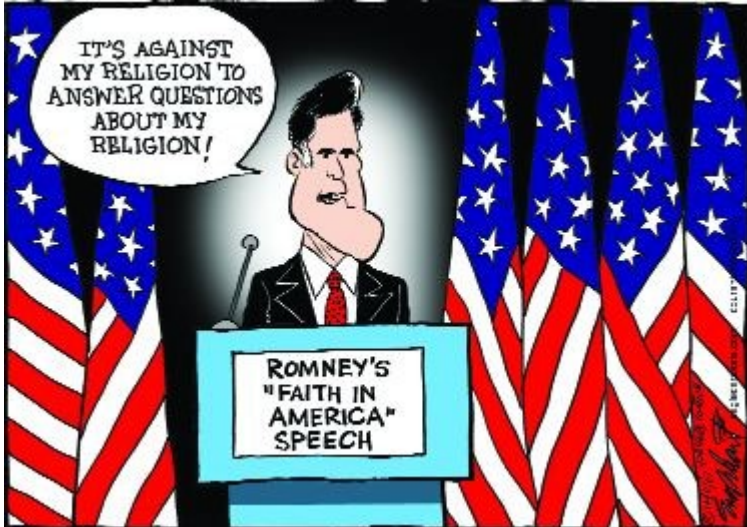


Century Marks

Century Marks in the [January 15, 2008](#) issue



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Speechless: Poet Scott Cairns recounts a Dan Rather interview with Mother Teresa in which he asked her what she says to God when she prays. “I don’t say anything,” she said. “I just listen.” Rather then asked what God says to her. “He doesn’t say anything,” she responded. “He just listens” (*Crux*, Winter 2006).

Object lesson: Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish scholar who teaches New Testament at Vanderbilt Divinity School, says that when her son was young she’d bring him along to class, wearing his yarmulka and fringes. And then she’d say to the class for the benefit of the Christian students, “When you talk about Jews or Judaism, think about this child. Say nothing that will hurt him, and say nothing that will cause a member of your congregation to hurt him. Do not use Judaism as a foil, do not bear false witness against it, and do not make the Gospel of Love into a message of hate” (*Currents in Theology and Mission*, December).

Slowing down: When American Quaker reformer John Woolman planned a trip to England in 1772, he learned that the English road system was known for its use of “flying coaches.” These six-horse coaches were fast not because the horses ran so fast but because they started early in the morning and went for hours without stopping. Woolman was disturbed to hear that the horses, driven to exhaustion,

would frequently become blind or die. He resolved not to ride in a stagecoach in England or to send any mail via the British postal system. From his youth, Woolman believed that creatures should be treated benevolently and that humans could even learn from animals. His views on animals were shaped by the millennial vision of the peaceable kingdom in Isaiah 11:6-9 (Geoffrey Plank in *Church History*, September).

Sex and slavery: William Stacy Johnson notes that there are three forms of homoeroticism. Age-differentiated homosexuality, known as pederasty and common among the ancient Greeks, is when a younger person is expected to give sexual favors to his mentor as a rite of passage. Status-defined homosexuality, in which a superior performs a sexual act with a passive inferior who is often stigmatized, was common among the ancient Romans. Egalitarian homosexuality, in which the partners are in an equal and mutual relationship, is the predominant form today. Johnson points out that no biblical text addresses this third type of homosexuality and that the second type is the context for the three New Testament texts that deal with same-sex activity. If the New Testament is a protest document that offered an alternative to Roman dominance and exploitation, as scholars are increasingly concluding, could one of the implications be that egalitarian homosexual unions are not proscribed by the New Testament, especially when its writers seem not to have known of this form of homosexuality? (*Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Winter).

It's about us, not God: A Dutch Protestant pastor who describes himself as an "atheist pastor" has become a publishing success in the Netherlands. Klaas Hendrikse's book *Believing in a God Who Does Not Exist: Manifesto of an Atheist Pastor* was published in early November and went into its third printing within a month. It tells how his conviction that God does not exist has grown, and argues that it is possible to speak of God as a quality of relationship rather than a divine being (ENI).

Base instincts: Since the surge began in Iraq, a new military base has sprung up near the border with Iran. It's ostensible purpose is to check the flow of goods and people coming into Iraq from Iran, but it seems to have the strategic purpose of containing Iran's influence in the region. It is expected that this base will have a continuous presence, even after there is a drawdown of troops. Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, Iraq's national security adviser, has said that though Iraq has looked to the U.S. for help in the war against terrorism and to protect its borders, "permanent forces or bases in Iraq for any foreign forces is a red line that cannot be accepted by any nationalist Iraqi" (*Chicago Tribune*, December 10, and Reuters).

Healing: In a 27-page cover story, “Sacred Places,” *U.S. News & World Report* (November 26–December 3) looks at the role that holy sites play in the life of religions and religious people, and includes vignettes about sacred places in different religions all over the world. Pilgrimages to these sites are increasingly popular. Devotees make such trips to connect with the divine or honor a sacred moment or leader from the past. And even more mundane ends are sought. At the Great Hypostyle Hall in Karnak, Egypt, for instance, festival attenders scrape dust from the temple walls for its purported healing powers. “Men drink their temple scrapings in tea to become more potent—early Viagra!” explains Salima Ikram, professor of Egyptology at Cairo’s American University.

Room to pray: Setting aside places for meditation is a trend on college campuses. The University of Idaho’s University Commons, built in 2000, has a meditation room that overlooks wheat fields in the foreground and mountains in the background. Richland College in Dallas, Green Mountain College in Vermont and Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York, have each installed a labyrinth. Students at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina built a stone meditation hut. And Wake Forest University, which already had meditation space for its predominantly Christian student body, is creating a meditation room—“neutral space”—in its student center for people of other faiths to use (insidehighered.com, December 3).

Ask a monk: Online questions about Buddhism are being directed to Venerable Shih Ying-Fa, abbot of CloudWater Zendo, the Zen Center of Cleveland, at www.cloudwater.org/askamonk.html. Ying-Fa said he tries to answer e-mails within 24 hours, giving priority to those writers with a family member or animal near death, or others experiencing crises (RNS).

For thirsty souls: Wayne Enterprises in California offers Holy Drinking Water that has been blessed in the warehouse by an Anglican or Catholic priest. A Chicago entrepreneur markets Liquid OM, supposedly super-purified water, and promises that imbibers will take on a positive outlook on life. Spiritual Water comes with ten different Christian labels, including the Virgin Mary bottle with the Hail Mary printed on the bottle in English and Spanish (*Newsweek*, December 17).