TROUBLED MINISTRIES
How does the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability hold them accountable?

U.S.-Mexico border frustration
Young black conservatives
Checking Facebook’s fact-checkers
In ministry and in life, the ability to have hope in brokenness only comes from confidence in God’s truth.

Derek Simpson ('13)
Campus Pastor, Family Church Downtown, West Palm Beach, Florida

Watch stories of God’s truth at work at sbts.edu/TrustedforTruth
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Notes from the CEO

It’s September, and I have not yet provided an update on WORLD's fiscal year, which ended June 30. In fairness, it takes some time to “close the books” on the old year, so even though we have a general idea of our financial results, we don’t have reliably complete numbers until the accounting department says we do.

This year, our transition to a new business-wide tracking system complicated the accounting wrap-up. But that transition is by itself a key part of this report: successfully launching this new system, for our small IT, accounting, and member-services staffs, required an enormous effort that consumed resources all through the fiscal year. A few of you made contributions to support this vital, behind-the-scenes project. That major project is complete.

Which I consider almost miraculous.

I can’t even figure out how our people manage their “normal” workload. Keeping up with a 24/7 news cycle (we strive to maintain a 24/6 schedule, unless important news happens on a Sunday), delivering that news reporting in several formats, and delivering it for both adults and students—frankly, it seems more logical that our small staff wouldn’t keep up than that it would.

Yet, with your help we’ve managed to add more and more.

Here are several examples: the launch of The Olasky Interview podcast; the re-launch of a new season of Listening In; an upgrade of our daily news report “The Sift”; the development of a daily video news program for students we’re calling WORLD Watch; additional World Journalism Institute (WJI) mid-career courses and another WJI China session.

Another near-miracle is that we did all of it with a balanced budget. But that part is more easily explainable, because it’s clearly the result of your support. We couldn’t do any of this—not the “normal” stuff, not the major projects—without you. Thank you for a strong fiscal year.

Kevin Martin
kevin@wng.org

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For the last twenty-five years, Samaritan Ministries members have been sharing medical costs while praying for and encouraging one another—all without health insurance. Faithful. Affordable. Biblical.

**Monthly costs**
Ranges based on age, household size, and membership level

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<td>Individuals</td>
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This is a ministry that is trying to actually do some good out there for the Lord when it comes to health care.

— Cameron & Roanna, members since 2017
Charity choices
A BASIC QUESTION TO GUIDE YOUR GIVING

Nobody’s ever confused me with “Dear Abby.” In the 33 years I’ve edited this column, nobody’s ever written me asking for advice about courtship, marriage issues, or an intrusive mother-in-law.

But it’s a rare week’s mail that doesn’t bring several appeals for advice of a different kind. What do I think about ABC College? Would I recommend DEF University? What about GHI Seminary? Is the JKL Relief Agency careful in its use of funds? Is the MNO Home for Children a reliable orphanage?

What’s behind all these queries, of course, is the hurricane of mail—both traditional and digital—seeking our financial support for hundreds and even thousands of nonprofit entities engaged in a wide array of supposedly faithful Christian ministry. But before writing out a check, we want to know: Is that organization dependable? Has it stuck with its historic mission statement? Or is it on the same slippery slope that has led to the demise of so many once-faithful ministries?

It’s a fair series of questions—even an essential attitude for any conscientious donor. And we don’t ask that only about others. What guarantees can we offer that WORLD—in both its print version and its digital expressions—won’t be peddling a package of skepticism and unbelief a generation or two from now? We would hardly be the first journal that started with a mission statement? Or is it on the same slippery slope that has led to the demise of so many once-faithful ministries?

The historical record is all too clear. The tendency seems overwhelmingly tilted from right to left, from faithful to unfaithful, from confidence to skepticism. On every side are organizations that have left their first love and chased after other gods.

But having said all that, it’s also important to stress that WORLD has never seen its role to be a rating agency of Christian organizations. Yes, we will report on specific developments in a variety of settings that either build up or diminish the reputations of various agencies. These reports may touch on financial issues, theological faithfulness, cultural matters, or personnel relationships. But each report we bring you is intended not so much to prove some final profile of that institution or organization. Our goal instead is to give you a trustworthy tool for building your own such profile. That’s your task—not ours!

But as you do that, let me suggest a pretty basic question that should be settled before you write out your first check. I asked this in this column just over 25 years ago—but the test is even more valid today. Is the ultimate decision-making process at the institution or organization regularly and self-consciously rooted in the Bible as God’s only infallible rule for our faith and practice?

Three phrases in that question deserve amplification:

Ultimate decision-making process. Don’t fall into the trap of equating the organization itself with some bit player whose aberrational behavior may distract you from the organization’s main direction. Focus instead on the chief players, the official mouthpieces, the administrative anchors, and the boards of directors. Yes, they bear responsibility for everything else as well. But ask yourself what the final decision-makers do when crunchtime comes.

Regularly and self-consciously. Another trap is to focus on the unusual or exceptional occurrence rather than the typical pattern. What is the regular practice? Is that practice followed with self-imposed discipline? Are the decision-makers known as mere pragmatists? Will they do anything for a dollar? Or can you call those decision-makers back to the principles of the Bible and find them dealing with familiar territory?

Only infallible rule of faith and practice. You want to support and be involved in organizations where the Bible determines both what people believe and how they behave.
Radius exists to train missionaries to fulfill the Great Commission by aiding the local church in pre-field training. The Radius Missiology Conference is uniquely suited for potential missionaries and church leaders who want to better understand current issues in missions and their part in fulfilling the Great Commission.
After hearing and reading excerpts for years, it’s exciting to get the full interviews. Marvin Olasky is an experienced journalist and an expert interviewer who asks good questions and lets the other person speak.—iTunes reviewer

Hear the depth and substance you’ve always wanted from interviews with prominent authors, politicians, thought leaders, and the kind of intellectuals that make you feel smarter just by hearing their voices. You know the type. Marvin Olasky does too, mostly because he’s interviewed them for decades and knows exactly what questions to ask.

Get the full story with The Olasky Interview. Available everywhere you listen to podcasts.
Rough weather

TWO WEEKS OF METEOROLOGICAL AND POLITICAL STORMS, WITH MORE BREWING

by Michael Reneau

A man walks over what remains of homes in the area called “the Mudd” after it was destroyed by Hurricane Dorian on Abaco Island, Bahamas.

FERNANDO LLANO/AP
It could have been much worse in the United States. On Sunday, Sept. 8, many church prayers included thanksgiving for deliverance from Hurricane Dorian, which could have been another Katrina or Maria. Dorian did spin into the Carolinas, flooding towns and shooting off tornadoes, and at least four people died while preparing for the hurricane.

It could not have been much worse in the Bahamas. Dorian hit those islands on Labor Day weekend as a Category 5 storm and stalled there for more than a day, lashing everything in its path. “We are in the midst of a historic tragedy,” Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said. A week after the storm, reporters said bodies of residents still lay decomposing and uncollected (and presumably uncounted) in some neighborhoods. By Sept. 10 the official Bahamas death toll had reached 50, but the figure was sure to keep rising. Christian relief agencies were among the first to mobilize.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, a different kind of storm clustered: political hurricane Brexit. Though British voters in 2016 chose to leave the European Union, politicians continued fighting about evacuation routes. Conservative British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he wants to leave with or without a deal with the EU by Oct. 31 unless the government strikes a deal to leave. Johnson remained stalwart. Both sides were hunkered down with no sign of a break in the weather.

The skies turned dark in West Texas on Aug. 31 as a gunman killed seven people and wounded 25 others in Odessa and Midland. Seth Ator had lost his job as a truck driver earlier that day. He called 911 and ranted on an FBI hotline. When police tried to pull his vehicle over for a traffic stop, he fled. Along the way he opened fire, stole a U.S. Postal Service truck after killing its driver, then shot more people before crashing. Police eventually killed him. The attacker had previously failed a background check while trying to buy a weapon. He bought the AR-15-style gun he used in the shooting from a private seller.

The shooting caused some political rumbling (but no lightning yet) after Democratic presidential candidate Beto O’Rourke released a profane T-shirt and campaign video decrying gun violence. He also declared that if he’s elected president, owners of AR-15s and AK-47s would have to sell them to the federal government. O’Rourke was one of 10 candidates who qualified for a Sept. 12 debate. Candidates who won’t move on include hyper-feminist New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, relatively

And the winner is …

Effective compassion always requires hard work. Helping those who have spiraled into drugs, homelessness, and despair is the hardest of the hard. That’s one reason why the votes of WORLD readers from late July through Sept. 6 made Watered Gardens of Joplin, Mo., the 2019 grand prize winner of the Hope Awards for Effective Compassion.

The name “Watered Gardens” comes from Isaiah 58:10-11: “If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted…you shall be like a watered garden.” Watered Gardens emphasizes work by having a “Worth Shop” that teaches residents to work for their room and board. An hour of work earns groceries for a week, and 12 hours a week earns a bed. Those who have worked there for three months can move on to the Forge Center for Virtue and Work, which by teaching Biblical truths and work readiness helps residents to transition to financial independence combined with dependence on God.

WORLD is giving $10,000 to Watered Gardens and $2,000 each to four regional winners, but the biggest prize is publicity and increased credibility. To read WORLD’s story about the big winner, go to wng.org/2019winner. To nominate a local Christian charity for next year’s contest, please send Charissa Koh—ckoh@wng.org—an email with its name and your reasons for recommending it.

The political storm surge is sure to wash more candidates away in the next few weeks, and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders may be one. He faced backlash after saying in a CNN town hall on Sept. 4 that more women in the developing world need access to abortion to curb overpopulation—a myth busted long ago. That same day, Planned Parenthood said it wants to make its mobile app, Planned Parenthood Direct, available in all 50 states. It’s currently available in 27, offering users birth control pills shipped to their front door. Planned Parenthood says it does not “yet” offer so-called emergency contraceptives via the app, but given the organization’s promotion of “tele-medicine” abortions in 14 states, could abortifacient-by-app be far behind?

Pete Buttigieg blew hot air on Sept. 6 when he defended abortion all the way up to a baby’s first breath. The Democratic presidential candidate told The Breakfast Club radio show the Bible says life begins at first breath. Democrats defending abortion—even to the point of birth—isn’t breaking news, but Buttigieg’s Scripture-twisting is Category 5. New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees found himself in a tropical storm of media criticism after he recorded a video for Oct. 3’s Bring Your Bible to School Day, sponsored by Focus on the Family, which—gasp!—supports Biblical marriage.

Dark clouds may be lifting for pop music phenom Justin Bieber, 25. He posted a long statement on Instagram acknowledging that his adolescence and early adulthood storms included drug use, broken relationships, and depression—but he’s “navigating the best season my life” after getting married last year. The attention stardom heaped on him at an early age was too much, Bieber said. He encouraged his fans: “Be bold today and love people today not by your own standards but by God’s perfect unfailing love.”

### BY THE NUMBERS

- **77**
  - The age of Jeanne Socrates, who on Sept. 7 became the oldest person to sail around the world alone, nonstop, and unassisted.

- **$4 billion**
  - The price for which Exxon Mobil Corp. will sell its oil and gas assets in Norway, according to the Reuters news service, closing out the American company’s operations there after more than 100 years.

- **1.3 mph**
  - The average speed of Hurricane Dorian over one 24-hour period, making it the slowest major Atlantic hurricane ever measured, according to climate researcher Robert Rohde.

- **419 million**
  - The number of exposed names and telephone numbers (including many apparent duplicates) in a newly revealed Facebook privacy lapse that likely occurred in 2018.

- **22%**
  - The proportion of U.S. Navy personnel who qualify as obese, according to a new Defense Department study.
Announced
Nearly every state and two U.S. territories announced plans to investigate whether Google’s power in the online advertising market unfairly stifles competition. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, said the tech behemoth “dominates all aspects” of the internet advertising and search business in what could be a violation of antitrust laws. The federal government, the states, and Congress all have Google under investigation now. The latest effort includes the attorney generals of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia plus every state except Alabama and California.

Died
Robert Mugabe, who led Zimbabwe’s independence fight and was forced out of office after three decades as president, died at age 95 on Sept. 6. He had been receiving medical care in Singapore. A former teacher, Mugabe led one of two guerrilla armies that fought the white colonial regime controlling what was then called Southern Rhodesia. But after winning that fight and gaining office, he began a tribal war that destroyed his rivals, a tribal minority, the Ndebele. He jailed political opponents, bullied the media, and led his country into devastating hyperinflation. A coup removed him from power in 2017.

Ended
In the wake of a measles outbreak, New York state passed a law that ends all religious exemptions for vaccinations that involve children in schools or child care centers. The law states that these children must begin getting their vaccines in the first two weeks of the school year and complete them before summer. Parents who do not comply may homeschool or leave the state. The state has suffered from over a thousand measles cases since an outbreak began in October 2018, most in Hasidic Jewish communities where many children are not vaccinated because of religious considerations.

Fired
In a Sept. 10 tweet, President Donald Trump wrote that he had told national security adviser John Bolton “that his services are no longer needed at the White House.” Trump tweeted that he “disagreed strongly” with many of Bolton’s suggestions, “as did others in the Administration.” Bolton, who held the position since April 2018, tweeted that he offered to resign on Sept. 9, but Trump told him they would “talk about it tomorrow.” While the president did not give specifics, the two have reportedly butted heads when Bolton’s hawkish tendencies clashed with Trump’s more isolationist policies.

Sued
Fourteen women are suing the ride-sharing app Lyft for allegedly mismanaging their reports of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. The women, listed anonymously in the lawsuit, claim that Lyft did not cooperate with law enforcement in investigations, is careless in background checks, and does not tell riders about accused drivers. In at least one case given, police informed the woman involved that the driver was still working with Lyft two weeks after she filed a sexual assault claim against him. The suit also claims that Lyft is hiding the number of sexual assault accusations involving its platform. Lyft has promised to dedicate resources to safety upgrades.
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‘They want to preserve India for Hindus. They want India to be a Hindu nation.’

JONATHAN ABBAMONTE, a research analyst with the Population Research Institute, on India’s Hindu nationalists’ embracing of a two-child policy for families. The policy, which is gaining momentum in India, would reduce the country’s birthrate among religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians.

‘I think the Holy Ghost is just fed up with it.’

Televangelist BENNY HINN on the brand of prosperity gospel he once preached. “I think it’s an offense to the Holy Spirit to place a price on the gospel. I’m done with it. I will never again ask you to give $1,000 or whatever amount.”

‘I saved my life.’

LACHELLE HUDGINS of Houston, Texas, on firing a gun at men who tried to steal her purse through a window while she was in her parked car, wounding one of the suspects and causing the others to flee.

‘It’s total devastation. ... It’s not rebuilding something that was there; we have to start again.’

LIA HEAD-RIGBY, who helps run a hurricane relief group, on the damage in the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian hit the islands.

‘Momma, I promise you, your baby boy, he’s going to serve the Lord forever.’

DANNY HOLMES in a courtroom confession to robbery, kidnapping, murder, and other charges. Holmes, who committed the crimes in 2016, said he felt convicted to confess after looking down at a notebook on which he’d written the lyrics to the song “Redeemed” by Big Daddy Weave: “Then You look at this prisoner and say to me, ‘Son, stop fighting a fight that’s already been won.’” Holmes said he deserved his life sentence and was prepared to spread the gospel in prison.

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Oil for ships
Short on cash, Malaysian officials would like to know if international arms dealers would accept palm oil for payment. Seeking to update its navy, the Malaysian government reached out to China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran to see if those nations would barter ships for palm oil. Malaysia and Indonesia control roughly 85 percent of the world palm oil trade. “If they are prepared to accept a palm barter trade, we are very willing to go in that direction,” Defense Minister Mohamad Sabu told Reuters. “We have a lot of palm oil.”

Stolen and taken
A quick getaway was foiled when a burglar discovered his car had been stolen during his robbery. Kennewick, Wash., police say William Kelley called police on Aug. 25 to report that his 1992 Chevy pickup truck had been stolen. Police reviewed security footage from nearby and discovered an unidentified man had found Kelley’s keys in the truck’s cabin and had driven off with the truck. Further review of the tape led police to discover that Kelley had left his car allegedly to break into a nearby business. Authorities arrested Kelley and charged him with burglary.

Hide the keys
A German boy’s need for speed has landed him in mandatory counseling. Twice in one week, German police caught an 8-year-old boy speeding down the Autobahn after stealing his mother’s Volkswagen Golf. After exceeding 85 mph during his Aug. 21 joyride, the boy pulled to the side of the road when he felt unsafe. During a reprise performance on Aug. 23, the boy reached 110 mph and later crashed the sedan into a parked trailer. There were no injuries in the accident, but the car was badly damaged. Police have ordered the child into counseling sessions.

Down the drain
Organizers of a festival in England are urging those at the festival not to clog campsite toilets with tents and sleeping bags. The notice went out to patrons of the Reading Festival outside London, which began on Aug. 28. Engineers responsible for maintaining the festival’s toilets said that in past years patrons have put all sorts of items into the latrines. “We’ve previously had to drag out tents, sleeping bags and foil blankets, along with smaller items like mobile phones, beer cans and clothes so they don’t clog up our machines,” an official with Thames Water told Berkshire Live.
Ear full of trouble
What Susie Torres thought was water in her ear turned out to be far more dangerous. Torres said she began feeling an odd sensation in her ear on Aug. 20. Later, a doctor examining the Kansas City, Mo., resident discovered a highly venomous brown recluse spider in Torres’ ear. Doctors say Torres remained calm when four medical professionals gathered to give her the bad news. Failing to flush the spider with water, a doctor managed to pull the arachnid from her ear in one piece. “The nurses said it was dead, but they might’ve just said that so I wouldn’t freak out,” Torres said. Torres has vowed to henceforth sleep with earplugs.

Back in the pen
Farmers in Vermont narrowly escaped a disaster when they were able to coax nearly 250 pigs back into their enclosure on Aug. 29. The pigs, which escaped from a farm in Orange, Vt., in July, had been causing damage to Orange and the property of nearby landowners. After weeks of futile attempts to round up the animals, farmer Walter Jeffries finally devised a plan to coach the 50 adults and 200 piglets back onto his property by laying out a trail of hot dog buns. Although the plan worked, Jeffries still owes the town more than $81,000 in fines from Orange for not properly controlling his animals.

That settles it
Energy drink maker Red Bull has agreed to settle out of court with a pair of customers who claimed they were fooled by misleading Red Bull marketing. According to a February lawsuit filed in Canada, Michael Attar and other customers say they felt misled by Red Bull’s claim to “give you wings.” Plaintiffs in the lawsuit allege they could neither fly nor felt the benefits of any improved performance after drinking Red Bull. To settle the case in August, the drink maker agreed to pay $850,000 to the class action plaintiffs.

Silent message
Librarians in Derry, N.H., suffered a setback when the opening of a time capsule proved disappointing. According to library director Cara Potter, the 50-year-old time capsule was empty. Potter struggled to explain the empty combination safe, saying it had been on a shelf undisturbed for years. Before that, the time capsule had been kept safe at a city government building. Librarians say they know nothing about the time capsule except that it was created in 1969 to be opened in 2019.

Clothing connection
A new idea to help robbed tourists has been a hit at Barcelona’s beaches. Officials in the Spanish city rolled out a plan in 2016 to provide clothes to beachgoers whose belongings are stolen while they swim in the Mediterranean. As of August, police officers had handed out 174 robbery kits to beachgoers this year. According to police, most of the kits are distributed to denizens of the city’s nudist beaches. The official robbery kit includes a T-shirt with the City Council logo, shorts, flip-flops, and a public transportation ticket.
Policy in its place
HOW TO MOVE FORWARD ISN'T THE ONLY IMPORTANT QUESTION IN POLITICS

The new documentary One Child Nation explores the effects of China’s infamous “one-child policy” from 1980 to 2015. In the film, co-director Nanfu Wang returns to her home village to reflect on growing up while the policy was in place, though ignorant of its implications. Only when she herself became pregnant, as an adult living in the United States, did her thoughts turn to the bitter harvest of the one-child years in her home country. While interviewing an elderly midwife, she asks how many babies the woman delivered. “I really don’t know how many I delivered. What I do know is that I’ve done a total of between 50,000 to 60,000 sterilizations and abortions.”

I haven’t seen One Child Nation, only trailers and clips. The tone of these fragments, and of online reviews and features, is undeniably somber. The story of Wang’s own uncle, who left a second daughter in the market hoping someone would take her, is emblematic: The baby died after two days. Other families sold their “surplus” infants to orphanages that in turn trafficked the babies to the United States (remember all those Chinese adoptions from the ’90s?). “In those days,” the midwife recalls, “women were abducted by government officials, tied up, and dragged to us like pigs.”

Ironically, Nanfu Wang and most reviewers draw the wrong conclusion. After lamenting the death of thousands of babies, mostly girls, they see the same thing happening here in reverse. Says Wang, “I left a country where the government forced women to abort, and I moved to another country where governments restrict abortions.” (Restrictions? In her home state of New Jersey?) According to the accepted view, the central issue is government attitudes toward women, not toward human life itself.

But this is not a column about abortion, or about China. It’s about policy.

In the film, when asked about their regrets, many of the interview subjects respond with a shrug. “Policy is policy,” says an old village official. “What could we do?”

Policy, determined by a handful of top-level party members, ruled that China’s food problems were due to overpopulation. Policy ruled that the solution was coercive population control. Now, faced with severe demographic imbalances, policy is advocating two-child families. In the future, what’s to stop policy from requiring couples to produce two children each, by natural means, purchase, or surrogacy?

During the second round of Democratic presidential debates on July 30, New Age guru Marianne Williamson raised eyebrows with her reference to “dark psychic forces” hovering over the White House. Her brand of spiritual politics may have knocked her out of the running, but the first part of her statement, calling out the “wonkiness” (i.e., policy solutions) of the other candidates, sounds weirdly true. Policy has become the end-all of politics. Bad policy caused the current mess, however we define the messiness; good policy will fix it. That’s why candidates are always talking about “my plan” to reform healthcare, heal the environment, or improve education. Marianne Williamson was wrong to trace the bigger problems to one source only, but right that wonkiness won’t solve them.

Policy matters, of course, but politicians exaggerate its importance. Policy should come at the end of the discussion. It’s how elected representatives (and their unelected staffs and agencies) determine the means of solving a problem. The “how” shouldn’t precede or dictate to the “what” and the “why.” In China, the stated reason for one child was potential starvation, and the stated cause was overpopulation (rather than the predictable failures of a Communist system). The policy sprang from a totalitarian framework, not thoughtful consideration of two doubtful premises.

In the United States, one party or the other will roll out a policy “solution” with great fanfare, but with little discussion of the causes of a problem or even what the real problem is. Policy is touted as savior before we’ve agreed on what needs to be saved: Incomes, or values? Choice, or life? Jobs, or purpose? Policy can’t answer these questions, and by itself won’t solve a single problem. We should keep that in mind in 2020. ©
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These days, streaming services like Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu, as well as premium cable channels like HBO, are dominating watercooler conversations and sweeping up awards shows. The reign of broadcast seems well past—at least when it comes to dramas or documentaries. But sitcoms are one genre the younger outlets haven’t taken over yet. When Americans want to laugh, they still typically turn to one of the Big Four networks. Here’s a rundown of three new offerings from CBS and ABC.

**Carol’s Second Act**
Perhaps no actor or actress on television right now has a stronger track record than Patricia Heaton. After playing Ray Romano’s long-suffering wife in *Everybody Loves Raymond* for nine years and the perpetually frazzled, blue-collar mom Frankie Heck in *The Middle* for another nine, Heaton is always a good bet for ratings. The question is, will audiences give her a second (or really a third) act in a show that doesn’t trade as much on the travails of motherhood? It’s an iffy call. It’s not unusual for sitcoms to require a few episodes to find their feet, and it’s worth recalling that *Seinfeld*’s first outing wasn’t all that funny. The pilot for *Carol’s Second Act* requires too much heavy lifting from Heaton, who plays a retired teacher embarking on a new career as a doctor. The rest of the much-younger cast fails to match her physical comedy and her way with a one-liner. But this could be the fault of directing. Given a few more episodes for the stars to gel, Heaton’s latest venture could come together in the end. (CBS; premieres Sept. 26)

**Sunnyside**
One of the buzziest new sitcoms highlights a popular subject across television this season: the immigrant experience. Unfortunately,
Sunnyside’s preaching is so heavy-handed, it’s unlikely even a left-wing choir will want to tune in to hear the mostly unfunny sermons.

Former Obama administration official Kai Penn stars as an Anthony Weiner–like disgraced city councilman. After one scandal too many leaves him ousted from office, he’s reduced to leeching off his sister. That’s when a group of immigrants hires him to tutor them through their citizenship tests and help them navigate the red tape of U.S. naturalization. One doesn’t expect much political nuance from a sitcom, but with characters whose entire description can be summed up with “Dominican lady who holds down a lot of jobs,” Sunnyside doesn’t even try. (ABC; Sept. 26)

Bob Hearts Abishola

Christian audiences may not have appreciated the lazy sexual puns writer-producer Chuck Lorre—a/k/a “The King of the Sitcom”—traded on in series like Two and a Half Men and The Big Bang Theory. But there’s no denying Lorre’s gift for hooking an audience. His latest show shares Sunnyside’s interest in immigrants, with the difference being that it’s actually funny. In fact, Bob Hearts Abishola may be the funniest (and certainly the sweetest) pilot the man with the golden laugh track has ever produced.

The premise is deceptively simple. Bob (Billy Gardell), who runs a compression sock business, goes to the hospital after a heart attack and develops a crush on his Nigerian nurse, Abishola (Folake Olowofoye). He spends the rest of the episode trying to track her down so he can begin wooing her.

I don’t use an antiquated term like “wooing” carelessly. Perhaps because Olowofoye is herself a Nigerian immigrant and executive producer Gina Yashere is the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, the pilot focuses on the culture clash inherent to their courtship, with almost none of the lame double-entendres that are Lorre’s hallmark. By presenting two well-developed, specific characters, instead of lazy types, it accomplishes what Sunnyside overtly works at. That is, encouraging the viewer to see our daily experiences through the eyes of the newly arrived.

Yashere told CNN she hopes Bob Hearts Abishola will offer common ground for people at all points of the political spectrum to laugh. If it continues as it begins, it seems likely to succeed. (CBS; Sept. 23)

Television

All Rise

It seems there are nearly as many TV shows about lawyers as there are lawyers. Few represent the craft honestly. (I’m talking about the TV shows.) The pilot of the new CBS legal drama All Rise doesn’t make a strong case for watching additional episodes. Romantic entanglements and a kooky trial clutter a promising premise. What All Rise needs is order in the courtroom. Better yet: Law & Order in the courtroom.

Lola Carmichael (Simone Missick) is an African American woman and Los Angeles County’s newest Superior Court judge. From the bench, the former district attorney better sees the disadvantages that minorities experience in the legal system. In a position that women of color rarely hold, Lola faces extra scrutiny herself.

In one of the pilot’s two court cases, Daphne, a Latina five months pregnant, is charged with sleepwalking with a colleague. The public defender gets a restraining order against her ex-husband, but she and the bailiff hit it off. The court reporter has a crush on a DA—who’s dating a model.

A second court case presumably testifies to the show’s lighter side. I found it campy and unrealistic, more akin to Night Court than a Law & Order contender.

The pilot (not yet rated but likely TV-14) ends on a positive note. Daphne has doubts about parenting, but Lola reassures her: “You have…that loving superpower that only moms like you get.”

Lola won that battle, but it’ll take more for All Rise to win the war.

—BY BOB BROWN
American Factory

When General Motors Co. in 2008 shuttered a factory near Dayton, Ohio, thousands of workers lost high-paying union jobs. Eight years later, a Chinese glass manufacturer reopened part of the plant, bringing new employment but a very different work culture. The new Netflix documentary American Factory is a fascinating and evenhanded look at the stark differences between American and Chinese work life.

Cao Dewang, chairman of the Fuyao Group, wants to establish an American presence for his glass company. After investing millions of dollars in the Dayton plant, the chairman expects productivity there to catch up with the company’s factories in China. Former GM workers are excited about their new jobs, but are quick to recall that wages were much higher in the former days. Some employees aren’t enamored of the productivity demands of their Chinese colleagues or of the pressures to take shortcuts that could endanger their health.

Fuyao brings several hundred managers from China to train and work alongside the new employees. The supervisors are largely disappointed in their American workforce. One tells chairman Cao on a plant tour: “They’re pretty slow. They have fat fingers. We keep training them over and over.” Another is surprised that health and safety inspectors consider the extreme heat of the furnace room a hazard.

Soon, some workers band together and try to form a union. Fuyao works aggressively to squelch these attempts: Supervisors threaten terminations and hire an anti-union consulting firm to intimidate workers. After firing the company’s American president and vice president, Cao hires a Chinese-born leader for the Ohio plant, hoping new leadership will reverse the factory’s mounting losses.

American Factory, rated TV-14 for some colorful language, might not be what one would expect from Barack and Michelle Obama’s Higher Ground Productions. But directors Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert masterfully tell this story of two very different work cultures attempting to come together.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL

The Spy Behind Home Plate

The Golden Age of Baseball conjures up black-and-white images of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Another player of the 1920s and 1930s is not most recognizable but is arguably most enigmatic.

Moe Berg played on five major league teams over 15 years, mostly as a catcher. But as the title of a recent documentary, The Spy Behind Home Plate, foretells, Berg wasn’t known only for his rocket arm.

Director Aviva Kempner shows how this son of Jewish Ukrainian immigrants used his athletic cover to spy for the Office of Strategic Services, precursor to the CIA, during and after World War II. Berg was quite a catch for the OSS. He’d graduated magna cum laude from Princeton, eventually spoke 10 languages, and completed Columbia Law School while he played professional ball.

The documentary doesn’t clarify when the government recruited Berg, but in 1934, on a goodwill baseball tour to Japan, Berg surreptitiously photographed Tokyo from its tallest building with a camera he’d hidden under his kimono. The film ended up with the U.S. government.

Among his clandestine exploits, he helped Italian scientist Antonio Ferri escape to the United States in 1944, eliciting President Roosevelt’s comment, “I see that Moe is still catching very well.”

Another time, Berg listened to German physicist Werner Heisenberg’s Zurich lecture, ready to shoot him then swallow a cyanide capsule himself if Heisenberg revealed he was close to creating an atom bomb. Speaking on an unrelated topic, the unsuspecting Heisenberg finished and both walked out alive.

This riveting film’s rapid-fire format of photos, clips, and nonstop narration from family members, ballplayers, and historians personify Berg: He rarely stopped long enough for many to know him well. The personal recollections reveal only part of a complicated and talented but often unhappy man.

Berg never married, and he embraced no religion. His dying words: “How did the Mets do today?” The documentary’s footage and storyline fascinate, but, without meaning to do so, it underscores the emptiness of living without Christ.

—by SHARON DIERBERGER
Myron Magnet’s *Clarence Thomas and the Lost Constitution* (Encounter, 2019) combines a biography of a brave Supreme Court justice with analysis of his most important decisions and dissents. Magnet portrays Thomas as not just a solid justice but a great one, “one of a handful of honest and brave iconoclasts who love liberty, especially the freedom to think for oneself.”

Two passages particularly got to me. Magnet shows how Woodrow Wilson believed a Constitution modeled on a Newtonian understanding of checks and balances had to give way to government operated “under the theory of organic life. It is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton.... No living thing can have its organs offset against each other.... Living political constitutions must be Darwinian,” evolving as political scientists dictate.

That thinking underlay the Supreme Court’s extraordinary *Roe v. Wade* stretch in 1973. Thomas, to his everlasting credit, has fought that for three decades, most notably in his *Stenberg v. Carhart* dissent in 2000. He wrote that the court majority had decided “states cannot constitutionally prohibit a method of abortion that millions find hard to distinguish from infanticide and that the Court hesitates even to describe”—because describing it, in a society even half-civilized, leads to opposing it.

Was “hesitates even to describe” an exaggeration? The following is not for children to read, but you might give nurse Brenda Shafer’s description of an abortionist murdering a 16-week-old unborn baby to an undecided neighbor. (Thomas quoted it in his dissent.)

Here goes: “The baby’s little fingers were clapping and unclapping, and his little feet were kicking. Then the doctor stuck the scissors in the back of his head, and the baby’s arms jerked out, like a startle reaction... like a baby does when he thinks he is going to fall. The doctor opened up the scissors, stuck a high-powered suction tube into the opening, and sucked the baby’s brains out. Now the baby went completely limp.”

Bobby Duffy’s *Why We’re Wrong About Nearly Everything* (Basic, 2019) shows how most Americans greatly underestimate the percentages of those who are overweight or say they are happy. We overestimate the percentage of those who live with their parents, have lots of sex, give birth, are immigrants, are Muslims, are unemployed, have a Facebook account, or have diabetes. We also overestimate the percentage of people living in extreme poverty.


Eric Mason’s *Woke Church* (Moody, 2018) laments church prejudices and tendencies to downplay the Biblical connection between justice and righteousness. He lists initiatives of his Epiphany Fellowship regarding crisis pregnancies, school-to-prison pipelines, and technology training programs. The aspirations are good, and I’m looking forward to seeing how all that works out at street level.

Mason’s book title, though, indicates the problem of trying to get ahead of the curve. Mason says he wants to redeem the word woke. That’s a good thing to do with Biblical words like compassion, but why try to redeem a non-Biblical word that *Saturday Night Live* in 2017 had already mocked? (See its funny “Levi’s Wokes” on YouTube.) When evangelicals look as if our goal is to be cool, we end up looking like Christian bands trying to “sound like” whatever was hot last year.

Adrian Goldsworthy writes in his succinct *Cannae: Hannibal’s Greatest Victory* that Rome’s greatest years came after its army suffered a great defeat in 216 B.C. After that it had centuries of victories, as Goldsworthy shows in another book, *Roman Warfare*. The books, models of readable scholarship originally published in 2000 and 2001, are now out in new Basic Books editions. –M.O.
Four theology books
reviewed by Caleb Nelson & Susan Olasky

ON DIFFICULTIES IN SACRED SCRIPTURE
*St. Maximos the Confessor*
St. Maximos (580-662) was a Christian ascetic who believed that avoiding self-indulgence is the most obvious and proper approach to serving God. His watchword: “Do not love the world.” He insisted that sensory attachment to the things of this world prevents us from raising our minds to God and understanding His Word. As true as that core conviction is, Maximos uses it to find ascetic practice in every Biblical text he looks at, even when it’s not there. Yet in our current culture where self-denial is virtually unthinkable, a judicious evaluation of patristic arguments for it might be useful to Christians. —C.N.

PLAIN THEOLOGY FOR PLAIN PEOPLE
*Charles Octavius Boothe*
Boothe (1845-1924), founder of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala., believed that “the private members of churches ... have great need for the truths that books teach,” but that few theology books were “suited to their time, their understanding, and their wants.” So he wrote one. He lays out the entire system of Christian doctrine in 140 glorious pages. The chapter titled “How Christians Should Live and Labor” focuses largely on joining the church and partaking of the sacraments, and much of the book consists of long Bible quotations. —C.N.

MY HEART CRIES OUT: GOSPEL MEDITATIONS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE
*Paul David Tripp*
Tripp’s poems/meditations deal with the struggles of the Christian life. Some of them are bracing, with short lines of rat-a-tat truth: “No idea can liberate, no power can save, no institution can redeem, restore, resuscitate, or recreate what sin has destroyed.” Others use repetition to underscore important truths. Illustrated with photographs by Tim Kellner, each poem brings a Biblical perspective to daily concerns: “I was anxious this morning—too many details, loose ends. ... Doubt plunders faith. Anxiety decimates rest. ... Anxiety is a form of amnesia. Forgetting your presence, your plan.” —S.O.

BLESSED BROKEN GIVEN: HOW YOUR STORY BECOMES SACRED IN THE HANDS OF JESUS
*Glenn Packiam*
Bread is ordinary, but it’s also a Biblical metaphor conveying spiritual truth. Packiam follows the metaphor, tracing out its application to identity, grace, God’s love, sin, mission, and service. Just-right illustrations from his life clarify his message. Packiam concludes by comparing two feasts found in Mark’s Gospel: Herod’s feast, which ends in death, and Jesus feeding the 5,000. “At Herod’s feast, performance was everything.” At Jesus’ feast the people “didn’t have to perform for Him to notice them. He saw them from the beginning. And He loved them. So He fed them—with words and with bread.” —S.O.

AFTERWORD
In *40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life* (P&R Publishing, 2019), literature scholar Leland Ryken provides the text and background information on 40 hymns, analyzing how each one functions as poetry and interacts with Scripture. He argues that hymnic poems are an ideal introduction to poetry but also rewarding for someone like him, a professor for more than 50 years: “I did not realize what a transformation occurs when we see hymns printed as sequential poems accompanied by music. ... I wish someone had taken me by the hand at the beginning of my career and said, ‘Look.’”

Matthew Sleeth—carpenter, emergency room doctor, and former atheist—explains in *Reforesting Faith* (WaterBrook, 2019) his love for trees. He calls fellow believers to appreciate trees as God does and notes how trees (seeds, sticks, leaves, vines, bushes) often mark places where God calls His people.

—S.O.

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September 28, 2019 • WORLD Magazine 23
Family ties
FOUR BOOKS ABOUT DADS AND GRANDDADS
reviewed by Susan Olasky

OUR FAVORITE DAY Joowon Oh
Papa does the same thing nearly every day. He rides the bus to town and eats dumplings at the same restaurant. But on Thursdays the routine changes. That’s when his beloved granddaughter comes to visit. On that day they eat twin orders of dumplings at his house and work on a project together. The cut-paper illustrations complement the text and offer insights into Papa’s life: a photo of his wife on the bed table and a picture of them as a young couple on the wall. This simple story shows the mutual love and enjoyment between a grandfather and granddaughter. (Ages 3-7)

GRANDPA’S TOP THREES Wendy Meddour
Grandpa is distracted. When Henry complains, his mom says, “Ask him if he wants a sandwich.” Henry does, but Grandpa doesn’t answer. The boy asks about his top three sandwiches and offers his own list: chocolate spread, raspberry jam, and grated cheese and butter. Grandpa’s are tuna fish, egg salad, and beetroot. Gradually, they discover more top threes. Here’s where the story offers an emotional punch. Henry asks, “Who are your top three grannies?” and begins his list with “Granny who is dead.” Grandpa responds with three memories of his wife, captured in impressionistic watercolor illustrations. This is a lovely story about love and grief. (Ages 3-7)

RAJ AND THE BEST DAY EVER Sebastien Braun
Raj and his dad are tigers. They’ve planned a big day out with a list of all the things they hope to do. But when it comes time to check out a book at the library (item No. 1 on the list), they find that Dad has forgotten his wallet. Instead of letting this ruin the day, Raj and his dad begin to improvise. They come up with creative ways to accomplish their list without needing money. The mixed-media illustrations offer lots of interesting details. A humorous twist at the end will ring true to many parents. (Ages 3-7)

AROUND THE TABLE THAT GRANDDAD BUILT Melanie Hieuser Hill
This bright, cumulative, rhyming story begins: “This is the table that Grandad built.” Each page adds items to the table: sunflowers in a vase, napkins made by Mom, “glasses from Mom and Dad’s wedding. ... Everyone has a part.” The feast includes “stacks of toasty tamales” and “samosas, spicy and hot.” The story ends with a full spread showing a bird’s-eye view of the abundant table and hands clasped at the edges: “For these hands we hold, for tasty good food, for family and friends, for grace that is given and love that is shared, we give thanks ... around this table that Grandad built.” (Ages 3-7)
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—Lynn M.

It’s about time the whole family had access to news from a biblical perspective.

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John West is vice president of Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank best known for its research and advocacy for intelligent design. West is also the author of several books, including Darwin Day in America, which examines how Charles Darwin’s idea influences culture today. Here are edited excerpts of our conversation in Seattle.

Where has Darwinian thought had the most influence on society today? The area of faith. Darwin’s theory wasn’t just about change over time—it was that we’re part of an accidental process. So Darwin has been the greatest gift to people who would like to deny that God exists. But it’s gone way beyond that: We’ve seen Darwinism used to devalue human life, because Darwin thought humans are basically animals. At the end of On the Origin of Species he says it’s through death, disease, and starvation that the best things have come about in nature.

It seems like some of these ideas are not always connected to Darwin because people read On the Origin of Species without reading his later book, The Descent of Man. Exactly. I have met scholars who say Darwin has nothing to do with religion or morality—it’s just about science. I ask: “Have you read The Descent of Man?” No. That is where Darwin talks about religion, morality, mind, and social policy, about how he thinks we’re destroying the human race by inoculating people against smallpox and helping the poor.

Let the weak die on their own. Correct. Darwin was a kind and compassionate man, so he worried about the implications, but that’s what he thought the theory meant. He thought that if we follow reason, we probably shouldn’t be doing things to help the people he thought were defective.

How has Darwinian thought influenced the sexual revolution? In The Descent of Man Darwin argues the original form of human mating was not monogamy, but community marriage—lots of different sexual partners. Darwin himself favored monogamy as in 19th-century Victorian England, but his overall claim was that appropriate mating practice was determined by whatever survival needs you had. So it would radically change over time.

Darwin influenced many of the people who made these arguments more widely in what became known as the sexual revolution. No. 1 is Alfred Kinsey. Most people don’t know he was trained as an evolutionary biologist. Only later did he look at animal and human sexuality and become the father of the sexual revolution.

What about crime and punishment? Like much of 19th-century scientific thought, Darwinian thought was reductionist: It tried to reduce everything about us—our moral beliefs, our actions—to the product of blind matter in motion. It’s not something we can be held accountable for, because our environment dictates it. Today we say our genes made me do it. There was a whole school of criminal anthropology that followed Darwin and went in two directions. One, the liberal form of criminal justice, says we’re not responsible for our actions, so you have a “Get out of jail free” card. The other, on the law-and-order side, says if this behavior is bred into criminals, then you have to either get rid of them—execute them—or cure them through things ranging from lobotomies to indefinite detention.

What about ideas of racial superiority? Darwin was not the world’s first racist, but you’re avoiding history if you don’t understand the role Darwin played in virulent scientific racism. He believed everything about humans ultimately could be explained by natural selection, or survival of the fittest. And since it acts differently in populations according to different environments, Darwin said we shouldn’t expect natural selection to produce races of equivalent capabilities. He provided a scientific agenda, a research agenda, for several decades of evolutionary biologists and anthropologists who looked for how the races were inherently

Here’s what we published in WORLD on June 28, 2014:
unequal. Mercifully, that is not the mainstream scientific view today.

**How did that change?** Not because of the scientists. It was the civil rights movement and many religious leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and others who, based on Christian convictions, pushed back and made that view unfashionable.

You mentioned reductionism—the idea that we’re all a product of our genes and environment. How has that contributed to the tendency to overmedicate? Psychoactive drugs are a great benefit to society—I’ve had family members who have benefited from them. But I think it should concern people that in some schools in America, 40 percent or more of the young boys are put on Ritalin for ADHD. Ritalin is pharmacologically related to cocaine, so it is going to affect your concentration whether you have ADHD or not. This idea that we’re just these material creatures leads to a psychoactive-drug-first mentality. You don’t look at people as body, mind, soul; they’re just bodies. If you think we’re hybrids, both material and spiritual, then you’ll want to explore a wider range of potential treatments.

**As scientific research continues to undermine Darwin and strengthen the case for intelligent design, are we seeing a reevaluation of some of these associated ideas?** A growing number of voices in and out of the scientific community are raising questions about Darwin’s theory and pointing to the evidence of design, but the cultural cache of Darwinian reductionism is still powerful, particularly in the social and in the nonscientific realm. Fields like political science, sociology, and psychology all took their underlying assumptions from 19th-century natural science, including Darwin.

**Some pushback in science?** We are seeing more pushback to the garden variety science claims you still get from people like Neil deGrasse Tyson or Bill Nye—that Darwinian science shows we’re the product of this unguided process. That sort of village atheism is getting harder to sustain. In physics and cosmology, lots more people are talking about the exquisite fine-tuning that leads to life.

And in biology, they’re talking about the exquisite molecular machines.

**How can the average Christian affect the cultural conversation surrounding Darwinism?** The No. 1 thing Christians can do: Be responsible for those in their own circles of influence. Don’t fret if you don’t have 100,000 people listening to you on YouTube or Facebook. Pay attention to your own kids. Pay attention to the kids of your friends. Even in evangelical churches, parents often farm out the raising of their kids. You can’t cede your parenting to schools—public or Christian. And you certainly can’t cede it to the internet, social media, or video games. If you feel ill-equipped, there’s good news: Various groups have produced lots of great resources to help you talk about these things with your kids. You don’t need to be an expert. Just watch a video with your kids each week and engage them in discussion around the dinner table. 

‘Darwin was not the world’s first racist, but you’re avoiding history if you don’t understand the role Darwin played in virulent scientific racism.’
You’ve realized for some time now that most exorbitantly priced 50th-anniversary box sets embody more of a good thing than anyone but a zealot needs—and that few artists’ catalogs have been exploited to this end more than Elvis Presley’s.

So, as much as you love “the King,” you’re passing on FTD/Legacy’s new five-disc American Sound 1969. You’re passing not because hearing Presley and the Memphis Boys take multiple runs at the likes of “Kentucky Rain,” “You’ll Think of Me,” and “True Love Travels on a Gravel Road” is tedious (it isn’t), but because you’ve already spent a small fortune on the albums on which all but five of those 90 multiple runs first appeared.

You couldn’t legitimately claim to love the King if you hadn’t. Sony/Legacy’s new Live 1969, however, the 11 discs of which document a solid week of Presley taking care of business at Kirk Kerkorian’s International Hotel in Las Vegas, is a different story. ’Sixty-nine, after all, was Presley’s last great year, a peak from which he’d spend the next eight years falling—slowly at first, meteorically toward the end.

The very thought of an 11-disc Live 1977 box in 2027 gives you the shudders.

But the reputation of these two-a-night ’69 shows, some of which you’ve heard as parts of slenderer packages over the years, has retained its glow, and now you can bask in it for 12 hours straight if you’re so inclined.

Disc 1, the “midnight show” of Aug. 21, has you thinking you might be. The TCB band, the Bobby Morris orchestra, and the Sweet Inspirations (not so much the undermiked Imperials) sizzle, all but forcing Presley to deliver even when it seems as if he’d rather not. The singing on his surest crowd-pleasers (and those of the Beatles, Ray Charles, Del Shannon, and the Bee Gees) isn’t exactly slipshod, but he does give the impression of wanting to get through them as fast as possible. Only the recently chart-topping “In the Ghetto” and the soon-to-be-chart-topping “Suspicious Minds” consistently engage his full attention.

On the other hand, you can’t help noticing his complete investment in the faux-yokel, double-entendre-studded stand-up routines that comprise his extensive ’tween-song patter. He repeats them nearly verbatim during every show, enabling you by Disc 4 (earlier if you’re a quick study) to joke along in tandem and causing you to wonder whether Presley might’ve been incubating dreams of a comedy career.

You particularly treasure the rare improvisations (the two shows, for example, in which Presley likens the parched sensation that singers experience in Sin City to feeling “like Bob Dylan [had] slept in your mouth”).

One thing’s for sure: By Discs 6 and 7, the scriptedness of practically every second of each show has you feeling like Bill Murray in Groundhog Day and questioning the wisdom of your vow to see the project through to the end.

But stick with it you do. And midway through the final disc you’re glad that you have, for it’s there that you encounter the famous “laughing version” of “Are You Lonesome Tonight?,” wherein Presley sings “Do you look at your bald head and wish you had hair?” then hilariously loses his composure for the rest of the number. Never again would he seem so in the moment or so human.

And although you may never plow through all 11 discs again, you know that you’ll cue up that Disc 11 cut whenever you need cheering up—and that it will always do the trick.
LAST PUNK STANDING ... AND OTHER HITS!
Wild Billy Childish & CTMF

The ...and Other Hits! part of the title is a joke, of course. None of these 14 songs will ever rule the stream-o-sphere. They’re too raw, too unself-conscious, too alive. The sonics begin and end in mid-to-late-'60s proto-punk. The lyrics sound most whimsical when they’re not. And although you may not care who’ll be the last punk standing yourself, Childish is sure that “when no one’s left / to give you a whiff / of the stolen riff / of Mark E. Smith,” you will.

BRIGHTER DAYS
Robert Randolph & the Family Band

Randolph continues to make his own the influences that his House of God Church upbringing made sure he came to late. There’s Allman Brothers in “Baptise Me.” There’s Sly & the Family Stone in “Don’t Fight It” (with the “it” being “Holy Ghost power”). There’s Stevie Wonder in “Second Hand Man.” There’s even Delbert McClinton in “I’m Living Off the Love You Give.” But, most significant of all, there’s Randolph’s fierce, riff-mongering pedal steel guitar, binding together every potential loose end like a signature writ large (and loud).

I’M NOT CHIC
Noodles

If these 10 adorable garage-rock songs don’t finally earn the all-female Japanese trio responsible for them a sizable English-speaking following, nothing will. So what that in Yoko’s approximately phonetic English pronunciation “I don’t want to bother you” sounds like “I don’t want Brazil”? It’s still cute. And if you plug the Japanese lyrics of “Buggy Loop” into Google Translate, you’ll get “In a room with cactuses, / I have the same dream as you, / like noonday moon,” which isn’t bad for accidental haiku if accidental it is.

VICTORIOUS
Skillet

Titles such as “Rise Up,” “Never Going Back,” and “Victorious” don’t quite say it all, but they come close. These are songs to bolster the weary, particularly those feeling worn down by the daily grind of spiritual warfare. And in typical Skillet fashion, the majority of the sentiments get hammered home by industrial-strength metal. There are, however, changes of pace (relatively speaking), one of which, “Terrify the Dark,” peaks with a line that the weary would do well to ponder: “My doubt will answer to Your scars.”

ENCORE
Approach Jimmy Lee (Columbia), the new album by Raphael Saadiq, as the latest installment in a long and lucrative career devoted to maximizing the elasticity of R&B, and you’ll feel shortchanged. Sure, there’s bounce, flow, and spirited singing at almost every turn, but there’s darkness, anguish, and disjunction too, traits not usually associated with Saadiq’s previous solo work, his résumé as a producer, or his role as the leader of Tony! Toni! Toné! So be sure to approach it for what it is—an album-long response to the heroin-related death of Saadiq’s older brother, the Jimmy Lee of the title. The abruptly shifting perspectives from which Saadiq and his occasional guests give eloquent voice to pain result in a cubist collage that includes prayers to God for deliverance as well as the possibility that those prayers might be answered. And speaking of possibilities, “This World Is Drunk” suggests that Saadiq may be a closet Wallace Stevens fan.

—A.O.
Does approval from the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability offer Christians useful information about an organization’s financial discipline?

By Michael Renneau
IMPORTANT WORK. POTENTIALLY LIFE-CHANGING WORK.

With headquarters located blocks from the U.S. Capitol, NRB has marketed itself as being to the First Amendment what the National Rifle Association is to the Second. U.S. presidents have spoken at NRB’s annual convention.

Last Dec. 7 you receive the NRB’s latest audited financial report. Your reaction might be like NRB Treasurer Frank Wright’s, revealed in an email legally obtained by radio host and independent journalist Julie Roys, who sent it to WORLD’s editor in chief last month. Wright wrote, “The fact that [the report] arrived 11 months after the close of the fiscal year was an immediate red flag for me, and the substance of the Audit Report and the Management Letter more than verified my concerns.”

In March Wright tells you that after receiving the audit report, he reviewed reports going back to 2014: “The results of this analysis are deeply troubling.” NRB had suffered operating losses of $873,000 since 2014 and had been “financially insolvent for each of the last three fiscal years.” As of Dec. 31, 2018, NRB’s deficit in unrestricted net assets was $613,000. Its cash reserves were virtually depleted. The independent auditor, Wright says, “had flagged NRB as being at-risk as a ‘going concern’—the worst language you can ever see in an audit.”

On April 10 you receive another email from Wright: “NRB needs $750,000 to pay all its convention obligations AND carry it through the summer slump until September 1. To date, we have received $164,500 in pledges.... Let me be candid here. Without your full financial support in raising this $750,000, NRB will have no option but bankruptcy reorganization.”

Wright’s emails were not the only signs of trouble. In February the organization announced Jerry Johnson was resigning after six years as president. Neither Johnson nor NRB cited a reason. Two other high-level NRB staffers also left. Roys said other emails leaked to her showed Johnson, after his resignation, was pushing the NRB board to increase his healthcare benefits and severance pay.
Johnson and several other NRB board members refused to answer my questions about the split-up. NRB general counsel Craig Parshall—husband of NRB board chair and popular Moody Radio host Janet Parshall—told me in July NRB “is firmly established on solid ground.”

But as Wright’s communications to the board show, that financial ground has been anything but solid since 2005. Only twice in those 13 years—in 2007 and 2009—has NRB ended the year with operating surpluses. Many nonprofits have years in which they spend more money than they make, but those 11 years total more than $1.5 million ($1,531,205) in combined deficits.

As Wright indicated, NRB’s net assets have also tanked. In 2015, tax returns showed net assets of $320,089. The next year’s tax returns showed net assets at $165,811, and NRB’s profile page on the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) website shows its 2017 net assets at $220,900, leading up to the deficit of more than $600,000 at the end of 2018 (according to Wright’s email).

So how did NRB get into its current financial trouble? Stuart Epperson, founder of Salem Media Group, sits on the NRB board along with more than 100 other people. He downplayed NRB’s financial troubles: “It appears to be much, much worse than it is.” But he admitted the organization overspent.

“Jerry had plans to cover any expenses, but some of those plans to cover all expenses didn’t work out as he anticipated,” Epperson said. In his view, Johnson “wanted to take us beyond—this is where the added expenses likely came in—take us beyond where people thought NRB wanted to go.”

As it lobbied for Christian broadcasters in the nation’s halls of power, in 2016 the organization got a new hall of power of its own. In June that year, the NRB moved its headquarters from Manassas, Va., to a suite in the National Guard Memorial Museum building on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C., blocks away from the U.S. Capitol. NRB lost $170,000 on the sale of the Manassas headquarters and the move to Washington. In February 2019—about the time NRB announced Johnson was leaving—the organization moved again, this time into an office suite in a smaller building, next to the National Guard Museum building.

NRB’s former president, Jerry Johnson, speaks during a rally at the U.S. Supreme Court in 2017.

URING THIS ENTIRE TIME, the NRB remained accredited and in good standing with the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA), a financial accreditor whose stated mission is “Enhancing Trust in Christ-Centered Churches and Ministries.” The ECFA emerged in the late 1970s as an attempt to restore trust in the finances of Christian nonprofits. Back then a series of scandals involving religious ministries woke up regulators in Washington and ministry heads across the country. As Congress threatened new laws to rein in nonprofits, evangelical leaders met to hash out plans for a new organization to prevent such scandals. In 1979, they met in Chicago to announce formation of the ECFA.

Its mission was to protect donors: “Every Christian charity must be fully accountable to its giving public,” ECFA’s first executive director, Baptist minister Olan Hendrix, said later that year. “Each dollar must be regarded as a sacred trust. ECFA will seek to insure that it does.”

The brewing scandal facing NRB board members earlier this year was just the sort of situation ECFA’s
existence was supposed to prevent. Forty years after its creation, it’s time for a report card. How has ECFA performed? What does its seal on websites and marketing material mean? Does ECFA accreditation ensure responsible use of donor dollars?

ECFA boasts more than 2,400 members, representing more than $29 billion in annual revenue, including charter members like Compassion International, Dallas Theological Seminary, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, along with more recent additions such as Alliance Defending Freedom (formerly Alliance Defense Fund), Prison Fellowship Ministries, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Samaritan’s Purse.

NRB earned ECFA accreditation in 1981. Other than showing three recent years of NRB’s financial information on the ECFA website, the only warning ECFA has offered to donors is a footnote on its NRB profile page saying, ‘A going concern is noted in the 2017 financials.’

ECFA President Dan Busby refused an interview with me, but Guardian, an Atlanta public relations agency, answered my questions with written responses that it attributed to Busby: “ECFA has been in consistent communication with NRB concerning their finances over the last few years and NRB has been fully cooperative and transparent in responding to our requests for information.”

The Guardian response acknowledged NRB’s financial problems but said the organization’s debt campaign and payroll reduction have contributed to “an annualized financial turnaround of over $1 million.”

But NRB donors and the general public would not have known of the 13-year downturn unless they had known what “going concern” meant or had examined NRB’s financial documents themselves. “ECFA does not intervene in the financial decisions for its members; however, we closely monitor financial viability,” the written statement says.

NRB isn’t the only example of problems with an ECFA-accredited ministry.

ARVEST BIBLE CHAPEL joined ECFA in 2013. At that time the Chicago-area megachurch was already embroiled in scandal. Former elders and members were raising questions about Pastor James MacDonald’s leadership, lifestyle, and undisclosed salary. Harvest remained an ECFA member for the next six years as more of the church’s problems became evident. ECFA only terminated Harvest’s membership four months after a December 2018 WORLD story that detailed MacDonald’s abusive leadership and reckless spending, and two months after Harvest fired MacDonald.

While ECFA says it requires transparency from its members in disclosing financial documents, ECFA won’t reveal details about how it reviewed Harvest’s finances while it was still a member. The Guardian/Busby written statement says, “We believe it is the responsibility of a former member to determine appropriate transparency concerning further details.”

ECFA has proceeded slowly with ministries getting into trouble. One reason could be organizational structure. ECFA pays its bills by charging membership fees to the organizations it’s supposed to monitor. In 2018 ECFA brought in more than $5 million in total revenue. Nearly three-fourths of that—$3.7 million—came from fees charged to its members.

Annual accreditation fees are based on each applying organization’s revenue: The bigger the organization, the bigger ECFA’s accreditation fee. According to a fee schedule on ECFA’s website, NRB pays a $1,650 accreditation fee based on its revenues. Compassion International, which has more than $800 million in total revenue, pays $16,000 in yearly accreditation fees.

If ECFA terminates members, it cuts off revenue. Since 2017, 150 organizations have left ECFA. Some lost accreditation because of failure to turn in required paperwork, or due to a merger with another organization. Harvest Bible Chapel is the only group in that time terminated for failure to meet ECFA’s Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship, whose requirements include a written statement of faith, a board of directors not made up mostly of employees or family members, a yearly audit.

‘Each dollar must be regarded as a sacred trust. ECFA will seek to insure that it does.’

—Olan Hendrix, ECFA’s first executive director
by a CPA, compliance with relevant laws and Biblical mandates, and compliance with ECFA policy on setting a top executive's salary.

According to Busby, Harvest failed four ECFA standards—but it took organizations other than ECFA to bring those failures into the open. When problems arise, ECFA's website says, they “are addressed respectfully, confidentially, and with a redemptive approach.” That approach appears to value the confidentiality of member organizations more than donors' need to know.

Each year members submit annual fees and a renewal application stating they are in compliance with the standards: “Decisions regarding membership are voted on by ECFA's board,” Busby's written statement says. Wayne Pederson, an executive with Far East Broadcasting Company, serves on the NRB board. He also serves as ECFA's treasurer. Busby's statement says that's not a problem: “If any matter concerning NRB came before the ECFA board, Mr. Pederson would be recused from the discussion and any decisions, thus eliminating any conflict of interest.”

Pederson did not return my phone and email messages seeking comment.

Busby himself sits on NRB's President's Council, which takes the lead in lobbying lawmakers in Washington. NRB says the council also serves as an advisory board for the organization. Busby didn't address my question on why his role with NRB's President's Council is not a conflict of interest. I again requested an interview with Busby to give him the opportunity to answer questions about ECFA's overall credibility, but Busby, through Guardian, declined.

OME SCANDALS under ECFA’s nose go back to the organization’s early days. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s PTL Club maintained its ECFA membership from 1981 through the end of 1986, even while Jim Bakker was committing the fraud that sent him to prison. Gary Tidwell's 1993 book Anatomy of a Fraud reported that ECFA sent a letter to Jim Bakker flagging concerns and telling Bakker not to use the ECFA seal on PTL materials—but the organization did anyway. ECFA terminated PTL’s membership only after news outlets reported the scandal.

Some examples are more recent. In March 2014, ECFA revoked the membership of Teen Mania Ministries, a now defunct youth ministry. But as WORLD reported that year, by 2011 Teen Mania had net assets of −$4.1 million. The report detailed extravagant spending and questionable leadership. In December 2015, Teen Mania closed and filed for bankruptcy.

The recent and historical scandals raise the questions: How well does ECFA police its members? Did ECFA membership make wayward ministries more accountable? At least one church—Village Church of Barrington, near Chicago—dropped its ECFA membership.
membership because of the agency’s failure to police Harvest Bible Chapel. Senior Pastor David Jones told Religion News Service this year his church sees ECFA membership as a “liability rather than an asset.”

ECFA leaders from the beginning made the agency out as a Better Business Bureau (BBB) for Christian ministries. Both offer seals of approval. Both term their approvals as accreditation. Both have products meant to serve their accredited members. Both have sliding schedules of membership fees. But BBB examines members annually. It gives grades to its members, based on performance. It maintains a forum on its website for consumers to review businesses—positively or negatively. ECFA offers no such forum and wouldn’t reveal specifics of its review of Harvest Bible Chapel.

CFA USES A PASS OR FAIL concept in applying the standards rather than a rating system.” Busby’s written statements say—but Harvest is the only already-existing member since 2017 to “fail.” He has previously said the group is not a watchdog. If an ECFA member turns in the necessary paperwork and pays its yearly dues, it retains its accreditation. But some nonprofits that have withdrawn from ECFA say that the limited involvement wasn’t enough to keep them paying, especially when other organizations provide financial oversight.

Geneva College, a Christian liberal arts school in Pennsylvania, ended its ECFA membership in 2017. Geneva director of marketing and public relations Cheryl Johnston said the school is already complying with financial and organizational standards with its academic accrediting agencies and the federal government. Johnston said Geneva considers ECFA’s stewardship standards valuable for ministries not regulated as closely as colleges. But Geneva considered the organization’s services redundant: “We really didn’t have a service at all [from ECFA]. We were just paying for a membership that really didn’t mean anything.”

Geneva has seen no drop in donor revenue since ending its ECFA affiliation. Christian universities Biola and Seattle Pacific have done the same in recent years, both saying leaders decided to end ECFA membership as a cost-cutting measure.

CrossWay International, a small, Texas-based mission and relief work organization, also dropped its membership in 2017. Founder and CEO Dean Chollar told me his board didn’t think the accreditation fee paid to ECFA, which was less than $1,000 each year, was worth the benefit provided to the ministry: “I never quite understood the value of it as time went by.” ECFA provided data on fair compensation and benefits packages Chollar appreciated, but dropping its ECFA membership hasn’t affected CrossWay’s revenue, he said. “We really haven’t seen that much of a difference.”
On Nov. 14, 2017, Vice President Mike Pence hosted, at an afternoon meeting at the White House, an unusual gathering of top Trump officials. From New York he summoned then-UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, and from Washington international aid administrator Mark Green and budget director Mick Mulvaney, who today is President Donald Trump’s acting chief of staff.

Pence was frustrated by feeble U.S. efforts to support Christians, Yazidis, and others forced from their homes by ISIS. He said he had convinced the president to redirect funds to religious groups in Iraq, bypassing UN programs (that historically have discriminated against them). Now U.S. aid would go to local NGOs and church groups that had supported displaced Iraqis since the 2014 ISIS invasion.

Trump came into office vowing to defeat ISIS, stepping up military coordination with coalition forces to liberate Iraq and Syria from a caliphate once the size of Great Britain ruling over nearly 12 million people.

Liberation allowed many Muslims to return and rebuild their communities. But Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities in Iraq have lacked resources and security to return, particularly to Mosul and the towns of Nineveh Plain.

After the leadership meeting, the vice president announced the course correction in a tweet. The United States will “PROVIDE DIRECTLY TO PERSECUTED COMMUNITIES of faiths,” Pence said, using caps for emphasis. To those communities, he added, “Help is on the way.”

Since that time, Pence has helped redirect about $55 million from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) toward church-based relief in Iraq, and he has touted the success of the administration’s efforts.

Pence told delegates at the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention “we will not rest” until Christians receive needed support to return to their homeland. At Ave Maria University, students and faculty applauded when he mentioned it.

A law passed with bipartisan support and signed by Trump at the end of 2018 also boosted Pence’s efforts. The Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act authorizes, among other protections, federal funding for the recovery of Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities.

Pence dispatched to the region last year his own envoy, Special Representative for Minority Assistance Programs Max Primorac. Primorac, 57, is a veteran of security and diplomatic work in Iraq and elsewhere, a Washington insider, and a Catholic.

In July, Pence heralded an ongoing rebuilding effort, at more than $340 million, in a speech to world dignitaries at the State Department’s ministerial on religious freedom.

Yet for all the momentum, the new efforts are wracked by familiar old obstacles—government overregulation, institutionalized bureaucracy, and wasteful spending. Further, Iranian influence is provoking a security situation that could halt—or even reverse—what progress has been made.

On the ground in Iraq, the change of direction Pence promised has yet to materialize, fully two years after towns and cities were wrenched from ISIS control.

According to a July document prepared by USAID, the State Department agency disbursing funds, nearly 387 projects are...
maybe] on the way
underway or just completed as part of what’s now a $367 million Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response initiative. Of those, 216—or 56 percent—are carried out by the UNDP despite Pence’s pledge to redirect funds to church-based charities and others.

Among the remaining 44 percent, most operate under an umbrella contract USAID entered with Chemonics—a Washington, D.C.–based company whose long-standing work with the agency epitomizes business as usual.

In 2018 the for-profit firm did more than $1.5 billion in business with USAID. The Iraq genocide recovery program represents $54 million in contracts for Chemonics—making it the largest recipient of such funds outside the UN. USAID officers said they could not provide dollar amounts for individual projects.

According to local sources in Iraq, Chemonics entered a four-year contract with USAID to supervise much of the local reconstruction effort. Chemonics subcontracts the actual work to smaller organizations that may be faith-based, including churches. But besides UNDP, the project list also includes international U.S.-based organizations, secular groups, and Arab and Muslim construction and development entities.

(Subcontractor names for 91 projects on the list are blocked due to security concerns, according to USAID.)

For Iraq’s local NGOs, many of them working a decade or more to protect minority groups facing terror attacks and forced dislocation, Chemonics adds a new layer of bureaucracy for needed U.S. funds. Its officers set up operations out of suites at the Rotana Hotel in Erbil, one aid worker told me, where rooms run $250 a night.

“We have been doing this work for years, and now we have to qualify as a ‘partner,’ while they work for a month hiring people and ordering new equipment out of a five-star hotel,” he said.

To rebuild a school near Dohuk, the Assyrian Christian, Iraq-based Christian Aid Program (CAPNI) waited three months to qualify as a partner with Chemonics, said executive director Emanuel Youkhana.

“We received cash only for the installment,” while Chemonics supplied the furnishings, said Youkhana. Furniture arrived in shrink-wrapped plastic, all imported. “Down the street we have carpenters and others looking to restart their businesses, and they did not involve local people, local labor,” said Youkhana.

“This is not capacity building.”

CAPNI has contracted with European aid agencies, but the United States is the only country managing government aid dollars through a for-profit, he said, a dynamic difference. Chemonics answers to shareholders, and succeeds by turning a profit on its taxpayer-funded projects.

In multiple conversations face-to-face in Iraq and by phone, similar groups (all of whom asked not to be named to protect their ongoing work) said Chemonics largely directed logistics and supplies, leaving to local NGOs token tasks with minimal community involvement.

Even then, several groups said they were subject to onerous, even ridiculous, regulatory requirements. Projects require multiple environmental impact assessments. USAID at one point wanted to delay needed burial of bodies left exposed by ISIS, to perform an environmental impact review.

The reviews include lengthy climate risk assessments, using climate-change standards the Trump administration discarded in 2017. A potential project in Nineveh Plain was rated “at risk” for adverse effects from future rising global temperatures—though average daily temperatures in July already are 108 degrees.

Chemonics senior vice president Catherine Kannam said Chemonics is following “the standard procurement process,” and “is also committed to building the capacity of our local partners and grantees.” Local partners say their capacity is too often underestimated, as is their role in supporting a displaced population for five years that’s exceeded 700,000 people.

I

n Qaraqosh, once the largest city in Nineveh Plain and a focus of the 2014 ISIS onslaught, USAID/Chemonics has several projects in Muslim areas of the city but has not yet partnered with the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, a church-based effort. “I expected more funds to cover the huge number of houses,” said Georges Jahola, a Syriac Catholic priest who is one of 10 clergymen spearheading the committee.

The committee inventoried 7,000 houses to rebuild, nearly half of them destroyed (see “Starting from zero,” March 29, 2018). Despite the widespread damage, about 25,000 residents have returned.

Some of the largest church-based aid efforts have found ways of working alongside USAID without contracting through Chemonics or another umbrella contractor.

The Knights of Columbus, the U.S.-based Catholic service organization, has sent $23 million to Iraq to support displaced Christians. The Knights do not take government money, but do...
Chemonics was founded by Thurston F. Teele, a former foreign service officer who launched the company in the 1970s as a pass-through for U.S. international development. Starting in Africa then Afghanistan, it expanded to former Soviet bloc countries, scooping up former State Department and USAID employees whose influence and expertise upped the company’s ability to win USAID contracts.

Unlike smaller nonprofits, Chemonics could leverage wholesale purchases of commodities and ship them at competitive prices to troubled areas like Afghanistan or the Middle East.

In 2018 Chemonics had more than $1.6 billion in revenue—nearly all from USAID contracts, according to the Center for Public Integrity. Around the world, USAID had contracts with Chemonics totaling more than $1.5 billion in 2018 and just over $1 billion in 2019, according to data compiled by USAspending.gov.

Chemonics has run afoul of government inspectors general numerous times, particularly in Afghanistan. In a 2010 audit of reconstruction projects there—similar to current work in Iraq—inspectors found five structures built under Chemonics supervision so defective that USAID ordered three buildings torn down and two retrofitted. Yet five months later, Chemonics had neither repaired nor demolished the buildings. The audit doesn’t make clear whether the company was fined.

Asked by lawmakers about Chemonics’ performance at a 2010 House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing on “poor performing contractors,” USAID acting assistant administrator for management Drew W. Luten III responded by asking for additional time “to respond separately.” The hearing record shows no indication the company was fined.

In 2011 Chemonics became a fully employee-owned company. And in 2012, Luten left USAID to join Chemonics, where he serves currently as a managing director. —M.B.

have a Memorandum of Understanding with USAID and work jointly on projects.

Samaritan’s Purse, one of the longest-serving U.S. aid groups in Iraq, learned this summer it will receive $3 million toward shelter and clean water projects under a new partnerships initiative with USAID.

A second CAPNI project with USAID/Chemonics looks more promising, said executive director Youkhana. His group has subcontracted to rehab water tanks in villages surrounding the Nineveh town of Al-Qosh. The improved water supply will serve both Christian and Yazidi villages. Beneficiaries, said director Youkhana, “are so grateful to USAID.”

Meanwhile, Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil, with perhaps the largest flock of displaced Christians, could not reach an arrangement with USAID. Chemonics instead hired the archdiocese to subcontract delivery of two front-end loaders and two dump trucks for removing rubble.

Archbishop Bashar Warda is one of the most prominent Christian leaders in Iraq, and one of the most vocal critics of USAID’s approach. He told the National Catholic Register that Christian families “don’t factor in plans from the UN or USAID,” and their efforts “actually have made the Christians’ situation worse.”

An ongoing policy debate, said Stephen Rasche, legal counsel for the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil, is “whether our aim is to protect and rehabilitate Christians or to protect and rehabilitate Christian sites in Nineveh.”

Rebuilding efforts often take place without engaging former residents, and lengthy project lists don’t measure whether Christians feel secure enough to return and live. About 200,000 Christians remain in Iraq. The majority live in temporary housing or rented apartments in Erbil and other parts of Kurdistan. They remain genocide survivors, yet USAID’s program is for now aimed at Nineveh and Mosul areas. While thousands have returned to their homelands, many may remain in Iraqi Kurdistan, which is now the center of Christian activity in Iraq.

Meeting up with Max Primorac at the U.S. Consulate in Erbil earlier this year, I found the special representative upbeat and cheerful in the face of Iraq’s post-ISIS challenges. Despite complaints around USAID programs and security threats, Primorac himself has earned respect as a quick study, understanding the Arab world plus the volatile politics and weighed-down bureaucracies of both Washington and Baghdad. He’s brought an energetic approach that’s equal parts warmhearted and straightforward.

As a political representative rather than a career diplomat, Primorac’s job often has been to meld White House objectives with an entrenched State Department aid apparatus that’s deeply antagonistic toward President Trump.

The day before in the Nineveh town of Bashiaq, he’d been on hand to launch a $17 million soft-loan program for private owners of ISIS-destroyed factories. “We have to help them get productive capacity up and running to provide jobs and stability,” he explained.

The 26 factories can employ from 50 to 200 people in areas where Christians, Yazidis, and others once lived. The factories’ revival, he said, represents not just an economic but a psychological boost.

Primorac defended working through contractors like Chemonics “because they know our systems,” and because he fears time may be short.

In mid-May the State Department suddenly ordered evacuations for nonemergency personnel in Baghdad and Erbil, based on an unclear threat connected to Iran. Suddenly, aid efforts were imperiled, many USAID projects stalled, and U.S. commitments yet again came into question.

The expansion of Iranian-backed militias known as Hashd al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization Forces, is centered on Nineveh and threatening ongoing projects and Christian return. “Christian towns in Iraq increasingly look neither Christian nor Iraqi—but Iranian,” wrote Carl Anderson, CEO of the Knights of Columbus, in a Wall Street Journal op-ed.

“The policy changes under the Trump administration are making a difference,” said Rasche. “The question has always been whether or not the ship can be turned around in time. We bleed people every month.” —with reporting by Hannah Harris
FEATURES

Migrant Protection Protocols are frustrating asylum-seekers, attorneys, and judges

BY SOPHIA LEE in San Diego | PHOTO BY GREGORY BULL/AP

A BAD DAY IN COURT

Migrant Protection Protocols are frustrating asylum-seekers, attorneys, and judges
Among all the immigration policies that the Trump administration has implemented, one that’s most frustrating to immigration lawyers and judges is the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the “Remain in Mexico” program.

Under MPP, the government is no longer allowing asylum-seekers from Spanish-speaking countries to wait for their court hearings in the United States but is instead sending them to border cities in Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings.

The Department of Homeland Security claims MPP will help “restore a safe and orderly immigration process.” It also claims the policy will protect migrants from smugglers and traffickers. Meanwhile, lawyers and advocates claim “Migrant Protection Protocols” is a misnomer: It doesn’t “protect” migrants but places them in danger.

I visited the San Diego Immigration Court to witness for myself how MPP affects asylum-seekers in court. For four hours I sat in during the preliminary court hearings of asylum-seekers whom the government had sent back to Mexico under MPP.

The first thing I observed was how bored and frustrated Judge Lee O’Connor looked. He rested his chin in his right palm, dragging his cheek down as he asked the respondents a question he had been asking all day: “Why are you here without an attorney?”

The respondents, a husband and wife whose young son had fallen asleep on his father’s shoulder, replied in Spanish: “We called everyone on the list of attorneys you gave us.” The list they refer to is a list of immigration law firms that all asylum-seekers receive before their first court hearing. One asylum-seeker in Ciudad Juárez let me read his: It’s a one-page document with the names and phone numbers of pro bono law firms—four based in Washington, D.C., one based in Baltimore. The sheet is useless, as the couple found out: “Everyone we called said we need to be in the U.S. to be represented.”

The judge asked for the umpteenth time: “Did you ask the offices you called for recommendations of other lawyers?”

The husband said, “Sí. But even they all said they can’t represent us.”

The judge’s expression remained bored: “If they say they can’t help you, then you ask them for names of other lawyers to call. Did you do that?”

“Yes, but they also cannot help us.”

The husband explained that he would leave his name and phone number with the receptionist, but nobody calls back, despite his numerous attempts to reach someone.

The judge said in a tired voice: “Call anyone else?”

“The answer’s always the same: They can’t help us. Or they recommend the same people on the list.”

The judge sighed: “All right. What would you like me to do? You want additional time to find a lawyer?”

The wife spoke up: “No. We’ve tried and tried. We want to continue with court proceedings”—meaning, she wants to move on to the merits hearing, where the judge will address their legal claims for asylum in detail.

The judge raised his eyebrows: “What about looking for private attorneys?”

“We found one lawyer in Los Angeles through social media. He agreed to represent us, but he said we have to pay in advance.”

The judge searched for that attorney’s name on his database. There’s no attorney by that name in LA, he said: “You sure he’s an actual attorney?”

The respondents looked at each other, then said, “Honestly, we don’t know.”

The judge warned them about scammers. There have been too many cases of notaries public who offer legal assistance for thousands of dollars but aren’t actually qualified to represent people in immigration court. They prey on immigrants because they’re vulnerable, gullible, and desperate. As the respondents realized

Juan Carlos Perla kisses his 10-month-old son, Joshua, inside a shelter for migrants in Tijuana, Mexico. After fleeing violence in El Salvador and requesting asylum in the United States, the family was returned to Tijuana to await their hearing in San Diego.
they may have nearly been scammed, they went still.

The judge reminded them that since they have no legal visa to stay in the country, they’re currently at a master calendar hearing, a preliminary hearing that begins the government’s efforts to remove them from the country. The respondents looked at each other: “We’re confused. We’re asylum-seekers.”

Evidently they didn’t understand that even as asylum-seekers, they have to undergo a removal proceeding, from which they can ask for relief as asylum-seekers. It’s all part of due process, but immigration law is so complicated that even immigration lawyers tell me they get confused.

The judge sighed at their confusion: “If you have trouble understanding this basic thing... You need to find a lawyer. Immigration law is very, very complicated.”

The woman’s voice sounded strangled: “But we don’t have any resources to pay for an attorney.”

The judge threw up his hands: “Well, ma’am. I don’t know what to tell you. I tell you DHS has charged you with removability from the U.S., and you look confused. I can’t go forward in this case when you don’t even understand that basic thing.”

The woman protested, “But in no point in time did we try to enter illegally.” They had presented themselves at the port of entry, and then the government had sent them back to Mexicali, Mexico, under MPP.

The judge explained to them that even though they didn’t enter illegally, they can still be denied entry because they don’t have a legal visa. “These are things an attorney would be able to tell you,” he said, and declared he was giving them more time to find an attorney, even though everyone knew the likelihood of that happening was near zero.

The couple picked up their son and left the courtroom, still looking confused but now also looking dejected.

A woman stepped up with her teenage daughter. Then a man with his teenage son. Then a woman with her two toddler daughters. A man alone. Another woman alone. Over and over, the judge asked, “Why are you here without an attorney?” Everyone gave the same answer: No attorney would represent them when they’re not based in the United States.

I also saw the judge berate respondents over and over again for not filing a home address.

One respondent answered, “I don’t have a specific place I’m living in.” Like many migrants stuck in Mexican border cities under MPP, he’s homeless. He and his son are hopping from place to place, sometimes landing a bed in a shelter, or sleeping on the streets.

The judge asked: “Why is it so difficult to get a post box somewhere?”

The man said that for a while he couldn’t find a stable job, so he couldn’t afford a post office box. Another woman, when the judge asked her the same question, said she’s unfamiliar with Tijuana and got lost looking for a post office. Another man said he moves from place to place, looking for a job so he can survive the many months he has to stay in Mexico.

The judge asked each of them, “Then why not find someone you trust and use their address?”
Most of the respondents also showed up in court with their kids. It’s tough for the children—they’ve been waiting for court for up to eight hours, which is boring and tedious even for adults. The DHS attorney was sympathetic—she passed out drawing paper and crayons to fidgeting kids. The judge did not seem as sympathetic. When one little girl kept interrupting her mother, the judge snapped, “This is why you don’t bring young kids to court.” But where would parents leave their kids for a whole day in a foreign city?

Later, I met up with Margaret Cargioli, a San Diego–based immigration attorney for Immigrant Defenders Law Center, a law firm that takes immigration cases pro bono. Her firm is one of two or three immigration law firms that regularly send lawyers to Tijuana to take MPP cases—that’s a handful of lawyers for the 7,000 people sent back to Tijuana under MPP.

Cargioli said MPP has made her job as a lawyer extremely challenging. It’s hard to develop trust with her clients when they’re mostly communicating via phone calls or text, and many are so engrossed in simply surviving in Mexico that they’re unable to focus on gathering the necessary paperwork for their asylum case. She said one client’s son almost got kidnapped. Another client had to bribe local officers because they were harassing him on the streets. Yet another got caught in a shootout while visiting a store in Tijuana.

But very few migrants dare report such incidents to local police. One woman in the United States called Cargioli on behalf of a family member under MPP in Tijuana. The woman said her family—a mother and child—had been kidnapped in Tijuana, and thus the mother probably couldn’t make it to her court date. She asked how she could explain to the judge what happened, and Cargioli encouraged her to report it to Mexican authorities. “But she was too afraid,” Cargioli recalled. “She said, ‘How do you know the police there will actually help?’ She never called back.”

Cargioli said she doesn’t think MPP achieves anything positive: “I think it’s a deterrence policy. The idea is that if we make this an extremely miserable process for people, we’ll stop getting the number of individuals coming. That’s not taking into account the reality of the circumstances these people are fleeing.”

Again—that’s not possible for many migrants. They don’t know anyone they trust in Mexico.

“Well, I told you numerous times what you have to do,” the judge said. “It’s up to you. I can’t force you to do it. You’re putting yourself in jeopardy.”

Not submitting an address is a serious due process issue: Without an accurate address, the government will mail any notices that the respondents need—the “notice to appear” letter, the charging documents, court dates, copies of transcripts and appeals, the judge’s writen ruling—to “No Domicilio Conocido” or “Unknown Address.” That mail will obviously go nowhere.

That’s also a consequence of MPP. If the asylum-seekers had been allowed to stay in the United States, they would have given the address of their sponsor—typically a family member, relative, or friend living in the United States. But most of them don’t know anyone in Mexico.

At times, the judge turned his frustration toward the DHS attorney in court. Too often, he said, the government is charging the respondents with the wrong charges, mixing people who entered at port of entry with those who entered between ports of entry. People who sought admission at a port of entry should be charged as “arriving aliens,” while people who cross the border between ports of entry should be charged as “Entry Without Inspection.”

Because the judge can only rule when charges are accurate, he has to dismiss any cases with wrong charges. That day, he did so in the case of at least one respondent—a man and his young son. That hurts the man, because it means his case will restart from scratch, further prolonging his wait in Mexico, in his case Mexicali.

About half the respondents in court came from Tijuana, while others traveled to San Diego from Mexicali, which is about 110 miles away from the port of entry in Tijuana. The respondents are responsible for showing up at the port of entry on time. Some have to appear at the port of entry as early as 4 a.m. Those who don’t show up on time run the risk of the judge ordering their removal in their absence. For those who arrive on time, a bus and armed detention officers will take them to the San Diego Immigration Court and then escort them right back to Mexico.

These detention officers keep watch on them the entire day: I even saw one officer stand guard by the door as a female asylum-seeker and her daughter used the restroom.

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A migrant from El Salvador (left) shows her documents from Migrant Protection Protocols, which she must complete in English to submit at her next court hearing. U.S. asylum-seekers (above) walk away from Mexican immigration offices after they were returned by U.S. authorities to wait in Mexico under the Remain in Mexico program.
Olivia Rondeau is used to facing tough opponents. The biracial Maryland native started wrestling as a freshman in high school, and in 2017 she made history by becoming the first female wrestler to win gold at the AAU Junior Olympic Games. But her toughest battles have come in a very different arena—the online wild west of social media, where users navigate political correctness, angry mobs, and “cancel culture.”

Around nine months ago, Rondeau posted a video to her YouTube channel—previously used just for her wrestling videos—titled “Why I Am Blexiting.” The term Blexit refers to a movement founded by conservative commentator Candace Owens that encourages the “black exit” of African Americans from the Democratic Party. In the video, Rondeau described why she rejected Democratic values and policies, such as the welfare state.

Owens shared the video, and a star-struck Rondeau found herself ushered into an energetic group of like-minded young adults and teens, many of them sporting outsized online followings.

These kids log on to Twitter every day and challenge all the stereotypes of their generation by being young, black, and some of President Donald Trump’s most outspoken supporters. And sometimes, they pay a price for it.

Rondeau did not always identify as conservative. She remembers how elated she felt both times former President Barack Obama won election. “We were a big Obama family,” she told me. Her dad believed Obama’s “hope and change” platform meant big changes for the black community on mass incarceration, the drug war, and unemployment.

Eight years later, disillusioned with a presidency they felt hadn’t lived up to its promises, her parents voted for Trump. Rondeau, who had begun watching Owens’ videos, underwent her own political transformation.

“Basically, it became a thing where, we can’t trust Obama just because he’s black, and we can’t distrust people because they’re white or Republican,” Rondeau said. “It came down to who is going to do the best by our community and our country.”

Rondeau soon began to get attention for her online presence. She now boasts 1,400 YouTube followers and 26,200 Twitter followers. She also began to meet up with others in the group, some at conservative and Republican events, and even landed an invitation to the White House in February for Black History Month.
ve
Now 17, the self-described populist conservative is mastering a new kind of political commentary. He blasts out short videos on Twitter to his 310,900 followers, reacting to the news of the day and taking aim at Democratic talking points with his homegrown Georgia drawl.

It’s made him plenty of enemies. One of his regular opponents is Roland Martin, a prominent African American political commentator and former CNN contributor. In one particularly testy exchange, Martin warned that Pearson would get his “[obscenity] whipped” for getting into “grown folks’ business.” Pearson fired back that “I don’t remember ANY journalist directing such violent hate towards the Parkland kids. Different rules for conservatives, I suppose.”

Anthony Bradley, author and professor of religious studies at The King’s College in New York City, has tracked the burgeoning online activism of young black conservatives with interest. He says the unexpected nature of the combination of young, black, and conservative—“in the era of Trump of all eras”—explains some of the rancor the group has drawn.

“People are afraid of change, and if you’re going to attack a bunch of teenagers and college students,” Bradley said. Teenagers naturally fight for causes and challenge the establishment, he said: “It just so happens that this iteration of black youth rebellion for speaking up in the first place: “I consider myself very pro-black, that’s why I decided to be an activist and out against existing norms happens to be in favor of Donald Trump... and because of that, people are losing their minds.”

Pearson has had some well-documented political missteps, including a stint when he disavowed the Republican Party and backed independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign in 2015. Not long after, he recommitted to conservatism and landed on the Trump campaign. He partially attributes his missteps to not having mentors or a community around him back then.

A little over a month ago, Pearson encouraged his followers to share why they had left the Democratic Party with the hashtag #BlackNotDemocrat. Within hours, the hashtag rose to one of Twitter’s trending topics.

In a phone interview he told me he started the hashtag because “stigma is the biggest thing we have to tackle.” Pearson said he did not specifically brand the hashtag as Republican because his goal is not necessarily to convince African Americans to switch parties. Pearson said he’ll question both parties when necessary, though he thinks Democrats should be challenged not to take the black vote for granted.

Nothing quite prepared Rondeau to deal with the amount of verbal abuse she would get for disavowing the Democratic Party. Strangers called her ugly, accused her of betraying her race and of being an “Uncle Tom,” and cast other racist slurs. She said she had to report one threat to come and find her from someone who lived nearby in Maryland.

Rondeau said she believes some of the hateful comments stem from “a huge misconception that black people who consider themselves Republican are anti-black or secretly white supremacists or hate themselves.”

At first, a somewhat shaken Rondeau locked down her social media accounts to private. But she decided to resurface after considering her reasons for speaking up in the first place: “I consider myself very pro-black, that’s why I decided to be an activist and outspoken; I believe Democrat policies harm black communities the most... That’s why I want to make a change.”

She made a YouTube video responding to the insults to show “I wasn’t taking it that seriously, that I was laughing at the stupidity of people who would refuse to debate me but just call me names.”

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So when he started identifying as a conservative online in 2016, “people I thought I could call friends ... completely disavowed me as soon as I chose to think differently.” Classmates accused him of going against his race by voicing support for Republican policies.

Rodriquez had started to question Democratic policies after experiencing a night-and-day difference in quality between public schools in his Harlem neighborhood and the private school he attended after earning a scholarship. He still doesn’t understand why, faced with abysmal reading proficiency statistics, fights breaking out in the halls, and outdated textbooks in some of the worst public schools, local Democratic politicians dismissed school choice as a racist Republican idea.

After that, he started to look into other conservative ideas. “Schools were the big red pill for me,” Rodriquez said.

Rodriquez became national chairman of the Black Conservative Movement, a grassroots effort entirely run by young black teenagers. The group has 97,800-plus followers on Instagram, nearly 15,500 likes on Facebook, and 27,300 followers on Twitter. The group’s main goal is to give young African Americans an alternative to the Democratic platform.

“It’s black people’s responsibility to make parties fight for their vote,” Rodriquez said. “If parties fight for their votes—just like with school choice—then you get the best outcome.”

Justin Corbin is another teen who worked with Rodriquez in the Black Conservative Movement. Unlike Rodriquez, he grew up in a right-leaning family. He remembers listening to conservative talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck in the car.

“I don’t think my mom realized she was creating a monster when she was playing it,” Corbin said. He jumped into politics by starting a side hustle, Jumpstart Strategies, that offered social media strategy for campaigns. After being featured in Students for Trump, he connected with the other teens from the Black Conservative Movement.

Corbin told me he’s wrestled with whether the movement is simply regurgitating identity politics for the right by “encouraging hyphenation when it comes to African Americans instead of just Americans.”

He said he eventually reconciled his activism with his identity because of the strong need to reach out to African American communities: “We won’t be in good shape in five, 10, or even two years if we haven’t done something where we’re normalizing a black Trump supporter.”

Trump’s rhetoric—especially during high-profile spats with minority members of Congress or when he called Baltimore a “disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess”—is sometimes a challenge for these young black conservatives. Some of the young adults I interviewed condemned Trump’s rhetoric but said their support for his policies remained unchanged.

Toby Pegues, a black conservative in his 20s, told me via email that “if someone is going to be president, I feel that they need to handle conflict in a presidential manner.” Pegues, a Christian, added that while the Twitter spats upset him, the only way Trump would lose his support “is if he blatantly disrespected my Lord and Savior.”

Meanwhile, Rondeau said she believed Trump’s tweets about Baltimore merely gave conservatives an opportunity to respond with action. On Aug. 5, she went to North Fulton Avenue in Baltimore to participate in a street cleanup. Armed with trash bags, a group cleared used needles, garbage, and other hazards from the sidewalks and roads from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. By the end of the day, close to 200 people had participated, and they had picked up more than 12 tons of trash.

Some on Twitter condemned the cleanup as an effort of “rich white people coming in to clean up black neighborhoods.” Rondeau shrugged it off, and said she believes her critics’ tactics will backfire.

“For every hate comment, I feel like that’s one more vote for Trump because people see that and they’re like, why am I on that side?” Rondeau said. “Droves of conservatives don’t come and call people ugly and stupid, or [say] racial slurs to a black girl wearing an Obama hat.” She hopes other black teens will start to ask themselves: “Why is there a huge backlash? Why do they not want me to think that way?”

Rondeau recently began training with the women’s wrestling team at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. She took her MAGA hat with her. ©
As clouds dumped late summer rain in Liberia, William E. Pewee was on his way to work as registrar at the Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) Hospital, a 54-year-old mission hospital in the capital city of Monrovia. Although he claims not to be a good singer, before his day started Pewee sang a song of worship to God.

He’s thankful to be alive. Five years ago, he was lying sick on a hospital bed at ELWA, bleeding from his eyes, ears, and nose. He’d contracted Ebola, a dangerous virus that swept the country in 2014.
and killed thousands of people. Pewee picked up the contagious virus while praying with an ELWA patient who turned out to be positive.

Dr. Rick Sacra also caught the virus from an ELWA patient. The longtime missionary doctor, an American who had worked at the hospital since the 1990s when staffers were treating gunshot wounds from the country’s civil war, became a patient himself during the Ebola outbreak.

Today, the room where Sacra was treated for Ebola is now a cramped hospital study library. Inside, when I visited, Sacra was working with ELWA medical residents on a PowerPoint presentation regarding a case of palpable purpura. The residents discussed vasculitis, adjusted font sizes, and boiled hot water for tea to stay awake.

In the hospital’s new dental clinic, clinic manager Loranso Gbogar was taking phone calls. During the Ebola outbreak,
Gbogar came down with typhoid, and ELWA was the only hospital taking patients like him. Much of the devastation of Ebola was that other diseases and conditions went untreated as hospitals and clinics closed.

Though Pewee, Sacra, and Gbogar recovered, many others did not. The virus killed 11,000 in West Africa from 2014 to 2016, the largest Ebola outbreak in history. Liberia bore the heaviest burden of fatalities.

Amid this crisis, ELWA Hospital, run by Serving in Mission (SIM), opened the country’s first Ebola treatment unit and became one of the primary treatment centers for the disease. Without this small mission hospital, many people—not just Ebola sufferers but other patients needing emergency cesarean sections or treatment for deadly fevers—would not be here today. Not only did ELWA’s medical workers weather the epidemic, they went on to contribute to the development of life-saving treatments. The hospital is now helping rebuild local institutions and training new health workers at a time when Ebola is on the move again in Africa—a yearlong outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has so far killed about 2,000.

It’s easy to forget how much panic Americans felt about the spread of Ebola in 2014, panic that could have derailed clinical care and breakthrough research. Workers at New York’s LaGuardia Airport went on strike over fears about possible exposure to Ebola from travelers. Airport officials quarantined nurse Kaci Hickox, returning from treating Ebola patients in Sierra Leone, even though she had tested negative for the virus.

During that time, Republican politicians in the United States called for a travel ban on West Africa. At one point, the governors of New York and New Jersey ordered all health workers returning from the Ebola zone to be quarantined for three weeks upon arrival in the United States, hampering health workers from going to serve in the crisis. Donald Trump, not a candidate at the time, took to social media to condemn President Barack Obama for sending “innocent soldiers” to West Africa and to call for a ban on flights from West Africa to the United States.

Sacra and other doctors argued a travel ban would hurt clinical care and research in West Africa, ultimately hurting other countries as the virus spread with few medical workers to treat or contain it. The United States at one point even blocked Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) experts and other government personnel from working in Ebola-affected areas.

But later, CDC experts started a lab on ELWA’s campus. A partnership between U.S. federal health experts and the Liberian Ministry of Health has since resulted in the largest-ever studies on Ebola survivors and helped with the development of new vaccines.

Yet while U.S. politicians debated travel bans, ELWA hospital workers were risking their lives to treat the sick. One was deputy nursing director Marthalyne Freeman. In the hospital’s emergency room this August, Freeman rushed a
dose of adrenaline to doctors who were performing CPR on a teenager. The boy had arrived at the hospital comatose, suffering from cerebral malaria.

Five years ago, Freeman was one of the few workers who volunteered to stay at her post to treat Ebola victims. Her own family asked her not to come home while she worked in the Ebola treatment unit (ETU), worried about the risk, so she slept in a vacant bed at the hospital. At that time, the outbreak was so bad that bodies were stacked in the streets for cremation.

“I woke up, and it was like a nightmare,” she remembered. At one point, a needle penetrated her protective gear and pricked her skin while she worked in the ETU, but she did not get sick. “I believe the Bible, but I did not feel the Bible. But when I went through the Ebola crisis, I felt the Bible. It was realistic. The reality of the Word was seen.”

Joshua Sweegaye, a staffer at the affiliated ELWA radio station, remembered asking Freeman, “Are you not afraid?” She answered him, “If we are all afraid, we will die.”

While Freeman was working in the ETU, her own daughter and son-in-law, Naomi and Dorbor Sirleaf, tested positive for Ebola. The hospital admitted the couple to the unit where Freeman worked.

Freeman would tell patients afraid of the isolation unit that her own daughter was in there. Dorbor’s sister, who accompanied him to ELWA, died next to him in the ETU. He lost most of his family to the virus, 14 in all.

In the hospital chapel this summer, Naomi and Dorbor gathered for a photo with their 8-year-old twins, named Praise and Praises, who were born in ELWA Hospital.

“We are the only few who are alive,” Dorbor said. “The only person who can comfort me is mother Marthalyne.”

Survivors like Dorbor, as well as ELWA workers, faced stigmatization from fellow Liberians because of the horrific nature of the disease and how little understood it was. Dorbor recalled that his family members couldn’t draw water in their community for a while after their recovery. Nurses remembered that their neighbors avoided them because they worked at ELWA.

SIM is trying to help address this problem through its trauma healing program for survivors of Ebola. SIM missionary Nancy Writebol, who contracted Ebola while working at the hospital, now leads the program. Writebol and her Liberian counterpart Jeremiah Kollie have worked with everyone from the police to the men who staffed the much-hated cremation teams during the Ebola outbreak (see p. 57).

Writebol has experienced stigma too, even in the United States: She recalled, after being declared Ebola-free and returning home, that someone from her home church put up her hand to keep her away, fearful of getting Ebola.

Distrust of health workers has also been a hurdle to defeating the current Ebola outbreak in Congo, aside from the ongoing political violence there. About 200 health facilities have come under attack during the outbreak. Liberia has faced the same issue, but trust appears to have grown, even if patients still come to ELWA as a last resort. Dorbor Sirleaf said: “Now everyone prays for hospitals.”

When the Ebola virus hit West Africa, no treatment existed for it. But the 2014 outbreak spurred scientific research, which has lessened the severity of the Congo outbreak. Since the Liberian outbreak, medical researchers introduced new Ebola vaccines and are developing others. Writebol and Sacra both have given their antibody-filled blood to researchers working on solutions to Ebola.

Seven of those infected in the West Africa outbreak agreed to an experimental drug, ZMapp, which had only been tested on animals. Writebol was one of those seven. She remembers the ZMapp she received in 2014 was marked “not for human use.” Health workers have since used ZMapp to treat patients in Congo, lowering death rates by about 50 percent in one trial.

And now there’s a big breakthrough, better than ZMapp. Researchers just
EMILY BELZ announced two new antibody drugs that have cured 90 percent of Ebola cases for those who get treatment early. The drugs, developed by two American pharmaceutical companies and the U.S. National Institutes of Health, could halt the Congo outbreak entirely.

The scientific discovery comes in part from Congo itself. The blood of a survivor of an outbreak in Congo in 1995 helped develop one of the new antibody drugs, and both drugs descend from decades of research by Congolese doctor Jean-Jacques Muyembe.

As Congo fights its Ebola battle, ELWA Hospital’s Liberian staff is helping Liberian institutions rebuild: After the Ebola crisis, the Liberian government tapped ELWA medical director Dr. Jerry Brown to run JFK Hospital, the big government hospital in Monrovia. ELWA has become a teaching hospital, preparing Liberian medical workers to be on the front lines of the next health crisis.

While ELWA is mostly Liberian-run and self-sustaining, it has relied on outside capital to become a full-fledged teaching hospital. After the outbreak, Samaritan’s Purse built ELWA a new, larger hospital complex as well as housing for medical residents, and African Mission Healthcare is building hospital faculty housing and supporting the residency program.

Still, resources are always slim. Sacra estimates 11 experienced Liberian doctors died from Ebola, out of about 250 who were in the country at that time, undermining a health infrastructure that had just started rebuilding from 14 years of civil war.

Post-Ebola, the chaos of a limited health infrastructure remains part of ELWA workers’ everyday lives. They care for patients in kidney failure with no dialysis, for those with diabetes with no consistent insulin, for palliative patients abandoned by their families because the families can’t pay the hospital bills. The country has no intensive care unit, and it’s waiting on its first pathology lab that can do biopsies.

And ELWA has its own foibles and failures. The doctors there were frustrated for a full day by a lost key to the ultrasound room (the key turned out to be locked inside the room). Sacra stayed up until 1:45 a.m. one night writing out a remedial test for a flailing doctor in residency. At one point a hospital bed was broken, and the administrators hadn’t arranged for a replacement, so the ward was short a bed. Antony Cyrus Suah, a physician assistant who worked at ELWA during the Ebola crisis, said it was “more stressful than five years ago” because of the current demand for beds.

But those stresses lessen at the sight of someone healing. Ibrahim Ly, a young Muslim boy, came to the ELWA emergency room with cerebral malaria, a severe form of malaria with a poor prognosis. His uncle Mamadou Yéru Ly said they came to this hospital because “people told us it was good.”

In the ER, the boy lay rigid, unable to move or speak, staring blankly at the wall. He lay there as another boy with cerebral malaria died next to him. But after two days in the pediatrics ward, Ibrahim was sitting up in bed, eating. The next day he was walking around, and the hospital discharged him, the geckos on the sidewalks scattering as he skipped out.

The rest of the world has since moved on, but “the Ebola times,” as Liberians call them, still cast a shadow. The high-school graduating classes were small this year because the students started high school in the Ebola years when everything in the country shut down.

At the Liberian church on ELWA’s campus, a small tank of bleach water with a spigot stood outside for parishioners to wash their hands before a service—a practice that began in the Ebola times. At the worship service, a man giving announcements reminded everyone to keep up the practice of hand washing.

This particular Sunday at the International Church of Monrovia, Sacra was on duty for intercessional prayer. He began by reading 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day...” He thanked God for the country’s peace of the last 15 years, and then prayed against the spread of Ebola in Congo.

“We praise you for the news this week of new treatments,” he said. “Bring the outbreak of Ebola to an end.” He concluded his prayer: “We present our bodies as living sacrifices this morning.” A chorus of amens rose up.

After church, he walked to the hospital to do rounds.

Post-Ebola, the chaos of a limited health infrastructure remains part of ELWA workers’ everyday lives.
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*APY=Annual Percentage Yield. APYs are accurate as of 08/29/19 and are subject to change without notice. APY assumes that dividends remain in the account until maturity. A withdrawal will reduce earnings. At maturity, the share certificate will renew into a 12-month (24 months for Step-it-Up), regular term share certificate at the prevailing rate. A penalty will be imposed on early withdrawals from share certificates and no additional deposits can be made during the term of the share certificate except for Liquid Certificate. Rates, terms and conditions are solely within the discretion of the Board of Directors. We may limit the amount you may invest in one or more accounts to a total of $1,000,000.

Regulation D imposes a six transfer/withdrawal limit per month, which includes the following types of transactions: (1) Pre-authorized or automatic withdrawal arrangement for a transfer to the member’s other account(s) at the credit union or to a third party; Telephone transfers; or Transfers initiated by personal computer to another account at the credit union or to a third party during a calendar month. Transfers to a third party if made by check. (2) Transactions NOT included in the six transfer/withdrawal limit are as follows: Transfers or withdrawals the member makes in person, through an ATM, by mail or by telephone (which results in the mailing of a check payable to the member). Transfers from a credit union account to the same credit union for the purposes of repaying a loan.

Each account is insured up to $250,000. By members’ choice, this institution is not federally insured.
The debate about bias at Facebook and other media intensified last month as investigators headed by former GOP Sen. Jon Kyl presented an “interim report.” Kyl’s Covington & Burling law firm interviewed 133 conservatives and heard concerns that Facebook’s third-party fact-checkers “skewed to the ideological Left.”

The report, though, did not present any case studies to support those concerns, so WORLD examined one specific bias claim in an attempt to see how Facebook’s fact-checkers work. Before we get to our analysis, though, it’s important to understand the power Facebook has.

The basics: Many people get their news from social media instead of news websites. Facebook, given charges of “fake news,” relies on five outside fact-checking groups: PolitiFact, the Associated Press, FactCheck.org, Science Feedback, and Check Your Fact. Conservatives often criticize the first four. The fifth is a subsidiary of the right-leaning Daily Caller. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), part of the journalism think tank Poynter Institute, certifies the fact-checking organizations.

Individual fact-checkers at those organizations then rate posts social media users have flagged or that the fact-checkers themselves question. Facebook demotes in its news feed posts that contain (according to fact-checkers) false claims or false headlines. That means fewer views, likes, and comments for the publisher. Demotions can turn into lost opportunities to advertise or monetize through Facebook, warnings on Facebook pages, and loss of designation as a news page.

Facebook, in short, forces news outlets to choose: remove the post or face heavy consequences.

Our case study begins in July when chemistry professor Gregory Rummo learned via Twitter that Townhall.com, a conservative news site, had retracted...
NOTEBOOK

his recently published column, “Apocalyptic Sea-Level Rise—Just a Thing of the Past?” Rummo was surprised. A week earlier a Townhall.com editor had emailed him to say a Facebook fact-checker had flagged his column as “false news.” Rummo sent the editor information to validate the article and assumed that would resolve the issue. But it didn’t.

Facebook ordered Townhall.com to remove Rummo’s article because of the “false news” flag. If Townhall.com refused, it could face the penalties Facebook levies against “false news” publishers: demoted posts. No designation as a news page. No ability to make money through ads.

Rummo writes for the Cornwall Alliance, a group of Christian scholars and scientists known for their stance against “climate change alarmism.” The organization has about 200 articles published in various outlets per year, says Cornwall Alliance founder Calvin Beisner, but this is the first article to be flagged his column as “false news.” Rummo sent the editor information to validate the article and assumed that would resolve the issue. But it didn’t.

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Townhall.com never told Rummo why it purged his article—not just from Facebook, but also from Townhall.com. Townhall.com editor Leah Barkoukis did say in an email to Beisner that Facebook “would not accept anything but a retraction,” even after Rummo and Beisner sent research to back up Rummo’s claims.

Who decided Rummo’s column was false news? Climate Feedback, a division of Science Feedback, fact-checked Rummo’s article and posted the analysis to its website. According to the fact-checker’s website, “The Climate Feedback editor provides feedback to the journalists and/or editors of the outlet of the original article reviewed.”

But Rummo never heard from Climate Feedback—other than a tweet boasting the article’s retraction with what Rummo called “lethal triumphalism.” It tagged Rummo and Palm Beach Atlantic University, where Rummo teaches.

Townhall.com replaced Rummo’s article with a note saying the column “incorrectly cited a graph.” But Rummo accurately referenced a graph that “shows two previous periods when temperatures were warmer than they are now,” namely the Roman Warm Period and the Medieval Warm Period. Rummo says his article, which focused on sea level rise, “wasn’t really breaking any new ground” by including the graph.

If climate scientists disagree with the cited study’s findings, they should take issue with the study itself, Rummo says. Climate Feedback’s report calls Rummo’s citation of the graph “factually inaccurate” with “flawed reasoning” even though Rummo accurately stated what the graph showed. “It wasn’t really a fact that was incorrectly reported,” he said. “It was the fact that [Climate Feedback reviewers] don’t like.”

Climate Feedback subscribes to the IFCN code of principles, which requires a commitment to nonpartisanship, fairness, and an “open & honest corrections policy,” among other qualifications. Rummo and Beisner don’t consider the retraction nonpartisan or fair. The IFCN says it expects “fact-checkers to be more committed to correcting the record than anyone else” and requires its members to have “robust corrections policies.”

Is it possible to appeal the decision? Technically, yes. Townhall.com would need to appeal to the fact-checkers that found issue with Rummo’s article. But the website hasn’t appealed. I asked Townhall.com editors about the decision, but they did not respond to my phone calls or emails. They seem to be

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Facebook’s fact-checker considered nonfactual an article showing a graph indicating that the Roman Warm Period actually happened. He could have read an expert account on the matter by a distinguished professor of classics, with vetting by a major university press.

In The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, & the End of an Empire (Princeton, 2017), Kylie Harper discusses why the two centuries on each side of A.D. 1 were so glorious for Rome. He gives considerable credit to global warming, or at least to the “Roman Warm Period” (also called the Roman Climate Optimum, or RCO). Contemporary comments, melted Alpine glaciers, tree rings, and other evidence left Harper believing that “warmth, precipitation, and stability characterized the RCO in the circum-Mediterranean.”

Harper also notes that high, stable solar activity and low volcanic activity contributed to Roman warmth. (Vesuvius was an exception.) Harper’s summary: “The climate was the enabling background of the Roman miracle. The RCO turned the lands ruled by Rome into a giant greenhouse.” Then cold centuries came, and “one of history’s most conspicuous civilizations found its dominion over nature less certain than it had ever dreamed.” —by Marvin Olasky

A copy of the graph that Rummo used to validate the position taken in the article that Townhall.com retracted

* Temperature Reconstruction* for N. Hemisphere, 1-2000AD shows Modern Warm Period Not Exceptional

Temperature (°C) anomaly relative to the 1961-90 mean

<table>
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<th>Year AD</th>
<th>Roman Warm Period</th>
<th>Medieval Warm Period</th>
<th>Modern Warm Period</th>
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following the adage “Don’t poke the bear.”

Rummo also decided against appealing because he didn’t want to “stir up the hornet’s nest.” Whether or not fact-checkers agree with Rummo’s claims, Facebook’s ability to silence one side of an argument is alarming. And Rummo wasn’t even debating the amount or cause of global warming now: He was referring to a scholarly report on temperatures two millennia ago.

What’s next? Last month Facebook gave fact-checkers free reign of Instagram as well. Instagram (which Facebook owns) will limit the audience reach of “false information” posts by downplaying them on the site’s “Explore” page. The concept is comparable to Facebook’s, except Instagram users won’t even be notified when their posts are flagged.

Facebook/Instagram now wields doubly dangerous authority. Its fact-checking partnerships are intended to limit the spread of false news. But if fact-checkers are biased or just mistaken, they can stifle debate and even historical research that challenges current pieties.

Facebook last month announced new initiatives to address perceived anti-conservative bias: Four staff members will now deal with bias complaints. Facebook also announced it will appoint an oversight board with “a diverse range of intellectual viewpoints.” We’ll see whether that result is different from Google’s: When some on the left protested the appointment of Heritage Foundation head Kay Coles James to an ethics board, Google dissolved the board before it ever met.

Media Research Center President Brent Bozell denounced the Kyl report and Facebook’s response, calling it “nothing of substance.” But Kyl’s team promises additional reporting in several months. Kyl said, “There is still significant work to be done.”

### Health

**Scars to heal**

*IN A COUNTRY RAVAGED BY WAR AND EPIDEMIC, AN AMERICAN EBOLA SURVIVOR AND A LIBERIAN PASTOR HELP RESIDENTS RECOVER FROM TRAUMA*  
*by Emily Belz in Monrovia, Liberia*

In August, Nancy Writebol, a missionary with SIM International, celebrated exactly five years of being healed of Ebola. She had contracted the virus during the 2014 outbreak while helping spray health workers with decontaminating bleach at Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia.

On this anniversary of leaving the U.S. hospital where she received treatment, she made dinner with her husband David Writebol, sitting at the table in the same house in Liberia where she had been sick and isolated before her medical evacuation from the country. The Writebols talked almost laughingly about all they went through. They’re a cheerful, jocular couple with a long career in hard places.

But certain memories still make Writebol cry. When she got out of the hospital, she was so thankful to be alive and Ebola-free that she was caught off guard by the way people treated her and her husband afterward. Close friends avoided her, fearful about Ebola. She carried an official letter declaring her to be a safe, noninfectious human being, but at one U.S. airport agents pulled her aside and brought out people in protective gear who said they were going to call in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“We were almost afraid to be seen because we didn’t know how people would respond to us,” said Writebol. “To this day it’s still painful.”

Soon after returning to Liberia with SIM in 2015, Nancy Writebol began work as a trauma healing facilitator for Ebola survivors in a country with the barest of mental health resources. She can identify with Liberians not only in terms of surviving Ebola, but also in having her home looted right after she was medically evacuated—something many Liberian survivors experienced.

Evangelical Church of Liberia Pastor Jeremiah Kollie works...
with Writebol to lead trauma healing sessions and train facilitators. They point out they are not trained psychologists, but simply offer Biblical counseling resources.

“People can put on brave faces and pretend that all is well, but in their closets they are hurting,” said Kollie, who was displaced during Liberia’s civil war. “When you talk about what is deeply buried in your heart, that is healing. It’s able to equip you to face future challenges.”

Kollie and Writebol use curriculum adapted for Liberia from the American Bible Society, offering what they say is the only Biblically based trauma healing in the country. The curriculum goes through basic principles of grieving, anger, and forgiveness, and then addresses specific situations such as domestic abuse, rape, or living in the midst of conflicts. Kollie helps too with cultural contextualization. The word “trauma” implies going mad to Liberians, so the facilitators use words like “heart wound.”

On ministering to women who have been raped, the curriculum says, “They should be allowed to say how angry and ashamed they feel. It is very common for rape victims to be angry with God. This is okay. God is able to accept their anger and still love them. It is better for them to be truthful about their feelings than to hide them.”

Kollie and Writebol have led healing sessions with rape victims, the paramilitary, the police, firefighters, children orphaned by Ebola, and men who worked in the national crematory during the Ebola crisis.

The crematory group had to take infectious bodies from families and burn them instead of giving the traditional washing and burial. Because those men did something culturally horrific, they felt the full stigma of the country while also occasionally coming across the corpses of people they knew. Their work felt like a “crime,” Kollie said.

Many of the crematory workers turned to alcohol and drugs to cope. When Writebol and another Evangelical Church of Liberia pastor hosted the first trauma healing group with them soon after the crisis ended, she could tell the men weren’t ready to discuss what they had been through. She told them to call her when they were ready. A year later, they did, and went through the entire program. Some are doing well now, although one that Writebol knows of is still struggling and drug-addicted.

The trauma groups often lead to a discussion of other needs. One girl, a junior in high school, came through their trauma healing program after losing both of her parents to Ebola. A friend of the girl’s family had taken her into his home, but the man ended up impregnating her. The trauma healing group provided counseling resources to her as she had the baby and graduated from high school. She wants to go to nursing school but will have to find tuition money.

Kollie and Writebol already have so few resources that it’s difficult for them to meet such needs. Resources are especially slim now that SIM has appointed Writebol the head of its global trauma healing initiative, which takes her to trainings around the world.

When the European Union had offered a grant of 750,000 euros for trauma healing in Liberia, the SIM team wrote a proposal. But Writebol said the EU cut their application.

“We didn’t address how global warming affects trauma,” said Writebol with a wry smile. “So they said, ‘We’re sorry, but you’re not being considered.’... Who writes a grant based on global warming affecting trauma?”

Kollie acknowledges the deep traumas of war and Ebola and notes that forgiveness is the biggest issue they work through in the group sessions. But he also emphasizes the trauma of everyday life in one of the poorest countries in the world, where economic opportunities seem out of reach for average residents.

“The war has come and gone. We stay struggling,” said Kollie, noting the regular hopelessness Liberians feel. Many believe that politicians have betrayed them and will probably betray them again. “[The trauma initiative] has allowed people to express their hurts and take their pain to the cross, where they find healing.”

A medical worker in Monrovia, Liberia; healthcare workers transport a body for burial (below).
In 1986, Hal Higley found a letter addressed to his wife in the mail. When he asked Kathi, she said it was from a friend in Louisiana, but their strained marriage had left him suspicious. Later, as they put their three kids in the car to go to dinner, Hal slipped inside to search for the letter and found it hidden in a drawer. When he read it, he said, his “whole world fell apart.” The letter was from another man.

Hal and Kathi had been married 18 years. Her father had abused and raped her, so Kathi entered the marriage expecting Hal to rescue her. Hal’s authoritarian father and military experience influenced him to control everything in the marriage: balancing the checkbook, paying the bills, putting gas in the car—and even how many children they had.

Over time, Kathi became miserable and resentful toward Hal. When the Air Force sent him to Greenland, she anticipated “a year of freedom.” Instead, managing the three young children and the tasks her husband usually handled made things even harder. On top of that, someone broke into their house, and a tornado damaged their property. Hal returned with no idea how hard things were for Kathi.

Something else was different when he got home: Kathi had started dating another man. When the Higleys moved from Louisiana to New York, Kathi and her lover secretly kept in touch by mail. That’s when Hal found the letter. The couple went to a chaplain for counseling, to little effect. Hal prayed, argued with Kathi, and lost 15 pounds from the stress. Eventually, he told her to return to Louisiana and decide if she would stay in the marriage.

Kathi agreed, feeling angry that Hal had found the letter but also convicted that the affair was wrong. The decisive moment came in Louisiana when the Christian friend she was staying with told her, “Go home. Your husband loves you.” Kathi said it took the friend being “brave enough to say that to me.... I knew that was the truth.”

Hal remembers picking up Kathi at the airport: She said she had decided to stay in the marriage, but her expression said she wasn’t happy about it. Hal wondered, “How do I put this all back together again?” He started by getting their family into a good church, something they had not prioritized during all their military moves, despite being Christians. Kathi remembers Hal chose to love her, despite her unkindness. She said, “The biggest thing that he did was he never brought it up again.”

Through their church, Kathi took a 12-week class about dealing with the past. The next-to-last chapter was on forgiveness: “I knew I’d come a long way, and I knew I had to forgive my parents, but I just wasn’t there,” said Kathi. So she took the class again. At the end of the next 12 weeks, she could forgive her abusive parents. As Kathi understood God’s forgiveness, she stopped holding things against Hal: “I really fell in love with my husband.” They began to enjoy talking and spending time together. Others observed the new joy in their marriage and asked what they were doing differently. The Higleys were eager to help. They started a marriage ministry in 1998.

Last year they celebrated 50 years of marriage. They live in Virginia, near some of their grown children and 11 grandchildren. “It wasn’t all roses,” Hal says, “but I can’t imagine a better situation now, loving my wife more, or any marriage that’s any better than ours.”
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Elizabeth

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Pressuring women  
[Aug. 17, p. 37] The comment that fatherhood rarely interrupts men’s careers does not sit well with me. I have given up many opportunities in my career because they would have hurt my family, and so have many other fathers.

—PHILIP COYLE / Hazle Township, Pa.

Leaving hate behind  
[Aug. 17, p. 42] Thank you for this enlightening insight into the formation of people who join hate groups. I will add this to my prayer list. Sophia Lee is a treasure.

—KATHLEEN BARRETT / Gaston, Ind.

I never tire of reading about how the Lord changes people’s hearts in truly radical ways. Often, we get to be part of that change through relationships.

—ALISON TWEED AGNEW on Facebook

The fact that the mainstream media sensationalize and exaggerate racism doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. I’m glad that WORLD faces the facts.

—MICHAEL PREWITT on Facebook

Good timing, given the recent shootings. Thank you for reporting honestly while reminding us of our hope in Jesus, who can change hearts and minds no matter how twisted!

—BETSY WILLIAMS on Facebook

Lee skillfully showed how only the love that enables us to honor the image of God in our enemies heals the festering wound of racism.

—BRENDAN BOSSARD on wng.org

Back to basics  
[Aug. 17, p. 56] I thank God for giving Josh Boehr the courage to deconstruct the youth ministry at his church. As a public-school educator, I get worn down by the pressure to keep kids “engaged” when there is little pressure on the kids to listen and learn. Thank you, once again, for letting me know I am not alone in this upside-down world.

—LEE TAYLOR / Dade City, Fla.

Maybe if leaders communicated our relationship with Christ instead of manufacturing fun or drumming rules into people, they would know how wonderful He really is.

—GWEN RUSHING on Facebook

There should be a balance. We had fun in my youth group, playing crazy games and hanging out with friends, but my youth pastor was also serious about discipleship and led in-depth Bible studies.

—ANNA STEWART on Facebook

As they get older, the youth in this article will probably be better able to integrate into their church than many who can’t make the shift from fun and games to a sanctuary full of adults.

—MARK & KIM NEWHOUSE on Facebook

We have taken this approach at our small church for the last decade. We have a vibrant, God-loving youth group that is an integral part of our ministries, from greeting to community outreach to reaching out to shut-ins. We are very blessed.

—NANCY SCHROEDL KRIZAN on Facebook

Too often ministry leaders take their cues from what others are doing rather than looking to the simplicity of the Scriptures.

—CLIFF STOLTZFUS / Cochranville, Pa.

These are timely thoughts as we plan a trip to far west Texas, far away from any cities. There we’ll have ample opportunity to consider the works of His hands spilled across the dark sky each night.

—PENNY PALMORE BEATTY on Facebook

Human Race  
[Aug. 17, p. 10] Josh Harris was devoured by our adversary the devil, and the rest of us should be of sober spirit and on the alert. Many professing Christians throughout history have made the same decision. Our hope is not on fallen men but in our sovereign God.

—LORENA SARUWATARI / Camarillo, Calif.
I’m saddened to hear the report about Harris. I can’t live the Christian life on my own either. As Paul wrote, “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.”

—A. (TED) BROWNE / Martinsburg, W.V.

Madcap mission

—CHRISTY DAVIS NORDSTROM on Facebook

Off to college
[Aug. 17, p. 63] Excellent piece. It’s not just that Christian students in college bow to stronger intellects because they are unprepared, but that they bow to the spirit of the age because they lack spiritual wisdom. They don’t know they’re facing a battle, like the generation of Israel that was “unfamiliar with war.”

—SUZANNA PETERSON MCDOWELL on Facebook

Woodstock won
[Aug. 17, p. 28] We celebrate with memoirs and festivals this highly revised history of the ‘60s, all while the tentacles of its deconstruction continue to deceive and destroy us.

—INDIA TORNELL on Facebook

The shape of fraud
[Aug. 17, p. 5] I agree that gerrymandering is political abuse. My congressional district is shaped like a huge U and crosses half of Arizona. Driving the entire district on the freeway with no stops takes eight hours. My congressman’s office is a four-hour drive from me, but I can still call him!

—KATIE LAMBERT on Facebook

Who Killed Garrett Phillips?
[Aug. 17, p. 21] The botched investigation doesn’t surprise me. More than 50 years ago I went to college in Potsdam, N.Y., where Phillips was found strangled. Even then the students had a nickname from The Andy Griffith Show for the police: Barney.

—HEINRICH ERBES / McLean, Va.
On making lists

THE PRACTICE HAS ITS EARTHLY AND SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

I’m a great believer in making lists. This is partly because I have a poor memory, and also because I think it is a good practice of a well-ordered life. My husband doesn’t make lists. Just saying.

I have a list on the refrigerator for groceries, with an asterisk near items not found at Aldi’s: faucet filter at O’Neil’s; mattress cover at Ambler medical supplies. I have a list on the counter for the day’s tasks that I wrote the night before: Bring broken microwave to town ship recyclables; take hamburger out of freezer; read book on Six-Day War; write essay; tell David I love him.

My kitchen calendar functions as a kind of list. It has people’s birthdays in red, and in regular ink the sundry commitments: Dad to foot doc; sympathy card for the Cnossens; Trans Wellness Conference downtown (see “A three-day circus” at wng.org). Last year I perused the box of calendars saved in the attic since 1985, hoping to jog my memory of the children’s childhood, but they were not very elucidating. Common entries: “J. to soccer,” “dog to vet.”

I have tried to convert my husband to making lists, but it’s evidently not his thing. He says it’s because he’s an ISTP, with borderline “S” and “P” scores, while I’m a strong ISTJ. That will mean something to Myers-Briggs personality test aficionados. For others, the gist is that I’m task-oriented while he’s a free spirit or some-
thing, I don’t remember exactly.

My mother was not warm (as I learned only as an adult from comparing notes with friends), but she made lists! Which put me in good standing for adulthood. If I had to choose only one of the two above-mentioned traits in a person raising me, I would be hard-pressed to forfeit the trait of organization for a little extra warmth. I turned out alright. ... Didn’t I? (Insert Gary Larson cartoon of deranged three-eyed monster here.)

Once in middle age I said to my mother, “Ma, do you realize that all my life you have asked me to remind you to do this or that—pick up milk, mend a sock—and I have never once done it?” “It’s OK,” she consoled. “Just saying it out loud helped me remember—plus I make lists.”

There are certain kinds of lists God solemnly proscribes—to wit, the collecting of other people’s sins against us. Sometimes when we are aggrieved and inclined to inflict pain, we may find ourselves mentally building a case against the offending party. If that offending party is a sister or husband, we may have amassed a lengthy scroll: “You slept on the train the whole way from Seoul to Pusan on our wedding day and left me to ponder the wisdom of what I had just agreed to.”

This kind of list-making has to cease and desist, if for none other than the practical reason that the fellow human in your personal defendant’s cage may have gathered a list of his own even thicker than yours, and more importantly that the ledger in heaven with your name on it may far outweigh your petty gripes (Matthew 18:21-35).

There is no getting around the plain English of the following: “If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15).

The best list I ever drew up was one day when I got so fed up with a defeated area in my life that I sat down and wrote the specific sins on paper; then brutally examined my heart for what desires were being frustrated (James 4:1); then brainstormed the Bible for what it prescribed on the subject, and jotted the verses. I drove with the paper to the cemetery, located the most remote spot, knelt down, spread the sheet on the ground before God, raised hands upward, and confessed them, seeking forgive-

ness. I followed this with concrete resolutions to God (Psalm 116:18) to not persist in these sins, by the dearly purchased grace of Christ.

I like the short list Evan Roberts went around Wales exhorting Welshmen to in the 1904 Revival: “Confess all known sin; get rid of everything doubtful; obey the Spirit immediately; proclaim Christ publicly.”

Hard to improve on a list like that. ☺
Vanishing dance
LESSONS ON THE DECLINE OF LIBERAL JUDAISM

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year’s Day, begins this year the evening of Sept. 29. Some synagogues and temples will be crowded the way churches are on Easter, but most won’t have many worshippers on a typical Sabbath.

Do those who don’t know history repeat the errors of others? A book published 85 years ago—Jewish Theological Seminary professor Mordecai Kaplan’s Judaism as a Civilization—led many Jews away from Judaism. Books with similar themes today are undermining Biblical Christianity.

Kaplan before World War II went on speaking tours, praising Judaism as a fine result of natural human development rather than divine inspiration. He said the Hebrew Bible was not God’s Word, merely a key document in the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. Noah’s flood was not a mega-drowning but a writer’s device to get our attention. Exodus was a work of fiction rather than an actual history of liberation from bondage.

Kaplan said young people were abandoning a Judaism based on the supernatural, for they did not find Biblical accounts believable. For the sake of the children, professors should present the Bible as merely “ancient religious folklore... there would be once and for all an end to that mental conflict which has alienated Jewish youth from their religion.”

Kaplan taught that the Bible is not special: “Beliefs similar to those found in the Bible about God arise among all peoples at a certain stage of mental and social development... The truths established by the various sciences of human nature and history no longer permit us to concede that Israel received a type of revelation or communication that was outside the order of nature.”

For the sake of the children, Jews should view Darwinian evolution as not only true but joyful: “The Darwinian conception of the descent of man from the lower animals... holds forth the promise of man’s evolving into a much higher type of being than he is now. Man has so far transcended his original animal nature as to possess reason and spirit.”

After World War II, many Jews learned of the Holocaust and saw incredible tragedy, but Kaplan saw man still progressing toward “the eventual dominance of his rational and ethical sense over his sensual appetites and savage lusts.” He published a complete siddur (prayer book) that omitted references to basic Jewish doctrines. A supernatural God who hears prayers? Gone. God punishes evil? Gone.

Orthodox rabbis vehemently disagreed. They called Kaplan a heretic and agreed “to excommunicate him and to separate him from the community of Israel until he fully repents.” Some publicly burned a copy of Kaplan’s prayer book in a New York City hotel.

Kaplan pushed back by starting within Judaism a “Reconstructionist” strain that amounted to a doughnut faith: Doughy but with a hole in the middle, where theology should be. Kaplan’s son-in-law, Ira Eisenstein, reported that the great professor at prayer times “would put on tallis [prayer shawl] and tefillin [phylacteries] and read from John Dewey,” the progressive sage.

Kaplan also published The New Haggadah for the Pesach Seder. (A haggadah is a prayer book used at Passover meals.) It was “new” because it minimized the miracles of the Exodus story, but it apparently did not become new enough. Now a trip to Amazon.com or other sites yields titles like Haggadah for Jews & Buddhists, A Hip Hop Haggadah, The Hyper-Modern Ancient With-It Traditional Haggadah, the Love and Justice in Times of War Haggadah (for LGBT users), and the punny Haggadah Good Feeling About This.

The forecast of the Orthodox rabbis was right. Kaplan’s “Reconstructionism” did not satisfy. The sect still has a minor presence in Judaism, but most rebels against Orthodox Judaism did not get off at the Reconstructionist bus stop. One of my cousins became a Jubu, trying to meld Moses and Buddha. Many became atheists. Some, surprised by Christ, became evangelicals (like me) or—like Robert Novak and Hadley Arkes—Catholics.

Today, millions who grew up in Christian homes are asking: What difference does the Bible make? We might think the way to hold onto them is to say, “Not much. Believe in evolution. Have an abortion.” That’s Biblically wrong, of course, but—judging by the Jewish experience—it’s also impractical. Judaism’s disappearing numbers teach that expecting faith, while lacking a theological core, is tap-dancing in the air.

Kaplan said the Hebrew Bible was not God’s Word, merely a key document in the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people.
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