

Pastor Stabbed to Death in Church School

A Sudanese Christian was killed earlier this week while participating in a peaceful protest against the government's attempted appropriation of a Christian school.

Younan Abdulla, part of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC), was participating in the three-day protest after the government-linked committee in 2016 authorized the sale of the land on which the school is situated without the school's consent.

A second church member, Ayoub Kumama, also suffered stab wounds. He was taken to hospital but has since been discharged.

Bahri Evangelical Church, a SEPC church of which Mr. Abdulla was a member, has long been in a dispute with a committee linked to the government, which wants to buy the land on which the SEPC-owned school is situated.

According to reports, around 20 people armed with knives and other weapons attacked the protestors, some of whom are thought to be linked to the committee, which was set up in contravention of Sudanese law.

Police made one arrest. According to the charity Middle East Concern (MEC), Shamshoun Hamoud, a member of the committee, was arrested after eyewitnesses identified him as the person who stabbed Mr. Abdulla. The charity noted that no more arrests were made despite more people being involved in the attack.

MEC wrote: "The police were present but failed to intervene to protect those who were attacked. They also failed to help Younan after he was stabbed."

School staff protesting against the proposed sale had been arrested on previous occasions—last month and in July of last year.

Prior to this attack, the police had repeatedly arrested Christians in peaceful protests at the school, including Mr. Abdulla and the school's headmaster on March 16.

Mr. Abdulla's funeral was held on Tuesday (April 4), and he is survived by his widow and two young children. The service was attended by senior representatives of the U.S. and U.K. embassies, MEC reported.

A foreign office spokesperson confirmed religious freedom in Sudan "remains a concern for the UK."

The charity Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said that Khartoum's targeting of the SEPC was part of its drive to "diminish or remove the Christian presence from Sudan".

CSW noted that the Khartoum Bahri Administrative Court last week rejected a case brought by 25 churches challenging a government order to demolish their places of worship. The 25 churches belong to denominations including the Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Sudan Church of Christ, Jehovah Witness and Pentecostal Churches.

The harassment of Christians has intensified since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, when Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a strict interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law) and many Christians left for the newly created country. {eoa}

This article originally appeared on World Watch Monitor.

Church of God, OneHope Begin Strategic Global Partnership

The Church of God and OneHope signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which sets in place a global partnership to affect destiny by providing God's Word to children and youth.

OneHope is committed to serving the local church in reaching children and youth worldwide through outcome-based programs. Through this global partnership, Church of God will be equipped to exponentially reach and disciple millions of children in the more than 180 countries where it works. Currently, Church of God and OneHope are collaborating with other ministries to create an outcome-based program for the North American market of youth ministers and leaders. The initiative will include specific outcomes for youth discipleship and measures for indicators of growth.

The Executive Committee of the Church of God will allow OneHope to serve the Church of God ministry by providing Scripture engagement resources through both print and digital formats to children and youth within the denomination worldwide.

The Church of God will endorse and promote OneHope as an organization that serves its children's and youth ministries. Among its partners and networks, the Church of God will help share OneHope's commitment to reach every child with God's Word.

"Although we have served thousands of Church of God churches around the world for the last 30 years, we are thrilled that this new partnership will allow us to strategize in a more intentional way to reach more children with God's Word than ever before," said Rob Hoskins, president of OneHope.

The global partnership will also help to support Church of God's recent vision for the FINISH Commitment, a "Global Church Focus on the Great Commission." OneHope's vision aligns with the FINISH Commitment as the ministry mobilizes partnerships and resources the church to reach every child, in every nation, by the year 2030.

"In this day of multiple media platforms, forming strategic partnerships among like-minded organizations is critical. Producing and marketing resources independently has become increasingly difficult and cost-prohibitive, so joining hands with groups that espouse our same evangelical beliefs and outlook is not only economically feasible, but most importantly, allows us to get that much closer to finishing the Great Commission," said Tim Hill, General Overseer of Church of God. {eoa}

Pastor: Why the 'Hillbillies' Are Optimistic Once Again

It seems like every day we hear the siren calls of a coming end of jobs. A new report out of the PwC says that 38 percent of all jobs in America are at risk of being automated. This mostly affects jobs that require little to no education, which could include entire industries, such as truck driving, storage or food service.

We are told that the trade-off will be "worth it." Millions of jobs will be destroyed. Uneducated workers, the very ones whose jobs will be eliminated, will face potentially permanent unemployment and the already enormous class divides will worsen. But never fear: productivity and production will

increase.

For many people, such reports are alarming or even hard to believe, but for those of us in Appalachia, it is like déjà vu.

Growing up in a small Appalachian town, I was often told that our way of life was “behind the times.” Yet I believe that much like the tortoise, somewhere among all the energy, excitement and frenzied activity of the city, the people of these woods have quietly taken the lead. The very people portrayed as “slow” have outpaced the hare in the march of history.

If you want to see the future, look to the mountains.

From “King Coal” to Economic Decline

I’m pastor a church in Bluefield, West Virginia, once known as the “Gateway to the Coalfields” or even “Little New York.” A few decades ago, our city was booming. We were a commercial and economic hub, an industrial powerhouse. Times were good, but there was one looming problem.

As . Tolkien once wrote, “A safe fairyland is untrue in all worlds.” All of our economic activity was tied to one industry, affectionately known as “King Coal.” As early as the 1950s, the writing was on the wall, new machines (such as continuous miners) and increasing globalization were going to deliver a mighty blow. A major percentage of our jobs were at risk of being mechanized or outsourced.

In the 80s, the predictions of economic destruction became reality. Personal income and housing values plummeted. Rates of drug abuse, domestic abuse and suicides climbed. Schools were crumbling and students were failing. As Ronald Bailey recently explained, “Only 32 percent of adults are in the civilian labor force, compared to 63.5 percent nationally.”

When second- and third-generation coal miners lost their jobs, they no longer knew who they were. They had always been coal miners, raised by coal miners. Now their very identity was gone.

Our economies began to produce people who had little to no hope and a low view of themselves. Our local governments became dens of self-interest and self-preservation, leading to self-serving and uncharitable policies. It was not a short road from mechanization to poverty, but it was the path of least resistance.

In his book *David and Goliath*, Malcolm Gladwell writes that “the act of facing overwhelming odds produces greatness and beauty.” Being an underdog “can change people in ways that we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable.”

This is the story of Appalachia. Many people have been crushed and many families destroyed in the wake of this storm. But among the ashes, a few flowers have begun to bloom.

Appalachia Rises

One of the greatest joys in my life is to witness the “greatness and beauty” now being produced in Appalachia. The path has been long and hard, but that may be the very reason for the sweetness of the victories.

Many of the sources of greatest pain have given us our strength. We clearly recognize that we are not playing on the same economic field as the rest of the country. Yet the loss of some economic incentives has actually freed us to find other incentives. For many people I know, these incentives have become honor, community, and justice.

In the best of my community, I see neighbors looking out for neighbors. I see people finding dignity not just in their job

but in being a good friend, growing a garden, or making art in their back yard. I see cooperation like I never thought was possible. I see government employees working together across borders of cities, counties, and even states. I see local lawyers offering to volunteer their time to any entrepreneurs with ideas for patents. I see local colleges with a renewed interest in adding value to the communities they serve.

I personally host a group of over 100 business owners that have committed to doing business locally because we are all in this together. I challenge them to refuse to buy from someone that does not have a face, or at least one you have never seen. We are shortening supply chains and localizing production. I am seeing businesses promoting other businesses and bartering making a comeback.

I see many people starting their own businesses. Providing a good service to their neighbors at a reasonable price. Seeing needs in a community and stepping up to offer a solution. Being voices of dignity and pride to our young people.

I see churches serving under resourced schools, offering tutoring, and delivering messages of hope.

I see the economically privileged deciding to stay and invest in their communities instead of moving to the beach. I see the retired coming out of retirement to teach and to "make." We are a community of makers.

I see trust being regained as we spend time with each other. I see former barriers of class or race disappearing at the very time that much of the country sees the opposite.

I think most of this would have been impossible if not for the path we have walked. Despair seemed inevitable but we never gave up. The path ahead of us is long and it is not going to be easy but silence is not our future and despair is not our end. Hope is rising and hope is not easily extinguished.

The Experts Are the Hillbillies

Let us return to where we began. America will soon be faced with a similar crash in the job market as what Appalachia has been through. Economists speak of potential “solutions” to the problems that will be created. These include an idea for a Universal Basic Income, known in our area as “the draw,” or even the idea of a “federal job guarantee.”

It seems obvious to me that they are looking to the wrong “experts.” Why would you not turn to the ones who have been through the battle and have field tested strategies and resources? I think it is simply pride.

It is humbling to turn to the shepherd, the one from the backwoods. The one with the thick accent whom you have previously mocked. The one you called “slow.” It is hard for the hare to turn to the tortoise. It is hard to believe that the very solutions our country needs are best articulated with a country twang.

It seems impossible that the experts are hillbillies, but Gladwell points out that, “Gifted children and child prodigies seem most likely to emerge in highly supportive family conditions. In contrast, geniuses have a perverse tendency of growing up in more adverse conditions.”

As we look to the future, I challenge you to include us in the conversation. You may just be surprised! {eoa}

This article was an adapted version of an essay published on Medium and originally published at . Used with permission.

Lance Wallnau: Witches Cursing Donald Trump for Fear God Will Use Him

Witches around the world are uniting to curse U.S. President Donald Trump.

Dubbed the #magicresistance, those who practice wicca and other religions involved in witchcraft have shared pictures of their spells via social media every month until Trump leaves office.

Entrepreneur Lance Wallnau says it's because witches are terrified God will use Trump while in office.

"That gives you a sense of the metron of authority that this particular ruler has that witches around the world are uniting trying to curse him. I don't recall a presidency that ever stirred up so much intense unity among occult opposition, and that ought to tell a Christian something. Obviously, there's an anointing on this administration, and God Himself must have an agenda because the devil's organizing publicly to try to block it," Wallnau says.

Watch the video to see more.

{eoa}

Fuller Theological Seminary

Students Commemorate Verna M. Linzey

Fuller Theological Seminary students from across denominational lines wrote a powerful message on behalf of the Fuller community, faculty and the entire student body, commemorating Verna M. Linzey, D.D. The statement was sent by the Office of Development of Fuller Theological Seminary. Rev. James F. Linzey, Southern Baptist minister of the graduating class of 1983 and now president of Verna Linzey Ministries, received the statement from Fuller Seminary. Their statement reads:

On behalf of our Fuller Seminary community, we want to extend our condolence and sympathy to you and the entire Linzey family in regard to the passing on of your mom—Verna Linzey. May the Lord our God fill your hearts with His comfort and give you hope as we look forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! God bless you richly.

The statement comes a month before the 1st Annual Verna Linzey Commemoration Services to be held on the East and West Coasts. Rev. James Linzey replied with a phone call to Fuller Theological Seminary expressing deep gratitude for the statement from the student body at Fuller Theological Seminary. “The rising up of the student body from Fuller Theological Seminary, which crosses all denominational lines, to show such sentiment and respect for Dr. Verna Linzey’s work and what she single-handedly did for God’s kingdom around the world, reflects the impact of Verna Linzey’s legacy,” said Rev. James Linzey.

Dr. Linzey audited the entire doctor of ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary at 61 years of age. “We greatly treasure her class notes and the theological acumen she

reflects while engaging timeless issues facing the church and the world,” said her son, Rev. James Linzey.

“We will be hosting one of the services on the East Coast for the 1st Annual Verna Linzey Commemoration, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, known as the City of Brotherly Love, which is where the first Bible in America was printed. This city is a very appropriate setting for celebrating the life of such a remarkable Bible translator as Dr. Verna Linzey, who served on the Committee on Bible Translation for the Modern English Version Bible,” said Bishop Janice Hollis, pastor of Progressive Believer’s Ministry, who has appeared on C-SPAN as an advocate for conservative Christian values. Another service is slated to be held in San Diego, California. A date will soon be set in the May 2017 time frame. {eoa}

After Church Attacks, Israel Bans Passover Holiday Exodus to Egypt

Israel took the unusual step on Monday of barring its citizens from crossing into Egypt’s Sinai peninsula, saying the threat of attacks in the area inspired by Islamic State and other jihadi groups was high.

Minutes after the ban was announced, the Israeli military said a rocket was launched from the Sinai and struck southern Israel, causing no injuries.

The ban will be in effect at the Taba crossing at least until April 18, the end of the Jewish holiday of Passover that begins at sundown on Monday, said a statement issued by the

Prime Minister's Office.

Thousands of Israelis usually cross the land border with Egypt during the holiday to visit resorts and beaches on the Sinai Red Sea coast.

Egypt declared a three-month state of emergency on Sunday after bombings of Coptic churches in Alexandria and the Nile delta city of Tanta which killed more than 40 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for both incidents and warned of future attacks.

In the thinly populated Sinai, an Islamist insurgency has gained pace since Egypt's military toppled President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, and militants have carried out deadly cross-border attacks on Israel in recent years.

Militants in the Sinai aim, the statement said, "to carry out terrorist attacks against tourists in the Sinai, including Israelis, in the immediate future."

The statement urged Israelis already in the Sinai to return home immediately, reiterating a travel advisory that Israel's Anti-Terrorism Directorate issued on March 27.

Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt in 1979. {eoa}

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Not Prepared: Will Most

Americans Be Absolutely Blindsided by Multiple Wars and a Simultaneous Economic Collapse?

According to CBS News, an astounding three-fourths of all Americans have to “scramble to cover their living costs” each month. In other words, most of the country is either living paycheck to paycheck or very close to it.

But instead of tightening their belts and trying to put something away for the very hard times that are coming, most Americans are completely and utterly unprepared for what is ahead because the people that they trust on television keep telling them that everything is going to be okay. Unfortunately, everything is not going to be “OK,” and when things start falling apart all around us there is going to be a lot of anger directed toward those who have been lulling everyone into a false sense of security. One of the reasons I am sounding the alarm so loudly is so that people will not be blindsided by the things that are about to happen to this country. As you will see below, we are on the precipice of two major wars, conditions are ripe for a devastating economic collapse, and if you were to throw in a major natural disaster or two, you would have a recipe for the kind of “perfect storm” that many have been warning about.

Earlier today I focused on our looming economic problems, and in this article, I want to address the potential for more military conflict in the very near future. When Donald Trump hit Syria with 59 cruise missiles, millions of Americans greatly celebrated, but much of the rest of the world was deeply alarmed.

The Trump administration has said that more strikes are possible, but Russia and Iran are both pledging that “we will respond with force” if any more attacks are conducted:

RUSSIA and Iran have said they will respond to further American military actions following the air strike in Syria last week.

In a joint statement, the command center for the two countries and allied groups said “we will respond to any aggression.”

The statement read: “What America waged in an aggression on Syria is a crossing of red lines. From now on we will respond with force to any aggressor or any breach of red lines from whoever it is and America knows our ability to respond well.”

Do you understand what that means?

If Trump fires off any more cruise missiles at Syria, we will essentially be in a state of war with both Russia and Iran.

Previously, Russia had warned that our two nations were “one step from war” because of Trump’s actions, but the Trump administration is showing no signs of backing down. In fact, U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley says that regime change in Syria is now a top priority:

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who has done a remarkable job of continuing the diplomatic tone set by her predecessor Samantha Power, said in an interview on CNN’s “State of the Union” which will air in full on Sunday, that regime change in Syria is one of the Trump administration’s top priorities in Syria. Her statement was a complete U-turn from what she said just over a week ago, when she told a group of reporters that the US was “no longer focused on getting Assad out.”

Some members of the administration are apparently even advocating a full-blown invasion of Syria. For example, it is being reported that National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster has come up with a plan to send 150,000 U.S. ground troops into the country:

As NSA, McMaster's job is to synthesize intelligence reports from all other agencies. President Trump is being given an inaccurate picture of the situation in Syria, as McMaster is seeking to involve the U.S. in a full-scale war in Syria.

The McMaster-Petraeus plan calls for 150,000 American ground troops in Syria.

Many special operations veterans including General Joseph Votel have raised serious concerns about McMaster's plans for Syria.

I don't know if I have the words to describe how incredibly foolish that would be.

Do we really want to fight an extremely bloody ground war with the combined forces of Russia, Iran, Syria and Hezbollah?

There is very little good that could come out of a war in Syria even in the rosiest scenarios possible, but if things go bad they could go really, really bad.

Meanwhile, NBC News is reporting that President Trump is considering various military options for North Korea, and one of those options includes "killing dictator Kim Jong-Un":

The National Security Council has presented President Donald Trump with options to respond to North Korea's nuclear program—including putting American nukes in South Korea or killing dictator Kim Jong-un, multiple top-ranking intelligence and military officials told NBC News.

After seeing what happened in Syria and hearing these threats openly discussed in the U.S. media, what do you think Kim Jong-Un is thinking at this point?

One member of Congress is warning that “millions can die” if a military strike against North Korea goes badly. Once U.S. missiles begin flying, North Korea can start firing off their nukes and their vast arsenal of chemical warheads almost instantly.

Could you imagine what would happen if large numbers of deadly nerve gas warheads started exploding in downtown Seoul, downtown Tokyo and at U.S. military bases in Japan?

The carnage would be off the charts, and this is a scenario that we want to avoid at all costs.

Unfortunately, it seems like we are coming closer to a conflict with North Korea with each passing day. In fact, today we learned that an aircraft carrier strike group headed by the USS Carl Vinson is sailing in the direction of North Korea right now:

Amid rising tensions with North Korea, an aircraft carrier strike group led by the USS Carl Vinson were heading toward the Korean peninsula.

The aircraft carrier and its accompanying ships had been scheduled to leave from Singapore for port visits to Australia on Saturday, but Adm. Harry Harris, head of U.S. Pacific Command, ordered the strike group to head north toward Korean waters instead.

So what happens if the U.S. starts fighting two major wars simultaneously, the biggest debt bubble in the history of the planet starts bursting, and the U.S. stock market crashes by 50 percent as some analysts are projecting?

Some Americans still have memories of living through the Great

Depression and World War II, but most of us have been living in a bubble of peace and prosperity for so long that we don't think that anything could ever come along and threaten our way of life.

And since the election of Donald Trump, interest in "prepping" has dropped to the lowest level that I have ever seen. Most people have been lulled into a false sense of security, while the truth is that we have entered perhaps the most dangerous period of time in modern American history.

So you all can do whatever you want, but me and my house are going to get prepared for the tremendous storm that is about to hit this nation.

Those who are wise will do the same, but unfortunately most Americans are going to get absolutely blindsided by what is coming because they have been trusting the wrong voices. {eoa}

No More 'Leading From Behind'

The barrage of urgencies—inhumanity, chemical weapons, Syrian civil war, North Korean missiles, Russian warships, truck bombings, ISIS—has streamed his focus into a statesmanship that impresses even his detractors. This reminds us of Trump's speech to Congress in February where he grew visibly into his presidential shoes.

Taking decisive action in Syria indeed was in the U.S. national interest, not only an understandable human response to a human atrocity. How is it in the national interest? Chemical weapons cannot be tolerated a bit. No excuse exists. Any shadow of their acceptability would quickly become a black cloud over a world cowed into suspicion and fear. Our national

interest depends upon a world open to itself and to the future.

How else was this in the U.S. national interest? Well, it also re-establishes U.S. credibility abroad. For friends and foes alike, the bombing is a North Star reference point to White House foreign policies still in formulation. And certainly, that point is not a line, red or other. That point? No more “leading from behind.”

From military giants to lone wolves, today’s range of actors has expanded up, down and sideways. And with their real-time access to global affairs, they are weaponizing most anything, be it information, chemicals, national debt, online data or delivery trucks.

With his action in Syria, Trump chose to weaponize leadership. And he showed that the United States will use it to its best effect. {eoa}

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The Debt Crisis of 2017: Once Its Vacation Ends, Congress

Will Have 4 Days to Avoid a Government Shutdown on April 29

April 2017 could turn out to be one of the most important months in U.S. history that we have seen in a very long time. On April 6, Donald Trump attacked Syria on the 100th anniversary of the day that the U.S. officially entered World War I, and now at the end of this month, we could be facing an unprecedented political crisis in Washington. On Friday, members of Congress left town for their two-week "Easter vacation," and they won't resume work until April 25. What this means is that Congress will have precisely four days when it returns to pass a bill to fund government operations, or there will be a government shutdown starting on April 29.

Up to this point, there has been very little urgency by either party to move a spending bill forward. It is almost as if everyone is already resigned to the fact that a government shutdown will happen. The Democrats will greatly benefit from a government shutdown because they can just blame the entire mess on the Republicans. But for the GOP, this is essentially the equivalent of political malpractice.

To me, there is simply no way Congress is going to be able to agree on a bill that funds the entire government in just four days. And it turns out that this upcoming deadline comes exactly on the 100th day of Trump's presidency:

The U.S. government is poised to shut down on Day 100 of Donald Trump's presidency unless Congress can pass a new spending bill or a continuing resolution before the current one expires on April 28.

Since Congress is currently on a two-week recess, there will be a sense of urgency to get a new bill passed once they

reconvene on April 25. Leaders in both chambers would have four days to craft a new proposal that each side can agree on and get it on the president's desk for Trump to sign.

If the Republicans control the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives, why will it be so difficult to get an agreement on a spending bill?

Well, first of all, look at how difficult it was for the Republicans to agree on a bill to repeal and replace Obamacare. At this point, it doesn't look like that is going to happen at all.

More importantly, any bill to fund the government is going to require 60 votes in the Senate. The "nuclear option" that the Republicans just used to push the Gorsuch Supreme Court nomination through is not available in this case under current Senate rules because a spending bill of this nature would not qualify.

So the Democrats have leverage, and they plan to use it to the maximum. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer is already promising to block any spending bill that includes funds for a border wall or that defunds Planned Parenthood:

The threat from Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and other Democratic leaders sets up a climactic first showdown with the president, particularly with their inclusion of Trump's signature border wall proposal.

"If Republicans insist on inserting poison pill riders such as defunding Planned Parenthood, building a border wall or starting a deportation force, they will be shutting down the government and delivering a severe blow to our economy," Schumer said in a statement.

Up until now, Trump hasn't needed Democratic votes to stock his cabinet or advance the repeal of Obamacare, but a

spending bill keeping the government open is subject to a 60-vote threshold in the Senate.

Do you understand what this means?

President Trump is going to be under an immense amount of pressure to end the government shutdown once it begins, but to do so will mean that he has to give up his goal of getting a border wall.

Do you think that Trump will just throw in the towel and forget about his beloved border wall after giving countless speeches promising one?

It is a game of chicken between Trump and the Democrats, and I don't think either side will give in easily.

Of even greater importance is the debate over the funding of Planned Parenthood.

There are members of the Freedom Caucus who will absolutely not vote for any spending bill that includes funding for Planned Parenthood. But without the Freedom Caucus, there aren't enough Republican votes to get a spending bill through the House of Representatives.

Alternatively, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer is vowing that his party will block any funding bill that attempts to defund Planned Parenthood in the Senate.

If Planned Parenthood is not defunded now, it never will be defunded. This is one of the most pivotal moments in recent U.S. political history, and the outcome is going to have extraordinary consequences for our nation.

For those who are optimistic that there will not be a government shutdown, do you actually expect me to believe that this battle over the funding of Planned Parenthood will somehow get resolved in just four days?

Give me a break.

And of course there are dozens of other major issues that have to be resolved as well. For example, Senator McCain is promising not to vote for any bill unless it includes an enormous increase in military spending, while many Senate Democrats would be very much against such a move.

I don't see any way that a government shutdown is going to be avoided at this point, and the longer it goes on, the more financial markets are going to get rattled.

Meanwhile, we continue to get even more signs that a substantial slowdown has begun for the U.S. economy. Last week, we learned that only 98,000 jobs were added in March, and that was only about half of what most analysts were expecting.

And since it takes approximately 150,000 jobs a month just to keep up with population growth, that means that we are losing ground.

At the same time, the Atlanta Fed's GDPNow forecasting model is now projecting that U.S. GDP growth for the first quarter of 2017 will be just 0.6 percent on an annualized basis.

That is absolutely pathetic, and as I have said before, I wouldn't be surprised at all if we actually end up with a negative number for the first quarter.

If we do indeed get a negative number for the first quarter and that is followed by another negative number for the second quarter, that will mean a new recession has already started right now but we just haven't gotten official confirmation yet.

And lots of other things are already happening which have not happened since the last recession. For instance, this is the first time since the last financial crisis when there has been

no growth for commercial and industrial lending for at least six months.

In addition, commercial bankruptcies spiked during the last recession, and now it is happening again:

Commercial bankruptcy filings, from corporations to sole proprietorships, spiked 28 percent in March from February, the largest month-to-month move in the data series of the American Bankruptcy Institute going back to 2012.

Of course, consumer bankruptcies are rising at an alarming rate as well. The following comes from Wolf Richter:

In December, bankruptcy filings rose 4.5 percent from a year earlier. In January, they rose 5.4 percent. It was the first time consumer bankruptcies rose back-to-back since 2010. I called it "a red flag that'll be highlighted only afterwards as a turning point."

In March, consumer bankruptcy filings rose 4 percent year-over-year, to 77,900, the highest since March 2015, when 79,000 filings occurred, according to the American Bankruptcy Institute data. The turning point has now been confirmed.

If you would like, I could keep talking about the bad economic news for a couple thousand more words. U.S. credit card debt has just surpassed the \$1 trillion mark, a major crisis has arrived for the U.S. auto industry, thousands of retail stores are closing all over America, our pension funds are underfunded by trillions of dollars and the U.S. national debt is now sitting at a grand total that is just shy of \$20 trillion. The only reason that we have not crossed that \$20 trillion mark yet is because the debt ceiling deadline has already passed, and that is another thing that Congress needs to address very quickly if they want to avoid a major crisis.

Needless to say, the last thing that we need at this point is

another war or two on top of everything else.

Unfortunately, a U.S. aircraft carrier strike group headed by the USS Carl Vinson is heading toward North Korea right at this moment, and Russia and Iran are promising to “respond with force” to any new U.S. attacks on Syria. I will be writing quite a bit more about all of this on *End of The American Dream* later today.

Those that were hoping for some sort of “reprieve” under Donald Trump can forget all about that now. The pace of global events is really starting to accelerate, and the U.S. is already in a more precarious position than it was at any point in 2016.

The clouds have been building for a very long time, and now the storm is almost upon us. I hope that you have been getting prepared, because a day of reckoning for the United States of America is closing in very rapidly. {eoa}

Billy Graham Addresses ‘CEO Christians’

With Easter coming up, Christmas/Easter Only Christians, or CEOs, are pulling out their Sunday best for the services.

Some families will darken the pews for the one of two times a year they visit church. If you asked them, they’d say they consider themselves believers. Does the Christian faith require you to be in church every Sunday?

One reader asked Billy Graham: “I admit I’ve always been kind of a ‘Christmas and Easter’ Christian, since those seem to be

the only times I manage to make it to church. What would you say to someone like me?"

Wise as always, Graham responded:

The first thing I'd say is that I'm glad you at least make it to church twice a year! Even if God and church don't mean very much to you right now, at least they must mean something—and in our increasingly secular age, this is noteworthy.

But I'm also glad for another reason: God could use these two days to speak to you and give you a new understanding of His love for you. You see, God may not be very important to you—but you are of infinite importance to Him! Once you discover this truth, your life will never be the same.

How do I know this? I know it first of all because of what happened on that first Christmas over 2,000 years ago: God came to earth in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus Christ, for He was God in human form. The Bible says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known" (John 1:18).

But I also know God loves you and you are important to Him because of what happened that first Easter. By His death, Jesus Christ took upon Himself the judgment we deserve for our sins, and by His resurrection He opened heaven's door for us. May this Easter season be life-changing for you, as you discover how much God loves you, and you open your heart and life to Jesus Christ. {eoa}