

Century Marks

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"I hated how they acted so much 'greener than thou.'"

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Protecting your eyes: Maggie Ross does not want to embrace a Vatican-style index of forbidden books, but she sees a legitimate intention behind such a list. "For all of us there are books we wish we hadn't read, movies we wish we hadn't seen, activities we no longer care to engage in—all of which can leave residual images in the mind that take time and effort to dissolve." About any encounter, Ross would have us ponder these questions: "Will this text, experience, or person create an interior storm of pleasurable excitement, or anguish and distress, clouding the mind with noisy distraction? What is the quality of silence in this text, experience, or person?" (*Weavings*, March/April).

Foreclosing foreclosure: Historian Howard Zinn says that though elections can make a difference—think of the difference between Roosevelt and Hoover in responding to the Depression—usually there isn't that much difference between the Democratic and Republican candidates. What matters instead are grassroots movements that pressure elected officials of either party to change. Zinn cites the actions of farmers after the Revolutionary War, many of them veterans of that war,

who couldn't afford to pay their taxes and were in jeopardy of losing their land and homes. They gathered by the thousands at courthouses, refusing to allow their properties to be auctioned. A movement like that needs to arise in the current mortgage crisis, says Zinn (*Progressive*, February 24).

Marketing the church: While many churches scramble to embrace modern marketing tools—Web sites, podcasts, billboards and the like—a backlash is forming, at the center of which is the Web site ChurchMarketingSucks.com. With more than 40,000 unique visitors per month, the site aims to “frustrate, educate and motivate” churches into communicating effectively in a religious environment. “If churches were doing what they’re supposed to be doing, they wouldn’t need advertising,” says the site’s founder Brad Abare. He contends that if churches were more active in the community and addressing its needs, they would grow naturally from the original form of marketing—word of mouth (RNS).

Marketing Jesus: “What’s frightening about the contemporary understanding of marketing,” says Edward Stone Gleason, “is that whatever the product is that is being marketed, its creator will gladly alter and package the product to serve the desires and needs of the consumer. This is not the case when the product is Jesus Christ. Alteration is not necessary, but announcement is mandatory” (*The Prayer-Given Life*, Church Publishing).

Televangelism, Muslim style: While some observers predict a coming clash of civilizations, Alan Wolfe thinks the long-term trends of globalization will have a moderating influence on religions. He sees the future of Islam, for example, in figures like Amr Khaled and Mustafa Hosni, both Egyptians. Khaled is a televangelist who lives in England most of the time and preaches themes of prosperity and self-improvement, a message that appeals to youth who are neither modern nor fundamentalist. Hosni’s YouTube messages of self-fulfillment and spiritual renewal appeal to jeans-clad Muslims in Europe and the Middle East (*Atlantic*, March).

Get it on: Paul Wirth, pastor of the Relevant Church in Tampa, Florida, is asking his congregation to take the 30-day sex challenge. Married couples are encouraged to have sex every day for 30 days, and singles are asked to abstain from sex for the same period. The problem for married couples, says Wirth, is that life gets in the way of sexual intimacy; the problem for singles is that sex gets in the way of developing genuine relationships (tampabays10.com).

Give it up: In July 2006 Will Bowen, pastor of Christ Church Unity in Kansas City, Missouri, challenged his congregation to give up complaining for 21 days and instead focus on the way things should be. To help reinforce the message, he distributed purple silicon bracelets with the word *Spirit*. The length of the exercise, according to Bowen, was deliberate—it takes three weeks to break a habit. His campaign has caught on: by now he’s sent over 5 million bracelets to 80 different countries, written a book on the topic, appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and formed a nonprofit group called A Complaint Free World (*Christian Science Monitor*, February 19).

Take it off: The Integris Health Care system is working with black pastors in Oklahoma City to encourage congregation members to lose weight. Working in teams, members weigh in on the first of each month and then report their aggregate weight to Integris. Their efforts are part of Mayor Mick Cornett’s “This City Is Going on a Diet” campaign. Cornett is imploring citizens of the city to lose 1 million pounds in 2008. Oklahoma City is among the top ten most obese cities in the country (integris-health.com).

Say a prayer for java: It is not so unusual that Catholic authorities in Croatia have opened a coffee shop. What is unique is that their customers can pay for their caffeine fix with prayers. The café in Zagreb charges four “Our Fathers” for a cappuccino and five “Hail Marys” for a Coca-Cola, the most expensive item on the menu (*The Week*, February 22).

Early Easter: This year’s March 23 Easter is the earliest Resurrection Sunday most us will ever see; only the very elderly of our population have ever seen it this early before. The next time Easter will be this early is the year 2228—that’s 220 years from now. The last time it fell on March 23 was 1913; only those 95 or older were around for that. March 22 is the earliest possible date for Easter, but that is quite rare. The next time for that will be the year 2285. The last time it was on March 22 was 1818.

Correction: Our editorial on immigration (February 12) repeated a legend about the 9/11 hijackers—that they entered the U.S. through Canada. All the evidence indicates that the hijackers did not come through Canada and that they entered the U.S. with U.S. visas. We deeply regret the error.