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04.24.21 VOLUME 36 NUMBER 8

WORLD

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WHAT WAS CITI FIELD IN QUEENS LIKE WHEN YOU VISITED THE OVER-NIGHT COVID-19 VACCINE EVENT?

“I loved talking to the bartenders just getting off their shifts, door-men heading to theirs, and others who chugged gallons of coffee to stay awake for their appointments. Everyone was so unusually friendly. That scene outside of Citi Field would make a good children’s storybook.”
—Senior Reporter Emily Belz, who helped report the story on p. 38

VOTER MIGRATION

MARCH 13, P. 38—MOLLY CROCKER/
EVERSON, WASH.

We shouldn't be surprised that immigrants who are desperate to come here are also not desperate for the socialism they left behind. They should make wonderful conservative voters. Meanwhile, can we imagine an America so prosperous that we have employment kiosks at all points of entry?

LIMBAUGH CHANGED RADIO

MARCH 13, P. 14—PAUL SPEROS/TIPP CITY, OHIO

Rush Limbaugh deserved more than one paragraph in your magazine. He had a zeal for life and a desire for Americans to use their "talent on loan from God" to make the world a better place.

RHONDA JOYNER/CLEBURNE, TEXAS

Love him or hate him, Rush Limbaugh goes down in history as one of the most influential modern conservatives. He transformed talk radio, gave conservatives a voice, shaped the Republican Party, and was a staunch defender of Christians. It seemed obvious as time passed he grew as a believer and spoke openly of Christ.

FALLOUT FROM ZACHARIAS' ABUSE BEGINS

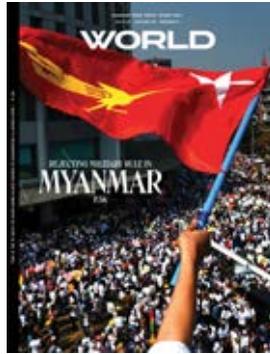
MARCH 13, P. 11—MOLLY LAMB/MURRAY, KY.

My heart breaks for Ravi Zacharias. I have decided against banning his books from my library. The truths are still true even though the man faltered, and they will serve as a reminder that the grace about which he wrote so winningly is to be accepted with deep reverence and humility—ever watchful of the bait of self-gratification and pride.

A CALL TO THRIVE

MARCH 13, P. 30—NEIL SLATTERY/
FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Marvin Olasky's interview with Samuel Rodriguez was a huge eye-opener for me, changing my paradigm on His-

**A COUNTRY UP FOR GRABS**

Angela Lu Fulton's nuanced coverage of the coup and the history that led up to it was fascinating. I am praying for the people of Myanmar and for the church that is there. May this present trial lead to a blossoming of the church for the glory of God.

MARCH 13, P. 56—JACE BOWER/
STAUNTON, VA.

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

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LETTERS MAY BE EDITED TO YIELD

BREVITY AND CLARITY.

panic culture and politics. It gives me long-term hope for the border crisis.

SPRINGING THE TRAP

MARCH 13, P. 26—ALDEN LEWIS/CARLISLE, PA.

It's only a matter of time before some scientist who believes in evolution makes a machine that loves him, its maker.

THE THREE TUNNELS

MARCH 13, P. 72—DANIELLE VERSLUYS/
WRIGHTWOOD, CALIF.

Marvin Olasky's references to Operation Rescue are unfair to that powerful movement. The vast majority of "rescuers" risked their physical safety and freedom in hopes of effecting the eventual outcome of the civil rights movement—legal protection for a targeted minority.

FAMILY DYNAMICS

MARCH 13, P. 27—RACHEL GAGE/DURHAM, N.C.

I was surprised and disappointed in your recommendation of Preston Sprinkle's *Embodied* without caveat or reservation. He advocates for "pronoun hospitality," an intensely dishonest and damaging way of interacting with transgender people that WORLD rejected in previous articles.

SARAH HORGAN/MOSCOW, IDAHO

Thank you so much for citing Katy Faust and Stacy Manning's *Them Before Us*. The Equality Act is painted as the new civil rights fight for our time, but children's rights should be the real focus for Christians concerned with caring "for the least of these."

CORRECTION

Roman Baranovsky faces a six-year prison sentence in connection with his activities as a Jehovah's Witness ("Crimes and punishments," March 27, p. 56).

READ MORE LETTERS AT WNG.ORG/MAILBAG



“What hath God wrought?”

A 40th anniversary reflection on history, technology, and God’s sovereignty

IN 1844, SAMUEL F.B. MORSE sent the first telegraph: “What hath God wrought?”

That was truly the beginning of the digital revolution.

I love Morse’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty, because WORLD is always asking theological questions—about news and about harnessing technology for God’s glory.

I’m thinking about this for two reasons: First, this is our 40th anniversary year and as part of that celebration, we’re reflecting on our history. Second, we’re about to roll out the first major update to our website in nearly 10 years.

I’ll begin with history: WORLD’s daily news site you know as WORLD Digital has not always been the robust online operation it is today.

In 1999, we began posting a digital version of the then-current WORLD Magazine on our website. Soon after that, we added archives of previous issues, but only as far back as we had digital “originals” to use. I admit we didn’t have much of a web strategy: We just thought we should post the magazines online, given the available technology.

And that was the extent of our efforts, until 2003, when we launched a collection of daily blogs. That represented our first attempt at exclusively digital content. Its primary contributor, at least at first, was Marvin Olasky. But he culled extensively from other WORLD people and good reporting from elsewhere, and he reviewed the news coverage of other outlets.

The blog effort grew quickly to include dozens of contributors, including Mickey McLean, whom we hired in 2008 to be our first full-time “web

WE’RE EXPECTING OUR LATEST DIGITAL ROLLOUT, LORD WILLING, IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

editor.” (Another frequent contributor in those early days was Lynde Langdon, now managing editor of WORLD Digital).

Under Mickey, we began to transform our website into what Marvin has referred to as WORLD’s daily newspaper. It didn’t take long for the daily “paper” regularly to produce as much content as we put on paper in WORLD Magazine.

Of course, WORLD’s digital expansion happened as rapidly and, in some ways, as haphazardly, as the digital revolution itself. From the introduction of our original iPad app in late 2010, to all of the mobile apps and accessibility available today, we’ve worked to offer our readers (and, increasingly, our listeners and viewers) a lot of different ways to access WORLD content. Some of those have been more successful than others.

We’re expecting our latest digital rollout, Lord willing, in the next few weeks. And the whole project will likely take months to reach its final form.

And what will that final form look like? Well, we still aspire to the daily newspaper, and that function is leading the form. That probably means more than just a new look for a website—it is likely to include new media forms, new ways of distribution, and valuable new daily content. ■

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What God has done for me

Reflecting on my story of salvation

DON'T YOU THINK," a longtime friend asked me recently, "that your **WORLD** readers would be interested in having you tell them how you first became a believer? You regularly tell those stories about other people. Why not about you?"

My friend's suggestion reminded me of a Saturday night some 70 years ago. I was just 10 years old (or so) when Dad loaded half a dozen of the kids from our church into our '48 Ford to go to a Youth for Christ rally. The speaker was a convicted—then converted—bank embezzler. On the ride home, Dad told us how glad he was that we could all hear this man's story about God's power to straighten out a crooked life. But Dad also hoped none of us would think we had to do something as bad as robbing a bank before we considered stories about God's mercy good enough to share with others.

Dad told us that night, and many other times as well, that everything we did that was wrong—even the little stuff—needed to be confessed to God. At first, that scared me. It reminded me of the toy I had stolen from my best friend Wendell. It made me think of the lie I had told my teacher about my homework. I thought of the smart-aleck insult I had directed at my mother just the week before. How could I possibly remember all the wrong things I had done?

"But if you confess your sins," Dad told us, "God will forgive your sins." And for those who do that, and who keep doing it sincerely and consistently, God promises to welcome them to live with Him for all eternity. He can do that, not because we somehow earned it as

**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION
MADE SENSE TO ME. BUT
GOD'S GOODNESS TO ME
WENT EVEN FURTHER.**

a reward, but because Jesus died to pay the entire penalty of our sin.

God has every right and prerogative, of course, to establish and enforce those standards simply because He is the Creator of this universe and the ultimate designer of every detail of the universe's operation.

I was blessed, beyond measure, to grow up in a home where such a worldview was persistently, consistently, and attractively taught. So God's plan of salvation made sense to me, even as a youngster. But God's goodness to me went even further. He put me also in a tiny church and in a tiny school that reinforced the things I learned at home.

That integration didn't come through some artificial curriculum, but through the powerful impact of three truth-telling agents.

The first was the Bible itself. Daily reading and Bible classes were assumed. We took notes on the sermons we heard. And we memorized Scripture—so that all these years later, 20 or more entire Psalms are still stashed away in my increasingly Parkinson's-wobbly memory.

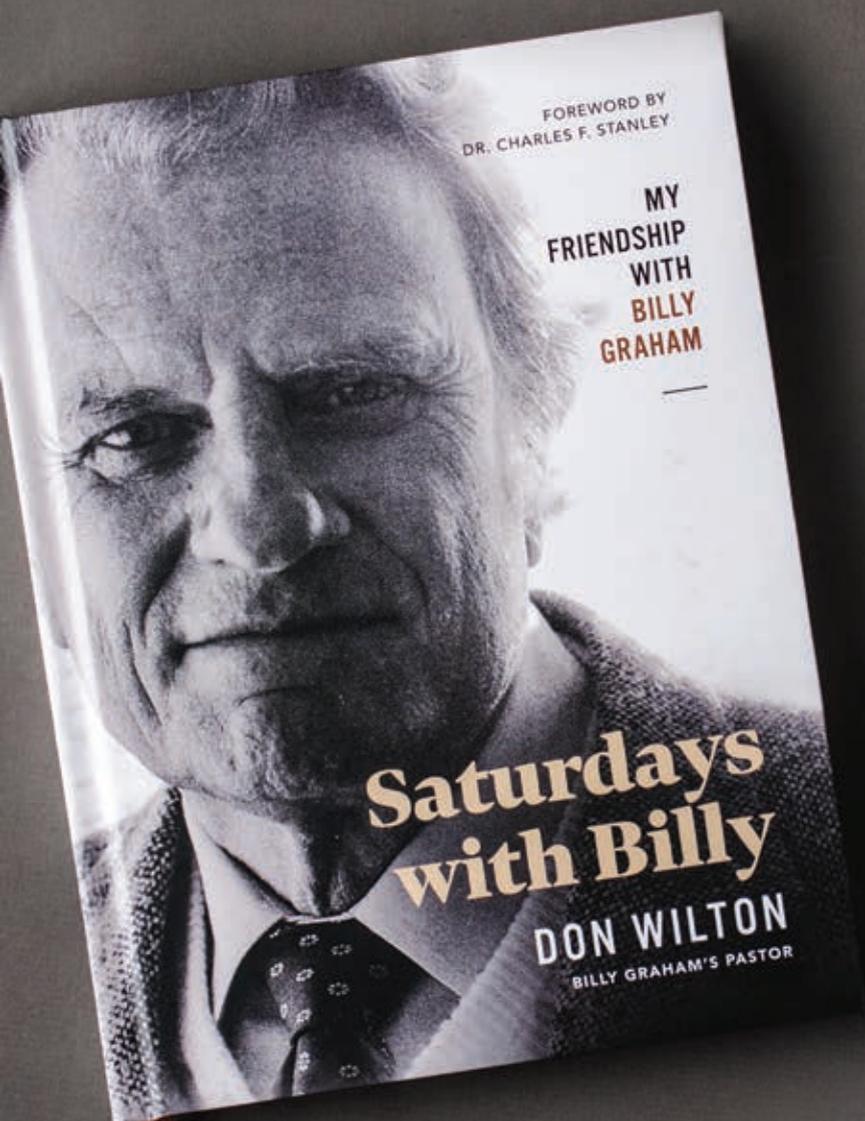
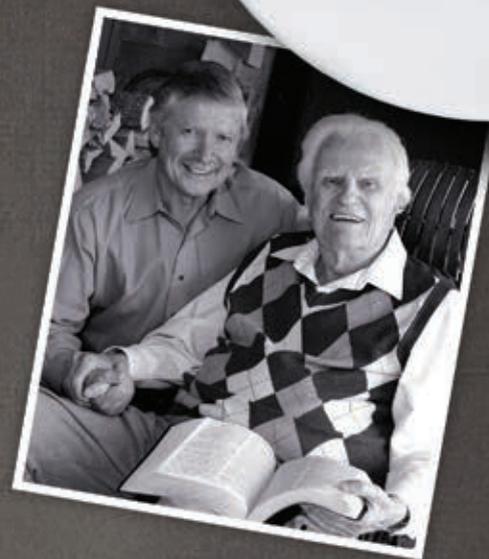
The second potent influences were the historic confessions of the Church. Weekly memorization of the Westminster Shorter Catechism gave me an organized cabinet for stashing away the Biblical truth I was also learning. If you ever need a pattern for efficient writing, for example, take a look at the answer to Question No. 9: "What is God's work of creation?"

The third truth-enforcer is a late-in-life surprise: my trusty hymnbook, which my wife Carol Esther and I keep right next to our kitchen table. Here you will sing the glories of God's creation; confess the terror of mankind's fall; explore the redemption of His people; trace the wandering of God's fickle sojourners; remind yourself of the marvel of Jesus' incarnation, His death, and His resurrection. And because you're singing and not merely reciting it, you're memorizing long stretches of unforgettably basic Biblical truth. There's no better teaching tool.

So that's how I became a believer in Jesus. Just as it is for every sinner, mine is a story of what God has done for me—not what I have done for Him. ■

Saturdays with Billy

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Most of us know Billy Graham as a man who preached God's Word to millions of people around the world. But who was Mr. Graham to those who knew him personally?

In *Saturdays with Billy*, Pastor Don Wilton shares heartwarming stories of his decades-long friendship with Mr. Graham. Just as Billy's words changed Don's life, they can change our lives today—a testament to a man who leaned on God's grace into eternity.

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DISPATCHES

News Analysis By the Numbers Human Race Quotables Quick Takes



Playing politics

Major League Baseball's foray into voting law debates

by Sharon Dierberger

M

AJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL'S DECISION to relocate its July All-Star Game from Atlanta because of Georgia's new election law has people choosing sides and fact-checkers yelling, "Foul!"

Commissioner Rob Manfred announced on April 2 he was moving the midsummer event and the MLB draft from Atlanta, saying he made the decision after consulting teams, players, and players' organizations. Others say he folded to political and corporate pressure, noting the Georgia election law expands, not restricts, voter access. They call MLB's decision harmful to the city and the individuals it claims →

Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred

to defend, and they pointed out the league just sealed a deal with a Communist-backed tech company in China, where free elections don't exist.

On March 25, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, signed the new law, a response to concerns about security and fairness during the 2020 presidential election.

President Joe Biden two days before MLB made the move said the law restricts voter access and later told ESPN he'd "strongly support" MLB moving the All-Star Game. Citing Biden's criticisms as false, *The Washington Post* gave the president "four Pinocchios"—its worst accuracy rating—for claiming the law ends voting hours early and limits voting opportunities. "Experts say the net effect was to expand opportunities to vote for most Georgians, not limit them," *Post* fact checker Glenn Kessler wrote.

Opponents continued to insist the law will suppress votes from African Americans because it requires identification when requesting and mailing ballots. (Georgia already requires ID to vote in person.) Like other Southern states, Georgia did use voter laws to disenfranchise blacks during the Jim Crow era, which eventually prompted the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965. And some proposals that never made their way into the final Georgia law—such as a provision to end Sunday voting, which would disproportionately affect black voters—raised alarm.

But even some Democrats such as Justin Giboney, president of the AND Campaign, said calling the new law "Jim Crow 2.0" is wrong. He wasn't alone.

OutKick sports media founder Clay Travis lambasted arguments about the elements of the new law that actually passed: "You need an ID to pick up tickets to attend a baseball game. Or to get a beer inside once you're there."

The Coca-Cola Co., headquartered in Atlanta, criticized the law yet required a valid ID for entrance to its own 2020 shareholders meeting. Thirty-six states require some form of voter ID, including Colorado, the state MLB moved the All-

Star game to. It mails ballots to all registered voters automatically. But it has fewer early voting days and uses signature matching to verify mail-in ballots.

ESPN's Howard Bryant said pressure from corporate sponsors caused MLB to change venues, according to his sources. He tweeted players did not threaten to boycott and did not get to vote on the issue. The Atlanta Braves organization announced it was "deeply disappointed" over MLB's move and had hoped Atlanta's hosting would enhance discussions of voting.

Coca-Cola and Delta, another Atlanta-based company, say they worked behind the scenes for changes to the original bill. But Delta CEO Ed Bastian condemned the final version, saying it didn't mesh with Delta's values and wasn't necessary because the rationale for it—claims of widespread voter fraud—was "based on a lie."

Kemp rebuffed Bastian's statements: "At no point did Delta share any opposition to expanding early voting, strengthening voter ID measures, increasing the use of secure drop-boxes statewide, and making it easier for local election officials to administer elections—which is exactly what this bill does." Kemp added he had to show his photo ID last time he flew Delta.

Liberal activists are calling for boycotts of Georgia-based companies for not doing enough to block the legislation. MLB's All-Star Game decision alone will financially harm a sizable portion of the population MLB says it's defending. The city of Atlanta is predominantly black, and more than 30 percent of its businesses are black-owned. The 2019 All-Star Game in Cleveland generated a citywide spending increase of \$65 million (there was no All-Star game in 2020). In 2000, when Atlanta last hosted the game, the economic impact to the city was \$49 million, according to *Baseball Almanac*.

U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., doesn't support moving the All-Star Game and opposes all boycotts but says corporations should stop supporting the Republican Party. Former President Donald Trump is calling for boycotts of MLB for caving to liberal pressures.

The same week it yanked the All-Star game from Atlanta, MLB signed a deal with Chinese tech company Tencent to stream 125 games in China. This is the same company that in 2019 yanked NBA games after Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey tweeted support for pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. ■

—A version of this story originally appeared in the *Muse* roundup at wng.org



2%

Portion of the 17 million new vehicles sold in the United States in 2019 that were EVs.

1%

Share of the world's lithium supply, crucial in EV batteries, produced in the U.S.

65%

The share of the world's lithium-ion battery supply that comes from China.

95%

The portion of U.S. lithium-ion batteries (considered hazardous material) currently discarded after their life cycle instead of being reused or recycled.

300%

The increase in demand for cobalt and lithium the International Energy Agency predicts by 2030.

ELECTRIC DEFICIT



\$174 BILLION

THE AMOUNT PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN'S proposed American Jobs Plan would direct toward electric vehicles (EVs), including funding to create a network of 500,000 EV charging stations across the United States by 2030. But the U.S. market for EVs, along with the market for battery production and disposal, must catch up to the demand analysts predict will exist by 2030.

**CROWNED**

Baylor, Stanford take titles

After missing a year because of COVID-19, March Madness delivers two NCAA champions

THE BAYLOR BEARS jumped out to a 9-0 lead against Gonzaga in the NCAA men's basketball championship on April 5 and never relinquished the lead, winning the title game 86-70. Baylor's victory gave the school its first NCAA title in men's basketball and ended Gonzaga's hopes for an undefeated season. The title bout between Baptist Baylor and Jesuit Gonzaga—the first basketball championship game between a Protestant school and a Catholic school—gave social media users fodder for funny one-liners: “Why’d y’all think the Catholics could beat the Baptists in any game that involves dunking?” “Baptists are playing like there’s a potluck after.” A day before Baylor’s victory, the Stanford Cardinal held on to win by 1 point against Arizona in the women’s championship. It was Stanford’s first title since 1992 and the third for coach Tara Vanderveer.

DIED

Beloved children’s author Beverly Cleary died March 25 at her home in Northern California. She was 104. The creator of well-loved children’s books about Henry Huggins and Beezus and Ramona, she was a children’s librarian who wrote because kids asked her for books about children like them. Gifted with a good memory, she wrote about the kinds of children she knew in her childhood in Portland, Ore. “I was so annoyed with the books in my childhood, because children always learned to be ‘better’ children and, in my experience, they didn’t,” she said. Cleary authored more than 30 books for children and young adults and sold more than 91 million copies of her books worldwide. Her books won numerous awards.

DIED

George Gordon Liddy, a central figure in the Watergate scandal, died March 30 in Virginia at age 90. A former FBI agent and Army veteran, Liddy served as the special assistant to Treasury in President Richard Nixon’s administration. He also led a team of operatives known as “the Plumbers,” who were tasked with finding information leaks that could embarrass the administration. He was convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and illegal wire-tapping in 1973 for his role in Watergate. He spent more than four years in prison. Liddy remained pleased with his role in the scandal, once saying, “I am proud of the fact that I am the guy who did not talk.”

KILLED

U.S. Capitol Police Officer William “Billy” Evans died after a driver crashed into a barricade near the U.S. Capitol in Washington on April 2. Police shot and killed the driver, Noah Green, who exited his vehicle brandishing a knife and ran at two officers after crashing into them. Investigators focused on Green’s mental health. In online posts that have since been removed, Green described being under government thought control and said he was being watched. He described himself as a follower of the Nation of Islam and its longtime leader, Louis Farrakhan. Police think the attack was an isolated incident and not terror-related.

“The more they crack down, the more we are motivated to fight back.”

KO THET AUNG, a 23-year-old anti-coup protester in Myanmar, where opponents of a junta that recently took power are resisting military forces with barricades and firebombs. “I will die protecting my country at the front lines,” he told *The New York Times*. The junta had killed more than 580 protesters and civilians by April 6.

“This is about kids who 10 years from now will say, ‘Where were all the adults? Why didn’t anyone stand up and say no?’”

Arkansas state Rep. ROBIN LUNDSTRUM, a Republican who sponsored a new state law that bans doctors from providing puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, or sex-change surgeries to children under 18 unless they have a genetic disorder of sex development.

“The government is not now nor will we be supporting a system that requires Americans to carry a credential.”

White House press secretary JEN PSAKI, responding to speculation that Americans will be forced to carry “vaccine passports” as proof of COVID-19 vaccinations for work or travel. Private businesses could still require patrons or employees to show proof of shots, though.

“I wanted something that would encourage life and show compassion for mothers.”

Republican Utah state Rep. BRADY BRAMMER, who sponsored a state law, passed in March, that makes biological fathers responsible for half of out-of-pocket costs a woman incurs during pregnancy and childbirth, according to *The Washington Post*.

“We haven’t seen an expansion of food assistance of this magnitude since the founding of the modern food stamp program in 1977.”

University of Kentucky economist JAMES ZILIAK, commenting to *The New York Times* on the Biden administration’s temporary boost of the federal food stamp program by tens of billions of dollars.



1

CELEBRATION WITH SARCASM

A LOUISIANA WOMAN gave the road construction on her residential street a birthday party on March 16 to celebrate 12 straight months of street work outside her front door. The New Orleans woman, Natalie Harvey, tied up balloons, invited guests, and served cake to commemorate the occasion. Harvey said the construction has blocked her driveway for months at a time, and she wondered what was taking road crews so long. “As an example, they’ll work every day for a week, then there will be two to three weeks with nothing,” she told WKRG. “The work has definitely picked up in the last couple of weeks. But you never know when it’s going to stop and when it’s going to start back up again.” Harvey created a chocolate sponge cake for the party, topping it with peanut butter icing and a roadwork scene complete with miniature bulldozers.

2 ARCTIC INTERLOPER An Irish 5-year-old made a surprising discovery during a seaside stroll on March 14. While walking with her father Alan Houlihan, the young girl spotted a walrus. How did the Arctic creature make its way to County Kerry in southern Ireland? According to Kevin Flannery of the local Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium, the young walrus likely floated atop a Greenland shelf iceberg that drifted across the Atlantic Ocean. While rare, walrus trips to Ireland also occurred in 1999 and 1987.

3 HACKING IN TO HOMECOMING A five-month investigation into a vote tampering scheme in Florida finally led to arrests on March 15. State officials took Laura Carroll, 50, and her 17-year-old daughter into custody for rigging the Oct. 30 homecoming court election at J.M. Tate High School near Pensacola. Authorities allege Carroll, an assistant principal at a local elementary school, allowed her daughter to use her login credentials to hack student accounts in the school’s system, including the online voting for the homecoming election. The daughter, police say, then used that access to cast at least 117 votes on her behalf for homecoming queen. Both Carroll and her daughter were charged with felonies for hacking into student accounts.

4 A DRIVE TO SUCCEED A Polish man has failed the nation’s driver’s license test for a 192nd time, according to state media outlet TVP. According to the broadcaster, the unnamed 50-year-old has tried to pass the written exam for 17 years to no avail, costing him an estimated \$1,550 in fees in the process. History suggests the man should keep trying. In 2009, a 68-year-old South Korean woman passed her driver’s license exam after taking it more than 900 times.

5 PROSCRIBED TYPEFACE Officials for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit took an unusual step March 16 by virtually banning a font from the court’s docket. D.C. Circuit court clerk Mark J. Langer issued a notice saying the court officially now “discourages the use of Garamond,” saying judges and employees are having a

hard time reading the popular if old-fashioned font. According to the court's style guide, lawyers must submit briefs with a typeface size of 14 points or above. Serifed fonts like Times New Roman are acceptable. Sans-serif fonts like Arial, a common default font on many word processing programs, are not.

6 FUN WHILE IT LASTED After kindly offering a video-game treat to her grandson, a Canadian woman said she now owes over \$1,100 in charges to her credit card. Diana Liscoumb of Sutton, Ontario, said she gave her 13-year-old grandson her credit card so he could buy credits and digital "skins" for a PlayStation Network game. She expected him to spend about \$12 on the game and was shocked when she got her credit card bill. "I spoke to my grandson, and he didn't realize what he had done," Liscoumb told *CTV News Toronto*. She contacted the PlayStation Network to reverse the charges, but the company declined. Liscoumb said her grandson has offered to get a job when he turns 14 to help pay off the debt.

7 WHEELS OF RENOVATION With construction at Belgium's Palace of Justice stretching into its 37th year, the nation's Public Buildings Administration announced in March the scaffolds outside the Brussels building need renovating. The government will spend nearly \$1.8 million rebuilding the scaffolds that first went up in 1984 and have now become a safety hazard. The secretary of state for building management, Mathieu Michel, criticized the slow progress of the renovations. "It is not a good signal of coherent and efficient public management to leave scaffolding on a building for 40 years when the work has not even been done," Michel said. "We really want a justice system that is not under construction." The project is slated for completion by 2030.

8 NEIGHBORHOOD FLAP A North Dakota man says his condominium association has threatened him with heavy fines because the American flag affixed to his deck makes too much noise. Homeowner and Fargo, N.D., resident Andrew Almer said he always wanted to



**YOU CANNOT TELL
ME SOMEBODY IS
COMPLAINING
ABOUT A
FLAPPING FLAG
IN THE WIND.**



display an American flag once he bought a home. Almer told Fox News he got a letter from the condo board in January detailing the noise complaint. "You cannot tell me somebody is complaining about a flapping flag in the wind," said Almer. A second letter from the condo association in early March warned that he'd face \$200-per-day fines if he did not remove his flag. But Almer, who suspects his upstairs neighbor—who is also the condo board president—is behind the complaints, has no plans to comply. "If I need to, we'll take it to court," he said.

9 THE ENEMY WITHIN A merciless foe has infiltrated a \$6 billion U.S. Navy nuclear-powered attack submarine. Sailors reported bedbugs on the USS *Connecticut* beginning in December, but it took until Feb. 19 for Navy experts to identify the pests conclusively. In the fight against the bedbugs, sailors have now moved to sleeping arrangements on dry land at Naval Base Kitsap-Bremerton, where the *Connecticut* is moored. *The Oregonian* reported that the Navy was building a temporary structure to house the sailors away from the pests. The *Connecticut* also tangled with wildlife in 2003, when a polar bear attacked the submarine, chewing on her rudder after she popped through polar ice.





Ralph Moody's America

Lessons learned from a master memoirist

ABOUT A YEAR AGO my husband and I began reading a series of books by a man who belongs in the top rank of memoirists (and whose book titles come from the colorful periods in his life).

Although born in East Rochester, N.H., in 1898, Ralph Moody's formative childhood occurred in Colorado, where the family moved when he was 8 years old. There the boy learned to rope and ride, acquiring the nickname *Little Britches* from the local cowboys. Having failed at ranching, the Moodys settled in nearby Littleton, where Ralph's father died after a horse/auto accident. As the 11-year-old *Man of the Family*, Ralph took odd jobs and even worked one summer at a neighbor's *Home Ranch*, proudly earning a man's wages.

In 1912, for complicated reasons, Ralph's mother abruptly moved the family to her hometown near Boston. Starting over with almost nothing, *Mary Emma & Company* established a laundry business while Ralph worked a number of side hustles. All perfectly legitimate, but somehow he acquired the reputation of a troublemaker. To clear the air, he went to New Hampshire to work with his cranky old grandfather in *The Fields of Home*. (That was the only book we didn't finish: My husband got tired of Grandfather's constant yelling.)

When America entered the Great War, Ralph's ill health sidelined his efforts to enlist. Instead he worked in a munitions plant, which didn't improve his condition (later diagnosed as diabetes). The family doctor prescribed that he move West, get plenty of sunshine, eat

WHAT WE CAN TAKE FROM MOODY IS THE WAY HE LIVED: WITH EYES WIDE OPEN.

lots of green leafy vegetables, and not do anything crazy. Ralph obeyed every rule except the last.

It wasn't entirely his fault: The only job available after he arrived in Arizona was performing "horse falls" for the movies. The stake he earned from that brief venture began disappearing when he met Lonnie, an overgrown hyperactive kid who talked Ralph into buying a Model T they nicknamed "Shiftless." Shiftless lived up to her name as the two young men tore across the Southwest, *Shaking the Nickel Bush* between breakdowns. They were flat broke when Ralph hit upon the lucrative scheme of molding plaster busts of bankers and lawyers in small towns between Phoenix and Santa Fe (one of his random skills, learned from an engineer at the munitions plant). The proceeds—almost \$1,000 in cash—he carefully rolled into the cuffs of his extra-long Levis, intending to buy a small ranch.

Unfortunately, when he and Lonnie parted ways the latter absconded with the jeans. Ralph was sure (pretty sure) it wasn't theft—Lonnie had just snuck out in the dark with the wrong pants. And no forwarding address. With one dime in his pocket, our hero hopped a freight train for *The Dry Divide* in Nebraska. By luck and pluck and loans from an obliging banker, he owned eight horse teams and rigs by the following fall, just in time for the 1920 wheat harvest. The final volume, *Horse of a Different Color*, sees Ralph proposing to his boyhood sweetheart from back East: the traditional prelude to "settling down."

All this packed into 25 years. For all his natural industry, creativity, and optimism, Ralph Moody never got rich, and the lean times didn't end with his marriage. But I doubt he regretted any of it, especially those early years which he recalled much later in meticulous detail. Though he carried a Bible with him, his religion leaned more on can-doism than amazing grace. "God helps those who help themselves" might have been the Moody motto.

At the dawn of the American Century, that might have been his country's motto too. I'm tempted toward nostalgia for the rough-and-tumble, snooze-you-lose, unpredictable, perilous, exhausting, and exhilarating America we probably won't see again.

But God has put us here and now. To look back with longing is a waste of time. There may be very hard times ahead, but we are part of a triumphant procession going ever forward with Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14). What we can take from Ralph Moody is the way he lived: with eyes wide open, observing, remembering, and appreciating.

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CULTURE

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LIFE AFTER THE BLIP

Disney's TV series
*The Falcon and the
Winter Soldier*
is smart but may
be leaning in
political directions

by Megan Basham



T

HOSE TURNING TO THE LATEST DISNEY+ ENTRY in the Marvel franchise as a form of escape from our fraught cultural debates may find themselves feeling a little cheated. So too will those hoping its small-screen stature might lend itself, à la *WandaVision*, to something gutsier and more creative than its big-screen brothers. *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* is both more reflective of the troubles of our present moment and more conventional than its streaming predecessor.

As with *WandaVision*, the story opens a short time after the Avengers have reversed Thanos' deadly "Blip." The half of the universe the Infinity Rings reduced to dust has returned to life, and the spectacle of societies struggling to get back to normal after a cataclysmic event feels all too familiar. This is a world that is indeed experiencing a great reset. With the last generation's leading defenders of life and liberty—Captain America and Iron Man—having left the stage, smaller players like Sam "Falcon" Wilson (Anthony Mackie) and Bucky "The Winter Soldier" Barnes (Sebastian Stan) find themselves uncomfortably called on to fill their shoes.

If the Mad Titan and Hydra offered more serious threats, they were also morally clearer ones. There's little question about whether your cause is just when you're fighting Nazi sympathizers and genocidal environmentalists. At first, our heroes' mission seems similarly straightforward, but as the series develops, we start to suspect the characters who are supposed to represent "America" might eventually cause more problems than they solve. In a possible foreshadowing of this theme (and of the show's intention to include current political divides), we see cops harassing the black Sam while presuming the white Bucky's innocence. Parents who would prefer their kids not absorb pop culture that reinforces this characterization of police, as well as those who would rather avoid a smattering of foul language, might want to skip this TV-14-rated superhero story.

If the show's villains are a bit murky, they're also its biggest asset in the first three episodes. The writers have clearly considered what that anomalous five-year interim would mean for those left behind. And the show explores what

those who found the world more to their liking would be willing to do to prevent it from returning to normal.

We've seen those who suffered in *WandaVision* and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, but this series considers who might have benefited from the Blip. How would they feel when the cosmically displaced return and require governmental assistance to get back on their feet? What resentments might develop from suddenly having to compete for jobs, housing, or even food and medicine? The aim of the vigilantes known as the Flag-Smashers—to wrest resources from



“

IF THE SHOW'S VILLAINS ARE A BIT MURKY, THEY'RE ALSO ITS BIGGEST ASSET.

”

the returned—is as interesting as their name, which suggests a desire for a borderless, one-world order.

What works less well is the dynamic between Sam and Bucky. They're meant to have the love/hate chemistry of classic buddy cops in films like *Lethal Weapon* or *Men in Black*, but somehow Mackie and Stan never quite gel at that level.

Still, though *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* is a less ambitious, inventive project than other Marvel outings, it is at least a smart one. If the franchise resists the urge to regurgitate the pat answers that real-world elites are offering for contemporary problems, it could yet grow into something special. ■



Wholesome repetition

by Marty VanDriel

What would you do with endless time?

In *The Map of Tiny Perfect Things*, writer Lev Grossman has brought fresh perspective to the time-loop genre, creating a sweet and inspiring film, almost an improvement on the original *Groundhog Day*.

Teenager Mark (Kyle Allen) is repeating the same day seemingly in perpetuity. The movie opens with Mark already well versed in the events of this 24-hour cycle: He's figured out he can use this time for good and daily helps folks in things big and small, from winning the lottery to avoiding embarrassing wardrobe snafus.

But no matter what, each day resets at 7 a.m.—until the day he discovers Margaret (Kathryn Newton) is also caught in the loop. “So, what have you been up to, with infinite time?” seems like a great opening for a chat with a fellow time prisoner.

But Margaret is hiding the key for them to escape the bondage of the endless day. Refreshingly, the answer to their dilemma is not sleeping together, defeating enemy troops, or something similarly trite.

Regrettably, characters do use casual blasphemy. Otherwise, the film, streaming on Amazon Prime, is a delight for teens and adults.

DOUBLE DUTY Lev Grossman wrote the short story “The Map of Tiny Perfect Things” in 2016, and later wrote the film’s screenplay.



A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Poor acting and a choppy script detract from the real-life drama of *Roe v. Wade*

by Leah Hickman

COLORFUL CHARACTERS lie behind the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision legalizing abortion: the abortionist-turned-pro-lifer who helped found NARAL. A lawyer who obtained an illegal abortion in Mexico while in law school before representing Jane Roe in court. The first black woman to graduate from Harvard Medical School who also served as the second president of the National Right to Life Committee.

Sadly, the new film *Roe v. Wade*, available on several streaming platforms, makes little use of them.

Narration by abortionist-turned-protagonist Bernard Nathanson (Nick Loeb) is supposed to emphasize intrigue. Sparing a few exaggerations, it’s all largely factual (including the courtroom wink from pro-abortion Judge Sarah Hughes, secret meetings between the Supreme Court justices, and a Texas attorney’s cringe-worthy joke before the Supreme Court). But the narration mostly succeeds in interrupting the flow.

Still, the film makes important points: Shots reveal aborted babies in buckets and unborn human body parts strewn on a medical tray. Nathanson’s character accurately describes a common method of late-term abortion that involves removing a baby from the womb piece by piece. A more professional depiction of Nathanson’s own gruesome career as an abortionist—he performed an abortion on his girlfriend to kill his own child—could have made for moving scenes.

Mostly unconvincing acting and an awkward script fail to do justice to the drama of the court case. The filmmakers could have opted for a documentary.

GOOD FILMS WITH PRO-LIFE THEMES



- [Soul \(2020\)](#)
- [Gosnell \(2018\)](#)
- [Arrival \(2016\)](#)
- [Hush \(2016\)](#)
- [Gimme Shelter \(2014\)](#)
- [The Giver \(2014\)](#)
- [October Baby \(2011\)](#)
- [Bella \(2007\)](#)
- [Children of Men \(2006\)](#)

WORLD’S REVIEWS OF ALL THESE FILMS AVAILABLE AT WNG.ORG

THE SILENCE TREATMENT

In *Sound of Metal*, a rock musician's hearing loss leads him unwillingly out of a noisy world

by Jim Hill



THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF *Sound of Metal*, filled with the raw sound of rage played out in a punk rock concert, will unsettle audiences. But that cacophonous beginning is an appropriate starting point for the story of one man's journey to find peace amid tragedy and the pangs of addiction.

The movie, streaming on Amazon, centers on the life of Ruben, a punk rock drummer and recovering heroin addict who's been clean for four years.

OSCAR NOBS *Sound of Metal* was nominated for six Academy Awards, including the best actor award for Riz Ahmed's portrayal of punk rock drummer Ruben.

British Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed (*Rogue One*, *Jason Bourne*) brilliantly portrays Ruben, who travels the country gypsylike with co-dependent girlfriend Lou, played by Olivia Cooke (*Ready Player One*). Together, Ruben and Lou make up a midlevel punk rock band, Blackgammon, and dream of fame.

All seems well until Ruben begins to suffer rapid and irreversible hearing loss. As he faces the end of his music career, Ruben's life unravels. Concerned he may relapse, Lou convinces him to seek help within a deaf community that also serves as a rehab refuge for recovering addicts who are hearing impaired.

Joe (Paul Raci), a deaf Vietnam veteran and a recovering alcoholic, runs the organization. Ruben is desperate to solve his hearing problem, but Joe attempts to teach him there is nothing about his hearing that needs "fixing": Instead, he should seek peace in solitude and learn to embrace his new reality.

The film hints that the peace Joe exudes is likely spiritually anchored. In one scene he tells Ruben the moments of real peace he finds in his times of stillness are "the kingdom of God."

Director Darius Marder uses two film techniques that allow audiences to experience more fully Ruben's anguished journey. First, Marder employs a methodical pace that contrasts with Ruben's fidgety restlessness. Second, he uses sound to allow audiences to hear at times exactly what Ruben is hearing (or not hearing). This technique is particularly effective in the film's final scene that suggests, in both sight and sound, Ruben may have finally made peace with the silence (and possibly even with God).

Sound of Metal, rated R, contains strong language, some sexual content (a scene showing a drawing of a nude female), and portrayals of drug use consistent with its punk rock setting. That said, Christians who watch this film may benefit by seeing themselves, to some extent, in Ruben—maybe not in his drug addiction, but in an inner restlessness that desires the world's noise and acceptance more than the peace that comes from being still and knowing God is God (Psalm 46:10).

As Mother Teresa once said, "God is the friend of silence." ■

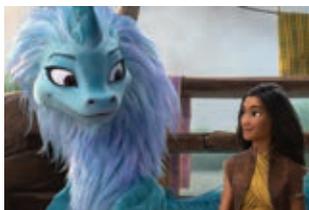
BOX OFFICE TOP 10

WEEKEND OF APRIL 2-4, ACCORDING TO BOX OFFICE MOJO. 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 **Godzilla vs. Kong** PG-13 1 6 4
- 2 **The Unholy** PG-13 . . . not rated
- 3 **Nobody** R not rated
- 4 **Raya and the Last Dragon*** PG 1 3 1
- 5 **Tom and Jerry** PG 1 3 1
- 6 **The Girl Who Believes in Miracles** PG not rated
- 7 **The Courier** PG-13 . . . 4 5 1
- 8 **Chaos Walking** PG-13 . 2 5 4
- 9 **The Croods: A New Age** PG 1 3 2
- 10 **French Exit** R 4 3 6

*REVIEWED BY WORLD



TOP 10 FOCUS

Raya and the Last Dragon is Disney's beautiful, animated movie about a magical dragon and a mythical land beset by dissension. It offers a chance to point out to children the truths of Proverbs: The power of life and death is in the tongue—and as no one, not even dragons, can stand before envy, we should aim not to build societies on it. —from **WORLD's** review



A DUO AND A DICTIONARY

Friendship, grace, and wordplay suffuse *The Professor and the Madman*

by Sharon Dierberger

THE PROFESSOR: graying and groomed beard, clear-eyed, loving husband and father, purpose-driven. The doctor: scraggly beard; often wild-eyed; plagued by terrible memories, hallucinations, and guilt. The two men's parallel stories—unlikely, yet true—merge in 1870s London during an endeavor to create the first-ever *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The Professor and the Madman, a 2019 film available on streaming platforms, isn't a simple recap of historical events, but a deep, emotional drama elevating God's grace, mercy, and redemption in the lives of complex characters. It also uses language in profound and often humorous ways. If you love a good story with heroic yet flawed characters, it'll draw you in. If you appreciate the play and precision of English words, you'll get an added bonus.

James Murray (Mel Gibson) is a Scottish autodidact—a self-taught professor accomplished in over 20 languages and dialects who delights in words, their meanings, and their origins. Because Oxford University's academic delegation is desperate to create a complete lexicon of the English language after 20 years of failure, its members grudgingly accept the unlettered, unconventional Murray to spearhead a new effort. Murray's enthusiasm is unbounded, but he first wants his wife's support: "If I'm to fashion a book, I'll need a spine." She inspires and strengthens him.

The movie opens by introducing Dr. William Minor (Sean Penn), a retired surgeon in the American Civil War who flees to England, believing a murderous army deserter is after him. In his delusions, Minor shoots and kills the wrong man and is sentenced to an asylum for the criminally insane.

When Murray enlists volunteers all over England to contribute words and quotations to his etymology research, Minor joins the quest from his asylum room. With passionate saneness, he gleans words and phrases from books lining his walls, contributing more than 10,000 entries for the dictionary.

Murray finally meets Minor on the deceptively serene asylum grounds. Seeing his shackles, Murray realizes Minor is not a doctor there, but a patient, yet still befriends him.

Despite his madness, Minor evokes sympathy and admiration. He frees an asylum guard from a crushing gate. He bequeaths all his goods to his victim's wife and teaches her to read. Yet, like Inspector Javert of *Les Misérables*, his tormented soul cannot grasp the concept of grace. His struggle leads to disturbing moments involving self-punishment and a torturous treatment by the asylum's superintendent, earning the film its R rating. Thankfully, the story doesn't end there.

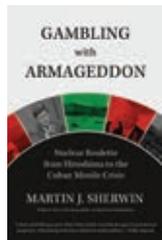
An unusual tale masterfully filmed, the movie's conversations and dimensional relationships make it memorable. You may even find yourself looking up words like *assythment*.

The nuclear option

Providential intervention averted World War III

by Marvin Olasky

MARTIN SHERWIN'S *Gambling With Armageddon* (Knopf, 2020) should do for the whole world what cancer scares should do for individuals: drive us to our knees and make us deeply thankful for being spared. It's a terrific book to read, even if the author's conclusions about why the world escaped a nuclear war are thoroughly un-Biblical.

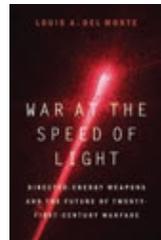


During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis President John F. Kennedy and Soviet boss Nikita Khrushchev thought their decisions would determine whether a war with 200 million casualties would break out. What Kennedy didn't know, because the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't know either, was that four Soviet B-59 submarines in the Caribbean were armed with nuclear warheads. What Khrushchev didn't know was that the submarine commanders had lost contact with Moscow, thought World War III may well have begun, and were in a mean mood as temperatures in the subs (made for North Sea use) ranged from 113 to 149 degrees.

I won't go through the whole story here, as Sherwin expertly does, but here's the essence: One Soviet officer, Capt. 2nd Rank Valentin Grigorievich Savitsky, wanted to launch a nuclear missile, which would have triggered a nuclear war. Capt. Vasily Alexandrovich Arkhipov kept him from doing so. Why? Sherwin's explanation: "Luck. ... The extraordinary (and surely disconcerting) conclusion has to be that on October 27, 1962, a nuclear war was averted ... because Capt. Vasily

Arkhipov had been randomly assigned to submarine B-59."

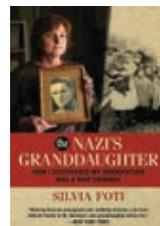
"Has to be"—according to one worldview. According to another, millions didn't die because God's in charge. We can praise luck or praise God's mercy. Same thing holds for 80-year-olds who have an annual physical and learn that



nothing going on in their bodies is likely to keep them from hitting 81. It's helpful to remember God's control as we read scary books. Louis A. Del Monte's *War at the Speed of Light* (Potomac Books, 2021) tells how hypersonic missiles may replace the supersonic variety and facilitate World War III. Shanna Swan's *Count Down* (Scribner, 2021) presents the microscopic bad news summarized by her subtitle: *How Our Modern World Is Threatening Sperm Counts, Altering Male and Female Reproductive Development, and Imperiling the Future of the Human Race*. Oh, is that all?



"Has to be"—What if Hitler's anti-Semitism hadn't pushed some of Germany's best scientists to leave? A Nazi nuclear bomb in 1944 or early 1945 could have forced U.S. and U.K. surrender. Without it, Germany was doomed, and Samuel Mitcham Jr.'s *The Death of Hitler's War Machine* (Regnery, 2021) vividly shows how the wages of sin is death for a country as well as for individuals. Silvia Foti's *The Nazi's Granddaughter: How I Discovered My Grandfather Was a War Criminal* (Regnery, 2021) shows how a woman had to come to grips with the realization that her honored Lithuanian granddad had enabled the murder of several thousand Jews.



Bookmarks



Peter Collier's *Things in Glocca Morra* (Encounter, 2021) is a brilliant novel—with some bad language—about John F. Kennedy in Hollywood immediately after World War II. George J. Veith's *Drawn Swords in a Distant Land: South Vietnam's Shattered Dreams* (Encounter, 2021) is a 600-page look at the rise and fall of the Republic of Vietnam, with an intense examination of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

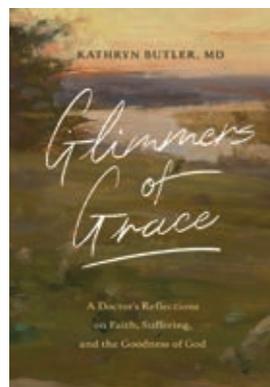
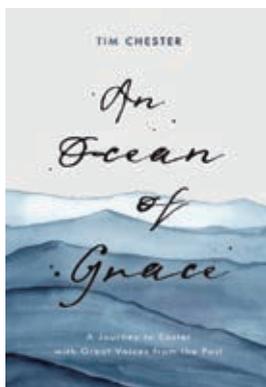
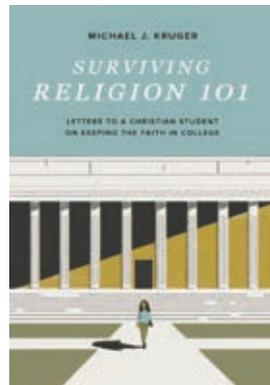
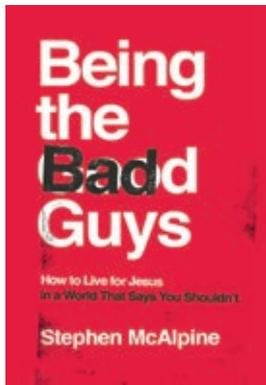
Scott Allen's *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice* (Credo, 2020) shows us how some leftist ideologues have twisted ideas of justice that emanate from the Bible—and how some Christians have naïvely gone along with the distortion. We should be discerning about programs that sound good but build class, racial, and cultural antagonism, and should consider Allen's approach. My own sense is that churches and organizations should foster and spotlight compassionate approaches that help people rise out of poverty.

Thinking About Evolution by four Reasons to Believe writers (RTB, 2020) is good for nudging those who still prop up Darwin. —M.O.

Reflections on grace and truth

Accessible theology books

by Jamie Dean



***Being the Bad Guys* by Stephen McAlpine:** McAlpine understands why Christians often feel like the bad guys, but he encourages believers to resist the mindset that “if we don’t win this culture war, everything is over. ... That is how earthly politics work, not God’s kingdom.” The author says we should be more concerned about what destructive belief systems will do to people made in God’s image than how we might suffer for embracing an unpopular worldview. He explores ways to spend time preparing for “a tsunami of the broken and wounded who wash up on our shores.” He calls for boldness and compassion: “A big view of God means we do not fear other people, but we do not despise them either.”

***Surviving Religion 101* by Michael J. Kruger:** New Testament scholar Michael Kruger offers practical, Biblical answers for common objections to Christianity: How can Christianity be the only right religion? How could a good God allow such evil? Are we sure that homosexuality is really wrong? How do we know the Bible is true? Kruger writes the book as a series of letters to his oldest daughter as she heads off to a secular college, and the volume would make a helpful gift for other young Christians poised to do the same. He begins with a fatherly reassurance that it’s OK not to have all the right words easily at hand: “Not having an answer does not affect the truth of what you believe.”

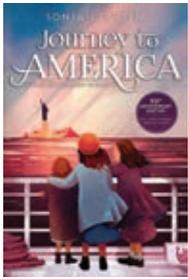
***An Ocean of Grace* by Tim Chester:** Nearly every spring, Christian book publishers release new titles to anticipate the season leading up to Easter. It’s a worthy way to spend the last few weeks of winter months, but I’ve always hoped such books won’t lose steam after Easter is past. Since every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Christ, I’ll commend a book technically designed for Easter preparation, but good for any time of the year. *An Ocean of Grace* leads readers through daily meditations and prayers from Christians across Church history. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Owen, Charles Spurgeon, and Samuel Rutherford are a few of the writers offering Biblical meditations on confession, repentance, and rejoicing in the saving work of Christ.

***Glimmers of Grace* by Kathryn Butler:** Butler is a trauma surgeon (and now a homeschooling mom) who writes vividly about her firsthand exposures to the wonders of the human body—and the woes of its breakdown. Her encounters with extreme suffering in trauma units and hospital rooms led her to despair, and then to Christ. She already knew that “the wounds of our flesh leave scars. The wounds of our soul gnaw us from within.” But she learned “Christ’s wounds heal everything.” Butler writes for the sick and those who love them: “When you gaze into the mirror and find your face wan from illness and haggard from grief, remember that even as our sense of ourselves fades, *who He is* never changes.”

Hanging on to hope

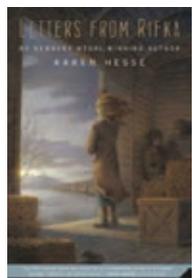
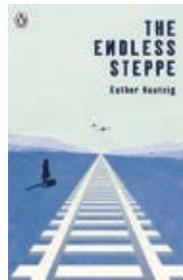
Four historical novels about anti-Semitism

by Susan Olasky



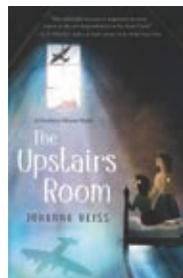
Journey to America by **Sonia Levitin**: Berlin in 1938 is a dangerous place for Jews, so Lisa's father decides to sneak away at night and head to America: When he finds a job, he will send for his family. That takes longer than he expects, but finally the time comes. The family takes a train to Switzerland, supposedly for vacation. Mother and three daughters face many trials, made worse by the mother's serious illness. Levitin shows the dangers families faced even after leaving Germany—and the courage and hope it took to persevere. (*Ages 12 & up*)

The Endless Steppe by **Esther Hautzig**: The daughter of a wealthy jeweler in Vilna, Poland, Esther Hautzig had a fairy-tale childhood. Even after the Russians came and confiscated her father's business, her life remained the same. In 1941, when she was 10, the Russians exiled her family to Siberia. With the eyes of a child she experienced the hardship—hunger, exhaustion, isolation, bone-chilling cold—and also the wonder of this strange place. Until the end of the war, her family struggles to survive with courage and hope. Hautzig's depictions of people and places are rich in detail. (*Ages 12 & up*)

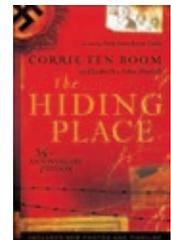
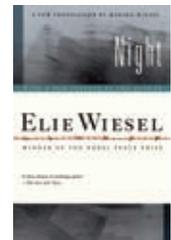


Letters From Rifka by **Karen Hesse**: Two decades before World War II, Rifka's family left Russia by train to escape pogroms and emigrate to America. The family came down with typhoid in Poland, which caused delays. Then Rifka developed ringworm, which meant she couldn't board the ship. Instead her parents left her in the care of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to get better. This novel, based on a true story, unfolds through letters that recount Rifka's experiences as she waits and wonders if she will ever see her parents again. (*Ages 12 & up*)

The Upstairs Room by **Johanna Reiss**: Reiss writes at the beginning of this book about her experience living in hiding in Holland during the war: "My sister and I suffered and complained, and sometimes found fault with the Gentile family that took us in for a few years, in which members of that family were not heroes but people, with strengths and weaknesses." Because she does that so well, capturing the individual personalities, they all come alive. She juxtaposes accounts of silliness with acts of bravery and kindness. The Gentile farmer, Johan, sometimes uses crude language. (*Ages 12 & up*)



Afterword



Some depictions of the Holocaust are bleak and tend to despair. **Night** by Elie Wiesel is one of those. He wrote of his experience in a Nazi concentration camp where he lost his faith. God seemed absent. A fellow prisoner captured the despair: "I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people." Forty years later Wiesel spoke of dissidents and others suffering in various ways: "One person of integrity can make a difference, a difference of life and death." He dedicated his life to being that person.

Mature teens should read Wiesel, but books like his should be balanced with others like Corrie ten Boom's **The Hiding Place**. It too recounts time in a concentration camp, where her sister died. Both depict the horrors of the camps. Because she sees God at work, the book offers hope in the darkness. —S.O.

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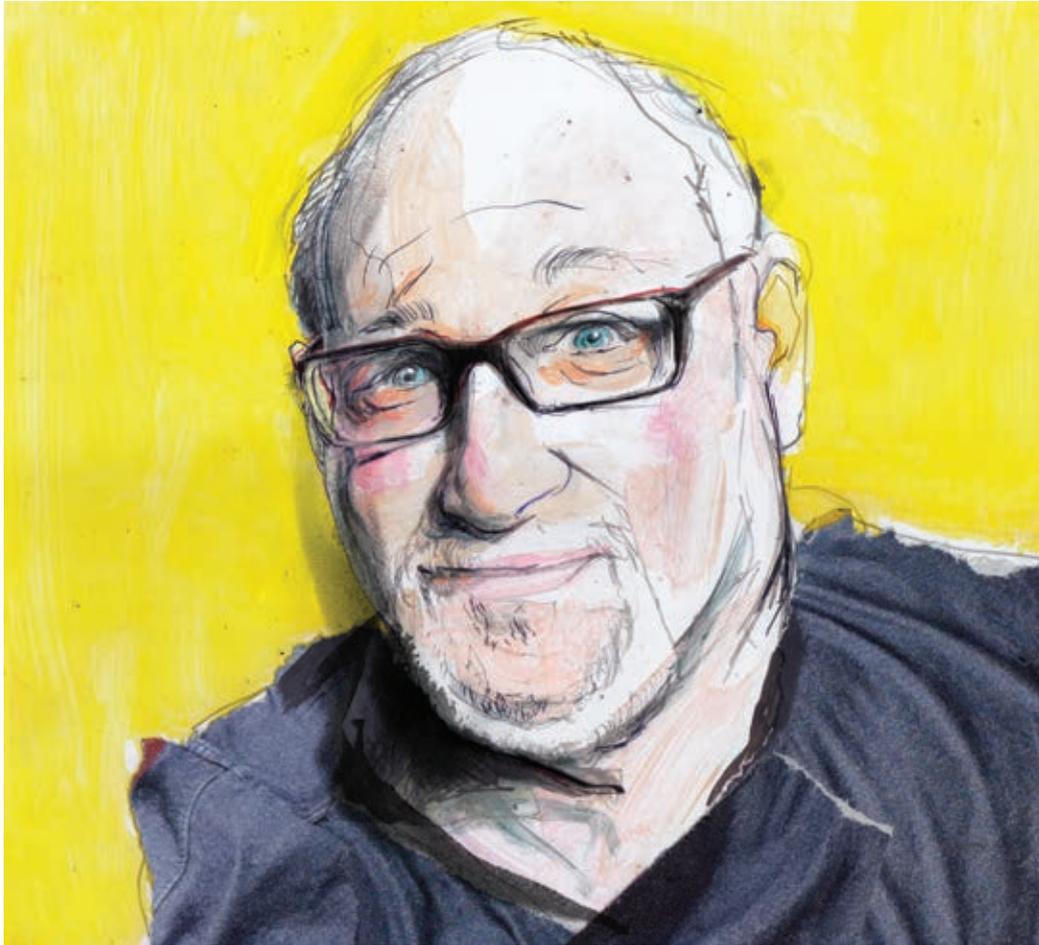
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ISRAEL'S STATE OF POLITICS

Netanyahu, nukes, and novels help illuminate a complicated nation

**MARVIN
OLASKY
INTERVIEWS
ZE'EV
CHAFETS**

THE MARCH 23 ISRAELI ELECTIONS concluded in a deadlock for the fourth time in two years (See “Courting Christians,” p. 52). Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu once again fell short of the parliamentary majority needed to form a new government, in what Israelis viewed as a referendum on his leadership: Netanyahu, first elected in 1996, was running for his sixth term.

Netanyahu faces charges of fraud, breach of trust, and accepting bribes. He dismisses the scandals as an attack by hostile politicians, lawyers, and journalists. Netanyahu recently campaigned on his

success in securing vaccines for all Israelis, which led to 80 percent of the population gaining inoculation by election time. Critics say Netanyahu has allowed his ultra-Orthodox allies to ignore lockdown rules and inoculation drives.

Ze'ev Chafets was born in 1947, grew up in Pontiac, Mich., and majored in Near Eastern studies at the University of Michigan. He moved to Israel and in 1977 became director of the Government Press Office under Prime Minister Menachem Begin. He was founding managing editor of *The Jerusalem Report* magazine and is now a Bloomberg columnist. I've edited and condensed our Feb. 26 interview.

Israeli politics is a mystery to most American readers. Could you explain the aleph, bet, gimel—the ABCs? I'll try. There are only 9 million Israelis, which means about 7 million voters. A national election is the size of an election in Michigan. The parliament here is called the Knesset and has 120 members. To form a government you need 61 votes in the Knesset. Each of about a dozen parties puts up a list of candidates and gets a percentage of the Knesset equivalent to the percentage of votes it receives. If Likud, the party of Netanyahu, gets 25 percent of the vote, it gets 30 members of the Knesset, one quarter.

No one ever gets a majority, right? Since Israel began in 1948, no party has ever had an absolute majority. All our governments are coalition governments. Until 1977 the ruling party was always the Labor Party, which founded the country under David Ben-Gurion. Since 1977 Likud, with rare moments of lapse, has been the dominant party and formed most of the coalitions. The real elections in Israel these days actually start the day after the election, which is when the coalition bargaining begins.

What's your assessment of Bibi Netanyahu? He's a demagogue in some ways, a very tough campaigner, very manipulative, which I guess is probably not a bad quality in a politician. I've known him for a long time. I stopped supporting him when I thought that in 1995 he played a role in whipping up the hostility in the country that ended with the assassination



**WHEN THE
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GO AFTER THE
IRANIANS.**



of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. I don't admire his character. I do admire his abilities. They're substantial.

What about his trial for fraud and bribery? I'm against him when he does things like attempt to suppress the justice system. His defense has been way over the top in a democratic country like Israel. He's been ready to undermine the attorney general, the Justice Department, the police department, and anybody else he

thinks might be a partner to him going to jail, or at least having to leave the prime minister job.

Has Israel turned to the political right?

The demography has shifted over the years. Israel used to be roughly 50-50 in terms of left and right. Today, I would say that in terms of that Jewish population of the country—which is 80 percent of the country—80 percent of that 80 percent is right-wing. Some of those people are ultra-Orthodox. Some are settlers or supportive of the settler movement in the West Bank.

What does right-wing mean in the Israeli context?

One component: You are a hard-liner on the issue of Iran. Second, Bibi was a Trump supporter—in some ways you could say he was a Trump whisperer, since the American plan for a Palestinian entity was essentially a plan scripted by Bibi and adopted by the U.S. government. People who support that plan, you could say, are right-wing, although they may be liberal on abortion: Abortion here is not controversial on the right or left.

But the Haredim—the ultra-Orthodox—are not pro-abortion.

No, the Haredim, about 12 percent of the population, are a world of their own, divorced from anything beyond what their own community wants and needs. That has become very clear in the last year, especially with the pandemic: They refused to follow any government restrictions. Likud is prepared not to press them into full citizenship; not to require their sons and daughters to go into military service; not to educate their children in mathematics, science, or even basic history or nonreligious texts. Netanyahu, Begin, even Ben-Gurion have been willing to accommodate them because, (a) they didn't realize that this is going to grow into such a big community, and (b) they're very easy coalition partners: They don't want anything in terms of the national budget.

Others in the right-wing coalition don't like them?

More than half the men and families are unemployed on purpose because they consider working inferior to Talmudic study. The government supports them, and almost all of these →

families are welfare families. They have seven, eight, 10 children in their families, because it's a Biblical commandment to be fruitful and multiply, and because they don't have to worry about raising these children because they're raised essentially by taxes.

The Arab bloc, about 20 percent of the country, sides with the left? They vote against any Jewish party. They've never been in the government or a coalition partner for anybody. Their political leadership is all much closer to the Palestinian idea of a non-Jewish state, what they think of as a state of all its citizens, than the Israeli model, which is Jewish and democratic. The Haredim don't like the democratic part of that slogan, but they don't deny the right of the Jewish people to have their own state.

What are the primary misunderstandings many American evangelicals have about Israel? Many don't realize that Israel is not a militarized country, that it's very Americanized, and that it's not (where most people live) a desert. There's a seamless cultural and media web between here and the United States. We watch the same things, listen to the same music, wear the same clothes. For many evangelicals, the big matters of Israeli politics are secondary. They love Israel because that's what God said they need to do.

In 2007 you wrote a column essentially saying *It may be a good idea to bomb Iran before it can nuke us*. Is that doable and desirable today? Today, not necessarily doable, nor worthwhile. Iranian facilities are spread around the country—not a single reactor Israel can take out. It would cause a major war and Israel would suffer a lot of missile damage, so what did they say in the 1950s—a balancing of terror?

MAD—Mutually assured destruction. When the Iranians have a nuclear weapon, it might be that Israel will decide it has no choice but to go after the Iranians. That's called the Begin doctrine here, that no hostile country denying Israel's right to exist can be allowed to have nuclear weapons. During the Trump administration, people here hoped American sanctions might bring down that regime. There's not a problem between the mass of Iranian people and the mass of the Israelis; but the government there is militantly anti-Israel and if there's no choice, there's no choice.

If there's no choice, Israel attacks, and it can't take out all the nuclear weapons—there goes Tel Aviv? Do Israelis have existential dread? At a low velocity, because after the Holocaust, nobody is under the impression that these sorts of things are impossible. It doesn't concern people every minute, but it could change if the Iranians do have nuclear weapons and the capacity to deliver them.

Do Israeli military people think the Iranian leadership is basically sane as the Soviet leadership was, or is the malignancy so great that the leaders would say, *Let's take out Israel, and so what if we lose a few million people*? I don't know. We know in retrospect that the Soviet Union was reasonably responsible with its nuclear weapons, and after Cuba in 1962 not looking for opportunities to threaten with them. Maybe if the Iranian

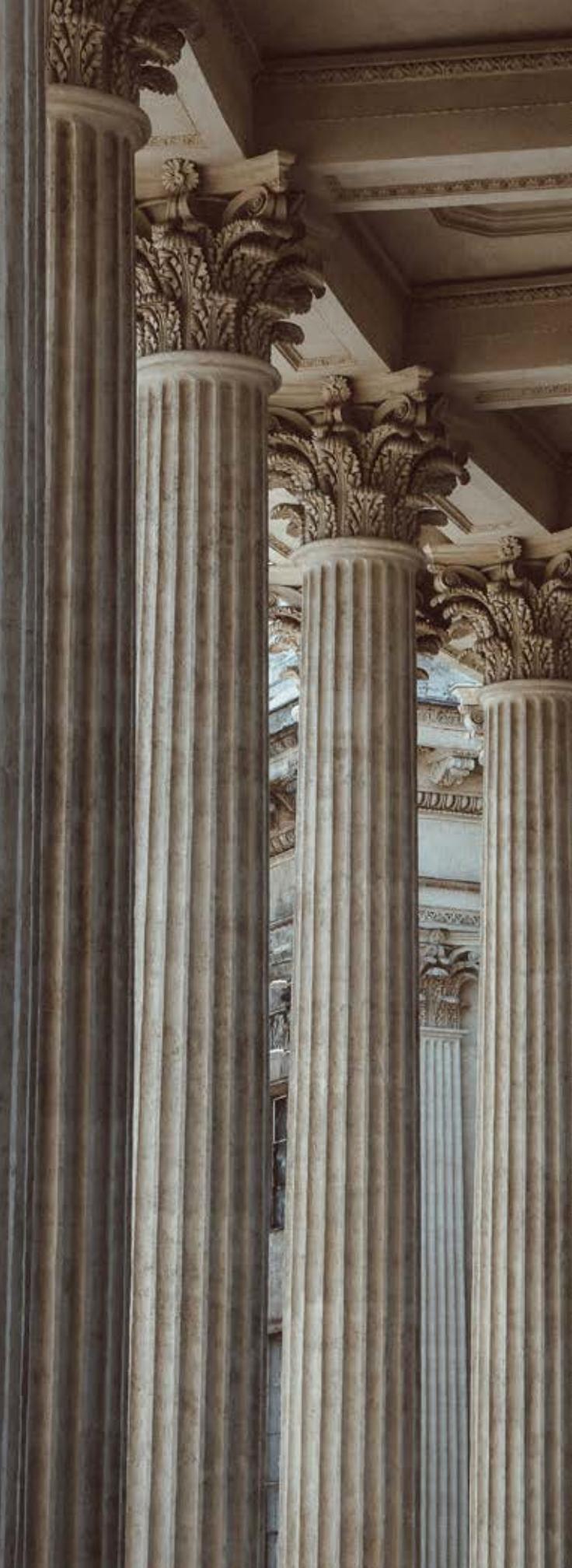
leadership thought they could do it, they'd try. I doubt that they're suicidal, but I'm not sure that they're not.

You wrote five novels during the 1990s. In your funny novel *The Project*, the Israeli prime minister outwits and manipulates the U.S. president. Could Netanyahu manipulate Joe Biden? I don't think so. They have known each other a long time, and Biden is not cold to Israel in the same way President Obama was. But Biden's senior foreign policy team are virtually all people who have a grudge against Netanyahu because of the fight he put up against the Iran nuclear pact.

For *The Project*, was Prime Minister Begin your model? No, but some of his staff people were models for different characters.

The other four novels you wrote are also laugh-out-loud, but *WORLD* readers should know that some of your novels include sexual situations and all of them have some bad language. I won't quote here what your NBA player in *Hang Time* teaches the son of a Muslim terrorist, but I was impressed with the wily Israeli prime minister. He's very hard-line—somewhat based on Yitzhak Rabin. ■





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Faithful renditions

Three albums surprise with new takes on classics, some with Christian roots

by Arsenio Orteza



Connick

AMONG THE CURRENT bumper cover-version crop, none are more eye- (or ear-) opening than those of Harry Connick Jr., David Ramirez, and Paul Stanley's Soul Station.

Connick's is called *Alone With My Faith* (Verve), and a more accurate title you won't find. Not only does Connick play every instrument and sing every vocal part, but all 13 songs address his rekindled faith in Christ. "I never took it seriously," he sings in the funkily off-kilter "Look Who I Found," "but you move mysteriously, Lord." (A few verses later, he quotes John 14:6.)

The song is one of the album's six originals, each of which slinks with an exploratory soulfulness not unlike that of Stevie Wonder's more purposeful meanderings. But it's the intimately sung covers and the various Christian traditions from whence they hail that universalize Connick's confessions.

HARRY CONNICK JR.: "It was almost like I was praying as I was singing 'cause the singing was the last thing on my mind."

There's evangelical hymnody ("Amazing Grace," "The Old Rugged Cross," "How Great Thou Art"); Catholic hymnody, both pre-Vatican II ("Panis Angelicus") and post- ("Be Not Afraid"); even Bill and Gloria Gaither's "Because He Lives."

"Because He Lives" also figures in the EP *Backslider* (Sweetworld) by the Austin roots-rocker David Ramirez. (Who'd have thought that in 2021 the Gaithers would be so hip?) On his Facebook page, Ramirez describes the mostly hymns collection as his "most nostalgic project to date." It's also his most low-key, providing stark contrast to his sonically detailed (and, despite titles such as "Hallelujah, Love Is Real" and "Heaven," thoroughly secular) 2020 long player, *My Love Is a Hurricane*.

The details this time are limited mainly to Ramirez's acoustic guitar, his co-producer Brian Douglas Phillips' organ, piano, pedal steel, and bass, and Ramirez's honey-and-gravel baritone voice. Together, they suffuse selections such as "Be Thou My Vision," "It Is Well With My Soul," "Come Thou Fount," and "I Surrender All" with a quiet intensity befitting dark nights of the soul.

"Before I ever picked up an instrument," Ramirez's Facebook post continues, "these tunes were a massive part of my life. Though, currently, my spirituality and faith don't look anything like they did back then, these songs are from my childhood and upbringing and, therefore, will always hold a sacred place in my heart."

Paul Stanley's Soul Station's *Now and Then* (UMe) contains no hymns. But, coming from the lead singer of KISS, its nine faithfully rendered classic-R&B covers and five compatible originals feel like the return of a prodigal son. What's most remarkable is the playing of the 10-member Soul Station orchestra, followed closely by Stanley's voice, which has somehow managed to survive decades' worth of hard-rock concertizing.

Recommendations for Volume 2: Billy Ocean's "Love Really Hurts Without You," Lenny Williams' "Ten Ways of Loving You," and—if only to give the background vocalists a chance to shine—the Flirtations' resplendent "Nothing but a Heartache." ■

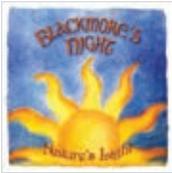
Rock and roots

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

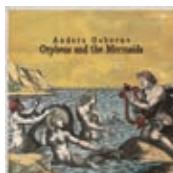
Nature's Light by Blackmore's Night:

Yes, the Renaissance-reenacting jigs and reels of the former Deep Purple and Rainbow guitarist Ritchie Blackmore and his wife have begun to sound like variations on the same theme. But, one, there's nothing wrong with the theme. Two, "The Twisted Oak" belongs on the couple's next best-of. And, three, Stevie Nicks could do wonders with "Four Winds." Additionally, Blackmore occasionally still plugs in and solos, and not every song is a jig or reel. On "Der Letzte Musketier" and "Darker Shade of Black" (OK, it should've been called "Blacker Shade of Dark"), Candice doesn't even sing. The former wouldn't have sounded out of place on *The Book of Taliesyn*. And the latter is an answer song over 50 years in the making.



Orpheus and the Mermaids by Anders Osborne:

For years, Osborne has practically owned New Orleans' roots-rock-singer-songwriter turf (see his 22 "Best of the Beat" awards going back to 1995 if you doubt), and there's local Crescent City color on this suite for solo voice, harmonica, and acoustic guitar too. But other places provide hues as well (see the travelogue "Jacksonville to Wichita"), and although his second song to mention the Florida Keys embeds a profanity in its refrain, transcendent moments abound. (See the



examination of conscience, "Light Up the Sun"). Most transcendent of all: the way that his voice (see Jackson Browne and Loudon Wainwright III) rolls and flows to a guitar sound that's pure *Blood on the Tracks*.

Rhinestoned by Jason Ringenberg:

There's enough hillbilly in Ringenberg's singing and enough Appalachia in his rock 'n' roll to make the wide-ranging subjects of his recent forays into hom-



age-paying seem radical in the most literal sense. Last time it was John Muir, the Ramones, and John the Baptist. This time it's the Freedom Riders, Crazy Horse, Hank Williams, and the resurrected Christ. Put all those together, and you get the impression that it's by tying himself to a tree with roots (and by turning guitar duties over to George Bradfute) that Ringenberg intends to weather the storms that threaten the memory of all he holds dear (Nashville's rhinestone era included). You also have a syllabus the likes of which history majors won't easily forget.

Denizen Tenant by Joseph Williams:

Williams is the composer John Williams' son and Toto's current lead singer. And, as with all Toto-related projects, this album's production, whether by Williams (nine tracks) or Jay Gruska (two), is sumptuous. Could any of these cuts have been hits circa *Toto IV*? "Black Dahlia" probably (although it owes more to Steely Dan circa *Aja*) and "Don't Give Up" (except that Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush wouldn't have yet minted the original). The lyrics philosophize colloquially—"Never Saw You Coming" (the home of the album's sole profanity) amounts to "Man knows not his time." As for the vocals, emerging as they do from someone deemed worthy to succeed Bobby Kimball and Fergie Frederiksen, they hold the line.



Encore



Available by itself or as a limited-edition, colored-vinyl twofer with his Toto buddy's Joseph Williams' *Denizen Tenant*, Steve Lukather's ***I Found the Sun Again*** (The Players Club) stretches five prime examples of what used to be called FM rock across tentpole covers of Traffic's "Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys," Joe Walsh's "Welcome to the Club," and Robin Trower's "Bridge of Sighs," at least two of which, if only marginally, improve on the originals.

But what really keeps *I Found the Sun Again* from doubling as a Toto disc (the contributions of David Paich on almost every song notwithstanding) is Lukather's burly voice, which would've weighted down "Africa" or "Rosanna" but which suits the svelte pop curves of "Run to Me" (not a Bee Gees cover) and the brawny, live-in-the-studio sizzle of "Along for the Ride" just fine. Still, it's as a guitarist that Lukather's best known, and it's the soaring instrumental "Journey Through" that most clearly demonstrates why. —A.O.



What's happening at the border?

Political narratives overlook Christians' work

THE WEEK I WAS REPORTING at the border (see “Border backtracking,” p. 44), I saw a lot of people spinning narratives about what’s happening there.

Republican senators traveled down to the border to raise alarm about “Biden’s border crisis” and “kids in cages.” One senator filmed himself in front of a large group of families with young children under a bridge, waiting for the Border Patrol to process them: “This is the thing that Biden doesn’t want you to see. This is absolutely an open border situation. Anyone who wants to come in from any country in the world ... they come in here, and they’re all released.”

Meanwhile on the left, I saw activists blast news reports about a “surge” at the border as “militaristic language.” Many Democratic leaders have been defensive, labeling the current border crisis as an “imperialism crisis,” an “environmental crisis,” a “trade crisis,” and a “carceral crisis.”

I was unmoved. Many of the same right-wing folks expressing concern for mothers and children huddled under a cold bridge didn’t shed a tear when an even worse border crisis happened during the Trump administration. The same left-wingers who sobbed about “children in cages” and excoriated Trump on social media are now blaming larger systemic problems.

But then, what’s new? Politics is about who weaves the most compelling, emotive narrative. It’s not reason and nuance that rile us human beings, but moral instincts and emotional judgment. Much of the narrative surrounding the border has been exactly that—savvy

POLITICS IS ABOUT WHO WEAVES THE MOST COMPELLING, EMOTIVE NARRATIVE.

politicians using political buzzwords to serve their political ends.

I heard a very different narrative from Christians serving at the border. One of them is a Baptist missionary who served 21 years in Matamoros, one of the most dangerous border towns in Mexico. Abraham Barberi helped plant 13 churches in the Matamoros area, four in El Salvador, and one in Argentina. Many Christians in the United States financially supported his work as part of the Great Commission.

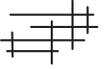
About three years ago, as more and more asylum-seekers and migrants traveled to the border, Barberi continued doing the same thing he had done for years: He shared the gospel with neighbors in need. When more than 2,000 asylum-seekers set up a ramshackle camp near his church, he visited them almost daily with firewood and other material help. He also helped raise five churches there. I was at that camp 16 months ago when I saw a group of asylum-seekers gather into a circle to sing hymns and pray out loud.

Barberi told me that since he began helping migrants, he’s lost about half his usual financial support from American Christians. That blew his mind: “Some people are so willing to spend thousands of dollars to do missions in third-world countries. But when the mission comes here to our country, suddenly they’re not OK with that. Something doesn’t match.”

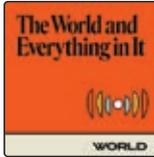
When Barberi sees men, women, and children arrive at the border with little else but their Bibles and prayers, he remembers Jesus’ commandment to His followers: “Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Many Christians I met share that otherworldly perspective. At a time when so many people’s eyes are on the border, they see an opportunity for God’s people to boast about their merciful and gracious God by loving one another: “We can feel the presence of God.” “God’s work is so visible here.” “They’re our brothers and sisters in Christ.” That’s a narrative you won’t hear on the news. It’s simple, maybe even foolish and naïve in the eyes of the world. It’s not a political perspective. But it is a kingdom perspective—and a powerful one.

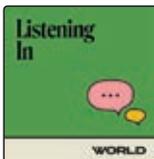
So what’s happening at the border? God is doing something among His people in His kingdom. ■



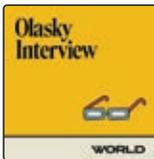
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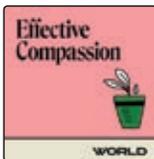
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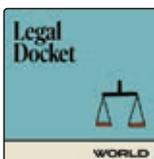
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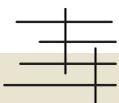
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Vaccine Center



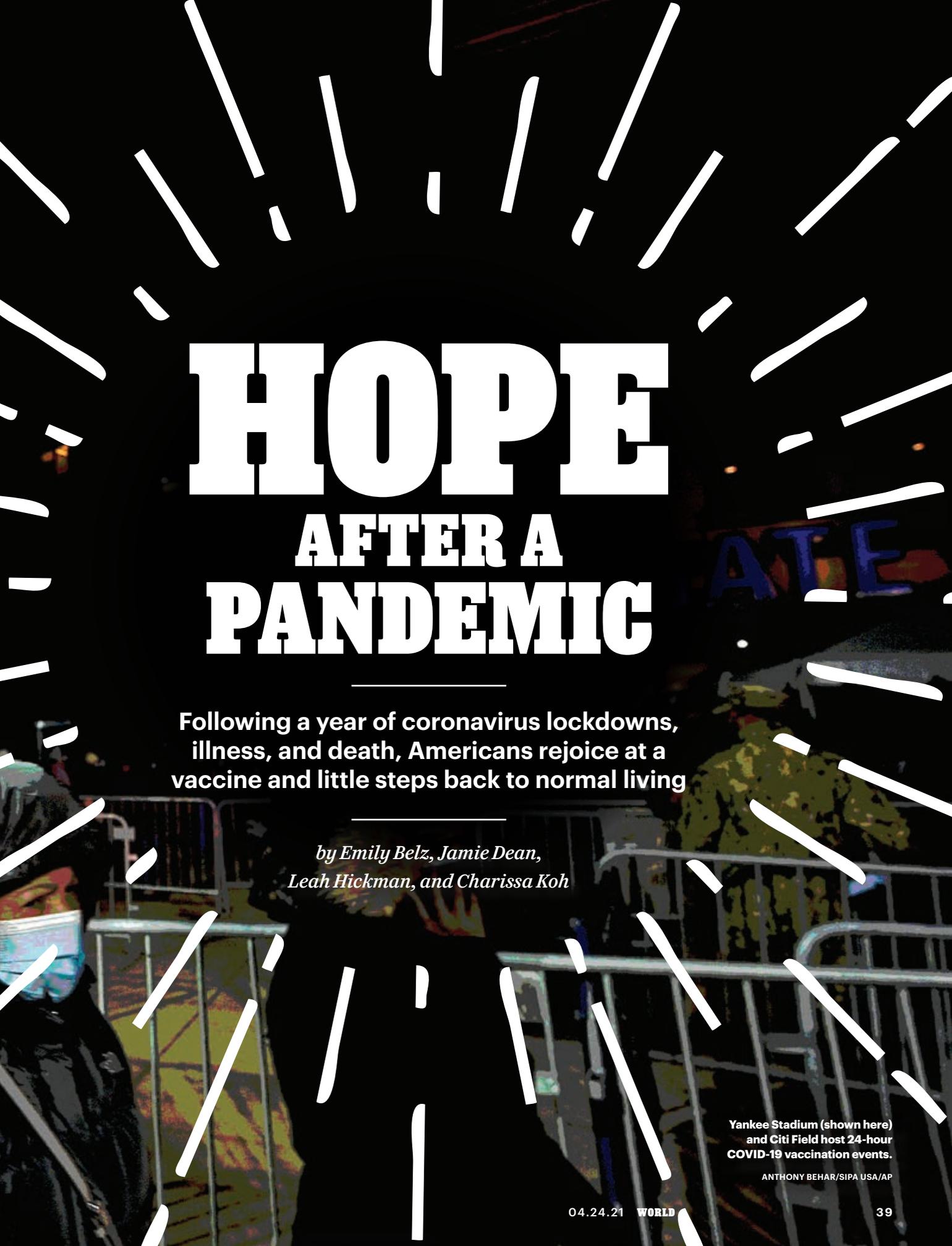
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HOPE AFTER A PANDEMIC

Following a year of coronavirus lockdowns, illness, and death, Americans rejoice at a vaccine and little steps back to normal living

*by Emily Belz, Jamie Dean,
Leah Hickman, and Charissa Koh*

Yankee Stadium (shown here) and Citi Field host 24-hour COVID-19 vaccination events.

ANTHONY BEHAR/SIPA USA/AP

At New York City's LaGuardia Airport, the flights stop each night to allow Queens residents to get some sleep. But in mid-March at Citi Field, the Mets baseball stadium next to LaGuardia, COVID-19 vaccine appointments continued all night long.

Outside Citi Field on March 18, police officers patrolled as vaccine-seekers arrived in the wee hours of the morning. Nearby, a parade of Department of Sanitation forklifts brought smashed cars to a junkyard across the street, and subway trains parked at the end of the 7 Line. On the perimeter of the stadium, a steady stream of people poured into a stadium sports bar where health workers were doling out COVID-19 shots.

Despite the early hour, typically grumpy New Yorkers were buoyant after receiving their vaccines.

"Uncle Steve!" proclaimed Mets fan Ian Brady, a bartender enthusiastic about the Mets' chances for success under new owner Steve Cohen and his bigger purse strings. Brady, who received his coronavirus shot at 2 a.m., wore a green T-shirt and a cloverleaf mask after getting off his St. Patrick's Day shift earlier in the evening. He said he signed up for the vaccine "as soon as I could get it." After what he described as a tough year financially, he was hopeful about getting back to normal—and getting out to a Mets game this season: "We say this every year, but this year, it's our year."

Vito Agate and his son Vincent Agate—also Mets fans—got vaccinated at 1:40 a.m. so Vincent could have his April wedding, postponed from October due to the pandemic.

"It's been a lot of anxiety and stress," said Vincent.

And Krishna Vegaraju, who works at an Indian travel company, hopes his business, which cratered last year, will return with the arrival of vaccines. Vegaraju lives in Flushing but hopes to travel to India in the coming months. He thinks international travel will pick up in the fall. Will you celebrate being fully vaccinated? I asked Vegaraju after he got his vaccine at around 2 a.m.

"At this point, I will sleep," he laughed.

People are breathing sighs of relief not just at Citi Field's 24-hour vaccine site, but across the country. After a year of sitting at home, wearing masks, canceling social events, worrying about catching the virus, and in many cases mourning the loss of loved ones, Americans are optimistic at what appear to be signs of a return to normal.

A majority of Americans ages 65 and

older now have received at least one vaccine dose, and by early April more than 17 percent of Americans were fully vaccinated overall. Others have gained natural immunity by catching the virus and recovering. Those rates, along with a steep drop in deaths and new infections since January, suggest the coronavirus's ability to circulate in the United States has weakened.

Now Americans are envisioning life in a world without COVID-19 restrictions. For many who are hugging family members in nursing homes again, meeting with friends after 13 months of isolation, or returning to volunteer work, each step toward normalcy brings a taste of joy.



Loneliness was a theme among New Yorkers at Citi Field. Richard Aguilar from Flushing remembered being alone for a month last year, sick with COVID-19. “I felt hopeless,” he said. “There were moments I thought we weren’t going to get back on our feet as quickly as we have.” Now he can imagine seeing friends and family.

Bella Rafailova said the pandemic forced her to return to New York from a study-abroad semester. She completed her last semester of college from her childhood bedroom, which she said was hard. She has since been working in retail, where she frequently has to tell people to put their masks on.

“It just feels nice after a year of this, there’s hope,” she said. “We’re almost through.”

ROBERT HAYWARD has spent the last year witnessing firsthand what the Bible teaches in its first pages: “It is not good for man to be alone.”

In March 2020, the president of Quarryville Presbyterian Retirement Community in Quarryville, Pa., followed state directives to bar visitors and make plans to care for 435 residents in isolation for the long haul. The retirement community—a mix of independent living, personal care (assisted living), and skilled nursing care—was spared severe outbreaks, but

Hayward says the past year was still tough: “We’re designed for relationship, not for isolation.”

The need for safety was clear: COVID-19 proved especially dangerous for elderly populations, and it spread quickly through congregated settings. Nursing home deaths account for nearly a third of U.S. coronavirus fatalities, according to a *Wall Street Journal* analysis of mortality data.

After spending months trying to encourage and motivate his staff, Hayward

A health care worker screens a person at a COVID-19 vaccination site at Citi Field.



says a chaplain encouraged him to lament more. Hayward went home and wrote a lament with his wife that he shared with the broader community last June: “Our lives are as we never imagined they would be. ... Our loved ones are taken from us. And You, O Lord, seem far away.” He ended with hope: “Our flesh and our hearts may fail. But you, O Lord, are the strength of our hearts and our portion forever.”

Hayward says, “I actually found the lamenting to be more encouraging to people than my trying to be encouraging to them.”

Last year, officials in some states started loosening visitor restrictions at long-term care facilities in an early effort to reunite lonely residents with their families. In October, after Texas eased restrictions, a Houston news station showed the moving reunion between a couple married for 68 years but separated by the coronavirus. Joyce and Bobby Myers had moved into the same retirement community, but Joyce lives in a memory care unit of the facility.

When health officials locked down the memory care wing to stop the spread of COVID-19, Bobby couldn’t visit. Finally, in October, new protocols allowed Bobby to visit his wife, and he held her hand for the first time in months: “We’ve been in love since I was 14 years old ... and the love never faltered.”

Now, a year after the pandemic began, a dramatic decrease in COVID-19 deaths in facilities across the United States is allowing even more family members to huddle, hug, and hold hands. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services declared in a March memo that care facilities should allow “responsible indoor visits at all times for all residents,” regardless of the vaccination status of the resident or visitor. (The memo included exceptions, such as a resident with an active COVID-19 infection.)

New guidelines still call for screening visitors for symptoms, wearing masks, and basic protocols for social distancing, but they do allow for physical contact between residents and visitors, when a resident is vaccinated.

In mid-March, Robert Hernandez visited his 97-year-old aunt in a Joliet, Ill., nursing home for the first time in a

year. Euldalia Asa survived COVID-19 and endured more than a year of window visits with her family. A Chicago news station reported on the reunion: With Asa’s faltering vision, she didn’t recognize her nephew right away. Hernandez said he told her “It’s me. ... And she said, ‘I recognize the voice.’”

He told his aunt he was sorry it had been so long since they had visited in person. She smiled: “I’m glad to see you.”

THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19 proved most dangerous to people ages 65 and older, and Americans in that age bracket had to be especially cautious about going to public places or meeting with friends and family members. Some have gone months largely isolated in their homes.

That demographic is also vital to U.S. nonprofits, which rely heavily on the volunteer work of retirees. When the pandemic struck, many nonprofits found themselves shorthanded. As of mid-March, several organizations told WORLD they hadn’t yet seen many people in the 65-and-older bracket return to volunteering.

But at least some of those volunteers have returned—and others hope to soon.

Raleigh, N.C., resident Jane Woodward, 72, returned to volunteering at the Raleigh-based Refugee Hope Partners (RHP) just a few weeks ago. She began working with the group in summer 2017, when RHP’s popular “read and swim” program was in full swing: Refugee children could read four days each week to earn a trip to the pool at a local Christian camp. Woodward, a former special needs teacher, remembers sitting at a table where kids could get help reading in English. “Sometimes you’d have kids who can’t read, so I would read to them,” she said. “When it ended I was sad.” She and her husband, Woody, also volunteered with the organization’s homework help program.

In February 2020, the Woodward family flew to Atlanta for a wedding. That’s where they believe their adult daughter caught COVID-19. “From then on it was seclusion,” said Jane. She had to stop tutoring lessons with a 7-year-old girl through RHP, whom she’d been teaching the colors. “My first thought



was, ‘She will never learn purple;’” said Jane. She could no longer lead a Bible study at a local retirement home, and her church small group met exclusively on Zoom. She could not see or hug her five grandchildren, even though they lived nearby. Jane remembers spending lots of time working in the yard, as the year passed in a blur. “Sometimes I wonder, ‘What did I do all last summer?’” she said with a laugh. “We really and truly have not socialized until recently.”

On Feb. 9, 2021, Jane and Woody got their second doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Two or three weeks later, they resumed weekly volunteering with RHP. Now they teach kindergartners and first graders



A pharmacist intern talks with a resident at a senior living community in Anaheim, Calif., after giving the COVID-19 vaccine.

on Thursday afternoons. In the last few weeks, Jane has also returned to church, started working in the nursery again, and hugged her grandchildren.

MANY SENIORS ARE STILL in the early stages of returning to pre-pandemic routines. Lorraine O'Shea, a 75-year-old resident of Bay City, Mich., received her first COVID-19 vaccine dose in late February. She had stayed mostly isolated with her husband, Mike, for the past year. The couple only met with family mem-

bers outside, in garages, or in large open spaces, and Lorraine stopped going to the pool to do water aerobics with her friends. When some of their friends contracted COVID-19, the O'Sheas couldn't visit them in the hospital. Three of those friends died.

After getting COVID-19 shots, Lorraine and Mike have remained cautious about going out and are still wary of visiting restaurants, but on March 15 Lorraine made her first trip back to the local pool after a year away. When she arrived at the pool at 7 a.m., two of her friends were already there. They were surprised when she emerged from the locker room. "Look at who's back!" they said.

"It felt as close to normal as anything has been in this last year," Lorraine said. "We talked nonstop."

Talk was about the only way Gwen Wilgus, 84, could keep in contact with her own friends and family for most of the pandemic. Until December, Wilgus, whose husband died in 2018, lived alone in a condo in Hannibal, Mo. With little face-to-face interaction with other people, she left her house only for daily walks around the cul-de-sac and weekly afternoon trips to the grocery store. "But I had a telephone," she said. "And I made lots of calls to my friends." The rest of the time, she said, she fed the birds, read, and talked to God.

Before the pandemic, Wilgus volunteered with the hospital auxiliary. One day a week, she clerked at the hospital gift shop, selling fresh flowers and candy to hospital staff and the family and friends of hospital patients. She also helped in the emergency waiting room once a week, welcoming families, delivering messages from doctors, and keeping the coffee pot going.

So she was disappointed last year when an email announced the gift shop was closed and that the emergency waiting room would no longer take volunteers. "I wasn't really scared, but I was very unhappy that I couldn't get out," Wilgus said.

In December, she moved to Chagrin Falls, Ohio, to live with her daughter and son-in-law. She hopes to return soon to volunteering someplace near her new home. For now, the former fourth grade teacher is volunteering remotely by making birthday cards for children at her daughter's church.

The first big thing Wilgus did after getting fully vaccinated around the beginning of March was to travel to Florida with family—a trip originally scheduled for March 2020. There, she enjoyed games with family and walks on the powdery white sand of Anna Maria Island. Speaking by Zoom from the island, Wilgus said she planned to start attending church again after returning to Ohio.

It will be her first time back to services since last spring: "I'll feel a little freer about going back and going out somewhere." ■

BORDER BACKTRACKING

The U.S.-Mexico border isn't open,
but a migrant surge and a mishmash
of messages and policies
have created another crisis

BY SOPHIA LEE

*in Matamoros and
Reynosa, Mexico*





Migrants from Central America, seeking U.S. asylum, arrive in Texas after crossing the Rio Grande in an inflatable boat.

ED JONES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A

DISORIENTED-LOOKING HONDURAN MAN clutched the arm of his 8-year-old daughter as though someone would snatch her away—and that was a good possibility. Local cartels have eyes everywhere at the border between Reynosa, Mexico, and McAllen, Texas. But the man didn't even know where he was.

They had crossed the border into the United States somewhere else the day before. By next morning, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials had expelled them to Reynosa under a pandemic-era public health statute called Title 42. I saw them climb out of a white CBP van with about 10 other migrants from Central America and Mexico, then wander from the international bridge to a busy intersection.

"This is Reynosa," a woman warned him when she saw him standing still, looking lost: "*Es muy peligroso*. You can't just

stand around here." The man nodded and gripped his daughter's arm tighter. The girl leaned on the crook of his arm, her hazel eyes fluttering with fatigue. She wore a Minnie Mouse sweatshirt and pink shoes. The father wore a blue button-down shirt and jeans. They carried nothing else.

The father, who declined to give his name, said he lost his job and couldn't feed his family after two hurricanes hit Honduras and Guatemala. The pandemic destroyed an already tattered economy, and organized crime ravaged his neighborhood. Friends told him to seek asylum in the United States: "Now's the time to go," they urged, saying President Joe Biden had opened the border. So the man left. The only way to survive, he thought, was to find employment in the United States and send money back home. He and his daughter traveled by bus to the U.S.-Mexican border to seek asylum.

But his friends were wrong: The border is not open.

So on this day in late March, they stood dazed, staring at a cartel-ridden city in a foreign country, without money to return home. "I'm asking God what to do," the father said, raising his eyes to the sky. A block away at a small public park, about 200 migrants lay on mats fashioned out of filthy blankets and scrunched-up jackets—all homeless and penniless after being expelled within the last several weeks.

When the Trump administration ended, the Biden administration stepped in promising a more compassionate border enforcement. But the reality at the border has not changed much. Though Biden has unwound some of former President Donald Trump's hard-line border policies—most notably the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), sometimes known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy—he has turned away most migrants by keeping Title 42. While mixed messages prompt new waves of migrants to head for the U.S. border, a backlogged and broken immigration system keeps many of them waiting in border camps or crude U.S. facilities.



Francisco, from Honduras, cradles his 9-month-old daughter after crossing the Rio Grande on a raft into the United States.



THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION first cited Title 42 in March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19, and it effectively rendered the asylum system inaccessible. Under Title 42, border officials have expelled more than 350,000 migrants and asylum-seekers at the southern border, including about 16,000 unaccompanied children, without asylum interviews. On Nov. 18, 2020, a district court order blocked Trump officials from expelling unaccompanied children.

Biden officials have allowed unaccompanied minors in for humanitarian reasons but have otherwise continued expelling the majority of people crossing the border, including asylum-seekers and families such as that Honduran man and his 8-year-old daughter.

After a brief lull during the pandemic, the number of CBP encounters at the southwest border has steadily increased since last summer. Then it spiked from 78,442 to 100,441 between January and February. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas warned in a statement that the United States is “on pace to encounter more individuals on the southwest border than we have in the last 20 years.”

A surge in border apprehensions is neither unexpected nor unprec-

Homeless migrants expelled from the United States sleep under a gazebo at a public park in Reynosa.

edented. The CBP usually sees seasonal spikes in the spring, and the number of unauthorized migrants released into the United States, including unaccompanied minors, is still lower than in 2014, 2016, and 2019. The statistics on encounters can also be deceiving: They include counts of the same individuals attempting to cross multiple times. Because Title 42 rapidly expels individuals with fewer penalties, more people have tried crossing the border again and again after expulsion. Single adults made up about 71 percent of the southwest border apprehensions in February.

The new problem is the spike in unaccompanied minors crossing the border when the government doesn't have the capacity to house them all, partly due to pandemic restrictions. In January, border agents encountered 5,694 unaccompanied children at the southwest border. That number shot up to 9,297 in February. About 75 percent of these children are ages 15 to 17, but some of them are 6 or younger. Federal law only allows them to spend 72 hours in Border Patrol facilities, which were never equipped to hold children. But a CBP senior official said the average migrant is spending about 90 hours there in overcrowded conditions. As of April 5, about 4,700 unaccompanied children were being held in Border Patrol facilities and another 14,300 in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) facilities and other makeshift shelters.

Many Republican leaders flew down to the border to film themselves blaming Biden's "open border" policies for the border crisis. They say halting MPP lights

THE SITUATION AT THE BORDER IS GRIM: MEXICAN BORDER TOWNS ARE STILL FILLED WITH DESPERATE PEOPLE SEEKING ANY MEANS OF SURVIVAL.



a “welcome sign” at the border. But progressive Democrats are equally displeased with Biden: They point out he should have been better prepared to handle the thousands of unaccompanied children. They’re also upset that he’s still expelling asylum-seekers under Title 42.

Immigration experts say what we’re seeing is a crisis that’s years in the making. Historically, the vast majority of unauthorized border crossers have been single adults from Mexico. In the last several years, a growing population crossing the border are asylum-seeking families and children fleeing extreme poverty and violence in Central America (and now increasingly from southern Mexico).

Instead of addressing these larger, long-term forces, the Trump administration relied on policies like MPP and family separation to deter people from entering the United States. Since early 2019, Trump officials forced more than 71,000 asylum-seekers to await their cases in Mexico under MPP, which immigration experts and advocates say created a humanitarian mess and logistical chaos at the border.

W HILE TRUMP WAS CLEAR about his anti-immigration stance, Biden’s messaging has been wishy-washy. He campaigned on ending Trump-era immigration policies, but Biden has since backtracked as his team struggles to tamp the migration flow to the border. From the start, White House officials have warned hopeful migrants not to leave their country. By mid-March, White House southern border coordinator Roberta Jacobson announced a clearer message: “The message isn’t, ‘Don’t come now,’ it’s, ‘Don’t

come in this way, ever.’ The way to come to the United States is through legal pathways.”

That’s not what people are hearing in their hometowns. Amalia Perez Perez, a 35-year-old indigenous farmer from Chiapas, an impoverished southeastern Mexican state, arrived at the Matamoros-Brownsville border seeking asylum in early March with her husband and three children. She told me she heard on local broadcast news that the Biden administration was “letting in people like us.” The news probably meant MPP enrollees, but Perez misunderstood that Biden had opened doors to all asylum-seekers.

At the time, local political groups were warring one another and threatening farmers in her community. Perez feared mostly for her 17-year-old son, because these groups often forcibly recruit teenage boys. So in January, Perez’s family packed up and traveled north, only to discover that the border was closed.

Now they’re staying at a church shelter in Matamoros, Mexico, uncertain of where to go. Perez says they cannot go back to Chiapas, and they feel unsafe anywhere in Mexico, where organized crime groups are well connected everywhere. When she and her husband discuss their future, “I get very sad and stressed,” Perez told me: “The only thing we can do is pray that the Lord will touch the heart of Biden and let us in.”

Such misinformation travels swiftly through word of mouth and only benefits smugglers and cartels all too happy to fuel and capitalize on it. Their victims are migrants themselves. Wendy Marta, a 26-year-old woman who’s five months pregnant, said she left Honduras two months ago with her 6-year-old daughter



FAR LEFT: Unaccompanied minors wait for their turn at the secondary processing station inside the U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility in Donna, Texas.

LEFT: Fatima Nayeli (center), 13, her sister Cynthia Stacy, 8, and Davidson Jair, 7, answer questions after they were smuggled on an inflatable raft across the Rio Grande in Roma, Texas. All three children traveled from El Salvador in the hope of reaching relatives living in the United States.



ABOVE: Vilma Iris Peraza, 28, from Honduras, collapses crying with her two children on the Paso del Norte bridge in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, after finding out they were expelled from the United States.

RIGHT: Migrants run to cross the Rio Grande to get to El Paso, Texas.

and her 40-year-old mother. The father of her children had recently abandoned her, and she was afraid of threats of violence in her hometown. “We heard the border is open,” Marta told me.

Her family crossed the border about a month ago, but U.S. officials expelled them into Reynosa. When I met them, they had been sleeping outdoors by the

bridge for weeks, with two backpacks and no shoes. When the Mexican police kicked them out, they moved to a public park nearby. Like the infamous migrant camp that burgeoned to about 2,500 homeless asylum-seekers in Matamoros, that park in Reynosa is becoming a makeshift campsite for expelled migrants like Marta, many of them families with young children. And it’s about to get worse.

B

ESIDES THE CHALLENGES at the border itself, the U.S. also faces the longer-term challenges of fixing a gutted asylum system and unclogging immigration courts, which have more than two years’ worth of backlogged cases. Some asylum-seekers probably won’t qualify for asylum because they’re primarily looking for work, not fleeing persecution.

Biden officials said they will expedite the asylum process so that asylum-seekers can receive a decision in weeks, not years. That means those who are legitimately fleeing violence can find faster relief, while others who came for economic reasons will



be swiftly sent back, which may disincentivize others from seeking asylum. Biden's advisers said they want to create legal pathways to apply for protection in the United States while in other countries, and Biden's sweeping immigration reform bill, the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, includes ambitious provisions to address the "root causes" of migration.

Leaders from both sides agree that the immigration system is long overdue for comprehensive reform, but the White House's bill faces a steep hill in Congress, which has focused on piecemeal reforms.

Meanwhile, the situation at the border is grim: Mexican border towns are still filled with desperate people seeking any means of survival. Erick Maradiaga, a 34-year-old asylum-seeker, said he fled Honduras after receiving death threats from cartels. It took him two weeks to convince his 12-year-old son to cross the border alone with his 13-year-old daughter. The boy cried, "But what if you die here? What if I never see you again?"

By then, Maradiaga and his children had been living in a tent at the makeshift migrant camp in Matamoros for more than six months due to MPP. Each time Maradiaga heard about yet another asylum-seeker being kidnapped or attacked by cartels, or saw bloated corpses floating in the river, he trembled. About half of the migrants at the camp sent their children alone across the border.

It was a chilly Sunday night when his children crossed. He took one last picture of them standing in the dark. The girl wore a bright pink jacket, the boy a black sweatshirt. They both wore brave smiles. Maradiaga watched them cross the international bridge from below at the camp. He couldn't cry out goodbye, and his kids couldn't turn around to wave at him, knowing authorities would turn them back if they knew their father was present.

That was January 2020, the last time Maradiaga saw his children in person. They reunited with their mother in Kansas City, Mo. She had crossed the border first with another 4-year-old son in March 2019, just before the Trump administration expanded MPP across the entire southern border. Today, Maradiaga is still stuck in Mexico by himself. As he talked about his family, his eyes began dripping, and he wept silently for a few minutes. Before, he used to pray that God would change Trump's heart. Now, he prays for Biden's heart. ■

WHO'S GETTING IN?

Currently, immigration officials are releasing only three categories of migrant populations into the U.S.: unaccompanied migrant children under the age of 18; asylum-seekers enrolled under MPP, whom the Biden administration is allowing into the U.S. in gradual trickles; and some families with children under age 7 who crossed in certain areas.

Due to a new child protection law, Mexican authorities in the Tamaulipas state (which borders the Rio Grande Valley) are refusing to accept families with young children. The Biden administration is flying many such families to other sectors in El Paso and San Diego, expelling about 100 people a day to Mexico from there. But according to a CBP official, the majority of families with young children are being released to sponsors in the U.S., a policy some call "catch and release."

Even some Democrats in border communities are criticizing that policy: "When you create a system that incentivizes people to come across, and they are released, that immediately sends a message to Central America that if you come across you can stay," Democratic Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, whose South Texas district sits near the border with Mexico, told *The Washington Post*.

Biden officials said they're working with Mexico to expand their capacity to accept these families.

—S.L.





COURTING CHRISTIANS

In Israel's battle to form a coalition government, the spotlight turns to ethnic Aramean Christians long overlooked by Jewish politicians

BY MINDY BELZ



Benjamin Netanyahu (center) visits the Jerusalem Mahane Yehuda market a day before the elections on March 22.

OLIVIER FITOUSSI/FLASH90/REDUX

The prospect of a record close election last month sent Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu campaigning for out-of-the-way votes, including in northern Galilee among the country's often neglected indigenous Christians. ¶ Netanyahu—who has spent 15 of his 71 years serving as prime minister (1996-1999 and 2009 to the present)—is in the political fight of his life. The Likud Party he leads increasingly is dependent on sprawling coalitions to govern. The latest fracture in the coalition forced voters to the polls yet again on March 23, the fourth national election in two years.

While his place at the top of the party is secure, support for Netanyahu nationwide is eroding. That's despite an unprecedented period of security and prosperity for Israeli citizens and a coronavirus vaccine program that's second to none.

Likud by far secured the most votes, winning 30 seats in Israel's Knesset to 17 for second-place center-left party Yesh Atid. But it takes 61 seats to govern. The scramble to form a coalition government out of the country's eclectic slate of 13 parties—which range from ultra-Orthodox to Arab Islamist and from secular hard left to nationalist right—began long before the polls had closed.

For Netanyahu, who has dominated the center-right secular Likud Party since the 1990s, this contest is happening against the backdrop of a courtroom drama. He faces indictments in three cases involving bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. The pandemic delayed the proceedings until this month. Supporters dismiss the charges as politically motivated and have galvanized Likud support around Netanyahu, who pleaded not guilty in February. But a prime minister has never faced criminal charges while in office, and daily coverage contributes to his declining popularity.

No number of votes is too small in so close an election. That reality and Netanyahu's legal troubles drove him to northern Galilee last month, where Jesus carried out most of His ministry, and where Christian residents date their lineage to the calling of the first disciples. Christians make up about 2 percent of the Israeli population, or 177,000 people, with 70 percent living in



the north. They play an important role in a governing coalition Netanyahu and others find up for grabs. For these Israelis—overlooked or overrun for centuries—waiting out a political crisis isn't new.

SHADI KHALLOUL KNOWS HOW TO WAIT. The reserve captain in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) for more than a decade has coaxed Israel to recognize its Aramean Christians as a distinct ethnic-religious group—separate from the country's main non-Jewish group, Israeli Arabs, a term broadly defining the country's Muslims.

Khalloul invited the main party leaders to visit northern Galilee, seeking their support (in exchange for his) to improve education and security, among other needs. Netanyahu, said Khalloul, was the first actually to come: "He is the only one who sees the importance of our vote. He did not neglect us."

For weeks Khalloul messaged with Netanyahu's son Yair, who took an interest in the Aramean story. But it was the record close election that forced the Likud

leader to campaign among non-Jewish voters, and that finally brought him to Galilee. He sought out Khalloul, a Christian Syriac Maronite, one of the ancient Catholic-affiliated churches, as a representative for all the Christians there.

Netanyahu made the northern swing a week before the election, first visiting Tuba, an Arab Bedouin village overlooking the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee. Then he headed west to Jish, also known in Hebrew as Gush Halav, the mixed Christian-Muslim village where Khalloul lives with his family. The Arabs of Tuba, like the Christians in Galilee, have long supported the Jewish state. Yet both saw their historic villages destroyed by IDF soldiers in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (or War of Independence).

Following a meeting with about 140 Christians in Jish, Netanyahu accompanied Khalloul to one of those villages, Bar'am, a town with a history cluttered centuries before Israel's modern-day founding. The ruins of its synagogue boast columns and cut stone from the Roman era, and the Old Testament prophet Joel reportedly is buried there. But Jews departed with Arab conquest.

An Ottoman-era tax registry from the 1500s names 114 households and 22 bachelors, all Muslims whose taxes were paid in wheat, barley, goats, and beehives. But the surrounding region was rich in Christian villages and wealthy olive merchants, though many slowly migrated to larger cities. From a high of about 2,000 recorded residents at the turn of the century, Bar'am by 1945 was a town of 10 Muslims and 700 Christians, all Maronite and Greek Catholic adherents.

Such a past, coupled with religious sites and artifact finds, gave the area historic value to Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. But it was its strategic value—atop fertile highlands just meters from the border with Lebanon—that made it vital for Israel's forces fighting the Arab Legions in 1948. The IDF occupied Bar'am and later destroyed it.

Khalloul's family joined an estimated 700,000 residents of what was until then known as Palestine who were forced to flee and relocate or who fled from fear during the war. Most were Muslims but many were Christians. "My grandfather was told to leave for two weeks and come back," said Khalloul, "but he was never allowed to return."

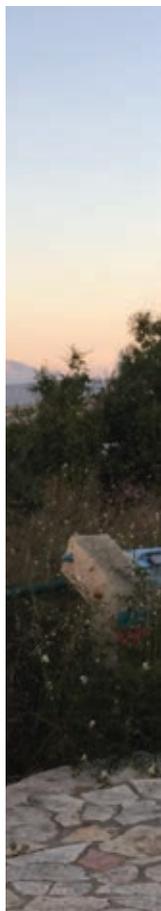
Today Bar'am is a desolate relic of a town marked by its stone church and ancient synagogue. Only the foundation walls of most buildings remain, surrounded by overgrown fields, with remnants of orchards and olive groves.

Abandoned military watchtowers sit in sight of a rigid security fence at the Israeli-Lebanon border. From atop a watchtower, where I stood with Khalloul during



A group of Likud party members celebrates following the March 23 Israeli parliamentary election.

LEFT: A boy walks next to a Christian priest during a Good Friday procession. RIGHT: Shadi Khalloul



a sunset in 2018, one can see the dots of lighted Maronite towns in Lebanon across the hills—territory now controlled by Hezbollah.

KHALLOUL, 45, WAS BORN long after the Arab-Israeli War in Jish, where his family relocated. He attended Arab schools in Haifa, with Arabic the primary language, not the Aramaic spoken by his grandfather and generations of Middle Eastern Christians. “Our history was gradually being swallowed by Arab and Jewish history, and yet we were ethnically and religiously tied not only to Maronites, but to Christian people all over the Middle East. We are the earliest believers of our faith, and we are losing it.”

In Haifa Khalloul and his brother persuaded a priest to teach them advanced Aramaic. Khalloul went to school in the United States and served in the IDF as a paratrooper before returning to Jish. In 2007 he founded the Israeli Christian Aramaic Association (ICAA), a nongovernmental organization to restore and strengthen the Christian minority in Israel while reviving traditional belief and practice.

The group focuses on raising up new local Christian leaders, hosting youth camps and summer programs. The long tables on Khalloul’s patio fill with student

guests for dinner most summer nights. In a region where Christian populations are widely in decline, the Christian population in Jish is growing through the work of ICAA, largely while avoiding the politics of grievance that characterize many Palestinian leaders.

The ICAA philosophy encourages loyalty as citizens of the state of Israel along with service, including mandatory military service. Ultra-Orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs traditionally have been exempt, and many Christians avoided conscription by identifying as Israeli Arabs. ICAA encourages Christians not to hide their identity, supports a training program to help Christians get along with Jews during their mandatory military service, but also encourages young Christians to defend their full rights as citizens.

“We live in a sensitive region surrounded by those who want us to fail,” said Khalloul. “We have to work harder and pursue positive engagement.”

ICAA’s political clout has grown as it has lobbied for government recognition: winning in 2014 recognition for Aramean Christians as a separate minority group, and for Aramaic as one of Israel’s official languages.

A 2019 Supreme Court ruling further boosted education options for Aramean Christians, allowing them



to send their children to either Jewish or Arab schools and requiring municipalities to provide transportation to accommodate them. The ruling cited the Christians' "right to preserve and nurture their identity as members of a unique minority group."

Those efforts have sparked a revival of Aramaic instruction not only in Galilee but also in the West Bank (where most Christians do not hold Israeli citizenship). The Ministry of Education now supports an Aramaic course in Jish for first through eighth graders, and a similar program is growing in Beit Jala near Bethlehem. ICAA has helped to create curriculum supporting Aramaic instruction.

THE MARCH VISIT BY NETANYAHU, in effect, endorsed the Christian community's recent gains. His arrival in Jish marked a "sea change" in Jewish-Christian relations, said Robert Nicholson, president of the New York-based Philos Project, where Khalloul has served as an advocacy fellow. "It sent a signal to the Israeli public that non-Jewish communities are a vital part of the national fabric and that patriotic Israeli minorities, whether Aramean or Arab or otherwise, deserve to be recognized."

It also went a long way to securing votes for the

Likud party, as Netanyahu toured the town and its church, met with Christian families, then made his way to Bar'am. Khalloul has twice run for seats in the Knesset himself, in 2015 and 2019, but under Yisrael Beiteinu, or Israel Our Home, the right-wing Zionist party that split from Likud and is led by Avigdor Lieberman.

After the visit Khalloul didn't hesitate to say he would switch support to the Likud party. Such a move could be significant: Lieberman, who in the past has been part of a coalition government with Netanyahu, has ruled it out over the corruption charges against him. So losing Christian votes to Netanyahu may in the end weaken the opposition's chances.

Khalloul also petitioned Netanyahu: to establish in the education ministry a Christian section separate from the Arab section; to take action against organized crime proliferating in the Galilee region, including in Nazareth; and to rebuild Bar'am, where Khalloul hopes to establish an Aramean study and research center.

Former Prime Minister Menachem Begin promised to rebuild Bar'am in 1977, Khalloul reminded Netanyahu. "You have given me a new mission that I need to do," Netanyahu replied.

Whether that's campaign-speak won't be clear unless Netanyahu prevails, yet with dismal voter turnout on March 23 (67 percent), any clear path to victory evaporated.

Post-election the Likud leader fought to hold onto support from Orthodox parties on the right, while at the same time doing the seemingly impossible: Besides courting the Christian vote, Netanyahu appeared to win over the Islamist United Arab List (known as Ra'am).

No Arab party has ever been part of an Israeli government, much less a right-leaning one in a coalition of Jews, Arabs, and Christians. But the two Arab parties, long kept to the fringes of Israeli politics, looked poised to be kingmakers heading into the April 5 certification. In order to win, the country's leading Jewish politicians can't ignore the demands of Arab voters. Khalloul is working to make sure they can't ignore Galilee's Christians either.

Netanyahu's opposition, calling itself the "change bloc" and led by the center-left, second-place Yesh Atid, has struggled for a leader equal to Netanyahu. On April 5, President Reuven Rivlin, according to Israel's parliamentary process, gave Netanyahu the mandate to form a coalition. His party received the most nods in the Knesset but by a slim margin. Many, like Khalloul, believe Israel will head to a fifth election, sometime in August or September.

In the Middle East, internal instability carries risks—particularly as Israel seeks to normalize relations with key Arab countries and ward off Iran's aggression. Netanyahu has spearheaded that mission, working with the United States.

"I'm worried," said Khalloul. "Israel must have a stable government." ■



Refugees' gambit

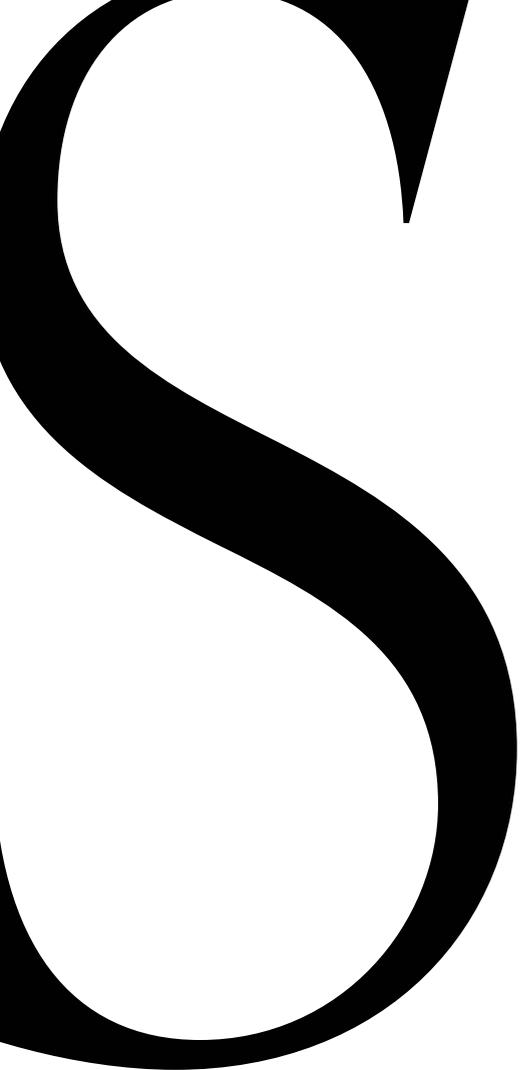
Top chess players from Iran are seeking asylum elsewhere, following a long history of chess talent using international events to escape persecution at home

by EMILY BELZ



**Iranian chess arbiter
Shohreh Bayat competes
in a Four Nations Chess
League tournament in
Maidenhead, England.**

HOLLIE ADAMS/GETTY IMAGES



stop. The president of the Iranian Chess Federation asked her to write a public letter in support of the hijab, and the chess federation removed her photo online.

The next day she woke up “fed up,” she said: “I told myself, ‘Enough is enough.’” Sensing her fate was already sealed, she wore no hijab that day at the tournament. She flew on to Russia to officiate the second half of the tournament but knew she could not return to Tehran. After the tournament she flew to London and applied for asylum.

Her lawyer told her that her asylum case was straightforward, but the COVID-19 pandemic delayed processing of asylum requests in the United Kingdom. So for the last year she wasn’t able to work or open a bank account while awaiting refugee status.

“I was reliant on the little money I [had] with me and the kindness and generosity of the people who have helped me here,” she said.

Similar to the Olympics, chess draws players into tricky geopolitics: Top players represent their home countries through national chess federations. Players often can’t afford to travel to the gamut of international tournaments without support from the national federations, which means putting up with their politics too.

Bayat joins a long history of chess players who sought asylum because of persecution or political upheaval at home (see sidebar). Bayat was Asia’s only female Grade-A chess arbiter, which allowed her to officiate top tournaments. She was the first woman to be general secretary of the Iranian Chess Federation. But leaving her home and family—and seemingly small things like her mom’s cooking—crushed her.

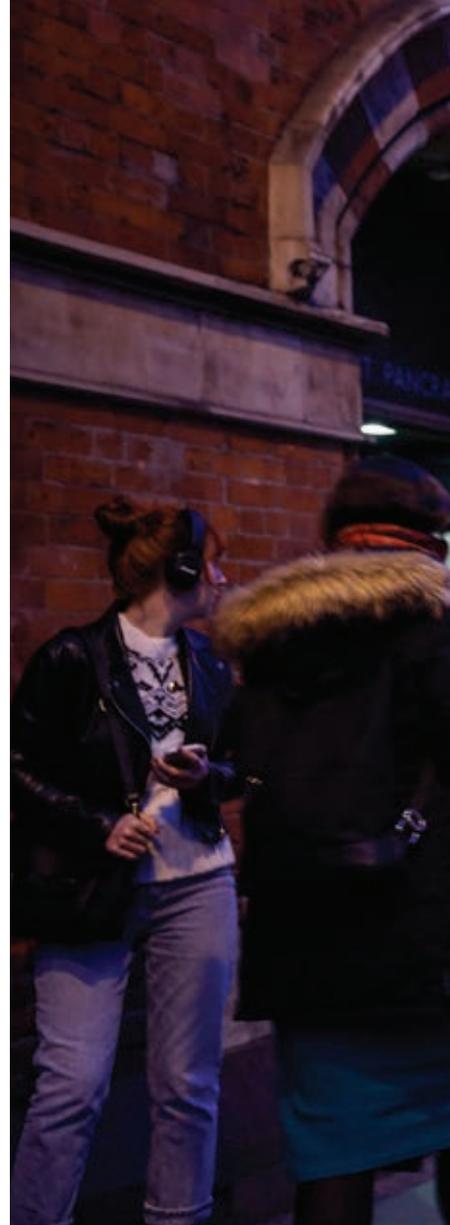
IRAN HAS PRODUCED a number of top chess stars in recent years, but many have fled the country. In addition to the hijab law, Iran forbids Iranian players from competing against Israelis.

Many experts predict 17-year-old Iranian Alireza Firouzja will be a world champion one day. He dazzles the chess world because, at his young age, he is strong at all forms of professional chess: classical, rapid, and blitz.

SHOHREH BAYAT DIDN’T KNOW how her life was about to change when she packed her bags for Shanghai, China, in January 2020. Bayat, 34, one of the top chess arbiters in the world and a former Iranian national champion, was traveling to referee the Women’s World Chess Championship.

Iranian law requires women to wear hijabs, a law that Bayat had resented from a young age, but followed. She found subtle ways to rebel, wearing colorful scarves and styling them loosely on her head, which was usually acceptable in Iranian society. She wore her hijab loosely one day at the tournament in Shanghai, and a photographer captured her at an angle where it appeared her hijab was wrapped around her shoulders like a scarf—not on her head at all. The photo made the rounds in Iranian media.

Bayat received a stream of text messages. One read, “Don’t come back, they will arrest you.” She told me she was so shocked she began crying and couldn’t



Shohreh Bayat goes to meet friends from the chess community at a pub in London.

But in late 2019, Iran forbade Firouzja from competing in the World Rapid and Blitz Championships because he might be paired with an Israeli. Firouzja made a clean break, abandoning the Iranian federation and playing the tournament under the flag of FIDE, the international chess federation. He had a stunning tournament, winning second place, and did not return to Iran. He lives in France now.

“For Iran ... it’s a massive loss,” said Elshan Moradiabadi, 35, who was the top chess player in Iran before he left the country in 2012. He is now an American

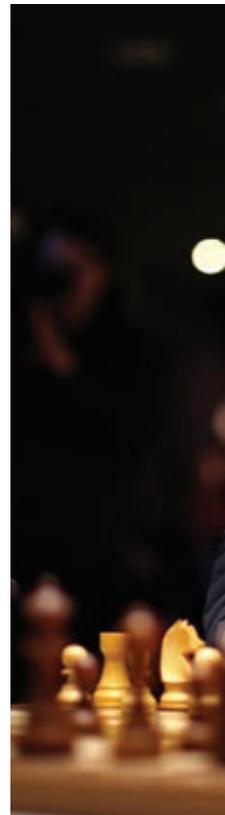


**“I WAS SEEING HOW MY
FOREIGNER FRIENDS WERE LIVING—
THEIR TRADITIONS, THEIR
CULTURE, THEIR RELIGION.
IT OPENED MY EYES.”**

citizen. “How often do you get such a phenomenal talent in a country? ... You win the jackpot and give it to someone else?”

Moradiabadi was one of the first big Iranian chess stars in recent decades to leave, although he left to pursue higher education in the United States rather than because of an explicit conflict with the Iranian regime. But he recalled the frustrations of Iranian rules as a chess star. In 2005, the year he became a grandmaster, he was excited to play at a major tournament in Germany. But then he was paired with an Israeli and had to forfeit.

“I had to, to make sure nothing happened to my family,” he said. He has since become friends with Israeli players in the United States.



LEFT: Mitra Hejazipour plays at the Chess Federation in Tehran in October 2016. RIGHT: Alireza Firouzja competes during a January 2020 tournament in the Netherlands.

Though Moradiabadi did not participate in the protests that followed Iran's 2009 elections, they made him realize he needed to leave the country. Many Iranian stars like Firouzja go to France, but Moradiabadi recalled that when he visited the French Embassy, staff were condescending about having certain paperwork. When he went to the U.S. Embassy, the woman helping him kept saying "okie dokie" and told him she would help with any copies of forms he forgot.

In 2012 he obtained a U.S. green card and in 2017 became an American citizen: "That was a happy day for me." Moradiabadi was delighted to see an Iranian women's grandmaster, Dorsa Derakhshani, playing for the United States a few years ago, after the Iranian federation expelled her for not wearing a hijab at a tournament. She was a student of his in Iran as a young girl.

"Actors are leaving, artists are leaving, it's everything. Chess is one of many things," said Moradiabadi.

THE SAME WORLD RAPID AND BLITZ tournament that led to star Firouzja's break with Iran last year was decisive for another Iranian too. Mitra Hejazipour, 28, a one-time women's chess champion in Iran and a women's grandmaster, said the Iranian federation warned her before the championship in Moscow not to remove her hijab or officials would remove her from the tournament and kick her off the national team.

Hejazipour had seen women in Iran protesting the hijab law by hanging their scarves in the street and decided she should do something to support them. She increasingly resented how in every aspect of Iranian media and culture, the hijab was used to place women in second-class status. So she played the Moscow tournament without one.

The Iranian federation expelled her, declaring publicly, "She has no place in the Islamic Republic's national team anymore." Her family suffered consequences

too. A company rescinded a job offer to her sister in Iran after Hejazipour's statement.

She thinks the international friendships she built through chess helped her see the repression she was living under. Through one-on-one games at global tournaments, players often build friendships across national lines.

"I was seeing how my foreigner friends were living—their traditions, their culture, their religion. It opened my eyes," Hejazipour said. "I'm not sure other sports have the community like that."

After her expulsion, Hejazipour was able to get a worker's visa in France and now lives and plays chess from Brest. The French federation has been "very supportive," she said, but she misses her home and her family terribly. She was stranded abroad when she was expelled and wasn't able to say goodbye to anyone.

"I didn't know it would be this difficult," she said. At the tournament, "I was thinking, 'This is the right thing to do.' But I didn't think of the consequences."

But if she had to make the decision again, "I would choose the same thing."



BAYAT'S FAMILY SUFFERED consequences too. After Bayat's refusal to wear a hijab, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard forced her father to quit his job as president of their local chess association, according to Nigel Short, the FIDE vice president.

In the U.K., Bayat tried to go about her life as a chess professional as she awaited a decision about her refugee status. In May 2020, Bayat won second place in the Women's English Blitz Championships. She officiated several top tournaments. She argued chess rules with her friends who are arbiters around the world, one of her favorite exercises: "Sometimes we argue about one sentence in the laws for days!"

In October, the United Kingdom granted Bayat's asylum request, and she is now working for the English Chess Federation. Bayat said she loves Britain, but there is always heartbreak underneath "when you are a refugee and won't be able to come back to your home country anymore." She doesn't know when she will see her family again. But she hopes one day Iran will change and they will reunite. ■

A long history of chess asylum-seekers

Nazi Germany invaded Poland—starting World War II—in the middle of the 1939 Chess Olympiad in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Many Jewish players on the Polish team, including chess legend **Miguel Najdorf**, sought refuge in Argentina rather than returning to Poland.

In the Soviet era, several high-profile Soviet chess players defected to the United States and elsewhere. Grandmaster Lubomir Kavalek, one of the best in the world at the time, was playing chess in Poland when Soviet forces invaded his home country of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He realized he needed to "go West" and found his way to West Germany before finally arranging passage to the United States in 1970. Kavalek became an American citizen, won several U.S. titles, and became the longtime chess columnist for *The Washington Post*. He died in January in his home just outside Washington, D.C.

During a tournament in East Germany in 1952, top Hungarian chess player Pal Benko tried to defect to the American Embassy in West Berlin. East German officials caught him, interrogated him as an American spy, and sent him to a concentration camp in Hungary for 16 months. Five years later, he finally got permission again to play in international tournaments.

Benko successfully defected after "strolling into the American embassy" in Reykjavik, Iceland, during a tournament there, according to *The New York Times*. He became an American citizen and a legendary player, while developing younger talent. He famously gave up his spot to American Bobby Fischer in the championship tour that made Fischer the world champion in 1972.

Glimpses of this phenomenon are in popular culture too. In the 1993 film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, a real-life Iranian chess champion who escaped to the United States ahead of the Iranian revolution in 1979, Kamran Shirazi, appears in one scene playing chess opposite actor Laurence Fishburne. —E.B.



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CADETS CONQUERING COVID

Christian cadets at military academies have found new opportunities to serve amid pandemic restrictions

by Esther Eaton

WHILE QUARANTINING after a COVID-19 exposure in late January, U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) junior Devin McClure followed a simple routine. He woke up, read his Bible—"I find if I don't do that, then Satan eats my lunch"—and attended online classes from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. After a workout, he did homework, went to bed, and started again the →

U.S. Coast Guard Academy swabs participate in Sea Trials on Aug. 13, 2020.

next day. On Fridays, he attended an online Bible study discussing patience.

McClure found the topic applicable to his situation. Once his 14 days of quarantine were up, “I was definitely grateful to come back to the real world as we know it.”

Yet for service academy cadets training during the COVID-19 pandemic, the real world is still far from normal. Usually cadets can escape the high-stress environment of campus—designed to prepare students for military leadership—by leaving on the weekends, including to attend church or other religious gatherings. This school year, restrictions intended to stop the spread of the coronavirus among cadets have added to the monotony of academy life and at times prevented them from leaving campus, taking a toll on students’ mental health. Still, some Christian cadets have found new opportunities to serve their peers.

Academy leaders have kept a tight leash on students’ behavior to avoid out-



THE NUMBER OF COAST GUARD ACADEMY STUDENTS QUARANTINING OR ISOLATING PEAKED AT 115 IN EARLY FEBRUARY.



breaks sparked by parties or travel. At USCGA’s New London, Conn., campus, each semester started with a two-week quarantine. In February, safety restrictions changed weekly: During tighter restrictions, cadets were allowed off campus only for outdoor dining or hikes. They wear masks everywhere except in their bedrooms and the dining hall and to exercise. Assistant Superintendent Capt. Richard Wester said the number of students quarantining or isolating peaked at 115 in early February before dropping down to just a few.

Isolation can affect mental health. Last spring, the Air Force Academy sent everyone home except the seniors, aiming to graduate them on time to help fill a pilot shortfall. The academy moved them into individual rooms, and within days two seniors died of suicide. In December, the Naval Academy’s football coach told *The New York Times* he’d asked sports psychologists and chaplains to address anxiety and depression on the team for the first time in 22 years.

To boost morale, Wester said, the USCGA hosted outdoor movies and talent shows. Campus chaplains offered encouragement. But the pressure and monotony still affected students: “You have little sleep, and there’s all these expectations, and there’s kind of manufactured stress,”

The Long Blue Climb (left) and drill and rifle training on the parade field (right) at the Coast Guard Academy



said senior Samantha Koval. “And then on top of that not being able to leave base for weeks on end. ... It gets honestly kind of miserable here.”

Cadets can still attend religious services, but the pandemic has altered those, too. Carl Crabtree runs the USCGA branch of Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF), a military Bible study network. Typically, he spends summer Sunday mornings with new cadets attending basic training. OCF holds a Bible study before the cadets’ chapel service. Even nonreligious new cadets take the opportunity to escape their training instructors’ screaming orders. They hear a message and sing together, often hoarse from chanting during training. This year COVID-19 restrictions canceled the pre-chapel Bible study, and Crabtree couldn’t hand out cough drops and shake every cadet’s hand as he normally would.

Other OCF activities have continued with modifications. Pre-pandemic, up to 100 cadets would descend on Crabtree’s house and 16-acre property for retreat weekends, sleeping in rows of bunk beds in the basement. The retreats attract cadets usually uninterested in Bible study, with free food as a draw.

This year, safety restrictions limited the retreats to smaller, largely outdoor groups. They gathered wood for bonfires and played Frisbee and football, and most returned to campus at night. Eventually, snow and tighter restrictions ended the retreats altogether.

But Christian cadets have found ways to reach struggling peers. They still hold Bible studies either online or spread out in an auditorium. Senior and OCF leader Isaac LaLonde ordered food from Chick-fil-A to lure more cadets to some in-person meetings. Koval said her friends visit struggling cadets in their dorm rooms to talk: “Cadets really value time because that’s the thing that we have the least of.”

McClure noted the cadets’ discouragement over changing safety rules has opened opportunities for him to hint at the unchanging hope Christ offers. Koval agreed. “The Church is supposed to shine brightest when everything else around them is darkest,” she said. “We do have a very perfect time for us to really be the light.” ■



NEVER TOO OLD TO GROW

Otis and Fannie Fields had low expectations for their marriage—until they became Christians

by Charissa Koh

20TH IN A SERIES ON LONG MARRIAGES

OTIS FIELDS MET his future wife Fannie while working in the same office building as her near Houston, Texas. He noticed her good looks and would smile at her on the elevator. One Friday night in 1974, he asked Fannie out, and they went to a soul blues club downtown. Both enjoyed the date, but Fannie was unimpressed when Otis needed help getting downtown, then forgot where he parked.

Fannie told her roommate, “If I go out with him again, kick me.”

Yet as she got to know Otis, she found herself enjoying his kind manners and fun personality. They dated, got engaged, then married in October 1976.

But they had little understanding of the commitment necessary for marriage. Fannie remembers telling friends she could always get divorced if things didn’t work out. Otis didn’t know anyone who was faithful to his wife: He’d seen many failed marriages growing up, with relatives and siblings getting divorced. After marrying Fannie, →

he continued visiting nightclubs to drink and socialize with other women.

Fannie got frustrated when Otis told her how to handle money and bills: “I thought I was my own boss and could do what I wanted to and buy what I wanted to buy.” She was a working woman and thought the responsibilities in marriage should be split 50/50. The Fieldses had two daughters and grew closer in those early years, but they disagreed on spending and who should do household chores.

Ten years later, the couple moved to Austin. When a neighbor invited Fannie to Christ Memorial Baptist Church, she went, heard the gospel, and asked God to save her. Otis refused to go—until he realized he could make business contacts at the church. In the first sermon Otis heard, the pastor held up the Bible and said, “I’m just a man. I can let you down or lead you astray. If you know what’s in this book, no one can lead you astray.” Impressed, Otis determined to read the whole Bible, and soon he too heard the gospel and believed.

The Fieldses built friendships with other church members, and as they grew in their faith, their marriage began to change. Fannie learned she could appeal to Otis when she disagreed with him, but then “that’s the decision we’re going to make together, because he’s the leader.”

The gospel also helped them be patient with their different parenting styles. Fannie thought Otis was too harsh when he would announce on weekday mornings, “I’m leaving at 7:30, and whoever is ready for school can come with me.” Meanwhile, Otis became frustrated when Fannie repeatedly told the girls to clean their rooms and they ignored her. Over time, they learned to work together: Otis could make the girls clean their rooms, but Fannie could get them to take their medicine when Otis couldn’t.

Otis and Fannie have now been married 43 years. “Your marriage never gets too old to grow,” says Fannie, 69. Otis, 70, adds, “It’s primarily the little things now,” such as remembering to hold her hand when they go out and showing affection through touch instead of assuming Fannie knows he loves her.

The Fieldses still live in Austin and attend Christ Memorial. Their two married daughters live nearby, and they see their three grandchildren weekly. ■

SWOONING FOR KOREAN DRAMAS

Broadcasting clean, romantic fun, K-drama grows in popularity in the United States

by Joyce Wu and Juliana Chan Erikson



W

HILE SCROLLING THROUGH NETFLIX last year, Wright Doyle and his wife Dori clicked on a show with an interesting premise: A South Korean heiress accidentally paraglides into North Korea and drops into the arms of an attractive North Korean soldier. Within minutes, the Texas couple in their 70s was hooked on the 2020 Korean drama series *Crash Landing on You* (see “Love beyond borders,” March 27).

The Doyles are among millions of Americans who have added Korean dramas, also known as K-dramas, to their entertainment diet as pandemic restrictions have closed theaters and streaming platforms have released more international fare for American audiences. Even though the shows require non-Korean viewers to read subtitles, K-drama viewing on Netflix nearly tripled in the United States last year, according to *Time* magazine.

And while American shows often push the envelope in depicting sex, K-dramas remain a relatively tame affair featuring longing gazes and rumpled bedsheets. Some hark back to an earlier era of romance: lovers locking lips to schmaltzy theme songs or couples buying matching promise rings.

One reason for K-dramas' cleanliness: They air on South Korean TV networks subject to government decency regulations. (Korean movies aren't held to the same standards.) Yet even these shows aren't immune to the culture wars between traditional Korean culture and the liberalized younger generation.

The popularity of K-dramas began expanding in the late 1990s when viewers in China started tuning in. Chinese media dubbed the K-drama craze the Korean wave, which now encompasses Korean cuisine, clothing, beauty products, and of course the music known as K-pop. The Korean wave reached the rest of Asia with the popular 2002 romantic drama *Winter Sonata* and 2003 period piece *Jewel in the Palace*. The latter, which follows an orphaned kitchen cook who becomes the king's physician, played in over 90 countries, earning \$103 million.

Today, the Korean wave has entered the U.S. mainstream with Korean thriller *Parasite* winning the 2020 Oscar for best picture. Netflix recently announced it invested \$700 million in Korean productions from 2015 to 2020 and is investing another \$500 million this year.

Viewers connect to K-drama emotionally even if they don't understand it all, said Grace Jung, a Ph.D. student at UCLA who teaches a class on K-dramas. "I know plenty of people who watch K-dramas without subtitles and without knowing any Korean," she said.

Tiffany Nichols, a 38-year-old in Somerville, Mass., said listening to K-pop was her gateway to K-dramas. She found them refreshing because characters express affection in ways besides sex. In U.S. shows, she found that often "the whole series is really just about their sex life."

Although K-dramas aren't squeaky clean, in the 50-plus K-dramas we watched over several years, none showed any nudity and all contained significantly less explicit language and violence than a typical Netflix show.



K-DRAMA VIEWING ON NETFLIX NEARLY TRIPLED IN THE UNITED STATES LAST YEAR.



Still, some series are changing with the times: The 2012 romantic comedy *Reply 1997* includes a gay teenager in a love triangle, while the 2020 series *Itaewon Class* featured a transgender character trying to run a restaurant in Seoul's nightlife district. The 2020 rom-com *Backstreet Rookie* faced backlash from viewers and a warning from government regulators for using sexually explicit language and depicting a high-school girl kissing an older man.

Critics point to the negative effects of K-dramas, such as perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards that lead some impressionable fans—both male and

female—to turn to plastic surgery to look like their idols. Others note the shows often depict their male lead character as an unrealistically perfect package of brains, brawn, and boyish charm.

But for some Korean Americans, the rising popularity of K-dramas in the United States has helped them better appreciate their cultural background. Growing up as a minority in Richmond, Va., Paul Kim, 42, remembers trying to blend in, knowing it wasn't cool to be Asian. He even started looking down on his ethnicity. But after watching K-dramas during the pandemic, he said seeing Koreans in a positive light on the screen showed him "a lifestyle, value system, and heritage I can finally appreciate."

Back in Texas, Wright Doyle said he's found redemptive arcs in some of the K-dramas he's watched. For instance, in 2011's *Heaven's Garden*, a broken marriage brings a hurting woman to the countryside where she must repair her relationship with her father. But her father isn't the only one experiencing restoration—the entire village transforms too.

"It's a great example of how God uses broken things and broken people to bring healing," Wright said.

The Doyles say the 30-hour series was so good they're watching it all over again. ■





Today, not next Tuesday

Rejoicing doesn't get
a rain check

IF YOU ARE GOING to rejoice in the Lord, you have to do it today, not next Tuesday. This is because if you wait until next Tuesday, you will come up with a reason to postpone it again.

I understand that today is the pits. Your car's in the shop, your adult daughter's not speaking to you, and your Amazon package didn't come.

By next Tuesday, you think, this should all be straightened out. Then you'll rejoice in the Lord.

Ha! Have you no memory?

I don't think we *mean* to disobey the Lord on this point. When we read Philippians 4:4 that says (twice) "Rejoice!" we believe it is a good thing to do: God deserves it, our mental health needs it, and we fully intend to get around to it.

But at the moment we are indisposed because of the car, the daughter, and the package.

Surely God understands this, we tell ourselves (already excusing noncompliance): He Himself took on flesh; He knows we are dust; He totally gets our present case of nerves and short-temperedness.

Right?

What if you died tonight? I guess you'd make it "in." You have met the minimum requirement of faith in Christ. It's just that it's not a faith that makes you excited that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). Or that this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17). Or that after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ, will

**"AFTER A LITTLE CARE WE
SHOULD FIND HIS LOVE
INWARDLY EXCITE US TO IT
WITHOUT ANY DIFFICULTY."**

Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (1 Peter 5:10).

Ouch.

Quick, change the subject and talk about how "joy" is not the same as "happiness"—how happiness is superficial, transient, and circumstantial, while joy is an *inner* quality and not necessarily visible to the naked eye. In fact, joy is so *inner* that it has the appearance to everyone who knows you of depression and complaining.

"Well, see here! Are we just supposed to rejoice on command?" As a matter of fact, yes!

The people of Israel were gathered in the square near the Water Gate by the completed walls of Jerusalem, and Ezra the priest read the Book of the Law from early morning till midday (Nehemiah 8:1-3). The people's realization that they had neglected God's book for centuries sank their spirits. They didn't feel like rejoicing. Gov. Nehemiah *commanded* it: "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep. ... Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (verses 9-10).

Rejoicing is a choice. It is always deliberate, never accidental. There are two ways, the high way and the low way. There are two and only two settings for your mind: on things above or on things below (Colossians 3:2). The act of rejoicing is the doorway to the higher setting, giving instant perspective for rightly viewing the earthly troubles. We put on "the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit" (Isaiah 61:3).

Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite friar, called it "practicing the presence of God": "In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must at first apply to Him with some diligence; but after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty."

What victory there is in such abiding consciousness of God (1 Peter 2:19)! This is primary reality, rather than secondary reality (the car, the daughter, the package).

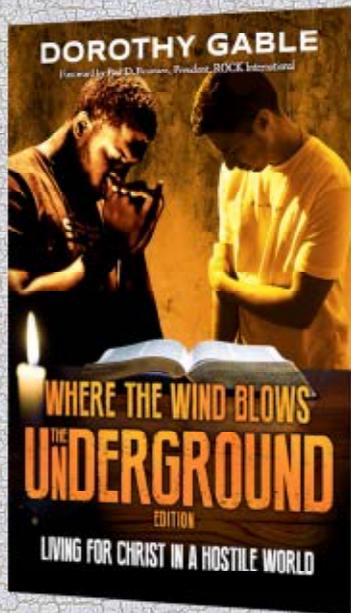
This column is almost over, so let us try it together, moving beyond mere thinking and lending it voice: "I rejoice in You, Lord!"

If you just said that out loud, you've committed an act of rejoicing. Despise not the day of small beginnings.

God's kingdom is not future only. It begins today, not some elusive Tuesday.

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Blessed disappointments

Counting the kindnesses of God's providence

ALFRID TENNYSON IN 1842 wrote that “in the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” Sounds like a romantic comedy, but Tennyson was often depressed. He suggested that those who don’t keep their hearts socially distanced are sitting ducks for sadness.

In spring 2021, some high-school seniors after a COVID year have eagerly awaited an admissions message from the college with which they’ve fallen in love—but what if the college doesn’t reciprocate? This column is for the disappointed.

The biggest thrill I’ve ever had from a mail delivery came in April 1968. I had feared receiving a thin envelope that would contain a rejection letter. I was overjoyed to receive a fat one from Yale University containing information on enrollment, housing, and so forth. I went, but that thrill led to the worst years of my life.

Those years may have been bad anywhere because I was a selfish atheist—but Yale and I were a mismatch that started a pattern. Get what I want: be miserable. Take what God offers me, often on the rebound from a disaster: gain joy. Here are three examples.

1) At Yale I headed toward Communism. After graduation in 1971 I went all the way, literally: 3,000 miles by bicycle to Oregon, and after various intrigues 5,000 miles by Soviet freighter to Tokyo, then 5,000 miles to Moscow via the Trans-Siberian Railway.

I spent a week in Moscow waiting to be handed a job as a foreign correspondent/Soviet propagandist, only to be left stranded. But without that disappointment I wouldn’t have headed to Michigan for graduate

WE LIVE OUR LIVES FORWARD BUT UNDERSTAND THEM BACKWARD.

school and eventually the greatest blessings of my life: meeting God and then meeting Susan. This year brings our 45th anniversary.

2) Starting in 1995 I was a critic and then an occasional, informal adviser to Gov. George W. Bush, who lived a mile from my office at the University of Texas at Austin. When he started his presidential run in 1999, I was excited about opportunities to take my advocacy of compassionate conservatism nationwide, and even thought about leaving my WORLD editorship and moving to Washington.

Early in 2000, though, some reporters on the left decided to undermine Bush by taking some of my writings out of context. Their early cancel culture efforts helped me remember that journalism, not politics, is my calling. I renewed my covenant with WORLD. The subsequent two decades have been terrific.

3) My 24-year professorship at UT provided economic security and time to edit WORLD, but in 2007 I was tired of teaching mostly atheists to write more effectively, and our four children were out of the house. We moved to New York City where I became provost of a struggling Christian college in the Empire State Building.

Susan and I enjoyed living in Manhattan, yet by 2010 the college was so financially desperate that the board of trustees hired a president with money-raising connections but insufficient Biblical understanding. Giving up the UT lifetime property right known as tenure, and then leaving The King’s College, allowed me to become dean of our World Journalism Institute, have the best teaching experiences of my life, and develop for WORLD a steady stream of new talent.

Looking back from age 70, I see how every disappointment was a blessing. Here’s a thought from Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard that I did not understand when younger: We live our lives forward but understand them backward. Often it’s only in retrospect that we grasp the kindness of God’s providence.

At the time, whether I was 22 or 49 or 60, I did not rejoice in God changing my plans. I don’t expect greater maturity from an 18-year-old disappointed by a college turn-down—or people of any age facing career or romantic disappointment. But my life’s experience suggests that we not just count our blessings. Sometimes, count what at the moment seems like a curse, and thank God for it.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. ■

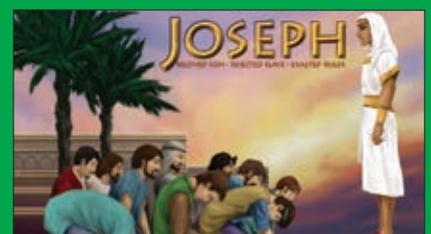
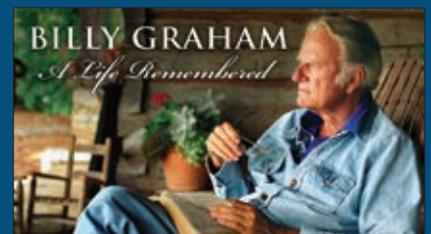
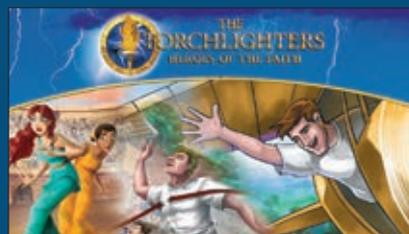
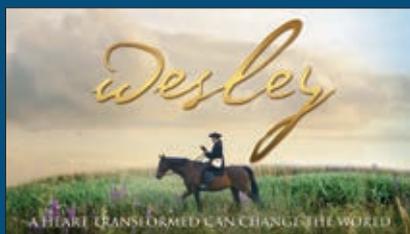
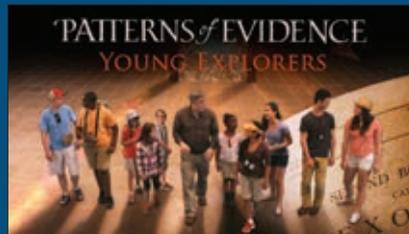
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KICKING THE CAN HAS CONSEQUENCES

Does Debt Really Matter?

Most Americans have become desensitized or simply are incapable of comprehending the enormity and consequences of our national debt, which has tripled since 2008, now approaching an unfathomable sum of \$30 trillion. Multi-trillion dollar government spending policies have set the stage for a future inflationary or hyper-inflationary climate that could decimate the value of the dollar.

Warnings from the Ages

Wisdom, dating from ancient biblical patriarchs to our Founding Fathers have all sounded the trumpet alarm concerning the dangers and consequences of reckless spending and multiplying debt.

"The borrower is a slave to the lender".

—Proverbs 22:7

"We must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt."—Thomas Jefferson

"There are two ways to destroy a nation...one is by the sword, the other is by debt"—John Adams

The Key to Protecting Your Wealth

Many Americans are unaware that their paper dollars have lost over 85% of their purchasing power over the last 50 years. Since the government decision to abandon all ties to gold in 1971, no other primary asset group has outperformed gold, providing investors and savers the ultimate form of preserving their purchasing power.

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