

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [August 22, 2006](#) issue

WHAT WOULD JESUS DRIVE?



© Gary McCoy

Anatomy of faith: John Fanestil (author of “Why Maria crossed over,” August 8) recalls that when he visited his grandparents in Kansas as a child, he and his siblings and cousins would sleep on the living room floor. Before they went to sleep, his grandmother would come in and, starting with the smallest child, rub their backs, stroke their heads and whisper something into their ears. As a young adult he returned to the faith that he had previously rejected, and his sophisticated friends wondered why. He says he never had the guts to tell them the truth: “because my grandmother used to rub my back” (*Mrs. Hunter’s Happy Death*, Doubleday).

Making religion an issue: Scott MacLean, a retired United Church of Christ pastor, is running in the Republican primary for a congressional seat in Connecticut. His opponent, Miriam Masullo, has criticized MacLean for not dissociating himself from the political stances of the UCC, which she terms “leftist and anti-Republican.” MacLean has responded that the UCC includes political conservatives, moderates and liberals. He said that he and his wife disagree on some issues, but that is no cause for divorce, and that he has no intention of divorcing himself from his

denomination (UCC News, July 12).

The place for conservatives: Conservatives function better as an opposition party rather than a governing party, argues Alan Wolfe (*Washington Monthly*, July-August). As the opposition, conservatives function as a necessary counterweight to liberals' tendency to foster wasteful bureaucracy. But "conservatives cannot govern well for the same reason that vegetarians cannot prepare a world-class boeuf bourguignon: If you believe that what you are called upon to do is wrong, you are not likely to do it very well." Wolfe cites three examples of conservatives' not governing well: the operation of FEMA after Hurricane Katrina, the Medicare prescription drug plan and the prosecution of the war in Iraq.

Higher math: Since 1990 the cost of an education at a public colleges has gone up 68 percent, and it has gone up 47 percent at private institutions. Pell Grants covered about three-fourths of college costs in the 1970s; now they pay less than a third. No wonder fewer working-class and poor youth are going to college, and the average college graduate owes \$20,000 in student loans and \$3,000 in credit card debt. This may also help to explain why Americans age 45 to 54 are more educated than those between 25 and 34 (*U.S. Catholic*, July).

The g-word: World leaders cannot agree on whether the killing in Darfur, Sudan, amounts to genocide, which is defined by a 1948 convention as "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." No matter what you call it, the situation in Darfur is ghastly. Still, labels matter: The g-word gets by far the most response internationally; "ethnic cleansing" is a distant second. Calling what is happening "killing," regardless of the numbers involved, elicits a yawn, especially when it is happening in Africa (*Harper's Magazine*, August).

Failure to communicate: An international meeting was considering a report about a food shortage. Each group at the meeting found the report confusing. The African delegation asked, "Food? What is food?" The Europeans wondered what was meant by the term *shortage*. The American delegation asked, "Could someone please explain the phrase 'rest of the world'?" (a joke told by Emmanuel Katongole in *A Future for Africa*, University of Scranton Press).

Almost persuaded: The curmudgeonly Will Campbell, a Baptist minister, says that when he went to Yale Divinity School he nearly became a Methodist. He didn't want

to take the Baptist polity course because he thought that the professor was boring and that the professor teaching Methodist polity was entertaining and undemanding. Later, after being ordained, Campbell went to New York to be recognized and blessed by a Methodist bishop. Being at the tail end of a group that was to march into the church and sit in the front row for the ceremony, he was instructed to close the outside door as he brought up the rear. Close it he did—from the outside. He never went in; he said to himself: “I don’t know what the hell I want to do, but I don’t want to do this” (interview in *Walker Percy Remembered*, University of North Carolina Press).

High-tech creationism: The Creation Museum being developed in Petersburg, Kentucky, near Cincinnati, will feature a special-effects movie depicting the Genesis version of creation, a recreation of a section of Noah’s Ark and the jaws of robotic dinosaurs. The mission of the museum, scheduled to be completed in May, is to cast doubt on the claims of evolution. Said one supporter of the museum, “Americans just aren’t gullible enough to believe that they came from a fish” (AP).

Holy rappers: Hip-hop worship services are cropping up across the country. Noticing the ubiquity of rap in his neighborhood in the Bronx, Timothy (Poppa T) Holder, a white, middle-aged minister, created a hip-hop mass for Trinity Episcopal Church and developed a hip-hop version of the Book of Common Prayer. His take on the 23rd Psalm: “The Lord is all that, I need for nothing. / He allows me to chill. / He keeps me from being heated / and allows me to breathe easy . . . / And even though I walk through the hood of death, / I don’t back down, for You have my back” (*Newsweek*, July 31).