

Century Marks

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RJ Matson, The St. Louis Post Dispatch

Censoring Corrie: *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is a play based on the journal entries and e-mails of the 23-year-old woman from Washington State who was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza three years ago. She and others were serving as human shields against the razing of Palestinian homes. The one-woman show played to sellout crowds in two runs in London last year. But after it was scheduled for the New York Theatre Workshop, it was mysteriously postponed indefinitely, apparently due to pressure from the pro-Israel community in New York. The theater company explained that it needed a companion play that included testimonies from Israelis who had been victimized by Palestinian terrorists. Corrie's mother pointed out that the workshop had scheduled a lesbian play without regard for those who oppose homosexuality. Her father said: "Do an investigation, follow the money" (*Nation*, April 3).

Let the debate begin: Jonathan Tasini, a Jew who has lived in Israel and is running for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in New York, says that it is time for Jews to speak out on behalf of Palestinians and for dialogue in the U.S. about American foreign policy on Israel. He makes it clear that he is for a secure and prosperous Israel. But he also believes that "the occupation is draining the moral

and economic strength of Israel and that there will only be a just peace agreement when a Palestinian state—a strong, vibrant, prosperous, independent state, able to provide jobs and a good life for its people—thrives alongside Israel.” One problem is that most Jewish Americans, and most Americans, don’t know how brutal the occupation really is, nor do they know the U.S. role in perpetuating it (www.rachelswords.org, March 23).

A time for war? As terrible as war is, notes historian Mark Noll, wars have produced theologically profound works. The *City of God* grew out of Augustine’s brooding over the sack of Rome. John Calvin revised the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* a number of times in response to the French civil wars in the 16th century. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) produced remarkable hymns, including Martin Rinkart’s “Now thank we all our God,” Georg Neumark’s “If thou but suffer God to guide thee” and Paul Gerhardt’s “Holy Ghost, dispel our sadness.” But the American Civil War, Noll says, produced neither profound theology nor great hymns (*The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, University of North Carolina Press).

It’s about dialogue: Brian McLaren, leader in the evangelically oriented Emergent church movement, thinks that dialogue with people of other religions doesn’t preclude witnessing to faith in Christ. In talking with a Muslim imam, McLaren learned that this man was part of a reform movement within Islam. This gave McLaren an opening to talk about Jesus as a reformer within the Jewish community of his own time. McLaren got an appreciative letter from the imam, who said he had never really understood Christianity before their conversation. In another instance a woman visiting McLaren’s church identified herself as a Buddhist. When McLaren asked her about how she had become a Buddhist, the woman admitted she doesn’t really know that much about Buddhism and merely called herself that so Christians would leave her alone. The woman eventually became a Christian (interview in *Criswell Theological Review*, Spring).

Be happy: Tal D. Ben-Shahar teaches two of the three most popular courses at Harvard College. In those two courses he teaches at least a fifth of Harvard’s undergraduates. But he is not on track to get tenure and is not seeking it at Harvard. To get tenure he would have to conduct original research and publish the results. His passion is teaching. His most popular course is “Positive Psychology,” which doesn’t focus on pathologies but follows the assumption that happy people function better and that optimism is a skill that can be taught and learned. Although it sounds like a self-help course, it is part of a national trend in higher education and is grounded in

serious psychological research (*Boston Globe*, March 10).

Dan Brown, evangelist: Conservative Christians have often boycotted movies that challenge traditional Christianity. But a different approach apparently is being planned in the case of the movie *The Da Vinci Code*, based on the novel by the same name. Julie Scheving of Michigan, for example, intends to take some of her unchurched friends to see the movie—scheduled to be released next month—hoping that it will lead to a discussion about Jesus Christ. “Any spiritual conversation is better than no spiritual conversation,” she says (*Newsweek*, April 3).

Warm embrace: A professional grief counselor said that when her father died, she and her mother and sisters went through his personal effects and distributed everything but his overcoat hanging in the hallway. She volunteered numerous times to take the coat to Goodwill, but her mother always declined, saying she would take care of it. The overcoat hung by the front door for ten years, until her mother died. She had died in her sleep, and was found wearing her husband’s coat. What appeared to others as only a piece of clothing was for her a way of staying close to her husband (newsletter of St. Peter’s Church in Chicago, March 26).

Of mice and rats: In research using rats, scientists in Canada have used stem cells to repair spinal cord injuries and restore significant mobility. The stem cells used were extracted from adult mice. This research apparently demonstrates that adult stem cells work as well for this type of injury as do fetal or embryonic stem cells (*Toronto Star*, March 29).