most playful and intelligent creatures in their natural habitat.

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Brent Fulton (no relation to me) is the founder of ChinaSource, a Christian organization that works to help the global church better understand China’s rapidly growing church. The author of China’s Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden, Fulton is no newcomer to China: He started working with China Ministries International in Hong Kong in 1985 and has been tracking the rise of China’s churches since then. He announced in September that he will step down as ChinaSource president.

**What has surprised you most about the Chinese church in the past few decades?** The rules that govern what Christians can and can’t do in China have been in place since the early 1980s, and haven’t changed much. Every time I’ve been to China in the past 15 years, I saw Christians doing something and thought, “You can’t do that in China”—but they’re doing it. Believers are creative despite the restrictions. They’ve moved into new areas, opening stand-alone urban house churches, publishing Christian books, and setting up Christian websites, counseling centers, and schools. Until now, the Chinese government has rarely quashed these things.

**What’s the greatest change that you’ve seen in the Chinese church between the ’80s and today?** When I first got involved in China, the church was primarily rural. It was very much a church in survival mode trying to meet immediate needs. Now we’ve seen a shift to a younger, more cosmopolitan church that has a very different outlook on life. There’s a very different sense of what’s possible because they didn’t grow up with all these government restrictions. No one has told them they are marginalized in society.

**Is this more urban church facing its own set of challenges?** The original challenges were very practical: There weren’t enough Bibles or trained pastors. They couldn’t meet because they were under government pressure. A lot of those needs have been met and the political situation has changed. Now the challenges are not too different from what we face in the West: How do we disciple the next generation, tempted by materialism? How do you nurture healthy marriages among first-generation Christians who have no frame of reference on what a Christian family should look like?

Because the church was previously in survival mode, there wasn’t much talk about the succession of leadership or how to run the church well. Nowadays they are discussing church structure, church growth, and denominations.

**As the Chinese church undergoes these changes, does this shift how the Western church relates to it?** In the ’80s and ’90s, the overseas church had a very significant role to play in providing theological training and materials. It also sent Christians to teach on university campuses or start businesses. You can find many Chinese Christians today who trace their faith journeys back to the witness of those Christians.

Today, China isn’t as welcoming of foreign teachers—and with the new ranking system for foreigners in China, it’s getting harder to get a visa into China. Foreigners used to be a real novelty in China, so if you went to teach, you would be considered an attraction. That’s changed. A Chinese church with foreign connections is becoming more of a liability as China continues to become more anti-foreign. The big question has shifted from “How do we serve the church in China?” to “How do we serve with the church in China?” Today, it’s the believers in China who are on the cutting edge of new ministry initiatives, as they should be. There’s a role for foreigners to serve as mentors to Christians who are doing things that the Chinese church hasn’t done in the past, such as journalism, counseling, and education.

The global church can provide friendship and encouragement as the Chinese church plows new ground. We should consider how we can encourage them, pray for them, and be there for them.

**Can you describe some trends that will define the Chinese church in the next decade?** Certainly denomination-alism. There are some who very enthusiastically embrace the Reformed tradition. Their churches are looking more Reformed in terms of their structure, leadership, beliefs, and ethos. We’re probably going to see more differentiation between churches if that trend continues. In the past churches had their distinctive—the biggest being the charismatic distinctive—but they didn’t emphasize it as much. They didn’t have a fully formed paradigm and worldview around their distinctive like the Reformed church does.

Another trend we are seeing is the missions movement: People are thinking about missions and mobilizing Christians to go into missions. But not everyone’s excited about that: Some wonder, “Why are we going overseas when we have so much work to do at home?”
‘The global church can provide friendship and encouragement as the Chinese church plows new ground. We should consider how we can encourage them, pray for them, and be there for them.’

home?’ Others affirm that mission work is important to the church, but they criticize the way the movement’s leaders promote it. They think it’s a lot of hype and not a lot of substance.

Does the American church have any misconceptions about its Chinese counterpart? A few weeks ago I was talking to my Uber driver and found out she’s a Christian. When I told her what I did, she said: “Wow, is China still rounding up the Christians and executing them?”

That’s the most common misconception that I hear, that it’s illegal to be a Christian in China and all the Christians are actively being persecuted. Certainly there are restrictions on the church, and in the last couple of years we’ve seen the potential for even greater restrictions. But when I talk to believers in China about their challenges, that’s usually not the first thing they talk about. I think that by homing in on that one narrative, we miss a lot of the complexity of what’s going on with the church in China.

How will the new religious regulations, which went into effect in February, change what the Chinese church looks like in the future? In recent years, the vision in the cities has been to follow a “megachurch” model and create a stand-alone church where hundreds of people can meet openly on a Sunday. I think some are rethinking that model, as it will no longer be viable if the religious regulations are enforced. They may need to go back to the home church model.

It raises a really interesting question for the church: If the restrictions increase to the point where Christians can’t gather together and do their own thing, then how will the church relate to society? In the last decade, we’ve seen the church carve out its own space in areas like publishing or Christian education. But with that space shrinking, they’re going to ask the question, “How do we live our Christian faith in a way that is within the restrictions that we are facing? Instead of having a Christian school or Christian counseling, how do I do that as a Christian within a secular society?”

The global church can provide friendship and encouragement as the Chinese church plows new ground. We should consider how we can encourage them, pray for them, and be there for them.’
Petty and Prince, again

POSTHUMOUS ALBUMS RECALL THE TWO SUPERSTARS by Arsenio Orteza

The posthumous careers of Tom Petty and Prince have begun. Petty’s began on Sept. 28 with the release of An American Treasure (Reprise), four CDs’ worth of meticulously curated outtakes, live performances, alternate versions, early takes, remastered “deep cuts,” and other esoterica culled from Petty’s solo, Heartbreakers, and Mudcrutch recordings. It has everything, in other words, but the Traveling Wilburys (and the singles—those are what Geffen’s forthcoming The Best of Everything is for).

Perhaps in recognition of its emphasis on the unfamiliar, An American Treasure is selling for under $50, a price of which the consumer-conscious Petty would’ve been proud. (Caveat emptor: The six-LP vinyl edition, which hits stores on Black Friday, more than doubles the price.) The omission of hits also makes the first listen—especially if undertaken in one four-hour swoop by anyone but a Petty enthusiast still working through his grief—feel like a bit of a slog.

But the second go-round is easier. And by the third it’s obvious that the set has a life of its own. Petty put as much thought and effort into songs that didn’t stand a chance at Top 40 radio (because of their length, their introspective nature, their medium tempos) as he did into songs such as “Refugee” or “Free Fallin’.” And because he did, his bands did too. Nothing on An American Treasure sounds like filler.

The program unfolds chronologically, with Discs 1 through 3 corresponding to the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s respectively and Disc 4 to 2000-2016.

Absorbed in order, they chronicle Petty’s slow but steady maturation as a songwriter and, particularly, as a singer: Somewhere in the ’80s, he outgrew the nasally constricted vocal approach with which he debuted and began easing into a relaxed delivery that, by the time he hooked up with the Wilburys, made him sound if not like an American treasure at least like an American natural.

It would be claiming too much to say that An American Treasure tells a story. Despite such high points as the infectious “Keep a Little Soul,” the early take of Petty’s Roger McGuinn duet “King of the Hill,” the walking-like-an-Egyptian “Fault Lines,” and the Blonde on Blonde–meets–Pet Sounds-ish “Bus to Tampa Bay,” the collection never climaxes. It does, however, have a denouement. “Thank you so much for giving us your ears tonight,” Petty tells a 2016 Boston crowd at the end of Disc 4. “I really appreciate it. I hope it was musical for you. God bless ya. Good night.”

At the time that Prince retreated to his Kiowa Trail Home Studio to record Piano and a Microphone 1983 (NPG/Warner Bros.), his superstardom-heralding Purple Rain was on the horizon. He even segues from the “When Doves Cry” B-side “17 Days” to a snippet of Joni Mitchell’s “A Case of You” with 1½ minutes of its title track. But what was on his mind was getting in touch with his inner shape-shifter—a creature that would prove to be among the most protean ever to emerge from the pop-culture petri dish.

If Piano and a Microphone 1983 were a story, it would—at 34 minutes and 21 seconds—be a short one, its theme elusive. But its exposition would be clear enough from its title (although Piano, Voice, and a Microphone would’ve been more accurate—he does, after all, sing). And between the sacred “Mary Don’t You Weep” and the profane “Cold Coffee and Cocaine” there’d be, as there always was where Prince was concerned, internal conflict aplenty.

PETTY: CHRIS O’MEARA/AP • PRINCE: DANNY MOLOSHOK/AP
Recent releases
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

**KALEIDOSCOPE**  *Cyrus Chestnut*
What you'll notice right off is the elegant jazz oneness achieved by Chestnut (precision piano), Eric Wheeler (upright bass), and Chris Beck (understated drums). What you'll notice next, assuming that you're not a classical buff, will be Chestnut's quotations of “Pop Goes the Weasel” (in “Darn That Dream”) and “It Is Well with My Soul” (in “Prayer for Claudine”). If you are a classical buff, you'll notice, and enjoy, sparklingly recast melodies by Satie, Mozart, Debussy, and Ravel. Deep Purple buffs get—what else?—“Smoke on the Water.”

**STONE COLD SOUL: THE COMPLETE CAPITOL RECORDINGS**  *Jackie DeShannon*
By 1971, Jackie DeShannon had only two hits and zero successful albums to show for her 15 years in the game. That she was too nondescript a singer to get away with nondescript material was the problem, and her first Capitol producer, the Southern-blue-eyed-soul specialist Chips Moman, seemed to understand. Nevertheless, Capitol rejected DeShannon's Moman recordings, the hauntingly alluring “They Got You Boy” among them, releasing the nondescript *Songs* instead. *Songs* rounds out this 25-track collection. The 16 finally released Moman productions define it.

**HEAVY MUSIC: THE COMPLETE CAMEO RECORDINGS 1966-1967**  *Bob Seger & the Last Heard*
A decade before he steered the Silver Bullet Band toward the platinum pantheon, Seger fronted the Last Heard, a hard-rocking garage band whose signature tune was the appropriately titled “Heavy Music” and whose fatal flaw was its lack of identity. Half of the time they could've been a novelty act, mimicking Dylan (“Persecution Smith”), Jan & Dean (“Florida Time”), and James Brown (“Sock It to Me Santa”). But they weren't boring. And sometimes—“Come on, Comet! Come on, Cupid! / Don't just stand there lookin' stupid!”—they were hilarious.

**TRUE MEANINGS**  *Paul Weller*
In his fourth musical incarnation (fifth if you consider his 2017 *Jawbone* soundtrack a thing apart), Paul Weller emerges as a fully formed, brooding British folkie à la Nick Drake circa *Bryter Layter*. Soft acoustic picking, bucolic melodies, and spectral strings create sympathetic contexts for lyrics that range from savoring a serenity that enables Weller to accept what he cannot change (mutability, outliving David Bowie, dying) to a trepid hope in something bigger than himself (wishing wells, love, “grace”). “What Would He Say?” might even be about Jesus.
Dealing in realism

THE KHASHOGGI MURDER ISN’T AN EXCEPTION TO SAUDI RULE

It didn’t take Jamal Khashoggi’s brutal murder to know the House of Saud is full of violent, merciless rulers. Ask the dissidents and non-Muslims. Ask Raif Badawi, Lalia Bint Abdul Muttalib Basim, or untold others.

Badawi is the well-known 34-year-old Saudi blogger whose “Free Saudi Liberals” website earned him a 10-year prison sentence for apostasy and 1,000 lashes—50 times a week for 20 consecutive weeks. The first week’s lashes so crippled Badawi, authorities reportedly postponed the rest.

The lesser-known Lalia Bint Abdul Muttalib Basim was a worker from Burma charged with murdering her stepdaughter. Officials dragged her through the streets, as she screamed that she was innocent, and beheaded her in a parking lot. Captured on video, her death took three blows by the state executioner’s sword and four police officers holding the woman—a public beheading that was one of 10 carried out in a two-week period in 2015.

The Saudis on average execute 150 people each year (about half are foreign workers, and many of those are Christians), giving it one of the highest capital punishment rates in the world. Many are for nonviolent crimes, including insulting Islam, apostasy, and, yes, sorcery. The state’s weapon of choice is the sword—crude, medieval—and executioners force bystanders to watch, instilling fear.

So while the international business community and global leaders showed disbelief and outrage over the 60-year-old Khashoggi’s murder inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, few Saudis were surprised by a squad of 15 killers with a bone saw. But the export of Saudi brutality—even to also-brutal and autocratic Turkey—should not go unpunished.

The United States does not have to end a relationship to suspend 180-day waivers and cancel privileges on U.S. soil. President Trump has made both surgical and strategic use of U.S. sanctions law, with effect. It’s time to use those tools on Saudi Arabia in ways his predecessors failed.
How can we bring our best when tempted to say and do our worst?

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To learn more, please go to AgeOfOutrage.org.
A campus doctor first introduced Kristen Gunn to the drug Klonopin during her final semester of college at the University of Virginia.

She had a paper to write, about some Reformers’ views of Scripture, which sparked a personal crisis. She wanted to do well in it, but she had questions about her Christian faith. Once an aspiring missionary, now she didn’t know what she would do with her religion major after graduation.

“My views were becoming undone,” she recalled. “Personal, spiritual, emotional, professional, everything you can imagine was on unstable ground.”

Five days before the paper was due, Gunn was awake all night with anxiety. Then the anxiety about not sleeping built on top of her anxiety about her life. She didn’t sleep the second night. She went to student health, and someone talked her through some breathing exercises, but those didn’t work. She didn’t sleep for a third night.

After 72 hours without sleep, she stumbled back to the student health office, where the doctor prescribed a drug called Klonopin. It was a script for a couple of weeks, when she was supposed to come back and see a psychiatrist. She didn’t remember receiving any instructions or warnings; she does remember a glorious night of sleep.

“I felt like Superman taking this drug,” said Gunn. She had never done any hard drugs, but her roommates told her she seemed “high as a kite,” and they were worried. After a couple of weeks she went back to the psychiatrist and got another prescription, and began taking Klonopin every night. When spring break was approaching, she recalled the psychiatrist telling her to go easy on alcohol, without forbidding it—so she drank. Alcohol and benzodiazepines, the class of drugs to which Klonopin belongs, together can be deadly, but she only learned that later.

Gunn continued to take Klonopin the rest of the semester. Those three months in her memory were fuzzy, a common side effect of the tranquilizing drug. She had a good memory, but she couldn’t remember vocabulary words in her Hebrew class. Klonopin also removes inhibitions, which was a wonderful feeling for Gunn, but her friends were bearing her uncharacteristically harsh comments. Gunn remembered

America’s drug crisis now includes benzodiazepines, commonly prescribed for anxiety, and as the death toll grows, the underlying problems remain unaddressed

by Emily Belz illustration by Krieg Barrie
apologizing to a few people, telling them she didn’t know why she was saying such things.

When classes ended, she went on a beach trip, where she received a panicked call from her dad, who had been talking to a doctor friend about the drug she was on. He warned that it was highly addictive and dangerous over a long period of use. When she returned home, she went to a different psychiatrist.

The doctor promised to help wean her off the drug but warned that withdrawal would be difficult.

The United States is facing potentially the third year of decreased life expectancy at the end of 2018, a streak that hasn’t happened since record keeping began. A record 72,000 Americans died of drug overdoses last year, even as opioid prescriptions were down. The ongoing deaths show a general crisis of drug addiction, not just opioids.

Bob Cutillo—a doctor working in a clinic for the homeless in Denver, Colo., and who teaches at Denver Seminary—puts the responsibility for lower life expectancy on these rising “deaths of despair” like suicide, drug overdoses, and deaths from alcohol abuse.

“The Christian community has much to contribute, but I am not sure it is equipped to respond,” he said. American Christians are lacking concern for “how lost people are in our Western culture” while showing “limited dependence on the hope we have in Jesus Christ.”

What are the drugs of despair? They’re not just opioids or heroin. When I talked to addiction doctors this month about troubling trends they’re seeing, they pointed me to benzodiazepines (“benzos”), a class of prescription drug that typically treats anxiety. That class includes drugs like Xanax, Ativan, Valium, and Klonopin—the one that hooked Kristen Gunn.

While opioid prescriptions are down, benzo prescriptions are still rising and are among the most prescribed drugs in the United States. They’re very addictive, but patients often don’t understand the risks of long-term use and chemical dependence.

Because benzos depress breathing, they’re dangerous when combined with opioids or alcohol. In 2016 the CDC issued new guidelines urging doctors to avoid prescribing benzos alongside opioids. But prescribers told me that patients often hide their other drug or alcohol use when seeking benzos.

Users don’t typically abuse benzos by themselves but combine them with other substances to get a different high. Like fentanyl, some benzos are sold on the internet and shipped through the mail. Benzos are involved in more than 30 percent of overdose deaths.

This overdose epidemic has dominated the young career of emergency medical technician Sara Del Vecchio. Most of her emergency training is in overdoses.

She worked an ambulance in an affluent county outside of her native Philadelphia for a year, where she responded to suburban overdoses. The last two years she’s worked in an emergency department in Kensington, Philadelphia’s worst neighborhood for drug use and violence, and specifically in a part of Kensington called the Badlands.

On a given 12-hour shift, Del Vecchio estimates that overdose patients fill half of the beds in the Kensington emergency department. Once revived in the ER and observed for a few hours, those who overdose hear a list of options for next steps. They can talk to a psychiatrist at the hospital, do...
detox, and get referrals to rehab programs or local ministries. But they usually head back out to the street because they’ve tried everything and “it hasn’t worked,” said Del Vecchio.

One day, an overdose victim was brought into the ER, and Del Vecchio began doing chest compressions to try to revive the patient. As she was doing compressions, she looked up and saw that it was a guy she went to high school with. Del Vecchio helped the medical staff identify him—they couldn’t revive him.

“I just remember standing there,” she said, stunned. She knew he dabbled in drugs in high school, but had no idea about his pill and heroin problem. “He was a nice, sweet kid.”

Even before Del Vecchio became an EMT, she had lost friends to overdoses. She’s seen it in well-to-do suburbs and in the poverty-stricken Badlands, and knows no one is immune. About half of the users in Kensington die, she said, and she is shocked how many of her overdose patients feel helpless and have made peace with the idea of dying from drugs.

Kensington has several long-term ministries serving the addicted population, and those ministries are providing most of the outreach to addicts in the Badlands. But they have conflicting approaches to addiction, in Del Vecchio’s view. She volunteered with one ministry, but felt it was offering only “comfort care” to addicts.

“It’s an over-ministried area, which confuses me, because why is this still such a problem?” she asked. “Why are they still dying?”

Benzos were one drug of many for Kyle Walker, according to his mother, Bridget Crowley. When Walker was 17, he was in a bad car accident, and doctors prescribed opioids for about a year after as he recovered. Crowley didn’t realize Kyle was addicted. Her son seemed to be doing well, but then started a job with a railroad company where his co-workers were using pills recreationally. Soon he was on heroin and had to quit his job: A recent study estimated that 2 million Americans of prime working age are out of the workforce because of opioids.

For the last 15 years Crowley has supported her son through two stints in rehab. Crowley recalled that one time, when her son was asleep, she looked in his pockets and found an assortment of benzos and other pills. She said parents of addicts are “constantly waiting for them to fall asleep so you can snoop through their stuff, which is terrible.”

There have been victories, like happy family dinners after a successful rehab. But one time, when he was a month out of rehab and she was picking him up for church, he wasn’t coming out of his house. She decided to see what was taking so long—and found him unconscious on the floor of his closet. He had overdosed on heroin laced with fentanyl. Crowley called 911. Paramedics revived him with Narcan.

“That was something I never want to see again,” said Crowley, as tears crept into her voice. “I don’t think God wants us to stay in this spot forever. But you can’t make a person change.”

Crowley finds few people at church can relate to this close relationship with someone with a drug addiction: the shame mingled with love for her son, the walking on eggshells around him, the regular feeling of not knowing if she’ll see him alive again.

Now he is in a court-mandated boot camp to get clean, and about to graduate: “In his letters he goes, ‘Mom, I just want to be part of the family again.’” Crowley is planning to talk to her pastor at their Southern Baptist church about re-starting a prayer group for men with addictions that her son could join when he gets back from boot camp.

Sandy Dettmann, a Christian addiction doctor in Michigan, had her own experience of dependence on benzos. Previously she was a pediatric emergency specialist and saw
enough horrible accidents with children that she began to feel intense anxiety about her own children. (She recalled putting helmets on her kids in the car.)

Her doctor prescribed Ativan, and she continued to take benzos regularly for seven years—as prescribed. In 2011, feeling the effects of the dependence, she went to a five-day medically supervised detox to get off of them. Withdrawals from benzos are more dangerous than from opioids, and can be deadly.

Now, as an addiction doctor, she is educated about them. Dettmann says benzos should only be for rare emergencies, and doctors shouldn’t prescribe them for regular use of more than two to four weeks: “They work very well for anxiety, until your whole life falls apart. Then the drug you used for anxiety in the first place actually causes anxiety, and people quickly get on escalated doses.”

Thomas Paulus, a psychologist working in intensive outpatient addiction treatment in San Diego, Calif., also finds benzos to be a huge problem. Benzos aren’t always bad, he said, but “I’ve not encountered cases where I’m glad someone is on them.” Paulus says benzos mask the natural but unpleasant physiological symptoms of anxiety, and thus prevent addressing the mental illness underneath: “Many in our culture view painful experience as a problem to be solved rather than as a symptom to be understood.”

Kristen Gunn, the former University of Virginia student, knows her addiction was a symptom of a larger problem. Her psychiatrist’s prediction of difficult withdrawals from Klonopin proved to be true. As Gunn cut down the amount of Klonopin she was taking, she experienced her most intense anxiety ever. She remembered almost running out of Klonopin on her first day of work that summer, and not getting to the pharmacy for the refill before it closed.

She went to a different pharmacy and tried to get the prescription filled there, but the pharmacist declined because a different pharmacy had already filled it. Gunn broke down in tears there in the pharmacy, terrified not to have the drug. Through the summer as she took less and less of it, she had panic attacks and uncontrollable shaking. When a panic attack started, she took a walk.

“I wish I had never gotten involved in drugs to try to fix this,” Gunn said. “There were issues that needed deeper therapy, but I didn’t have the time to invest in that.” She knew she was putting her identity in the wrong places—in being the perfect student, in being a good writer—and wished she had instead sought spiritual resources. Seeing how her parents and friends had sounded the alarm about the drug, “I knew deep down that I would need a community to get off of this stuff,” she said.

At the end of her summer internship, she packed her bags and final bottle of Klonopin to go to the evangelical community L’Abri in Switzerland. She spoke about her dependence on the drug in a group prayer meeting, and one of the people there was a pharmacist who empathized with her.

After a month she resolved to be done with the drugs. She went to the bathroom with her pills, negotiating with herself—maybe she needed one more week? But with two friends cheering her on outside, she dumped her pills down the toilet.

Gunn retaught herself how to sleep, and described the wonder of standing in the kitchen chopping a tomato and feeling present. When she returned to the United States, she started seeing a psychotherapist to work through her anxiety. Three years later, anxiety remains but she feels she’s begun to find resolution through therapy and “spiritual resources.” She is hoping to re-create a slice of L’Abri in her living situation too.

“There’s something about all Christian communities that work—which is some degree of shared vulnerability and intimacy,” she said. She wished churches would offer more of what L’Abri offered her: She spoke about her anxiety once in a church setting and got uncomfortable silence.

“My church was probably the hardest place to talk about any of this.”

Dettmann
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FIRE IN THE MOUNTAINS

Rural Colombia remains a ‘Wild West’ of guerrilla and paramilitary violence, but amid threats and attacks village pastors preach the gospel of Christ

by JAMIE DEAN in Medellín, Colombia
Colombian soldiers train in Tumaco, Colombia.
PHOTO BY RAUL ARBOLEDA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES
IN A SMALL ROOM IN A NONDESCRIPTOR BUILDING near Colombia’s mountainous border with Venezuela, Pastor Juan Martinez leans his slight frame over a bulky Bible and describes Christian ministry in his rural Colombian village: “I am currently under threat of death for preaching the gospel.”

Martinez isn’t alone.

In the same room, three other Colombian pastors tell similar stories about the dangers of leading evangelical churches in rural regions where armed militants still roam the hills and demand control.

(Martinez is a pseudonym, and WORLD agreed not to name the pastors because of threats against their families and their lives.)

One pastor says three different guerrilla groups are clashing in the area around his hometown. Ministry grows dangerous as militants accuse pastors of aligning with one group against another, though ministers say they simply speak about Christ with anyone who comes to their churches. In some cases, that includes militants now interested in Christianity.

In other cases, church members fear militants kidnapping their children for forced recruitment—a practice the pastors say continues, despite a 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the country’s largest guerrilla group, known as FARC.

On Sept. 16, members of an armed group assassinated 55-year-old Pastor Elfren Pérez outside his home in a rural village in northwest Colombia. The advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported the pastor had pushed back against militants’ demands to control the village.

In November, Colombia will mark the two-year anniversary of a peace accord aimed at stopping five decades of civil war between FARC, paramilitary forces, and other guerrilla groups. The fighting has killed more than 220,000 people and displaced some 7 million Colombians from their homes.

But instead of planning celebrations, the country is facing fresh conflict. The controversial peace treaty is fracturing, as thousands of FARC dissidents and other guerrillas re-group in the mountains of Colombia, where coca fields now stand to produce more of the plant used to make cocaine than ever in Colombia’s history.

The country’s new president, Iván Duque, has said he will revise the peace deal and pursue new measures to curb the production of cocaine—a process watched closely by U.S. officials worried about a recent surge of cocaine-related deaths in the United States.

For Christians living in the Colombian countryside—and for those displaced to other areas of the nation—a different concern arises, particularly for pastors leading churches: How can they best maintain ministry in dangerous conditions—and encourage their congregations to welcome militants now interested in the gospel?

For Pastor Martinez, his own history compels him to continue ministry, despite threats against him and his family. “I share the gospel because the Lord has transformed me,” he says. “I was once a member of those groups too.”

TRANSFORMATION IS A POPULAR THEME IN Colombia, a Latin American nation with a burgeoning middle class and modern skyscrapers nestled into verdant valleys surrounded by the Andes Mountains.

In bustling cities like Medellín—once infamous for drug lord Pablo Escobar’s brutally violent cartel—residents stroll city streets, commute in a modern metro system, and sip coffee in upscale shopping malls.

Colombian forces killed Escobar during a 1993 raid at the kingpin’s Medellín hideout, and the crackdown on drug cartels helped improve living conditions in urban areas.
Meanwhile, paramilitary forces battled guerrilla groups that had roamed the countryside for decades. The guerrilla organization known as FARC (a Spanish acronym for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) arose in the 1960s, with Marxist militants claiming to fight for the rights of the poor in the countryside.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the FARC guerrillas were fighting for a cut of the drug trade and wreaking havoc in rural areas with fields producing the coca plant used to manufacture cocaine for a global black market—including the United States.

Paramilitary groups formed to fight the guerrillas, but Colombians say many of those forces fought for a slice of drug trafficking and control of rural areas too. Even today, when some villagers describe the bloody conflict they’ve endured for decades, they often aren’t sure whether the violence came from guerrilla or paramilitary groups.

Colombia’s former president, Juan Manuel Santos, gained international praise (and a Nobel Peace Prize) for a 2016 peace deal with FARC guerrillas to halt violence.

But the plan was unpopular at home: It stipulated FARC guerrillas must surrender their weapons and report to transition camps, but it also allowed thousands of militants to go free without punishment for past crimes. Many evangelicals and Catholics also opposed a portion of the peace accord they said would introduce gender theory into local schools.

In a nationwide referendum in October 2016, Colombian voters rejected the accord. A month later, the Colombian government signed it anyway.

Setbacks came quickly.

Earlier this year, federal prosecutors in New York charged FARC members and associates with conspiring to import 10 tons of cocaine into the United States in 2017. One of the accused surrendered to authorities and was extradited to the United States. Another was one of the FARC leaders who had negotiated the peace deal and was slated to take an unelected seat in Colombia’s Congress.

Meanwhile, violence in rural areas has spiked again, as FARC dissidents unhappy with the peace accord—or unable to acclimate to normal life—regroup in the countryside. Villagers report smaller guerrilla groups and paramilitary members also remain in the area, making the countryside a combustible brew of competing forces.

It’s not an easy place to lead a church. The rural pastors I met near a Colombian border town this summer had gathered from different regions for a training session on how to disciple former guerrillas and militants interested in learning about Christianity.

But the pastors must also contend with militants hostile toward their churches. They reported that some armed groups vying for control of towns incorrectly suspect local pastors of allying with their enemies. Other militants see pastors and churches as competition for the loyalty of local residents, and as obstacles to gaining control.

Some pastors have reported armed groups demanding their churches remain closed at certain hours, and that they surrender portions of their Sunday offerings. The threats can grow dangerous, particularly if pastors stand up to militants seeking to kidnap young people. Militants have forced boys into fighting and girls into sexual slavery. Women and girls have reported enduring forced abortions. One of the pastors at the conference said parents have knocked on his door early in the morning, begging him to help them recover children or teenagers taken in the night.

Pastor Martinez wasn’t kidnapped, but he said he was conscripted into an armed group as a young child. By the time he was a teenager, he says, he had risen to a leadership role in the group: “But I felt empty, and the Lord sent His Word to me in different ways.” He became a Christian,
left the group at age 16, and eventually became a pastor.

His past experiences inspired him to reach out to others in armed groups. Some have threatened him for supposedly competing with their rule, but others have come to him interested in learning more about Christ.

That’s when another challenge arises: the response of local church members. The pastors say their congregants often are frightened of militants who once threatened them, but who now want to join them, even if informally.

They often teach their church members about the story of the Apostle Paul—a former persecutor of the early church who converted to Christianity, but initially faced fear from Christians who knew about his former way of life. One pastor said he reminds his congregation, “From a former militant, the Lord can make a great servant.”

For many rural Colombians, staying in violent areas eventually became untenable.

Over the last five decades, officials estimate some 7 million Colombians have fled their homes because of violence, making those Colombians the largest internally displaced group of people in the world.

Many fled to the hills and mountains just outside of major cities like Medellín and the capital city of Bogotá, setting up a mixture of shantytowns and permanent structures, including schools and churches.

In Medellín, lavish homes of wealthy residents dot sections of the surrounding hills, with stunning views of the Andes Mountains. Other parts of the mountains are filled with makeshift homes without basic services like running water.

From well-kept metro platforms around Medellín, residents and visitors can catch rides on a system of gondola-like cable cars that ascend from the city streets up hundreds of feet into the air to the dirt roads and steep hills of the surrounding mountains.

On a day when the cable cars aren’t in service, a ride on a packed bus around the steep streets of the winding mountains is a lesson in how many of the residents in the surrounding hills make the long trip down into the city for work or school.

On a warm weekday morning, the air grows cooler as the bus climbs higher into the hills, going up as far as its last stop allows. From there, it’s a steep hike on dirt roads into a neighborhood of lean-to houses and small stores carrying supplies residents might need without making a trip into the city below.

On this bright morning, Emperatriz Arrieta stands outside her small wooden home, sweeping dirt off a front step. Arrieta has lived here for 15 years and is a founding member of a nearby church. She’s known as a mother to the neighborhood and quickly invites guests to step down into her small home. It offers a snapshot of life for many displaced Colombians living in similar circumstances all over the country.

In a tiny living room, Arrieta’s adult nephew greets visitors from a wheelchair. Nearby, a motorbike sits propped up against a kitchen table. It seems like an out-of-place item in such a small room, but Arrieta’s husband explains that local gang members demand a fee for parking the bike outside.

It’s an arbitrary “tax” imposed by gangs threatening residents who don’t comply with similar demands—storekeepers pay a tax to sell their own eggs, water, propane, and other items. They often pass the cost to customers, who sometimes pay more than they would in the expensive city at the bottom of the mountain.
Long after Arrieta serves large mugs of piping hot coffee she’s brewed for our visit, she mentions the gang members have cut off the neighborhood’s water supply at a nearby spigot. Apparently, a resident hadn’t paid the “water tax,” and the gang members cut off access for the whole neighborhood.

That didn’t keep Arrieta from sharing with her guests the limited supply of water she had saved, and when a young boy arrived at the doorway asking if she had any water to share with his family, she grabbed a jug and filled up the empty pitcher he brought.

Her reputation for serving the neighborhood has drawn gang members to seek her out for prayer, and she says they sometimes tell her they wish they could leave the lifestyle behind but don’t know how to leave.

Arrieta knows about leaving a life behind. She fled to Medellín from a rural town near the coast in 1990, when guerrillas terrorized her village: “If you didn’t do what they said, you were in trouble.” She says militants especially targeted pastors. After she and her family left, they never returned: “Not even to visit.”

They first lived in Medellín, but the drug violence of the 1990s eventually drove them up into the hills. Thousands of people have moved into the area since then. Arrieta began holding prayer meetings in her home on Wednesday nights, and the group used flashlights to read portions of the Bible before electricity came to the area.

Eventually, mission groups and churches from Medellín helped Arrieta and others build a church building near her home. A pastor from Medellín travels up on Sundays to preach to the congregation.

Arrieta leads the way up a steep road to the church building that others in the community use during the week. On this morning, workers from the Christian group World Vision are holding a meeting on children’s health.

These hills can be a difficult place for children.

On a separate part of the mountains, another church group has built a community center for local youth. The volunteer directors say drug use, domestic violence, and underage prostitution plague parts of the communities. Social workers come once a week to teach at-risk girls job skills they could use to find employment in the city, but the Christian workers say the challenges remain great for a community of people displaced and scattered.

Arrieta says it’s true in her part of the hills as well, and she says she hopes eventually to start similar classes to teach a trade to vulnerable girls in her area. “We pray for them,” she says. “But we need to give them something practical as well.”

For now, she keeps her home open to young people who come looking for comfort or prayer. She serves a meal, she listens to them, she prays with them, and says she hopes “that they will really hear the gospel.” She’s satisfied that it’s enough for now: “We thank God for this place He has given us.”

**BACK DOWN IN THE CITY OF MEDELLÍN, LIFE** is much safer than it was in the days of Pablo Escobar, but gangs and drugs still rule parts of the city and make them unsafe for visitors and sometimes for residents.

On a Sunday afternoon, a former pastor glanced around at the faces in a Subway sandwich shop before he talked about his life as a former associate of the Medellín cartel. He left the group 20 years ago but says his former connections could still put him and his family in danger.

The pastor lost two brothers to drug violence before he became a Christian and left the cartel. A decade ago, he moved to a rural area to try to reach militants with the same Christian gospel that had converted him out of sin and a life of danger. He was surprised at the differences: In the city, gangs were more organized into controlling separate parts of the city. In the countryside, he said: “Everyone had a machete and a knife. It was the Wild West.”

Still, he did reach some members of both FARC and paramilitary groups, and even cartel members who had fled to the hills. He remembers one woman showing up at church carrying a pistol and a hand grenade.

Violence in the countryside eventually drove him back to Medellín with his wife and young children a few years ago, but he hopes to begin to reach out to gang members in the city again, when the timing is right.

In the meantime, it’s unclear what the time ahead will hold for Colombians, including Christians living in still-dangerous circumstances. But during a shared cab ride a couple of hours after morning worship, the pastor said he’s been moved by how he’s seen deeply hardened people change as they come to Christ.

Before he hops out to head home, he pauses to add something to his story. “One important thing I shouldn’t leave out,” he says. “I give God all the glory.”

A World Relief worker gives instructions on child health (above); Christian volunteers at a community center in the hills mentor at-risk youth (right).

A World Relief worker gives instructions on child health (above); Christian volunteers at a community center in the hills mentor at-risk youth (right).
TARGET OF
On Sept. 21, 2016, human rights advocate Huang Yan stepped out of the Liwan District Detention Center in a bright yellow blouse, breathing fresh air for the first time in nearly a year. Her ankles and calves were covered with infected cuts where heavy shackles had dug into her skin—her punishment for yelling slogans at the guards until her throat grew hoarse. Huang, then 47, suffered from late-stage ovarian cancer and diabetes. Police released her so that she wouldn’t die inside the prison.

But escaping China’s Communist regime isn’t so easy for political targets like Huang, who is also a Christian. After she left the prison, two Chinese hospitals, apparently under government pressure, refused to give her needed surgery for her cancer. She ultimately had to travel to Thailand to get medical treatment.

Even outside mainland China, Huang faced harassment, and she says hackers sent viruses to her cell phones. Back in China, local officials harassed her husband, ransacked their home, and tried to entice her to return.

After surgery in Thailand and a temporary stay in Indonesia, she booked a flight back to Beijing, but made a getaway during a layover in Taiwan: Before landing at Taoyuan International Airport in late May of this year, Huang tore up her People’s Republic of China passport. At the airport, she walked up to immigration officers holding only her United Nations refugee card and asked them for asylum.

Huang, a former evangelist, has spoken out against government oppression in China for 14 years. Chinese authorities have tried to silence her multiple times, arresting her without notice, jailing her on spurious charges, and beating her brutally. Now in Taiwan on a temporary visa, Huang is seeking U.S. asylum at a time when the Trump administration has restricted the number of refugees admitted into the United States.

The island of Taiwan, which China claims as its own, is not part of the UN and cannot accept refugees. Despite facing the ire of Beijing, the Taiwanese government granted Huang a temporary visa to stay on the island until a third country grants her asylum. Leaders of the Taiwan Association for China Human Rights (TACHR) sponsored Huang, and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan provided her with housing, medical care, and living expenses.

“It’s a big moment for the Taiwan government,” TACHR President Yang Sen-hong told
Taiwan’s The News Lens. “You cannot force her to leave this country and face persecution in China. The [Chinese Communist Party] is manufacturing refugees, and we should do something to rescue them. Taiwan is the Noah’s Ark of human rights.”

When I sat down with 49-year-old Huang at the red-brick Chi-nan Presbyterian Church in Taipei in September, it seemed a decade’s worth of trauma had taken its toll on her. She at times cried and at times railed angrily against the Communist Party for its cruelty. Even after leaving China, she still doesn’t feel safe from the Chinese government.

Yet one of her biggest sorrows is the theft of her motherhood: She has miscarried two babies as a result of government beatings, she says. That violence and ovarian cancer have left her barren. At times it leads her to question the justice of God.

“If you do evil [in China], the government reveres you; if you do good, it suppresses and persecutes you,” Huang said. “I believe the Chinese government has reached an all-time low... There’s no way God will let Xi Jinping off for demolishing crosses and destroying churches.”

Her voice quavered and tears fell from her eyes as she added, “If God lets him get away with it, I don’t think I can believe in this God anymore.”

Huang grew up in a Christian family in Jingzhou city in Hubei province, where her parents owned a successful candy factory and used its profits for ministry. Huang became an evangelist, spreading the gospel while running a bridal shop. Once, Huang prayed for God to heal the bedridden owner of a local steel factory. When her health suddenly improved, a grateful factory manager hosted a revival meeting, and many in the area professed faith in Christ.

Huang continued evangelizing until 2004, when the persecution of Christians intensified and several of Huang’s fellow evangelists were imprisoned. She fled to Beijing, where she stayed at the home of prominent house church Pastor Cai Zhuohua and his family. Government officials arrested Cai in September 2004 for illegally printing and distributing Bibles. Huang accompanied Cai’s mother in seeking a legal team to represent Cai, and found some of the most promising young human rights lawyers, including Gao Zhisheng.

Gao, one of WORLD’s 2012 Daniels of the Year, had irked Communist officials by representing victims of land seizures, Falun Gong practitioners, and other persecuted minorities. He also documented the torture of political prisoners and wrote open letters criticizing the government. In retaliation, authorities disbarred him and detained and tortured him multiple times.

In 2004, Huang knew little of the human rights world and didn’t realize Gao was a politically sensitive figure. During Cai’s trial, Huang snuck into the courthouse and marveled at the authority with which Gao spoke. “This is a real Chinese lawyer who isn’t afraid of persecution,” she thought. In the end, Cai was sentenced to three years in prison.

As Huang befriended Gao and his wife Geng He, she began to see firsthand the injustices in Chinese society under Communist rule. Yet her involvement in the human rights community—and friendship with Gao—came at a price. Every time Gao and Geng visited her, Huang would be arrested and detained the next day, she recalls.

Whenever police detained Gao, Huang alerted human rights activist Hu Jia, who passed the news along to international reporters. The government hated the publicity.

On Sept. 21, 2007, at 8 p.m., a group of police captured Gao while another group apprehended Huang. They covered her eyes and ears and duct-taped her mouth shut, leaving her to breathe only through her nostrils, Huang recalls. Someone pushed her head between her knees and bound her wrists together with cable ties. Security bureau officials hit her with unopened water bottles until bruises covered her entire body, she said. Later they sent her back to Hubei and placed her under house arrest for 30 days.
Gao, taken separately that night, later wrote about the torture he endured in an essay called “Dark Night, Dark Hood, and Kidnapping by Dark Mafia.” He described how the secret police beat him until he shook uncontrollably, pressed an electric shock prod over his entire body, and pierced his genitals with toothpicks. Guards threatened to go after his family and ordered him to write articles claiming that he was treated well in prison and that his Falun Gong clients had tricked him. After 50 days, they allowed Gao to return home to house arrest.

Huang stayed in touch with Gao through a secret cell phone and helped him sneak the torture essay out of his home on a USB drive. In January 2009, U.S.-based ChinaAid helped Gao’s wife, daughter, and son escape to the United States, where they received asylum. Gao, taken separately that night, later has either been in prison or under house arrest.

As Huang continued to advocate for Gao and other human rights lawyers—holding up posters in parks, traveling to Hong Kong to protest the Communist Party’s actions, writing posts on social media—her detentions continued. She says her “kidnappings,” in which government agents apprehended her without warning, are “too many to count.”

Torture and mistreatment severely affected her health. Twice officials beat the pregnant Huang so hard that she miscarried, she said. The second time, officials burst into the bathroom where she had just miscarried her child and continued to beat her, according to reports by ChinaAid. Officials beat her even after she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

In November 2015 police showed up at Huang’s home in Guangzhou and detained her on suspicion of “deliberately disseminating terrorist information.” A month later, they arrested her on nonsensical charges of “obstructing official duties.” In prison, guards confiscated her cancer and diabetes medicines.

In her prison cell, Huang screamed at the police, calling them scoundrels and wolves for detaining an innocent woman. Guards refused to let her shower, and they beat and shackled her, according to China Human Rights Defenders. Huang lost 30 pounds in one month due to a poor diet. Without access to diabetes medicine, she could barely see, and she couldn’t walk due to injuries sustained from the shackling.

Officials finally transferred her to the prisoner’s ward of Guangzhou Armed Police Hospital, also known as Wujing Hospital. They wanted to perform surgery on her, but fellow prisoners warned her that many had died on the operating table, Huang said. Terrified, she began yelling in hopes that passersby would hear: “Wujing Hospital helps Guangzhou police commit murder!”

One day she told the guards that if anything happened to her in the hospital, word would get out: She was well-known in international media, and her sister had alerted the U.S. Embassy about her situation. “If you kill me here,” Huang told them, “my sister will make sure justice is done.” The guards soon sent her back to prison.

As her health continued to deteriorate, officials acquitted Huang and finally released her in September 2016.

After her release, Huang checked into Sun Yat-sen University No. 1 Hospital in Guangzhou for surgery to remove her left ovary where tumors had grown. Yet the day before the scheduled surgery, her doctor suddenly canceled the procedure and told her to leave the hospital. The doctor claimed he was simply obeying his superior’s instructions, said Huang. Another doctor at Zhuhai Hospital of Southern Medical University who had years earlier removed Huang’s right ovary also refused to perform the surgery.

After Radio Free Asia reported on her situation, the original doctor agreed to do the surgery as long as she signed a waiver absolving the hospital of responsibility if anything happened to her during the operation. Knowing this could be a tactic for the government to “rid” itself of a nuisance, Huang refused to sign.

Instead, with the help of ChinaAid and pro-democracy Hong Kong lawmakers, Huang traveled to Hong Kong and from there flew to Thailand in late December 2016, where she received the surgery and chemotherapy she needed.

Since Huang left mainland China, government officials have frozen her bank account, refused to allow her to collect insurance reimbursements, and sold her house in Hubei, Huang said. Her husband, still in China, continues to face harassment: Police have detained him overnight, beaten him until he couldn’t walk, and broken into his home. They also monitor his communications.

Huang’s initial 90-day Taiwanese visa has expired, but the government has allowed her to extend it. She’s waiting to confirm whether the United States will accept her as a refugee. She has family in the United States and believes it’s where she would be the safest from the Chinese government.

“I’m not afraid to die, I believe in God, I believe God has planned everything in my life,” Huang said. “Perhaps God sees this injustice, and he gave each Christian different levels of wisdom and courage, different amounts of blessing. Maybe God gave me the ability to withstand these trials, maybe that’s the blessing He bestowed on me.”
In March 1994 Ray Rising disappeared into the Colombian jungle. FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia) had abducted the Wycliffe missionary and radio technician. For the next 810 days, hard men with machine guns in their hands and murder in their hearts held him captive, constantly moving from camp to camp, always watching. When the guerillas released Rising in June 1996, he thought his ordeal was finally over. But Rising’s battle had only just begun.

In the 22 years since his release, Rising has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Day to day, he is plagued by paranoid thoughts, intrusive memories triggered by little reminders—a Bible verse he read in the jungle, say—scrap[s] of the past that whisper fear and anger. “If somebody’s [standing] close to me and talking and talking and talking, I start feeling nervous,” Rising told me. “I want to run.”

He’s hypervigilant and has trouble concentrating, constantly scanning his surroundings for signs of danger. Sometimes he’ll feel angry or guilty for no reason at all. Then there are the nightmares—vivid dreams that take him back into the jungle’s shadow.

“You wake up, not sure where you are, but glad you’re not where you thought you were in the dream,” Rising said.

More than two decades have passed since his captivity, but Rising says the symptoms are just as bad now as they were when the trauma was fresh: “It’s a serious debilitating disorder, so you just have to learn to live with it.”

Though Rising’s ordeal was particularly harrowing and the fallout severe, he is far from alone. Missionaries and aid workers across the globe both experience traumatic events and suffer from resulting PTSD and secondary trauma at far higher rates than the average American. Yet the issue is little known or discussed.

Experiencing critical incidents, trauma, and high levels of stress is common in many of the contexts where cross-cultural workers serve. Missionaries bringing the gospel to unreached people groups go to remote areas, because that’s where the unreached are. Those who serve the poor or provide humanitarian aid find themselves in slums or conflict zones—places beleaguered by...
violence, instability, and extreme poverty.

One 2007 study found that 71 percent of men and 64 percent of women serving as missionaries in West Africa had experienced three or more severe traumatic events, compared with only 9.5 percent and 5 percent respectively of the general American population. A 2001 study of returned aid workers found that 30 percent reported significant symptoms of PTSD, compared with a 3.5 percent prevalence of PTSD among the American population measured in a 2003 study.

“Just because people have critical incidents, that doesn't mean they'll develop PTSD,” said Mark Ventrella, clinical director for the Well International, a Thailand-based counseling center. “Most people are actually quite resilient. [But] if people feel overwhelmed and their normal coping strategies are undermined, if there's intense fear, helplessness, or horror... that makes it much more likely that someone will develop a PTSD response.”

According to Ventrella, only 8 to 10 percent of those who experience a traumatic event actually develop PTSD, and there’s evidence that missionaries and aid workers, psychologically bolstered by their strong sense of purpose and an expectation of suffering, are more resilient than most.

“There's about 425,000 cross-cultural workers in the field,” Ventrella added. “So that’s still over 20,000 people a year developing PTSD symptoms. That’s a significant number.”

But PTSD is only the more obvious of the psychological specters threatening missionaries and aid workers. Secondary trauma, in which a person develops PTSD-like symptoms from accumulated exposure to the stories of others’ pain and trauma, is more insidious. According to Dr. Tim Sieges, clinical director for Wycliffe USA’s counseling ministries, it is not only more common, it’s more difficult to spot.

“It’s a more complex traumatization,” he said. “They could be struggling and nobody’s noticing. That’s what gets through the cracks the most.”

If people feel overwhelmed and their normal coping strategies are undermined, if there's intense fear, helplessness, or horror... that makes it much more likely that someone will develop a PTSD response.’

—Mark Ventrella

‘If people feel overwhelmed and their normal coping strategies are undermined, if there’s intense fear, helplessness, or horror... that makes it much more likely that someone will develop a PTSD response.’

—Mark Ventrella

Pip Rea had always had a heart for the poor and was no stranger to tough overseas assignments. But when the New Zealander nurse arrived in Kolkata, India, in 2010, she wasn’t prepared for what was to come.

Tasked with setting up a health program for Freeset, a social enterprise that employs sex-trafficking survivors, Rea began by interviewing each woman to assess her health needs.

“Pretty quickly it became apparent that... their social and emotional health was very tied up in their physical health,” Rea told me.

For four hours a day, Rea would do back-to-back interviews with sex-trafficking survivors—one horrific, in-depth story of trauma and abuse after another. Within her first six months, she had interviewed 155 women, and the cumulative weight of their suffering began to overwhelm.

Rea served with Freeset for the next six years, living and working around Sonagachi, one of the most notorious red-light districts in the world. She was sexually harassed on a daily basis, and sexually assaulted several times. All the while, stories of rape, slavery, and abuse continued to seep into her mind.

“My experiences and the women’s experiences became intertwined in my brain,” Rea said.

The symptoms started slowly. Initially, she worked herself to exhaustion—putting in hour
after hour, day after day. Then she withdrew, putting off meetings to avoid hearing yet another horrific story. She became hypersensitive to her surroundings, and her sleep became progressively worse—plagued by stories of her friends’ sexual trauma played out like a movie reel in her head.

One morning, about six years in, it all came crumbling down.

“I broke down, cried, and basically didn’t stop until I got on a plane and went to New Zealand,” said Rea. “I couldn’t eat, couldn’t sleep. [My] body totally shut down.”

Diagnosed with severe secondary trauma and compassion fatigue, Rea spent the next five months recovering in New Zealand. After weeks of counseling and lots of sleep, she returned to India, and to Freeset, armed this time with healthier boundaries and a toolkit of coping strategies. Though Rea was better prepared, she knew that, given what she had already experienced, it was not sustainable for the long haul. In 2017 she moved back to New Zealand, continuing to serve the poor in a more sustainable context.

Now, Rea thinks that secondary trauma is much more prevalent than we realize.

“When I came back, I saw [secondary trauma] everywhere,” Rea said. “There’s this notion that we have to be strong as overseas cross-cultural workers. … People will keep going to the point where they can’t handle it anymore. … It never really gets talked about. Never really gets processed. There’s [constantly] this wave of people [leaving the field]. … It just doesn’t get the label ‘secondary trauma.’ It’s just—‘somebody decided to go home.’”

As for Rising, PTSD hasn’t slowed him down. For the three years immediately following his release, Rising shared his story of survival with churches, universities, and high schools, but the pull of Latin America proved irresistible. In 1999 he and his wife moved to Bolivia. For seven years Rising helped establish radio stations that would broadcast Scripture, translated into the local language. In 2007, he moved back to Colombia, serving until 2011 in the country where he had been held captive.

“I’m more at home in Latin America,” he explained.

Now 76 years old, Rising lives in North Carolina and continues to work with Wycliffe, his employer of 53 years. In February 2018 he went back to Colombia to visit the town where he was kidnapped. Still wary, he showed up unannounced, bearing boots and uniforms for the local fire department.

Rising still attends Wycliffe counseling sessions twice a month. That care is, in part, responsible for his ability to cope, his faithful tenacity. The fear is still there, the flashbacks, the nightmares—yet still, again and again, he goes back to the mission field.

“This isn’t about me,” Rising said. “You can’t quit living because there’s a risk.”

Churches will ask counselor Tim Sieges, often, why his job matters. Hudson Taylor didn’t need a counselor, they’ll say. William Carey wasn’t breaking down. So what’s with this generation of missionaries? Why can’t they handle it if our old heroes could?

Sieges thinks that’s all bunk: “They were breaking down, you just didn’t know about it. William Carey’s wife went bonkers.” He called the current generation of missionaries “darn resilient” and said “they stack up to the best in history.”

He added, “I’ll tell you what, though, they gotta take care of this thing,” tapping his temple with two fingers. “Too many missionaries, they go out there, they recognize that the rest of their body is made out of dirt, but they don’t [see] that this thing is made out of the same stuff. It lives by the same rules. … You ride that pony too hard, and it’s going to drop.”

—Andrew Shaughnessy is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course

‘There’s this notion that we have to be strong as overseas cross-cultural workers…. People will keep going to the point where they can’t handle it anymore…. It never really gets talked about.’

—Pip Rea

Rising (right) and a friend in Puerto Lleras, the town he was kidnapped from in 1994

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Hips sway. Hands clap. Arms wave in the air, heels bounce, and faces lift up wide smiles as the choir belts out, “You are good, and Your mercy endures forever.” The audience smiles as it listens. Irresistibly, a toe starts tapping along to the beat, shoulders begin loosening, and heads begin bopping.

That’s the magic of gospel music. A synergy of vocals, facial language, and body movement, a genre of Christian music dating back to the late 19th century, when African-American churches in the U.S. South fused classic hymns with traditional African-American spirituals and beats.

Except this particular choir was neither black nor Christian. It consisted of about two dozen Japanese college students praising God in a music room at Aoyama Gakuin University, a prestigious school in Tokyo—and only one student called himself a Christian.

One soft-spoken choir member, 20-year-old Yuri Nakajima, said she first heard of gospel music through her mother, a big fan of the 1992 movie Sister Act. When Nakajima saw Whoopi Goldberg and a group of nuns rock to a gospel rendition of “I Will Follow Him” in that movie, she too fell in love with the music style: “Everybody singing was so emotional, so excited. I felt that everyone was enjoying themselves.” She said she doesn’t have “a clear image of God,” but the lyrics of gospel songs uplift her. She finds the words “so warm, so kind.”

Ever since Sister Act and its sequel became surprise hits in Japan, the gospel music bug has bitten its citizens—so much so that local community centers began offering gospel singing lessons. The gospel boom was reaching its peak when a community center hired American missionary Ken Taylor, director of Nakajima’s choir, to teach gospel music classes.

At the time, Taylor, a former jazz musician, had been doing church-planting work in Tokyo for three years. What he saw at the community center amazed him: The room was packed, and about 100 more people had signed up on a waiting list. Millennial housewives and elderly grandmothers were enthusiastically singing, “Oh happy day! Jesus washed my sins away!”—and not a single person in the group was a Christian.

“Who would have thought this would come out of Sister Act? This was not something I was trying to manufacture,” Taylor recalled when I met him 17 years later at a Tokyo Starbucks. “It was one of those things where it was so obvious that God was saying, ‘Here’s an open door for you.’” And he wondered, “Where is the church in this?”

In a nation whose population is less than 1 percent evangelical Christian, Japan’s churches couldn’t attract even
a handful of people to attend their free outreach events, yet these non-
Christians were paying 2,500 yen apiece (about $22) to worship for 90 minutes. That’s when something clicked for Taylor: Ah, of course—Japanese culture follows a cyclical ritual of obligatory gift-giving. Give something for free, and the recipient feels obligated to give back. When churches offer music lessons for free, that’s a burden the Japanese are less likely to accept.

So Taylor did the same at his church plant in Tokyo: He charged people a small fee to attend a 10-week gospel music workshop. And people started coming. Other pastors took notice and asked Taylor to help them start their own choirs. In 2000 Taylor and his wife Bola (she died of cancer in 2015) co-founded Hallelujah Gospel Family (HGF), a ministry that helps churches start gospel choir groups. Today, churches all across Japan from Hokkaido to Nagasaki host more than 60 gospel choirs. About 80 percent of the 1,500 members of those choirs are non-Christian, or “not-yet-Christians,” as Taylor calls them.

Taylor trains all the music directors, but otherwise, local church leaders are responsible for caring for the choir members. Taylor refuses to help start a choir unless a pastor or elder actively participates in it. He wants churches to be not just meeting spaces but living communities that build lasting relationships with the choir members.

Evangelistic strategies that have worked in places like India or Brazil don’t always work among the culturally homogenous, super-polite Japanese, Taylor said. Japanese appear Westernized but hold fast to their national traditions, and although they’re not antagonistic toward Christianity, they see it as a part of Western culture. Japanese also tend to build relationships through existing social groups, not one-on-one encounters with strangers. That’s why gospel choirs are actually drawing unchurched people, Taylor said: “We need to meet them where they’re at.”

At an HGF choir, rehearsals may include a prayer or mini-sermon from the church pastor. Each choir member gets a songbook that explains what the lyrics mean, offers tips on how to pronounce certain difficult words, and gives devotionals with Bible passages. Once a year, HGF holds a combined concert in which all the choirs across the network sing together onstage. This July in Tokyo, 400 choir members sang for a 900-person audience. Over the years, many choir members have professed faith in Christ, along with
family members, and others attend Bible studies and Sunday services at the church where they take their lessons.

**That’s the power of music**, said musician-missionary Ray Sidney, who recently traveled to Japan and the Philippines to teach and perform gospel music. He says he can preach on the streets in Japan and people walk right past him, but when he sings those same words with snapping fingers and stomping feet, people stop and listen. He and his gospel team Firm Soundation were there on the stage with HGF in Tokyo this summer bopping and hopping to gospel music with 1,300 Japanese.

Sidney says they’re planting seeds: “You can only say ‘Jesus’ so many times before something changes in your life, because that’s a powerful name to call upon. There’s a reason they feel so emotional when they sing gospel—there is power in the name of Jesus.”

Sidney was the principal of a private Christian school in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles back in 2004 when he first met Taylor and one of his HGF choirs. A teacher had asked Sidney if a black gospel Japanese choir could come sing for the school kids, and Sidney recalls asking, “What did you just say? Because that does not make sense.”

Now in his 50s, Sidney has been trilling along to gospel music ever since he was a 5-year-old sitting on his mother’s lap during her church choir recitals. The music had always been part of his lifestyle as an African-American Christian growing up in LA, but he had never heard of “black gospel”—it was just “gospel” to him—and he had no idea that Japanese folks hopped off the metro in Watts and sang traditional gospel music for his students. He was further shocked to discover that most of these Japanese singers weren’t Christians. When Taylor invited him to Japan to teach the Japanese how to sing gospel, Sidney, who had never traveled farther than Mexico, thought, “Wow, that’s a long way from home.” But as he prayed about it, he says, he remembered the “visions and dreams” he’d had about “all nations” and “crossing seas”—things he says didn’t make sense until then.

Today Sidney visits Japan twice a year to teach gospel music workshops. In California, he leads three gospel choirs made up mostly of Japanese immigrants. Before starting each class, he tells his students, “I love the Lord, and I love to sing. But I don’t sing for the love of singing. I sing for my love of the Lord.”

I joined him one Friday night at Grace Brethren Church in Long Beach, where Sidney and a group of about 20 Japanese men and women belted out songs such as “There Is None Like You” and “Awesome God” while Sidney banged out the tunes on an old piano.

It was a fun, upbeat class, full of laughter and giggles as Sidney let out theatrical groans when the choir’s claps mismatched the beat. But the choir members were serious too, as Sidney coached them on how to prolong their final note.
“Some people find it helpful to do this”—he demonstrated by quivering his lower jaw. “Do whatever you gotta do.” When they repeated the song, several members tried to tremble their chins to draw out the last note. They listened seriously too, nodding and murmuring when a missionary explained to them in Japanese what “blessing” means in the Bible. “It’s not just something external,” she said. “God is the source of our blessings, the source of our hope.”

That speech lasted maybe eight minutes, but it implants something deep, said choir member Fumiko Gray, 52. Gray said she fell in love with gospel music 20 years ago in Japan: “Most people here are non-Christian, and they don’t feel what the words mean. When you explain it to them like that, they then understand and feel what they sing.”

Sidney says that inevitably, someone always comes up to him and asks, “Why do I feel so joyful when I sing this music?” To which he responds by explaining what “gospel” really means—good news.

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**New on the American side of the Pacific...**

**CHRISTIAN POP, HIP-HOP, AND FAMILY BOP ALBUMS** | reviewed by JEFF KOCH

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**LET THE TRAP SAY AMEN**

**Lecrae & Zaytoven**

Lecrae’s evolution toward social analysis and secular collaboration sometimes provokes hand-wringing among evangelicals. He challenges suburban critics from ivory towers: “This is my district, I witness, I live this / You don’t even visit, why you in my business?” There are many nods to faith, but the battle between dark and light plays out on the street. Amid gritty musical atmosphere and pulsing robotic rhythms, Lecrae’s characters realistically wrestle with myriad temptations, like easy money selling drugs. He exposes how drug recruiters “ain’t tell you ‘bout easy money selling drugs. He exposes how drug recruiters “ain’t tell you ‘bout easy money selling drugs.”

**WHEREVER I GO**

**Dan Bremnes**

Wherever he goes on Wherever I Go, Bremnes grips the piano and makes it swing and sing, giving pop-rock oomph to his musical chops. In “How You Love Me,” horns send pleasing shivers down the spine: “Reminds me of Van Morrison, but more bluesy and less elastic. Lyrics edge into generic CCM territory, but then again, it is CCM. That said, Bremnes rightly tags God’s grace as a “crazy kind of mystery that I don’t understand.”

**HOW COULD I BE SILENT**

**Caitie Hurst**

Hurst is all pop all the time, ranging from a sassy Cyndi Lauper to a snappy Taylor Swift. Verve and pep are consistent throughout, particularly in the title track—a bold piece stuffed with girl power and big, zigzaggy keyboards to rev up the crowd. “Answers” is an intimate, searching moment where Hurst tosses out in a heap all the haunting questions about hurricanes and God-allowed evil. There is no easy resolution when “all I want is answers, / but all You want is faith.”

**COME ON HOME**

**Heidi Snyder**

Imagine Fernando Ortega meets Norah Jones to sing hymns of motherhood—if by hymns you mean folksy, family-centered poetry set to an Americana jazz ensemble. The title track, with gently swinging jazz guitar mingled with flute and tangy harmonies, conveys the feeling of coming in from the cold—or coming home. Cello and piano create richness and warmth on “Let You Go,” a duet that features Snyder’s daughter and expresses the bittersweet feelings of watching children grow up and walk out the door: We want them to grow and go, yet our hearts break at their going.

**SONS OF INTELLECT**

**KJ-52 & Goldinchild**

In this collaboration with Goldinchild, KJ-52 serves up trademark zingers, such as those aimed at undisciplined, wannabe rappers who want fame and lights but are “lost in the high beam / plus your theology’s probably worse than ya hygiene.” Another KJ-52 classic contemplation: “I don’t know where in hell I’d be / if Jesus didn’t step in and kick the sin out of me.” Sturdy grooves nailed down by rock drums and record scratching reveal his retro roots. But tight bass and contemporary keyboard riffs keep it lean and fresh.

**WHETHERMAN**

**K-Drama**

The seven songs on K-Drama’s Whetherman represent seven days of the week and different seasons of the Christian life, tagging Christians who stay theologically shallow as “spiritual vegans.” The easy funk of “Sonday” shows the first bloom of faith but eventually gives way to the next day, “Mundane,” a gloomy return to drudgery: “Today,” though, is a rousing, spiritual carpe diem: “I’m investing in tomorrow with the present / One life to live, cannot waste another second.”
The KJV Spurgeon Study Bible features thousands of notes and excerpts from Spurgeon’s sermons, chosen and edited by Alistair Begg in order to bring the richness of the Prince of Preachers’ insights into your daily study of God’s Word.

Available in KJV for the first time
Barbara Comstock, the GOP incumbent in Virginia’s District 10, is supposedly as vulnerable as a hot dog dangling from the hand of a 4-year-old surrounded by dachshunds.

The district stretches 70 miles from the deep blue suburbs near Washington west to the bright red apple orchards of Frederick County—and Democrats want to make it one of the 24 seats needed to win back the U.S. House. The question is whether Comstock can, like her predecessor Frank Wolf, tiptoe the line between the GOP’s conservative base and the district’s increasingly liberal-leaning voters, a task even more difficult than usual in the Donald Trump era.

Republican Wolf won the 10th in a 1980 upset and kept it for 34 years through hard work and savvy political positioning. He showed up to chicken dinner fundraisers, looked after his constituents, and focused on issues that endeared him to conservatives but seldom antagonized moderates or Democrats. When he retired in 2014, WORLD named him Daniel of the Year for his efforts promoting international religious freedom.

Then Comstock took over. Her margins of victory shrank from 16 points in 2014 to six in 2016, but that...
was an impressive win given that the district went for Hillary Clinton by 10. In Virginia’s 2017 state elections voters in the 10th wiped out the GOP, flipping several state House seats to the Democrats. Analysts noted that the district’s wealthy areas near Washington, packed with traditionally Democratic voters like government workers and union employees, are growing much faster than the rural areas that reelected Wolf for decades.

And yet, turnout at the Loudoun County Republican Committee’s Spring Jamboree in Purcellville last April was the largest in years. The line for BBQ pork sandwiches looped around the community hall as a live band blared oldies rock and kids played cornhole. Comstock was there early, working the line with an easy smile. The queue snaked out the door and down the sidewalk where her primary opponent, retired Air Force Capt. Shak Hill, was handing out stickers.

On paper the primary, at the time still two months away, was no contest. Comstock is a two-term incumbent known for her relentless work ethic, organizational talent, and fundraising chops: In campaign season she attends five or six events daily. The Georgetown-educated lawyer started in Washington as a Wolf staffer, became a feared GOP opposition researcher in the Clinton years, and was a rising star in the Virginia state Legislature. Vice President Mike Pence, the NRA, and the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List all endorse her. She has never lost an election. She supported the federal tax cuts.

But Hill, an ex-fighter pilot, financial planner, and foster dad who ran on a pro-family, pro-Trump “America First” agenda that included a crackdown on illegal immigration, ran a tough race. Comstock endorsed a website, “ShadyShak.com,” that mocked Hill as “creepy” and made unsavory allegations. Comstock won the June primary, but Hill’s outraged supporters made up 38 percent of the vote, raising questions about how many will turn out for Comstock in the midterm.

Some of those pro-Trump, pro-Hillary folks have wondered for years whether Comstock is really that conservative. She has voted with Trump over 90 percent of the time, but critics point to a couple of key votes this term: one against repealing Obamacare and another against a ban on the military funding transgender surgery and hormone therapy. She declined WORLD’s repeated interview requests.

Comstock has also pointedly distanced herself from Trump, in 2016 calling his statements on the Access Hollywood tapes “disgusting, vile, and disqualifying.” Twice this year she pushed back publicly against Trump’s threat of a government shutdown over budget negotiations. The issues page on her website discusses national security, tax relief, sex trafficking, transportation (traffic in the D.C. area is horrible), and her pro-business efforts, but doesn’t mention abortion or religious liberty.

Comstock seems more at home with GOP moderates, said Loudoun resident and conservative activist Patricia Phillips. “I hope she wins,” Phillips said, “but I hear from a lot of people who are very frustrated and disappointed.” Some think that the only way to get a truly conservative representative is to let a Democrat win now and then start fresh in the next cycle, she said, but many “will probably come around” by Election Day.

The “Trump effect” on a given race is hard to pin down. Trump’s unpopularity is a drag on conservative turnout and energizes Democrats, according to conventional wisdom, but Democrats face the mirror image of that problem in the “resistance” movement. Since 2016 the party has debated whether to follow Bernie Sanders and progressives toward single-payer healthcare and a radical social agenda or focus on economic issues to appeal to independents and Trump-voting Democrats.

Although a few Democratic primary winners have gained national attention for their far-left positions—see democratic socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York—many more are like Comstock’s opponent, Jennifer Wexton. The Leesburg lawyer and sitting state senator supports LGBTQ priorities and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, but she stops short of calling for a socialized medical system. She easily defeated a crowded field of resistance candidates, and in October a New York Times/Siena College poll put her about 7 points ahead of Comstock.
Election energy

ELECTION DAY TURNOUT ISN’T THE ONLY WAY VOTER ENTHUSIASM WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS YEAR by Henry Olsen

Many political pundits claim that Democratic enthusiasm will be the key to this year’s midterm elections. They are mostly thinking of turnout: Democratic voters hate President Donald Trump so much that they will vote in much higher than usual numbers. But the real effect of that enthusiasm might be found elsewhere.

Candidate recruitment is the first place where high enthusiasm normally shows up. Most people aren’t interested in spending two grueling years of their lives running from speech to speech and dialing for dollars in order to win elected office. But they may do so when they are especially angry at something and think they have a good chance of winning. That worked to Republicans’ benefit in the 2010 election, as conservative fury at President Barack Obama and the rise of the tea party convinced many people to take the plunge. The same thing happened last year, as a record number of Democratic candidates—especially Democratic women—rose to the challenge.

Getting a vibrant candidate is only the first step, though. Congressional districts contain, on average, over 700,000 people. Even the most energetic of candidates can personally meet only a tiny fraction of voters. Reaching them takes money, lots of it.

Incumbents typically hold the advantage in money, but Democratic enthusiasm has evened the score. As of June 30, 61 Democrats running for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives this fall had raised over $1 million each. In many cases the challenger had raised more than the incumbent. These totals are set to rise even more as the third-quarter financial reports come due. Already 23 Democratic challengers have raised over $1 million between July 1 and Sept. 30 alone. Andrew Janz, who is running against House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes, R-Calif., raised $4.3 million during that period, more than enough to saturate the airwaves in the inexpensive Fresno, Calif., media market.

Such funding gives Democratic candidates the ability to spread their message to independent voters, who in turn decide key races. Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report cites a recent poll showing that Democrats have double-digit leads in the congressional generic ballot among independents, and much larger leads among independent women. Many of these voters do not like Donald Trump and plan to vote Democratic if there is a viable candidate in the race. Thanks to Democratic enthusiasm, they are likely to find such a person rather easily.

Any surge in turnout on top of these trends is like icing on the cake. We know that self-reported enthusiasm among Republicans has increased in the wake of the contentious confirmation hearing for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. While Democratic enthusiasm is also at record highs, we just don’t know how self-reported likelihood to vote actually translates into voting. Pew Research found in June 2012 that Republicans were more enthusiastic about the upcoming election than were Democrats. By October, the respected Gallup organization estimated that black voters would turn out at slightly lower rates than they did in 2008—leading it to estimate that Mitt Romney held a 3-point edge over Obama in the presidential race. Despite these findings, Romney lost by 4 points as black turnout surged to record highs.

Democrats and suburban, educated women might swamp polling places on Nov. 6. But even if they don’t, their vitriolic anger against Trump has already put control of the House within Democrats’ reach. ⬜️
Indoor urban farming is, you could say, a growing trend. Indoor farm startups want to provide pesticide-free, locally grown vegetables directly to urban stores and restaurants that otherwise would buy produce that may have been shipped thousands of miles. And one California startup is taking indoor farming a step further: The company is offering a completely autonomous farm with no human workers.

In October, Iron Ox opened its first operational indoor robotic farm in an 8,000-square-foot hydroponic facility in San Carlos, Calif. The company hopes to grow about 26,000 heads of leafy greens each year without soil, a production rate typical of an outdoor farm five times bigger, according to MIT Technology Review.

“We designed the entire process, from the beginning, around robotics,” Iron Ox co-founder and CEO Brandon Alexander told Fast Company. “It required us pretty much going back to the drawing board to see what we could do if robots were in the loop.”

At the farm, robotic arms plant the crops, add nutrients, transplant the plants to larger containers as they grow—maximizing health and yield—and according to Alexander will eventually harvest and package the greens for the market. Another mobile robot autonomously navigates the room carrying the 800-pound trays containing the crops. An artificial intelligence system nicknamed “The Brain” controls the entire operation, which currently includes some minimal human involvement still necessary until the farm is fully automated.

Alexander plans to sell initially to restaurants. “The next step,” he told Fast Company, “is to be working with chefs and say, ‘Hey, we’re your neighborhood robotic farm,’ and we want to supply probably the freshest produce they’ll ever have access to.”

Iron Ox hopes soon to begin working with grocery stores as well as restaurants, and next year plans to expand to other locations throughout the country.

One agricultural analyst suggested to Technology Review that, while the large investment needed for robotic farming might leave smaller family-owned farms behind, automation is needed across the industry to solve long-standing labor shortages.

Virtual reality (VR) may be emerging as a viable alternative to traditional pain therapies. VRHealth, an Israeli company based in Boston, and VR headset manufacturer Oculus announced a partnership in September to provide a range of pain management applications, according to MobiHealthNews. The two companies plan to offer therapies designed for mothers undergoing labor pain during childbirth, cancer patients experiencing pain associated with chemotherapy, as well as general anxiety management both before and after surgeries. Using virtual reality headsets, patients might experience environments such as a Hawaiian beach or a cool, icy video game called SnowWorld.

Clinical researchers experimenting with the technology are learning that VR not only distracts patients from their acute pain, it may be able to block the brain’s pain receptors like a prescription opioid, but without the addiction dangers.

“If you were to do a functional MRI of individuals who have pain, their brain will light up like a Christmas tree,” said Dr. David Rhew, the general manager of enterprise healthcare at Samsung Electronics America, at a recent virtual medicine symposium. “But when you have virtual reality in these treatments, and even after you’ve taken the headset off—which is the remarkable part, it’s not just being distracted in the moment, but it’s this persistence of the pain relief—we can still see a quieting down, and that’s seen visually on the functional MRIs.”

Therapeutic researchers hope to integrate VR along with other tools into broader programs of holistic treatment. —M.C.
Suppressed and silenced
A DRAFT LAW THREATENS THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN WEBSITES IN CHINA by June Cheng

WORLD has reported in the past about the plethora of Chinese Christian media online, providing Christians with video sermons, written testimonies, movie reviews, and in-depth theological articles. As long as these media outlets stay away from politics and breaking news, they’re allowed to publish content that enriches and informs their readers. Most post content on the ubiquitous Chinese social media app WeChat.

While working on a 2016 story (“Peering into a fiery furnace,” Feb. 20, 2016), I subscribed to several of the most well-known Christian WeChat channels, including Overseas Campus, 7g.tv (a video site), Church China, and Territory. Every day, my WeChat subscription feed filled with new stories with headlines like “Is assurance of salvation essential to our faith?,” “Here are some problems with the theory of evolution,” and “God is starting a completely new season, repentance is key.”

The writers of these stories don’t have the same freedom Christians in the West have, yet they’ve been able to address otherwise taboo topics like porn addiction and depression, unpack complicated Scripture passages, counsel Christians dealing with difficult marriages and unmanageable children, and inspire readers with testimonies of how God rescues sinners.

Yet upcoming regulations could mean the end of Christian media online: Last month, China’s State Administration for Religious Affairs released a draft law that would restrict the types of religious information that can be posted online. It would ban videos of prayer, baptism, burning incense, or other religious activities, as well as online evangelism.

Religious media would need to register with the government, which requires applicants to be an organization “lawfully established” in China. This would exclude house churches and foreigners (including ministries based in Taiwan or Hong Kong) who run WeChat channels, according to a crowdsourced translation of the draft law’s text on China Law Translate.

Provincial-level religious affairs departments would decide whether to approve or reject the applicants, and each license would be valid for three years.

Reasons the government could take away that license include using religion to “incite subversion of state sovereignty, to oppose the leadership of the Communist Party,... [and] to undermine national unity.” The draft law also would ban “undermining the peaceful relations between different religions,” which could mean that a Christian publication would not be allowed to point out the exclusivity of Christianity. The sites would not be allowed to attract minors to a particular religion or recruit followers.

Only registered groups would be able to post sermons online. Sermons must be conducive to “social harmony, the progress of the times, and healthy civilization, leading religious citizens in proper thought and action.”

Same with teaching: Only registered schools would be allowed to carry out religious education online, and all of their website participants must use their real names.

If the draft becomes law and authorities strictly enforce it, it would be a blow to vital resources for Christians. ☩
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“We’re making our own choices with our health care and Samaritan participates in that.”

— Patrick and Melody
Dear Anonymous Dad
[Sept. 29, p. 30] Since 1973 society has been playing God by determining who will be born and who will be killed before birth. That wasn't bad enough, so in the 1980s we embraced new ways to conceive children. When will we learn to trust God to determine who will become parents and how many children He will provide?
—BARBARA KUHLS / Fond du Lac, Wis.

I don’t understand. Where is the hurt in being the child of a sperm donor? Is their complaint that they have life, whereas otherwise they would not? No human being ever had anything to say about who his parents were or the situation into which he was born.
—LENORE HUTCHENREUTHER / Southfield, Mich.

What does it matter who the sperm donor was? As an adoptive father and father figure to others, I can tell you being “Dad” is something you earn, and I grieve that so many have not stepped up to be worthy dads.
—PETE JOHNSON on wng.org

Echo churches
[Sept. 29, p. 59] The author mentions a “darker trend” toward politicization in churches, but should a pastor enjoy a surge of godly pride upon realizing that half his members are pro-choice and LGBT activists? Is that church a depoliticized success? Perhaps churches that refuse to budge on orthodox issues are trending toward faithfulness, not politicization.
—JEREMY LARSON / Virginia Beach, Va.

Evangelical political views should come from a Biblical worldview, but we should welcome those without one in the hope that attending church with us will help them develop one.
—RICK BYE on wng.org

While a church should be open to discussion on any matter, it is no surprise that those with strong moral foundations would feel more comfortable together and those without would feel more comfortable elsewhere.
—CHRIS CHAMBERS on wng.org

Forty years ago Republicans and Democrats didn’t seem so diametrically opposed, but now it is tough to find common ground. I want to find connection points, as I believe God directs us, but the chasm is wide.
—REVOE ROE on wng.org

Are evangelicals to seek out churches that espouse progressive views such as same-sex marriage? Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost, but when it comes to worship—not evangelism—how is it a “darker trend” and a “contradiction” if believers share a Biblically inspired faith?
—JOHN MAYS / Burke, Va.

‘Gay, but celibate’
[Sept. 29, p. 3] To say that people who struggle with same-sex attraction and remain celibate out of obedience to Christ are ineligible for positions of leadership in the church shows that you are very close-minded and ill-informed.
—ROBB MOSS / Lynn Haven, Fla.

It is not wise to celebrate or hide same-sex attraction, even if there is a promise of celibacy. Those who struggle with heterosexual and homosexual sin are the same. The world tells us homosexuals can’t help it, but the Bible says differently.
—BOB KADLECIK on wng.org

As long as people buy in to the lie that our identity is in our lusts and that to fulfill them is to fulfill our personhood, they will eventually act on those lusts. I’ve got to hand it to the devil—this lie has been spectacularly effective.
—JENNYBETH GARDNER on wng.org

Saying goodbye to Nike
[Sept. 29, p. 59] It was so refreshing to read of College of the Ozarks President Jerry Davis’ courageous banning of Nike athletic gear.
—MARTHA MARTINSON / Pine City, Minn.

I understand discomfort with not standing for the national anthem, but our military (including my husband) took an oath to defend the Constitution—not a flag or anthem—and it protects our right to protest. Kaepernick is trying to bring racism to light; in our great country we still fall short on treating each other equally.
—DIANNE DANIELSON / Gulf Breeze, Fla.

Beer bashing
[Sept. 29, p. 64] Prohibition is an example of the tendency to seek the eradication of one vice, thinking it will cure all societal ills. Let us remember that true salvation is found in Christ, who heals all brokenness.
—PAULINE MARIE FERRILL on Facebook

We were dismayed at this column’s tone toward Prohibition. As chaplains at a large county jail, we have seen
hundreds struggling to escape the chains of alcoholism after starting as social drinkers. Inmates are incredulous hearing that some Christians drink.

—LINDA & RON JINKENS / Arlington, Wash.

Puppets go ‘blue’
[ Sept. 29, p. 63 ] Andrée Seu Peterson’s exposition of how we’re all about the children in this country, “except when we’re not,” is brilliant and heartwrenching. We as parents need to be far more mindful of the fact that children can never unsee things.

—URSULA MAC DOUGALL / Modesto, Calif.

Beyond sanctions
[ Sept. 29, p. 28 ] Thank you for this wise article. I pray that Iran can be liberated by its people and a relationship with our country be regained.

—BRANDON WINDHAM / McDonald, Tenn.

A seat at the circus
[ Sept. 29, p. 6 ] Thank you for a wonderful article calling the Kavanaugh hearing exactly what it was: a circus.

—THOMAS LEEP on wng.org

A new and different Jack
[ Sept. 29, p. 19 ] That spinning sound is Tom Clancy turning over in his grave. Admiral Greer a converted Muslim and cynic? Evil Americans and Israelis were responsible for turning simple, peace-loving Muslims into terrorists because they “targeted” innocent civilians in the Bekaa Valley in the ’80s? What drivel. The “real” Jack Ryan was portrayed best by Harrison Ford.

—RUSS HEPLER on Facebook

God Bless the Broken Road
[ Sept. 29, p. 18 ] Your reviewer didn’t like this movie, but I am thankful for its message: God saves us in so many ways when we are totally broken and have nowhere to go except back to Him.

—GAIL GRAESER, Fremont, Mich.

Not Louie’s story
[ Sept. 29, p. 17 ] Unbroken is a real page-turner. It’s a shame that Unbroken: Path to Redemption distorted the real story.

—RITVA MENBERE on Facebook

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Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.
There is in poetry a thing called “the turn.” It is that place in the poem where something happens and the verses, be it gently or wrenchingly, are torqued in a new direction. All that was concealed or latent becomes clear at last.

I believe this is deeper than poetry. I believe in fact that literary art, from Hamlet to Wordsworth’s “Old Man Traveling,” cannot but incarnate the rhythm God embedded in the universe itself. What goes up must come down. What cannot be sustained will, in a chain of acts reversing it, be finally unraveled and undone.

The very nervous system of the reader, unawares, finds its release from tension in this blessed fulcrum where all starts turning to rights.

It is amazing to me that everyone at once, the wise and dull alike, beheld that precise turning point in Esther. Here a plot to wipe out Israel from the map is foiled. The movement up until “the turn” was all in the direction of success for wicked Haman—then something, some empirical event that was discerned like tea leaves by its viewers, tipped the scale, and simultaneously they knew the jig was up.

Haman’s own family seems to recoil from him at this instant, acknowledging at arm’s length his inevitable fall: “And Haman told his wife Zeresh and his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him” (Esther 6:13).

Hamartia, in Greek tragedy, is the fatal flaw in the protagonist that brings about “the turn” and his demise, that starts unraveling “the best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men” (Robert Burns). It also is the Greek New Testament word for “sin.” Hamartia means “to miss the mark,” “to err.” That is, it is man’s own diabolical devices, not some extraneous punishment deus ex machina, that turns on him.

The yearning for justice is as engrained as yearning for the last note on a scale to be played, and godly souls feel ill at ease till it’s complete.
in the 1990s, cities across America replaced Great Stadiums with postmodern ballparks: First came Camden Yards in Baltimore, and then beauties like PNC Park in Pittsburgh, AT&T Park in San Francisco, and Safeco Field in Seattle. Postmodern ballparks are asymmetrical like the classical parks, with walls of different heights and foul lines of different lengths. They hug the old but enjoy the new, with wider seats and concourses.

Republican speechifiers orating about the welfare reform bill that became law in 1996 said they had torn down the all-purpose welfare stadium. Not so: We have about 80 different federal welfare programs, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (now called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) was only one of them: Essentially, we merely removed the stands behind the foul pole in left field.

So here’s the problem: Where are the PNC Parks and Safeco Fields of the welfare system? They don’t exist. We know every person has a unique set of circumstances, needs, and values. We also know cities differ, but we prefer uniformity (equated with fairness). For decades experts and would-be experts have proposed changes, but politicians and pundits typically strangle proposals at birth, saying they won’t work because our society has hugely changed over the past century.

Some say we can’t learn from the old ballparks or the old charity systems—but it’s still 90 feet to first base. Probably about the same percentage of Americans become addicted to alcohol and drugs as in 1912. Many who are affluent have to travel farther to help those in the poorer part of town, but it doesn’t take more time to get there. Manufacturing jobs have given way to service ones, but in most parts of the country jobs are still available for anyone who wants to work—and working conditions are better. Racism was a problem then and remains a problem now.

The biggest changes in the past century involve beliefs, values, family formation or nonformation, and education. Marriage rates are down. More kids grow up without the sense of right and wrong once gained from either earthly fathers or our Father in heaven. Schools pretend that almost everyone should go to college, so millions graduate or drop out without work skills.

Let’s find a way to unite old virtues with new opportunities. Otherwise, we’re stuck with the Oakland Coliseum, which now has two enormous scoreboards so fans who get bored between innings can watch dot races. Bread and circuses, as in Rome’s Coliseum.
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-Francis A. Schaeffer

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