

Century Marks

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Arizona immigration suit © John Cole, The Scranton Times-Tribune

In B&W: In 1983 Shabaka WaQlimi came within 15 hours of being executed in Florida for crimes he did not commit (he was charged with robbery, rape and murder). In 1987 he was released from prison after the 11th Court of Appeals ruled that the prosecution intentionally allowed false testimony at his trial. “Nobody knows what it’s like not being able to hug your child or touch your lover,” said WaQlimi, who was nearly 40 when released. The victim in his case was a white woman. “Nobody is going to Death Row for killing a black person,” he said. He has become a spokesperson for People of Faith Against the Death Penalty (*Charlotte Post*, June 24).

Face time: Amy Thompson Sevimli, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, didn’t interact much with people outside the church until she “started a new call” to connect with young adults. She solicited names of young adults to contact and then, over coffee, dinner or beer, she’d ask them what they thought of the church. To her amazement, they talked a lot. They gave their impressions of church and said why they don’t attend one. Some told of how they practice spirituality without the church. Some subsequently reconnected with it. “Web sites, Facebook, and Twitter are all necessary tools,” she says, “but nothing can compare

with a face-to-face connection” (Call & Response blog, June 28).

Rock on: Connections Band is a Dallas-area rock group fronted by United Methodist clergy. The band grew out of a clergy retreat when two pastors stayed up late at night to play songs by Dan Fogelberg. Now a 15-member ensemble that includes some nonclergy, the band does charity concerts featuring music by the Eagles, Chicago, the Doobie Brothers and others. It has raised over \$100,000 for the UMC’s disaster relief fund and an African antimalaria program. Each show includes several breaks for offerings, and church members serve juice and cookies. One fan said, “There’s something inherently trustworthy about a minister who can rock out” (*Dallas Morning News*, June 28).

False shepherds? For clergy, losing faith is not only an occupational hazard, it’s often a huge and burdensome secret. If they remain in the pulpit, it’s because they need a job, or to protect their own family or congregation from the secret they carry. In a study reported in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology*, a common denominator among pastors who claim to have lost their faith is exposure to historical-critical study of the Bible in seminary. These pastors are often protected from having to divulge their secret by denominational and congregational processes that scrutinize pastoral candidates for their pastoral and relational skills but only superficially test candidates’ theological commitments (RNS).

Parenting myth: Studies show that parents today spend more time with their kids, yet kids don’t seem happier, more independent or more successful. They seem more troubled and needy. To raise healthy kids, put your marriage first and your children second, argues David Code (*To Raise Happy Kids, Put Your Marriage First*, Crossroad). For many couples, children are priority No. 1 and marriage is priority No. 10—and few make it past the top three priorities on the daily to-do list. Unlike children and their demands, marriages are regarded as important, but not urgent. Code says current priorities set a poor example of marriage for children and create anxious households—and kids soak up that anxiety.

Networking dangers: Facebook can be a powerful social networking tool for keeping tabs on far-flung friends, finding a job or pushing a cause. But some Muslims worry that Facebook runs afoul of Muslim standards of modesty. Online debates ask if Facebook is *haram* (forbidden). Recently Facebook was banned in Pakistan and Bangladesh after a group featured depictions of Muhammad, which is forbidden in Islam, but it continues to be the social network of choice in Muslim countries like

Egypt and Pakistan and in the wider Muslim community. Some imams even break the 5,000-friend limit and have to switch to fan pages. Facebook has deleted numerous anti-Islam groups (ENI).

Dog gone: An Iranian cleric has issued a fatwa against keeping dogs as pets. Dogs are unclean and, furthermore, “there are lots of people in the West who love their dogs more than their wives and children” (*The Week*, July 2–9).

The longest war: Columnist Bob Herbert believes that Washington isn’t leveling with the American people about the war in Afghanistan, which has lasted almost a decade. The counterinsurgency strategy isn’t working, and the most ardent supporters of counterinsurgency in the military say it will take 10 to 15 years of hard work to make it somewhat successful. The irony is that “we’re bulldozing Detroit while at the same time trying to establish model metropolises in Kabul and Kandahar,” says Herbert. “We’re spending endless billions on this wretched war but can’t extend the unemployment benefits of Americans suffering from the wretched economy here at home” (*New York Times*, June 25).

The Berry papers: Wendell Berry has decided to move his papers from the archives of his alma mater, the University of Kentucky, to the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. The author made the decision after the university approved building a new dormitory for its basketball team that will be called the Wildcat Coal Lodge and be financed in part by money from the coal industry. “I don’t think the University of Kentucky can be so ostentatiously friendly to the coal industry . . . and still be a friend to me and the interests for which I have stood for the last 45 years,” Berry explained (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, June 23).

Readers wanted: A collections librarian at the University of Denver reported that 47 percent of the books acquired between 2000 and 2009 were never checked out. A spokesperson for the University of Arizona echoed this report, saying the university library spent \$19 million on books over the past decade that were never used. Both libraries are going to a user-based system: upon request, new books can be rented as e-books. After a certain number of requests, the book is purchased in hardcover (PublishersWeekly.com, June 22).

Slow reading: In an era when people consume words like fast food and flit from one Web site to the next, a slow reading movement is starting to catch on. Two old strategies are being renewed: reading aloud and memorization, to help students truly “taste” the words. Lindsay Waters, executive humanities editor at Harvard

University Press, called for a “revolution in reading” in 2007. “Instead of rushing by works so fast that we don’t even muss up our hair, we should tarry, attend to the sensuousness of reading, allow ourselves to enter the experience of words,” he wrote. The slow reading movement is calling for a closer connection between information and readers, said John Miedema, who published *Slow Reading* in 2009 (AP).