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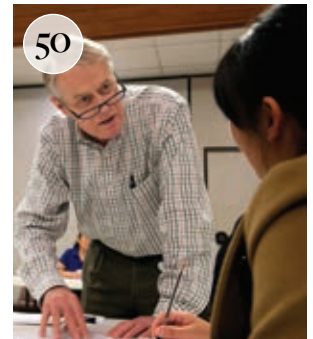
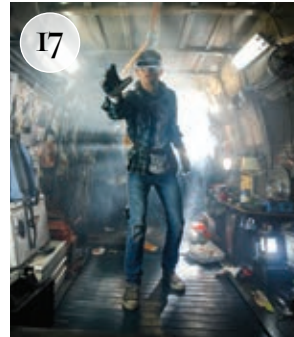
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Notes from the CEO

D

o not underestimate the digital revolution. It's been a little more than 10 years since the first iPhone rolled out, and even among WORLD's passionate-for-print membership, nearly 40 percent of you consider your mobile device your primary means of consuming news. By contrast, less than 10 percent of you turn primarily to a newspaper.

These stats come from our recent WORLD member survey. Here are a few more:

It might seem counterintuitive, but 6 percent of you don't read print magazines at all. That means one of three things: that you're reading the mobile edition, or that WORLD Radio or WORLD Digital are the primary ways you benefit from WORLD. Our daily online news, The Sift, is popular with 73 percent of you.

The survey also told us what you like most about WORLD Magazine. Our Year in Review issue is your favorite of our special issues, with Books of the Year a close second. The "Features" section of the magazine is your favorite, but not by a wide margin. "Culture," "Voices," and "Dispatches" are close behind. Many of you would like more international coverage. A huge number of you enjoy our Hope Awards coverage, yet 85 percent of you have never voted in our Hope Awards contest. I'm curious why that is.

You gave us some basic demographic facts: More than 80 percent of you have been married at least 10 years. Almost a quarter of you describe your church as "non-denominational." Baptists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans together make up over 40 percent of you.

What cheers me most is how seriously you take our mission of Biblically objective journalism. Overwhelmingly (greater than 95 percent), you told us you'd rather hear the truth about a story than hear something that makes you feel good, or something that supports your preconceptions. And just as overwhelmingly, you said that journalism ought to help in the renewal of your mind. Your commitment to the mission certainly helps to bolster ours.

Kevin

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the world and those who dwell therein."
—PSALM 24:1*

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MISSION STATEMENT

Biblically objective journalism that informs,
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AP



A mouthful of bluff

TODAY, EVEN THE ADULTS ARE TELLING FIBS

→ A friend from Pennsylvania told me the story 25 years ago, but I still remember the depressingly funny details.

He was mostly retired but drove a public school bus to augment his income. Glancing in his rearview mirror, my friend noticed that one of his young passengers was breaking the no-gum-chewing rule designed to keep the buses passably clean.

My friend reported: “When I asked the boy if he was in fact chewing gum, he said no, so I told him to open his mouth—and behold, a wad big enough to choke a Dalmatian. The boy was clearly thinking things through now, and seemed to be grasping the possibility that telling a lie was maybe going to get him into more trouble than just chewing gum.

“So I decided to mix a little mercy with my discipline. I tore up his ‘ticket,’ and headed a different direction by asking him (in private, of course) whether he knew the Ten Commandments. No, he said—but then, spurred by a streak of optimism, added that he *might* know some of them. ‘Good,’ I responded. ‘Tell me the ones you know.’

“‘Freedom of the press,’ he stated proudly. Zonked, I asked him to repeat what he’d said. ‘Freedom of the press,’ he pled—and then added, ‘The Bill of Rights.’ And he was not kidding.”

Well. Little liars learn their craft first from their sin nature; check out Adam and Eve. Then they perfect the art by watching all the slick and not-so-slick examples they see around them as they grow up.

So it’s no longer honesty that we exalt as a national virtue. Instead, these days it has become one’s ability to fib his way out of a political quagmire that wins the electoral rewards. Appoint enough special counsel lawyers; schedule enough congressional hearings; fire enough top personnel; bluff your way through enough *Washington Post* or network TV interviews. Do all that once or twice for practice—and then repeat the process a few

times over—and see if you’re any less confused than the poor little eighth-grader on the bus in Pennsylvania.

So have you been tempted to hijack that big school bus, head for Washington, D.C., and load it up with all the bald-faced liars we can find? Let’s run them out of town—once and for all! Let’s drain the swamp of every truth-breaker we can identify. Ready?

Problem is, we’re dealing with several categories of habitual falsifiers. Where in Washington do we start? The temptation is to start with the politicians. Everybody does. But here’s a troubling test: Whom do you trust to stay behind and make things right? Let’s turn the process upside down for a minute and start by assembling a brief list of politicians whose words you consider as good as gold. Jot down even six examples of statesmen whose words you utterly trust. Now do you see how challenging the honesty test really is?

In Category Two are the media who report on Category One. This

includes the giant media mainstreamers—with their often well-earned reputation for peddling Fake News—all the way down to the increasingly influential social media whose digital gossip collectively shapes the thinking of millions of Americans. Whether those opinions are accurate is quite another matter.

(In between, we shouldn’t ignore the plethora of voices coming from amateur reporters, commentators, lobbyists, and other would-be political leaders whose inexperience and failure to fact-check too often keep them from providing an accurate, faithful picture. If you ever think WORLD has gotten off the believability track, we welcome your inquiries! Our editorial team thrives on the transparency of truth-telling.)



Being lied to is never fun. Discovering that you’ve been deceived is a souring experience—and such a discovery on the part of millions may partially explain the unhappy tone so prevalent in today’s culture.

There is, however, something a good bit worse than being lied to by others. That’s the discovery that you’ve been deceiving yourself. You’ve looked in your media mirror, and you see something that suggests you weren’t as careful as you should have been in pursuing the truth. What a good time to stop and ask God’s Spirit to saturate us all with new—and frequent—doses of His eternal truth! ☺



There is, however, something a good bit worse than being lied to by others. That’s the discovery that you’ve been deceiving yourself.



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DISPATCHES

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Teenagers rally

Protesters fill Pennsylvania Avenue on March 24 during a “March for Our Lives” rally in Washington, D.C., that drew an estimated 180,000 people. Gun control advocacy groups organized rallies across the nation involving high school students calling for stricter gun control legislation.

JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP



Counting the cost

REPUBLICANS TURN THEIR BACKS ON PROMISES TO DEFUND PLANNED PARENTHOOD *by Jamie Dean*

➔ A few hours after President Donald Trump signed a \$1.3 trillion spending bill to keep the federal government funded through September, satirical news website *The Babylon Bee* ran a stinging headline: “Republicans Clarify That By ‘Defund Planned Parenthood’ They Meant ‘Give Them \$500 Million Every Year.’”

The fake-news-for-laughs carried an unfunny truth: After months of lofty promises from Republicans and Trump to defund the nation’s largest abortion business, the GOP-controlled Congress passed a bill that keeps the funds flowing. And President Trump signed it.

Planned Parenthood performed 321,384 abortions last year.

In December, the Department of Justice began laying the groundwork for a possible investigation into Planned Parenthood over the sale of aborted baby parts—an illegal practice brought to light by a series of under-

cover videos released by the Center for Medical Progress in 2015. (Planned Parenthood has denied wrongdoing.)

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, was among 23 Senate Republicans who refused to vote for the spending bill in March: “It continues to fund Planned Parenthood, a corrupt organization whose horrifying abortion practices should preclude it from receiving taxpayer dollars.”

The abortion giant insists it doesn’t use federal funds to conduct abortions, but as pro-lifers have pointed out for years, money is fungible,

Trump speaks about the \$1.3 trillion spending bill (above); a pro-life rally in Denver (right).



and having more funds for non-abortion services frees up money for offering abortions.

When it comes to those non-abortion services, Planned Parenthood points to its cancer screenings and—ironically—a smattering of prenatal care, but it also touts cross-hormone therapy for men and women identifying as transgender.

At least 90 House Republicans also opposed the March spending bill, with many lamenting the spending increases in areas they thought should be cut back, not expanded.

President Trump said he wasn’t happy with the bill either and had tweeted that he might veto the legislation because it didn’t fully fund the border wall or address issues regarding DACA recipients. Trump said he decided to sign the bill “as a matter of national security” because it increased funding for the military.

Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., told *The Atlantic* the Republican leadership agreed to a trade with Democrats in order to get the bill passed: more domestic spending for more defense spending. Democrats expressed delight. “We don’t have the House. We don’t have the Senate. We don’t have the presidency,” Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said. “But we produced a darn good bill for the priorities we believe in.”

A tweet from the Heritage Foundation called the bill’s bloated spending and the failure to defund Planned Parenthood an “embarrassing rundown of broken promises.”

The president signed the bill the day before tens of thousands of protesters flooded Washington, D.C., to demand

tighter gun control laws in the wake of the Parkland, Fla., school shooting that killed 17 people in February.

Legislators continue to debate what steps could

BY THE NUMBERS

prevent similar shootings in the future, and it's a gut-wrenching issue for families and students grappling with the sudden loss of loved ones cut down by violence. But it's also a deeply complex issue, since no one knows when a madman will strike, what kind of weapon he'll use, or what could stop him.

With abortionists, it's much clearer. They post office hours. Thousands of unborn children will die this week, and many conservatives hope Republicans will someday keep the promise to stop giving taxpayer money to the groups that facilitate those deaths.

Governing is complicated. Spending bills are complex. Politics grow thorny. But sometimes, moral clarity is simple—even if it's costly.

We see it in Leah Sharibu, a 15-year-old Nigerian girl who refused to renounce her Christian faith in exchange for her freedom. Boko Haram militants kidnapped Leah and 110 other girls from a school in February.

By late March, Leah was the only girl still in captivity after terrorists released the other students. "She was about to board the vehicle to bring them back," her mother told reporters. "Her friends said they tried to convince her, but she will not convert to Islam. Boko Haram said since she will not convert to Islam she should remain behind. That was how they left her."

During the same week, a French police officer (see p. 28) faced his own moment of truth. When a Moroccan-born gunman claiming allegiance to the Islamic State took hostages at a supermarket in Trèbes, France, on March 23, Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame made a simple calculation: He had everything to lose, and he risked it all to save someone else.

Beltrame volunteered to take the place of a female hostage. Hours later, Beltrame lay dead, reportedly with his throat slit.

The officer was a practicing Catholic, and chaplain Dominique Arz said that Beltrame "radiated" his faith: "To believe is not only to adhere to a doctrine. It is first to love God and his neighbor, and to testify of his faith concretely in everyday life." ●

2,223

The number of pages in the \$1.3 trillion omnibus spending bill President Donald Trump signed on March 23.

2.6%

The percentage of high-school football players who go on to play Division I football, according to the NCAA.

3,130

The number of people Iraqi officials have sentenced to death for terrorism-related crimes since 2013, according to an Associated Press analysis. Since 2014, about 250 convicts have been executed so far for involvement with ISIS.

24%

The increase in cassette tape player sales reported by the U.K. supermarket chain Tesco over the past year.

146,000

The increase in population in the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metropolitan area last year, the biggest numerical increase for any U.S. metro area, according to the Census Bureau.





Resigned

Andy Savage resigned from his position at Highpoint Church in Memphis, Tenn., on March 20, after an incident of sexual misconduct became public. Twenty years ago Savage was a college student serving as a youth pastor in Houston, Texas, when he initiated a sexual encounter with Jules Woodson, a 17-year-old girl under his spiritual care. Woodson told church leaders at the time, and they asked her to remain silent. Woodson brought the matter to public attention in January. Savage had been serving as a teaching pastor at Highpoint Church. Highpoint leaders told the media they did not find any further instances of abuse but supported Savage's resignation.

Bombed

Mark Anthony Conditt, the suspected bomber who terrorized Austin, Texas, for three weeks, blew himself

up on March 21 after leaving a recorded confession. His first three bombs were in packages delivered to households on the east side of the city. A 75-year-old woman was severely injured. Anthony House, a 39-year-old father, and Draylen Mason, a high-school student, were both killed. A fourth bomb, attached to a trip wire, wounded two men on a street in the more affluent southwest Austin. Then a fifth package exploded in a FedEx van en route to the city. Local and federal authorities tracked Conditt, 23, to a hotel but were unable to capture him alive.

Killed

Sacramento police shot and killed a man found holding a cell phone in his grandmother's yard. Police said they had thought the cell phone was a gun. They tracked down Stephon Clark, who is black, after reports that a man fitting

Clark's description had been breaking car windows with a toolbar. Police body camera footage shows the officers telling him to stop and show his hands. Clark fled to the backyard, and two police officers followed him.

According to the police, it was then that he stopped and started toward them holding what looked like a gun. They fired 20 shots, hitting him multiple times. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators told the media that nothing was found on Clark except the cell phone lying next to his body. The two officers are on leave pending an investigation.

Accused

Several women have accused **Bill Hybels**, founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, of inappropriate behavior spanning the past two decades. They say the behavior included inappropriately long hugs, invitations to his hotel rooms, sexual comments, an instance of crude humor, an instance of unwanted touching, and an unwanted kiss. The church

had investigated some of the accusations and reportedly cleared Hybels, but the *Chicago Tribune* made them public on March 22. Hybels told the *Tribune* the accusations were all false and the result of collusion against him: "I'm so exhausted of hearing so many lies that I've stopped playing detective."

Nominated

A Holocaust denier is the official Republican nominee in a Chicago-area House race. Arthur Jones ran unopposed in the primary and received the nomination despite the Illinois Republican Party's denunciation of his campaign. "We strongly oppose his racist views and his candidacy for any public office," Republican Party chairman Tim Schneider said in a statement. Jones has been involved with anti-Semitic and racist groups since the 1970s. His campaign website includes articles calling the Holocaust a lie and "good business for the Jews and their bandit state Israel." Jones will face the Democratic nominee in November.



Jones (center) speaks at a KKK rally in 1986.

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like Joseph

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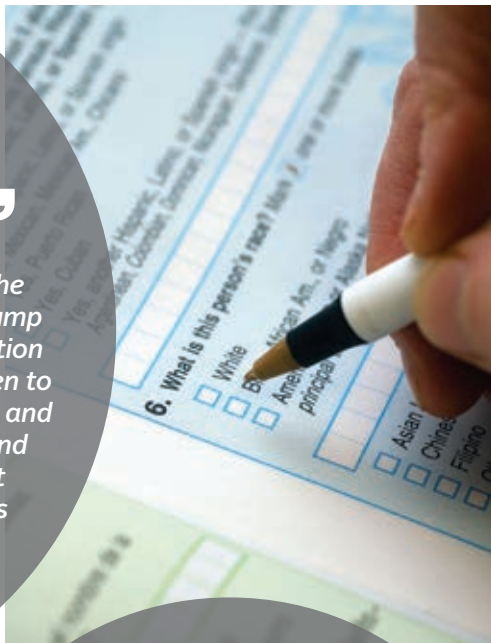
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'We are a nation of citizens.'

MIKE GONZALEZ, a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, defending the Trump administration's decision to add a question about whether the respondent is a citizen to the 2020 Census, in the face of criticism and lawsuits from Democrats. "The race and ethnicity questions are the ones that present huge problems to us in terms of governing, in terms of being a constitutional republic," said Gonzalez. "Not a citizenship question."



'I remember walking, tears freezing up on my face, because I began to cry because it was so cold.'

LINDA BROWN on the long walk to her all-black school in Topeka, Kan., in winter. Brown was the plaintiff in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954 that desegregated public schools. She died on March 25.



'We take no pleasure in having to constantly criticize Russia, but we need Russia to stop giving us so many reasons to do so.'

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations **NIKKI HALEY** on Russian political assassinations and Russian support for Syria's use of chemical weapons.



'We need a disney princess who's had an abortion.'

A tweet from **PLANNED PARENTHOOD KEYSTONE** in Trexlertown, Pa. The group deleted the tweet but also defended it as making "a point about the importance of telling stories that challenge stigma."

'It became fairly obvious very early on that this wasn't a regular missing persons case.'

Bexar County (Texas) Sheriff **JAVIER SALAZAR** on Maarib Al Hishmawi, 16, who ran away from home after her



parents tried to force her, allegedly using violence, into an arranged marriage. "Several times it was reported to us that this young lady was abused, with hot oil being thrown on her body. She was beaten by broomsticks. At one point she was choked almost to the point of unconsciousness," said Salazar. The family is from Iraq and has been in the United States for two years.



Heavy metals

A mishap by a plane during takeoff nearly cost a Russian mining company hundreds of millions of dollars. The problem: The plane was a cargo plane, the cargo was gold-and-silver doré bars, and the mishap involved the plane accidentally dropping 3.4 tons of the valuable cargo onto the runway. The March 15 incident happened in Yakutsk, a Russian city in Siberia, when the plane's cargo door gave way during takeoff. Pilots landed the plane at a nearby airfield and returned to Yakutsk airport to begin collecting the precious metals. According to authorities, all the bars were eventually recovered.



Cheesed off

They had one job. Many patrons of a British cheese festival left with empty stomachs after organizers ran out of cheese midway through the event. An official with the Big Cheese Festival blamed stormy weather for chasing off some of the festival's vendors and leading to the shortage. An official with the event published an apology for the March 3 fiasco on its Facebook page and promised a 50 percent discount to all dissatisfied patrons for next year's event.



Under the influence

Forget drunk dialing, comparison shopping site Finder.com says Americans have a new problem: drunk shopping. According to the site's February 2018 survey, drunk Americans spent nearly \$450 on average over the course of the year during alcohol-influenced online shopping sprees. Last year, Finder.com reported the average American spent just \$206 drunk shopping. The survey also claims that men's boozy spending more than doubles women's.



Cleveland blues

An informal support group for fired Cleveland Browns coaches met at a restaurant in Indianapolis during this year's NFL Scouting Combine, according to ESPN. Since 2008, the Browns have racked up a 38-122 record while firing five head coaches. In that time, the Browns have also cycled through nine offensive and defensive coordinators. According to ESPN's Adam Schefter, the group met at a restaurant named "Rock Bottom."



Return trip

He went to the hospital in an ambulance, and he went home in one also. **Danny Lee Konieczny** told Lake County, Fla., sheriff's deputies that his long wait in the Villages Regional Hospital waiting area prompted him to steal an ambulance and drive it 7 miles back to his home in Lady Lake, Fla. "He was upset because he was just put in the hallway to wait and was not being seen at the hospital," an officer said. Officers used a GPS device to locate the ambulance at Konieczny's home. Konieczny, 60, said he checked to make sure the ambulance was empty before taking it.





High above them

An attempted robbery led to an unusual standoff in Auburn, N.Y. Police allege that 33-year-old **Bradley Strange** demanded the wallet of a 75-year-old man on March 11. When officers arrived at the scene, they spotted Strange climbing out of a window and onto the roof of a two-story home. There, authorities surrounded the building and decided to wait Strange out. An Auburn police spokesman said Strange finally gave himself up, but only after spending nine hours avoiding custody on the roof.



Disney in the desert

Headlined by a 50-story-tall Torah-themed roller coaster, a group of investors has announced plans to build a Jewish Disneyland in the Negev desert of Israel. The group has hired American theme-park builder ITEC Entertainment for the project and expects its completion by 2023. The proposed 4,000-acre park has already raised \$400 million in foreign investment and promises a re-creation of the Splash Mountain attraction found at Disney theme parks.



A fine mess

A resident of Western Australia has discovered he's breaking the law by living on his own land. City officials with Menzies, Australia, began fining **Rolan Gopel** \$50 a day in August for living in a camper van on land he purchased in 2015. Specifically, the city has ordered Gopel to install a septic tank on the property and connect to the city water mains. Gopel, 58, lives off a small pension and said he cannot afford and does not want the improvements. In an effort to obtain compliance, the local court imposed a fresh \$3,100 fine in March. "I refuse to pay a fine for living," Gopel told Australia's ABC. "I refuse to be homeless."

Voyage down under

A gin bottle washed up on Australia's Wedge Island—132 years after the German navy tossed it into the ocean. Tonya Illman discovered the message in a bottle while walking on the beach in January. "I picked it up thinking it might look nice on display in my home," she said. Illman later discovered a cryptic message in the gin bottle.

Eventually officials with the Western Australian Museum helped her and her husband identify the note as part of a German naval experiment dating to 1886. The German navy had tossed bottles into the ocean to study ocean currents. Each message asked the finder to return the note to the nearest German consulate along with where and when the bottle was found. Before Illman's discovery, the last bottle had been returned in 1934.





'Move on' to what?

A COMMON RESPONSE TO TRAGEDY SAYS A LOT ABOUT VIEWS ON LIFE

➔ An op-ed in *The Washington Post* in February stirred no small amount of comments (at least 3,000 on the WaPo page, last I looked). The writer, Ruth Marcus, was disturbed about legislative proposals to ban the abortion of babies with Down syndrome. Or, as she put it, “barring women from terminating their pregnancies after the fetus has been determined” to bear the defective gene.

Her arguments should be familiar to all of us by now. The Supreme Court determined that it's OK to have different views of when life begins, so no one opinion can be imposed upon all. It's true that parenting always involves risk, but that's different from demanding that a woman bear a child whose intelligence and life choices will be limited. And where does society get off “demanding” anything from a free woman? Isn't that tantamount to “hijacking her body”?

Marcus has nothing against Down syndrome sufferers; the new Gerber baby is very cute, and she admires parents who welcome these children into their families. But make no mistake: She wouldn't do it. “I can say without hesitation that, tragic as it would have felt and ghastly as a second-trimester abortion would have been, I would have terminated [my own two] pregnancies had the testing come back positive. I would have grieved the loss and moved on.”

Kudos to her for being so forthright, but what does that even mean?

First of all, what's to grieve? What was lost? If a potential person who's better off dead, why be sad? You did him or her a favor. But if an innocent human being, however impaired, then another body was hijacked. Marcus offers no moral justification for such a ghastly act, except a somewhat refined, understated version of survival of the fittest with unmistakable nods toward eugenics.

And if we're unclear about what was left behind, then what does it mean to “move on”?



To bypass vital questions in order to get where you want to go may look like ‘moving on.’ But it’s really standing still.

It seems to me there's a lot of careless assumption behind that statement. We hear it constantly (and its corollary, “getting on with my life”) in connection with unpleasant experiences—especially unpleasant experiences for which the speaker bears some blame or made some contribution. (Rape victims and parents of murdered children seldom speak glibly about “moving on.” Their very souls cry out for justice.)

Traditional moral theory, both Biblical and ancient, asks us to consider purpose when

determining value. In other words, part of understanding how to behave in relation to food, sports, sex, children, education, etc., is to ask ourselves, *What are these things for?* To bypass vital questions in order to get where you want to go may indeed look like “moving on.” But it's really standing still. If the purpose of one's life is to avoid as many unpleasant experiences—or even

tragic situations—as possible, there's no real movement at all. Avoidance is stationary.

To accept and deal with the challenges of life as they come is to ride the current, honing reflexes and chiseling away sharp edges and shouting in triumph at the end. The opposite is to hunker down in the stream like a rock. The waters pass but don't shape you. Rather than ending the journey a different—and likely better—person than you were at the beginning, you grow hard and inflexible.

What is the purpose of life? One theory—Call it Door #1—is that life is for us to shape to our perceived advantage. The other theory is that life is for shaping us. Most people, I would guess, share the former view if only by default—and life as a rock can be very pleasant, if one is both gifted and lucky. Otherwise it's likely to disappoint. And for everyone, it ends.

What is your life for? What is a Down syndrome baby's life for? If Door #1, the answer is plain, and ultimately meaningless. If Door #2, the answer is unfolding, with the best-case scenario of hope that is inexpressible and full of glory. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” 🌍



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Tye Sheridan

Movie

Past and present

SPIELBERG CREATES A CROWD PLEASER, BUT IT MAY NOT BE A PARENT PLEASER *by Megan Basham*

➔ It's hard to imagine a movie where the plot hinges on 1980s nostalgia being directed by anyone other than the man responsible for creating plenty of that nostalgia, Steven Spielberg. From the thrilling action sequences in *Ready Player One* to the perfectly executed flirtatious quips, we feel we're watching a great musician

play his greatest hits. And everybody else's. Nearly every pop-culture reference from the Reagan era—including Marty McFly's DeLorean, the A-Team van, and Monty Python's holy hand grenade—pops up in this wild *Tron*-meets-*Willy-Wonka* dystopian tale.

I use the description “dystopian” loosely. While

the future of teenager Wade Watts, aka Parzival (Tye Sheridan), isn't exactly bright (and includes plenty of time in virtual reality shades), it's a lot less disturbing and violent than those of his genre comrades like *Katniss Everdeen*.

In the year 2045, Wade, like most of the rest of the population, lives in abject

poverty in towers of trailer homes known as “stacks.” The good news is he and his friends don't have to fight each other to survive. Except, that is, when they want to in the seemingly endless role-playing world they use to escape their troubles—an international video game phenomenon known as the OASIS. And thanks to the last will and testament of the game's trillionaire creator James Halliday (a phenomenal Mark Rylance), one lucky player has the chance to make the real world pretty good too. All he has to do is solve clues from Halliday's past to find three keys



that unlock the door to controlling interest in his company.

While Spielberg may have a reputation for leaning left, it's clear from the changes he made to Ernest Cline's best-selling novel that he was committed to creating a crowd pleaser for, well, crowds. Cline's book devoted tedious amounts of time to grating lectures on climate change and eighth-grade-level diatribes against organized religion. While your standard-issue evil corporation fills the role of the movie's bad guy, its aims are too generic and nonsensical to feel like any serious anti-capitalist messaging. Mostly it just seems like Spielberg needs imposing adults for the kids to rail against.

What's more, he pointedly ditches the liberal, atheist proselytizing of the book in favor of sly jokes that audiences on all sides of the aisle can enjoy. For example, rather than blaming climate change or any other current hot topics on the conditions Wade and his friends live in, as the book does, Spielberg has it all come about from "corn syrup droughts" and "bandwidth riots." Not only are these subjects unlikely to get anyone's dander up, they're also a far cleverer commentary on where present-day America's failings really lie.

That said, there's a downside to Spielberg sticking so close to an '80s script. Namely, that kids' movies had a lot more profanity back in the day. *Goonies*, *E.T.*, *Adventures in Babysitting*—all these favor-

ites from my childhood shock me with their dialogue when I go back and watch them now. Though *Ready Player One* at least benefits from the more appropriate modern designation of PG-13, many parents won't appreciate that a movie that should be perfect for all ages includes so much bad language, including an F-bomb.

If there's any other major complaint, it's that as diverting as the movie is, as a viewer you get a sense that it could have been more. Had Spielberg followed his story's advice and spent a little more time in the real world with real people rather than dazzling our eyes with the CGI spectacles and pop-culture throwbacks in *OASIS*, *Ready Player One* might have been one of those films today's kids reflect on fondly 30 years from now. As it stands, the movie is, like its central conceit, just a place to forget our problems and have fun for a couple of hours. But at least, for once, it's fun the whole country can have together. 🍿



Television

Rise

➔ Has Hollywood ever given us an unsympathetic high-school English teacher? Viewers of the NBC drama *Rise* will find themselves wishing to root for the show's central character, Lou Mazzuchelli, an English teacher taking charge of his small-town high school's theater program. But sympathetic or not, Lou leads this drama in the wrong direction.

Lou (Josh Radnor) faces challenges at home, such as an insolent son with a drinking problem. The cast members in his play have personal troubles, too: One is a foster child, another is watching her parents' marriage crumble ... and there are no secrets in tiny Stanton. The theater has little to no budget. Tensions flare

between Lou, the administration, and the football coach, whose star quarterback also stars in Lou's show. Lou makes a lot of arrogant mistakes as a first-time director, but that simply makes him seem human to us.

However, his choice of play, *Spring Awakening*, is an actual musical with extreme

sexual content. It parallels events in the lives of the Stanton cast, including teen pregnancy and homosexuality. In the end, both works—*Spring Awakening* and *Rise*—rail against the "repression" of adolescent sexual identity, whatever that identity may be. (Courage and leadership, in this school, look like Lou allowing a transgender student to change in the opposite sex's dressing room.) *Rise* shows characters genuinely struggling with sexual identity, but ultimately normalizes their choices and romances.

The show is based on a book, *Drama High*, about a real high-school theater program in Pennsylvania that doesn't shy away from making audiences uncomfortable. Broadway actress Rosie Perez anchors the cast of *Rise* as Lou's passionate assistant director, while Auli'i Cravalho (*Moana*) and others wow us with their musical abilities. *Rise* is well-written, hopeful, and considerably more mild than *Spring Awakening* (this is network TV, after all), but it's still overly sexualized. Something tells me Lou is not going to choose *The Music Man* next year.

—by LAURA FINCH

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

FOR THE WEEKEND OF MARCH 23-25
according to Box Office Mojo

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

S V L

- 1 **Pacific Rim: Uprising*** PG-13.....2 5 4
- 2 **Black Panther*** PG-13.....2 6 3
- 3 **I Can Only Imagine*** PG.....1 4 1
- 4 **Sherlock Gnomes** PG.....2 2 1
- 5 **Tomb Raider** PG-13.....1 6 4
- 6 **A Wrinkle in Time*** PG.....1 4 1
- 7 **Love, Simon*** PG-13.....3 2 5
- 8 **Paul, Apostle of Christ*** PG-13.....1 5 2
- 9 **Game Night** R.....3 6 6
- 10 **Midnight Sun** PG-13.....not rated

*Reviewed by WORLD

Movie

Paul, Apostle of Christ

➔ In our so-called golden age of television, where big visions and big budgets bring sweeping historical epics to life, one of my constant gripes is the shortage of shows based on the Bible. It's especially galling because I've seen several decent Bible *films* in the last few years that would have made outstanding TV series. The latest case in point: *Paul, Apostle of Christ*.

Paul's story certainly works as a movie, thanks especially to the acting talent of Jim Caviezel as Luke and veteran British character actor James Faulkner as Paul. And there's plenty of historical drama, like the threat of Emperor Nero and his bloody circuses, to keep the story riveting.

The well-executed film mines fresh tension out of old material—like what early believers such as Aquila and Priscilla must have experienced in deciding whether to stay in Rome or scatter to safer cities. Then there are the temptations the early church faced that we still battle today—whether to look for worldly solutions to oppression and discrimi-

nation. Perhaps most intriguing is seeing Paul reflect on his time as the persecuting Saul of Tarsus and struggle through prayer to “forget what is past” so he can press on toward the goals God has given him.

All gripping stuff, but it's a lot of ground to cover—so much that, watching the film, it's hard to feel invested in any one storyline, including Paul's.

You can't help imagining what the story could have been, had it been told through a long-form medium like television. Of course, that would only work if the networks hired writers and producers who cared about accurately reflecting the spirit of Scripture, as Mark Burnett and Roma Downey did with their hit series *The Bible*.

In contrast, we have ABC's and NBC's failed attempts to adapt King David's story, both of them weird and soulless interpretations.

Paul's story, as this film proves, has enough drama, emotion, and spectacle to capture any binge-watcher. I'll happily take the two hours it offers. But I'd love to have more. —by MEGAN BASHAM



Caviezel (left) and Faulkner



Movie

Pacific Rim: Uprising

➔ *Pacific Rim: Uprising* is to sci-fi flicks what a bodybuilding competition is to sports—a beefy display with little drama. The formulaic film's impressive visual effects likely won't win over viewers hoping for a good story.

In the original *Pacific Rim*, monstrous creatures called Kaiju emerged from an intergalactic “breach” located on the Pacific Ocean floor. Humans fought the invaders by building giant robots called Jaegers, each operated by multiple human pilots positioned inside the robot's frame and wired mind and body to each other and into the robot's software. Stacker Pentecost sacrificed his life defeating the Kaiju and sealing the breach, saving the world.

Uprising opens 10 years later. Loners and isolated bands of humans scrounge for survival in the rubble left over from the widespread destruction of the Kaiju-Jaeger battles. The profit-hungry Shao Corp. manufactures Jaegers, but someone on the inside doesn't have Earth's best interests in mind. Instead of pursuing what could be an interesting post-apocalyptic tale, though, the film

settles into a clash of alien and mechanical titans.

As in many recent futuristic films, in *Uprising* the planet's fate rests with a small group of teens. Slow to join in is Jake Pentecost (John Boyega), Stacker's son, who wants nothing more than to escape the shadow of his father's legend. The film (rated PG-13 for expletives and sci-fi violence) muddles through requisite scenes of combat training, where rivalries fester until the reluctant hero rallies the troops.

“We are a family,” Jake implores. “We are Earth's last defense. Now help me save the world.”

Before their training is complete (of course), the teens are thrust into action. They pilot Jaegers against a renegade robot and against more Kaiju after a new breach opens.

The real muscle behind the \$150 million production is an army of visual artists and other crew members who designed the formidable computer graphics: The giants trample bridges and trash skyscrapers. And as in classic monster movies, the final showdown takes place in Tokyo. —by BOB BROWN

Capital conditions

MONEY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING *by Marvin Olasky*



➔ I dislike the term “must reading” when used about anything other than the Bible, but if you are wealthy and creating a foundation, here’s an almost-must: Martin Morse Wooster’s *How Great Philanthropists Failed and You Can Succeed at Protecting Your Legacy* (Capital Research Center, 2017). Spoiler alert: Neither you nor your money will live forever, and by the third generation your dollars may be used for purposes antithetical to your beliefs, so create term limits.

Ran Abramitzky’s *The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist World* (Princeton, 2018) shows that the founders of Israel’s collective farms could not keep their legacies intact. It turned out that small-scale communism—people in little communities having no property and sharing everything equally—was no more likely to last for several generations than the failed Russian and Chinese experiments.



Abramitzky doesn’t like that conclusion, but facts are facts: The early 20th-century kibbutz population in what became Israel never accounted for more than 7 percent of the Jewish population there, and now it’s down to 2 percent. Many productive members left, even though they had to relinquish any claim on kibbutz assets, and kibbutzim to survive linked pay to productivity. Even in their heyday, some kibbutz residents were more equal than others: Stellar workers became leaders and assigned poorer workers to miserable jobs.

Ken Wytmsa’s *The Myth of Equality* (IVP, 2017) argues rightly that racism remains, but echoes fashionable rhetoric about privilege and complains about “our idealized white standard of success.” It should be read alongside Phoebe Maltz Bovy’s *The Perils of “Privilege”: Why Injustice Can’t Be Solved by Accusing Others of*



Advantage (St. Martin’s, 2017).

Paul David

Tripp’s *Redeeming Money* (Crossway, 2018) shows how our attitude toward money reveals our deep beliefs, which with God’s grace can change. *The State of Church Giving Through 2015* by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle (Empty Tomb, 2017) reveals that church members across denominations gave their churches 3 percent of their income in 1968 and 2 percent in 2015.

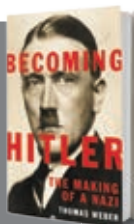
Robert Wuthnow’s *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (Princeton, 2018) presents with sociological evidence the reason despairing rural Americans voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump: It wasn’t just “the economy, stupid,” as Bill Clinton’s staffers used to say, but the sense that America’s liberal rulers made fun of small-town ethical norms such as personal responsibility, frugality, and common sense.

Illustration from The Mystery of the Kibbutz

BOOKMARKS

Thomas Weber’s *Becoming Hitler: The Making of a Nazi* (Basic, 2017) is a well-researched, slow-motion horror narrative of Satan’s assistant from 1918 through 1926. Rick Richman’s *Racing Against History: The 1940 Campaign for a Jewish Army to Fight Hitler* (Encounter, 2018) tells the little-known story of desperate attempts. Gregg Carlstrom’s *How Long Will Israel Survive?* (Oxford, 2017) is a view from the left.

Nicholas Stargardt’s *The German War* (Basic, 2015; paperback 2017) is a scholarly examination of how German citizens viewed World War II, with fascinating detail that reads like the book of Esther: Haman’s family said his attack on Jews would be his downfall, and many Germans saw the bombing of their cities as God’s retribution for the Holocaust they knew was happening.

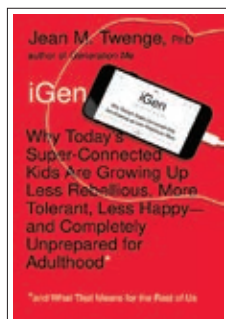


Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith’s *A Season in the Sun: The Rise of Mickey Mantle* (Basic, 2018) suggests that sportswriters in the 1950s should have been asking how long Mantle would survive, given his injuries and carousing. Bill Nowlin’s *Tom Yawkey: Patriarch of the Boston Red Sox* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018) shows how a baseball big-spender couldn’t buy a pennant, largely because he was slow in signing African-American players and in firing his drinking buddies.

I reported in September that the Acton Institute had published three volumes of Abraham Kuyper’s works. Conflict of interest watch: I don’t like to mention that organization because I’m a senior fellow there, but I need to mention three more excellent volumes now published—*On the Church, On Islam, and Pro Rege: Living Under Christ the King (Vol. 2)*. —M.O.

RECENT NONFICTION BOOKS

reviewed by Susan Olasky



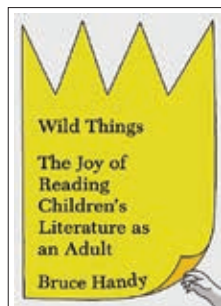
IGEN: WHY TODAY'S SUPER-CONNECTED KIDS ARE GROWING UP LESS REBELLIOUS, MORE TOLERANT, LESS HAPPY—AND COMPLETELY UNPREPARED FOR ADULTHOOD... *Jean M. Twenge*

This look at the cohort the author dubs “iGen” relies on national data sets to describe the generation of young people who grew up with smartphones and social media. These innovations have played a formative role in the development of people who spend more time alone, less time with friends outside of school, and less time drinking and engaging in other risky behaviors. They are also more likely to be unhappy. The book’s many charts show the changes between this generation and previous ones. Takeaways: Delay giving kids

smartphones—and limit access to social media.

WILD THINGS: THE JOY OF READING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS AN ADULT *Bruce Handy*

Handy learned about children’s literature as a child reader, a father reading to his children, and a scholar. He brings all those perspectives to this delightful, roughly chronological exploration of the genre. His first chapter focuses on Margaret Wise Brown, *Goodnight Moon*, and very young children. His last chapter focuses on E.B. White, *Charlotte’s Web*, and books about dying. In between he has an insightful chapter on C.S. Lewis and *Narnia* (written from an agnostic perspective) and a chapter connecting Maurice Sendak with fairy tales. Caution: That chapter has one obscenity.



A HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN 100 BOOKS *Roderick Cave & Sara Ayad*

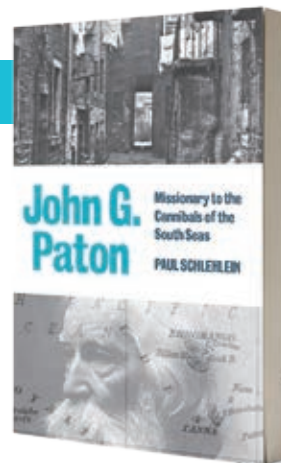
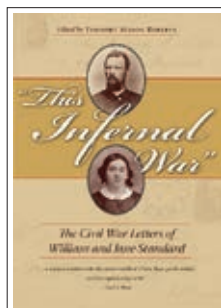
This coffee table book tells the story of children’s publishing in Britain and other English-speaking countries through 100 books. The chosen books convey evolving understandings of child development, changes in printing technology, and changing literary taste. The book focuses on illustration and printing and offers many color plates, but its survey nature might disappoint readers seeking more insight: The *Narnia* tales receive only one paragraph. (C.S. Lewis gets several other mentions.) Those interested in modern picture books will be disappointed since the book stops at about 1980—with most chapters focused on trends prior to World War II.



'THIS INFERNAL WAR': THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF WILLIAM AND JANE STANDARD

ed. *Timothy Mason Roberts*

During William Standard’s military service in the Union Army, he and his wife Jane exchanged more than 200 letters, which provide fascinating details about day-to-day life for a wife left behind in western Illinois, trying to provide for her children, paying off debts, taking in boarders, and raising livestock and crops. Her husband’s letters recount his days as a sergeant in the 103rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, where he did much stealing of pigs and crops from farms throughout the South. Not surprising is their casual use of the N-word. More surprising is their occasional use of barnyard crudities.



AFTERWORD

John G. Paton: Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas by Paul Schlehlein (Banner of Truth Trust, 2017) is an inspiring account of the persevering Scottish missionary who brought the gospel and planted churches in the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu)—islands in the South Pacific once known for their cannibalism.

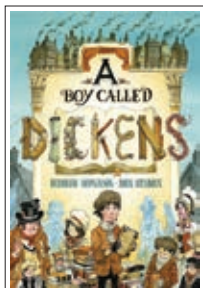
The pagan culture was cruel to women: “Fathers sometimes practiced infanticide on their baby girls.... Sons of competent age were expected to strangle their widowed mothers.” Though many church leaders did not want Paton to go, his mother and father were great supporters.



Author **Paul Schlehlein**, himself a missionary in South Africa, depicts the courage it took for Paton and others to go to these hostile lands—and the suffering they endured for the sake of the gospel. Divided into two parts, the book provides an account of Paton’s life and the principles we can learn from his experience. —S.O.

Dickens delight

PICTURE BOOKS FOR BUDDING CHARLES DICKENS FANS
reviewed by Mary Jackson



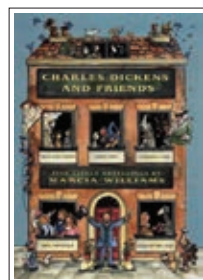
A BOY CALLED DICKENS *Deborah Hopkinson*

Charles Dickens' bleak childhood prompts this book's question: "Are we brave enough to follow him?" On cold London streets readers meet a skinny 12-year-old who longs for books more than food. He works 10-hour days in a rat-infested blacking factory and on Sundays visits his family in a debtors prison. But Dickens' imagination flourishes, portrayed in the book with swirling blue figures amid a dark-hued cityscape and bright-eyed caricatures. Hopkinson's lively writing introduces kids to Dickens' harsh surroundings—"ladies with shattered hopes; an old miserly man; a young gentleman with great expectations"—that later become scenes, characters, and plotlines

in his best-known stories. (*Ages 4-8*)

CHARLES DICKENS AND FRIENDS *Marcia Williams*

With small, sepia-toned comic-strip scenes bursting with animated characters, this retelling of five of Dickens' beloved melodramas is sure to entertain readers meeting Pip, Oliver Twist, Bill Sikes, and Scrooge for the first time. Williams takes creative liberty with comical character renderings, but the stories use Dickens' chosen narrative voice and contain snippets of original dialogue, such as Oliver Twist's famous plea, "Please, sir, I want some more." Some might find its convoluted style unappealing, but it is perfect for fidgety boys and graphic-novel fans who are still years away from tackling the English author's original works. (*Ages 8-12*)



USBORNE ILLUSTRATED STORIES FROM DICKENS *adapted by Mary Sebagg-Montefiore*

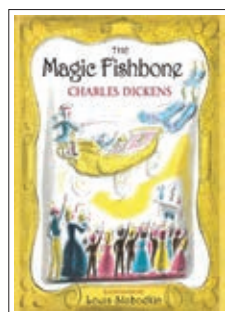
Full of plotlines involving villains, orphans, pickpockets, and convicts, this book gives early readers a simplified retelling of five of Dickens' beloved tales—*Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *David Copperfield*. Like Sebagg-Montefiore's other popular retellings, it introduces Dickens' timeless stories and whets a reader's appetite for later appreciation of his thick volumes. Parents will like its lighthearted illustrations and overcoming heroes that mute for younger audiences the murder, workhouses, guillotines, and loss in Dickens' tales. A short biography covers

Dickens' early years, family, charity, and life in Victorian London. (*Ages 7-10*)

THE MAGIC FISHBONE

Charles Dickens, illus. by Louis Slobodkin

An impoverished king meets a richly clad fairy "Grandmarina," who tells him his daughter will discover a magic fishbone in her salmon dinner that night. Princess Alicia, the eldest of 19 children, must "dry it...rub it, and...polish it till it shines" and it will grant her one wish, "provided she wishes...at the right time." Illness, misfortune, and accidents ensue, but to her father's chagrin, Alicia resourcefully cares for her siblings and mother without using her magic wish. When the right time comes, a whirlwind of fairy-tale excitement unfolds. (*Ages 6-10*)

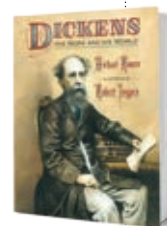


AFTERWORD

Kids whose interest in Dickens is piqued by abridged versions of his classic tales might want to dig deeper into his life and times.

Presuming some familiarity, **Michael Rosen's** *Dickens: His Work and His World* (Candlewick Press, 2005) provides an easy-reading biographical sketch with an emphasis on the novelist's vivid imagination, his love for reading and theater, his family's hard times, and the way his stories changed hearts. Robert Ingpen's watercolor illustrations provide a compelling compliment in their portrayal of 19th-century Victorian London landscapes and characters.

Another noteworthy mention: Andrea Warren's *Charles Dickens and the Street Children of London* (Houghton Mifflin, 2011) focuses on the social ills Dickens observed, experienced, and sought to change with his stories. She paints a portrait of the novelist as a social reformer and advocate who "gave the lower classes a voice and made them human and likable." —M.J.



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MARY LI MA

Great awakenings

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY'S APPEAL TO CHINESE HEARTS *by Angela Lu Fulton*

➔ Mary Li Ma and her husband Jin Li collaborated to write *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China*. Through hundreds of interviews with Christians all across the country, Ma and Li show how Christianity transforms the lives of believers, including their views on education, marriage, charity, and nationalism. Here are edited excerpts of my interview with Ma, who grew up in China and professed faith while earning her Ph.D. in sociology.

How did you come to Christ? God brought me to Him while I was pursuing a Ph.D. in the most secular academic field at a top Ivy League university: I was not looking for faith. To many people, entering Cornell's doctorate program with a full scholarship would be the height of one's self-fulfillment, but during that time I experienced an existential crisis as I was disillusioned by the lack of integrity and the hypocrisy of academia. I realized academia could be as corrupt as politics or business, so I started to doubt the meaning of life and academic pursuit.

But then a few Christian friends reached out to me, including Paul Lee, who is now the chair of business and economics at Wheaton College. He modeled for me how someone can lament at evil and remain sympathetic to individuals, something I struggled with. Paul had a moral and intellectual integrity that intrigued me. I started to wonder what he had that I didn't. So we started talking more about the Christian faith. He's an academic, but to me he's a true missionary because his moral example is consistent with the gospel.

What surprised you the most when you interviewed Chinese house church Christians? People were eager to share how deeply God transformed their lives. When I first embraced the Christian faith in the United States, many of my American colleagues were shocked. Some very kind friends would say: “I know Christianity is very new to you, but this has been around for many, many years; it’s very cliché to us.” This shows the gospel can be surprising and new to the Chinese. There’s a freshness when the power of God’s Word first penetrates hardened soil and first enters a context where things are the opposite.

What is the biggest difference between older Chinese Christians who have faced persecution and younger ones who haven’t? The old generation lived in survival mode. The younger generation today has more space to witness personally and professionally, but faces more temptations than the old: materialism, consumerism, and very subtle types of state co-optations. Government strategies to infiltrate the church are becoming more diversified, latent, and high-tech.

What’s the draw of having a Christian worldview in modern-day China? When people who are used to being taught an airtight system of thought have exposure to a competing worldview that gives more satisfying answers, the general disillusionment soon gives way to curiosity and a willingness to learn more about the other worldview. That’s why the Christian worldview—which the West might think is cliché—became really fresh, new, and powerful in China. It gives answers to major life issues like purpose, meaning, and direction. But Christians also need to bear witness to that kind of worldview because if your witness is contrary, then it’s not credible to people. For instance, under Mao conversions happened when the power of the Christian worldview was delivered through Christians whose testimony withstood the harshest tests—imprisonment or labor camps.

In the book, you mention some of the drawbacks of short-term missions for local Chinese believers. What

challenges have you seen? In modern times, short-term missions has become almost a consumeristic or fast-food style of engagement. As human beings, we know that when we interact with people within a short time frame, we tend only to notice the superficial things like cultural differences or dietary habits. That may be intriguing for learning about the culture, but mission work really requires people to invest in each other’s lives for a long time and to nurture real relationships.

‘There’s a freshness when the power of God’s Word first penetrates hardened soil and first enters a context where things are the opposite.’

Because of the limits of time, short-term missionaries sometimes intentionally water down the gospel.

There’s an unintended consequence: Their presence may draw an audience more interested in their American culture or Americanized version of Christianity. I’m not saying short-term missions are all wrong. I was blessed by short-term missionaries, as there is an advantage for strangers to come into your life and tell you a fresh message—but more regularly a type of Americanized Christianity is projected to the audience.

You write that the Shanghai churches often make newcomers attend small groups for three months before they can join Sunday service. Does that deter seekers from learning about God, or does it make church members more committed? Many churches in Shanghai are in a survival-coping strategy because the Shanghai government controls the city more tightly due to its international status. This method deters seekers because all visitors need to go through these screening mechanisms. But given the massive needs for spiritual resources

in China, even these very self-selected small groups grow at an exponential rate. So in reality, the deterring effect of this setup is not at all worrisome: Church members are actually more committed because it requires a higher cost, and people generally long to worship together. It becomes a very treasured time for them.

What do Western media get wrong about the church in China? Journalists tend to write case-by-case reports focusing on individual groups or incidents.

Not many go deeper beyond impressionistic stories to analyze the deeper causes. Some focus on the persecution narrative when the reality is more complex than that. Sometimes the issue isn’t directly religious persecution, but right to assembly: The government is not only closing down churches, but controlling other kinds of groups, too.

Do you have an optimistic or pessimistic view of the future of the Chinese churches? I tend to be optimistic: I’m not optimistic about human nature, but I’m not that pessimistic about what will happen in the church in China. People worry about China regressing back to what it was like a few decades ago, but I think China’s economy has become so embedded in the global economy that it’s difficult for China to retreat. China is absolutely redrawing the boundaries of political power, but it will be hard to retreat to what it was like a few decades ago because China and the rest of the world are interdependent.

Having said that, China now has the technology to aid its control and that’s something I’m pessimistic about. The worst-case scenario is we go back to the type of persecution experienced under Mao. But even if that looks like the worst scenario from an outside view, internally it would strengthen believers. I don’t think it will go that far: This kind of power tug of war will intensify, but the government has many other issues to deal with that are more urgent than the role of the church in China. The church has always been very peaceful, so it’s not a top priority for the government. ☉





Missing their points

ARTISTS DON'T SEEM TO REALIZE HOW MUCH PROFANITY WEAKENS THEIR ALBUMS *by Arsenio Orteza*

➔ In a recent column responding to a profanity-laced post-Super Bowl speech by the Philadelphia Eagles' Jason Kelce, the Catholic pundit Matthew Archbold wondered whether "the f-word is even a thing anymore."

Had he thrown in the S-word, Archbold could've also been pondering the latest albums (listed in ascending order of quality and socially redeeming value) by Taylor Swift, Justin Timberlake, MGMT, the Divine Comedy, and Belle and Sebastian.

For some time now, musicians have used profanity the way that they use tattoos—to declare themselves hip. Instead, they declare themselves ignorant about the way language functions irrespective of one's intent. "Generally," the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti told an interviewer in 2015, "dirty words divert the attention from what you're trying to get across."

Ferlinghetti, the *éminence grise* of the Beats, was explaining why only one of his many poems contains profanity. But he was also reiterating an increasingly neglected truth: that the correspondence of words with reality

gives them objective qualities, and that one objective quality of "dirty words" is their tendency to suck the air out of a room.

That tendency looms especially large in a "room" as claustrophobic as the one currently inhabited by Taylor Swift. The unrelenting electronics (AutoTune included) of her new album *Reputation* (Big Machine) close in upon her modest melodies like the trash-compactor walls in *Star Wars* until there's little left but a treacherous trickle. When she drops the S-bomb in "I Did Something Bad," there's simply nowhere to run.

Swift's obliviousness to the finer points of linguistic expression dovetails with other naïve and/or arrogant statements she has made about writing lyrics. "I wouldn't be a singer if I

weren't a songwriter," she told *Billboard* in 2014. "I have no interest in singing someone else's words." Feminists used to talk about only wanting a room of their own. Swift only wants a room of her own making. To anyone so imprisoned, occasional profanities are understandably no big deal.

By comparison, Justin Timberlake's *Man of the Woods* (RCA) feels expansive. The former teen idol sings to, about, and with his wife (the actress Jessica Biel) and toddler son. He varies his electro-pop palette with soft, acoustic numbers and homages to both brown- and blue-eyed soul. He even mentions church as a place to kneel and search one's soul.

In short, Timberlake comes off so good-natured that the profanities besmirching "Midnight Summer Jam," "Supplies," and "Montana" feel like shibboleths cynically inserted to provide him with commercial cover in a time of diminishing sales.

MGMT's electro-pop *Little Dark Age* (Columbia), the Divine Comedy's live chamber-pop *Loose Canon* (Divine Comedy), and Belle and Sebastian's studio chamber-pop *How to Solve Our Human Problems* (Matador) come off good-natured too. So it's a shame that they don't adhere to Ferlinghetti's wisdom either. Much of what they're trying to get across really does deserve undivided attention.

In "TSLAMP," for instance, MGMT lampoons cell-phone zombies. In "Generation Sex," the Divine Comedy's Neil Hannon refurbishes a Lewinsky-era satire for the #MeToo era. In "Show Me the Sun," Belle and Sebastian's Stuart Murdoch drinks deeply from the story of Lazarus and the rich man found in Luke 16. To be fair, *Loose Canon* and *How to Solve Our Human Problems* include only one F-word apiece and are therefore cleaner than

the majority of films made during the last 40 years.

But not that long ago most good pop albums included no profanity at all. And none of the few that did were ever better as a result. ☹



NEW OR RECENT RELEASES

reviewed by Arsenio Orteza



EVERGREEN *Audrey Assad*

Evergreen comes as close to perfect as an album that contains a tonally discordant rap cameo (by Propaganda on “River”) can. The beauty of Assad’s soprano voice unfolds naturally rather than showily, its fluidity both a metaphor and a match for the numinous instrumentation and the even more numinous lyrics. Although she draws on Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Nehemiah, Amos, and the Song of Solomon, it’s what she makes of them while making them her own that gives her devotionally compressed language the force of prayer.

THE ASYLUM YEARS *Chris Hillman*

Slippin’ Away (1976) and *Clear Sillin’* (1977) generated little interest when they first appeared, but their breezy mainstreaming of Hillman’s pedigree (bluegrass, Byrds, Burritos) sounds pretty good now, his liner-note demurring notwithstanding. “I wasn’t really that confident as a singer yet,” he says of *Slippin’*; of *Sillin’*, “I don’t think it has the feel that the first one had.” Note that he doesn’t knock the vocal harmonies. And for good reason. Whether supplied by Herb Pedersen, Rick Roberts, or moonlighting Eagles, they’re spot-on and airborne throughout.



PILGRIM *Janne Mark*

Although it bears the imprint of the German jazz label ACT and gives the lighter-than-air Norwegian jazz trumpeter Arve Henriksen co-billing, *Pilgrim* is really a showcase for the hauntingly lovely contemporary Christian hymns of Janne Mark, a Copenhagen-based vocalist who sings only in Danish and for whom “jazz” is at best an approximate descriptor. The booklet includes English translations that confirm both her orthodoxy and her sincerity. The melodies, especially those of “Elsket Favnet, Husket Savnet” and “Julen I Hjertet (Bethlehem),” speak for themselves.

ALIEN BEANS *Ty Tabor*

Tabor originally intended this two-disc album to be a partially rerecorded, thoroughly remastered single disc of highlights from his non-King’s X efforts. Good for him (and his fans) that the project ended up inspiring 10 new songs: From their riffs to their lyrics, they outshine the older stuff. (Compare the new bad-faith-decrying “Somebody Lied” with the old bad-faith-decrying “Politician’s Creed”). Common to both halves are frontman-worthy vocals and guitars that seem less like heavy metal than like electrified steel wool.



ENCORE

First things first: The Choir responsible for the latest gem to emerge from Omnivore Records’ archive-raiding ways, *Artifact: The Unreleased Album* (Omnivore), is not the Choir led by Steve Hindalong and Derri Daugherty. Rather, it’s a Cleveland band that over the course of 10 different lineups (including musicians who’d later seed the James Gang and the Raspberries) and the latter half of the 1960s wrote and performed the kind of British Invasion-influenced Midwest music that 10 years on would become known as “power pop.”

The Choir did not, however, record very much, a fact made all the more lamentable by the even more significant fact that *Artifact’s* 10 tracks (recorded in 1969 at the Cleveland Recording Company) display a rich fermentation from which—the Kinks cover “David Watts” and the Bee Gees soundalike “Have I No Love to Offer” aside—the group was clearly distilling its own sound. It’s as ripe for discovery now as it was then. —A.O.





What the world needs now

A FRENCH POLICEMAN GIVES A LESSON IN SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE

➔ Neither heroes nor heels are made in a day. Long before 10 a.m. Friday, March 23, when a four-hour drama involving a terrorist in a grocery store began, policeman Arnaud Beltrame knew the drill.

The lieutenant colonel in France's national police had joined its elite special forces in 2003 and in 2005 served in Iraq, a year when 900 NATO coalition forces were killed. Upon return he became a member of the presidential guard, earning in 2012 the Order of Merit. Three months ago Beltrame led a counterterrorism drill in the south of France, arming his officers with paintball guns to confront a make-believe hostage situation in a grocery store. "We want to be as close to real conditions as possible," he said.

When on that Friday morning newscasters reported a police officer wounded inside the Super U, a grocery store where a terrorist had taken hostages in Trèbes, Beltrame's mother, out shopping herself and listening to the radio, knew it was her son.

How trained professionals prepare for the moment when they will walk toward the burning building, enter it, and lay down their lives is a story for all. No matter how many times we may hear of it, such breathtaking courage should at least quiet our silly squabbles and rude complaining.

Beltrame, who was 44 and recently married, on that day wasn't relying only on training and time in combat. Making a commitment to the Catholic Church at age 33, he was known by family, friends, and associates as a man of faith. One of the striking features of the stories about him in the aftermath of the attack is that, among those who knew him, no one was surprised by what he did. "He lived a genuine conversion," said the priest of the abbey he regularly attended and served with his wife Marielle.



'Only his faith can explain the madness of this sacrifice.'

From a ring of special police forces surrounding the Super U, Beltrame went into the building where the 26-year-old Radouane Lakdim, a Moroccan-born French citizen who had pledged allegiance to Islamic State, had killed two shoppers. Already he also had wounded a driver and killed a passenger in a carjacking. As gunfire rang out from the store, some shoppers escaped, some locked themselves in a meat locker, as Lakdim took hostage a 40-year-old cashier named Julie.

Beltrame approached as Lakdim held Julie, the mother of a 2-year-old, and asked to take her place. He kept his mobile phone on to allow police outside an ear to what was happening.

We now know that after freeing Julie, Lakdim took Beltrame and at some point slit his throat, an ISIS trademark tactic. In Syria when ISIS captured mostly Christian towns, the militants first beheaded male hostages, hanging their heads in public squares for all to see. "The beheadings were the horror that silenced people," a Syrian father told *National Geographic*.

Police killed Lakdim amid gunfire in the subsequent assault, but Julie and many others were saved.

Beltrame, who died of his wounds, was far from silenced. He did not hide his faith, "he radiated it," said police chaplain and Catholic

priest Dominique Arz. "We can say that his act of offering is consistent with what he believed. He went to the end of his service to the country and to the end of his testimony of faith."

Father Jean-Baptiste, canon of Beltrame's church, attended him as he died and told *Famille Chrétienne* (Christian Family) magazine: "It seems to me that only his faith can explain the madness of this sacrifice, which is today the admiration of all. He knew as Jesus told us, '... there is no greater love than giving one's life for one's friends' (John 15:13). He knew that if his life began to belong to Marielle, it was also to God, to France, to his brothers in danger of death. I believe that only a Christian faith animated by charity could ask for this superhuman sacrifice."

Beltrame's quiet service amid the loud clangings of the day should remind a watching world of the sudden brevity of life and the surpassing greatness of self-sacrificing love. It should quicken fellow Christians to prepare for such a day. 🌐

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FEATURES



Starting from **zero**



Iraq's Nineveh churches are retaking their towns from years of ISIS control, without guarantees of money, safety, or a future

BY MINDY BELZ IN QARAQOSH, IRAQ

F

ather Georges Jahola sits hunched over his laptop, his clerical collar just visible underneath a jacket he's forgotten to remove. The parish priest is studying spreadsheets and cadastral maps of his hometown in Nineveh Plain, Qaraqosh, while men and women scurry in and out of his office, questions flying amid a shuffle

of papers in Syriac, Arabic, and English. The balding Jahola, whom everyone everywhere calls Father George, is the steady in the room, concentrating on the figures on his screen, then breaking into a slow smile that sends wrinkles around his wire rims before choosing which of the languages to use to answer that last question.

Jahola approaches the day's frenzy with the deliberation you might expect from a parish priest, but the Syriac Catholic clergyman's slim build and calm demeanor seem no match for the responsibilities he shoulders: As head of the church board for reconstruction in Qaraqosh, Jahola is in charge of rebuilding efforts underway in the largest Christian city in Nineveh Plain. That's thousands of homes caught in the heaviest destruction outside of Mosul following three years' occupation by ISIS.

Before the ISIS takeover in 2014, Qaraqosh numbered 60,000 people, nearly all members of Assyrian, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. ISIS took captives, including a 3-year-old girl named Christina, and sent everyone else fleeing under heavy fire. In November 2016 Iraqi forces with assistance from a U.S.-led coalition fought the Islamic State militants street by street, from the air, above and below ground. After its liberation, Qaraqosh sat empty and in ruins: The militants torched homes and churches, left wired explosives everywhere, and tunneled extensively under the city. When I visited Qaraqosh three months later, the odors from burnt metal, oil fires, and decaying flesh hung in the streets (see "Iraq's grisly liberation," March 18, 2017).

That's why, instead of presiding over prayers or sacraments (though Jahola does those things), the priest more often is at his desk, a giant aerial map of the city hanging behind him and a spreadsheet charting progress before him. Since returning to Qaraqosh last September, Jahola has overseen reconstruction efforts for more than 2,600 homes. More than 1,200 are complete with returning families living in them.

Testifying to the community's progress and determination are the sounds of power saws and machinery outside as Jahola talks. Across the street from his office a print shop has a floor-to-ceiling sign reading in English and Arabic, "Come in, we're open." A motorcycle swerves around dug-up sewer pipes while front loaders and tractors dodge oncoming cars.

Near an intersection at St. George's Church, where ISIS had tunneled out a base of operations and set up a bomb-making factory, shops have returned. One year ago the storefronts sat charred and empty, ISIS slogans spray-painted across the walls.



Today one is selling generators, another lightbulbs, and two doors down is a shop selling refrigerators and washing machines. Grocers have strung bright awnings over stands selling produce, meat, and spices. Reopened restaurants serve customers at tables and chairs arranged outside.

Throughout the sprawling Nineveh province where ISIS expelled about 120,000 Christians in 2014, the churches are leading a self-starting campaign to reoccupy their hometowns. An umbrella group organized a year ago, the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, has spawned church boards in key cities, turning clergymen like Jahola into city planners. They are working across denominational lines—and without government funding or oversight—to recapture one of the longest-inhabited areas of Christian life in the Middle East. The work goes forward, too, amid a fragile peace.

More than 37,000 Christians have returned to Nineveh, but at the same time up to 6,000 families—perhaps 25,000 people—have emigrated abroad. Church leaders fear more will leave if their towns aren't restored. "We have to rebuild now," said Father Salar Kajo, a Chaldean priest and member of the committee supervising rebuilding efforts in the Nineveh towns of Telskuf and Batnaya. "If we take more time, families will leave and Christianity will disappear from Iraq."

To facilitate returns to Qaraqosh, Jahola and his 16-member board—which includes Syriac Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, and Orthodox clergy, plus engineers and other advisers—divided the city into 10 geographic zones, all color-coded on another wall map. Within each zone the board spent weeks assessing every structure for damage and theft, using satellite imagery, photo documentation, and on-site damage surveys.



‘We have to rebuild now. If we take more time, families will leave and Christianity will disappear from Iraq.’

—Father Salar Kajo

At the start, they knew the ISIS toll on churches: 52 partially damaged, 15 burned, and one completely destroyed, leveled flat to rubble. Soon they reached another sobering conclusion: Of 7,000 homes assessed, 99 percent suffered damage.

Jahola was undeterred, even though he also had displaced parishioners to care for in camps 50 or more miles away and was himself without a home or a church. “It is a problem but not impossible for God,” he said. “We have to arrange both, caring for day-to-day needs and for rebuilding. At the same time we have many people so we divide the work.”

The church board classified each home according to damage and made agreements with 12 NGOs to carry out the reconstruction. Together they identified homeowners and created detailed work plans on eligible homes. Costs average \$25,000 to restore a burned home and \$65,000 to rebuild a totally destroyed home.

Along the way, the board’s teams are documenting damage assessments and repairs. Someday, they hope, a war crimes tribunal or others will want evidence of atrocities. Someday there may be restitution for all that’s been lost. After all, most international bodies, the United States, and the European Union have ruled the 2014 ISIS attacks on Christians and Yazidis in Iraq as genocide.

“After liberation, it was worse than we expected,” said Jahola. “I have no idea, nobody imagined how we would find the city, these houses. They are burned, the furniture burned, everything destroyed. It was difficult. We start from zero.”

- (1) Father George in his office.
- (2) Activity on the streets of Bartella.
- (3) Reopened shopping street in Qaraqosh.

The NGOs are mostly regional church-based aid groups, but the largest efforts arise from U.S.-based Operation Blessing and Samaritan’s Purse, the Netherlands’ SALT Foundation, the U.K.-based Aid to the Church in Need, and the French Christian aid group L’Oeuvre d’Orient. They raised their own funding and began with rebuilding the least damaged homes.

Jahola and others told me the effort receives no funding or direction from the Iraqi government in Baghdad; no funds via



the UN Development Program (UNDP), which has set up offices to assist in more populated Mosul and among mostly Muslim groups; and no word on U.S. funding since a pledge of assistance came from the Trump administration last November. UNDP has assisted in reopening schools in Qaraqosh and elsewhere. But the absence of an overall plan to rehabilitate Nineveh is a handicap, given the international attention and advocacy for ISIS victims.

On the street Nasser Michael, one shopkeeper, shakes his head when I ask about business. “The work is slow, like a person coming back from the dead. It will take time.” He paused over a display table where he was arranging hardware supplies, then added, “No one asked us to move back. But because we love our town, we moved back and we are starting over.”

Such outlooks can’t compensate for the glaring lack of international or national government strategy to rebuild. Months ago the Iraqi army delivered mobile cell phone towers and restored some electricity and water, but nearly the entire city lacks basic utilities. Roads are abysmal, cratered from fighting and sewage-ridden. Volunteer labor and sheer determination to rebuild are alone prompting the city’s comeback.

Down residential streets stacks of cement bags rise high outside homes where the shrill noise of power drills and clanging sledgehammers echoes off garden walls. Taraq Butros Tomas was applying gypsum to an outside wall on the day of my visit. One of his sons swept debris as we talked, while inside the tile man was working on the kitchen.

In many homes like this, ISIS piled all the household goods in one room, doused them in diesel fuel or kerosene, and lit them. The fires created noxious smoke damage, charring concrete walls and melting rebar supports without actually burning the houses down. This home, located in Section F on the church board’s color-coded map, is one of 148 homes in the section rated badly damaged but repairable.

With support from Samaritan’s Purse—which has 300 homes under reconstruction in Qaraqosh—workers have stripped charred plaster walls, installed new wiring, and begun work on the kitchen. Tomas was a fish seller in Qaraqosh before ISIS forced his family to leave. He moved back last September with his wife Janar and their eight children. They tried for a time to live in the house while working on it, but the noxious smells made them sick and they had to move out again. Now Tomas stays upstairs with several sons, while Janar with the other children, including one newborn grandchild, sleep in a nearby home without fire damage.

Still, it’s home. When I ask whether moving back has been worth it, he’s quick to respond: “Absolutely. This is our home. Even without an economy and jobs, we are home and we are together.”

Returning also means reckoning. Family members are traumatized all over again, shocked by the devastation and forced to remember life-and-death escapes in 2014. Some homes I visited remain full of rubble, yet the families live upstairs while they clean. Their furniture destroyed, they make do with repurposed boxes. Some have rushed to make repairs, plastering over structural flaws like damaged rebar supports. They have to be coaxed into tearing out walls and ceilings. A few families, worried about security and the lack of infrastructure, have decided to return to the camps.



For all those human and structural challenges, churches offer prayer times, and a new evangelical church is planned for the city, planted by the Alliance International Church out of Erbil to minister to returning families who’ve been living there. Samaritan’s Purse, too, has set up local teams to meet with families for prayer and support during reconstruction, explained Maria Andrawis, the group’s area coordinator: “It’s about more than rebuilding, than paint and plaster. It’s important to walk with families, for them to know they are loved and cared for and that they are not alone.”

Deeper challenges loom. Iraq has turned military control in Nineveh Plain over to Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) known locally as Hashd al-Shaabi. Formed with support from Iran and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, an Iranian cleric living in Iraq, the units are made up of Shiites, many Iranian, operating in mostly Sunni Mosul and Nineveh province. Christian returnees rightly fear the PMUs as yet unchecked control over their homelands.

“The Shia presence in Nineveh Plain is alarming. In some areas it looks like we are losing the battle,” said Emanuel Youkhana, an Assyrian clergyman who heads CAPNI, one of the Iraq-based NGOs working with the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee. Youkhana pointed out a banner at the entrance to Qaraqosh depicting Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. “What does he have to do with Qaraqosh, or Iraq?” Youkhana asked.



2



3

(1) Tomas works on repairing his home. (2) Palm Sunday at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh. (3) PMU fighters in Tal Afar, a town in the Nineveh province.

Hezbollah is fighting alongside Iranian units to prop up the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria's civil war. Hence, Iran's help in Iraq's war with ISIS and control now of north-central Iraq seems strategic: By controlling the Nineveh region through Mosul and across into Syria, Iran could open a corridor of military dominance stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean.

Armed clashes between PMU fighters and Kurdish peshmerga units are not uncommon, and at any moment threaten Christian populations. Last year the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee with aid from the Hungarian government moved back 900 families to the town of Telskuf, just 10 miles from Mosul. One month later, as PMU and peshmerga units traded fire, the Iraqi army ordered the families out.

Those families are back now, holding worship services, reopening schools and businesses. But the upheaval left a lasting impression, according to Stephen Rasche, an American who serves as legal counsel for the Nineveh Reconstruction

Committee: "Telskuf was the poster child for resettling the displaced Christians. There has to be a willingness on all sides to take them back, provide security in their villages and towns. But the message to Christians is that they are acceptable collateral damage in every political move that's made."

In the Nineveh town of Bartella, where 1,200 Christian families have returned and small businesses again are thriving, Shiites are completing a residential project on 25 acres outside town, according to Nicodemus Daoud Sharaf, the Syriac Orthodox archbishop of Mosul. In an interview with Aid to the Church in Need in March, he said the project suggests "a plan to bring in people from outside the region" and called that "a threat to the security of the region."

Privately, aid group leaders say the United States with redirected humanitarian aid could foster stability but

funding necessary to make a difference was needed a year ago. A November announcement of U.S. aid was followed by silence until a late March meeting in Baghdad organized by USAID and attended by numerous aid groups. Talks centered on a \$35 million U.S. initiative to minority Christian, Yazidi, and Shabak groups in Nineveh. The program is in a "research and assessment" phase, an attendee told me, and possibly a long way from implementation.

Most U.S. government funds appear headed toward the larger displaced Sunni Muslim population in the region. Even so, the \$35 million proposal is a start: "It's a good initiative, and we have to wait and see what will come out of it," said Aaron Ashoff, regional director for Europe and the Middle East for Samaritan's Purse.

Looking ahead, said CAPNT's Youkhana, "is all conditional. NGOs are doing what they can, but government too has to do something. Until now we've had no national debate on what happens, who is in charge, how to prevent ISIS returning. What ISIS did in 2014 is called 'cross-border terror,' but no one has accounted for how ISIS came to take over a very well-trained Iraqi army and to conquer a city like Mosul."

Formidable challenges ahead and threats on the ground only highlight the present progress. In Qaraqosh, "as in the Bible when Jerusalem was destroyed, always someone is against the reconstruction," said Father Georges Jahola. "But they succeeded despite the odds."

"He's our Nehemiah," said one of his colleagues. Jahola laughed and continued, "We are like those coming back from Babylon. We aim to succeed." ☸

—For more information on reconstruction efforts, visit the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee website at nrciraq.org

FEATURES

CAMDEN

*A crime turnaround in a New Jersey city
shows how a reformed police department
can contribute to community flourishing*

by **EMILY BELZ** *in Camden, N.J.* PHOTO BY COREY PERRINE/GENESIS



'S NEW DAY

In downtown Camden, Officer Tyrrell Bagby chats with longtime resident Odessa Morton.

Homes on “Heroin Highway” in North Camden now have potted plants outside and laughing teenagers hanging out on a porch after sunset. Police officers walk down a quiet block once controlled by drug dealers.

At the peak of violence six years ago on this block, four officers attempted to arrest a suspected drug dealer, only to have a crowd of more than 100 attack them and free the suspect.

Today, the drug set is gone, and a teacher leads a class of little kids down the street holding a rope. Little League season is starting soon at a new, nearby baseball field, which a few years ago was a needle-littered haven for drug users.

Camden, N.J., infamous for its violent crime and drug trade, has seen a remarkable turnaround driven by a reformed police force. In 2012, violence was at its peak: 67 murders in the city of 77,000. That year Chicago grabbed headlines as the U.S. city with the most murders. But measured by population, Camden’s murder rate was almost five times that of Chicago’s.

Five years later, the crime statistics from 2017 showed homicides at a 30-year low. Homicides have dropped 66 percent from the 2012 peak. Camden’s homicides are a small sample size, so large percentage swings aren’t unusual—but “Part 1” crimes like robbery and assault are at their lowest levels since Camden officials started keeping statistics in 1969. From 2012 to 2017, Camden achieved a 26 percent drop in violent crime.

One key to Camden’s turnaround: City, county, and state leaders decided in 2012 to dissolve and reform the police department, a radical and politically risky move. Another key: City leaders—the police chief, the mayor, and City Council—have taken a holistic approach to the city’s problems, turning to local churches and nonprofits as allies.

In the community, ministry workers and pastors I spoke to say they’re seeing change both on the streets and in the hearts of the people they serve.

“We’re seeing what happens with right policing,” said Ernest Grant II, lead pastor of Epiphany Camden.

How did this turnaround happen? It seemingly began with a risky political maneuver. In 2012 the city, in conjunction with the state and county, decided to dissolve the police force entirely. Officials created a new, nonunion force from scratch, where training had a new emphasis on de-escalation tactics and community policing.

In the process, local leaders made enemies of the police union, a situation no politician wants to be in. “[The police union] did not want to be a part of the process,” said county executive Lou Cappelli, a Democrat who led the effort to reorganize the department under county control. “They were putting their interest ahead of the residents.”

The Camden City Council president at the time, Frank Moran (now the mayor of Camden), recalled that his chambers were filled with protesters, and people called him a union buster.

But Moran, who grew up in Camden, said he has no regrets about the department reorganization. The union’s pay scale and contract arrangements meant the city couldn’t afford more than a dozen officers patrolling the city most nights. Under budget pressure, city employees were taking furloughs, but “the police union refused to give anything.”



“It was a tough time, because here we were dissolving the same folks that we needed to protect us,” said Moran, also a Democrat. The city and county had backing and funding for the effort from Republican Gov. Chris Christie.

Police Chief Scott Thomson, who had spent his career with the police in Camden, launched the new Camden County Police Department with reforms. The department hired back about half of the previous force, with a new emphasis on community relationships.

Camden police officers recall feeling in the old days like an occupying military force in a city controlled by drug dealers. After the reorganization, officers began giving their cell phone numbers to residents, meeting with neighborhood pastors and other community leaders, and working with local ministries serving prostitutes or gang-bound teenagers. The department’s new manual for use-of-force training emphasized “the sanctity of life” and the importance of a “moral compass.”

On a recent March morning, Officers Tyrrell Bagby and Michael Agron—both Camden natives—set out



Pastor Ernest Grant

on street patrol. Bagby, part of the force since 2013, said he has to replace his boots every year because the officers walk the streets so much. In a city where less than half of high schoolers graduate, he not only graduated but went on to gain admission to Yale Medical School. He decided that he wanted to be a police officer in his hometown instead, to be part of the city turnaround.

Bagby and Agron greet every person they see on the street. The two said they never just sit in their squad car running speed traps. But if they do stop someone, they are trained to explain why, rather than opening with a demand to hand over a driver's

license or asking, "Do you know why I stopped you?" That approach is meant to help build trust. Bagby rattles off his script: "Hi, I'm Officer Bagby with the Camden County Police Department, I stopped you for speeding."

Later as Bagby drove through North Camden in his patrol car, he neared a woman who was walking down the middle of the street. He slowed down and explained that this woman had been attacked by dogs as a child and was mentally ill. He said the officers know about her and let her be. He navigated around her.

The community policing here is even more radical than knowing residents and talking to them on the street.

Last fall a man fleeing arrest shot a Camden officer in the leg at point-blank range, an incident captured on

bodycam video. Then—according to the police—the suspect tried to shoot the officer in the head, but the gun jammed. The wounded officer was able to arrest the suspect, who now faces attempted murder charges.

The 18-year-old suspect turned out not to be from Camden, a persistent problem here where outsiders cause havoc that community-police relationships can't solve. But for the following week after the officer was shot, the police department held barbecues at the site of the shooting. The message was intended to show the neighborhood that the police weren't going to retaliate.

Grant, the Epiphany church pastor, lives with his wife and two children in South Camden, along with other church staff. The neighborhood is still rough, he says, but the attempted break-ins at his house have stopped. Grant, who is African-American, is concerned about the issue of police brutality and police shootings of minorities, but he adds, "I want to be safe! I want to call the police!"

He said Camden police now seem better trained on de-escalation, on avoiding implicit bias, and on getting services for the poor instead of locking them up. When he talks to officers, he doesn't feel they're "on alert," but engaged in a real conversation.

Epiphany, a nondenominational church, focuses its ministry and outreach on four groups of people: the poor, the unborn, single mothers, and victims of violence. "Different layers" of change are happening in Camden, Grant says: "I'm seeing change on a heart level, from people who were addicted to crack and addicted to cocaine who are starting to walk on the right path, looking to take care of their kids. For me that's focus No. 1."

Cooperation with local ministries has proven vital for Camden police, who hope to deter youth from crime and make their neighborhoods safer.

One recent evening in North Camden, Elvis Reyes, a college freshman who grew up in Camden, leaned on the ledge of a porch, looking out on the darkening street. The weather was springlike, and a half-dozen teenagers



Scott Thomson is sworn in as chief of the new Camden County Police Department by Freeholder Director Louis Cappelli Jr. (left) in 2013.



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lingered outside with Reyes. “It does feel different,” he said. “It feels safe. But it’s still Camden.”

William Morales, a high-school senior who also grew up in North Camden, remembered how drug dealers would sell drugs here at 6:30 in the morning. The teenagers don’t remember seeing cops in their neighborhood very often.

“No one would stand on a corner now,” Morales said.

The teens were at the house where CASA (Camden Adolescents Striving for Achievement) hosts an after-school program that gives teenagers a place to hang out, develop life skills, and find an alternative to gangs. It’s a project of a larger Catholic social work group, Guadalupe Family Services.

Chief Thomson describes the program as essential to helping with the “trauma” in the community, and police officers come and speak to the CASA teenagers on various occasions. Every student who has gone through the program in the last six years has graduated high school, and each who applied to college was accepted.

“Some people get discouraged by the fact that they came from here ... you just get demoralized,” said Reyes. He still struggles with that demoral-

(1) William Morales (left), CASA director Tim Gallagher (center), and Elvis Reyes talk in the kitchen at CASA. **(2)** Teens trickle in for the after-school program at CASA. **(3)** Tyrrell Bagby in downtown Camden.

ization, doubting that there will be a job for him here after graduation. “It’s a stereotype... You’re applying for a spot. You’re from Camden, the other guy is from Cherry Hill. We’re going to go with the Cherry Hill guy.”

With that in mind, one of the most remarkable Camden renaissance numbers comes from the U.S. Census: From 2015 to 2016 Camden’s poverty rate fell from 40 percent to 30 percent, and business has slowly returned to the city. Camden tied with Dallas in 2016 for the nation’s highest percentage increase in employment. City officials credit tax incentives for enticing companies into Camden.

Camden’s waterfront on the Delaware River has cranes showing the signs of development. A hotel is going up, the first in decades. A state prison used to sit on the waterfront, but state and local authorities agreed



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to demolish it and create a park. Cooper’s Poynt Waterfront Park opened last year.

Despite the good signs, Camden still faces its challenges. The week I visited, the police department was in turmoil because an officer was caught on camera repeatedly punching a suspect. Lt. Kevin Lutz, who oversees training at the department, was visibly frustrated. The department had trained officers against this kind of behavior, and officers here wear body cameras.

Lutz was visiting roll calls at the different police substations to underscore that the behavior in the video was unacceptable—though an investigation

COREY PERRINE/GENESIS PHOTOS



From lawn mower to mayor's seat

Camden Mayor **Frank Moran** was in his early teens when he saw the exodus of industrial businesses like Campbell's Soup from the city and the arrival of the crack epidemic.

"We became a ghost town," he said.

Moran is one of seven children raised by a single mother. He started working as a laborer for the city after high school, cutting grass in all the parks.

Rising in the ranks at the parks department, he became part of the City Council, then president of the City Council, and finally—in January—the mayor. His priority, he says, is to continue the city's turnaround and to make sure that the renaissance reaches all Camdenites, not just waterfront developers.

Moran says he became a "born-again Christian" about 15 years ago, when his mother, part of a local Assemblies of God church, passed away. He joined the church as a fiery member, going on mission trips and sharing about his faith at events in Camden.

He counts the Antinores as friends and says the inclusion of churches and nonprofits in the city's renaissance is essential.

Has he gotten pushback about those partnerships?

"Actually sometimes we've got to push back, because now every ministry that wants to do something comes to the mayor's office and says, 'God gave me a vision,'" he laughed. "If God gave you the call, He's going to back you up some way. I ain't got the money!" —E.B.



of the full circumstances around the video is still ongoing.

Excessive force complaints against the police department have been dropping overall. From Lutz's perspective, the most important thing the new department has done is to repeat training for officers over time. "We're training everyone the same way," said Lutz, to "shape the culture of the department."

Camden doesn't have all of its crime problems solved. South Camden is still struggling, and drugs remain a serious issue. Overdoses continue to increase, reflecting a national trend. One of the young prostitutes I interviewed on a previous trip had died.

Bill and Brenda Antinore serve prostitutes, prisoners, and the poor through their Camden ministry Seeds of Hope, a 2014 WORLD Hope Award regional winner (see "Street savvy," Aug. 23, 2014). The Antinores know parts of the city are transforming, but they are sometimes overwhelmed by the endless need. In the couple's South Camden home, half of a dining room plate rack is filled with memorial photos of ministry recipients who have died in the last few years.

The Antinores have a good relationship with Chief Thomson and local officers. A few days after I visited, there was a murder (the city's fifth this year) around the corner from their home and ministry. Immediately a police officer they knew texted them about the murder and said he would keep them updated on the investigation.

"We hope we're one of their best allies in the community," said Brenda. "We're doing what we're called to do in God's strength. Because you could just turn and leave. ... But you have a nucleus of people in this city committed to praying—praying for the police, praying for the city. That's how it's going to happen."

In May, city officials will host a carnival with residents to mark the five-year anniversary of the new police department. Pastor Grant, for one, is enthusiastic.

"[The police] have done an incredible job," he said. "And that's something we need to celebrate." 🌐



HOLLYWOOD'S CON

TWO DECADES AGO, Kevin Sorbo was busy slaying dragons. As the star of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, Sorbo pranced around in 12-pound, glute-hugging leather pants and a chamois shirt that revealed sculpted pectorals. The popular Greek mythology TV series ran for six seasons from 1995 to 1999 and gained a cult following around the world.

Sorbo's wife Sam (then known as Sam Jenkins) also played on the show, cast as the beautiful Serena, a mortalized Golden Hind who captured Hercules' broken heart. That happened in real life, too: The actors met on set while shooting *Hercules* and knew "right away" that they were in love. It helped that both were Christians and that Sam found Kevin a "normal nice guy" instead of the big-ego stud she had expected. Then when Sam found out he was a conservative as well, she thought, "Oh good, he's not insane." Six months after they met, Kevin proposed. They wedded in 1998 at a tiny chapel in Los Angeles.

The Sorbos are a rare pair in Hollywood: They're conservative evangelical Christians in an industry that swings far to the left—and they're willing to voice their opinions at a politically fraught time when the few conservatives remaining in Hollywood feel pressured to hide in the closet, fearful of being blacklisted.

During the 2016 presidential election, for example, Kevin Sorbo received public backlash for supporting Donald Trump and saying Jesus would have voted for Trump as "the lesser of two evils." Meanwhile, Sam hosted a nationally syndicated radio show, *The Sam Sorbo Show*, for almost four years, talking about religion and politics. The Sorbos are also vocal advocates of homeschooling, and Sam published a

hard-hitting book criticizing the liberal agenda within government-run education.

Conservative actors, producers, directors, and screenwriters can remember a time as recent as 20 years ago, back when *Hercules* was running strong, when they felt safe to air their conservative views to friends in the industry. That's no longer the case: Conservatives in the entertainment industry today say they feel shut down and shunned as political acrimony grows in an already left-leaning Hollywood. Politics seeps into TV shows and movies that push pro-LGBT narratives. It takes front stage at the Golden Globes and the Emmys, where celebrities lambasted President Trump and applauded when Hillary Clinton read an excerpt from Michael Wolff's gossip-laced book *Fire and Fury*.

According to unofficial estimates, the number of conservatives working in the local entertainment industry ranges around a few thousand individuals—a mere blot out of the 180,000 entertainment-related jobs in Los Angeles. Some well-known figures in the industry such as Clint Eastwood, Gary Sinise, and Tim Allen remain outspoken about their political stances, but many others keep their red stripe secret. In Hollywood, politics can greatly affect a person's career because people spend long hours together on sets and projects, and producers like to hire people who fit in and won't cause conflicts.

Kevin Sorbo said he has noticed a huge drop in calls from big studios in the last decade and said it would be "a shock" if he was ever cast in a blockbuster movie again: "I don't get it. In the last 50, 60 years there's been this slow brainwashing

SERVATIVE COUPLE

Actors and filmmakers Kevin and Sam Sorbo are outspoken conservative evangelicals in a fiercely liberal industry | BY SOPHIA LEE



Kevin as Hercules (above); the Sorbo family (from left to right): Braeden, Shane, Kevin, Octavia, and Sam

going on from the left, but now, it's open warfare.”

Today the Sorbos still attend some movie premieres (like Clint Eastwood's *The 15:17 to Paris*) and book speaking engagements, and they recently made a faith-based drama film together. But the more vocal they are in their viewpoints, the more they feel removed from the Hollywood bubble, and they say they've never really cared for the schmooze parties with the predictable cliques.

I visited the Sorbos twice—once at their kids' weekly homeschooling classes at a local co-op, then at their house in Westlake Village, a mountain-hugging bedroom community in Los Angeles. The Sorbos have done

well in their careers: They live above a gated driveway in a multimillion-dollar, Mediterranean-style villa that includes a pool, a gym, and a state-of-the-art theater on a 1.5-acre private estate growing avocado, orange, apple, apricot, plum, and lemon trees.

On a Thursday morning, I sat in their dining room, a sun-trickled space with vintage fabric armchairs and a grand chandelier. On the wall hung a man-sized framed painting of Kevin Sorbo as Hercules, with his trademark chestnut tassels and bulging biceps. It was a nod to the old days when a show like *Hercules*—feel-good, light-hearted entertainment featuring an upstanding hero who naturally does what's right—could rake in millions of views in 176 countries.

Hercules paintings aside, the Sorbos' house was otherwise quiet and homey. Their golden mutt Hunter snored loudly underneath the dining room table. Sam wore a magenta jacket, jogging pants, and a blue cap, having just gone for a walk that morning at the nearby golf course while Kevin played his usual quick morning golf. Upstairs, their two teenage sons, Braeden and Shane, were working on Latin and math, while their 12-year-old daughter Octavia sat at the kitchen table practicing her spelling.

The Sorbos first moved to their neighborhood for its well-rated public schools, but now they homeschool their kids, using a classical Christian curriculum. Sam was once an active volunteer in her oldest son Braeden's elementary school, busy baking cookies, grading papers, and helping out in the classroom. One day, she asked the teacher



about Braeden's book reports, and the teacher responded that his book reports weren't very good. Sam was shocked: By then Braeden had already submitted five book reports, yet the teacher hadn't graded them or informed her that her son's work was subpar. So the next day, Sam sat her son down after school for 45 minutes to teach him how to write a well-composed book report. As Braeden complained about the extra work and Sam pushed him on, she realized, "Hey, this is homeschooling. I'm doing the teacher's work—except we're doing this when we're both tired and cranky!"

Then when Kevin had to fly off to Oahu, Hawaii, to shoot the movie *Soul Surfer* for several weeks, his family came to visit him, because the Sorbos had made a pact early in their marriage never to stay more than two weeks apart. During those couple of weeks by the beach, Sam gathered her children around the dining room table every morning to complete their math and writing assignments for school. Again, she realized she was already homeschooling her kids, and she was providing one-on-one care they couldn't get in a 30-student classroom. As she did more research, she decided she didn't like everything schools were teaching either, so the Sorbos pulled their kids out of school and began homeschooling them.

Sam now travels the country advocating for homeschooling—and has gotten some flak for it. At one event hosted by preschool mothers, she spoke about the dangers of what public schools are teaching children. A leader then stepped up to the stage and asked her to leave because she was making people feel uncomfortable. Sam said she was "devastated," but that incident made her more determined to speak up: "We Christians have been cowed. ... I'm just pursuing truth, that there is even such a thing as the Truth"

Tired of seeing the secular culture challenge her children's faith every day, Sam wondered what it would look like for Christianity to challenge an atheist's beliefs. That led to a script that became the 2017 film *Let There Be Light*, funded by conservative commentator Sean Hannity, directed by Kevin, written and produced by Sam, and starring the Sorbos and their two sons. In it, Kevin plays a hedonistic atheist who has a "Road to Damascus" moment after a near-death experience and reconciles with his family. While some critics called it a "heavily proselytizing" drama, they praised the Sorbos' performance, and the movie made \$7.2 million on a \$3 million budget.

Let There Be Light is just one of several commercially successful faith-based films that have mystified Hollywood filmmakers. *God's Not Dead*, starring Kevin Sorbo as an atheist professor, was a surprise box office hit in 2014, raking in more than \$60 million on a \$2 million budget. Last year's *The Case for Christ*, a biopic of atheist-

turned-apologist Lee Strobel, earned \$176 million on a \$3 million budget. Most recently, *I Can Only Imagine*, a movie about Christian songwriter Bart Millard, nabbed \$17.1 million in its opening weekend, placing third on the box office list.

While Hollywood analysts scratch their heads about how such explicitly Christian projects with low budgets and little marketing could have performed so well, Kevin Sorbo explains it this way: Major moviemakers have forgotten about a sizable audience that prefers its entertainment clean, inspirational, and uplifting, with good old family values such as redemption, forgiveness, and love. "Hollywood has an agenda, let's face it," he said. "They put out so many violent movies full of sex, violence, and hate. ... Why can't we have more feel-good, good-message movies?"

And that's the kind of content the Sorbos plan to continue creating. They just released *Let There Be Light* on DVD, along with a book with 40 devotions that delve into the movie's themes of family, faith, forgiveness, grief, and redemption. This summer, the Sorbos are inviting people to join them on a 10-day trip to Israel to "follow the light in the footsteps of Jesus." A film crew will shoot the journey, and the entire Sorbo family will be there to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel—and to celebrate the God-man born there two millennia ago.

Meanwhile, it seems that shooting *Let There Be Light* has bitten the Sorbos' two sons with the acting bug. Both kids, ages 16 and 13, are taking acting classes and talking of becoming actors. Sam is ambivalent about their Hollywood ambitions—"It's a tough industry," she says—but she also remembers when she was a gangly young nerd who dreamed of becoming an actor but received little encouragement to pursue her dreams. After studying biomedical engineering at Duke University, she finally took the leap and moved to Los Angeles, where an acting coach asked her, "Why do you want to act?" She responded earnestly, "To change the world." She still believes in that purpose, even if the world of Hollywood has put up a wall against conservative Christians like the Sorbos.

But perhaps that's why Hollywood needs the Sorbos—it doesn't quite yet understand their audience. Like their filmgoing fans, the Sorbos are outsiders at heart—skirting the social circles of Hollywood, in the industry but not of it. And they're fine with that, because they know they don't belong here. And they know they're not alone. ☺



'Hollywood has an agenda, let's face it. They put out so many violent movies full of sex, violence, and hate. ... Why can't we have more feel-good, good-message movies?'



A smile in the SORROW

Rebecca Dali has become a lifeline for Nigerians traumatized by abuse and Islamist violence

by ONIZE OHIKERE in Jos, Nigeria

Excited chatter filled the air inside a gated compound in the town of Bukuru, just south of Jos in north-central Nigeria. It was graduation morning at the Center for Caring, Empowerment, and Peace Initiatives (CCEPI), and 32 widows and orphans were preparing for a ceremony to celebrate their completion of the center's skills program. In one bedroom, several women applied makeup and donned matching T-shirts. Outside the compound, staff members loaded a truck with sewing machines, knitting equipment, and computers the students would receive at the ceremony.

These students and Boko Haram survivors, who had learned skills enabling them to earn a living, owed a debt of thanks not just to the center, but to its founder, Rebecca Dali. Known internationally for her humanitarian work, Dali has spent years assisting Nigerians suffering from poverty, widowhood, and more recently, violence and abuse perpetrated by the Boko Haram terrorist organization.

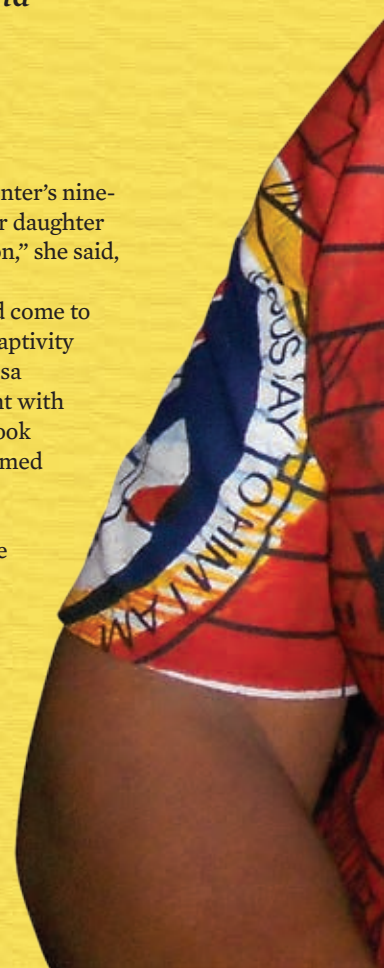
In the compound courtyard one graduate, Esther Bitrus, sat on interlocking floor tiles as she finished eating her breakfast, her baby firmly seated against her chest.

Nineteen-year-old Bitrus finished the center's nine-month sewing program the same day her daughter turned 9 months old. "Double celebration," she said, laughing.

She had more to celebrate. Bitrus had come to the center a year earlier after escaping captivity from Boko Haram's stronghold in Sambisa Forest, Borno state. She became pregnant with her daughter after one of the militants took her as a wife. After her escape, Bitrus named the baby after Dali.

Remarkably, some 350 babies have been named after "Mama Rebecca" since 2014—names given as gestures of gratitude from hundreds of mothers Dali has helped over the years.

Rebecca Dali, sometimes called "the Dorcas of our time" by Boko Haram survivors, set up CCEPI to care for the poor and orphans in her native Borno state in Nigeria's northeast long before Boko Haram's Islamist





THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
WOMEN FELLOWSHIP



insurgency there. As the violence intensified, Dali adjusted her services to assist the thousands of Christians and Muslims who have lost husbands, parents, and properties. Dali and her center have helped teach trade skills to refugees and have assisted young women who've endured kidnapping by Boko Haram.

Although Boko Haram has suffered territorial losses amid a Nigerian military offensive against the group, thousands of people continue to suffer from the conflict. And the kidnappings continue: Boko Haram militants abducted 111 girls, some as young as 11, from a boarding school in the town of Dapchi in February. The militants freed most of the girls in March, but did not immediately release a 15-year-old Christian whom witnesses said had refused to convert to Islam. Five girls reportedly died in captivity. For survivors, the trauma of their experience becomes a major hurdle to reintegrating with society and finding personal stability.

At the graduation ceremony in Jos, 57-year-old Dali, dressed in a traditional black-and-white cloth and headscarf, encouraged the graduates: "I have walked the same path that you are going through. My history is terrible, but I did not lose hope, so I don't want you to lose hope."

Dali grew up in a poor family in Borno state and hawked traditional bean cake on the streets as a child. When she was 6 years old, a man raped her and threatened to kill her if she told anyone. Driven by the desire to help others with similar experiences, Dali started CCEPI in 1989. For years, the initiative focused on providing academic scholarships to orphaned and vulnerable children and providing care for widows and the elderly.

The calls seeking Dali's help increased in 2011 after her husband, the Rev. Samuel Dali, became president of the EYN Church of the Brethren. That same year, Boko Haram began staging mass attacks.

Once, Dali received an urgent call to help a woman after the militant group murdered her husband and two children. She arrived to find the woman screaming in a pool of their blood. Dali called some nearby soldiers to help pick up the bodies, and she helped clean up the woman and calm her down. "The grief was too much," Dali says.

Boko Haram's violence landed on the Dalis' doorstep in 2014, when the terrorists overran their church's headquarters in Borno. Rebecca and her husband fled the Oct. 29 attack with a bullet in the back of their Toyota Hilux four-wheel drive. They relocated to Jos, Plateau state's capital city, where Samuel set up new headquarters.

As the crisis ravaged the northeast, many Muslims moved farther north, while thousands of Christians fled to Jos. Dali continued to travel back to the northeast while assisting the refugees in their new home. She partnered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and international groups like the International Rescue Committee and the Church of the Brethren in the United States. Together they provided food aid, sanitation and hygiene assistance, trauma counseling, and medical aid to people within and outside

refugee camps. The support extended to refugee camps in neighboring Cameroon, where residents also suffer from Boko Haram violence.

Dali's center works with three legal practitioners to verify and prosecute cases of sexual abuse within refugee camps and host communities. The center also sent out monitoring staff to gather evidence of Boko Haram atrocities. Dali showed me several bulky, green hardcover books detailing the number of people displaced and killed due to the conflict, based on direct reports from family members. One of the books, recording people killed by Boko Haram from

2008 to 2015, lists the names of more than 40,000 individuals, along with their villages and the name of the family member who confirmed their death.

Dali's work in the northeast has led to

Some of the newly released Dapchi schoolgirls on March 21



'If my organization is not there, who will go?' —Dali

close encounters with Boko Haram. On Aug. 30, 2014, she was driving to Chibok in Borno state when some Boko Haram militants stopped her. She prayed quietly as they started to grill her with questions. The terrorists told her they were familiar with her work and thanked her for assisting both Christians and Muslims. They ordered her to turn back, saying some of the other militants might not know her. "I've never been afraid of these places," she says. "If my organization is not there, who will go?"

As the crisis persists, Dali has found many refugees sitting idly in the camps. CCEPI has organized clubs and activities for camp children, and it has set up "livelihood centers" for widows and orphans at two camps in northeastern Adamawa state and another in Jos. Program participants learn trades like soap making and sewing and learn how to run a computer center. CCEPI and

the Church of the Brethren furnished the centers with training equipment, provided some meals for students, and covered transportation costs for those who had to travel. The program also provides students with equipment and resources to start a business after graduation.

After the first class graduated from the center in Jos, Dali discovered one student had sold the sewing machine she received. The center now asks the students to pay a \$10 token fee. Dali explains, “If you give everything free, people will not cherish it much.”

The livelihood centers assist people like Bitrus. Boko Haram militants captured her in 2014 when they raided her village in Borno state. She remained with the terrorists for two years and three months in Sambisa Forest, where the militants also kept the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped during the infamous Chibok raid.

untreated. Her father and several other family members died due to Boko Haram violence. “One day, we buried more than 400 people.”

Amid the violence and pain, Dali attempts to remain a source of kindness and hope for her people. Sitting in her home in Jos, Dali lends a warm greeting and a smile to visitors who occasionally appear through her open door. In her living room, 10 plaques and awards decorate a slab, many of them commending her humanitarian work. During a trip to Geneva last year, she received the United Nation’s Sérgio Vieira de Mello humanitarian award for her efforts to reintegrate former Boko Haram captives.

Esther Bitrus and her daughter Rebecca

Dali visits rescued captives shortly after their release to learn their immediate needs and where their families are located. She works with local village heads to resettle widows and sometimes helps to build homes for them. She also pays the school fees for some of the rescued orphans. CCEPI has helped to reintegrate 250 people since the conflict began.

Reintegration for Bitrus and others is not easy. The process for each individual can take two to six months. And sometimes it fails: Last year, center workers were still visiting one of the rescued girls when she fled back to rejoin Boko Haram. Dali said the girl had become radicalized and still supported the group’s ideology.

When CCEPI begins the process of reintegrating a former captive, the initial response from families or communities is fear, as villagers worry the survivors could become radicalized and kill them. Dali’s intervention process begins with prayer: “I usually pray to God to give me peace of mind and that God would speak to them before I go.” She also shares her personal story of suffering and loss with the families.

In 2011, Dali’s own teenage son went missing during an ethno-religious crisis in Jos. She has had to go through her own healing to deal with the trauma of loss.

“That one usually sticks deep,” she says. “It’s very difficult and the scar is still there, but God is still good.”

Sometimes, she lets her actions speak for her. In one village where the residents were worried about a formerly captive widow, Dali held a small celebration to hand over the house CCEPI had built for her. The widow cooked, and she and Dali ate together from the same plate. “It showed them she’s [not] harmful.”

Dali finds fulfillment in these success stories. Regarding the 350 babies who now bear her name, she laughs: “They’re too many.”

In her culture, people buy gifts for children named after them. But her gift to her namesakes, Dali says, is to love and help their parents. 🌍



“I was praying and fasting,” Bitrus said of her time in captivity. When the extremist who “married” her died in battle, Bitrus—seven months pregnant at the time—escaped, running for three days until Nigerian troops picked her up. She arrived at the livelihood center in 2016, and CCEPI helped her through the rest of her pregnancy and childbirth. She plans to continue sewing and hopes eventually to return to school.

Aisha Moses, a 45-year-old volunteer at the livelihood center, sees the program’s impact reaching beyond each graduate. “When I ask them what they’re going to do, they say they’re going to help their families and train other people.” At the center, Moses sat on a wooden desk, a cloth tied around her waist and a set of crutches leaning against the wall nearby. CCEPI paid for surgery last July to amputate Moses’ right leg. She said an insect bit her leg as she fled her village in Borno state in 2014, and the injury had gone





FOREIGN MISSIONS AT HOME

Some churches and ministries are preaching the gospel to the world by reaching out to international students in America

by **SOPHIA LEE** ○ Photo by Robin Rayne/Genesis



ANGIE MERCER WONDERED if she was the only person freaking out in the hospital room. The others—an international student from China, his pregnant wife, and his mother—wore stoic expressions. The mother-to-be was deep in labor, yet the doctor had not arrived, and the understaffed nurses were busy elsewhere.

The student's mother, an obstetrician-gynecologist in China, tightened her lips and told her son in Mandarin all the things that needed to be done, right away, and the son interpreted her

recommendations to Mercer, who quickly relayed their needs to the nurses. After many active years serving in international student ministry, Mercer learned enough about Chinese culture to know that her foreign friends were more anxious than she was—they just didn't show it.

This was 2009 in Atlanta, Ga., five years into Mercer's and her husband Joel's involvement in international student ministry. The birth of this Chinese couple's baby—a healthy boy named Andy—was the fifth delivery Mercer witnessed with her international friends. In this case the couple, both Ph.D. students at Georgia Tech, called Mercer around 5 a.m. from the hospital for help. Mercer rushed over to serve as their advocate, since none of them were confident in their English or familiar with the American healthcare system.

The couple were not Christians, nor did they profess faith in Christ while in Atlanta. But they attended Mercer's church for Sunday service and the Sunday school class that her church offers for international students. After they graduated, the couple continued sending Mercer Mother's Day cards. Although they've gradually lost contact, Mercer hopes the couple will remember that time a blond, twinkly-eyed Christian American woman had given them a voice (with a Southern twang) when they felt they had none—and perhaps the next time they encounter another Christian, they would be inclined to listen to the gospel.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS have been attending American colleges in never-before-seen numbers. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of international students in the United States spiked from 500,000 to more than a million. (The numbers declined some in 2017.) China sends the largest group of students, followed by India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia—which means many of these international students are atheists, Hindus, and Muslims.

Although the majority of international students don't profess faith in Christ before they return to their countries, those who experienced positive interactions with local Christians hold favorable views of Christianity and the church, said Douglas Shaw, president of International Students Inc. (ISI), a Christian organization that ministers to international college students. These students tend to become influential leaders in their native lands as politicians, educators, and executives.

Yet according to ISI, about 75 percent of international students never step foot into an American home—an incredible opportunity lost for churches to welcome the nations, said Al LaCour, coordinator of Reformed University Fellowship International (RUF-I), a PCA campus ministry. In 2004 when the Metro Atlanta Presbytery sent LaCour, then a 56-year-old church planter and pastor, to start an RUF chapter for

Joel Mercer teaches English as a Second Language.

American students at Georgia Tech, the university ranked No. 20 for having the most international students among U.S. campuses but didn't have a single campus ministry exclusively for international students. LaCour founded the first one with RUF-I (aka International Buzz) and after 30 years of church planting, switched his ministry from local to global missions.

The 70-year-old veteran pastor now oversees 15 RUF-I ministries across the nation. Part of his vocation involves "poking eyes" (as former RUF

coordinator Tom Cannon termed it) at PCA churches and conferences so church members can discover a field ripe for harvest: Just as God commanded Israel to welcome the foreigner, God charges the church to practice Biblical hospitality, which means to love strangers like family members.

Most local churches think of global missions as sending out missionaries overseas, which requires tremendous funds and skills and commitment, but the welcoming of foreigners who are here requires only a love for Christ and a willingness to make room for new relationships, LaCour said: "It's one of the most cost-effective ways to fulfill the Great Commission."

SOME CHURCHES HAVE caught that vision. St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Atlanta made a commitment as a church to serving international students in the city. The decision came when the church's missions department was going through some restructuring and looking for ways to be more strategic in doing missions other than sending money overseas. Trevor Williams, volunteer coordinator of St. Paul's missions team, said the lightbulb flicked on after hearing LaCour's definition of Biblical hospitality: "We're nine blocks away from Georgia Tech. So we had to ask: Why aren't we doing more with the international students?"

St. Paul's now partners with RUF-I and local churches of other denominations to organize events and provide services for international students such as airport pickups. This year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, members of St. Paul's took 36 students and visiting scholars on a tour around the city's MLK Jr. National Historic Site. The day ended with a home-cooked Vietnamese lunch at St. Paul's sanctuary, where senior pastor Tolivar Wills gave a short speech about the significance of MLK Jr. Day: "What drove Dr. King was the belief that all humans are made in the image of God." For many of these students, it was the first time they had ever stepped foot into a church. Some came back, and several became Facebook friends with Wills and other church members.

Williams said it's hard to measure the impact of the MLK Jr. trip, but such events are already blessing church members with more opportunities to serve globally. Any additional developments with students, he said, is just gravy: "We don't count our success with conversions, but see it as fitting into the context of what God is already doing. This is long-term missions."

[1] RUF students at Lake Day.
[2] Joel and Angie Mercer with students.
[3] St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Atlanta hosts an international students tour of the city's MLK Jr. National Historic Site.



IN CORNFIELD-SURROUNDED MUNCIE, IND., where the racial demographic is less diverse, churches such as the Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) team up with ISI, Cru's Bridges International, and the Friendship Family program at Ball State University to reach out to international students. WPC provides a Bible class every Sunday morning to international students using Bible study curriculum from ISI and Bridges, and church members extend the relationship by inviting students to meals and providing transportation to airports, supermarkets, and doctor's appointments. The church also started a furniture donation program when a student from Kuwait asked a church member if he could borrow a used mattress. When other local churches learned about the furniture program, donations poured in: Beds, desks, and dressers overfilled the church's garage until two pastors had to open up their own garages.

When Hope Robinson, who runs the furniture program and Bible classes, first got involved in international student ministry, she had no knowledge of or interaction with other cultures. Now she and her husband visit graduates and professors in China who need spiritual encouragement. Robinson said some church members were at first anxious about approaching foreign students: Would they understand us? What do we talk about? But as church volunteers interact with these students, they realize that ministering to international students is similar to building regular friendships, Robinson said: "You're just being a friend. ... God does the work. We are His hands."

Unlike many American students jaded toward Christianity, foreign students are generally curious about the Christian faith and open to discussions about religion. RUF-I's weekly "Dinner and Discovery" event at Georgia Tech attracts about 50 students each week. A recent gathering drew students from all around the globe for a catered Mexican-American dinner of chicken fajitas, salsa, and tortilla chips. The students then divided into table groups, where volunteers from local churches led discussions on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

One table included a married couple from France, a Muslim from Turkey, and a graduate student from China. None of them were Christians, but all engaged actively in the discussion about anger, heart issues, and love for enemies. When they read Matthew 5:20 about the hypocritical righteousness of the Pharisees, the Turkish student asked, "Why do we say the



2



3

Although the majority of international students don't profess faith in Christ before they return to their countries, those who experienced positive interactions with local Christians hold favorable views of Christianity and the church.

Pharisees don't love God even though they obey God?" The French student had an issue with Matthew 5:22, in which Jesus tells the people not to be angry with a brother or sister: "But you can't stop yourself from feeling anger. I think it's more logical to say, 'Do not act in anger.'" To which the Turkish student piped up, "Ah, but if anger in the heart is not resolved, it builds up and your action will reflect that at some point, no?" Later the Chinese student asked why Jesus would tell people to settle matters with someone who has something against them: "If it's the other person who's angry, not me, then what's the point of trying to reconcile?"

Table leaders and campus ministry leaders often reach out and meet one-on-one with students who show interest. That's what happened with Sam Zhu, a 24-year-old electrical engineering graduate student from China. Like many other international students, Zhu decided to attend "Dinner and Discovery" because he was bored and it seemed "interesting."

Zhu remembers that the first event was so packed that the food quickly ran out—a bad first impression on any Chinese. Then the white-haired man sitting beside Zhu turned to smile at him, and soon Joel Mercer and Zhu were engaged in a lively conversation about the Bible. That night Zhu, who once regarded the Bible as literature, left craving more spiritual food, while Mercer had trouble falling asleep from excitement—he knew a seeker when he met one, and Zhu was one.

Later Mercer invited Zhu to Westminster Presbyterian Church, and Zhu continued attending after his first visit. Zhu, an expert in mathematical formulas and scientific theories, said certain Biblical concepts such as Christ's resurrection and grace flummoxed him. So he kept asking questions, and Mercer and other Christians took the time to answer them. The ultimate

"sinker," Zhu told me, was his acceptance of God's grace: "The fact that God wants a personal relationship with me? That's beyond my understanding—that's grace." In July 2016, Zhu was baptized in the same church. Among those celebrating with him were Angie and Joel Mercer, other Christians who befriended him, and his non-Christian college friends. When he graduated last May, the Mercers took him and his parents out for brunch.

It was a whirlwind of activities for the Mercers that graduation week, as it always has been since they began working with international students 14 years ago. They've attended numerous graduation ceremonies, family meals, going-away parties, and baby showers for the international students they have befriended over the years. In the last 11 years since they started weekly ESL classes in their church, they've served more than 900 students from 30 different countries including Iran, Ecuador, Chile, and Japan.

Last year, the Mercers traveled to South Korea and China and visited more than 30 international students whom they met through their ministry. One former ESL student, now a brain surgeon in China, woke up at the crack of dawn to catch a three-hour train ride to meet them for brunch in Shenzhen. He had started reading the Bible the Mercers gave him. He said it brings him peace. Later as they took a walk by the Shenzhen River, Joel Mercer explained the gospel to him.

The Mercers, who both grew up in the culturally homogeneous, racially segregated Deep South, later marveled, "Who would have ever imagined we would be doing this?" They didn't have the linguistic skills or the training of traditional missionaries overseas, but they knew how to practice fine Southern hospitality—and found themselves reaching people of various nations and tribes. ☺



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A Christian tap dancer in New York

ANDREW NEMR
ON FAITH AND
THE INTRICACIES
OF HIS ART

by Emily Belz

→ On a chilly New York day, tap dancer Andrew Nemr, 37, had just left rehearsal for his latest show (“Rising to the Tap”), a solo-performer autobiographical piece. It had been a grueling day—he was choreographing, directing, and dancing, the culmination of two years of work on this show—but he has a performer’s energy and the cheerfulness that comes from doing what he loves. He often fasts through rehearsals because it gives him a clarity of mind.

Nemr, the only child of Lebanese immigrants, has danced since he was young: When he was 7, he danced at a dinner theater. His parents wanted an outlet for him to meet friends, but tap became something much bigger. At age 10 he became a pro—getting a paycheck for dancing—and a protégé of the great Gregory Hines,

who revived American interest in tap.

Nemr began his 20s by becoming a founding member of a tap company with legend Savion Glover. (He calls Glover’s mother “Aunt Yvette.”) At 25 he started his own dance company, Cats Paying Dues, now one of the top tap companies in the country. Nemr is elite, but not too fancy to dance when asked at family weddings, and he still has to hustle. “Of all the performing arts, dance is at the bottom, and of all the dances, tap dance is at the bottom,” he quipped.

The café where we stopped in after practice was blasting the Destiny’s Child hit “Bills, Bills, Bills”: “Can you pay my bills? / Can you pay my telephone bills?” Nemr mused on the wealth and materialism of New York: “The Lord and Savior that we follow had a

particular life... If that’s a life that we’re supposed to be OK with, then everything else is bonus. And that puts a whole new spin on what you do... The choices have to be informed by, I believe, something greater than just, ‘Where’s the money?’”

Nemr, not aiming for a Broadway jackpot, has a lot of projects going. He runs his dance company, teaches, and speaks all over. He is also working on a book of poetry. While in intense rehearsals for his show, he recorded an album with the band Holler Jake where his taps are another percussive instrument in the band.

When most people think of tap, they think of Shirley Temple or Gene Kelly—a theatrical, vaudeville dance. Audiences love that stuff, but Nemr said it’s not a form that gives space for



tap to develop as an art. Nemr is more like a jazz musician, with his body an instrument. He keeps his taps “tight,” so the sound is clear when it hits the floor, not a looser tap that “jingles around.” Legs working, ankles loose, the weight concentrates in his upper body.

As jazz improvisation builds on blues scales, so Nemr riffs off a basic tap structure. At a recent TED conference he led a group of tap dancers in an improvised dance they managed to do in unison. In grittier corners of New York he also does live performances with jazz bands, bringing just his shoes and a small board to tap on. He used to perform every week with

the jazz band the Cangelosi Cards in the packed back room of an Irish bar on Second Avenue.

“You’re dealing with vocabulary, a set of mechanics your body can do that’s part of a tradition. So that’s your language,” he said. “And then you’re using words which we tend to call steps, to create sentences, rhythmic statements, things that sound interesting, look interesting, hopefully create some sort of dynamic with the other people you’re playing with, who are watching and listening.”

Nemr has also managed to do a sermon while tap dancing, at Graffiti Church on the Lower East Side, where he and his parents attend. Speaking while tap

dancing, he explains, is an old tradition. He thinks about tap as “speaking in tongues,” saying it’s a language that dancers often understand that the audience doesn’t, so he likes to interpret it verbally when he can.

His parents, who met at a youth group in Lebanon, fled Lebanon in 1976 at the beginning of the country’s civil war. They raised Nemr in the United States. His parents wouldn’t speak Arabic with him as a child because they didn’t want him to have an accent, but he speaks it now. His Lebanese immigrant identity has left him without an easy box to fit in. A press agent suggested he adopt a catchier name

for his professional billings, but with the encouragement of Henry LeTang, another dance legend, Nemr stayed Nemr.

When he did a podcast interview with several artists of different ethnicities, the interviewer turned to him and asked for his take on their discussion as the “prototypical white male.” Nemr laughed: “Actually, I’m Lebanese.” Then, when people hear he’s Lebanese, they’ll often assume he’s Muslim: “I’ve gotten every confused identifier. ... You end up being the person who can disequilibrate people, which is great so long as that serves a purpose.” The purpose? “Point them to Christ.” ☉



BRET HARTMAN/TED

Water solutions

CHEAP NEW FILTERS PRODUCE DRINKING WATER FREE OF LEAD, ARSENIC, AND BACTERIA *by Michael Cochrane*

→ Clean drinking water is one of the developing world's most critical needs. But current methods of water purification such as boiling, chemical treatment, or reverse osmosis require energy, technology, and time.

To address this problem, researchers continue to develop inexpensive methods of water purification. One startup called Mesofilter Inc. has developed a simple, cone-shaped paper filter that removes pollutants from water, including lead, arsenic, and bacteria.

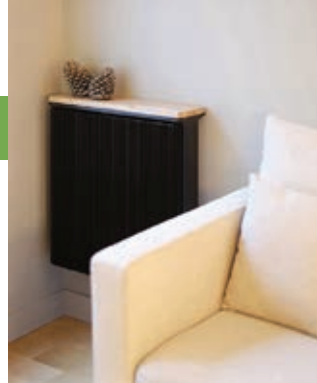


Called **Mesopaper**, the filter contains three layers of bamboo-based paper laced with tiny ceramic granules with pores small enough to capture heavy metals while letting water pass through, according to *Fast Company*. Each pore contains microscopic iron needles that function as hooks to capture bacteria and deactivate viruses. The iron gradually reacts with the water, closing up the pores and sealing the pollutants inside so discarded filters don't recontaminate either the soil or water.

"Hundreds of millions of people worldwide drink contaminated water," Liangjie Dong, the CEO of Mesofilter, told the public health standards organization NSF International. "Our goal is to provide access for anyone, anywhere, to safe drinking water."

NSF has tested and certified the Mesopaper filter's ability to reduce lead and arsenic to drinkable standards. Each 9-inch-diameter filter can purify about 6 gallons of water, depending on the level of contamination, according to *Fast Company*. Mesofilter is selling the filters at \$6.99 for a pack of six.

Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization recently tested another newly developed water filter. The graphene-based filter purified the heavily contaminated water of Sydney Harbor to a drinkable standard in just one pass, according to a press release. Researchers say the material, called "Graphair," could be used to filter both seawater and industrial wastewater on a large scale.



HOT INVESTMENT

Heat has always been an annoying byproduct of personal computers. The harder your computer works, the more heat it generates. Now, French startup Qarnot has designed a computer specifically meant to heat your home while offsetting your electricity bill through cryptocurrency mining.

The **QC-1** looks like a wall-mounted heater but contains a computer with two powerful graphics processing units. It's designed to do nothing but crunch the complex math problems involved in mining the cryptocurrency Ethereum and in the process produce heat.

The \$3,600 QC-1 sets up and starts mining in less than 10 minutes, according to Qarnot, and is controlled by a mobile app that collects the mined Ethereum coins in a digital wallet. Users keep 100 percent of the currency they mine, TechCrunch reports. Based on the QC-1's processing speed, Qarnot says the computer could generate around \$120 per month at current Ethereum prices. —M.C.



LABELLED FOR LIFE

Technology giant Google has classified and indexed more than 4 million *Life* magazine photographs using only artificial intelligence. The project debuted in March with the launch of the website artsexperiments.withgoogle.com/lifetags.

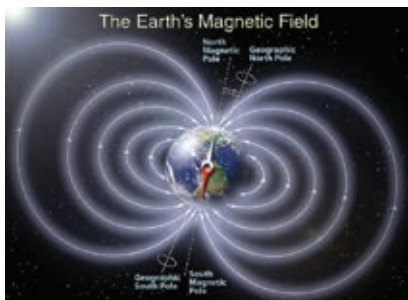
At the website, users can click on machine-generated labels to browse the *Life* photos. Clicking on "ballet," for example, reveals dozens of photos of ballet performers along with a Wikipedia definition of ballet. Selecting an individual photograph provides the picture's title and photographer, along with the computer's identification of the individuals in the picture as dancers.

The classification process was not perfect, though. Google's AI technology failed to generate labels for some obvious and iconic *Life* topics, such as the Vietnam War, according to the website *Ars Technica*. —M.C.

Earth on decline

THE PLANET'S MAGNETIC FIELD FLUCTUATES BUT CONTINUES TO WEAKEN *by Julie Borg*

→ The strength of Earth's magnetic field has been weakening for 160 years, and some scientists worry the planet's magnetic poles may soon flip or reverse. In a recent study, researchers



from New York's University of Rochester analyzed data from as far back as the first millennium A.D. to try to understand better the magnetic field decay. They discovered a pattern of fluctuations in magnetic field direction and intensity but said it is too early to know if a full-blown pole reversal is on the horizon.

Swirling liquid iron in the Earth's outer core generates the magnetic

field that encases our planet and protects us from harmful solar radiation. If the field becomes too weak, increased radiation levels could cause increases in skin cancer.

Many scientists

believe the last pole reversal took place nearly 800,000 years ago. A modern-day reversal could cause electrical grid failures and wreak

havoc on navigational systems and satellites.

The weakest region in the magnetic field encompasses a large area that stretches from Chile to Zimbabwe. The University of Rochester scientists believe the birthplace of pole reversals may lie in an exceptionally dense area 1,800 miles beneath Southern Africa. This area, positioned just above the boundary between the

Earth's hot liquid outer core and the more solid, cooler mantle, may periodically sink slightly, disrupting the flow of iron and decreasing the magnetic field, the scientists said. In their research, published in *Geophysical Research Letters* in January, they studied magnetic minerals in African clay samples and identified a series of field fluctuations dating back to A.D. 400.

David Coppedge, a young-earth creationist and founder of the *Creation-Evolution Headlines* blog, believes the magnetic field will continue to decay. He noted on his website that while currents in the Earth's core can act as a dynamo and generate a magnetic field, those currents will eventually slow down without an energy source. Coppedge suggested the magnetic field is sustained by dying residual currents formed when God first created the Earth.



PRESCRIPTION FOR PROFIT

Consumers often pay more for drug prescription insurance co-pays than they would if they had purchased their drugs without using insurance, according to new research from the University of Southern California.

The research showed that customers overpaid for their prescriptions 23 percent of the time, with an average overpayment of \$7.69. The practice of charging a co-pay higher than the cost of a drug is called a "clawback," because the middlemen that handle drug claims for insurance companies take back the overpayment from the pharmacy.

Unless patients ask, pharmacists often don't tell them they could pay less if they didn't use their insurance. Some insurers also use gag clauses to prohibit pharmacists from giving customers that information. Several states have banned such gag clauses, and Maryland, Arkansas, Louisiana, North Dakota, Georgia, Connecticut, Maine, and Texas have outlawed clawbacks altogether. —J.B.



OIL WARNING?

An unpublished study presented at the Endocrine Society meeting in March found that chemicals in lavender and tea tree oils may interfere with developmental hormones in young boys. The study indicated that these essential oils, popular as alternative medicine treatments and used as aromatherapy and in personal hygiene and cleaning products, could adversely affect puberty and cause abnormal breast development in boys.

"Our society deems essential oils as safe," J. Tyler Ramsey, the lead researcher, said in a statement. "However, they possess a diverse amount of chemicals and should be used with caution because some of these chemicals are potential endocrine disruptors." —J.B.

Boys will be girls

'GENDER FLUID' ATHLETE PRESENTS NEW WRINKLE IN TRANSGENDERISM DEBATE *by Ray Hacke*

➔ Nationwide, transgender athletes are blurring the once-distinct lines between male and female in public-school sports programs that, for the most part, remain segregated by sex. One California seventh-grader is blurring the lines even further.

Junior White, who recently turned 13, is biologically male. From the start of basketball season until February, White played for his school's boys' squad and used boys' restrooms and locker rooms. Then he asked for permission to use girls' facilities but also said he identified as "gender fluid," meaning sometimes he thinks of himself as a girl and sometimes as a boy. White currently considers himself a transgender female, according to his father, Matt.

The Antelope School District in Red Bluff gave White permission to use his school's girls' facilities but told him he could no longer compete on male-only athletic teams. When he complained, LGBT-friendly media rallied around White and publicized a Twitter campaign, #ISTANDWITH34—a reference to White's jersey number. White and his friends showed up at games holding signs demanding that the district let him rejoin the boys' basketball team.

California law requires that public schools let students compete for athletic teams and use facilities consistent with their gender identity. The law does not require that students' choice of teams match what locker room they use.

White is 5-foot-7 and weighs 145 pounds, according to his father: "His body is built more like a man's than a



child's," Matt White said. "That's all there is to it."

White is also a standout football player who was already attracting national attention for his abilities on the gridiron before his flap with the Antelope School District made national news. According to Matt, Junior can bench-press 225 pounds and dead-lift 420.

Should Junior White compete against girls in basketball or other sports, his physical strength and aggressiveness could endanger biologically female competitors: "Let's say he's going for the ball in a basketball game and going as fast as he can," Matt said. "Because he's bigger, stronger and more toned, he's gonna put everybody in a bad spot."

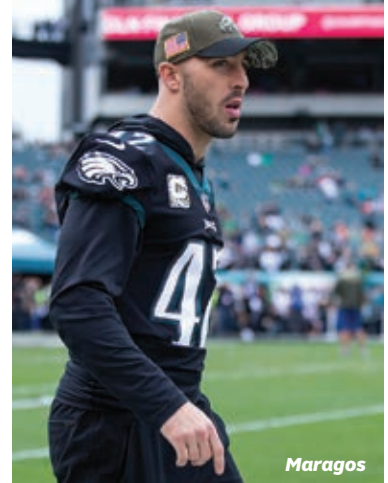
Matt isn't just referring to the athletes on the court but the backlash his family could face for letting Junior be out there: "If my child collides with a girl who's, like, 80 pounds—a petite little thing—some angry person is going to believe he shouldn't be out there. ... [The girl's] father is going to get upset, and he has every right to."

SAFETY FOR THE UNBORN

Chris Maragos, who plays free safety for the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles, is the heir apparent to veteran tight end Benjamin Watson as the NFL's pre-eminent pro-life activist.

Maragos is involved with AlphaCare, a pregnancy help center that shares a wall with Kermit Gosnell's now-closed abortion business. Last year he participated in a charity kickball tournament to raise money for a mobile unit that travels around Philadelphia providing free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, and social services to women in need. Maragos is also vocal about pro-life issues related to AlphaCare's mission—namely, providing support for women who otherwise might choose abortion because they feel abandoned by their families and their unborn children's fathers.

Maragos and his wife Serah admire AlphaCare's Christ-centered approach: He says, "Each mother with doubt in her heart ... needs us, she needs Jesus, to rally around her, to soothe her pain and lift her spirits. She needs to know that she is not alone." —R.H.



Maragos



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'Dueling visions, gnawing suspicions'

MARCH 3 Ralph Winter would not have retained the Frontier Ventures/William Carey International University campus if doing so undermined the gospel mandate. But, as a Last 1,000 supporter and a former student, I believe that when campus leaders waffle on their plans and offer nothing but vague platitudes for the \$100 million windfall, they should put on the brakes. WORLD gave them plenty of opportunity to clarify their intentions and they couldn't. Something doesn't smell right.

—NORM PARKER on wng.org



Even in an internet age, in-person connections spark the kind of innovation Winter wanted to foster, so I'm sympathetic to the goals of Save the Campus. But its leaders should stop their attacks on campus administrators. Let's build a vision for using the campus to reach the remaining unreached peoples.

—KEVIN BERASLEY on wng.org

WCIU's decentralized approach allowed me to obtain a master's degree without coming to campus, and I appreciate the vision to extend that opportunity globally. But I understand the concerns about donor intent. FV/WCIU's refusal to commit to selling to a like-minded evangelical organization is troubling, as is the lack of clear communication over the years.

—ROSA EDWARDS / Fayetteville, Ark.

You assert that Winter's vision "is no longer welcome." He is gone, but the organization's vision for world evangelism remains, as the current leadership asserts. A large campus in Southern California may no longer be consistent with Winter's vision.

—STEVE SHIVE on wng.org

'Back to square one'

MARCH 3 Joel Belz asks, if we could fix America by rewinding history, "how far would you go?" I would go back to the point at which this country accepted slavery. It is America's original sin and will eventually cause its downfall.

—JOE COMERCI / Elmhurst, Ill.

I would choose 1928 because in 1929 the Anglican Church accepted artificial contraception, and other Protestant churches followed suit. Since then sexual sins have exploded and rained down chaos upon us. From abortion to gay marriage to transgenderism, it is not just disturbing, it is demonic.

—JOE MARINCEL / Flower Mound, Texas

Some periods are filled with hope and good intentions yet tainted by greed, corruption, and callous indifference to other races. Even this nation's founding is filled with bloodshed. We were rebels from the start, first toward the king of England, now toward the King of Kings.

—DAVID RIDDLE / Saluda, N.C.

Glossy versions of American and Christian history that ignore sin are problematic, but neither should we be cynical about the past. In the United States there have been shining strands of human character that have helped make the world a better place. The key is to pursue Christ and His kingdom above all.

—DANIEL MCPHEARSON on wng.org

'All right, we are two nations'

MARCH 3 If we didn't have the Bible, we would all go along with child sacrifice and laugh at sick jokes about the demise of our unborn neighbors. Romans 1 is playing out before our eyes, and it just can't go on much longer—can it?

—JANET SEAGRAVES on wng.org

In our current political and cultural climate, I take heart knowing that "the three men I admire most / The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost" (also from "American Pie") have promised never to leave us or forsake us.

—HANNAH TIMMONS on wng.org

'On pandemics and providence'

MARCH 3 Thank you for this rational and Biblical assessment. My mom and I were both very ill from influenza A after Christmas. I got better, but my mom died; did she suffer God's wrath while I was spared? Of course not. It's just the way of this fallen world.

—HUNTER O'RYAN on Facebook

Some actions clearly have consequences, but some things, such as natural disasters, are not clearly a consequence of anything. We should not try to explain exactly why everything happens, but it is always right to return to the Lord.

—ANDY KNUDSEN on wng.org

'A well-behaved woman'

MARCH 3 I wept as Janie B. Cheaney read her powerful tribute to her mother and her generation; I listened to it three times on *The World and Everything in It*. Apparently the culture that rails against the body of Christ would rather our girls become pregnant pirates than righteous women.

—RICHARD OWENS / Alpharetta, Ga.

I loved Cheaney’s comment that her mom made civilization. I pray that more women (and men) would make that their goal.

—TOM SCHENK on wng.org

‘Ready for the job’

MARCH 3 Ken Isaacs, the Trump administration’s nominee to the International Organization for Migration, has led an amazing life. May God continue to use him to care for the least of these.

—CHRISTY DAVIS NORDSTROM on Facebook

Although I have never met Isaacs, as a doctor I am constantly in contact with those whose good work here in Sudan depends on Isaacs and Samaritan’s Purse. The *Washington Post* writers who took cheap shots at Isaacs should come to Africa and see what he and his colleagues are doing rather than sit in their air-conditioned offices and

make irresponsible comments about him.

—CLARKE McINTOSH / *Gidel, Sudan*

‘A new Marvel’

MARCH 3 I enjoyed *Black Panther*. It handled many politically charged topics without resorting to simplistic answers, and it portrayed women respectfully and with depth, especially the young scientist. And despite all the female warriors, the movie seemed comfortable with the men being strong and brave leaders.

—LAURA WEIENETH on wng.org

‘A gerrymandering journey’

MARCH 3 Usually I would not be interested in gerrymandering, but Evan Wilt’s added spice and local flavor made the story so much fun to read while clarifying the issue for me. Great writing.

—CHERYL IRISH / *Bastrop, Texas*

Corrections

Armenian Christians formerly lived in territory east of present-day Turkey (“All guilt, no atonement,” March 17, p. 14).

Protestant missionaries arrived in Vietnam three centuries after Catholics did. The person in the lower right photo on p. 33 is Seventh-day Adventist Pastor Tran Thanh Truyen (“After the fall,” March 31, p. 30).

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Ze said, xe said

THE PRONOUN POLICE HAVE A CLEAR GOAL—
AND IT ISN'T CLARITY

➔ We are seeing the revenge of the pronoun. It (I use the word advisedly) has long been abused by practitioners of English, and its time has come. It has sat in the shadow of the noun, created for no other lot than to give the noun rest, some second-string surrogate, forever the bridesmaid and never the bride. “He must increase, but I must decrease,” said the Baptist happily of Jesus. But the pronoun is not happy.

No more. Pronouns are having their day.

For too many years have we put “who” for “whom” and thought it a light thing. We wouldn’t know “thou” from a cow. We confuse “it’s” and “its” and mix subjective and objective with disdain, even thinking it the height of ostentatious erudition to say “I” where “me” should be—as in “Would you deliver the car to Jim and I?” (Fingernails on a blackboard here.)

A Philadelphia bike touring company called Gearing Up has changed its email signature protocol to sandwich between sender’s name and job title a line indicating preferred pronouns. “Lately, with people talking about gender so much, we realized that policy wasn’t quite as clear or accepting as we needed to be,” program director Al Sharrock (whose preferred pronouns are they/them/their) told *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

That’s getting out in front of it! For now it’s all voluntary, at least in the States. Canada is not so lucky. Last year they passed Bill C-16 (has a nice Orwellian ring, doesn’t it) that added to its criminal code transgressions against people’s preferred pronouns. Psychology professor Jordan Peterson of the University of Toronto worked in obscurity over theories of philosophy and meaning till he ran afoul of the pronoun. He refuses to surrender his free speech by being forced to call a student some made-up honorific of choice and knows he could be fined for that decision. He says he will not pay the fine, which means he may well go to jail.



Today a biological man may object to being called a man; tomorrow it will be ‘How dare you call me a person! I feel like an orangutan!’

“This is coming your way,” Peterson tells his American interviewer David Rubin, and then shares more previews from the PC north: “In Alberta... the Alberta Teachers Association recently launched their LGBT education material, and they’re trying to teach kids in grades 7 and 12 that there’s no relationship between biology and gender—which is also written into this [C-16] legislation.... They seriously propose that children address each other as comrade.”

Back to the pronoun. How will we know when we mean singular or plural if we have to

call people like Al Sharrock “they/them/their”? Or is it quite on purpose, all this fudging of categories until anything means anything? To classify at all is to discriminate, we learned from deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Today a biological man may object to being called a man; tomorrow it will be “How dare you call me a *person*! I feel like an orangutan this morning, and that is how you must address me!” (There is a Florida man who identifies as a

trans-racial Filipino woman, so this is a thing.)

My Tuesday ESL students will not like this at all. There are enough natural obstacles to language acquisition. They already groan under homonym perversities (now/thou/Frau/bow/bough) and the 29 rules governing the definite article “the.” I thought we were all about foreigners in this country. Where is the consideration for them?

The British language curmudgeon Lynne Truss is an activist for punctuation marks and the necessity for clear communication for a well-functioning society. She compares “Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off” with “Charles the First walked and talked. Half an hour after, his head was cut off.”

So the comma has a champion. But who will rise up to defend the beleaguered pronoun?

And what army of therapists will be needed to treat the general dysphoria caused by ineptness with “ze/zie/xem/hir”? Already the LGBT Resource Center I consulted must field questions like: “What if I make a mistake?” “How do I ask someone what pronouns they use?” Folks will find it safer to retire the pronoun altogether. As in: “I like Joe Slobodsky. Joe Slobodsky is always generous with Joe Slobodsky’s money.”

Retirement will be sweet revenge. ☹



Hedonistic strains

HOW AMERICAN BANDSTAND SOLD THE ROPE

➔ March 20 was the 40th anniversary of the day in 1978 I went to work in Wilmington, Del., as a novice speechwriter for DuPont's president and CEO. I took the job to support my family but also as a kind of penance for my Communism, which ended five years earlier when I realized God exists and Lenin was wrong.

Oddly, my five years at DuPont taught me Lenin was right about one thing: "Capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them." He believed corporate leaders would see only one move ahead in a chess game where it's important to take into account the next several.

Marxists are economic determinists, but Christians understand the importance of worldviews that direct personal behavior. Healthy companies need people who have a sense of purpose that leads them to be sober and drug-free, people who will sublimate their own desires to build an organization, people who aren't exploiting each other sexually. Backing whatever will bring short-term profit is rope-selling.

And thus we come to an extraordinary eight minutes you can watch on YouTube—not a stupid pet trick or smart baby episode, but the appearance of a revolutionary band in June 1967 on *American Bandstand*, the ABC show that featured teens listening and dancing to Top 40 tunes introduced by Dick Clark.

The segment began with Clark, then 37 but looking like a teen himself—he preternaturally kept that look for decades—sitting next to a high-school-age girl and asking, "Ever been to San Francisco?" She said, "Yes," and Clark replied, "There's a whole new scene now ... and we're going to talk to some people who are making it happen. ... Jefferson Airplane."

The camera moved to group co-founder/guitarist Paul Kantner in a dark cowl and power-voiced Grace Slick in what looked like a nun's habit with the suggestion of a cross necklace. She sang a militant pro-psychedelic song, "White Rabbit," with lines about how "logic and



'Feed your head,' Grace Slick sang. Not bow your head before God.

Paul Kantner and Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane perform in 1967.

proportion have fallen sloppy dead." The song ends with the command, "Feed your head."

Clark told the audience, "This has got to be one of the most unique and unusual recordings ever." Then came song No. 2: "When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies, don't you want somebody to love? Don't you need somebody to love?" The pile-driving tune makes love seem like rape, and each stanza again ends with a command: "You better find somebody to love."

Slick's father worked in investment banking. Her mother was a *Mayflower* descendant. But Jefferson Airplane was pushing cultural revolution. As the teeny-boppers applauded, Clark said to the band, "Older people worry. They see the way you're dressed. They hear your music. ... Do parents have anything to worry about?" Kantner replied, "I think so."

Television networks sold the rope: Jefferson Airplane offered its powerful propaganda even on *The Perry Como Show* with its older demographic, but the major audience was baby boomer teens. Kantner later said he was amazed how quickly teens moved from "prom gowns and tuxedos" to "nude mud love-ins." Given the big media push, with both hippies and playboys pushing drugs and sex, that should have been no surprise.

Jefferson Airplane was just one band, but many others presented a similar message, using conventional TV shows to sell the rope of cultural revolution. Baby boomers went slip-sliding into a cesspool. "Feed your head," Grace Slick sang. Not bow your head before God. Forget earlier concepts of truth, joy, and perseverance. Consume sex and drugs.

The U.S. Supreme Court reflected that cultural change and soon legalized all abortion, all pornography, and all purportedly consensual sexual conduct. That had a depressing effect on democracy: The Supreme Court took millions of ballots out of the hands of ordinary citizens and made all these issues dependent on nine votes. In 2004 Republicans celebrated an election victory, but when cultural analyst Michael Adams analyzed the returns in his book *American Backlash* (2007) he said the big story was how politically disengaged most Americans were—and the truly significant event was the television ratings success of Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*.

Americans, he wrote, had embraced hedonism. Major corporations pushed it. Now, with continued shortsightedness, many are pushing the LGBT agenda—and the band plays on. 🍷



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