“IF EVERYONE LEAVES, NOTHING CHANGES.” “I NEED TO BE THERE.” — CUBAN PASTORS WORK TO CHANGE THEIR COUNTRY FROM WITHIN, P. 42

BACK TO SCHOOL
WEATHERING COVID-19 IN THE CLASSROOM
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CUBA’S RISING CRY
As the Cuban people protest a lack of food, medicine, and basic freedoms, pastors in the Caribbean nation say they, too, can no longer stay silent
by Jamie Dean

STILL SAILING
How Christian colleges survived a year of COVID-19—and where they’ll go from here
by Esther Easton

A YEAR OF COVID HOMESCHOOLING
Parents who home educated their children for the first time last year aren’t all diving in again. But many are, and others say the experience has changed their perspective
by Esther Easton

CREAM OF THE CROP
The last milkmen of New Jersey carry on their solitary work each night—come rain, snow, or pandemic
by Emily Belz
Jungle Cruise

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—Senior reporter Emily Belz, whose story is on p. 62
THE PRESIDENT AND THE PEW

JIM IRISH/BASTROP, TEXAS

The Roman Catholic Church has no moral authority in terms of making President Biden aware of his support of abortion and the consequences of it. And he knows it. Like most of the kings in ancient Judah and Israel, Biden “did evil in the sight of the LORD.”

STANDING ON GENESIS

JULY 17, P. 60—JANET HUNTER/LAKE BLUFF, ILL.

I was so grateful for this article. Many believe that evolution or theistic evolution is no big deal, but I beg to differ. Evolution is an idol because it puts man’s thoughts higher than God’s. I prefer to take God at His word.

NEIL THOMPSON/LITTLETON, COLO.

Thank you for your excellent article on creation. I thought you summarized WORLD’s fidelity to creation very well without getting too deep into one version or another.

A NEW LEADER IN A CONTENTIOUS AGE

JULY 17, P. 30—JOE LUND/HENDERSONVILLE, N.C.

As a Southern Baptist Convention pastor who is concerned about what is taking place in the denomination, I commend Sophia Lee on her interview with new SBC President Ed Litton. I specifically appreciated her short follow-up questions that drilled down on his answers.

SEEKING ACCOMMODATION

JULY 17, P. 11—JIM SCHULTZ/DECATURE, ILL.

To Catholic Social Services: Thank you for sticking to your core principles. To Bethany Christian Services: Please drop the name Christian from your name. To Catholic bishops: Take a lesson from Catholic Social Services and stand up for what is right.

OUR DEMOCRACY RECESSION

JULY 17, P. 36—JAMES D. MARSHALL/CONCORD, N.C.

Only 20 percent of the world’s population is “free” because we have turned our backs on the true source of morality and religion: the Christian faith as rooted in God’s Word. What we see in our nation today is the result of our discounting the value of a moral foundation for our families and leaders.

MENDERS OR SPLITTERS?

JULY 17, P. 8—BARBARA MILLER/MIDDLEBURY, IND.

Regrettably, the Church has failed to be a light to the nations during the pandemic. Christians could have shown concern for one another by adhering to proven preventive measures enacted by medical experts. Instead, too many were more concerned with their prideful politics or selfish self-righteousness.

ONE YEAR TO GO

JULY 17, P. 72—PAT STIMERS/HARRISONBURG, VA.

The preparations being made for Marvin Olasky’s retirement as editor made my heart sing! Unhurried and thoughtful, they sound like I can look forward to this reliable and honest source of current information in the years ahead. I’m grateful.

THOUGHTS AT A WEDDING

JULY 17, P. 70—MIKE MALONEY/LARKSPUR, COLO.

Andrée Seu Peterson rightfully credits an old Prairie Home Companion sketch for the six-month relationship/oil change thoughts of a couple, but the story originally appeared in Dave Barry’s Complete Guide to Guys.

SOCIAL ECONOMICS

JULY 17, P. 26—STEPHEN LEONARD/VIDALIA, GA.

Kudos to Marvin Olasky for his book column on Thomas Sowell, a brilliant voice crying in the wilderness. One must hope for and certainly wonder if any like replacements will appear before Sowell leaves us.

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

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Another notable anniversary

While we celebrate our company’s 40th year, our newest program marks its first

Mid the celebrations of our 40th anniversary, we quietly observed the one-year mark for WORLD Watch, our daily video news program for students. We shouldn’t miss this milestone: A first anniversary may not be as noteworthy as a 40th, but it may be more important.

When we launched WORLD Watch on Monday, Aug. 10, 2020 (WORLD’s 39th anniversary), we had high hopes: that we could produce a program that was entertaining and educational; that we could give students a bigger view of the world, and God’s work in the world, through news stories; that we could introduce complex topics in a clear, understandable way; and that we’d bring Biblical truth to bear on all the stories we cover.

We also hoped we’d be able to do all of that every day in video—a medium in which we had little experience.

As God delights to do, He has given us more than we asked or imagined (or hoped). The students in our audience make it clear that they are happy with the program. That’s a good thing, because that’s what we hoped for and have been working for all these months.

But God has exceeded even our wildest hopes in the grown-ups who love the program too. Many are the parents or teachers of the students at whom we targeted the program, but we hear from many others who subscribe to WORLD Watch for themselves, not for the kids in their lives.

We didn’t expect adults to love the program, but we shouldn’t have been surprised. All those things we built into every episode for the sake of the students—entertainment, education, a bigger view of the world, the explanation of complex issues, context to big news stories, and a Biblical perspective on all of it—are the same things adults want and need from their news source.

The beginning of a school year (and the beginning of WORLD Watch’s second year) is a great time to subscribe for the students in your life, or for yourself. To do so, go to the website worldwatch.news, where we give you several subscription options, including a free trial if you’d like to check it out before you subscribe.

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Our justice system’s problems go deeper than we think

ALMOST 75 YEARS AGO, a big brick courthouse in Waterloo, Iowa, handed me my first disappointment with civil justice.

I sat with my father and my grandfather while a judge ruled against them in a tax case involving the grain business they owned together. I was only 5 years old, but I learned that a building’s impressive looks and a judge’s authoritative appearance weren’t enough to ensure that justice would be served. My father and grandfather were honest businessmen, and they were grieved that their government was treating them unfairly.

Thirty-five years later, a van operated by the Christian high school where I was headmaster was involved in a minor fender bender—but not so minor that the driver of the other car didn’t sue. Four times, I took five students from their classes for the whole morning to serve as witnesses in the court case that followed. Four times, the party suing our school and its insurance company failed even to show up in court. And four times, inexplicably, the judge continued the case. The students learned a good bit more about American justice than I wanted them to.

Fast-forward 10 years. A hospitalized friend was raped in the middle of the night by a male nurse in the intensive care unit of a local hospital. The criminal and civil cases that followed over the next few years made cynics of most of us who wanted to stand by our friend. Looking for justice, she got mere scraps thrown out the back door of a traveling circus.

I cite these specific scenarios, as I have before in this space, because they illustrate so vividly how broken our system of justice tends to be here in America. The whole idea of a process thoughtfully assembled through the centuries was to gather components in careful balance that would punish wrongdoers while also protecting the rights of the innocent. But many Americans have lost all confidence that such justice prevails.

Why shouldn’t they? When righteous government shows itself so elusive, when educational systems have rotted to the core, when the term “business ethics” strikes many as an oxymoron, when the great old institutions fail us—why should we be surprised when jurisprudence also shows signs of collapse?

You may well have your own little list of personal disappointments. But whether we’re talking about government, education, business, or some other system, keep in mind that we’re not finally dealing with problems of structure, process, or methodology. The problem is with people.

The problem isn’t with the jury selection procedure. It’s with the people who get selected.

The problem is that the people who get put on the juries, the people chosen as judges, and the people who become policemen and then get called on as witnesses—all these people have been shaped by the governments, the educational institutions, the business ethics, and the systems of justice of our day. The result is that you don’t really want to put your welfare in the hands of such people. People can no longer be trusted to produce what we used to call “justice.” The basic tools of justice were never put in their hands in the first place.

You can’t tell people for two or three generations, for example, that there’s no such thing as “truth” and that nothing is absolute—and then expect them to take truth seriously.

The bottom line is this: Imagine you’re on trial for your life. But before the trial begins, you have a chance to get on a bus or an airplane, or go to your doctor’s waiting room, to walk through the seats, and to pick any 12 people at random to serve as the jury that will determine your guilt or innocence. Does it matter to you what kind of teaching these people have had all their lives on the issue of truth as absolute or merely relative? Does it matter where they went to Sunday school, what kind of gospel they heard? Where they think the world and everything in it originally came from?

If you would be scared, as I would, to go out and pick your own jury in a case like that, no tinkering with the system will work. It’s the people within the system who have lost their way.
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Biden’s bench picks
President Joe Biden is filling federal judicial holes fast

by Maryrose Delahunty

President Joe Biden since taking office has nominated 33 candidates to fill judicial vacancies on the federal district and appeals courts—with nine already confirmed by the Senate as of Aug. 7. Biden’s rate of judicial appointments during the first 6½ months of his presidency outpaced that of the previous six presidents.

Biden supporters have lauded the ethnic and gender diversity of the president’s nominees, who include 23 minority candidates and 26 women (including two identifying as lesbian). But some of his choices have evoked mixed reviews among liberals.

Federal Magistrate Judge Zahid Quraishi, for example, becomes the first Muslim
Fielder Lewis Brinson, who is Black. Statement of fact. No attribution.

The rest of the story was a series of indignant comments. But 12 hours later the Times slapped on an updated lead: “The Colorado Rockies are investigating whether a man in the stands at Coors Field in Denver on Sunday repeatedly and loudly yelled a racial slur at Miami Marlins outfielder Lewis Brinson, who is Black.”

The rest of the article, though, was similar to the first: indignant comments. Then five hours later, in a new story, the Times posted its third lead: “After investigating reports that a fan had yelled a racial slur during a game at Coors Field in Denver on Sunday, the Colorado Rockies determined the fan was actually yelling for the team mascot, Dinger.”

Turns out that a grandpa behind home plate was asking the mascot a few rows away to pose for a photo with his grandkids.

Each time, the Times did not acknowledge that its earlier reporting was inaccurate. The newspaper in its third take offered a defense of its reporting: “Although this event seems to have been a misunderstanding, there have been incidents in which players have reported racial abuse in stadiums.” —Marvin Olasky
THE NUMBER OF MONTHS elementary-school students across America are behind on reading as a result of school closures, online learning, and other pandemic restrictions imposed in 2020 and 2021. Elementary students are five months behind on math. Consulting firm McKinsey & Co., which studied test results for 1.6 million American schoolchildren this past spring, found academic results were even worse for majority-black schools and schools with more low-income students. As schools open back up for the fall, teachers must catch students up while a new variant of the coronavirus threatens to disrupt another school year.

83%
The share of preschool, K-12, college, and university students around the world whose schools were closed on March 30, 2020, due to pandemic restrictions, according to UNESCO.

0.8%
The annual rate of economic growth lost for the world as a consequence of school shutdowns in 2020 and 2021, according to an estimate in Comparative Education Review.

1.5M
The decline in U.S. public-school student enrollment from the 2019-20 school year to 2020-21—a drop of 3 percent.

$191B
The bundle of cash Congress set aside in 2020 and 2021 for public-school systems to address learning loss, upgrade sanitation services, or deal with other hardships related to the pandemic.
Cuomo out in Albany
New York’s governor announces resignation after multiple sexual harassment allegations

In a televised address on Aug. 10, the day he announced his resignation, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he takes “full responsibility” for his actions, but he could not remember ever inappropriately touching anyone. The Democrat previously rejected calls to resign following the New York attorney general’s report alleging he sexually harassed 11 women, violating state and federal laws. In a news conference just before the announcement, Cuomo’s attorney, Rita Glavin, rejected most of the report’s allegations and criticized investigators for missing key facts and witnesses. The report cited interviews with 179 witnesses and reviews of more than 74,000 documents. Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, will take over the governor’s office. The State Assembly was investigating a series of scandals involving Cuomo, including accusations he covered up COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes.

DISPATCHES
Human Race

Died
Iconic Florida State University football coach Bobby Bowden died on Aug. 8 at age 91. Bowden led his team to national championships in 1993 and 1999 and was open about his Christian faith, earning the nickname Saint Bobby. Bowden said in conversations with his children, “There’s only one person who’s ever been perfect on this earth, and He ain’t your daddy.” Despite his success, Bowden remained a humble mainstay in the Tallahassee, Fla., community, even after retirement. He and his wife lived in a middle-class neighborhood, kept their landline phone number listed in the phone book, and welcomed visitors to their home in Bowden’s final weeks.

Sentenced
A Chinese court on Aug. 11 sentenced entrepreneur Michael Spavor to prison for 11 years on spying charges, a move critics say is part of Beijing’s “hostage politics” after Canada arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, who was wanted by the United States. The court also fined Spavor $7,700 and said he provided state secrets to Michael Kovrig, a former Canadian diplomat. Chinese authorities detained Spavor and Kovrig in 2018 days after Meng’s arrest. Canadian officials say Spavor’s trial “failed to meet basic standards” of fairness and defendants’ rights. The day before, a Chinese court upheld the death sentence of another Canadian citizen accused of smuggling drugs.

Charged
Former Washington, D.C., Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, 91, became the first U.S. cardinal to face criminal charges for alleged sexual abuse. Prosecutors say McCarrick sexually assaulted a teenage boy at a wedding reception in 1974. He denies the accusation, and his lawyer said they “look forward to addressing the case.” McCarrick faces three counts of indecent battery and assault. His alleged victim was a 16-year-old boy at the time and said McCarrick was a family friend. He claims the clergyman fondled him and ordered him to say “Our Fathers” and “Hail Marys” to atone for his sin afterward. Pope Francis defrocked McCarrick in 2019.
“I do not regret my decision.”

President JOE BIDEN, telling reporters on Aug. 10 he did not regret pulling U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, despite a subsequent Taliban resurgence there. “We spent over a trillion dollars over 20 years. We trained and equipped with modern equipment over 300,000 Afghan forces. ... They’ve got to fight for themselves.”

“The military is weaponizing COVID.”

YANGHEE LEE, a founding member of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, who said the country’s military leadership is barring civilians who support the pro-democracy movement from receiving treatment at military hospitals. Despite a surge in COVID-19 deaths in the country, the regime has also arrested democracy-supporting doctors.

“No, thank you.”

Team USA weightlifter SARAH ROBLES, who took the bronze medal in the female weightlifting +87-kilogram event at the Tokyo Olympics, when asked by a reporter to comment on the event’s first-ever inclusion of a biological male, transgender competitor Laurel Hubbard. The other two medalists also declined to comment.

“What I have in Christ is far greater than what I have or don’t have in life. I pray my journey may be a clear depiction of submission and obedience to God.”

SYDNEY MCLAUGHLIN, an American hurdler who won two gold medals and broke her own world record in the 400-meter hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics, writing about her faith in an Aug. 5 Instagram post.

“They’re demonizing and vilifying you, and then they want to put you in a unit where you’re under an even bigger microscope.”

DARYL TURNER, head of a union representing police officers in Portland, Ore., opining to The Wall Street Journal why only four officers had volunteered to join the city’s newly reconstituted gun violence reduction team, briefly disbanded during last year’s race protests. New team member qualifications include the “ability to identify and dismantle institutional and systemic racism in the bureau’s responses to gun violence.”
GOATS OF NEW YORK

NEW YORK CITY’S RIVERSIDE PARK has new gardeners to maintain its green space: five goats. Riverside Park Conservancy officials let the goats loose into the park’s north end July 14 to munch down vegetation—including poison ivy—that has proven too difficult for workers to control. The goats will spend the summer in the park feasting on the flora. The conservancy first brought goats to the park in 2019, calling their segment of land “Goatham.” The pandemic canceled plans to bring the goats back in 2020. “Putting them to work in Goatham is like treating them to an all-you-can-eat buffet,” Riverside Park Conservancy President Dan Garodnick told reporters at a news conference. “It’s healthy for the goats and it’s good for the environment.”

GOLDFISH GALORE Dropping a line into some Minnesota lakes may get you more than bass, crappie, or walleye. According to officials in Burnsville, Minn., local residents have been dumping pet goldfish into local lakes. “Please don’t release your pet goldfish into ponds and lakes!” city officials posted on Twitter in July. “They grow bigger than you think and contribute to poor water quality by mucking up the bottom sediments and uprooting plants.” Burnsville and a neighboring city, Apple Valley, contracted Carp Solutions to survey the lakes and determine the extent of the goldfish infestation. The aquatic pest management company found goldfish the size of footballs. Last year in nearby Carver County, county workers removed between 30,000 and 50,000 goldfish in one day from local lakes.

RAIN ON DEMAND? In an attempt to make it rain, officials in the parched United Arab Emirates are exploring using drones to zap clouds with lasers. For years, the government has invested millions of dollars in rain-enhancement projects to cope with the 4-inch average rainfall the nation receives. On July 18, the UAE’s National Center of Meteorology posted a pair of videos to Instagram showing a heavy rainfall the agency said was prompted by its drones. According to the agency, the drones fire lasers into clouds, charging water vapor with electricity and prompting water droplets to coalesce—which promotes precipitation.

OFF-DUTY AWARD A police union in California has come under scrutiny after giving its 2020 Officer of the Year award to a cop who didn’t work a day in 2020. During a June 29 ceremony, the El Monte Police Officers Association gave its yearly award to Officer Carlos Molina, and city and state officials helped the award winner celebrate. But Molina spent from September 2019 to April 2021 on paid administrative leave after higher-ups within the department accused him of spending a year investigating a simple domestic abuse case with little to show for it and bilking the city out of $242 hours of overtime pay. Text messages between El Monte Mayor Jessica Ancona...
and a concerned city councilman published July 19 in the San Bernardino Sun revealed the mayor declined to cancel the ceremony for Molina even after learning of the circumstances. “[Union officials] have invited family members and ordered a cake,” Ancona said, according to the Sun.

5 PARROT POTTY MOUTHS Workers at a British zoo have been forced to separate five parrots due to the birds’ salty language. Staffers at the Lincolnshire Wildlife Park said they noticed curse words emanating from the small group of African gray parrots for months. Though no visitors complained, staff said patrons, including children, could hear the birds using the four-letter words. According to zoo head Steve Nichols, the foul-mouthed animals rile one another up. “We are quite used to parrots swearing, but we’ve never had five at the same time,” Nichols said in July. “Most parrots clam up outside, but for some reason these five relish it.”

6 DEAD ALL OVER According to the IRS, a 25-year-old woman living in New Jersey hasn’t been alive for seven years. Samantha Dreissig says she’s spent years trying to convince the federal government she’s still among the living. “The last actual person I had spoken to from the IRS—and I quote, ‘Wow, you’re dead all over our system,’” she told CBS New York. Dreissig said her troubles began when her mother died. She believes someone at the IRS accidentally marked her as deceased instead of her mother. The mix-up has made paying taxes hard and has caused problems for her father, who was told he could not claim a dead person as a dependent. Before the pandemic, Dreissig even had an in-person meeting with IRS officials, who promised to resolve the issue. More than a year after that meeting, Dreissig is still waiting. “I honestly want the IRS to know that I’m alive, kicking,” she said.

7 PORKY PANIC Bacon lovers in the Golden State may want to get their crispy breakfast dish while there’s still time—or while they can afford it. Under a new animal protection law voters approved in 2018 and which the state will begin enforcing next year, California consumers will only be able to buy pork from farmers and suppliers who keep their breeding pigs in pens at least 24 square feet in size. The problem? Only 4 percent of U.S. hog facilities meet that new standard. In Iowa, a major pork-producing state, sows typically live in 20-square-foot group pens. With California farmers producing only one-fifth of the pork consumed in the state, Californians could find the meat more expensive or in short supply come January. Jeannie Kim, owner of SAMS American Eatery in San Francisco, worries the new rules will undercut her business. “Our No. 1 seller is bacon, eggs, and hash browns,” she said. “It could be devastating for us.”
Shifty with words

Don't let a revolution in terminology be a knock-down argument

WHEN LEWIS CARROLL’S Alice goes Through the Looking-Glass, she finds a world turned upside down—especially in regard to words. Trying to have a sensible conversation only makes her head hurt. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her meeting with Humpty Dumpty, who takes nothing she says at face value and loves a nice knock-down argument: “There’s glory for you!”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean a ‘nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

I’ve encountered this passage a lot lately, in reference to current convulsions in the English language. Words are shifty things that echo what a culture is thinking, but they usually take their own sweet time to shift. Unless a revolution is underway, as in the 1790s, when French Jacobins insisted that “Sir” and “Madame” be replaced with “Citizen” and “Citizensess.” Vocabulary by diktat usually lasts only as long as the diktat-ors, but Humpty Dumpty is correct: General acceptance of a term depends on who’s winning the argument.

For instance, the terms sex and gender used to be interchangeable. Then they separated, the former referring to biology and the latter to identity. But in the brave new world of gender ideology, sex is something we do, not something we are. At WriteInclusion.org, the “Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity” doesn’t define sex at all, but has plenty to say about “Gender Binary,” “Gender Expansive,” and “Gender Inequality.”

The group’s 13-page “Expanded Glossary” offers guidance for writers and media professionals on a wide field of verbiage, such as “haka” (a Maori ceremonial dance), “Melanesia” (a subregion of Oceania), “code-switching” (using more than one language in a conversation), “tiki culture” (a cultural appropriation), “tiger parenting,” “DACA,” “Islamophobia,” and “womxn” (a term for a gender that eliminates “man” but might be offensive to nonbinary people). Some of these glossary definitions could be useful, some are questionable, and almost all tilt leftward but present themselves as gospel truth.

“Gender binary,” for example, is “the false, long-held societal and cultural categorization of gender into just two distinct and opposite terms.” “Allah,” however, is the “same God worshipped by adherents of [Muslim,] Christian and Jewish faiths”—a false cultural categorization if there ever was one. But then, the document, which gives ample space to Islamic, Buddhist, Druze, Hindu, Zoroastrian, and Yazidi faiths, never defines Christianity or Judaism.

Outdated terms that must change are “Middle East” (a relic of colonialism that ignores North Africa—use “MENA” instead), “Internment” (which soft-pedals Japanese American incarceration), and “slave.” “Enslaved person” is preferred, because it “separates a person’s identity from his/her circumstance.”

Outdated ideas include the “medical model of disability,” which assumes that all so-called handicaps should be corrected if possible. The approved “social model” puts the onus on society to fill any gaps caused by a person’s impairment. And pay attention when “Disability” is capitalized: That means the person who claims the adjective identifies with it. For example, a Deaf person identifies with a culture and community, while a deaf person simply can’t hear.

Stereotypes? “Mean girl,” “dragon lady,” and “damsel in distress” are all ways to denigrate women. However, “patriarchy” and “toxic masculinity” are not stereotypes but the poisoned root of such evils as the wage gap, homophobia, mansplaining, and segregated bathrooms. WriteInclusion.org passes lightly over actual terrorism and violence: “Jihad” simply means to “strive and struggle for God,” and blatant Chinese aggression against Hong Kong is, er, “quite complex.”

Language has been a battleground ever since the serpent asked Eve what God really said. In the current struggle for mastery, the revolutionaries seem to have the advantage, but the Creator of language has the definitions. Rest in that, and in any debate never fail to ask, “What do you mean by that?”
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LOST IN THE AMAZON

*Jungle Cruise* strays from the classic ride that inspired it

by Collin Garbarino

The best parts of *Jungle Cruise* pay homage to the venerable theme park attraction of the same name: beautiful scenery, dated special effects, and a steady stream of corny jokes. But the ride gets a little bumpy when Disney tries to upgrade the easygoing adventure into a spectacular summer blockbuster that checks the boxes of its social agenda.

The film begins at a fictional version of London’s Royal Society where MacGregor Houghton (Jack Whitehall) attempts to enlist the society’s aid for his scientist sister’s expedition to the Amazon. The society has no time for Dr. Lily Houghton (Emily 🎥
Blunt) because she’s a woman, so she steals what she needs from the society’s archives before heading to South America. Lily, with MacGregor in tow, seeks a legendary tree with petals called “the tears of the moon” that supposedly cure all diseases.

Lily hires skipper Frank Wolff (Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson) to give her passage up the Amazon River. Frank usually entertains tourists with manufactured adventure and bad puns, but he’s the right guy to help Lily navigate the dangers of the rainforest.

Apparently those dangers weren’t exciting enough for a jungle cruise, so the writers have evil Prince Joachim of Germany (Jesse Plemons) use a submarine to pursue our intrepid explorers. Joachim wants the tears of the moon to help Germany win World War I and achieve global domination.

Evil Germans chasing the heroes through a deadly rainforest also might not be exciting enough, so the writers added 400-year-old conquistador zombies who chase everyone.

*Jungle Cruise* starts out strong—like a glitzy theme-park version of Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn’s *The African Queen*. For the first half of this adventurous scientific expedition, Blunt and Johnson play off each other well: Lily wants to stay focused on her mission, and Frank wants to have a little fun while dissuading her. MacGregor supplies an extra dose of comedy as the fastidious sidekick.

But the film loses its way with its turn to the fantastic. Why did Disney decide to break out the *Pirates of the Caribbean* playbook with curses and zombies? Their arrival sucks all the fun out of Lily and Frank’s relationship. The search for the tears of the moon also becomes ridiculous. Everything depends on magic, and the movie’s climax hinges on impossibly coincidental timing.

Once again Disney panders to progressives, but not to the point of hurting its profits. The filmmakers want us to view Lily as a hero of feminine liberation: She goes where men are unwilling to go and wears pants in 1916. But of course, Lily falls in love with grungy Frank, which doesn’t do much for the liberation narrative.

Meanwhile MacGregor reveals he’s gay halfway through the movie, allowing Disney to claim some LGBT representation in its films. But even when he’s “coming out” he never actually says he’s gay. He talks around the subject so adults will get the hint, but many children won’t understand.

Disney also has trouble depicting indigenous peoples, something the original ride received criticism for. The movie can’t quite decide if it wants to revere or ridicule the Amazonian natives.

*Jungle Cruise* gets its PG-13 rating for its action sequences (on a large enough scale to distract you from the movie’s nonsensical second half), and the gruesome zombies will probably be too scary for small children. But most of the objectionable content is implicit (such as MacGregor’s hinted-at homosexuality). The language is relatively clean compared with most PG-13 movies. There’s one implied expletive, and Prince Joachim utters a foul word in German.

The movie is diverting enough summer fare, especially for fans of Johnson and Blunt, but I don’t expect many people will be excited enough to queue up for a second ride.
"I’D NEVER MET ONE."
—Actor Matt Damon, saying he’d not met a “roughneck,” or oil rig worker, before traveling to Oklahoma to prepare for his role in Stillwater.

The message of the new film Stillwater is summed up in a key line: “Life is brutal.” Oklahoma oil-rig worker Bill Baker (Matt Damon) travels from Oklahoma to Marseilles to visit his young-adult daughter, who’s in jail in France, convicted of murdering her lesbian girlfriend. When she finds a new lead that might exonerate her, Bill remains in Marseilles to investigate. He meets a young French girl named Maya and her mother Virginie (Camille Cottin): The three become friends as Virginie helps Bill with his investigation.

Damon plays Bill’s character believably: a generous, pragmatic fixer of all things mechanical and electrical, but also a beaten-down sinner seeking justice for his family by nearly any means. Bill also possesses a dark past. The movie asks whether he can change himself.

In one scene, Bill accosts two young women in a restaurant, showing that he’s possibly willing to act uncivilly, as a brute might. Yet he shows ample kindness to Maya and Virginie, and he repeatedly prays to Jesus before each meal. Given Bill’s conflicted behavior and faith, media hype has set out to portray Stillwater as a commentary on Trump voters.

The film (rated R for vulgar language, violence, and a brief sex scene without nudity) builds complex characters and themes, but several sharp turns at the 90-minute mark serve too-sensational plot elements. Stillwater ultimately pits the possibility of personal redemption and new, unexpected friendships against the darker view that life is simply cruel.

FLATFOOT FIZZLE

Vindication wanders from its original strengths

by Bob Brown

LAST YEAR, WE REPORTED that Redeem TV’s Vindication, a well-acted police drama centered on the fictional town of East Bank, Texas, made for “compelling viewing.”

The second season of Vindication is less arresting. In each of its first four episodes, police officers’ relationship blues consume much of the half-hour show. While the first season also allotted scant time to investigative elements, it told stories with teachable moments about family turmoil related to the crimes.

Season 2 is more a workplace soap opera. Sgt. Gary Travis (Todd Terry) has had no knowledge of his mother’s whereabouts. His wife, Becky (Peggy Schott), part of a women’s prison ministry, happens to meet her behind bars. Meanwhile, Travis is vying with the surly commander of another precinct for the chief’s job. And there’s a romantic triangle involving two female officers and the department’s IT guy. More teachable moments? Barely, and at the expense of the crime stories: After an initial query, one or two short scenes abruptly wrap up each investigation.

Happily, the new season corrects earlier costume missteps—no more skimpy dresses (so far)—despite at least one sensual camera shot. There’s no other offensive material, unless you count some secondary characters’ awkwardly written roles. The Biblical perspectives, however, remain solid and relevant.

“There is no sin that can place us beyond the reach of God’s love,” Becky tells an inmate. Vindication fans might be less generous of the latest episodes.

NETWORK REBOOTS FOR FALL 2021

1 The Wonder Years (ABC)
2 FBI: International (CBS)
3 NCIS: Hawaii (CBS)
4 CSI: Vegas (CBS)

STILLWATER: JESSICA FORDE/FOCUS FEATURES; VINDICATION: SONY ENTERTAINMENT
FAMILY ATTACHMENT

CODA’s emotional punch stays true to life as a family’s deaf members struggle to let their hearing daughter chase a newfound dream

by Sharon Dierberger

OMING OF AGE STORIES can be predictable. And CODA (short for Child of Deaf Adult) has its shortcomings. But its uniqueness (multiple deaf characters and their challenging dynamics) and its elevation of family love and loyalty make it a worthwhile watch on Apple TV+ and in theaters.

The film focuses on 17-year-old Ruby Rossi (Emilia Jones), the only hearing member of her family, as she attempts to find her own voice—literally.

Her family has no idea she’s a phenomenal singer. Even she doesn’t realize her gift until her high-school choir director Bernardo (Eugenio Derbez)—who initially seems like an artsy, scarf-wearing caricature but is actually a warm-hearted teacher—listens to her sing. Then he proposes training her: “If I’m offering, it’s because I hear something.” He wants her to audition for a scholarship to the prestigious Berklee College of Music.

But Ruby’s commitment to help her deaf family navigate the hearing world collides with her desire to sing. For generations her family has fished for a living off the coast of Gloucester, Mass. Every morning before school Ruby helps on the family trawler hoisting and separating the netted catch, then selling it to buyers who try to undercut prices. The long hours interfere with voice lessons and cause her to fall asleep in class.

Her bawdy parents—hippie throwbacks still madly in love—assume Ruby will always be there to interpret. Ruby’s mom (Marlee Matlin) guilts her into decisions, while her dad (Troy Kotsur) has never tried to devise another plan for his family. Older brother Leo (Daniel Durant) is torn between needing Ruby’s help and getting angry because he wants to assume responsibility and start a fishing co-op.

The actors portraying Ruby’s family are themselves deaf. About 40 percent of the film’s dialogue is in American Sign Language, usually interpreted by Ruby.

Some themes are all too familiar: mean girls who mock Ruby for her unusual family and her occasional fishy smell, her supportive boyfriend with his own family problems, and the question of whether Ruby will get to audition.

Sadly, we never hear a note of anything spiritual but do see a bit of objectionable content (CODA is rated PG-13 for drug use, strong sexual content—including a sex scene—and bad language, including some in sign language).

Still, director Sian Heder does an admirable job helping actors grow their characters into people we start caring about. One such poignant directorial moment is when the film goes silent while we see—not hear—Ruby belt out a song. In numerous scenes she accurately catches tension or humor, and we can’t miss how much these family members love each other.
In Vivo, a soaring soundtrack lifts a tale of lost love

by Bob Brown

VIVO IS A NEW ANIMATED MUSICAL from Lin-Manuel Miranda, creator of the Pulitzer-, Grammy-, and Tony-winning Broadway hit Hamilton. In Vivo, now available on Netflix, Miranda again demonstrates his gift for marrying story with song but also shows he can create kid-friendly entertainment.

And that’s not just because of the film’s panoply of talking animals. As one of the executive producers, Miranda gets credit for keeping the PG-rated Vivo free of sensuality, bad language, and social-policy pushing. It’s an adventure tale with a timely if conventional lesson: Don’t miss your chance to tell someone you love him or her.

The story opens in Havana, Cuba, where Andrés (voiced by Juan de Marcos González) earns a living playing his trecs, a guitarlike instrument, in the city’s open-air plazas. A bongo-drumming, flute-tooting kinkajou—a tropical mammal resembling a lemur—named Vivo (Miranda) accompanies Andrés and collects tips.

Sixty years earlier, Andrés performed with Marta Sandoval (Gloria Estefan) but never told her he loved her. She moved to Florida to further her singing career, which is now coming to a close with a final show in Miami. Years before, Andrés had written her a love song, “Para Marta,” and it falls to Vivo to deliver the handwritten music to her in time for the performance.

The geography between Havana and Miami is the least of the journey’s obstacles. Along the way, Gabi (Ynairaly Simo), a spunky 10-year-old girl with purple hair and a garish outfit, joins Vivo. “I bounce to the beat of my own drum! I’m a ‘wow’ in a world full of ho-hum!” Gabi raps over a synth beat. Her Auto-Tune style offends Vivo’s refined musical sensibilities: They’re not the team he and Andrés were.

Also hindering their quest are hungry Everglades critters and a trio of girl scouts, rules sticklers who want Gabi to wear a proper scouting uniform. Can Vivo put the song into Marta’s hands before the curtain falls?

The humor and dramatic elements may not leave lasting impressions, but the production design is unmatched. I hit pause more than once to admire the exquisitely drawn background buildings. The music is lively and diverse: Miranda incorporates a classical Cuban sound bouncing lightly over a claves rhythm, electronic dance music, and melodies ready for Broadway.

One sour note: The buildup to the unveiling of “Para Marta” comes in flat. Perhaps, though, it’s a dose of reality.

“You spent your life making music. I thought the songs would never end,” Vivo sings. Miranda seems to know they do. Every wise man understands he’s powerless to make the beat go on.

AUTHENTIC VOICE First-time actor Juan de Marcos González is a Cuban bandleader and musician who grew up in Havana.
I’VE KNOWN OF DENNIS PRAGER as a columnist, radio talk show host, and popular speaker, but not until reading his *Genesis: God, Creation, and Destruction* (Regnery, 2019) did I see that he’s a lucid Bible exegete from a Jewish perspective. The book could be promoted with a 1980s Raisin Bran ad: Two scoops of insights in every chapter.

Judaism’s High Holy Days (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) begin at sunset on Sept. 6 and 15. In honor of our Jewish brothers and sisters, here are some Prager raisins:

› *Bara*, the Hebrew word translated as “created,” means nothing material preexisted Genesis 1:1’s “In the beginning God created.” Humans make things. Microevolution leads to changes within kinds of animals. Only God creates.

› “Male and female He created them” emphasizes that the only vital distinction among human beings is the one God makes: male and female.

› God says we should be fruitful and multiply, but secular people “look to enjoy the only world they believe exists: the material world.” Many fear that children will reduce personal consumption.

› The Hebrew name for Abel, *havel*, is the same word (literally, “vapor”) that’s translated as “vanity” in Ecclesiastes. Life is short.

› Lamech’s boast that he will retaliate 77 times for any offense shows that “an eye for an eye,” limiting retaliation to 1-for-1, was a moral improvement.

› “By stating Noah was righteous ‘in his age,’ the Torah makes it clear we are to judge people by the standards of their age, not the standards of our age.” That’s worth remembering at a time when we change the names of schools if the individuals so honored don’t fit contemporary likes.

› When God scattered the Tower of Babel builders, “they stopped building the city.” Urban life can bring anonymity, “and when people are anonymous, they feel less moral obligation to their neighbors—who are also likely to be anonymous.”

› In Genesis 15, “the notion of a covenant between God and man was revolutionary because all other cultures and religions believed that the gods acted capriciously and that the world was therefore completely erratic and unpredictable.”

› Abraham serves meat and milk together: “The Torah’s repeated recounting of Jews engaged in practices that violate later Jewish law actually confirms traditional beliefs about the veracity and age of the Torah. ... That Jacob married sisters is one more argument for the antiquity of the Torah. Later Torah law prohibited this practice.”

› “Every family described in the book of Genesis is what we would today call ‘dysfunctional.’”

› “Myriad instances of payback”: Jacob and Rebecca used a young goat to deceive Isaac, Laban and Leah deceived Jacob, Rachel deceived Laban, Joseph’s brothers used a young goat to deceive Jacob, Joseph deceived his brothers.

My column on page 76 notes some limitations of Prager’s perspective.

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**Bookmarks**

Dennis Prager’s *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Regnery, 2018) also has challenging insights. He notes that the midwives in Chapter 1 feared God, and “fear of God is a liberating emotion, freeing one from a disabling fear of evil, powerful people”—yet some portray fear of God as “onerous rather than liberating.” On the midwives’ decision to lie to Pharaoh, Prager writes, “We are not only permitted, but morally obligated, to lie to the evil in order to save ourselves and other innocents.”

Prager’s fauna and flora notes are interesting: In the promised land of milk and honey, the milk would come from goats, not cows, and the sweetness would come from syrup dates, not honey produced by bees. When God turned Moses’ staff into a snake and commanded him to grab it by its tail, He was testing Moses’ faith: The old shepherd knew a snake should be held by the neck to prevent it from striking, so he was taking a risk in obeying God’s command. —M.O.
Mystery and suspense
Four novels, old and new
by Susan Olasky

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley (with Karen Swallow Prior): Prior continues her guides to classic novels with this edition of Frankenstein. In addition to the novel’s text—with clarifying footnotes—the handsome book includes an introduction, reflection questions, and an appendix with Shelley’s introduction to the 1831 edition. Prior discusses Shelley’s parents, who were social and political revolutionaries, and her marriage to Romantic poet Percy Shelley. Their demanding vagabond lifestyle resulted in the death of all her children but one. Prior shows how Shelley’s life and the philosophical movements of the day influence the book’s themes and how those themes interact with a Biblical worldview. Thoughtful reflection questions encourage a close reading of the text and provide a helpful guide for those reading alone, in a group, or in an academic setting.

Surviving Savannah by Patti Callahan: This dual narrative novel takes place in present-day Savannah, Ga., and in 1838 Savannah, when prominent residents boarded the steamship Pulaski for a doomed voyage to Baltimore. The 1838 story follows the plight of two women from one prominent Savannah family. The story’s present-day narrator is a historian and museum curator tasked with putting together an exhibit of artifacts from the recently discovered Pulaski shipwreck. As she digs into the past and solves long-buried mysteries, she better understands her own difficult past. Callahan bases the novel on historical events and people. She adds characters to provide narrative structure and occasionally uses bad language. She also shows the injustice of slavery and weaves questions about suffering and God’s goodness and control throughout the book.

The Nature of Fragile Things by Susan Meissner: In 1905 Sophie, an Irish woman eager to escape New York tenement life, answers an ad to move to San Francisco and marry a widower with a young daughter. At first all seems well: He’s handsome and well-off. His daughter is sweet though mute from the trauma of her mother’s death. But cracks appear. They burst open the same morning a massive earthquake tears apart the city. Meissner shows the chaos that ensues as residents escape the destruction and pour into city parks. Six weeks later, Sophie reports her husband missing and police begin to investigate. Transcripts of interviews between Sophie and a U.S. marshal break up the narrative and crank up the suspense in this story that explores evil and the meaning of justice.

Billy Boyle: A World War II Mystery by James R. Benn: The first of 16 books in the series features a young Irish cop from Boston who lands a plum military job on the staff of distant relative Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower needs a fixer and someone he can trust. Billy needs a safe place to ride out the war. Then Eisenhower goes to Europe, and Billy finds himself on or near the front lines. Eisenhower uses Billy to investigate murders and other crimes that might blow up and hurt morale. The first novel takes place in England. Subsequent ones find Billy in new locations that correspond with the war’s progress. James Benn packs action and World War II history into each novel, along with meditations on the ethics of war and the value of life, and a sprinkling of bad language.
Inquiring minds
Middle grade mysteries that spark curiosity
by Katie Gaultney

The Clockwork Sparrow by Katherine Woodfine: Woodfine’s stunning debut novel boasts tantalizing Edwardian-era set dressing. A new London department store serves as the backdrop for the daring theft of a priceless artifact. Fourteen-year-old Sophie Taylor, recently orphaned, finds gainful employment in the millinery department of Sinclair’s, but she finds herself perilously entwined in the aftermath of the heist. New friends Billy (a porter), Lilian (a young fashion model), and Joe (a street urchin) work with Sophie to clear her name and bring down the network of a villain known only as “the Baron.” (Ages 8 & up)

Framed! by James Ponti: At only 12 years old, Florian Bates has become an FBI secret weapon. He developed a technique, the “Theory of All Small Things” or TOAST, to identify patterns and abnormalities and then crack mysteries big and small. With his new friend Margaret, Florian uncovers the nefarious deeds of a crime syndicate at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Framed! scores points for clean, snappy dialogue and its depiction of healthy friendships and parent-child dynamics. Adults and children alike will appreciate this first installment in Ponti’s Framed! series. (Ages 8 & up)

The Mystery of Black Hollow Lane by Julia Nobel: Emmy Willick’s biggest concerns revolve around her next soccer match. That is, until her mom sends Emmy to a British boarding school an ocean away from her native Connecticut. Soon Emmy is learning more than just Latin: She starts to uncover details of her missing father’s mysterious past. As her family history and the school’s dark secrets converge, Emmy relies on her wits and confidants to fend off a secret society and preserve her father’s prized possession—and her life. Note: The book’s few slightly salty words are relative outliers. (Ages 8 & up)

Summer of the Woods by Steven K. Smith: Brothers Sam and Derek have high hopes for exploring their new Virginia home. With a creek and thick woods just behind the house, the elementary-age boys jump headlong into summer and find themselves pulling at the threads of a decades-old mystery. The discovery of a rare coin in the creek precedes an even greater find: a map of an abandoned mine leading to what they expect will be treasure pillaged from the local museum in 1953. A Hardy Boys flavor characterizes this sweet pick, though occasionally clunky dialogue may stall the reader. (Ages 7-12)

All of the books on this page are part of series that capitalize on our natural inquisitiveness, leading readers from page after page, to book after book. Elizabeth C. Bunce’s Premeditated Myrtle (Algonquin Young Readers, 2020), the first in the Myrtle Hardcastle Mysteries, stands out among them.

Precocious 12-year-old Myrtle comes by her curiosity honestly. Her father is the court prosecutor in the fictional British town of Swinburne, and her late mother had been a medical student. Myrtle’s vast intelligence and her fixation on court proceedings and police activity set her apart from other young ladies of the Victorian era. When her elderly neighbor—an heiress with a well-known green thumb—dies, Myrtle suspects foul play.

Horticulture, estranged relatives, and penny dreadfuls enter the fray as the unflappable Myrtle seeks justice. Under the guidance of her gentle governess, Miss Judson, Myrtle learns to channel her curiosity and rein in her impulses. Bunce keeps readers on the edge of their seats with strong character development and surprising revelations. —K.G.
GENE EDWARD VEITH is a scholar but not a scowler. He shows joy in his writing and did so in his teaching: He is professor emeritus of literature at Patrick Henry University, where he was a dean and provost. Before that he was a dean and professor at Concordia University in Wisconsin, and then WORLD’s culture editor. He has written more than 20 books, including *Modern Fascism*, *Reading Between the Lines*, *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*, and *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Here’s an edited and tightened version of the interview we had at the Veith home in Blackwell, Okla.

What should parents look for in a Christian school? Two things: Christianity, of course. That’s not always something you can take for granted. Secondly, a school that isn’t just a place for socialization: It’s a place to learn knowledge.

Let’s say parents are aware of the decline of public schools and have decided to send their children to a Christian school. If several options exist, what should parents particularly look for? I’m excited by
Christian classical education that emphasizes forming virtues and focuses on content, truth, objectivity, and a Christian worldview. A lot of schools are self-consciously cultivating that.

What questions should a parent be sure to ask? Ask about the reading list. What do the students read at different levels? If they are classic works, that’s a good sign. If they read exclusively contemporary works with an obvious ideology behind them, not good. It’s good to teach students about the world God has made and its history, so they don’t think Christianity is a narrow thing we are walling off from the rest of reality. They should learn how Christianity is the bigger reality that embraces every area of knowledge.

What questions should parents ask about the creation vs. evolution debate? Ask about the science curriculum. That is a very telling point of division. Some Christian schools, particularly colleges, say, “We teach creation in our theology classes, but we teach evolution in our science classes.” You should see that the science course accords with the theology course: What students learn about creation in Bible classes should shape how we approach the natural world and its wonders in science classes.

Students should exercise critical thinking about evolution? Yes, since it’s the dominant view today, they should recognize evolution’s blind spots, weakness, and implications. They should be exposed to a lot of the bad ideas that are out there so they can recognize them and not be influenced by them. Otherwise, a lot of times students will think their church or Christian school was sheltering them and didn’t want them to know about certain theories, so they must be true.

As my wife and I drove into Blackwell, we saw signs about the many wrestling champions who grew up in this city. How important are sports in a Christian school? Sports grow out of a classical education. Plato thought the highest part of a liberal education was gymnastics because that taught how the mind can control the body. Overemphasized sports can be a distraction, though. So here’s the critical question: Are sports unconnected to learning, or part of a curriculum designed to develop the whole human being to the highest degree possible?

How have we misdefined science? There were three sciences. First, the natural sciences, the knowledge of the objective creation that God has made. That includes most of what we think of as physics, chemistry, and the like. There were the moral sciences, knowledge of human beings. History was a moral science: You could draw moral lessons from both the good and the bad. The third science was theological science, the knowledge of God, His revelation, the Christian faith. It’s God who is the source of nature, human beings, language, mathematics. That’s what gave everything its coherence.

Have we wrongly defined “practical”? A lot of people, even Christians, when they talk about being practical, mean “How can I make money from this? How can my child get a job?” But God’s calling is not limited to what you do to make a living. Learning to become a good parent or a good spouse is probably more important than learning to be a good worker at a certain specialty that brings in a lot of income. Working and getting paid are important, but a comprehensive vision will look at other things too. What do you do in your leisure time? Do you waste it? Do you do harmful things with it? A full education is about how people actually live their lives.

I used to think it was good for Christian students to go to a secular university, as long as a good church and a good Christian student group were close at hand. It’s true that students need the support of a good church and a good campus ministry. The big challenge to students’ faith is not necessarily what they’re taught in the classroom, but the social pressure to have sex apart from marriage, the temptation to be popular.

I’m rethinking that question of going to a state school, given the way colleges have moved so sharply to the left. A lot of Christian students will go to the local state university for economic reasons, or because they have a certain interest in a highly specific field, such as nuclear engineering: That’s their love, they feel called to it, and very few Christian colleges have a program in nuclear engineering. That’s workable: At most big universities, because there’s so much choice, a Christian student who really tries can find some old-school professors. Many of them are terrified of their colleagues and their administration, but they’re still plugging away. A Christian student needs to identify those professors.

Sometimes those professors are hard to find, since job longevity may mean staying under the radar. It’s a big task. Talk to other students. A typical Christian
church in a college town will probably have some faculty members attending: ask. That’s one way you can identify kindred spirits. You can also read their published works. The pressures do affect Christian faculty members too. Many want to be accepted by peers, but that means eventually sharing their views: Professors start hiding their faith, and when you start hiding it, it can shrivel away.

It’s a challenging environment. Yes, and sometimes it’s good for us to be challenged. Some Christians facing the challenge come out more devoted than ever because they’ve fought the battles. It depends on the individual. A secular environment maybe isn’t right for those who are weak or delicate in their understanding and in their faith.

What should students and parents touring a Christian college look for? See how the people talk about their Christian identity. An admissions adviser who was showing around one student said, “Yeah, we’re Christian, we’re connected to the church, but it doesn’t hold us back much.” Read mission statements carefully and see if there’s a desire to minimize their importance, or to say merely, “We are historically related to the Reformed church,” or “We support Christian values,” or “We offer a values-based education.” Some will mention “tolerance” for all. I would also look at their core curriculum, although they probably won’t call it such. Are these presented as classes to get out of the way, or are students excited about them? Do students continue class discussions over meals? Hang around with students: Are they going to help you be a better person, or turn you into a worse person?

How can Christian colleges help students to identify with Christianity as a worldview and not as a tribal identification? Christianity is not a tribe. We need to be careful not to let it be one, as in, “Here’s the Christian tribe, there’s the Muslim tribe, here’s the gay tribe, here’s the black tribe, the white nationalist tribe.” We need to resist the fragmentation of society into different tribes at each other’s throats, where the trick is for your group to get power, with ideology as a way to get power. That’s the death of education, certainly the death of freedom and democracy. Christians have to combat that and show there’s a better way than just dividing society into victims or oppressors.

You wrote in the 1990s about postmodernists who were moral relativists and tolerant. How has that changed? Today we have moral zeal that comes out of a feeling of resentment: You’ve been oppressed and you desire to pay back in kind the people who’ve oppressed you. That will leave our society in rubble, but in Post-Christian I write about the opportunity for a Christian view to put things back together again. For example, racism is a problem, but the Christian response to racism is different from the critical race theory approach. If the critical race theorists are right, there is no solution to racism because white people intrinsically oppress black people, who become victims and can merely fight for reparations.

The Christian view is different. It’s a transformative view that recognizes sin but shows how God transforms people. We can be salt and light that can make things not perfect, but better.
Sound journalism for your speakers

Are you an NPR fan who'd prefer a Christian perspective? This top-rated, daily news program called *The World and Everything in It* might be your thing.

Ever wish you were a proverbial fly on the wall in a room full of thought leaders and newsmakers? Try *Listening In* with Warren Smith.

Is your home library filled with dusty tomes? Do you own more than one blazer with elbow patches? You might be able to keep up with the *Olasky Interview*.

Are you on a first-name basis with the staff of your local rescue mission? Do friends and colleagues often ask you to join the boards of nonprofits? *Effective Compassion* seems like a good fit.

Can you name all of the Supreme Court justices? Have you thought about taking the LSAT? Listening to *Legal Docket* is a much more engaging way to understand the U.S. legal system.

Listen to the latest episodes on your favorite podcast app and at wng.org/radio.
HE OLDER YOU GET, the more you realize that much of
what’s labeled “pop music” belongs to the category
of childish things you really should put away—and that the
subcategory of pop known as “folk” is an exception.

It’s a genre that, as the new book and four-CD set The
Electric Muse Revisited: The Story of Folk Into Rock and
Beyond make entertainingly clear, is a tree with deep roots
and many branches.

In common usage, “folk” refers to songs deriving from
or inspired by the late-medieval European ballad tradition
whose songs are full of doomed sailors, star-crossed lovers,
blood-red wine, and milk-white steeds.

Both the Electric Muse Revisited book (Omnibus Press)
and the 64-track box (Good Deeds) are updated versions
of a book and four-LP collection that appeared in 1975
(minus the “Revisited” and the “and Beyond” parts of their titles). Together
they amounted to an informative and entertaining crash course in history, cul-
ture, and art.

The updated book contains Robert
Shelton, Dave Laing, Karl Dallas, and
Robin Denselow’s original text plus eight
new chapters and a new introduction
from Denselow (the only one still alive).
The CDs, which duplicate nothing from
the original vinyl, contain selections
from dozens of acts, most of them cur-
rently active and only several of whom
(Shirley Collins, Steeleye Span, Fairport
Convention, Richard Thompson, Carole
Pegg, Davey Graham, Ashley Hutchings)
were included the first time around.

Whether the lack of overlap results
from the compilers’ commitment to the
collection’s “and beyond” aspects or their
unwillingness to pay the licensing fees
for tracks by big names, the range of
performers and the variety of styles con-
sistently illustrate what Denselow, writ-
ing about the acts Stick in the Wheel and
Sam Lee, says in his new introduction:
“In their love of the old songs and will-
ingness to experiment they show how
the original folk-rock spirit lives on.”

The “and beyond” kicks in fairly early
with the programmed drums of Imagined
Village’s previously unreleased Eliza Car-
thy–sung version of Sandy Denny’s “The
Quiet Joys of Brotherhood.” It reappears
consistently throughout.

Sometimes it seems forced (the hip-
hop break on Jim Moray’s “Lucy Wan”),
at other times luminous (Catrin Finch
and Sekou Keita’s instrumental harp-
kora duet, “Les Bras de Mer”), and, at
least once, just plain funny (the Albion
Dance Band’s injunction to “Roll over,
Travolta” and “tell Prince the news” in
“I Got New Shoes”).

No project this large in scope can do
its subject full justice. Neither the book,
for instance, nor the CDs so much as
allude to the prolific post-1975 career of
the former Incredible String Band leader
Robin Williamson.

Quibbles aside, the revisiting and
celebration of anything hoary and West-
ern, especially at a time during which
seemingly nothing connected to the past
and the West is safe, is an encouraging
sign.
Folk, funk, and more

Noteworthy new or recent releases
by Arsenio Orteza

**Early Work, Volume 2: 2020 Versions by Josh Garrels:** The first volume of this series comprised early Josh Garrels recordings scraped free of litigation-inviting samples and lasted for an hour. This volume comprises new recordings of eight early, out-of-print Garrels songs. Although it comes in at under 34 minutes, it doesn’t feel like a quickie, so substantial is Garrels’ engagement with the sentiments of his younger self. “Testify” and “Mercy Triumph” go back to 2003, “Restless Ones” to 2002. There’s no reggae, but Garrels’ lyrics and the way he sings them emerge from his music with a similarly organic feel. And, in the true folk spirit, he even borrows a melody—one going back to 1976 from, believe it or not, the Alan Parsons Project.

**Roundtable by Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver:** Given the frequency of the membership changes in this bluegrass group’s 42-year history, it might be helpful to think of Quicksilver as a college football team and Lawson as its head coach: Some lineups have been better than others, but they’ve all been competitive, and this one is no exception. The high tenor (and guitarist) Ben James and the Burl Ives soundalike (and bassist) Jerry Cole divide most of the lead vocals, while everyone chips in on the upbeat a cappella spiritual “A Little More Faith in Jesus.” But, as sincere as that song’s sentiments come across, it’s the presence of three songs with the word “Lonesome” in their titles that gives those sentiments gravitas.

**Scaled and Icy by Twenty One Pilots:** The “synthetic highs” identified on “Mulberry Street” refer to “pills,” but they can also refer to the Pilots’ sound. And although Tyler Joseph and Josh Dun might not agree, their main challenge is to humanize their music until it sounds less like something composed by computers and more like something composed by human beings. Occasionally approximating the android funk of David Bowie’s “Fame” is a step in the right direction, and, overall, these songs are their warmest to date. Even extra-musically, however, their lack of roots still shows, whether in their pronunciation (“formidable”), their grammar (“they’re trying hard to weaponize you and I”), or their metaphors (meteors don’t rise, kids!).

**So Many Places To See by Orion Walsh:** Not counting performers who play nothing but Child Ballads, you won’t find a folky folkie these days than this ukulele- and acoustic-guitar-strumming Nebraskan. (The credits don’t say, but he might also be the guy blowing harmonica on the title cut.) He’s topical (“House Arrest,” “Slaves to Screens”). He tells stories, whether his own (“Song for John Denver”) or the Postal Service’s (“Sleeping In,” which begins and ends by paraphrasing that uber-folkie, Pete Seeger). And in both his salt-of-the-earth singing and his get-up-and-go playing he’s spry as all get-out. Ditto for the playing of his accompaniments.

**Encore**

Whatever one thinks of Amy Grant’s divorcing and remarrying more than 20 years ago, there’s no denying that those events cast a long shadow over her professional accomplishments, the most impressive of which was, and still is, her multiplatinum, hit-spawning 1991 album *Heart in Motion*. The culmination of her then-14-year career, it proved what many Christians had since the advent of CCM believed to be true: Make the music effervescent enough (no problem with Michael Omartian and Brown Bannister overseeing production) and, no matter how faith-based it is, the world will respond.

To celebrate the album’s 30th anniversary, Grant has just released *Heart in Motion 30*, a remastered edition accompanied by an hourlong bonus disc of demos and extended (and truncated) mixes. It also contains three out-takes, none of which, had they been included the first time around, would have done any harm. “Don’t Ever Want To Lose It (Wind in the Fire),” hard as it may be to imagine, might have even improved it. —A.O.
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DON’T KNOW WHAT IT’S LIKE to grow up not knowing Jesus.

Scratch that—what I mean is, I don’t know what it’s like to grow up not hearing about Jesus. I was born into a missionary family. By the time I could understand words, my parents were singing to me Jesus songs. Some families talk about baseball or movies at their dinner table. Our family talked about Jesus. During family vacation, on long car rides while drifting between groggy naps, I half-listened to my parents talk about Jesus. Sometimes at night, I would awaken to my father stretching outside after long hours of sermon prepping, and as he cracked his back, cry out in Korean, “Ju yeo!” Or “Lord Jesus!”

There’s a special grace in such an upbringing. Every step in life, my parents sprinkled armfuls of God’s Word over me to guide my path. But even the most fragrant and beautiful petals, torn and thrown at somebody’s feet, eventually shrivel and die because they’ve been plucked out of living soil. My parents shine on me flickers of the God they knew, but they couldn’t make me know and love God on an intimate, heart-to-heart level.

That’s the risk of an upbringing that’s so rich in church services, prayer meetings, and family devotions: It’s easy to fill your head with so much knowledge of Christ and train your body to follow Christian customs, yet never fully develop a relationship with Him because your daily life already feels stuffed with Christianity.

There’s a verse that never fails to stop my breath: “Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). My heart does a little tight hop of envy and longing: To talk to God, face to face ... as though to a friend! Oh, the questions I’d ask Him! How eagerly I’d cling to His every word, tattooing each word to my brain.

But isn’t that what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross? He tore the veil of the temple that separates man from God and made available to us the indwelling of His Spirit. Why then does Moses’ experience feel like a privilege that’s out of reach for me?

I noticed something in myself and a lot of my Christian friends. We all have our own list of favorite pastors and theologians, depending on our theological, cultural, and political leanings. Some admire Tim Keller and John Piper. Some follow Eric Mason and Charlie Dates. Some admire Kevin DeYoung and John MacArthur. Others read everything by John Mark Comer. We read and share their articles, tweets, and books. We listen to their podcasts and sermons. All these resources are helpful, edifying, and at times prophetic to our era. But how much time do we spend drawing direct insight and revelation from the primary source, compared with the hours we spend absorbing and debating the thoughts of others?

I noticed my tendency to lean on others to interpret for God when I would come across a passage of Scripture that makes me scratch my head and immediately google my favorite pastor’s name to read what he has to say about that passage. Instead of wrestling directly with God, leaving room and time for His Spirit to teach and convict and change me, I wanted somebody else to pitch me the answers, perhaps because that’s quicker, easier, or clearer. Or perhaps I lack trust and experience in the Wonderful Counselor who lives in me, whom Jesus promised would “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

So I’m trying something new. I still love my books and podcasts, but I’m also embracing moments of silence, so I can hear God speak instead of only hearing others speak about God. I want my face-to-face time with God, even if at times I don’t get the immediate, clear-cut answers I want. Even if sometimes, what I get in response to my cries of “Ju yeo! Lord Jesus!” is more the quiet stillness of God’s presence, because that is enough.
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As the Cuban people protest a lack of food, medicine, and basic freedoms, pastors in the Caribbean nation say they, too, can no longer stay silent.

by JAMIE DEAN in Miami
A man is arrested in Havana during a protest against the Cuban government on July 11.

YAMIL LAGE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
Others were bold, too: Several Cuba-based evangelical denominations and Catholic groups released statements denouncing violence and calling on Cuban officials to answer the demonstrators’ pleas. The unusually vocal criticism of the Communist regime is part of a growing willingness among some Cuban Christians to push back against their government, even as conditions deteriorate and the United States grapples with how to respond.

Police didn’t show up at Peréz’s house after his public Facebook post. He was surprised when airport officials allowed him to board a flight for a ministry-related trip to the United States he had
planned with his father weeks before the demonstrations.

A few hours after landing in Miami in early August, Peréz and his father, Daniel Josue Peréz, talked about their work in Cuba and their readiness to address issues the Cuban government deems too political for pastors. Jatniel Peréz said a good pastor helps his people when they are suffering. His father, Daniel, said a good pastor also isn’t afraid to denounce abuse, even when it’s costly: “God is a God of justice, and we must imitate Him.”

**IF THE LITTLE HAVANA** neighborhood in Miami, Fla., seeks to imitate the capital city of Havana, Cuba, it was probably a bit too festive on a recent Saturday afternoon. Tourists packed the famous strip along Calle Ocho, drinking fruity concoctions and waiting in long lines to buy boxes of cigars while Cuban bands played Caribbean tunes.

At the neighborhood’s famous Versailles Restaurant, customers squeezed around tables filled with plantains and empanadas next to the parking lot where thousands of Miami residents rallied in July to show support for Cubans.

At a Cuban café in a much quieter neighborhood nearby, Alberto Reyes adjusts his clerical collar, orders a strong cup of coffee, and explains why he is willing to speak about the fears of many Cubans: “We are tired. ... Life in Cuba is really, really hard.”

The Catholic priest arrived in the United States for a work-related visit two days before the July demonstrations, but he says conditions have grown worse for months: “The first question a mother asks when she wakes up in the morning is, ‘What am I going to put on the table today?’”

Food shortages and inflated prices are common in the government-run economy. The state’s complicated overhaul of its currency system left many...
Cubans without access to cash to buy extra food, even if they could find it.

Meanwhile, officials raised salaries for some workers, but increased prices far more. Reyes says a woman in his parish told him she now earns more money but can’t afford the same amount of food she was buying before.

Hospitals lack basic medicines, particularly as COVID-19 has surged, and public transportation often breaks down in a country where many people don’t own their own cars. A simple visit to a doctor in a nearby town can feel impossible, says Reyes: “You don’t know if you can make it back in the same day.”

Though Reyes wasn’t in Cuba during the demonstrations, he’d written about the country’s problems before. In a series of Facebook posts he called the Northwest Chronicles, the priest explained why he decided to speak publicly in a country that doesn’t encourage dissent.

During a motorbike ride to a village to visit parishioners, Reyes says, a lightning storm and a near-collision with a bus frightened him. But he realized he wasn’t afraid of dying. He was afraid of dying without saying things he had wanted to say, including “Communism is a big lie.”

That’s an unwelcome message in Cuba, where government officials tightly regulate local churches through the Office of Religious Affairs. A church building in Reyes’ parish was destroyed in a hurricane two years ago, and the priest says he still can’t get a permit to rebuild. He says he’s free to conduct worship services, but he knows the government has informants in the churches.

Reyes resists the notion that priests shouldn’t talk about politics, especially when pressing issues overlap with the Bible’s teaching about oppressing the poor: “If people are suffering because of a system, you have to denounce it.”

Reyes faces pressures over his outspokenness, and he isn’t sure if that will worsen when he returns to Cuba. “But I have decided to be free,” he says. “If you don’t fight for justice, you have to pay a price. If you fight for freedom, you have to pay a price. So, I prefer the second way.”

As the political and social climate deteriorates, the priest says he doesn’t want to face a parishioner who tells him, “I was in prison, and you didn’t say anything.”

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As the political and social climate deteriorates, the priest says he doesn’t want to face a parishioner who tells him, “I was in prison, and you didn’t say anything.”

“Not to talk,” he says, “is to leave people alone.”
JATNIEL PERÉZ DECIDED he couldn’t leave people alone either.

The Baptist pastor started William Carey Seminary in Velasco a few years ago. Visiting Bible scholars from the United States and Canada obtain religious visas to teach seminars, and Peréz says he’s been able to operate with little interference from the government. (He says Cuban officials do sometimes discourage local pastors from studying at the school because of its connections with Peréz and outsiders, but the work continues.)

His father, Daniel Peréz, has had more difficulties. After restarting a seminary closed by Communist officials long ago, Daniel says, authorities confiscated the property again two decades ago. He says he became a pastor after Cuban officials dismissed him from a job teaching English because of his religious views and association with a church his own father served for years.

In the church in Velasco, the younger Peréz says, he’s free to preach but is aware informants sometimes sit in his services. “We know faith comes by hearing,” he says. “So we are glad they can hear the gospel.” (Daniel Peréz says some informants have professed faith in Christ after surveilling services.)

Other forms of ministry are more difficult, particularly when it comes to helping the local community with material needs. Communist officials see such service as a duty of the state. Even if the cash-strapped government can’t or won’t help, officials don’t want churches offering assistance. Peréz says when his church recently distributed basic cleaning supplies, a Cuban official told him to stop. He continued anyway.

It’s part of a wider dynamic reflecting the government’s definition of religious freedom: Most activities within the walls of the church are OK, but those freedoms don’t extend to serving the wider community or applying faith to other areas of life. (Last year, another pastor and his wife served jail time for homeschooling their children.)

Teo Babun, head of the Miami-based evangelical group Outreach Aid to the Americas, says Cuban officials often target pastors by charging them with crimes not directly related to religious activities but still intended to blunt their work.

For example, he says his group assisted a pastor in Cuba who bought meat for a group of elderly people living in a home served by local churches. Police later demanded the pastor show a receipt for his purchase. When he didn’t have one, they charged him with theft. The pastor went to prison.

Babun says his organization has helped dozens of Cuban families enduring financial hardship after pastors have faced various charges and jail time.

In 2020, the advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that the Cuban government “violated freedom of religion or belief routinely and systematically” through arbitrary detentions, false charges, threats, and harassment of religious leaders. The U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended the U.S. State Department keep Cuba on its special watch list for countries tolerating severe violations of religious freedom.

Jatniel Peréz says religious freedom should mean a Cuban can be a Christian outside the church walls: “That I can be a Christian on Tuesday at work. I can be a Christian on Wednesday at a meeting in the park.” His father adds: “And I can criticize what is unjust.”

The thousands of Cubans criticizing an unjust government on July 11 seemed to pour into the streets spontaneously after images of demonstrators spread on social media across the country. (The Cuban government quickly cut internet access to the island, though some Cubans were able to work around the blockage.)

Peréz received a text message in the evening, saying police had detained Yarian Sierra Madrigal and Yeremi Blanco Ramírez, Baptist pastors who teach in his seminary, during demonstrations in the province of Matanzas.

The ministers remained in jail for 13 days before police released them. They’re now under house arrest, but even that has grown complicated: Madrigal’s family said their landlord evicted them from their home after facing threats from police. CSW reported another pastor, Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, had been detained on July 11 and transferred to a maximum security prison in early August.

Peréz says Cubans are “just asking for simple things. For milk. For food. For liberty. That they can go and live a regular life.”

—Jatniel Peréz (left), with his father, Daniel
Cuba, a 2019 report from the U.S. State Department noted that the United States is “the largest provider of food and agricultural products to Cuba, with exports of those goods valued at $220.5 million in 2018.”

For Cubans seeking to flee, President Joe Biden said the United States would continue to enforce current policy that doesn’t give automatic legal status to Cubans who arrive here, whether by boat or by land. In part, the policy seeks to discourage dangerous crossings by land or sea, but Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said it also prevents the Cuban regime from escaping pressure (or attempting to blackmail the United States into lifting the embargo) by allowing large numbers of Cubans to flee—a tactic it has used in the past.

Matthew Soerens of the evangelical agency World Relief says it’s important for the U.S. government to allow more refugee resettlement in general, after a dramatic decline in recent years. He says resuming resettlement of Cuban nationals with a credible fear of persecution “would be among the most compassionate and just things the U.S. government could do to save lives and make a clear statement against communist authoritarianism.”

Soerens says the same would be true for those fleeing a credible fear of persecution in other countries like Venezuela and Nicaragua. He hopes the United States will “offer processing and vetting close to home that would allow people to arrive safely in the U.S. via airplane and be met by a team from a local church helping them integrate.”

The advocacy drew derision from the Cuban government. In 2019, NPR reported that Mariela Castro, daughter of former President Raúl Castro, called the church “the serpent of history.”

Pastor de Prada says officials intensified their harassment of ministers and regularly called some of them for questioning. (The constitution passed without a new provision explicitly permitting same-sex marriage, but CSW reported some of the changes weakened the language meant to protect freedom of religion and conscience.)

During a visit to Miami in August, de Prada said he expects pressures to intensify for pastors criticizing the government. “If you talk about anything, it’s seen as political,” he says. “Just talking about freedom in Christ is seen as political. But the church can’t stay silent where there’s abuse.”

The recent demonstrations also raised questions about how the U.S. government should respond. Cuba’s president largely blamed the U.S. trade embargo for the country’s woes. While de Prada says the embargo affects the island, “it’s not the driving factor of poverty, and it’s not the reason people are protesting. ... It’s the failed system of Communism.”

Although the U.S. government does restrict trade and prohibit tourism to Cuba, a 2019 report from the U.S. State Department noted that the United States is “the largest provider of food and agricultural products to Cuba, with exports of those goods valued at $220.5 million in 2018.”

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For now, the Cuban pastors I spoke with in Miami are already anticipating their return to Cuba after their short visits to the United States, and hoping they don’t have trouble getting back into their homeland. Pastor de Prada says some have urged him not to go back, but he responds: “If everyone leaves, nothing changes.” Pérez agrees: “I need to be there.”

Reyes, the Catholic priest, says he’s also had friends encourage him to remain in the United States, but he demurs. “I deeply feel my place is in Cuba,” he says. “I absolutely want to be there with them.”

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Still sailing

How Christian colleges survived a year of COVID-19—and where they’ll go from here

BY ESTHER EATON IN SILOAM SPRINGS, ARK.

Illustration by Krieg Barrie
On a Sunday in April last year, David Burney pulled out his computer to write the first draft of his school’s request for CARES Act funding. He made headway with the paperwork, then called the school’s vice president of finance to update her.

Kim Hadley picked up. “OK, Dave, what do you got?”
They talked, and not until the end of the call, when Hadley said she was headed to spend time with her family, did Burney realize: It was Easter.

Burney handles financial aid for John Brown University, a Christian college with about 1,600 undergraduate students in small-town Siloam Springs, Ark. If he was the only staffer briefly to forget Easter, he certainly wasn’t the only one pulling long hours to keep the school out of financial disaster during the early months of the pandemic.

When COVID-19 arrived, it forced U.S. colleges and universities into unfamiliar waters: Old formulas for calculating likely enrollment and expenses no longer worked, and campuses had to comply with ever-changing safety rules while avoiding becoming the epicenter of an outbreak—a potential public relations disaster. Education experts feared the pandemic would sink smaller institutions of higher learning already running on tight margins.

For Christian schools, the situation was especially fraught. Many avoid heavy debt yet have relatively small endowments, relying on steady student enrollment and room and board revenue. COVID-19 threatened that model as parents and students lost jobs or worried about returning to the close quarters of campus dorms.

In June and July last year, Burney had to set up financial aid for students without knowing whether John Brown would have a full fall semester or whether tuition would be reduced. “The financial aid office had to work from the perspective of, ‘Oh, there’s no stress, let’s try to make it work,’” he said.

As it turned out, John Brown and most other Christian schools survived the worst of the pandemic. To stay afloat, Christian colleges worked hard and got creative: They adjusted campus life to accommodate social distancing, received a boost from donors, found ways to encourage enrollment, and applied for pandemic relief funding.

I spoke to officials at seven Christian colleges and universities, learning how they survived the first year of COVID-19 and how they’re preparing for the future. Despite the year’s challenges, many are optimistic about the future, and in some cases adapting to the pandemic has boosted their confidence that they’ll be able to attract students in coming years amid changing demographic realities.
followed congregate living rules, for example, while the cafeteria obeyed restaurant rules, and the fitness center followed gym rules.

To provide COVID-19 testing for students, Buhrow signed a contract with a small hospital nearby—then watched dismayed as its promised turnaround time grew from 24 hours to 72. Because of Oregon’s repeated rule changes regarding classroom social distancing, George Fox rewrote its fall class schedule three times. Buhrow estimates he’s written answers to over 200 FAQs to communicate the shifting rules and decisions to staff and students.

Buhrow jokes about how he suggested to school leaders that George Fox move to a state with fewer COVID-19 safety regulations: “They felt that that would be cost prohibitive.”

To ensure a robust fall enrollment, some schools asked their donors for help: In Arkansas, John Brown University launched a donor-supported “Close the Gap” fund. It gave 115 students grants averaging about $3,000 each.

Schools also cut costs. In spring 2020, John Brown temporarily cut employee pay and saved money on canceled travel and events. The school skipped hiring high-school students for summer mowing, instead assigning the task to university coaches whose sports camps had been canceled due to COVID-19.

The school added an online summer class program to bring in extra revenue. Hadley priced it at $299 per credit hour, which seemed better for marketing than a round $300 but complicated Burney’s financial aid calculations. (To apologize for the uneven number, she sent him 48 bottles of his favorite soda, Diet Dr. Pepper.)

Intercultural studies teacher Aminta Arrington at first didn’t like the idea of a summer program—it meant extra work for professors. But she changed her view after learning of the financial boost the program would give John Brown. She stocked her freezer with popcorn chicken so her teenage sons could cook for themselves while she recorded 36 Old Testament class lectures.

ACCOMMODATING HUNDREDS of students on campus during the global outbreak of a highly contagious virus took creativity. By the time students arrived for the fall 2020 semester, campuses looked different: At John Brown, students ordered to-go meals from a new cafeteria app. They ate at picnic tables under rented white pavilions or on Adirondack chairs around shiny metal fire pits. Small lawn signs reminded students of social distancing guidelines, displaying a sideways picture of the school’s 6-foot-tall president, Chip Pollard. Caption: “Please Leave a Chip-Width.”
Buhrow estimated George Fox spent over $100,000 on COVID-19 tests. Some schools that couldn’t access or afford widespread testing in the fall relied on symptom checks through apps: Students answered questions about COVID-19 symptoms and exposure each day to get a green check on the app, which they flashed to get into the cafeteria and classes. Yellow or red meant they’d forgotten to check in or had symptoms and should quarantine.

Quarantining, besides disrupting classes, could get expensive, too: Grace College in Winona Lake, Ind., had about 180 students quarantining at its peak and had to rent hotel rooms for extra quarantine space.

Some schools minimized the risk by enrolling some students online. In Lakeland, Fla., Southeastern University created an all-online remote school option after hearing from students nervous about attending during the pandemic. Almost 300 students enrolled remotely.

ULTIMATELY, NONE OF THE SCHOOLS whose officials I spoke to had to shutter for a semester, and none hemorrhaged enrollment as administrators feared. Out of its average undergraduate enrollment of about 2,600 students, George Fox lost only about 150 in 2020-21. Gordon’s enrollment actually grew 5 percent over fall 2019. John Brown lost only about 20 students, with 42 attending remotely for the fall semester (most returned in the spring). Iowa’s Northwestern College actually saw a record high enrollment in fall 2020, with 1,546 students.

Although schools spent big on safety measures and lost money on room and board refunds, millions of dollars in funding from the CARES Act cushioned the...
Consumer Finance Institute at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia estimated that although higher education will lose $100 billion in revenue over the next five years, private nonprofit colleges will fare better than for-profits and public schools.

Still, challenges lie ahead. If the economic recovery from the pandemic stalls, families may need additional help with tuition. The more contagious Delta coronavirus variant poses a threat this fall and may require continuing expensive safety measures. And looming above everything is the so-called demographic cliff—the declining birthrates that will result in fewer high-school graduates headed to college starting in 2025.

For some schools, dealing with COVID-19 has affirmed that the strategies they’re using can be successful in preserving future enrollment. While Christian schools still emphasize their on-campus undergraduate experience, they’ve been diversifying with online master’s programs and adult education they hope can compensate for undergraduate losses. At George Fox, graduate enrollment stayed steady this year while undergraduate enrollment dropped. Though undergraduate enrollment at Pennsylvania’s Eastern University slipped 4 percent, online adult education and master’s degree enrollment grew so much that the school gained 18 percent enrollment overall.

Hoogstra confirmed that COVID-19 encouraged other Christian schools to stabilize enrollment by diversifying with online courses and degrees. “In some ways, it was a forced experiment that has turned out to give schools really good data,” Hoogstra said.

John Brown hopes to compete with the plethora of niche majors at state schools by banding together with other small Christian schools. By sharing a few online classes, the schools can mitigate the expense of adding in-demand majors such as construction management or computer science while maintaining their own core Bible and liberal arts classes.

And while schools navigate these larger trends, they’re considering how to embrace smaller changes that the pandemic forced. Besides keeping its new picnic tables, Adirondack chairs, and fire pits, John Brown may continue holding some faculty and staff meetings online and continue recording and streaming classes so sick students or traveling student athletes can keep up remotely. (School President Chip Pollard noted that would require a carefully drafted attendance policy to ensure students don’t always try to attend class from bed.)

George Fox is also considering adding more permanent online classes: Bill Buhrow said that, by driving the school to remote learning, the pandemic showed administrators and teachers the possibilities of online education as another way to reach new students and add flexibility for current ones. “It showed folks what could be done, because they were forced to do it.”
A year of COVID homeschooling

Parents who home educated their children for the first time during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic aren’t all diving in for a second year. But many are, and others say the experience has changed their perspective

BY ESTHER EATON
Illustration by Michela Buttignol
Charlotte Wright had a beautiful plan for her first foray into homeschooling last fall.

Every morning in the kitchen of her family’s home in Fairfax County, Va., she would lead son Liam, grade four, and daughter Hailey, grade two, in the Pledge of Allegiance. Then, while she retreated to her home office, the kids would fetch workbooks from the cabinet and work at the dining table until lunch, when her husband would teach them history before an afternoon of more independent schoolwork.

That plan quickly dissolved. Waking too early left everyone grouchy, the smorgasbord of workbooks overwhelmed Wright, and hours of grading ate her weekends. So she found a cheap all-in-one curriculum on Amazon and asked her in-laws if they wanted to help.

Soon Liam and Hailey had a new routine. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays they shut their bedroom doors and worked over FaceTime with their grandparents for several hours, then finished any extra work on their own. Wright spent about $300 on equipment to boost the household WiFi. Tuesdays and Thursdays, she paid for Liam and Hailey to attend a remote learning supervision center, where a teacher guided them while helping other students navigate Zoom classes. To practice cursive, Liam and Hailey exchanged letters with their great-grandmothers.

“I outsourced homeschooling,” Wright said. “It was pretty much a win-win for all of our sanity.”

Millions of U.S. parents turned to homeschooling in 2020, nervous about COVID-19 safety and frustrated with the upheaval of switching between online, hybrid, and in-person schooling. Last summer I spoke to several of these parents, including Wright, about their makeshift schoolrooms and crisp new workbooks.

This summer I followed up: With COVID-19 less likely to disrupt public and private schools this year, will first-year homeschool parents stick with homeschooling? My interviews suggested mixed results. Some parents were relieved not to homeschool again, but others have decided to home educate for at least another year. States won’t release this fall’s official numbers on homeschooling for several months, but early enrollment at homeschooling conferences, classes, and co-ops suggests the homeschool surge will persist, at least in part.

And while the rigors of daily homeschooling have battered children’s workbooks and altered many parents’ dreams, even some returning to public or private schools say homeschooling has reshaped their perspective.

That includes Wright, who said that although the inflexibility of her job rules out another year of homeschooling her kids, she now wants to take a more proactive role in their education.

“I would consider homeschooling again,” Wright said.

The number of U.S. homeschoolers has crept upward for decades, but when COVID-19 arrived, the growth graph went from a gentle curve to a hockey stick: Homeschooling doubled from about 2.5 million students in spring 2019 to between 4.5 million and 5 million in spring 2020, according to Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute. By fall 2020, 11 percent of households with school-age children reported homeschooling in a U.S. Census Bureau survey—and that after the bureau clarified its survey question to filter out students who were...
taking public or private school classes online from home.

The forced plunge into homeschooling has made some parents eager to get back into brick and mortar schools. In Austin, Texas, Mariela Freire is a full-time student and single mom of three. She didn’t technically homeschool last year, enrolling her kids in online public school. But she considered it similar to homeschooling since it still fell to her to enforce homework and keep her children motivated and focused.

Her oldest, a fifth grader, loves researching quantum physics and multiple universe theories. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, he returned from school days bursting with new facts to share. During online classes he lost focus, but he developed anxiety and depression from bullying when he tried returning to in-person school, forcing him back to online classes. Her middle child struggled to keep track of his online course schedule and threw himself on the floor to avoid logging in. This fall, they’ll attend a science- and technology-focused public charter school. When I asked if she would consider homeschooling this year, Freire wrote a two-word answer: “Heck. No.”

But other parents found traditional homeschooling worked for their families. Ashley Kluck lives in San Antonio, Texas, with her husband, two kids, and grandmother, whom she cares for full time. Her older child, 8-year-old Carson, was already getting bored and misbehaving in class as a first grader in 2020. He liked online school even less. “I had to do Zoom calls, and they were boring,” Carson said. Kluck disliked the busywork assignments teachers gave. That, plus assessments that showed Carson years ahead of his grade in most subjects, convinced Kluck and her husband they couldn’t return Carson to public school.

So they jumped into homeschooling last fall. Most homeschooling happens in their bright living room, where sunshine streams through a skylight onto their couch. Kluck started out with a curriculum that took up her weekends marking reading passages in books and making grocery trips for cooking lessons.

Then, like Wright, she switched to a simpler, all-in-one option. She supplemented it with a string of activity boxes that arrived monthly full of materials and instructions for projects—such as a science box containing a red filter, wood pieces, and a light bulb to assemble a flashlight and study night vision. Carson learned math through computer programs featuring comic-book monsters and wizards catching animals if he solved a problem. When he struggled with fractions, Kluck found a game about aliens eating pizza that made the concept visual.

Kluck likes elements of homeschooling besides pure academics. On bad days, Carson can take a break on the backyard trampoline and try again later. They joined others from a Facebook homeschooler group to try indoor skydiving. And already Carson and his sister spend more time together and with their dad on his lunch breaks.

And there’s freedom for other types of educational activities: On a Tuesday afternoon, Carson helped his mother prep pigs in a blanket, orange chicken in foil packets, and other freezer meals. The family raises chickens and ducks, and visiting friends from Louisiana...
slaughtered and plucked ducks with Carson (he said he wasn’t excited to eat the resulting meat). Kluck found a local meteorologist on TikTok who invited the family to lunch and answered the kids’ weather questions.

As she teaches her kids, she sometimes worries she may inadvertently overlook a topic or forget about a historical event, but she’s convinced that a few focused hours of homeschooling per day is as productive as a day in a typical classroom setting. “We look at public school and their eight-hour days—how much of that time is spent herding cats?” she said.

The Klucks have decided to homeschool indefinitely. So has Naomi Mulitauaopele Tagaleo’o, a mom in Washington who started homeschooling to avoid COVID-19 exposure last year—she’s excited to continue and urged her sister-in-law to join her. Last summer, Texas parent Rachel Carothers told me she planned to homeschool her youngest child while the older two attended an online school from home. This fall she’ll homeschool two of the three.

These families aren’t alone. Homeschool group leaders report many parents have stuck around. Near Detroit, a teaching and support group called Homeschool Connections enrolled 153 new students last fall, according to president Becky Thompson. By June 2021, 57 of those had reenrolled for fall, and 115 more new students had applied. In Florida, an information group called Florida Homeschooling estimated 50 percent of the state’s COVID-19 homeschoolers planned to return, and in New Hampshire, Granite State Home Educators gave a similar estimate.

Homeschool researcher Brian Ray emphasized that those anecdotal figures are an incomplete picture. But he loosely estimated the United States would have over 3 million homeschooled children in fall 2022—fewer than in 2020 but more than in pre-pandemic times.

Ray also pointed to polling data with potentially long-term implications for homeschool growth: Parents’ attitudes toward homeschooling has shifted. Monthly polling from school-choice nonprofit EdChoice showed that, like Kluck, 63 percent of parents in February reported feeling more favorable toward homeschooling. (Like Freire, 21 percent of parents said they were somewhat or much less favorable toward homeschooling since the pandemic.)

Pandemic-driven homeschooling might also shift the role of faith in homeschooling. Previously, most homeschool parents surveyed by the National Center for Education Statistics have listed religious instruction as an important reason for homeschooling, but many of the newest homeschoolers (including some of those I interviewed) are making the switch more for health or academic reasons.
Still, Christian homeschool advocates see the growth as a chance for more parents to invest in their children’s faith. In New Mexico, the Christian Association of Parent Educators has seen enrollment spikes at conferences and new homeschooler workshops. “Let’s face it, homeschooling is not what saves our kids. Christ coming into their lives is what saves our kids,” board member Cathy Heckendorn said. “But when you have all day long to answer their questions and present the gospel to them, you at least have a greater opportunity to plant seeds.”

Even parents who return to public or private schooling have been influenced by their experience as COVID-19 homeschoolers. A Tyton Partners survey found almost 80 percent of parents wanted to be more involved in their kids’ education next year than they had been before the pandemic.

Charlotte Wright was once hesitant about homeschooling and now sees its benefits. The family took a vacation to Jamestown and Colonial Williamsburg, a historic town full of reenactors, and counted it as history class.

Homeschooling allowed Wright to accelerate Hailey’s learning by giving her homework above her grade level and to focus on improving Liam’s struggling reading skills: She required the kids to read 30 minutes a day and let them take their iPads to bed—a treat—to read another 30 minutes before lights-out. When the kids’ grandparents couldn’t do FaceTime, she declared a reading day. Together, Liam and Hailey downloaded 400 titles during the school year, racing through Lunch Lady and Dork Diaries books and maxing out Wright’s library card until she took them to get their own. (In the spring, standardized tests showed that Liam had caught up to grade level in reading.)

Wright said the long hours and conference calls required by her job rule out homeschooling again this year. But, she said, “I’m definitely going to take more of a role in their education now.” She might do that by testing them independently again so she won’t miss gaps in their learning.

Wright has two copies of the Dr. Seuss book *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* which she plans to give to Liam and Hailey at their high-school graduations. Each year, she asks their teachers to sign the books.

This year, Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa will all sign.
The last milkmen of New Jersey carry on their solitary work each night—come rain, snow, or pandemic.

By Emily Belz in Hawthorne, N.J.

Photos by Danielle Richards/Genesis
A RECENT SUMMER NIGHT in Hawthorne, a New Jersey town not far from New York City, Roy Hook worked alone at a loading dock. It was midnight, and Hook was hauling milk from a warehouse cold room to his truck to deliver to local homes. The 69-year-old milkman makes night deliveries to milk boxes his customers leave on their porches or beside their garages.

Hook is one of the last old-school milkmen in New Jersey. During last year’s pandemic lockdowns, he was one of the forgotten night shift workers who never stopped showing up, along with essential workers like police, medical professionals, and those serving the homeless.

Hook and some local farms saw a surge of demand for home milk delivery at the start of the pandemic. One milk delivery company in Pennsylvania, Cow Belle, reported that its home delivery business tripled to 360 homes a week. But as people returned to grocery stores, that demand ebbed, and Hook plans to retire next year. Milkmen (and milkwomen) have been going out of style since grocery stores began selling milk and people began buying refrigerators.

The home delivery route isn’t profitable nowadays. Hook and his brother Tom Hook — also a milkman and a partner on the route — have sustained their business on small commercial deliveries to schools, bagel stores, diners, and delis. As the economy has revived, Hook has gotten more milk delivery requests from commercial entities, like a nearby hotel.

“We’re not trying to get customers. We do what we do because we want to,” he said as he threw a thermal blanket over the plastic jugs of milk in the back of his truck to keep them cool.

Around 60 milkmen used to work out of this warehouse, Hook recalled. He remembered when four family dairy businesses sat within a mile, all bottling milk each day. One dairy had a Christmas party every year for the dealers.

Now there are no dealers, no local dairy, and no Christmas party. The milk he delivers to families comes from a dairy in Pennsylvania.

“There’s no more little guys,” he said as he pulled out of the warehouse lot. “Just the big guys.”

HOOK JUMPED OFF at his first stop with several jugs of milk at around 12:45 a.m., when all the houses were dark. He knows where dogs are that might wake neighbors and has a practiced way of softly closing the door of his truck outside a house. He has never used GPS but has memorized his winding route of stops past darkened soccer fields and postage-stamp yards. By working a night shift, he avoids heavy traffic.

Sometimes he and Tom have startled neighbors at night. Someone once pulled a shotgun on Tom as he brought milk up the driveway. “Don’t shoot, buddy!” Tom shouted. “It’s the milkman!”

ROY HOOK: “There’s no more little guys. Just the big guys.”
In his career, Hook has missed only two days of deliveries because of snow, he says. He never missed a delivery during the pandemic, but it did affect him personally: His daughter contracted a serious case of COVID-19 that landed her in the hospital. (She recovered.) For his delivery routine, the pandemic meant he had more stops to make and no coffee along his route because all the Dunkin’ Donuts shut down overnight. The overnight coffee spots are still unpredictable, open one night, closed the next.

To prepare for his shift, he usually sleeps a few hours in the afternoon and then a few hours starting at 7 p.m. before getting up to start at midnight. Every night, his daughter sets up the coffee maker for him so he can just press the button when he wakes up to leave.

Hook checked his voicemail on his flip phone at about 1:15 a.m. One of his customers had called at midnight and said she didn’t need her order this week. The deadline to call is at 5 p.m., but Hook knows his customers, and this one regularly calls him around midnight. Other headaches come with being a one-man milk delivery service: His honor system for check payments in milk boxes doesn’t always work out. One bagel store left him five bad checks.

“A lot of it is our fault because we trust people too much,” he said.

A fox ran out on the street on the way to the next stop. Hook has plenty of wildlife encounters in this job, even in the suburbs. A skunk sprayed him at one house where he was delivering, and he had to throw his clothes away and take a tomato juice bath. A bear lives behind a gas station he treads carefully there.

Another place that never closed during the pandemic is Dee’s Luncheonette, a customer of Hook’s and a family-owned diner in Hawthorne that has been around since 1973. Hook has delivered milk to the diner since it started, according to owner Deanna Neeb.

“He’s the only milkman that I’ve known,” said Neeb, whose mother started the luncheonette. Hook knows their milk orders, and Neeb knows his breakfast order. “I don’t have to tell him anything. He had his own milk case there, and he puts in whatever.”

Sometimes Hook would come for breakfast at Dee’s at 4 a.m., Neeb said, along with electricians and painters.
Many of the members at their Dutch Reformed church from Hook’s childhood were milkmen. Hook’s sister married a milkman (now retired) whose brother was also a milkman (now retired).

Hook says over and over that keeping his business “simple” is how he has supported his family for decades. He didn’t have to sell tractor-trailers full of milk or go into a lot of debt, and his brother helped him when he couldn’t deliver.

He has thriftiness too: Someone hand-painted “Hook’s Dairy” on his truck, and he just retraces it whenever it begins to fade. He, his brother, and his brother-in-law humorously agreed to get each other Christmas presents each year from trash they saw along their milk route, so long as it was functional: “no junk.”
Hook remembers listening to Milkman’s Matinee, one of the first overnight radio shows that started out of New York City in the 1930s for night shift workers—the milkmen, cab drivers, and delivery people. The show, with music and chatter from host Stan Shaw, ran from 2 a.m. to 7 a.m. Drivers could send in requests for songs via Western Union.

Today Hook still listens to the radio as he drives. One night during a call-in show he heard a caller introduce himself as “Eddie, I’m a milkman.” Hook laughed: It was a guy he knew, one of the few milkmen still delivering.

At one stop, it started raining, and Hook quickly fashioned a cardboard shield to go over the boxes of milk he put in front of a local bank. At the next stop a customer had left a note in the milk box saying she would be on vacation the following week. Hook tucked the note into her page in his route book. The driver’s seat in his truck is worn and taped up from him sliding in and out to deliver jugs of milk.

He likes to talk to the people he sees on his route. Sometimes they’ll stumble into a spiritual conversation: “I never try to push it, but sometimes I may say something like ... ‘I was coming home from church the other day and saw all these cars with flat tires.’” That may lead to deeper conversations.

From 50 years of delivering he has stories. His delivery truck was stolen twice. He recalled a milk delivery strike in New York City decades ago, which prompted him and his brother to sneak a truck of milk across the George Washington Bridge. Across the bridge “we made the first right, said to the first bodega we saw, ‘Would you like milk?’”

Once when he arrived at a school to deliver milk in the dead of night, he discovered broken windows and graffiti inside and had to call the cops. He used to have keys to the schools where he delivered, but that changed after the rise in school shootings.

“It’s a tough world we live in sometimes,” he said. “Maybe that’s why I like doing this. It’s nice and quiet.”

He finished his route at 6 a.m. and had a coffee.

ESSENTIAL SHELTER WORKERS

Besides milkmen and medical workers, other sometimes-overlooked essential night shift workers during the pandemic were emergency shelter employees. In Tribeca, the Bowery Mission’s emergency shelter remained operational throughout the pandemic, even amid the city’s lockdown and night curfews during the June 2020 protests.

Bowery staffer Ayisha Etan worked night shifts at the women’s shelter and remembered riding late trains alongside dozing passengers—all essential workers also on night shifts. She packed her own food since restaurants were closed, and she kept bags of tea, her preferred caffeine source, at the shelter.

“I don’t think your body ever adjusts to the night schedule,” Etan said, laughing.

Etan said the women at Bowery’s emergency shelter relied on the mission’s free meals for their day’s food during the pandemic because everything else had shut down. Policymakers “didn’t think about the repercussions of people who don’t have homes, of what they’re having to go through because of the restrictions,” she said. Women in line for transitional housing, court dates, or jobs before the pandemic now felt “stuck.” Many residential programs paused accepting new applicants.

Today, with the vaccines and reopening in New York, Etan senses things have improved for the mission’s guests. When we spoke, she was preparing for a shift that started at 11:30 p.m.

“A lot of people don’t realize that people who work in shelters were essential workers on that front line, with nurses and medical workers,” she said. “I knew I needed to be here and I needed to make sure the women were safe. This is God’s family.” —E.B.
The six-bedroom house was built 139 years ago on Franklin Street in San Francisco, California. Owner Tim Brown had it moved six blocks to Fulton Street. House mover Phil Joy said that trees were trimmed, power lines were lifted up, parking meters were ripped out, and traffic signs were taken down before the move. You could walk faster than the house crept along. Mr. Brown paid thousands of dollars to have his house moved. Proverbs 24:3 reminds us, “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.”

Tim Brown must love his house. He did not sell it. He had it moved! Up on rollers the old house went. It rolled slowly along. Watch out! It came to rest six blocks away.

Lessons:
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POST-COVID CLASSROOMS

Three schools illustrate ways the pandemic altered educational practices—perhaps for the long term

by Esther Eaton
N A MAY MORNING at a community center in North Las Vegas, elementary-school students laughed and chattered through cloth masks as they wandered from the gym to class. Students worked independently through lessons on their computers, occasionally summoning a teacher for help: “How do you spell ‘fastest’?” In the hall, an instructional aide leaned over math problems with a student while soft pop music played from ceiling speakers.

More than a year ago, this school meeting in a community center didn’t exist. The Southern Nevada Urban Micro Academy (SNUMA) popped up as a partnership between the city and an education nonprofit to help kids floundering during remote classes. Now it has become so popular that it will outlast the pandemic.

COVID-19 has prompted a myriad of changes in schools, whether startups or multigenerational institutions. For a new girls’ charter school in Nevada, the pandemic complicated its inaugural year, while it drove a decades-old Christian school in Missouri to try new methods. These three schools offer a sampling of the ways educational institutions look different after a year of pandemic learning.

North Las Vegas teamed up with education nonprofit Nevada Action for School Options to create SNUMA as a solution to a common problem caused by school shutdowns. As Las Vegas schools began the 2020-21 school year online, students who struggled with remote learning needed an alternative. Some also needed help to catch up from lost learning. So the city provided funds and facilities, while Nevada Action provided the nonprofit expertise and administrators. (The students technically are homeschoolers: To enroll, they withdraw from the public school district.)

SNUMA hired classroom teachers and aides, but assigned most of the teaching to computer learning programs that provide each student work based on assessments. Each Monday after a temperature check at the door, teachers helped students pick goals for how many levels to complete that week to win a Friday prize, such as a pizza party.

The school has experienced hiccups. A malfunctioning thermometer read high temperatures for a few people, forcing them to skip the school day. COVID-19 exposure sent an entire class home for two weeks. And kids reacted differently to returning to classrooms full of peers: One drew on his desk and played with classmates’ keyboards, while others were late or absent. The school relied on frequent communication with parents to keep kids motivated to set academic goals and to manage social dynamics.

By the end of the year, SNUMA had achieved its goal of helping students catch up: Every student entered the year behind in math, according to Nevada Action President Don Soifer, but assessments show 87 percent finished at or above grade level. Nevada Action is stepping back, but the city will keep SNUMA running this fall.

Just south in Las Vegas, the Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS) ran its inaugural year at a Boys & Girls Club building made extra cramped by social distancing requirements. At a school-wide assembly, a few dozen middle-school students sat 6 feet apart on bright dots on the atrium carpet and took turns

Plexiglass shields protect kindergartners at Central Christian School, providing workspace for two students at tables rather than the typical number of four.
RYAN DANIELS STARTED All Good Craft Granola Bars in 2018 by what he calls a “happy accident”: As he brewed beer in his free time, he noticed how good the steeped grains smelled. Hoping the fragrance might translate to an edible ingredient, Daniels tweaked a few online recipes to develop his first two granola bar flavors incorporating spent brewing grains, Cranberry Almond IPA and Coconut Mango Tropical IPA.

Today, Daniels is one of dozens of innovators giving beer a green makeover—recycling beer waste into food products, including granola bars, puffed snacks, and flour.

During the beer-making process, grains (usually barley) are soaked in hot water to extract the sugars and form a sugar-rich liquid called wort. The wort is fermented into beer, while the leftover grains are typically discarded. These spent grains constitute 6 billion pounds of brewery waste annually in the United States. Spent grains can...
be used as livestock feed, but for most city-based brewers, it’s easier to send them to a landfill.

Daniels, based in Virginia Beach, Va., brought his granola bars to a local farmers market, where he now sells about 200 bars each time he sets up a booth. He also sells at coffee shops, yoga studios, a climbing gym, breweries, and online.

Branding within the beer byproduct space sometimes presents a challenge. People ask, “Is it alcoholic?” or “Can my kids eat it?” Each All Good granola bar is labeled “alcohol-free” and displays a baby icon in response to those questions.

I purchased a sampler pack of all five granola bar flavors: The spent grains imbue a desirable chewiness to the bars. My favorite: the Coconut Mango Tropical IPA, with its sweet mango notes.

Some companies have developed their own processes for drying spent grain, reducing drying time from hours to minutes. ReGrained in San Francisco patented a technology for converting spent grain into SuperGrain+, a milk powder suitable for use in baked goods, beverages, sauces, and ice cream.

ReGrained sells SuperGrain+ snack puffs, but it is primarily an ingredient company, with partnerships that include Doughp, an edible cookie dough company, and Semolina Artisanal Pasta.

ReGrained co-founder Dan Kurzrock is ambitious. He wants to expand to “upcycle” waste from not just beer but other beverages, too. “ReGrained was named when we were just looking at beer, but bigger picture, it’s about upcycling at large,” he said.

Resembling shrunken Sun Chips, the puffs come in five flavors with distinct profiles. I particularly liked the Mexican Street Corn flavor—salty and sweet with a kick of spice.

Grain4Grain in San Antonio combined aspects of milling and pharmaceutical technology to design its process for drying spent grain. Started in 2018, Grain4Grain also markets itself as an ingredient company, selling gluten- and carbohydrate-free flour online at Amazon and within Texas H-E-B stores. It also sells pancake mix and seasoned breadcrumbs.

After winning third place in H-E-B’s 2019 Quest for Texas Best competition, Grain4Grain earned shelf space at nearly 200 H-E-B supermarkets throughout the state. But by the time Grain4Grain was ready to release its flours and baking mixes in early 2020, COVID-19 hit. The first panic-buying spike completely wiped out Grain4Grain’s inventory.

“Our product was almost dead by the time we got back in stock,” said co-founder Yoni Medhin. “We really relied on continuous tastings, word of mouth, but the moment the product’s not on [shelves], you lose a ton of that momentum.” By September, Medhin was ready to call it quits.

But then H-E-B reached out to request a partnership using Grain4Grain’s flour in its in-store bread. The startup also won first place in San Antonio’s 2020 Tech Fuel competition. More important than the $50,000 prize was the publicity and connections Medhin gained with local tech companies—interest he leveraged to acquire new wholesale customers.

Medhin’s Christian faith shapes his vision for Grain4Grain. He hopes his company’s redemptive work of breathing new life into a waste product will inspire other Christian-run companies and owners asking: “How do I create things that are actually going to add value and improve human conditions?”

HOW DO I CREATE THINGS THAT ARE ACTUALLY GOING TO ADD VALUE AND IMPROVE HUMAN CONDITIONS?
PLAYING FOR PEANUTS
MLB cut dozens of minor league clubs, yet remaining players still cope with meager salaries
by Ray Hacke

IN THE MOVIE Field of Dreams, the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson wistfully recalls his days with the Chicago White Sox before his fall from grace following a 1919 gambling scandal.

“T’d have played for food money,” Jackson, played by Ray Liotta, tells Kevin Costner’s character Ray Kinsella, the Iowa farmer who plowed under his cornfield to build a baseball field in hopes Jackson would play there. After further waxing romantic about his life in baseball, Jackson says, “Shoot, I’d have played for nothing.”

Minor leaguers across the country don’t share that sentiment.

A year ago, in response to minor leaguers’ demands for better pay, Major League Baseball considered axing 42 minor league clubs. MLB essentially got its way last December, eliminating 40 teams in a massive restructuring of its minor league system. Each club now has just five minor league affiliates—one at each level (Triple-A, Double-A, High-A, Low-A, and Rookie)—whereas before, some teams had as many as eight.

The purge left roughly 1,000 players jobless. The remaining prospects say their paychecks haven’t gotten fatter: According to Harry Marino, executive director of Advocates for Minor Leaguers (AML) and a former minor leaguer himself, most players earn less than $15,000 per year playing baseball.

The players’ parent clubs haven’t done much to ameliorate their spartan living and working conditions either: At least three teams—the Los Angeles Angels, Oakland A’s, and Baltimore Orioles—have come under fire for their treatment of their minor leaguers this season.

Kieran Lovegrove, a pitcher for the Angels’ Double-A affiliate in Huntsville, Ala., described how he and six teammates crowded into a three-bedroom apartment. Shane Kelso, who pitched for the Angels’ Low-A team in San Bernardino, Calif., before retiring, said some teammates slept in camper vans at trailer parks while others slept in their cars.

AML raised similar complaints on behalf of Orioles minor leaguers back in June: Facing a two-week homestand (a series of games between two teams played in one place), the organization tweeted that players for Baltimore’s Double-A affiliate in nearby Bowie, Md., considered sleeping in their cars because they couldn’t afford to stay in the team hotel. At $900, the cost of the two-week stay would have consumed 80 percent of the players’ paychecks.

Orioles general manager Mike Elias denied that the Bowie players’ situation was so dire, vigorously defending his team’s efforts to ensure that players in its farm system are taken care of. AML later reported that the Bowie Baysox had arranged for its players to stay at the team hotel for a significantly reduced rate.

The Angels and the A’s have also faced criticism for failing to supply their minor leaguers with quality food. AML posted on Twitter a picture of an A’s player’s post-game meal: a cheese sandwich on shriveled white bread with a scoop of coleslaw on the side.

Eating well is “required for our job,” Kelso told Sports Illustrated. “If we don’t do that, our bodies fail and we can’t do it.”

Angels and A’s executives have pledged to do better by their minor leaguers. However, Elias said in June that MLB clubs are “continuing to evolve, continuing to fine-tune the way that the industry invests in player development.”

Translation: MLB teams will pinch pennies for as long as they can, and only minor leaguers themselves can decide whether it’s worth it to suffer in pursuit of their major league dreams.

In the meantime, cities that lost their minor league teams are not experiencing a baseball void: Some of the teams moved to leagues MLB has either formed or deemed partners. Others now have collegiate summer-league teams. The Salem-Keizer Volcanoes in Oregon, a former MLB affiliate, has even formed its own independent four-team league.

The Bowie Baysox take on the Erie SeaWolves.
Talks we never had

What’s holding us back from telling others about Jesus?

It happened to be in Brooklyn when I checked my phone and it was July 18, a date my memory has not seen fit to delete after 50 years (along with random useless phone numbers of childhood friends). It was Mary B.’s birthday.

On impulse I googled the name and hometown. Lo and behold there was a photo of her, same pretty Irish eyes and smile, but as if she had dusted baby powder on her hair to play the part of an old woman in a school play. Our school. Where we had shared secrets and graduated in the small class of ’69. Under the picture were dates: 1951-2021. I suppose I wouldn’t have looked her up this year anyway, any more than I bothered in previous Julys. But it was very different knowing that I couldn’t do it even if I wanted to. I had missed my chance by three months and two days. The door was shut and double-bolted now. The raven sits aloft it crying “Nevermore.” She would have liked this Poe allusion.

There is a tipping point in life where you realize that among the people you have known, as many are dead as alive: schoolteachers, my first female college friend, my first serious boyfriend, the other boyfriend I lost a bet to who made me go to the rock concert from which I took home tinnitus as a souvenir.

Mary B. was not a Christian when I knew her. And if I can read obituaries well, she wasn’t one in the end either.

“Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow,” says the psalmist (144:4).

An unusual number of people die of cancer on my street. My first husband started the fashion in 1999. Since then, Marie across the way succumbed, then Catherine three doors to my right, then Steve two doors to my left, then Kathy to my immediate left. And now the lady down the street is battling it. Some say it’s the power lines running like a spine along the railroad tracks behind our houses. I looked it up:

“There is no known mechanism by which magnetic fields of the type generated by high voltage power lines can play a role in cancer development. Nevertheless, epidemiologic research has rather consistently found an association between residential magnetic field exposure and cancer” (Environmental Health Perspectives, 1995).

So knowing he had cancer, I invited 50-year-old Steve to dinner, shared the gospel with him, saw him come to faith in Christ, and was present as he passed into the arms of the Lord.

Except no, that didn’t happen. I never invited him to dinner. I kept dithering till it was too late.

I like the 1980s choose-your-own-ending books for children, where the young reader can pick which adventure he wants to take. God does that with us too: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil” (1 Peter 3:10). “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25).

These are choices God invited us to make.

The minutest choices are small pebbles we throw into the pond that cause a ripple to the farthest reaches of the shore. Consider: Archduke Ferdinand visits Sarajevo in an open car, where an angry Serb in the crowd throws a bomb at him but misses. The archduke runs for cover, high-tails it back to Austria, and World War I never happens. Except that actually the archduke elected to stay, and the rest is history.

What would have happened if last summer, or the summer before, or 10 summers before, I had thrown fear to the wind and cast my bread upon the waters and tracked down my old friend Mary B. and told her about Jesus?

Ours is not to know the endings of the roads we never ventured on.
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Mysteries fulfilled
Creation, compassion, and community

The Jewish New Year’s Day next month, Rosh Hashana, commemorates creation. Jewish talk show host and Bible exegete Dennis Prager calls Genesis 1:1 “the most important verse in the Bible. The entire Bible rests on that claim. Life having ultimate meaning rests on it. If there is no Creator, there is no design and no purpose. All is random and ultimately meaningless.”

I place “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) next to that verse because our human tendency, if we believe in God, is to fall from theism to deism by thinking God watches “from a distance,” as singers Nanci Griffith and Bette Midler warbled. The New Testament shows how God came among us and showed ultimate compassion by weeping and then dying for us.

Prager, of course, does not see the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures as equally God-breathed. And yet, Genesis itself raises questions to which I found satisfactory answers in the New Testament, not in the Old.

First, as a 12-year-old I memorized in Hebrew that first verse of Genesis and asked why the word for God is Elohim, plural, but the verb is bara, singular. How can one God be plural? Prager says it could be “the royal we” or could refer to angels as well as God. Others argue that Elohim has multiple meanings and sometimes carries a plural. But the doctrine of the Trinity explains it best.

Second, Prager quotes a scholar’s comment on Chapter 19 of Genesis, where Lot escapes destruction for Abraham’s sake: “an unrighteous person might be spared for the sake of ... a righteous person.” How does that work? Who is righteous enough to save others? The New Testament has the answer: Christ.

Third, human sacrifice. When I turned 13 my bar mitzvah passage (for chanting in front of the congregation) concerned Jephthah, who in Judges pledges to make a burnt offering of the first creature to come out of his house to greet him following a victory. That turns out to be his daughter, his only child. Jephthah’s story pushed me to examine Genesis 22, where God commends Abraham for being willing to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.

Prager’s explanation—God wanted “to see if Abraham would pass the ultimate test of faith”—isn’t satisfying: Why encourage others to see that as the ultimate test and perhaps go through with it? For more on “The riddle of Isaac” (or the akedah, as it’s known in Hebrew) see WORLD, Jan. 23, 2016.

In Prager’s commentaries on Genesis and Exodus—see my review on page 28—he notes that “God uses flawed individuals to show His redemptive powers or, as Christians put it, God’s grace.” He mentions that “Protestants led the modern world’s abolition of slavery.” Right: Protestants, Catholics, and Jews today should work together against our modern form of child sacrifice, abortion.

That’s not all. Prager says God chose Jews “to serve as a vehicle for God’s blessing of the world ... to minister to humanity and bring as much of it as possible closer to God.” But Prager notes the “tension between the command to be a holy nation and the fulfillment of the purpose of Chosenness. ... Too much separation makes the Jews’ task ... almost impossible. It is difficult to influence people if you have virtually no contact with them.”

It’s hard to minister to people if you can’t eat with them. Chapter 10 of Acts shows how God told Peter he could eat all kinds of animals and should not “call any person common or unclean.” That fulfilled what God told Isaiah: Jews (and one in particular) could be “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

God now brings American Christians and Jews into very close contact. In His mysterious providence He has also turned people such as me into bridges. Next month brings Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—and more Jews now believe that Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
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