

Century Marks

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Morality tale: When asked to reflect on why pastors like Ted Haggard fall morally, preaching guru Fred Craddock said that it stems from the fact that many pastors never learn to deal with favorable attention. “Never at home or in seminary did anyone teach me how to handle applause,” Craddock said. “You don’t think about it when you’re coming along because you never imagine yourself getting applause for anything. Then when it happens, you say, *Hey, I can get used to this*. Pretty soon, you’ve got to have it. So you surround yourself with people who silently applaud you for one reason or another. And then your life is gone” (Rev! January/February).

Innocents abroad? Americans have long been enchanted by the Middle East, fed by both biblical history and books like *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. The number of Americans who trekked to the Middle East increased significantly in the years following the Civil War, and included Ulysses Grant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mark Twain (who wrote satirically about his travels there in *The Innocents Abroad*) and George McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. The encounter with some realities, such as the treatment of women, intensified their own sense of moral and cultural superiority and helped to perpetuate misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims. Though strongly biased against Muslims himself, McClellan concluded that Westerners would never be able to understand

people in the Middle East so long as they judge them by Western standards (Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, Norton).

Nancy Pelosi's coattails: Last November two new female senators and 10 new female members of Congress were elected. The percentage of women in Congress is still modest (16 percent in both houses), but since most of the women are Democrats they constitute a higher percentage of the Democratic caucuses (just under a quarter in the Senate and 21 percent in the House). More significant, perhaps, is that these women are committed to working collaboratively and in a bipartisan manner. The women senators of both parties meet monthly for lunch. A bipartisan group of female senators opposed the privatization of Social Security in 2005, and two female senators—one a Democrat, the other a Republican—co-wrote a port security bill in 2006. One exit poll indicated that voters think female lawmakers are three times more trustworthy than their male counterparts (*Washington Monthly*, January/February).

Test questions: Noah Feldman, author of *Divided by God*, asks some good questions about religion in the U.S. (*American Scholar*, winter): “In God We Trust. Do we?” “If Evangelical Christians are a powerful political force in the United States, why do they feel embattled?” “Are we a Judeo-Christian nation?” “Do we have a Judeo-Christian foreign policy?” “What the heck is a Judeo-Christian, anyway?” “Should public manifestations of religion be regulated according to nationwide standards? Can the rules in Cambridge, Massachusetts, be different from those in Montgomery, Alabama?”

Plugging the (religious) dike: The century-long secularization of the Netherlands has not only crested but has begun to recede, says an article in the conservative *Weekly Standard* (January 1 & 8). More than 100 companies allow groups of employees to have prayer meetings on their premises; in 2005 the most prestigious literary awards were given to books sympathetic to Christianity, one of which was a best seller; and the Alpha Course—an evangelistic tool used with the unchurched—is growing in popularity. Because of its aging population, the Roman Catholic Church can expect declining membership for another decade or so, however, and liberal Protestant groups continue to decline. One source of resurgent Christianity is the immigrant population. One report indicates that there are two Christian immigrants coming to Holland for every Muslim immigrant.

Dialectic at work? It was reported last summer that President Bush was reading Albert Camus. Scott McLemee (insidehighered.com, January 10) wonders whether the president might also be reading Hegel, especially *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In these lectures Hegel developed his notion of “world-historical persons” who do what they must do for the sake of progress, popular opinion be damned. These great leaders are “devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else,” according to Hegel. “It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even sacred interests, inconsiderately; conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower—crush to pieces many an object in its path.”

Mobile church: A floating chapel in St. Petersburg is available for hire for weddings (weddingsonwater.com). The wedding package includes organ music, an electric candelabra and a white uniformed captain, along with video coverage (*Faith and Form*). If you’d like to plant a new church and you don’t have your own building, then you might consider hiring the people at portablechurch.com. They’ll help assess your needs and truck all the resources—seats, sound equipment, special lighting, signage—to your site.

Doomsday clock: For almost five years the symbolic doomsday clock has stood at where it began in 1947—seven minutes until midnight. But the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, which controls the clock, decided to advance the minute hand to five minutes before midnight, reflecting the nuclear threat posed by Iran and North Korea, unsecured nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union and the threat to our security from climate change. The clock, which has been changed only 17 times in 60 years, has fluctuated between two and 17 minutes to midnight (Bloomberg, January 17).