

Century Marks

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"Can you give him something to calm him down till the country gets straightened out?"

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Choosing Hell: Walpola Piyananda, a Sri Lankan who was ordained a Buddhist monk at age 12, studied at Northwestern University and lived on the campus of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He says he was treated respectfully by most seminarians except for one, who told him, in front of other students, that as a Buddhist he would land in hell. Piyananda replied that he believed his challenger would go to heaven, but that his “noisy theological disputes” would create a racket that would disturb Piyananda’s meditation if he were there too. Piyananda said that “he would voluntarily choose hell, where he might compassionately serve suffering souls.” The proselytizing stopped (Gustave Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*, Viking).

Tough love: During the 1979-1981 Iranian hostage crisis, Firoozeh Dumas's father watched on TV as students held Americans captive in their own embassy. When he would see the image of the Ayatollah Khomeini, her father would ask, "In which part of the Qur'an does it say you can take hostages?" In 2007 Dumas, an Iranian-American writer, got to spend time with one of those hostages, Kathryn Koob of

Iowa. Like all of the hostages, Koob was accused by her captors of being a spy. She actually was in Iran as director of the Iran-America Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering better relations between the peoples of the two countries. Koob told Dumas that when she was taken hostage she knew she would have to sacrifice something, and after contemplating the Bible's admonition to "Love your enemies," she realized she needed to give up her anger and resentment. It was Koob's Christian faith that allowed her to walk away from her imprisonment without anger and resentment, says Dumas. And although the Bible is foreign to Dumas, she says, its concept of love of enemies is not (*Laughing Without an Accent*, Villard).

Good grief: Since 2000 the Parents' Circle Family Forum has brought together more than 1,000 Israelis and almost 5,000 Palestinians who are mourning the death of family members who died in the conflict in the region. Robie Damelin's son, for instance, was killed by a Palestinian sniper while he was doing his national service in the Occupied Territories. Telling her story to people from the other side and hearing their stories as well has helped her deal with her own grief and forced her to reexamine her own country's actions. She says Israelis must ask what the occupation of another people's land has done to their own moral fiber. Members of the organization give talks to youth audiences in an effort to help both sides understand each other (*Tablet*, July 12).

Targeting Muslims? Current guidelines from the U.S. Department of Justice require that the FBI have some evidence of wrongdoing before pursuing an investigation. But according to Juan Cole, some proposed changes in those guidelines would be tantamount to allowing ethnic or religious profiling. "The impending new rules . . . would . . . allow bureau agents to establish a terrorist profile or pattern of behavior and attributes and, on the basis of that profile, start investigating an individual or group," says Cole, a Middle East expert at the University of Michigan. Such strategies are legally dubious and have also proved to be ineffective. None of the interviews of Muslim men after 9/11 uncovered any terrorists, and such targeting will make the Muslim and Arab-American communities less willing to cooperate in efforts to uncover real terrorists (salon.com, July 10).

Downsides of the Ivy League: The advantages of going to an elite school like Columbia or Yale are obvious, says William Deresiewicz, who has taught English at both Ivy League universities. Graduates from such schools have greater potential of getting rich. But there are disadvantages of an elite education, he argues in the *American Scholar* (Summer). People schooled in elite settings tend to have difficulty

communicating with people unlike themselves, they're inclined toward a false sense of personal worth based on their academic achievements, and they possess an attitude of entitlement. An elite education takes away the choice of not being rich—graduates from these universities are less likely to risk low-paying service occupations such as teaching or artistic vocations such as poetry writing. And if they do enter those occupations, they are likely to abandon those pursuits more quickly than are graduates from less prestigious schools.

Mormons exposed: Chad Hardy, the creator of a controversial calendar featuring shirtless Mormon missionaries, has been excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hardy, a former Mormon missionary himself, said the “Men on a Mission” calendar was intended to provoke discussion among Mormons. Church leaders found his conduct “unbecoming a member of the church.” First released last year through Hardy’s Web site, the calendar features 12 shirtless male missionaries in various poses. All of the models had completed two-year missions and were active participants in the church. The calendar sold 10,000 copies in its first year, according to Hardy, and a 2009 edition is set to be published in September (RNS).

Think twice about ethanol: Before you buy a car that uses E85 (ethanol-based) fuel, consider this: ethanol-burning vehicles consume 25 percent more fuel. In this country ethanol is mostly made from corn, and the amount of corn used to fill an SUV with ethanol could feed a person for a year (caranddriver.com).

Tracking homosexuals: A Christian online news outlet run by the American Family Association automatically changes the word *gay* to *homosexual*. So an AP story about sprinter Tyson Gay’s qualifying run for the summer Olympics in China was changed to read: “Homosexual qualified for his first Summer Games team. . . . ‘It means a lot to me,’ the 25-year-old Homosexual said. ‘I’m glad my body could do it, because now I know I have it in me’” (washingtonpost.com, July 1).

Is that you, Father? A man passing himself off as a priest was caught trying to hear confessions in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The man was wearing clerical garb and was carrying documents that claimed he was a priest, but he and the documents turned out to be frauds. The imposter was subsequently tried by a Vatican tribunal for usurping an ecclesiastical title. No word about the verdict or punishment (*Chicago Tribune*, July 5).