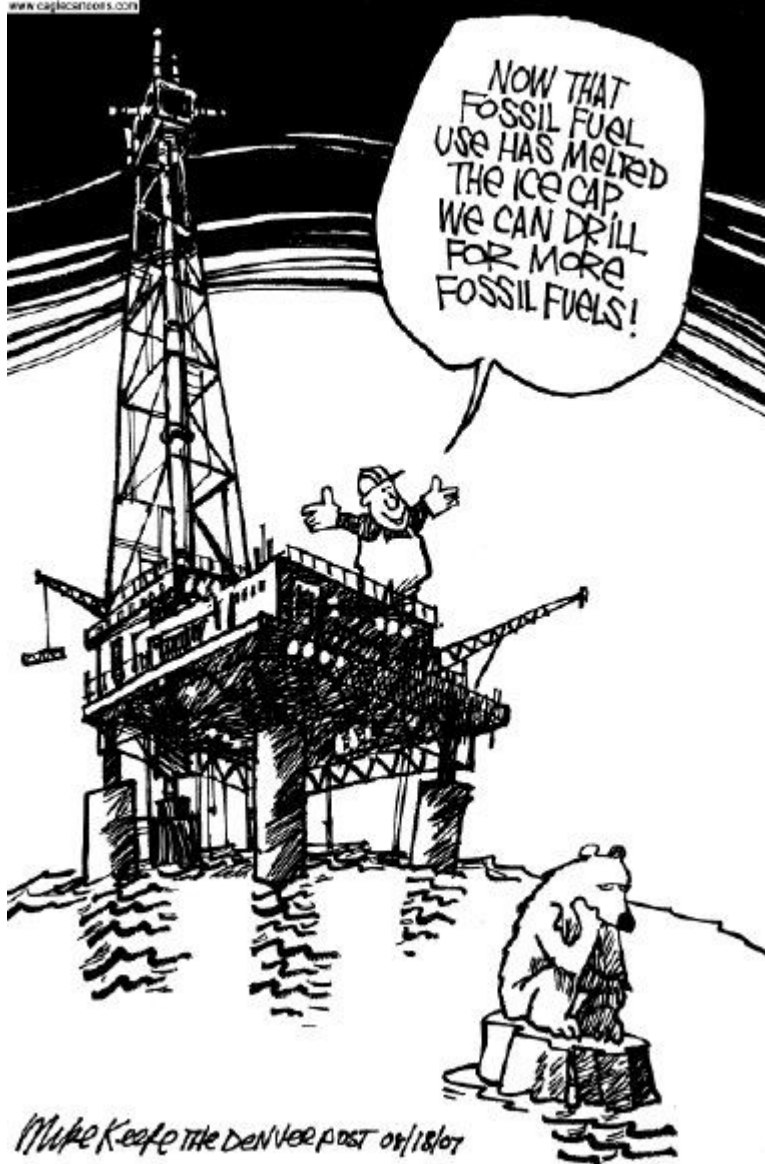


Century Marks

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Living in Mark: When Frank Tupper's wife's cancer returned, the New Testament scholar admitted to a colleague, "The first time in chemotherapy we had so much hope, but now there is so little hope, now we are suspended." Almost as if speaking to himself, he added, "I would not believe in God if I did not believe in Jesus." This startled his colleague, who responded, "Yet most people would say that if it were not for God they would not believe in Jesus." Tupper answered, "Yes, and that is

because they have not lived long enough in Mark's Gospel—the desperation of Gethsemane and the desolation of the cross" (Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence*, Mercer University Press).

Of faith and fate: Religious faith is part of what is driving the conflict in Iraq but also what is sustaining many Iraqis through the war. While mosque attendance may be down due to threats of attacks, the faithful continue to take risks to observe their religion, including turning out in large numbers for major religious events. "We console ourselves with faith and patience," said one young man who, along with his mother, was wounded by a mortar explosion. A Sunni woman who lost her husband in the war and was driven out of her neighborhood by Shi'ite militias has added to the five daily prayers expected of Muslims an extra nightly prayer called a "prayer of need." "I just ask God to help me raise my son," she says. There is a universal sense in Islam that whatever happens is in God's hands and that one can't escape fate (*Christian Science Monitor*, August 15).

Turtle effect: A massive new study by Robert Putnam, best known for his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*, concerns the relationship between racial and ethnic diversity and civic engagement. The results show that the greater the level of diversity in a community, the less people will vote or volunteer, give to charity or work on community projects. "People living in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down'—that is, to pull in like a turtle," Putnam writes. Some commentators think that the findings undermine arguments for diversity or multiculturalism—a conclusion Putnam feared. Others argue that diversity is a fact of life and that ultimately diversity aids problem solving, since people from different cultures bring different perspectives (*Boston Globe*, August 5).

Redneck evangelicals: It has been documented that teen sex and divorce are as common among evangelicals as the rest of the population, leading some to charge that evangelicals are concerned about family values in the public square because they can't get their own house in order. But W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia says that there is a significant difference between the behavior of weekly churchgoing evangelicals and nominal ones. Among weekly churchgoing evangelicals, for example, 12 percent of births are outside of wedlock; among the rest of the population the figure is 33 percent. Nominal evangelicals have sex before other teens, they cohabit and have children out of wedlock at rates similar to the rest of the population, and they're more likely to get divorced than the average American. The reason, says Wilcox, is that nominal evangelicals tend to be poorer,

less educated and part of an Appalachian “redneck” culture (*Wall Street Journal*, August 10).

Women’s work: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, with its main campus in Fort Worth, Texas, is inaugurating a 23-hour academic program in homemaking. Course work will include nutrition and meal preparation, “clothing construction,” general homemaking, child development and the biblical model for home and family. The seminary’s Web site says this program, which counts toward a B.A. degree in the humanities, “endeavors to prepare women to model the characteristics of the godly woman as outlined in the Scripture.” Benjamin Cole, a Texas Baptist pastor, said “it’s yet another example of the ridiculous and silly degree to which some Southern Baptists, Southwestern in particular, are trying to return to what they perceive to be biblical gender roles.” Added Cole: “It’s insulting . . . to many young women training in vital ministry roles” (*Washington Post*, August 9).

Good bet: The late Jerry Falwell used to joke that when he died, Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, which he founded in 1971, would get a great payout. His life insurance policies designate \$29 million for Liberty and another \$5 million for Thomas Road Baptist Church, where Falwell was pastor. This makes Liberty, which is expecting 10,000 students this fall, debt free and able to work on building its endowment. Though Falwell had a history of heart problems, according to his son he purchased six or eight policies from three or four different companies. One policy, for \$21 million, purchased as recently as 2003, cost the university \$1 million in annual premiums (*The News & Advance*, Lynchburg, Virginia, August 10).

Empty pews: The majority of younger adults don’t attend church nowadays, and those who do are hardly regular enough to be part of the core of any congregation. In the 1970s about a third of younger adults (31 percent) attended church. Today that figure has dropped to 25 percent. Robert Wuthnow points out that if the level of church attendance by younger adults were the same now as it was in the 1970s, on average each congregation would have about 21 more younger adults in attendance. “I cannot think of a clergy person who would not like to have 21 more younger adults in his or her congregation,” says Wuthnow (*After the Baby Boomers*, Princeton University Press).

Foiled by do-gooders: After a man robbed a bank in Marietta, Georgia, one Saturday morning, he attempted to blend into a group of volunteers outside a church who were unloading food for distribution to other churches. When he started

losing bills tucked under his shirt, two of the volunteers, who were former law enforcement officers, confronted the robber and held him until police arrived (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 12).

Leadership needed: Stepitup07.org is calling for rallies on November 3 to focus attention on three environmental goals: an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, a moratorium on new coal-fired power plants, and a Green Jobs Corps to help homes and businesses meet these goals. To highlight the need for leadership on the environment, the organization suggests that the rallies be held in places that honor past community leaders. Groups can register at www.stepitup07.org, and the organization will help promote the events.

Passing the peace—or not: There are two kinds of Americans, according to humorist Garrison Keillor. One is the kind who, when a big and smiley preacher says from the pulpit, “How about everybody turn around and shake hands with the person behind you and give them a big howdy!” will do what the preacher says and feel uplifted by it. The other is the kind who will do anything to avoid this, even miss church entirely. Even though the world thinks the first kind of American is typical, there are actually more of the second type (*Chicago Tribune*, August 15).