

# Century Marks

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**Hound of heaven:** Poet Mary Karr has chronicled her life growing up in a dysfunctional family in two best-selling memoirs (*The Liar's Club* and *Cherry*). In an interview with *Image* (Winter), she reports that she's at work on a third memoir that will likely bring her life up to the point when she came to faith as a Christian. Karr says she first went to church at the urging of her young son, who said he wanted "to see if God is there." After trying several churches and a Jewish temple, the two attended a Catholic mass. Afterward she told the priest, "I am taking my kid to this church the way I take him to soccer, a game I don't particularly like." The priest replied, "God's after you." She says she liked the priest's playfulness and the way the people in the parish were engaged in each other's lives. Eventually she found the experience of Eucharist to be healing, especially for the anger she harbored toward her mother.

**Liberty at home and abroad:** The story of religious freedom in the U.S. is one of the nation's success stories, but religion is either largely ignored or viewed as a problem by American foreign policy scholars and practitioners, according to Thomas F. Farr, author of *World of Faith and Freedom: Why Religious Liberty Is Vital to American National Security in the Twenty-first Century*. Farr thinks that the U.S.

should make the promotion of religious freedom a key component of U.S. foreign policy. “Doing so would give the United States a powerful new tool for advancing ordered liberty and for undermining religion-based extremism at a time when other strategies have proved inadequate,” he says. The International Religious Freedom Act, which mandates that the promotion of religious liberty be at the center of U.S. foreign policy, is nearly ten years old. It has been used to oppose religious persecution, but neither Democratic nor Republican administrations have taken seriously the promotion of religious freedom as a foreign policy tool, says Farr (*Foreign Affairs*, March/April).

**Give it away now:** When the editors of *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance* (April) interviewed Bill Gross, a very successful bond fund manager, they discovered that he was more excited about giving away money than making it. Gross, 63, credited his wife for doing the research for their philanthropic endeavors and said: “When you’re 80 years old and about to kick it, anybody can give away money. It’s important to give away a piece when it really matters and when it really hurts.” The Grosses so far have given away a third of their fortune.

**Strange country:** A country singer who wears a cowboy hat, hails from a small town in Oklahoma and sings with a twang—nothing unusual about that. What is unusual about Kareem Salama is that he is a country singer who is a devout Muslim. And he has a law degree from the University of Iowa and an interest in classical Arabic poetry. His songs are as likely to be about philosophers—one of his songs is called “Aristotle and Averroes”—as about broken hearts. Salama, 30, has two self-produced albums and is talking with an independent record label about a third (RNS).

**Cruel justice:** Debbie Shank was an employee of Wal-Mart when she suffered brain damage in a traffic accident. She will have to stay in a nursing home the rest of her life. The trucking company involved in the accident gave Shank a settlement payment of which a little over \$400,000 was put in a trust fund once legal fees were paid. Wal-Mart sued her family for all that money and then some in order to recover the cost of the medical treatment it paid for. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to take it on. Wal-Mart says all employees sign a contract that includes a clause allowing the company to collect damages from an accident in which the company has paid expenses. Shank’s husband divorced her so she could receive more money from Medicaid for her care. On top of it all, Shank lost a son in Iraq, and her ex-husband has prostate cancer (CNN, March 25).

**Way to peace?** Khalid Amayreh, an American-educated journalist from the West Bank, says that the Palestinian group Hamas is not opposed to Jews and Judaism; it is opposed to the creation of the state of Israel as a way to pay for the sins of Europeans (in the Holocaust) at the expense of Palestinians. Amayreh refers to the Islamic concept of a *hudna* or *sulh*, a lengthy truce, which Hamas leaders have said they'd be willing to enter into in exchange for Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied territories, the release of Palestinian prisoners and a serious effort to implement UN Resolution 194—the right of return of Palestinian refugees. One Islamic authority from the West Bank said that a *sulh* is a sincere endeavor to prepare for ultimate peace, and that it can last as long as both sides want it to (*The Link*, January-March).

**Supporting Darwin:** The *United Church Observer*, a Canadian church magazine, has become the first North American sponsor of a traveling exhibit on the life and work of Charles Darwin. The exhibit, which opened last month at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, had failed to find support from such exhibits' usual sponsors, who cited concerns about a potential backlash from Christians opposed to the idea of evolution. Editor David Wilson decided that the magazine should become a sponsor after learning that the exhibit had received no corporate support in other North American cities where it had been mounted. "There is nothing in the exhibit that threatens or diminishes religion," Wilson said. "If anything, it shines a light on the inherent beauty and wonder of a creation that is constantly and eternally evolving" (ENI).

**Get moving:** Americans could cut carbon emissions by 64 million tons if they'd either walk or bicycle for 30 minutes a day instead of driving. They'd also collectively shed 3 billion pounds of excess fat in the process. Even more would be done for the environment if people gave up eating meat, since livestock production produces 18 percent of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions (*Sierra*, March/April).