

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

GETTING READY FOR THE 'BIG ONE'



**Congo's Ebola Outbreak
Now Global Emergency**

**The EU's
New Approach**

**Iran's War with the West
Has Already Begun**

**When Did You Last Counsel
with Your Minister?**

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VOL. XVII | NO. 5 | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019

A R T I C L E S

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■ A health worker waits to handle an Ebola patient at a newly built treatment center in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo (Nov. 7, 2018).

PHOTO: JOHN WESSELS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Congo's Ebola Outbreak Now Global Emergency

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FRONT COVER: An artistic depiction of a powerful earthquake emanating from the San Andreas fault in California.

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH O. VIDAL/THE REAL TRUTH

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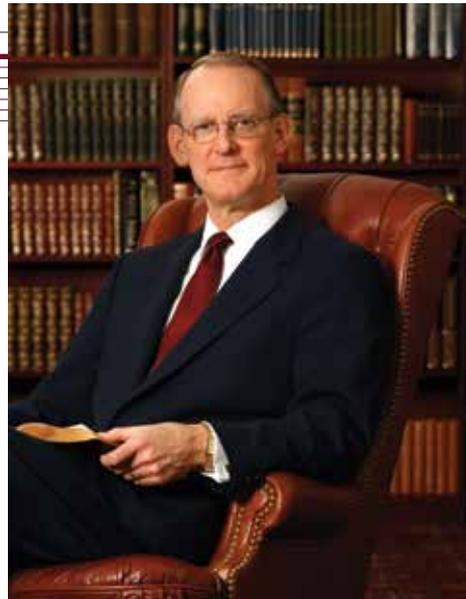
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Are You Being Called?

MOST BELIEVE that God is trying to save the world now! This thinking goes something like this: God and the devil are at war over the fate of mankind. This is seen as a desperate struggle between good and evil—God and Satan.

Let's put this another way: Is today the only opportunity for all human beings to choose or to reject Christianity? Must all people, as it is often put, "decide now to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior?" Is this what *the Bible teaches*? The answer is an emphatic *no*! If it were yes, then God is failing miserably in His battle with the devil for control over the fate of all men. In other words, God is "calling" all of mankind, but most are not answering!

Consider! In 1920, when my father was born, there were well under 2 billion people on Earth. There are now over 7.7 billion—and about a quarter million more every day. Approximately 2.2 billion, or one-third, believe—to one degree or another—in the name of Jesus Christ. This represents a total that includes every conceivable brand of the over 2,000 *different forms* of professing Christianity. Approximately another one-third of mankind has *heard* of Jesus but has not accepted Him and does not *claim* to follow Him. Finally, the last third of all people on Earth know nothing about Jesus Christ. Many in India, Africa, Japan, China and parts of South America and Southeast Asia have never even heard of Him. Are they condemned

to be lost, having never had an opportunity to understand what they missed or why—having no opportunity to be "called"?

When speaking of Jesus' name, the Bible plainly says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is *none other name under heaven* given among men, whereby we must be *saved*" (Acts 4:12). Further, Romans 10:13 states that men must call on *this name* to be saved.

Understand! It is obvious that all who have not yielded to the God of the Bible and not accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior are certainly *not* saved! Countless billions have died in this condition. Most have assumed the only other option for these is that they were lost to salvation, and that God long ago planned this for the vast majority who have ever lived.

If the war to win souls is as most supposed Christian ministers depict it, then the devil is much stronger, and much more effective, in his effort than God. This is the only other possibility—unless there is a third category containing the vast majority of people. But it must be a category that has not been recognized. There is such a category!—God is simply not calling the masses of humanity today.

But He *is* calling a select few!

Called and Chosen of God

The Bible plainly speaks of those who have been called by God. Let's read several places. Here is what was written to the Thessalonians: "Faithful is He [God] that *calls* you" (I Thes. 5:24). As a warning to the Galatian congregation,

who were losing sight of the true gospel, Paul wrote: “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that *called* you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal. 1:6), and he later added, “This persuasion comes not of Him that *calls* you” (5:8). To the Corinthians it says, “For you see your *calling* brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are *called*” (I Cor. 1:26).

Jesus Himself spoke on many occasions about the Christian calling. You may be familiar with this, “For many are *called*, but few are chosen,” found in both Matthew 22:14 and 20:16. Later, adding meaning to the second part of this phrase, He explained this to His disciples: “You have not chosen Me, but I have *chosen* you” (John 15:16), and then, “I have *chosen* you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (vs. 19).

When placed together, these passages explain that God is calling a few people—actually a *very* few—out of the world for His Supreme Purpose. Those who respond to His calling are then “chosen,” having gone on to repentance, baptism and conversion.

What About You?

After reading some of the literature from The Restored Church of God (the publisher of this magazine), many come to recognize that they have been brought in contact with extraordinary understanding. They find themselves learning things they have never heard before. They notice the Bible makes sense—that it is not as hard to understand as they had previously thought. Then, feeling a growing need to *act* on what they are learning, many wonder, “Am I being called by God?”

Sometimes this question takes the form of “Am I undergoing ‘conversion?’” or “Should I get baptized?” or even “Have I come in contact with God’s true Church?” At best, most are unsure of how to *answer* these basic questions, and many have absolutely no idea whatsoever how to even properly *address* them.

This Personal will make plain, from God’s Word, how to know if God is calling you. It will be kept simple, virtually impossible to misunderstand. After all, this question is one of the most important you will ever face. Properly understanding its answer is of paramount importance to your life!

I first began learning God’s truth when I was 17 years old. Before God called me, I had not known a single one of the true doctrines of the Bible. The calling process for me began when I heard the voice of a man named Herbert W. Armstrong, being broadcast from Pasadena, California. This was 1966, and it was immediately evident to me that I was hearing things from this man that I had NEVER heard before—and with plain scriptural proofs to back them up. I remember being astonished at how clear the Bible became—and how much fun it was to study. Prior to this—throughout the time I attended the well-known, respected denomination of my youth—I had always found the Bible boring and hard to understand.

People of all ages and backgrounds puzzle over just what a “calling” is. Many reduce it to little more than a particular *feeling* that comes over them, which they attribute to God. Millions in the world feel “called”—in some cases to the “church,” in other cases to the “ministry” or “missionary work,” in still other cases to work with children, and in yet others to serve in the medical profession or even in the military. Ignorant of what God says, so many people are left to rely on mere *feelings*, assuming that their lives—and the paths they choose—are divinely inspired. They attribute this thought-to-be “inspiration” to being “called of God.” Sadly, most never learn that these supposed “callings” have nothing to do with following the true God of the Bible—and how HE calls people.

A true calling from God is far more than a kind of *abstract feeling* that human reasoning concludes is from God!

Defining a True Calling

In John’s gospel account, Jesus stated, “No man can come to Me, except the

Father which has sent Me *draw* him” (John 6:44). Twenty-one verses later, He repeated to His audience, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were *given* unto him of My Father” (vs. 65). Notice the next verse, “From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him” (vs. 66).

Many who heard Jesus simply could not understand that God has to “draw” people and that a calling is something “given” to them. While many today appear to understand they must in some fashion be called, they do not seek to understand—from the Bible—how to know for certain that it is God who is calling—drawing—giving to—them whatever it is they are to receive.

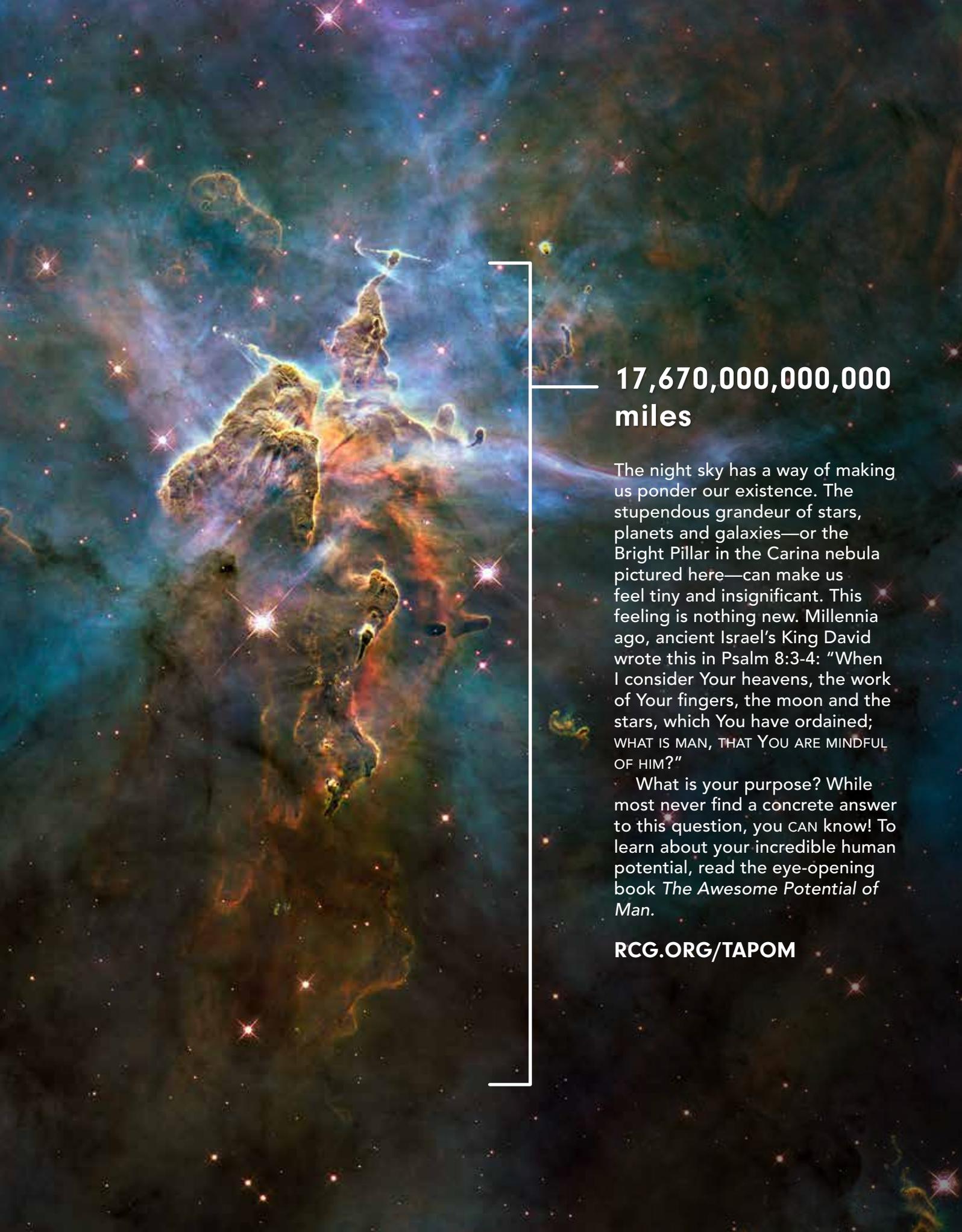
Let’s consider a few scriptures that make plain what it is Christians are “given” when they are called. We must clear up all possible confusion.

Jesus’ disciples asked Him, “Why speak You unto them [the multitudes who heard Him] in parables?” (Matt. 13:10). His answer summarizes how, and with what, God calls: “He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given* unto you to *know the mysteries of the kingdom* of heaven [or the kingdom of God], but to them it is *not given*” (vs. 11). The next several verses amplify what He meant, explaining how many in the world can hear the truths of God (the “mysteries of the kingdom”) but not grasp them. Since the overwhelming majority of mankind are not being drawn by the power of God’s Spirit, they have not been given the ability to comprehend God’s Word.

How does this apply to you? The answer directly explains how to know if God is calling you: in the simplest terms, a calling is understanding the truths of God when you see, read or hear them.

The Restored Church of God covers vital knowledge, and across a host of topics. Perhaps you have read much of it. Ask yourself: “Do I understand Bible teachings and truths when I hear them? Do the scriptures about the gospel of the Kingdom of God—the plan of sal-

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 26



**17,670,000,000,000
miles**

The night sky has a way of making us ponder our existence. The stupendous grandeur of stars, planets and galaxies—or the Bright Pillar in the Carina nebula pictured here—can make us feel tiny and insignificant. This feeling is nothing new. Millennia ago, ancient Israel's King David wrote this in Psalm 8:3-4: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM?"

What is your purpose? While most never find a concrete answer to this question, you CAN know! To learn about your incredible human potential, read the eye-opening book *The Awesome Potential of Man*.

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The EU's New Approach

Nominees to take the European Union's highest offices are more diverse than any in the past. Is this what it will take to fix the continent's longstanding issues?

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY



AFTER THREE days of deadlock and one of the longest-ever European Union summits—beating even the all-nighters that marked the Greek debt crisis—European Council President Donald Tusk announced the bloc's leaders for the next five years.

To most, the appointments were an utter surprise: Germany's Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen was tapped to take over the EU's powerful executive arm—the European Commission, which proposes and enforces the union's laws. She will replace current President Jean-Claude Juncker, who has served in the position since late 2014.

Heading the European Central Bank is France's Christine Lagarde. Belgium's Prime Minister Charles Michel was selected to become president of the European Council and

Spain's Josep Borrell the foreign policy chief.

Every one of them were put forward as last-minute candidates by EU leaders as part of an overall appointments package, sidestepping parliamentary wishes.

The response from lawmakers was fierce.

Some of those in the European Parliament accused Mr. Tusk and the bloc's leaders of handpicking the candidates in a series of shady backroom deals. They saw it as “an undemocratic stitch-up by national governments,” according to *The Independent*.

The council operated outside parliament's preferred system of *spitzenkandidat*—meaning “lead candidate”—in which parliament nominates their candidates for president prior to elections.

None of the candidates appeared real contenders a week previous. Despite insistence from leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron that only the best be chosen, the nominees' professional credentials were

low on the list of priorities. Ms. von der Leyen was not even on the ballot paper as a candidate and she had no manifesto.

But this time the council decided for itself that picking politicians for political reasons, not competence, would suit the continent's future much better. They were chosen to represent a wider diversity of cultures and genders in the bloc's highest echelon of power.

“First and foremost, we have chosen two women and two men for the four key positions. A perfect gender balance,” Mr. Tusk said in remarks after the special meeting determining the nominations. “I am really happy about it. After all, Europe is a woman.”

■ Left, president-elect of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in Aachen, Germany (July 21, 2019). Middle, nominee for High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell talks to reporters in Brussels, Belgium (July 15, 2019). Right, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel attends an EU summit in Brussels (March 22, 2019).

PHOTOS: TF-IMAGES/ (LEFT); THIERRY MONASSE/ (MIDDLE); SEAN GALLUP/ (RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES



The first test as to whether Europe as a whole would be “happy about it” was through parliament, which voted 383-327 with 22 abstentions to approve Ms. von der Leyen’s nomination. The confirmation required an absolute majority of 374 votes and the outgoing German defense minister scraped through with just nine votes to spare.

The same division permeates Europe, which continues to be fractured by political rivalries.

“We need to overcome this division,” Ms. von der Leyen stated after her confirmation, referring to the increasing rift between European nations over issues such as climate, migration and democratic values.

There is also the question of how the EU will handle Brexit. Britain is scheduled to depart from the EU October 31, the day before Ms. von der Leyen officially takes office. And the United Kingdom’s new Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised to leave the EU with or without a deal, insisting

he will not hold Brexit talks with EU leaders unless the bloc lifts its refusal to reopen the existing divorce deal.

Despite the secretive nature of the selection of these leaders, perhaps this is the dream team needed to breakthrough Europe’s impasse on increasing division.

New Vision for the EU

In 2011, long before she could have foreseen filling the role of European Commission president, Ms. von der Leyen expressed her vision for the continent.

“My aim is the United States of Europe—on the model of federal states such as Switzerland, Germany or the U.S.,” she said in an interview with German news magazine *Der Spiegel* while serving in Chancellor Angela Merkel’s cabinet.

Establishing lasting cohesion will be no easier in Europe today. Western nations worry that Hungary and Poland have both drifted from democratic values. For example, Hungarian Prime

Minister Viktor Orban declared the need to part from the notion that people are “free to do anything that does not violate another person’s freedom.”

Italy has also experienced a tense relationship with the EU, including a row over how the anti-establishment government spends its money and handles immigration.

If the bloc’s leadership can satisfy the needs of all member nations while upholding the EU’s core principles laid out in the Lisbon Treaty—namely “inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law”—only then is a tighter knit Europe possible.

Despite the need for votes to get the absolute majority, Ms. von der Leyen did insist that her European Commission would continue to be tough on countries like Poland and Hungary.

“There can be no compromise when it comes to respecting the rule of law. There never will be. I will ensure that we use our full and comprehensive toolbox at European level,” she said.

“Ms. von der Leyen faces a difficult start as she will have to battle the widespread mistrust as a result of the selection process. She will have to quickly make progress on a number of problems on the continent.”



PHOTO: FREDERICK FLORIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The incoming president comes from a political family and is the daughter of a former governor of her home state of Lower Saxony, Ernst Albrecht. She has been a deputy leader of Ms. Merkel’s party since 2010.

Still, Ms. von der Leyen faces a difficult start as she will have to battle the widespread mistrust as a result of the selection process. She will have to quickly make progress on a number of problems on the continent.

This is precisely what she plans to do in her new written agenda for Europe. “In its 24 pages, she describes the kinds of policies she wants to pursue in Europe over the coming years,” *Der Spiegel* reported. “‘This is my program,’ she says, proud of what she has accomplished in about two weeks.”

It covers everything from how to handle refugees, agricultural budgets and climate to the administration’s stance on Eastern Europe.

“As a defense minister, she took a clear position against Russia, fought for higher military expenditures and made sure that the Bundeswehr [German army] had a presence in Poland and Lithuania,” the magazine reported. “Now, she is trying to make use of the sympathies she earned in Eastern Europe.”

She even presented Brexit as an opportunity for European unity. Shortly after Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016, she said as defense minister that Brexit offered the

bloc the path to foster greater military cooperation.

“Britain consistently blocked everything that had Europe written on it,” Ms. von der Leyen said. She argued that closer military ties between member states could help ease the frustration many voters feel about the EU’s inability to tackle major issues.

The UK’s new prime minister Boris Johnson has pledged to deliver Brexit with or without a deal. Ms. von der Leyen acknowledged the “challenging times ahead of us” but said “I think it is very important to build up a strong and a good working relation because we have the duty to deliver something that is good for people in Europe and in the United Kingdom.”

She “said she is willing to grant the UK another extension to Brexit talks, if London comes up with good reasons,” according to *BBC*.

Ultimately, her policies are guided by her desire to establish greater European unity, a notion likely the result of her diverse upbringing.

Cosmopolitan Background

“I always wanted to come back to my roots,” Ms. von der Leyen said, geographically because she was born in Brussels, and politically since she came from a pro-European family where her father already held a high-level EU position.

“I come from a family that has a European history,” she said.

Ms. von der Leyen, 60, spent her early years in the Belgian capital and speaks fluent English and French, having studied at the London School of Economics in the 1970s. She also lived in Stanford, California, from 1992 to 1996, where two of her seven children were born.

She was long viewed as a potential successor to Ms. Merkel, but has had a tough tenure at the head of the notoriously difficult defense ministry and had long since faded out of contention by the time Ms. Merkel stepped down last year as leader of her center-right Christian Democratic Union party.

Still, Ms. von der Leyen, a medical doctor, played a significant role in modernizing the image of her party during the Merkel years. As minister for families in Ms. Merkel’s first cabinet from 2005 to 2009, she introduced benefits encouraging fathers to look after their young children.

She then served as labor minister until 2013, when she became Germany’s first female defense minister.

Pushing for gender equality will mark her next five years as well, she said. She only got the job, she said, “thanks to all the men and women who have broken down barriers and defied convention.”

Her ability to succeed on these issues and bring Europe together depends on her working relationship with the next leader of the council.

Council President

The European Council comprises heads of state of each member nation in the EU. The body sets legislative priorities for the commission, but it cannot pass laws itself.

Charles Michel is Belgium's youngest prime minister since 1845. He was elected at age 38 in 2014.

He is the second Belgian to hold the office of council president, following Herman Van Rompuy who was the first to hold the office in 2007. His father, Louis Michel, was a European commissioner and is currently a member of the European Parliament.

The quality most looked for in a council president is "the ability to be a builder of compromise and the ideal profile is that of these Belgian prime ministers who are skilled, shrewd," former French ambassador to the EU, Pierre Sellal, said according to *Agence France-Presse*.

Mr. Michel proved his ability to compromise. He leads the French-speaking liberal party (MR), which represents only 25 percent of the French-speaking population in the country. He was successful in being elected as prime minister after his party made a coalition with the right-wing nationalist N-VA party and another Flemish party.

It was seen as a "kamikaze" coalition that would not last long before crashing.

"But the tenacious Michel, a strong believer in compromise, managed to lead this team for more than four years, boasting of creating more than 230,000 jobs after a raft of economic reforms," *AFP* reported.

"The fragile coalition that included two other Flemish parties finally did collapse in December 2018 when the N-VA refused to back the UN migration pact in the run-up to elections. Michel has stayed on as a caretaker premier ever since."

Yet his fluency in English and Dutch, a rare attribute among Francophone Belgian politicians, as well as many other multicultural attributes may be just the right complement

to Ms. von der Leyen's agenda of unity for the continent.

At least in theory.

Foreign Policy

"Russia is an old enemy and a threat," Spain's Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said only months ago. He has also branded U.S. President Donald Trump's policy on Venezuela as "cowboy," and called EU foreign policy meetings a "valley of tears."

Now he is the face of relations between Europe and Russia, the U.S. and the rest of the world. Mr. Borrell, 72, was selected to become the spokesperson for the EU's foreign policy and negotiations with other nations.

The attack on Russia "caused embarrassment to Fernando Valderrama, the Spanish ambassador in Russia, who was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow to discuss the 'unfriendly' statement," *Euronews* reported.

Including fixing this, Mr. Borrell faces a daunting set of tasks as the EU's new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which he will take over from Federica Mogherini in November.

Financial Times listed five challenges the foreign policy chief faces in his new post:

■ Iran—"The EU is scrambling to save the landmark international nuclear accord with Tehran after the US pulled out and reimposed sanctions."

■ Balkans—"Tensions between Serbia and its former province Kosovo have been rising despite EU efforts to mediate."

■ Venezuela—"President Nicolas Maduro has hung on to power even though many EU countries have backed his rival Juan Guaido as interim leader."

■ China—"EU policy has grown notably more hawkish in areas ranging from digital security to market access for European companies."

■ U.S. relations—"President Donald Trump has at times been openly hostile to the EU and there have been transatlantic clashes over areas

ranging from trade to bloc joint military projects."

Though there is no speculation on how Mr. Borrell may specifically tackle these issues, his current approach may offer some clues: "He is vocal and not afraid of saying what he thinks," Antonio Barroso, deputy director of research at Teneo, stated to *Financial Times*. "Some people are really concerned that he is a free spirit and that he has such a candid approach in a position where you need diplomacy."

But with U.S. President Trump and Britain's Prime Minister Johnson leading the free world—of which the EU is a part—a candid approach may suit the times.

In what *Project Syndicate* labeled an "age of great-power politics," in which "great-power competition is shunting aside the international rules-based order," the EU has "an opportunity to relaunch its foreign policy" through Mr. Borrell.

Regenerating the Continent

History reveals that uniting 28 member nations—most having its own official language—and 508 million people (the world's third largest population behind China and India) is elusive. Can a group of leaders so diverse themselves help President von der Leyen's goal of a true United States of Europe?

During a visit with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris—her first visit to another country since being selected for office—Ms. von der Leyen expressed that she is "working for an ambitious Europe."

"You embody this new Europe," President Macron said. "Forty years after the first woman was elected president of the European Parliament, we now have the first woman to preside over the European Commission. It shows that Europe...wants to 'regenerate itself.'"

If the union—including each member nation's leaders and citizens—really does want to regenerate itself, prepare to see a continent in five years as unexpectedly different as the new team leading it. □

Congo's Ebola Outbreak Now GLOBAL EMERGENCY

AFTER FEELING sick for several days a man boarded a bus to eastern Congo's largest city. Only upon arrival at his destination did anyone suspect he had the highly deadly and infectious Ebola virus.

During his trip to Goma, the 46-year-old man managed to pass through three health checkpoints aimed at stopping those who are sick with Ebola and contagious.

Now health authorities along his route are trying to hunt down all those he may have been in contact with after the man became Goma's first confirmed Ebola case on July 14.

Somehow he was able to evade detection during the roadside health checkpoints, when all travelers get off the bus, wash their hands and have their temperature taken.

"During the checks, he did not seem to show signs of the disease. In addition, at each checkpoint he wrote different names and surnames on the lists of travelers, probably indicating his desire to hide his identity and state of health," Congo's health ministry said.

Containing the spread of Ebola in Goma is a crucial task. The city is home to more than two million people and the largest to confirm a case of the disease since the epidemic there began nearly a year ago.

"It's the door of this region to the rest of the world," said Dr. Harouna Djingarey, infectious disease program manager for the World Health

■ A health worker prepares a cleaning solution in Goma, a city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo where Ebola has spread (July 31, 2019).

PHOTO: PAMELA TULIZO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Organization's regional office in eastern Congo. "From here you can fly to everywhere in the world. If we don't have the control over the contacts, some high-risk contacts may fly, take a plane and go somewhere."

Health experts have long feared that the disease responsible for killing more than 1,800 people since August 2018 would eventually make its way to Goma, to the point of preemptively vaccinating more than 3,000 frontline health workers. Neighboring Rwanda also has taken measures to stop the disease from spreading across its border.

Goma is an important transit point for the region and beyond and a bustling trade hub drawing travelers from throughout Congo's east.

Speaking at a UN meeting in Geneva on the outbreak, Congo's minister of health, Dr. Oly Ilunga, called the spread of Ebola to the city "a warning."

The World Health Organization agreed and quickly labeled the outbreak an international health emergency, something it had declined to do on three previous occasions. This designation often brings greater international attention and aid, along with concerns that nervous governments might overreact with border closures.

This Ebola outbreak is now the second-deadliest in history. WHO has estimated "hundreds of millions" of dollars will be needed to stop the outbreak.

WHO and partners have also said the response has been hampered by a lack of resources, repeatedly citing a \$50 million gap in its Ebola containment plan.

"Unless there's a big scale-up in the [funding] response, we're unlikely to be successful in getting to zero cases," UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said.

Unlike Any Other

A disease outbreak is one thing. Yet it is unfolding in the turbulent part of northeastern Congo where dozens of rebel groups are active and wary communities had never experienced the disease before. Health workers have faced misinformation and even deadly attacks that have hampered the critical work of tracing contacts of infected people and deploying an experimental but effective Ebola vaccine.

The WHO's declaration quickly led to fears among some Congolese authorities and residents that governments might close borders or take other measures that could hurt the local economy.

One Congolese, 25-year-old Clovis Mutsuva, told *The Associated Press* that while the declaration might bring in needed funds to help contain the outbreak, any border closures would make locals "more unhappy." A lot of key local merchandise such as fuel comes from Kenya and neighboring Uganda, Mr. Mutsuva said.

"This scares us because Goma risks becoming isolated from the rest of the world," added Katembo Kabunga as some people in the city received vaccinations.

June saw the first confirmed cases in Uganda and a case just 43 miles from the border with South Sudan, where a recently ended civil war badly weakened the health system.

Some aid groups say they hope the declaration will spark a radical shift in Ebola response efforts to help address community resistance. The medical charity Doctors Without Borders said the outbreak is still not under control.

This is the fifth such declaration in history. Previous emergencies were declared for the devastating 2014-16





Ebola outbreak in West Africa that killed more than 11,000 people, the emergence of Zika in the Americas, the swine flu pandemic and polio.

WHO defines a global emergency as an “extraordinary event” that constitutes a risk to other countries and requires a coordinated international response. WHO was heavily criticized for its sluggish response to the West Africa outbreak, which it repeatedly declined to declare a global emergency until the virus was spreading explosively in three countries and nearly 1,000 people were dead.

As the global community springs more fully into action, those in the DRC are doing what they can to survive.

“God help us if Ebola is now in Goma,” said Baudouine Rudahigwa, 30. “My children are now on alert that they can’t greet or play with others. They are washing their hands all the time.” □

■ Top left, workers bury the remains of an Ebola victim who was an Islamic scholar who had prayed over those who were sick in Beni, DRC (July 14, 2019). Top middle, travelers are screened at an international airport in Nairobi, Kenya (June 17, 2019). Bottom left, a girl receives the Ebola vaccine in Beni, DRC (July 13, 2019). Bottom right, health workers treat an unconfirmed Ebola patient in Butembo, DRC (Nov. 3, 2018).

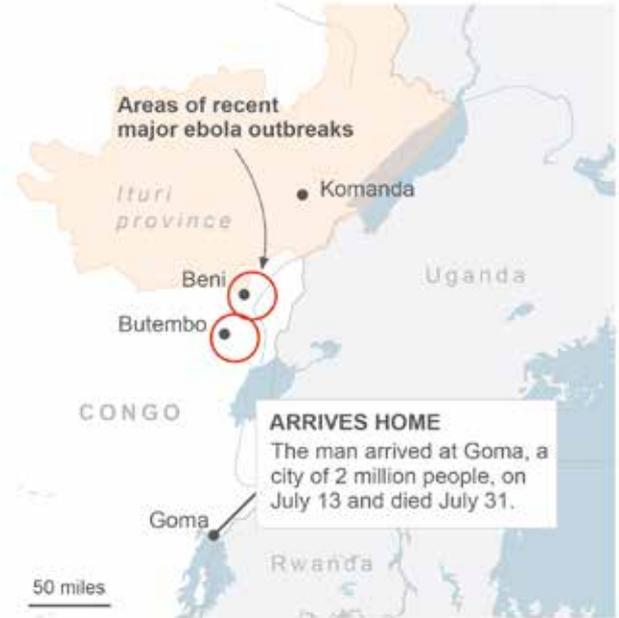
PHOTOS: AP/JEROME DELAY (TOP LEFT, BOTTOM LEFT); SIMON MAINA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (TOP MIDDLE); JOHN WESSELS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM RIGHT)





Tracing Route of Second Ebola Case in Goma

Officials said a man leaving a mining site in Ituri province in Congo may have contracted the Ebola virus anywhere between Komanda and Goma during his travels home.



Source: World Health Organization
Graphic: Phil Holm/AP



IRAN'S WAR

with the West Has Already Begun



Amid fears of a direct military confrontation between Tehran and Washington, a different conflict has already begun inside the Middle East country.

SINCE THE United States withdrew from the nuclear accord between Iran and global powers in 2018, tensions in the Middle East have hit boiling points.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani stated the nation will enrich uranium to "any amount we want" and has since exceeded the limits of low-enriched uranium as set forth in the deal, according to the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency. Experts warn that higher enrichment and a growing stockpile narrow the one-year window Iran would need to have enough material for an atomic weapon.

The Trump administration also said it had detected increased Iranian preparations for possible attacks on U.S. forces and interests in the Persian Gulf area.

With Iranian military threats in mind, including what Washington claimed were Iranian attacks on Saudi oil tankers, the United States is sending armed forces to a Saudi air base.

Britain, too, announced plans to develop and deploy a Europe-led "maritime protection mission" to safeguard shipping in the vital Strait of Hormuz, the key waterway through which one-third of all oil traded by sea passes, in light of Iran's prior seizure of a British-flagged tanker in the waterway in July.

For its part, Iran denies that it wants nuclear weapons and claims no wrongdoing in the Persian Gulf. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the UK oil tanker that it seized was in violation of "international law on safe passage" in the Strait of Hormuz on the day it was captured. He said the British ship had "turned off its signaling" for longer than is allowed and "was passing through the wrong channels."

Iran also announced the arrest of 17 Iranians accused of spying on the country's nuclear and military sites for the CIA and said some of them have been sentenced to death. President Donald Trump completely disagreed.

"That's totally a false story. That's another lie," Mr. Trump said at the White House.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a former CIA director, said: "The Iranian regime has a long history of lying."

"I think everyone should take with a grain of salt everything that the Islamic Republic of Iran asserts today," he said.

The back-and-forth accusations has those in the West fearing it could develop into an actual war in the Mideast, one that would have global consequences.

But underneath the veil of suspicion between the nation's governments, few realize the battle already going on between Iran's hardline govern-



ment and its increasingly Westernized populace.

Growing Disillusionment

To anyone visiting Tehran, Iran's capital of nearly 9 million people, the paradoxes are quickly apparent.

Girls wearing hijabs roller skate alongside T-shirted boys skateboarding at an outdoor park built by the government.

Men at a political rally shout a refrain of anti-American chants while elsewhere in the city Iranians peruse a Calvin Klein clothing outlet at a mall laden with escalators and fast-food joints.

On the side of a high-rise, an American flag is depicted with bombs instead of stripes and skulls in place of stars, with the words "Down with the U.S.A." printed over it. Meanwhile, teenagers walk around wearing baseball caps with normal U.S. flags.



In the deeply conservative country, where cultural expression remains tightly controlled by strict rules imposed after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, disillusioned youth are challenging societal norms as they lose sight of the ultra-conservative mentality of the older generation.

"Iran recently observed the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, but few Iranians beyond the regime's elites celebrated it," Brian Hook, the U.S. Special Representative for Iran and a senior advisor to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, wrote in *The New York Times*. "The reason for this lack of enthusiasm among ordinary Iranians is no mystery. By any reasonable mea-

sure, the revolution has failed to deliver the just and prosperous society that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and other revolutionary leaders promised the Iranian people in 1979."

Iran's population is aging rapidly as many young people have held off on starting families because of high unemployment. The United Nations expects the median age to rise from 27 to 40 by 2030 as a result.

"These days, Iran's ruling theocracy is best known for oppression, corruption and mismanagement at home, and ghastly sectarian warfare abroad," Mr. Hook continued. "Through its Shiite

Please see IRAN, page 30

■ Opposite page, a ship of Iran's Revolutionary Guard points its gun toward the British-flagged oil tanker *Stena Impero*, which was seized in the Strait of Hormuz (July 21, 2019). Top, Iranian musicians play in the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at Unity Hall (July 3, 2019). Bottom, young girls walk in front of a mural showing the Iranian flag in Tehran (April 23, 2019).

PHOTOS: MORTEZA AKHOONDI/TASNIM NEWS AGENCY VIA AP (OPPOSITE PAGE); AP PHOTO/VAHID SALEMI (TOP); ATTA KENARE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM)

TIMOTHY BUCHANAN says he never consults clergy about important decisions, but it is not for lack of faith. He regularly attends a nondenominational Christian church near his home.

Mr. Buchanan, 41, is not alone. A large majority of Americans make important decisions without calling on religious leaders for advice, according to a recent survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The poll found three-quarters of American adults rarely or never consult a clergy member or religious leader, while only about a quarter do so at least some of the time.

“The church we go to is quite large, and we’re relatively new there,” said Mr. Buchanan, who lives with his wife in North Carolina. “We really haven’t established a relationship with a minister there. Going to larger churches, it’s nearly impossible now to get a relationship with a clergyman or woman.”

The lack of personal connection with ministers even includes people who identify with a specific religious faith, though those most engaged with their religion are more likely to have relationships with clergy.

And while the poll found a majority of Americans still identify with a specific faith, about half overall say they want religious leaders to have little influence in their lives.

Jo King said she rarely consults with clergy members but would be moderately likely to talk to one of them about marriage, divorce or relationship issues. While she does not feel the need to regularly meet one-on-one with priests, she regularly attends services and says religion has always been “very important to me.”

“I used to consult periodically with them...when I was younger, but I rarely consult with anybody. I kind of live my life my way,” said Ms. King, 72, a Catholic from Ohio.

When Did You Last Counsel with Your Minister?

Why so many in organized religion no longer seek spiritual and personal guidance from their leaders.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

This poll exposes mainstream Christianity’s latest reality: many of its sheep no longer look to their shepherds for guidance.

“Religion has finally caught up with the times we live in,” some may point out.

That last statement carries more meaning than you may have ever considered. The arrival of counsel-free religion means we have landed on a historical turning point against which, ironically, Christians have been counseled before.

Early Counselors

Pastors were known as active counselors since America’s early history. Author E. Brooks Holifield wrote in *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America (Pulpit & Pew)*: “For the first 150 years of the colonial period, they had significant authority both in the local cultures of the villages and towns and in the broader realms of authorship, education, and institutional leadership.”

Contrasting that time with today, he adds: “Newspapers no longer print their Sunday sermons, as they often did as recently as the late nineteenth century. The laity no longer depend on their advice about mundane matters in precisely the same way that Catholic immigrant laborers and their families in the 1890s sometimes depended on the priest for cultural knowledge, financial counsel, and access to jobs. On many matters, clergy appear to have ceded jurisdiction to physicians and psychiatrists, social workers and sociologists, scientists and the gurus of technology.”

Now all these specialists abound. Back in the day, they were few and far between, if any. The local minister was the physician, the psychiatrist, the social worker, the sociologist and the scientist. Pastors needed to possess general knowledge of a wide variety of subjects to be able to help people in need.

Even formal education in the early days was administered by religious organizations.

“The landscape of higher education in North America first began to take shape at the start of the colonial period as religious communities and individual religious leaders realized the need to bring Western education to what was for them a newly discovered land,” *Encyclopedia of Education* states.

“The motivation for the education varied. Some communities began schools as a means for training religious leaders. The first college, founded in Massachusetts Bay Colony, was Harvard. Evolving from a Puritan tradition now incorporated into the United Church of Christ, Harvard published a brochure in 1643, explaining the college’s purpose as ‘to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches.’”

In those days, ministers were known to be a reliable resource of general wisdom to parishioners.

Diminished Role

As education became more available and secularized, the scope of religious leaders as general counselors diminished. According to *Encyclopedia of Education*, by 1881, “80 percent of the colleges in the United States were church related and private,” and by 2001, “20 percent of the colleges—approximately 980 institutions—had connection to a religious tradition.”

With more secular experts available and religion being less influential in society, counseling with a minister is no longer in demand. The current tendency to opt for *never* seeking counsel from clergy is unique to our time.

Various factors have contributed. Experts say the clergy sex abuse crisis confronting the Roman Catholic Church could be reducing parishioners’ trust in priests. A Pew Research Center survey found that about a quarter of U.S. Catholics said the scandal had led them to reduce their Mass attendance and their donations to the church. Some bishops have acknowledged that many Catholics are distancing themselves from the church because of the furor.

There has also been a steep rise over the past several decades in the share of Americans not identifying with a religion. A Gallup poll in 2018 shows 20 percent of Americans said they have no religion, up from only 2 percent in 1955.

At the same time, more Americans are describing religion as unimportant in their lives, and church membership and service attendance have declined. Gallup shows only one-third attended religious services within the past week, while about half did so in the mid-1950s. Among Catholics, attendance figures were roughly 40 percent in 2018, down from 75 percent in 1955.

Agreeing to Disagree

Another reason for a decline in counsel is a widening rift between clergy and churchgoers on controversial issues.

“Another reason for a decline in counsel is a widening rift between clergy and churchgoers on controversial issues.”

Americans’ age, education level and religious affiliation matter greatly when it comes to their opinions on a prospective clergy member’s sexual orientation, gender, marital status or views on social issues such as same-sex marriage or abortion.

The survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that, among all Americans who identify with a specific religion, about 8 in 10 say their faith should allow women and divorced people to be clergy members and just over half say the same about homosexual men.

Here are some of the poll’s findings:

Accepting homosexual clergy: 44 percent of Americans ages 60 or over who affiliate with a religion think their faith should allow a homosexual man to become a clergy member, compared with 54 percent of those ages 45 through 59 and nearly two-thirds of those under age 45.

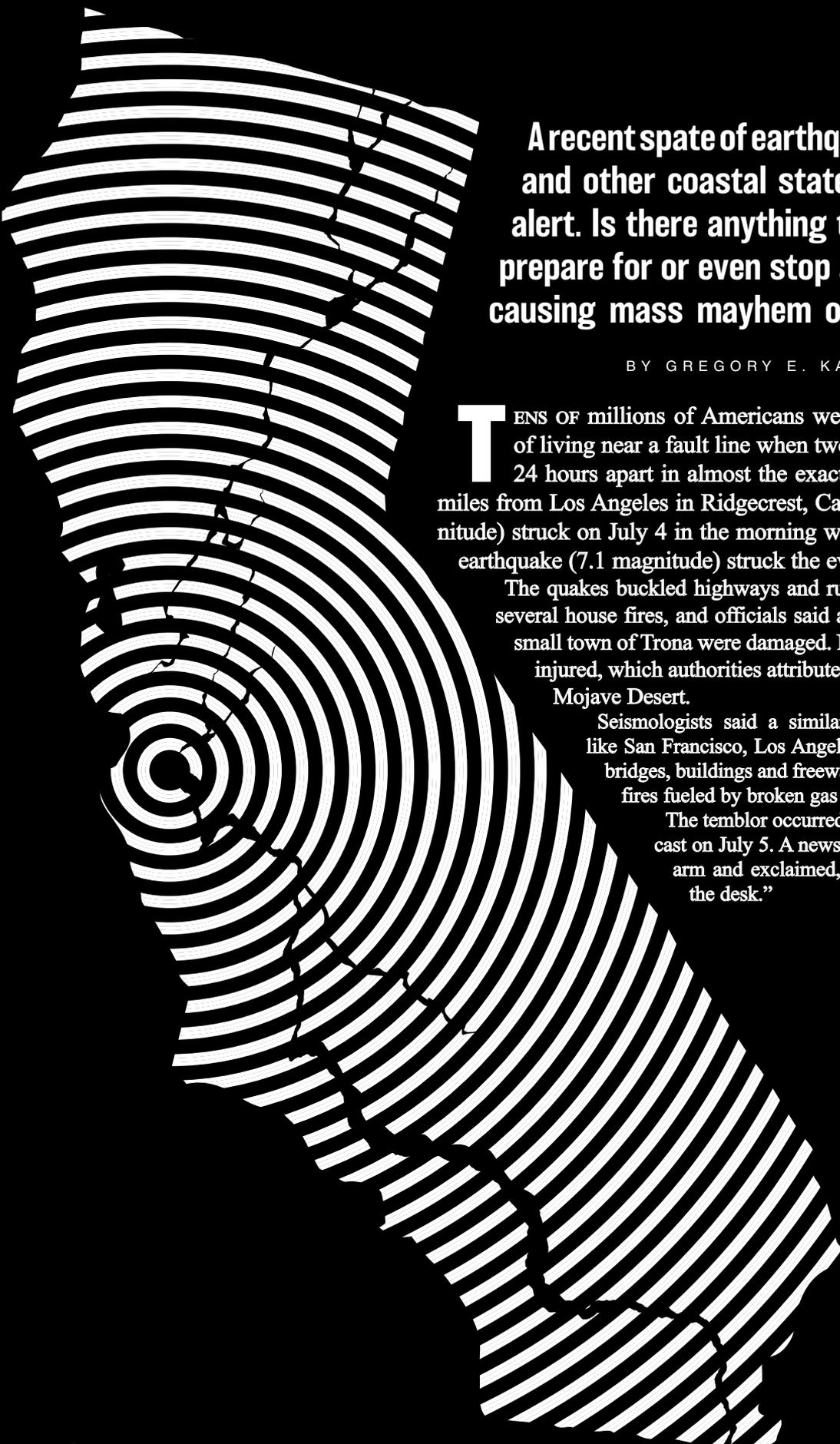
Ordination of women and divorcees: At least three-quarters of evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics think a woman should be able to become a clergy member in their respective faiths. Majorities across religious groups think someone who is divorced should be able to be ordained. Catholics, however, are slightly less likely than Protestants to find it acceptable.

Supporting social views of clergy: About half of Americans identifying with a religion say their faith should allow clergy members who believe that abortion should be legal, that homosexual men and women should be allowed to marry or that sex before marriage is morally acceptable. Religious Americans ages 60 or older are less likely than those younger to think clergy in their faith can include someone who believes sex before marriage is morally acceptable, 43 percent versus 59 percent, or someone who believes same-sex marriage should be legal, 38 percent versus 60 percent. Thirty-five percent of older religious Americans support their faith ordaining someone who thinks abortion should be legal, compared with 54 percent of those younger. Majorities of those who attend church monthly or less often think their faith should allow clergy members who believe that abortion should be legal, that same-sex marriage should be legal or that sex before marriage should be accepted. About a third of those who attend religious services at least twice a month think the same.

Self-service

But it is not all distrust that is fueling the separation between pastor and

*Please see **MINISTER**, page 28*



A recent spate of earthquakes has California and other coastal state residents on high alert. Is there anything that can be done to prepare for or even stop a mega-quake from causing mass mayhem on the West Coast?

BY GREGORY E. KAIDANNEK

TENS OF millions of Americans were reminded of the dangers of living near a fault line when two earthquakes struck around 24 hours apart in almost the exact same location—about 150 miles from Los Angeles in Ridgecrest, California. The first (6.4 magnitude) struck on July 4 in the morning while the second, even larger earthquake (7.1 magnitude) struck the evening of July 5.

The quakes buckled highways and ruptured gas lines that sparked several house fires, and officials said about 50 homes in the nearby small town of Trona were damaged. No one was killed or seriously injured, which authorities attributed to the remote location in the Mojave Desert.

Seismologists said a similar-sized quake in a major city like San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Diego could collapse bridges, buildings and freeways, as well as spark devastating fires fueled by broken gas lines.

The temblor occurred during a live *CBS News* broadcast on July 5. A news anchor grabbed her colleague's arm and exclaimed, "I think we need to get under the desk."

**GETT
TH**

A video clip from a nearby restaurant in Coachella captured hanging lights swaying violently like swings at a park.

A man living in Ridgecrest posted a video to the internet of his apartment living room rattling like popcorn. The television jumped off its mounts and a cat lept out of a room.

Pictures of the twin earthquake's aftermath filled social media feeds: Liquor store aisles littered with wine bottles, roads with significant cracks, and rooftops burning.

But these are not the biggest concerns among those who have experienced earthquakes before.

"When you see a place that suffers two huge earthquakes back-to-back like that, I always think what's next?" said Laura Sampson of Palmer, Alaska. "It absolutely makes me think of worrying about what comes next and if I'm prepared."

Mrs. Sampson was at home in her community northeast of Anchorage last November when a magnitude 7.0 earthquake shook the area.

Californians live with the daily threat of seismic activity. According to the United States Geological Survey, Southern California experiences over 10,000 quakes each year—most of which cannot be felt. However, 15-20 of these temblors are greater than 4.0 in magnitude and *can* be felt. This means that residents should expect to feel at least one per month.

"We're going to have a magnitude 6, on average, somewhere in Southern California every few years. We've actually gone 20 years without one, so we have had the quietest 20 years in the history of Southern California," said seismologist Lucy Jones of the California Institute of Technology.

"That's unlikely to continue on the long run," she added. "Geology keeps on moving...and we should be expecting a higher rate. And when it happens near people, it is going to be a lot worse."

What Is the "Big One"?

Articles permeated the biggest news outlets almost immediately after the recent California quakes, from "California Earthquake Is a Reminder that the Big One Lurks" to "How to make your own emergency kit before the Big One hits."

For most, the term evokes images of Hollywood doomsday movies such as *San Andreas*. It would be a quake so massive that would leave the western half of the state plunging into the ocean.

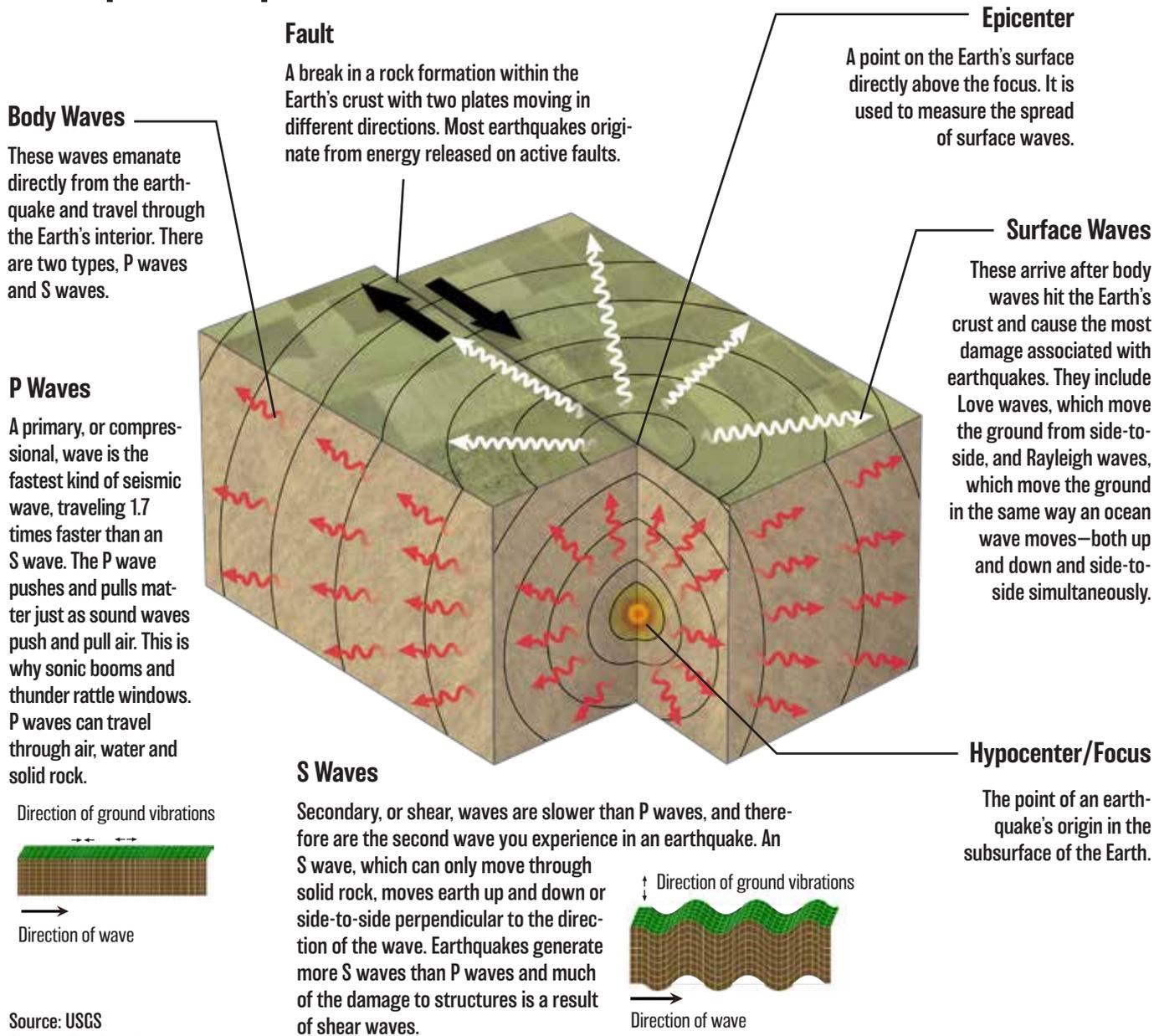
The reality is not *quite* that devastating, but it is certainly no small disaster. According to the USGS, the "Big One" refers to an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude or greater on the southern San Andreas fault. This may not seem much more than the 7.1-magnitude California quake, but the intensity of quakes increases exponentially on the moment magnitude scale. For example, a 7.8 would be 11 times more powerful than the Ridgecrest quake.

The USGS conducted a simulation of such a temblor hitting the southern San Andreas fault at 9:00 a.m. These were the results:

- 1,800 deaths
- 1,600 fires ignited, most of them large
- 750 people trapped inside buildings with complete collapse
- 270,000 people immediately displaced from their homes
- 50,000 people needing emergency care
- Search and rescue efforts would last for nearly three weeks
- \$213 billion in economic losses

ING READY FOR E 'BIG ONE'

Earthquakes Explained



Source: USGS
Graphic: The Real Truth

Getting Ready

The head of California's Earthquake Authority, Glen Pomeroy, stated that recent events are "an important reminder that all of California is earthquake country."

California Governor Gavin Newsom said in a news conference after the back-to-back earthquakes, "We all, I think, have a unique role and responsibility to bear—individually—to be prepared for the next earthquake of magnitude even greater than 7.1."

"It is a wake-up call for the rest of the state and other parts of the nation, frankly," Mr. Newsom said.

For many Californians, the wake-up call meant recalling lessons from previous quakes and being ready for survival.

The July 4 and 5 earthquakes were felt throughout the region, and for Los Angeles residents old enough they brought memories of the 1994 Northridge 6.7-magnitude earthquake that killed 61 people and caused \$15 billion in damage.

Greg Messigian of Los Angeles recalled how that quake damaged his San Fernando Valley home: "We had brick walls around the perimeter that had fallen down. We had cracks in the pool. Inside the house everything that we ever had on a shelf was broken. Television sets fell off the places where they were and cracked."

The recent quakes spurred Mr. Messigian to action. On July 7, he began going over his preparedness kit, making sure he had everything he would need for the next quake.



■ People survey the rubble of collapsed buildings after an earthquake and fire in San Francisco, California (1906).

PHOTO: HISTORIC PHOTO ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Among the contents: Enough water to last a week, extra shoes and clothes, blankets, flashlights, batteries, food, a cellphone charger and food for the family dog. On top of that, he has an escape route planned and keeps one car parked in the garage and another in the driveway—in case the garage collapses.

On a national scale, however, emergency preparedness is much more complex.

Several technologies exist or are being developed that can help detect earthquakes as they happen. The USGS is currently running pilot programs to issue cellphone Amber Alerts and announced the system was ready to be used more widely in October 2018. Currently, Los Angeles is the only city to have a mass public alert application called ShakeAlertLA. The system detects that an earthquake is occurring (through seismometers), rapidly calculates expected intensity levels and sends out alerts that give warnings ranging from several seconds to even a minute before potential damage strikes.

Yet the system is relatively new and admits on its website that it “might send warnings for earthquakes too small to cause damage or when there is no earthquake at all. Also, the system could fail to send warnings or send them too late to be acted upon.”

In addition, “It is also important to note that large earthquakes are not instantaneous. A fault takes time to rupture and ShakeAlert can’t predict how big an earthquake will become.”

The ShakeAlert system is only 50 percent complete as of January 2019 and current mass notification technology needs to be updated to deliver the alerts quickly.

New research in Iceland suggests scientists can use existing fiberoptic communications cable to assess seismic activity. In tests, a laser pulse sent down a single fiber of cable was sufficient to determine whether there were any disturbances along its length. When both the ground and cable was stretched or compressed, the team was able to record it. Dr. Jousset, one of the lead researchers, stated, “It’s almost as good as a seismometer.”

This system could prove to be much less expensive than current seismometer-based technology and already has the necessary equipment installed all

over the world. However, it is not yet developed for immediate widespread use.

The USGS stated on its website: “Neither the USGS nor any other scientists have ever predicted a major earthquake. We do not know how, and we do not expect to know how any time in the foreseeable future. USGS scientists can only calculate the probability that a significant earthquake will occur in a specific area within a certain number of years.”

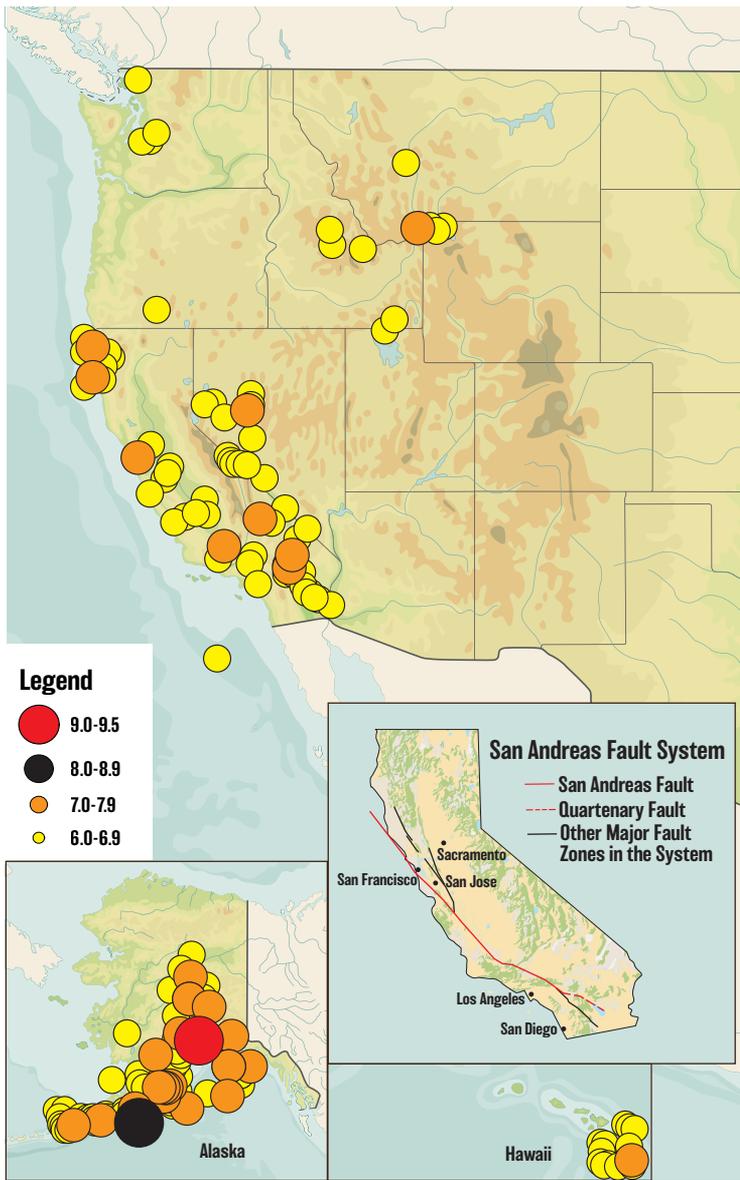
Outside of calculating probabilities from empirical data and real time warning during a seismic event, geologists, seismologists and geophysicists cannot directly predict or prevent against impending disaster.

Viewing Recent Events

Over millennia, many have perceived their narrow escape from earthquakes or similar situations as a wake-up call from a higher power. Others simply view their occurrence as time and chance.

Even 113 years after a 7.9-magnitude earthquake struck San Francisco in 1906, the devastation and damage stands as a stark reminder of what geologic forces in California have to offer.

United States Earthquakes from 1900-2019



This map shows earthquakes recorded by the USGS and contributing agencies. It is not a comprehensive list of all earthquake events in the U.S.

Source: USGS
Graphic: The Real Truth/Sarah O. Vidal

“That second upheaval was heart-rending,” Fred J. Hewitt wrote in “Wreck of City’s Buildings Awful” in the *San Francisco Examiner*, April 20, 1906. “It made me think of the loved ones in different portions of the country. It turned my stomach, gave me a heart-ache that I will never forget and caused

me to sink upon my knees and pray to the Almighty God that me and mine should escape the awful fate I knew was coming to so many thousands.”

Another eyewitness recounted: “Remaining in bed—it can hardly be said ‘quietly,’ with all the throbbing of the house—until the shock had

passed, wondering and commenting on what was happening outside and how it was affecting the tall buildings down town, and whether it might bind our doors so that we could not get out of our room, all the time with a calming subconsciousness of the good Providence of Almighty God

EARTHQUAKE FACTS:

- The largest recorded earthquake in the United States was a magnitude 9.2 that struck Prince William Sound, Alaska, on March 28, 1964. The largest recorded in the world was a magnitude 9.5 in Chile on May 22, 1960.
- The earliest reported earthquake in California was in 1769 by a group of explorers camping 30 miles southeast of Los Angeles.
- The “Ring of Fire,” also called the Circum-Pacific belt, is a line prone to seismic activity surrounding the Pacific Ocean. About 90 percent of the world’s earthquakes occur on the ring. The second-most seismic region is the Alpide belt, which extends from Spain to northern India. It accounts for 5-6 percent of quakes.
- There are an estimated 500,000 detectable earthquakes in the world each year. One-hundred thousand of them can be felt, and 100 cause damage.
- Each year, Southern California experiences about 10,000 earthquakes, most of them not felt. Only several hundred are greater than magnitude 3.0, and only about 15-20 are greater than magnitude 4.0.
- From 1975-1995, only four states—Florida, Iowa, North Dakota, and Wisconsin—did not have any earthquakes.
- Alaska is the most earthquake-prone state and one of the most seismically active regions in the world. It experiences a magnitude 7 temblor almost every year, and a magnitude 8 or greater earthquake on average every 14 years.
- The world’s deadliest recorded earthquake occurred in central China in 1556. It struck a region where most people lived in caves carved from soft rock. These dwellings collapsed during the earthquake, killing an estimated 830,000 people.

WHAT IS THE SAN ANDREAS FAULT SYSTEM?

- A network of faults including the San Andreas fault zone as the principal element.
- Major elements of the San Andreas fault system include the Bartlett Springs, Maacama, Rodgers Creek, Green Valley, Calaveras, Hayward, San Gregorio, San Jacinto, Elsinore and Imperial fault zones.
- The San Andreas fault is not a single, continuous fault, but rather a fault zone made up of many segments. Movement may occur along any of the fault segments in the zone at any time.
- The fault zone is a major strike-slip zone that is 800 miles long and up to 10 miles deep.
- The average rate of motion across the San Andreas fault zone during the past 3 million years is two inches per year. This is about the same rate at which human fingernails grow. At this speed, scientists project that Los Angeles and San Francisco will be in adjacent positions in approximately 15 million years.



■ Left, food litters the floor of an aisle at a grocery store following an earthquake in Ridgecrest, California (July 5, 2019). Right, firefighters battle an electrical fire in a mobile home park in Ridgecrest following the earthquake the previous day (July 6, 2019).

PHOTOS: CHAD MAYES/AP (LEFT); ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)

as our ‘Refuge, though the earth be moved.’”

This man paraphrased Psalm 46, “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed...” (vs. 2).

Realizing their futility against the cataclysmic forces in nature, people are moved to seek a higher power.

This is not new. The Bible records several accounts of earthquakes—small and great—used to get people’s attention.

The prophet Elijah was prepared to hear God’s voice by a strong wind, an earthquake and fire (1 Kgs. 19:11-14).

When ancient Israel was in the wilderness, God used an earthquake to stop a rebellion: “as he [Moses] had made an end of speaking all these words, that *the ground clave asunder* that was under them: and the *earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up*, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the *earth closed upon them*: and they perished from among the congregation” (Num. 16:31-33).

After Jesus Christ died, God sent a powerful earthquake that stirred those observing: “Now when the centurion,

and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake...they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54).

None of these events were coincidence or “geology moving on.” They were all specific events that a Supreme Being used to fulfill His purpose—waking people up to present reality. They reveal God’s pattern for working with humanity, a pattern that His Word indicates will be used again.

The Bible speaks about events when God will again use earthquakes to get a message across and capture attention. Read Matthew 24:7, Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11.

The prophet Haggai recorded: “For thus says the LORD of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land” (2:6). Isaiah, another prophet, added to this by describing how this earthquake will affect the planet’s entire topography (Isa. 40:4).

This will be an earthquake the likes of which the Earth has NEVER seen.

A Choice

Billions of people are wholly unprepared for an event of such magnitude,

partly because most dismiss that it is even possible. The USGS website, when answering “Can ‘MegaQuakes’ really happen?” states: “No, earthquakes of magnitude 10 or larger cannot happen. The magnitude of an earthquake is related to the length of the fault on which it occurs. That is, the longer the fault, the larger the earthquake. A fault is a break in the rocks that make up the Earth’s crust, along which rocks on either side have moved past each other. No fault long enough to generate a magnitude 10 earthquake is known to exist, and if it did, it would extend around most of the planet.”

Of course, looking at physical properties alone, this is logical. So what proof do you have to believe in the words of a seemingly archaic book?

You do not have to take chances on whether a “Big One” is coming. You can prove God’s existence and that the Bible is His Word—and in doing so turn to Him for protection.

Our book *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* (which can be read for free at rcg.org/bacibp) will provide the facts you need to trust God at His Word, and to escape what is coming! □

Redefining Sex

Experts have noted a steep decline in sexual intercourse over recent years. What does this trend reveal about society?

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

“BE FRUITFUL, and multiply.” Many recognize this expression from the Bible, which has remarkably much to say about sex. The timing of this command is just as revealing. It was said when people were fewest in number.

The first two human beings heard it in the Garden of Eden and, much later, so did the eight survivors of the Flood after they walked off Noah’s ark.

God’s instructions were purposeful and clear. Male and female should have intercourse to increase exponentially and ensure mankind’s existence.

Scripture just revealed an important purpose for sex: God wanted a world with lots of inhabitants, which thousands of years later Earth’s 7.7 billion progeny makes clear.

But this staggering number of people conceals something troublesome. Men and women are not copulating anymore. At least not as much. And what has demographers most on edge is the younger generation choosing celibacy.

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at the beginning of the 21st century, 73 percent of adults between 18 and 30 in the United

States were sexually intimate twice a month. This plummeted to 66 percent by 2016. Birthrates also continue to decline. The CDC reported that the number of births in the U.S. dropped another 2 percent between 2016 and 2017 to 60.2 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44. The birthrate decline generally began with the Great Recession of 2008 and has never recovered. This resulted in 2018 having the nation’s lowest number of births in 32 years.

This trend is not solely related to people having less sex, but it is clearly related.

Anthropologist Helen Fisher, who works for the dating site Match.com, readily admitted, “The data is that people are having less sex.” She was quoted in a comprehensive article in *The Atlantic* magazine in early 2019 on the decline of sex.

“I’m a Baby Boomer, and apparently in my day we were having a lot more sex than they are today!” A survey conducted by Match.com has been gathering statistics on people’s sex lives for eight years. “Every year the whole Match company is rather staggered at how little sex Americans are having—including the Millennials.”

People having less sex is not all bad, especially when including those who are too young and unmarried. The Bible speaks to both these subjects as well.



Yet it is the changing *view* of sex that is most alarming. Fewer young people having sex today could be an early indicator of future generations rejecting physical intimacy altogether. A decline in human offspring would be the natural result.

With famine, disease, war and suffering practically unavoidable in this world, a strong case could be made that fewer mouths to feed, bodies to heal, and people to oppress is a positive outcome to more people having less sex. This sex recession, as some are now calling it, does mean fewer miscarriages, abortions, birth defects and STDs.

Those who believe the Bible's authority must follow God's command to procreate and populate the Earth. Did God overlook other elements of sex and sexuality?

Substituting Intimacy

All sorts of reasons have been posited for the drop in sexual activity: people marrying at later ages, more women in the workforce, less time for personal relationships, Millennials living with their parents at later ages, sex education and the resulting prevalence of abstinence, and even people recognizing the perils of hookup culture.

Yet others are substituting traditional intercourse with other means of sexual gratification. Until fairly recently, most of these were seen as fringe and disreputable.

Pornography is now mainstream. Called "prostitution for mass consumption," its pervasiveness on the internet and social media prove it has reached a level of normalcy particularly with a generation who have never known a time before the internet.

Check the numbers. At least 30 percent of all data transferred across the internet is porn-related, according to *HuffPost*. More than two-thirds of youth ages 13-24 actively seek out pornography on a weekly basis, if not more often. A reported 87 percent of college-age men and 31 percent of college-age women admit to actively using pornography.

Pornographic images shape the attitudes, beliefs and eventually behaviors of its users. Like a drug, viewing it directs the release of chemicals in the brain tied to dependency. Its ease of access means millions of people are "overdosing" daily on virtual sex and abandoning the conventional—and real—kind.

Because large elements of society doggedly maintain the innocence of viewing pornography, such inordinate cravings are written off as meaningless. But it is clearly not harmless.

Many experts, even outside old-fashioned and religious circles, are admitting that pornography use is problematic. Its proliferation is directly tied to decreased sexual satisfaction, warped views of intercourse, loneliness and divorce. Pornography stretches the limits of human imagination to a point where a live partner cannot match augmented reality.

The result? Sexual satisfaction is pushed into dark places. Once no longer connected to intimacy, unleashed sexual cravings give rise to odd behaviors and fetishes. These include child pornography, bestiality, sex with robots and other manmade devices, human trafficking, prostitution and rape.

Yet the core problem of separating intimacy from sex can be harder to see and admit because the vast majority only draw the line at outlandish criminal behavior.

New Definition

Physiologically speaking, not much is required for a sexual experience beside visual and physical stimuli. Both these are available between husband and wife—yet more and more pursue other means.

Myriad alternatives have reduced sex to a solo endeavor. A loving, committed relationship is not a requirement for the pinnacle of pleasure. And we are at the point where neither is another human being. Gone are the days when individuals merely sought other *individuals* for spousal relations outside holy matrimony. Now, all options are on the table.

A more accurate way to view the statistic of "fewer people having sex" is *fewer people are having intercourse with other people*. People are still experiencing "sex," just by themselves.

In the Bible, a long list of descriptors was attached to a period called "the last days." As you read the list, try to honestly conclude it is not a glimpse of modern society: "This know also, that *in the last days* perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded [conceited], lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (II Tim. 3:1-4).

Three descriptors on this list of malevolent traits should jump off the page in relation to a decrease in sex. Can you spot them?

What better way to describe a person seeking to replace sexual relations with another human being than being a "lover of self." You can throw in being "without natural affection" and a "lover of pleasures more than a lover of God," who created and defined reproduction in the first place.

All three behaviors, and really the entire list, point to a common trait—selfishness. Self-centeredness is the reason mankind is distancing itself from the original purpose for sex.

Why Sex?

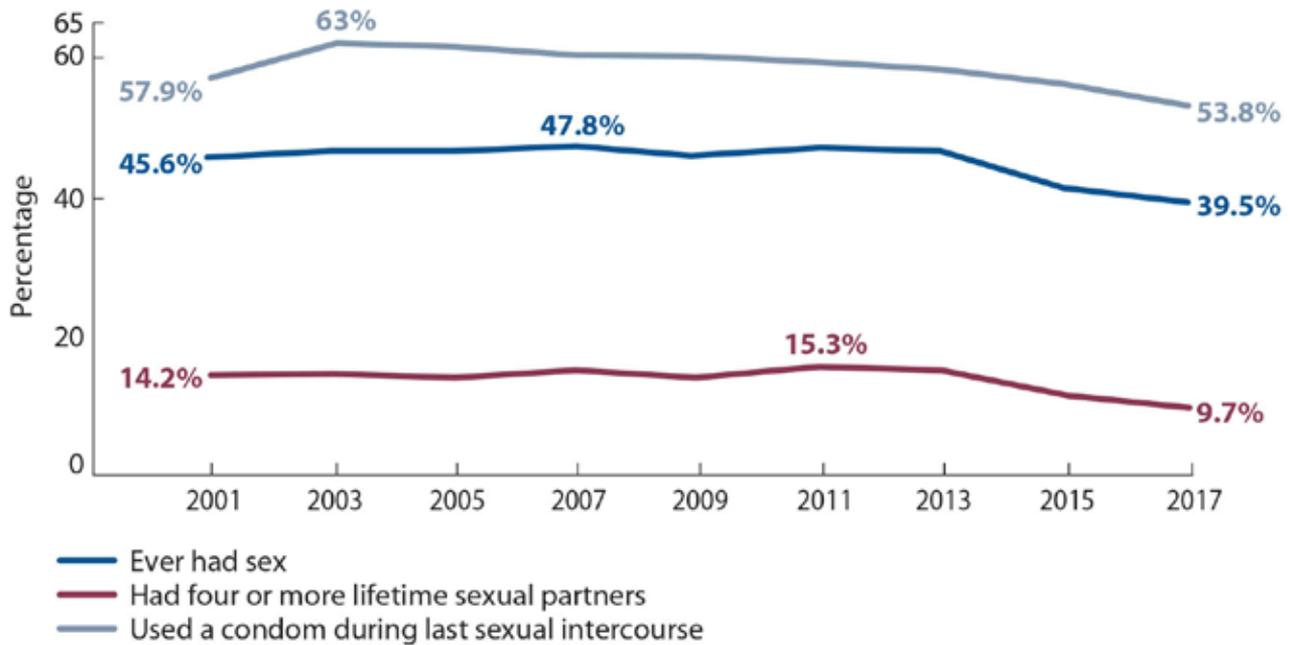
God did not say "have sex and enjoy it." On the contrary, His command to "be fruitful and multiply" appears to narrow the purpose of sex to simply having children.

Yet sex is undoubtedly enjoyable. Are the purposes of human reproduction and enjoyment completely unrelated? And if sex can be expanded beyond reproduction, are there any other God-ordained purposes for it?

Comparing human beings to their animal counterparts reveals more on the subject.

Both human beings and animals are similar in that male and female come

Sexual Trends Among U.S. High School Students (2001-2017)



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

together for reproduction. Animals, in essence, were to also be fruitful and multiply. However, the impetus for doing so is built on two fundamentally different premises. Sex in the animal world is *entirely* about reproduction and is built completely on instinct.

Animals come together when the female is in estrus or “in heat”—an instinctive mode during which the female attracts the male counterpart. Outside these precise times, animal sex organs are generally dormant. For perspective, a female dog is only in heat twice per year (with some variation based on the breed).

Human beings are different. One distinction is that women can become pregnant year-around (outside brief periods related to ovulation). Also, women are capable of sex at all times, not just when “in heat.”

Understanding these characteristics shows that procreation is only *one* important purpose of sex

for humans—not its sole purpose. Pleasure is an additional and equally important outcome.

Human beings were mentally and anatomically designed to enjoy sex. This part is not surprising. In fact, this distinction drives many of the selfish approaches people take to sex in today’s society.

What is less understood is that the enjoyment that accompanies sex is reciprocal—not one-sided. A one-sided enjoyment of sex is incomplete. The experience is maximized when it is part of a committed, meaningful relationship.

This is where being fruitful and multiplying comes back into focus.

Just as it takes two human beings to have a child, intercourse was meant to be shared with another person and in a committed marriage relationship. This, of course, is the ideal environment in which to care for a child that comes as a result. In all cases, sex was meant for two.

And not just for two people to *seek* enjoyment. It is a unique opportunity to *give* enjoyment—the greater purpose of intercourse. This is the exact opposite of how most view it. When people seek to please themselves, as is the norm in today’s society, human companionship is temporary and increasingly optional.

Understand the true purpose of sex. It requires another person and is a show of outgoing concern. It strengthens the marriage relationship. This was God’s intent and what He fully meant when He said to “be fruitful, and multiply.”

The Bible has much more to say about sex and relationships, including even *greater* purposes not discussed in this article.

To learn more, read our comprehensive book *Sex – Its Unknown Dimension* available free at rcg.org/siud. Using science and the Bible, it brings a much greater understanding to God’s purpose for sexual relations. □

Answers to Life's Greatest Questions...



Millions believe God exists! Few have *proof*. Have you proven that God exists? Or do you hope—suspect—feel—believe—think—He does? Can His existence be *scientifically* proven? Can you *know* with certainty that an all-intelligent *Mind* created the universe and all life on Earth—including you? Must the answers be “accepted on faith”? Let’s squarely face these questions!

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your free booklets!**

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

vation and the purpose of human existence—climactic, soon-coming prophesied events—God’s warning message to His people—His Law, including the Sabbath command—the annual Holy Days—tithing—proper baptism—the one true Church—and many other teachings make sense to me?”

When you read or hear these things or others in our magazines, books, booklets, articles and *The World to Come* broadcasts, do they have meaning to you? Are you grasping them? Are they *plain* to your understanding? Do you see them as special knowledge others do not have? Do you feel tempted to pinch yourself in disbelief that you could be shown things of which the masses have no idea?

If the answers to these questions are “yes,” then God *is* calling—“drawing”—you! The mysteries of the Kingdom of God *are* being given to you!

Responsible for Knowledge Given

Babies are born knowing nothing. They do not know even the basics of right and wrong. They have to be taught virtually *everything*. Similarly, the world does not know the things of God—*spiritual* right from *spiritual* wrong. But with the knowledge of these things comes the responsibility to act on them.

Two Bible passages demonstrate that God holds people accountable for what they understand. Notice James 4:17: “Therefore to him that *knows to do good*, and does it not, to him it is sin,” and Hebrews 10:26, “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the *knowledge of the truth*, there remains no more sacrifice for sins.”

Let’s understand. Each time you learn more of God’s truth (what is “good”), and it makes sense to you—you at least generally understand it—you are being *given* extraordinary spiritual *knowledge* for which God holds you accountable.

This is part of the calling process—and is actually central to it. Further, it makes understanding how God calls one much more serious than most have believed. Recognize that God will only call each human being *once*. Therefore, you are responsible now for the knowledge you are being given. If one does *not* act on what he is learning, God will take that understanding away, and such a person is in a grave spiritual condition. “For not the hearers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13) and, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that *do* His commandments” (Psa. 111:10).

The Greatest Freedom

God’s truth is most exciting to understand. It is the path to all the wonderful, good things in life—things God wants you to have. It is also the path to the greatest *freedom* that there is! Jesus told certain Jews professing to believe on Him: “If you continue in My word [the truth—see John 17:17], then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). You must be willing to “continue” in your studies of God’s Word, learning ever more of His truth, which Christ explains will “set you free” from a world cut off from God and held captive by Satan. Even *this* understanding is precious knowledge.

Your associates in the world probably understand none of these things. Neither do your relatives. Without God’s calling, they have *no possible way* of enjoying *now* what is being offered to you—*IF* you are understanding and acting upon God’s truth.

It is also vital that you make certain in your mind the things you are learning. You should find yourself wanting to prove the doctrines of God. Paul also told the Thessalonians to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thes. 5:21). If you know God is calling you, take time to *prove* that He exists. Then prove that the Bible is truly His inspired Word for mankind.

Finally, *prove* the identity of God’s Church. Remove all doubt, leaving no room for confusion. There are many counterfeit churches—many spiritual “look-a-likes” in the world. Do not be fooled by any of them. Jesus promised, “I will build My Church” (Matt. 16:18). Determine to know for certain if you have come in contact with it.

At the same time you are proving these things, pray fervently about what you are learning. When you are unclear on a matter, remember that Christ taught, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7).

John 14:17 explains how those coming toward conversion begin to find that they can see clearly the things of God. Notice what Jesus said when speaking to His disciples about the Holy Spirit they were soon to receive: “Even the *Spirit of truth*; [which] the world cannot receive, because it sees [it] not, neither knows [it]; but you know [it]; for [it] dwells with you, and shall be in you.” The pronouns are corrected in this passage because the Holy Spirit is *not* a person, the supposed third member of a trinity, an unbiblical idea nowhere taught in the Bible.

At this point, the disciples were much like many today—perhaps like you, too. They were seeing many spiritual truths in part, but did not yet *fully* grasp the enormous importance of learning God’s Plan and way of life. Through the Holy Spirit working with them, God was revealing certain things they would only understand in a greater way once it was in them, beginning at conversion.

Ultimately, to fully understand *all* the things of God—all the mysteries of the Kingdom of God—one must be begotten of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when it enters directly into the mind! Lacking baptism and the vital receiving of God’s Spirit, it is completely impossible for *anyone* to *truly* understand even a *single* biblical truth!

God’s Master Plan

Before discussing how this happens, let’s look at the big picture.

There is a great reason God is only calling a few now.

The core of God's Plan encompasses 7,000 years. Few have understood this. Many *have* correctly understood at least some of the verses describing God's 1,000-year reign on Earth with the saints (Rev. 20:4-7). And while most know little more than this, they know nothing of the fact that He has allotted 6,000 years, or six millennial days of a *seven-day week*, to man's rule, prior to the seventh 1,000-year "day." The sixth "day" is about to draw to a close. Satan is soon to be bound (take time to read Revelation 20:2).

However, he has *not yet* been bound. When Christ, having overcome sin, qualified to replace him (Matt. 4:1-11) as the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), He assured that Satan will soon no longer be present to deceive and confuse mankind (Rev. 12:9). But, once again, we must understand that Satan has not yet been bound, and he seeks to do everything possible—within the power he possesses—to thwart God's Plan. He has certainly deceived his ministers into believing that God has failed terribly in His Plan to save the vast majority of a mankind that He is not yet even calling to salvation. But it is only by God's permission that Satan holds sway over this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4).

God is not losing any supposed wrestling match over which He would clearly have complete control. He knows *exactly* what He is doing, and the beauty of His Plan *can* be known.

Be assured that no true God would ever choose to condemn the vast majority who have ever lived without giving them a *full opportunity* for salvation. Such a God would not be worth following. He would be an unjust *monster* whose primary purpose is the business of *condemnation!*

We must understand! The Bible says, "But, beloved, *be not ignorant* of this one thing, that *one day* is with the Lord *as a thousand years*, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8). Of course, most people *are* "ignorant" of not just this "one thing," but almost everything the Bible teaches.

This is a fascinating verse.

Man has been given six days, or 6,000 years, to try his own ways, governments, religions, value systems, philosophies and forms of education. Under Satan's sway, he has practiced sin—disobedience to God's commands—for nearly 6,000 years. Man has then tried to treat all the ill *effects* instead of treating the *cause* of having broken God's laws. This includes the invention of many religions that merely teach the hollow ideas of men in place of the wonderful truths of God.

God is allowing man to learn bitter lessons. The vast majority, who have never known the precious truths of God, are having to learn that their own ways do not work!

Now continue with II Peter 3, verse 9: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance." Did you notice that God wants to save *everyone*? Now read this: "[God] will have *all* men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). This scripture is plain. God is not, and never has been, in the "mass condemnation" business.

But He is calling and training a *tiny select few* who will participate in the setting up of God's glorious world-ruling Kingdom.

Remember. Satan has proliferated many forms of false religion all over the Earth. He counterfeits the truth in endless ways, and God's calling process is no exception. He is a master deceiver and the fruits of his efforts lie everywhere.

Your Path to Conversion

Your Bible states, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14), and, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (vs. 9). These two passages reveal just what a Christian is—one who has and is led by the Holy Spirit of God. This Spirit

is received upon repentance and baptism (read Acts 2:38).

If the truth is becoming clear—really PLAIN—to you, set the goal of repentance, baptism and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit—the moment true conversion begins!

While you are preparing for conversion, focus on examining all the wrong habits and attitudes that you can. There are certain *physical* changes you can make before baptism. Understand. Conversion is entirely about *changing, growing, overcoming—and developing the character of God*. This involves getting into the habit of regular *prayer, Bible study, meditation* and even periodic *fasting*, going without food and water.

Be sure to take time to study all of our books, booklets and articles dealing with *faith, conversion, baptism, your human potential*, and the proofs of *God's existence, His Word* and *His Church*.

Be sure to read *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!* And also read *The Awesome Potential of Man*. Much—actually *everything*—is at stake for you if God is calling you *now*.

Take each step carefully. Follow the timing that is right for you. But do not unnecessarily delay, merely because you have not asked fervently or often enough for the "gift" of repentance (see II Timothy 2:25 and Acts 11:18). Be careful that you do not follow the pattern of the world, falling into waiting for a magical feeling that "*now is the time*."

The Bible teaches that "*repentance is toward God*" and that "*faith is toward Jesus Christ*" (Acts 20:21). Conversion is a personal, private matter between the Father, Christ and each individual. The apostle Peter wrote, "Make your calling and election sure" (II Pet. 1:10). If *God is truly calling you*, make certain of your calling. It is most precious!

This is the only way to approach the marvelous gift you are being given! □



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MINISTER

Continued from page 15

parishioner. Another towering reason is church members feel they really do not need advice from an outside party.

For his part, Mr. Buchanan, who was quoted earlier, feels a connection to faith—he grew up in a small church and his uncle is a Baptist minister. But he is still feeling his way around where he worships. Besides the size of his current church, he feels some of his reticence to reach out to a pastor could be a reflection of the technology-focused times.

“People don’t know how to have personal communications with other folks when you need to ask questions or need to get help,” he said. “For instance, we’ve got some issues with our health insurance plan, so I spent an hour today Googling...instead of just picking up the phone and calling somebody.”

Tim O’Malley, a theology professor at Notre Dame University, said he suspects that technological self-service is among the factors contributing to infrequent contact with clergy.

“In American life, there has ultimately been a broad rejection

of ‘experts’ apart from the person searching for the answer on his or her own,” Dr. O’Malley said in an email. “Think about the use of Google. You can literally Google anything. Should I have children? What career should I have? When should I make a will? How do I deal with a difficult child?

“In this sense, there has been a democratization of information based on the seeking self,” he added. “You can find the information more easily through a search engine than finding a member of a clergy.”

Dr. O’Malley, who also serves as director of education for Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute for Church Life, sees “a lack of trust in all sorts of institutions,” including houses of worship.

“Surely the church—the Catholic church in particular—has lost some moral authority in the last 25 years in the United States,” he said. “But it is joined by schools, newspapers, the media in general, etc.”

As ministerial counseling becomes rarer in today’s churches, worshippers are developing a kind of spiritual independence from those they may see as preachers but not counselors. This can make religion more per-

sonal—more of a “between me and God” matter—so that ministers can focus more on preaching and less on “meddling.” What could be wrong with that?

Counsel for Today

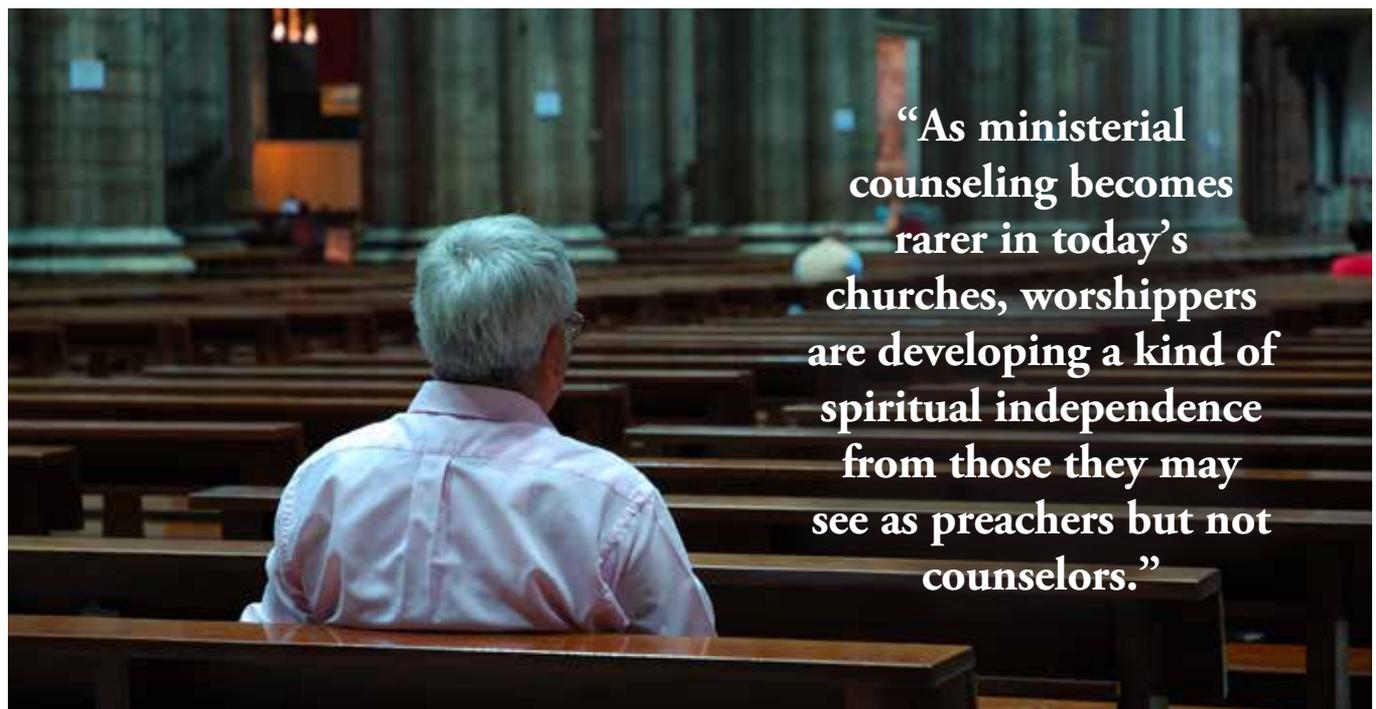
While the ability to seek answers for oneself can be helpful, it should really only be a means to an end. Not seeking spiritual counsel when needed carries a great danger. A little-understood Bible passage specifically warns against this.

Revelation 3 describes the ancient city of Laodicea whose residents and Christians had a prevailing attitude of self-sufficiency: “You say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (vs. 17).

That attitude was summed up as “neither cold nor hot...lukewarm” in verses 15 and 16.

While this was certainly true for the residents who lived in Laodicea (in modern-day Turkey) nearly 2,000 years ago, this perfectly reflects society today.

The meaning of the city’s name, Laodicea, is telling in itself. Notice



the Greek root words from which it is derived: *Laos* (“people”) and *dike* (“principle, decision”).

In other words, as the Bible reveals in verse 17, Laodiceans tended to trust in their ability to rule themselves, judging and deciding matters to the exclusion of any other authority.

God, the author of the Bible, warned His followers against this mindset by threatening to all those in a lukewarm condition: “I will spew you out of My mouth” (vs. 16).

The reason for God’s treatment toward those with such an attitude is their self-sufficiency keeps them from growing and getting the spiritual assistance they need from His ministers. The author of the Bible stated: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and *lean not unto your own understanding*” (Prov. 3:5). This is because He knows that “there is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (14:12).

And if there is any doubt that lack of counseling is an issue, notice how God, who is a counselor (Isa. 9:6), addresses them: “I counsel you...” (Rev. 3:18).

The lesson from this account: Seek advice before it comes seeking you.

Why Ministers

Ecclesiastical counseling is a bedrock of biblical Christianity. Throughout the entire Bible, faithful servants sought counsel.

The primary purpose of God establishing a ministry was for them to provide guidance. Moses was told by His father-in-law, who himself was a priest: “Hearken now unto my voice, I will give you counsel, and God shall be with you” (Ex. 18:19). Inspired by God, he instructed Moses to establish a structure of qualified leaders who would judge the matters of the people, rather than Moses wearing himself out from morning to evening counseling everyone on his own.

Later, in the kingdom of Israel, prophets counseled kings. The book of Proverbs states that “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (11:14).

Whole books of the New Testament are essentially letters of counsel written by the apostle Paul to address specific issues in the congregations of the Church.

Helpers of Your Joy

Harkening back to the title of this article, think about the last time you sought your minister for advice. Perhaps you attend a church but you feel skeptical about being open with a minister there.

Yet, deep inside, you crave for someone to listen and help you sort through your challenges and structure your life in a way God desires.

Ministers are established to be “helpers of your joy” (II Cor. 1:24).

God chose to work through flesh (see Ephesians 4:11-16). He structured His Church to function within the guidance of leaders He chooses because they teach the truth of God—not their own ideas or what you might “want to hear.”

If you are serious about seeking God, He expects you to counsel with His ministry. God has bound Himself to work through human beings this way.

However, the Bible also warns of false ministers and deceivers. Sadly, these are common today. God knows that and has provided a way for you to prove the authenticity and trustworthiness of your minister and the religious organization to which you belong.

Loyal Ministry

You should confide in your minister only if he brings you God’s truth about matters, not his own. For a church leader to do this, he must know God’s teachings.

The vast majority of ministers conform to the traditions and beliefs of their church’s brand of Christianity. Where their church’s beliefs divert from Scripture, the ministers must embrace and

defend them—even to the extent of ignoring or intentionally explaining away plain verses.

Why? Because they have never understood the true meaning of God’s Word. They have been trained to accept—without question—whatever their church or denomination teaches.

This world’s ministers must follow the dictates of their flock—or face unemployment. Only ministers who preach smooth, non-condemning sermons keep their positions. They quote secular sources to gently admonish their congregation about acquiring some admirable character trait. But correction from God’s Word is not tolerated. The congregation will only listen to “smooth things” from the pulpit.

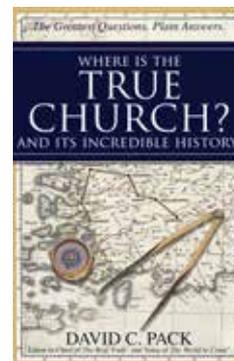
Clergy in this world’s denominations are more worried about pleasing people—especially those who control their payroll. They leave God out of the equation.

The book of Titus lists specific qualifications to look for in a true minister of God. The description includes being “blameless, the husband of one wife [not adulterous], having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly...not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine [an alcoholic], no striker [quarrelsome], not given to filthy lucre, a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men [meaning “fond of good”], sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught...” (1:6-9).

You must look for leaders who have these biblical qualifications. You will also need to find an organization where the standard is the Bible. Such a place does exist.

To prove where it is today, read *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!*

Once you find it, you can confidently seek guidance from God’s ministers. □



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IRAN

Continued from page 13

militias, the clerical regime has fueled violence and death in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and well beyond. Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas has enabled deadly cross-border attacks into Israel."

"Like the United States, Iran has a vibrant society that wants to be integrated with, not isolated from, other nations. Iranians living in the United States and around the world thrive. But Iranians aren't thriving in their own country."

Few remember how the Persian nation looked before 1979—a Western-oriented and secular society under the rule of a shah.

"Under the Shah's rule, Iran's economy and educational opportunities expanded," *Business Insider* reported. "Britain and the US counted Iran as their major ally in the Middle East, and the Shah forcefully industrialized large segments of the country."

As a result, as many as 50,000 Iranian students studied at American universities prior to the revolution. Men wearing business suits and women with skirts, button tops and handbags was the norm on the streets.

The generation of youth growing up miffed by the failed promises of the revolution are slowly bringing back this lifestyle.

Classical Story

The ballooning popularity of classical music in the nation's capital shows this. The Tehran Symphony Orchestra, including female musicians in burghundy headscarves on cello, horn and harp, played works by 19th-century Russian composers for an enraptured crowd in the capital's main concert venue, Vahdat Hall.

A major draw is Shahrddad Rohani, 65, the orchestra's charismatic music director. The Iranian-American composer, musician and conductor who has led orchestras in the United States and Europe, said he is proud of his home-grown crop of young musicians.

"Classical music is growing, and as you see, the audience, they are really supporting the arts and classical music," he told *The Associated Press* during the intermission of the sold-out concert.

In four decades of conservative Islamic rule, the space for artistic expression in Iran has expanded or contracted, depending on whether political hardliners or moderates prevail.

In the first decade after the Islamic Revolution, including the eight-year war with Iraq, pop music disappeared from the public sphere, said Nima Mina of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1933, continued its work after 1979, he said. Live performances were initially rare, but have increased in number since the 1990s.

"I love the work of Rohani," said concert-goer Ali Reza, 26, who was introduced to classical music by learning to play the piano. He said most of his friends prefer other styles of music, including rock and pop.

Some said there is a generational divide, with older people tending to prefer traditional Iranian music.

"There is a lot of interest in Western culture among the young urban middle class population," said Mr. Mina, portraying it as pushback against the lifestyle and artistic expression promoted by the authorities.

The War Within

Conservative authorities in Tehran are viewing the societal trends with caution.

The latest battleground is over social media. Hardliners unleashed criticism on a video of children singing and dancing to a Persian pop song that was uploaded to social media.

"The enemy is trying different ways to create anxiety among the people, including by spreading these disturbing videos we have been seeing in cyberspace," Iran's education minister stated according to *Los Angeles Times*.

The publication explained further that "with the rise in popularity of social media platforms, Iranian efforts to remain insular face a greater threat

than ever. That's because the types of entertainment that hard-line authorities have long abhorred are now spread and disseminated throughout society at speeds faster than can be controlled."

"These viral videos are cracks in the Iranian government controls and the internet has opened them up thanks to the ease of access," Holly Dages, an Iran expert at the Atlantic Council, told the news outlet. "In the eyes of hard-liners, messaging apps and the internet have become hubs for incitement against the state. Without their control on the flow of information, it can become a liability for hard-line authorities."

President Rouhani, who is politically moderate and ran his campaign in 2013 on promises of building a better diplomacy with Western nations, had hoped that the nuclear deal would soften American-Iranian relations.

Yet, since the U.S. pulled out of the deal, "he's lost ground to [Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei] and other hardliners who see a Western 'culture war' against Iran, while the country's regional rivals blasted Rouhani's attempts at diplomacy as duplicitous," *Bloomberg* reported.

"The hardliners want to demonstrate they are as powerful as they were before Rouhani's election...when Iranians gave a candidate who promised 'change' a decisive vote," an *NPR* article stated.

Burgeoning cultural resistance to the Islamic Republic is nothing new, particularly since 1979. On one hand, diplomatic relations are officially defined by the tensions and fiery rhetoric between Washington and Tehran. On the other, Iranians appear to have many qualities that could fit right into any Western democracy—fun- and freedom-loving, culturally expressive, an interest in science and education, and hospitality.

To better understand the relationship, it is crucial to see the big picture. *The Real Truth* article "Iran and Israel's Mideast Showdown" shows how past relations between Iran and Western democracies foreshadow their future. Read it now at reg.org/realtruth. □

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Mass Shootings So Far This Year Nearly Reach 2018 Levels

Just seven months into 2019, the U.S. experienced almost as many mass killings as occurred in all of 2018.

Back-to-back mass shootings in Texas and Ohio brought the total number of mass killings this year (as *The Real Truth* goes to print) to 23, leaving 131 people dead. There were 25 mass killings in 2018, claiming 140 lives, according to a database compiled by *The Associated Press*, Northeastern University and *USA Today*.

The database tracks every mass killing dating back to 2006, and the El Paso and Dayton massacres had traits that were similar to many earlier incidents. That includes shooting a family member while carrying out a mass killing, which happened in Dayton; the young age of the perpetrators; and the tendency of the shooters to commit suicide or get killed by police.

Overall Numbers

The last three years have seen several fluctuations in mass killing numbers. In 2017, 225 people died in 32 mass killings, driven by the massacre in Las Vegas. In 2018, the year was marked by a surge in mass killings in public places, including schools in Texas and Florida.

A typical year has roughly 29 mass killings.

Mass killings—defined as killings involving four or more fatalities, not including the killer—have occurred in 16 states this year. California has experienced four of them.

Family Members Killed

The majority of mass killings involve domestic violence, and eight of 74 public mass shootings since 2006 involved the killing of a blood relative, the data shows. The shooter's parent, sibling, cousin, nephew or niece was shot first and then the perpetrator sought out others to kill.

"They'll take it out on family and then society, figuring they already committed a murder," said David Chipman, a former agent with the Bureau of

Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives who now works as a policy adviser at Giffords: Courage to Fight Gun Violence. "Domestic violence is the most risky call for service that police go on."

Before 20-year-old Adam Lanza killed 26 children and staff at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, he had fatally shot his mother in their Newtown, Connecticut, home.

Jaylen Fryberg, 15, sent text messages to lure two cousins and several friends to the cafeteria at Marysville Pilchuck High School in Marysville, Washington, in 2014. He then shot the four students before turning the gun on himself.

In July, police say a man in Southern California began his rampage by killing and injuring family members before shooting strangers. In the end, he is accused of killing four people.

Young Killers

The AP/USA Today/Northeastern database shows that many mass shootings are committed by a certain demographic: young men.

The median age of a public mass shooter is 28; significantly lower than the median age of people who commit mass shootings of their families, according to the database.

Since 2006, 12 mass shootings have been committed by gunmen 21 or younger. That includes the 21-year-old suspected gunman in El Paso.

Arrested or Killed

More than half of public mass shooters either kill themselves on the scene or are shot by police.

Lanza and Fryberg killed themselves, as did Stephen Paddock, the man who killed 58 people and wounded 422 attending a country music festival in Las Vegas in 2017. So did the man who killed 33 at Virginia Tech in 2007; the former municipal worker who murdered

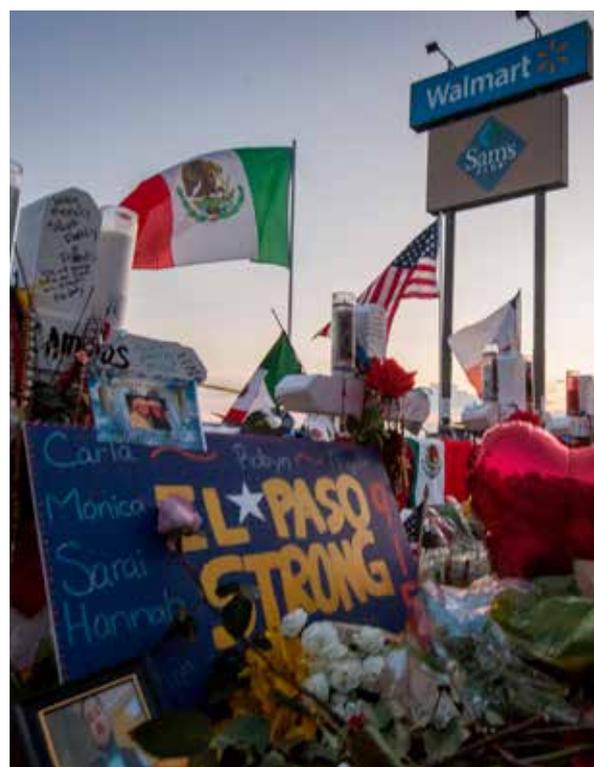


PHOTO: MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

12 in Virginia Beach this year; and the mentally ill man who gunned down four at an IHOP restaurant in Nevada in 2011. The Pulse nightclub shooter was killed by police in Orlando.

The man who opened fire at the Gilroy Garlic Festival in July also committed suicide.

"They obviously went through the thought process of 'I may end up dead,'" said Frank Farley, a Temple University psychology professor and former president of the American Psychological Association. "And did it anyway."

James Holmes, who killed 12 and wounded 70 in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, was sentenced in 2015 to life in prison. Dylann Roof, a white supremacist who fatally shot nine people attending the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015, was sentenced to death.

Prosecutors are also seeking the death penalty for Patrick Wood Crusius, the man accused of fatally shooting 22 people at an El Paso Walmart. □

Data Shows Flood of Opioids Across U.S., Many of Them Generics



PHOTO: AP/MARK LENNIHAN

Washington (AP) – The maker of OxyContin has been cast as the chief villain in the nation’s opioid crisis. But newly released government figures suggest Purdue Pharma had plenty of help in flooding the U.S. with billions of pills even as overdose deaths were accelerating.

Records kept by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration show that 76 billion oxycodone and hydrocodone pills—the vast majority of them generics, not brand names—were shipped to U.S. pharmacies from 2006 to 2012.

The annual number swelled by more than 50 percent over that period of time even as the body count climbed. The powerful painkillers flowed faster even after Purdue Pharma was fined \$635 million for falsely marketing OxyContin as less addictive than other opioids.

“This data confirms that the pharmaceutical industry created a tsunami of opiates that drove addiction and death rates up,” Dr. Thomas Frieden, former head of the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a statement.

It also illustrates how complicated it could be for the courts to figure out who should be held accountable for the public health disaster. More than 2,000 state, local and tribal governments have sued members of the drug industry in the biggest and possibly most complicated litigation of its kind ever in the U.S.

Prescription and illegal opioids such as heroin and fentanyl have been factors in more than 430,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000, according to the CDC. From 2006 to 2012, annual opioid deaths rose from under 18,000 a year to more than 23,000. During that time, prescription drugs were cited as factors in just under half the deaths.

Since then, overall opioid deaths in the U.S. have doubled, though the CDC reported that drug overdose deaths of all kinds probably fell last year for the first time in nearly three decades.

The newly released information shows in detail the flow of drugs from manufacturers to communities.

West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Nevada all received more than 50 pills for every man, woman and child each year. Several areas in the Appalachian region were shipped an average of well over 100 pills per person per year.

“It’s like being on the front lines of a war every day,” said Joe Engle, sheriff of Perry County, Kentucky, which received 175 pills per person per year. “Our people here in eastern Kentucky have been taken advantage of by these pharmaceutical companies. It’s one of the worst things you can do to a society, to a people. And we’re suffering.”

Nearly every state has filed a lawsuit. The lawsuits say that with the introduction of OxyContin, a time-released opioid, in 1995, Purdue created a new playbook to push the use of opioids for more patients and in higher doses.

But Purdue points out, accurately, that the company produced only a small fraction of the nation’s opioids—about 3 percent between 2006 and 2012, according to the data. Three companies—SpecGX, Par Pharmaceutical and Activis Pharma—that sold lower-priced generic drugs, including versions of OxyContin, combined to make 90 percent of the pills.

The three companies say that they did not market the drugs and were just meeting the demand of prescriptions filled out by doctors—and that they did not produce more than the DEA allowed.

As for the distributors, they contend they functioned as a delivery service and keep federal authorities apprised of the quantities of drugs being shipped.

Dr. Joshua Sharfstein of Johns Hopkins University said the lack of transparency around the prescribing data probably slowed the federal response to the opioid epidemic.

“To a certain extent, no agency really felt responsible and had access to the data in real-time to see what was happening,” he said. □

UN Says Death Toll from Libya Fighting Passes 1,000

Cairo (AP) – The battle between rival militias for the Libyan capital has killed more than 1,000 people since it began in April, the United Nations said, a grim milestone in a stalemated conflict partly fueled by regional powers.

Forces loyal to Khalifa Hifter, a veteran army officer, opened an offensive on Tripoli in early April, advancing on the city's southern outskirts and clashing with an array of militias loosely affiliated with the UN-recognized government.

Mr. Hifter's self-styled Libyan National Army is the largest and best organized of the country's many militias, and enjoys the support of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia. But it has faced stiff resistance from fighters aligned with the UN-recognized government, which is aided by Turkey and Qatar.

The World Health Organization said in a brief statement that 1,048 people have been killed since the

offensive began, including 106 civilians. It says 5,558 have been wounded, including 289 civilians.

The battle lines have changed little since the offensive began, with both sides dug in and shelling one another in the southern reaches of the capital. Militias aligned with the government recently recaptured Gharyan, a town some 60 miles west of the city that is on a major supply route.

The fighting has emptied entire neighborhoods of civilians. Thousands of African migrants captured by Libyan forces supported by the European Union are trapped in detention centers near the front lines. An airstrike on one facility in July killed more than 50 people, mainly migrants held in a hangar that collapsed on top of them.

Libya slid into chaos after the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed long-ruling dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Armed groups have proliferated, and the country has emerged

as a major transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty for a better life in Europe.

Mr. Hifter's supporters say he is the only leader who can end militia rule, reunite the country and keep it from being a safe haven for terrorists. They point to his success in defeating Islamic militants and other rival factions in eastern Libya over the past few years. Egypt and the UAE see him as a bulwark against the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists.

But his critics view him as an aspiring strongman, and his offensive appears to have at least temporarily united western Libya's fractious militias in opposition to a return to one-man rule. Many experts predicted at the start of the offensive that it was unlikely to succeed, noting widespread resistance to Mr. Hifter in the west and fractures within his own forces, which include Gadhafi-era army units, ultraconservative Islamists and tribal fighters. □

■ Fighters loyal to Libya's internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) fire a heavy machine gun during clashes against forces loyal to strongman Khalifa Hifter, south of Tripoli (May 21, 2019).

PHOTO: MAHMUD TURKIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES





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