

# Century Marks

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**Clergy silence?** In a tribute to William Sloane Coffin, a former Yale University chaplain and an antiwar activist during the Vietnam War who died in April, Helen Thomas asks where the clergy voices are on the Iraq war. Whereas many clergy led the struggle against the war in Southeast Asia, notes Thomas, “three years into the war against Iraq, the silence of the clergy is deafening, despite U.S. abuse of prisoners at Abu Graib and a reported American policy of shipping detainees to secret prisons abroad where, presumably, they can be tortured.” Thomas, a member of the White House press corps, concludes that the clergy seem “to be in the same boat as the news media and most members of Congress: they are victims of the post-Sept. 11 syndrome that equates any criticism of U.S. policy with lack of patriotism” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4). However, war protest songs have come from performers as different as Pink, Neil Young, Merle Haggard and Madonna. Defending his band’s antiwar song “Worldwide Suicide,” Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam says: “I am a citizen who cares about what happens to this country, and right now things are really bad” (*Newsweek*, May 15).

**Faith-based search for oil:** Conventional wisdom has it that Israel sits on a dry rock in the middle of a Middle Eastern sea of petroleum. But Texas oilman John

Brown is no conventional thinker. He's poured his life savings into searching for oil in Israel, and is raising money, mostly from Christians, to prove he's right. Brown gets his inspiration from Old Testament texts indicating that there is an abundance of (olive) oil in the Promised Land. Brown's first effort at drilling for oil in 2005 came up dry. His shareholder prospectus warns potential investors that his company "could remain unprofitable for a long time" (*Christian Science Monitor*, May 10).

**Contested speech:** The invitation to Bishop Eddie Long to be the commencement speaker at the Interdenominational Theological Center, a consortium of predominantly black seminaries in Atlanta, has created a firestorm. Long, a black minister and an alumnus of the school, is accused of preaching a prosperity gospel. He has publicly said that blacks should forget about racism because they've already reached the promised land, and that women are more susceptible to false teaching than men because of "their intuitive, emotional thinking." Black theologian James Cone, who was to have received an honorary doctorate at this year's ITC graduation, said he wouldn't attend the event because of Long's presence, although he said he'd welcome debate with Long in another context. Of the 103 graduating seniors, 33 wrote a letter to President Michael Battles protesting the invitation of Long (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 11).

**Case study:** Matthew Stewart, a former business consultant, believes that if you want to succeed in business you should study philosophy rather than get an M.B.A. degree. Stewart, who himself has a Ph.D. in philosophy—and no business degree—says much of the current management literature read in business schools boils down to a debate between the rationalists and the humanists: the rationalists put forth models of business efficiency, and the humanists remind managers that they must take care of the people who work for them. "The tragedy, for those who value their reading time," says Stewart, "is that Rousseau and Shakespeare said it all much, much better." Stewart believes that "management theory is mostly a subgenre of self-help" and that "just as most people are able to lead fulfilling lives without consulting Deepak Chopra, most managers can probably spare themselves an education in management theory" (*Atlantic Monthly*, June).

**What a sham:** If self-help books, tapes and seminars are so helpful, why is it that so many people who make use of them keep doing so? Market research has shown that the most likely person to buy a self-help book is someone who has bought another such book in the past 18 months. Steve Salerno, author of *SHAM: How the Self-Help Movement Made America Helpless* (Crown), argues that the self-help and

actualization movement (hence, *SHAM*) convinces its adherents that they have been victimized by past traumatic experiences, from which they alone can provide means of liberation—at a cost of \$500 for a one-day seminar (*Scientific American*, May).

**Faithful fido:** A *Washington Post* poll found that 43 percent of Americans believe pets can go to heaven, and of those people, nearly all (93 percent) said “people’s pets can go to heaven even if their owners do not.” The remainder of those surveyed weren’t so sure that pets would stroll through the pearly gates: 28 percent said no, 22 percent were not sure, and 7 percent do not believe there is a heaven. Dan Paden, a seminary-trained researcher with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, said a more important question is whether someone’s “treatment of animals prevents him or her from joining God in paradise” (RNS, May 8).

**It’s a waste:** The first city dump, created by the Athenians in 500 BC, was intentionally placed at least a mile from the city walls. The largest landfill in the world today is on Staten Island; closed in 2001, it covers 2,200 acres. Landfills are the largest source of human-generated methane, annually spewing 7 million tons into the atmosphere. Currently, Americans produce 472 billion pounds of trash each year, including 96 billion pounds of wasted food—more than 300 pounds per person. Each year Americans receive about 100 billion pieces of junk mail (*Discover*, June).