

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [July 11, 2006](#) issue



Tough love: Robert M. Franklin, former president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, says he once asked Bishop O. T. Jones of Philadelphia why Pentecostal churches seem to thrive in urban centers. Jones responded that many black Pentecostal churches deliberately transplanted southern patterns of care and discipline into northern cities, thereby helping blacks reconnect with their extended family and with the community. Also, Pentecostals take seriously the New Testament claims about the Holy Spirit's transforming power. Believing that no situation or person is beyond redemption, they take on some of the hardest-to-reach segments of the population (*Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Spring).

Envy up, blame down: American productivity increased by over 30 percent during the past decade, but it is people at the top of the economic ladder who have profited from this growth. If one charts Americans according to a ten-rung ladder, the gap between the ninth and first rungs has increased by a third since 1980. In that same time, the share of aggregate income of the wealthiest 1 percent has doubled from 8 to 16 percent. Still, most citizens believe in the American dream - that if you work hard and play by the rules you can get ahead. Rather than blaming their rich compatriots, Americans tend to blame the jobs that are shipped overseas, and the immigrants who come to this country with a willingness to work for less money. (*Economist*, June 17).

Awesome case: A year ago a school superintendent in New Jersey barred a second-grade girl from singing the song “Awesome God” in an after-school talent show. The superintendent said that the song was a problem not because it was religious but because it moved into proselytizing. (One lines says, “His return is very close / And so you better be believing that / Our God is an awesome God.”) The case is before a federal judge in New Jersey, who must decide whether letting the girl sing this song would be an endorsement of a particular religion in violation of the First Amendment’s establishment clause, or a recognition of the girl’s right to express her own faith under the free-exercise clause. The New Jersey chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is filing a friend-of-the-court brief on behalf of the girl and her family (*Christian Science Monitor*, June 15).

Congregations in pain: The nature of congregational conflict has changed over time, according to a study released by the Indianapolis Center for Congregations. In the 1960s conflict was about race, in the 1970s and ’80s it was about women in leadership. Now the issues tend to be over clergy authority (along with issues of homosexuality and worship style). Many congregations wait too long to seek outside help in facing conflict. The study reveals that intervention programs for dealing with conflict succeed. “Pain is your friend, not your enemy,” says John Savage of LEAD consultants, which works with congregations. “God is in the pain to renew it” (Religion News Service).

Prayers for people on the go: *My Morning Prayer* is a 2-CD set of daily services designed for commuters and busy people. Mostly sung or chanted, the services follow a pattern: a morning hymn, psalms, scripture, canticle, intercessions (with space for one’s own prayers), the Lord’s Prayer, and a concluding prayer and blessing. The music will be familiar to those who know the works distributed by GIA Publications, including those by writers and composers like Michael Joncas, Ruth Duck, Marty Haugen, John Bell and the Taizé community (www.giamusic.com).

About face: In a postmodern society, says Crystal L. Downing, “people’s faces have become signs, not of themselves but of someone else.” She points to the work of Richard Fleming, a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, who reports each year on the features people seek in their makeovers. In 2004 women wanted Angelina Jolie’s lips, Nicole Kidman’s nose or Catherine Zeta-Jones’s eyes. Men wanted Jude Law’s lips, Keanu Reeves’s nose or Johnny Depp’s jaw (*How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, Brazos).

Edible ethics: Consumers are increasingly asking about the source of their food—where it came from, how it lived and how it was killed. And some food providers are responding to these concerns. The Whole Foods grocery chain recently announced that it would no longer stock live lobsters and live soft-shell crabs because it couldn't guarantee humane treatment of the crustaceans in transport. Hundreds of restaurants are boycotting Canadian seafood to protest the annual baby seal hunt. Political entities are getting in on the act too: the state of California and the city of Chicago have outlawed foie gras on the grounds that the forced feeding of ducks is cruel (*Baltimore Sun*, June 20).