

# Century Marks

Century Marks in the [April 3, 2007](#) issue



President Bush goes to South America © Angel Boligan, El Universal, Mexico City

**Moral federalism:** Before *Roe v. Wade* some states were beginning to ease restrictive abortion laws. The Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in essence led to a one-size-fits-all approach. The court's ruling also moved abortion from the realm of normal politics, where deals are cut and attempts at consensus are made, to protest politics. The contentious issue of gay marriage seems to be moving the opposite way, toward "moral federalism," that is, away from national debate over a constitutional amendment against gay marriage and toward "a diversity of practice" at the state level. Jonathan Rauch argues that this moral federalism makes contentious issues less volatile politically. "Even moral absolutists . . . should grudgingly support [this state-by-state] pluralism, because it makes the world safe for their moral activism by keeping the cultural peace" (*Atlantic*, April).

**Spirit moving:** Liz Grossman is 12 years younger than her brother Tim, who was diagnosed with autism as a child. Growing up in her Jewish family she thought he was peculiar—and downright scary when he got angry. In adulthood, she noticed that Tim's attendance at a Pentecostal church was having a positive effect on him. She decided to visit the church to see firsthand what the church was doing. At the church she saw that Tim sat in the same spot that he always sat in when he went to

the temple. In 10 minutes at church Tim introduced her to more friends than she thought he had had in his whole life. After what seemed to her an emotionally draining service, she asked him, “How do you feel?” He responded, “Elated.” And then he asked, “Do you think the rest of the family will come too?” Grossman says she hopes they do (*Newsweek*, March 19).

**Upstaging Bono:** One of Thomas Troeger’s hymns, “Praise the Source of Faith and Learning,” was sung at the National Prayer Breakfast in February. The singing was led by the featured speaker, Francis S. Collins, director of the National Genome Research Institute. In asking Troeger for permission to use this hymn, Collins wrote: “I will try to explain the ways in which science can be a form of worship of God the Creator. But for many of us, words are so much more powerful when coupled with music—and your remarkable lyrics, sung to Hyfrydol, would be the perfect summation of what I want to convey.” At the prayer breakfast, Collins noted that “some may find it ironic that last year’s speaker, the rock star Bono, spoke about justice and world economics, but passed up the chance to sing. Now this year’s speaker, a scientist who might be considered a bit of a nerd, proposes to sing and play guitar” (Yale Divinity School News).

**Historians in the present tense:** By a three-to-one ratio, members of the American Historical Association expressed their opposition to the Iraq War and urged a speedy conclusion to it. The resolution was first passed at the AHA annual convention in January, but due to the “intrinsic importance” of the resolution and low attendance at the convention, an online discussion of the resolution was held in February, concluding with an online vote in March. About 15 percent of the group’s membership participated in the vote. Some members argued that, while it was appropriate for them to take a stand on political issues that have a direct bearing on their profession—such as restricting foreign scholars due to heightened security measures—it wasn’t the place of historians to take a stand against the war (insiderhighered.com, March 13).

**Reconciling step:** The Evangelical Christian Baptists in the former Soviet Union, torn by schisms provoked by antireligious measures under Premier Nikita Khrushchev in the early 1960s, took a significant step toward mending relations in early March in Donetsk, Ukraine, according to Walter Sawatsky, professor of history at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. The Baptists had been in the news when Georgi Vins, then-general secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, was imprisoned for the second time in 1974 despite

worldwide church protests. Expelled to the U.S. in 1979, Vins wound up in Elkhart and died there in 1998. Sawatsky, invited to review past church splits and the current hope for reconciliation, said that church leaders of three different groups responded positively to a request to pray for their rivals. “To pray for the other, publicly, as a post-Soviet evangelical church, is therefore an important step on what must still be a long road toward reconciliation, given the many, many negatives that have circulated,” said Sawatsky.

**Aid workers in Darfur:** Since the crisis in Darfur began in 2003, an estimated 200,000 Darfurians have died and another 2.5 million have been driven from their homes, largely the victims of Sudanese government forces and their militia allies. But as bad as the situation is, it would be much worse without the presence of courageous humanitarian workers—some 13,000, of whom fewer than 1,000 are foreigners. The lives of the humanitarian workers are also at risk. Due to the threat of attack from the militias and from bandits, they are now hunkered down in camps. Attacks on aid workers increased last year, and the government is hampering relief efforts by slowing down travel permits and delaying the shipment of supplies ( *Christian Science Monitor*, March 12).

**Guarding the henhouse:** People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has accused a Trappist monastery in South Carolina, which has an egg-production facility, of “shocking cruelty to chickens.” “Tens of thousands of hens at the monastery are painfully debeaked, crammed into tiny cages, and periodically starved,” according to PETA. PETA quotes then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, as saying that “animals, too, are God’s creatures” and the “degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible.” The abbot at Mepkin Abbey says the monks treat their animals humanely and their chickens are better off in cages than in a free-range field where they would be exposed to rodents, snakes, disease and bacteria. Egg production accounts for about 60 percent of the abbey’s annual income (National Catholic Reporter Conversation Café, February 21).