

# Century Marks

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*"We will now observe a moment of silently checking our BlackBerrys."*

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**Heart of the matter:** "Why do we persist in trying to 'solve' problems with violence, despite the fact that violence threatens our survival?" asks Parker J. Palmer. We resort to violence when we don't know what to do with our suffering, he says, and he points to the U.S. response to 9/11 as a prime example. Suffering can be life-giving if our hearts are broken open so that we then have the capacity to empathize with others' suffering. To reach that point we must honestly name our suffering, feel it fully and then allow the turmoil to settle and an inner quietude to emerge so God can help us find our way through (*Weavings*, March/April).

**Darwin's loss:** Through his study of evolution Charles Darwin was well aware of suffering in nature. Suffering became a deeply personal matter for him when Annie, his eldest daughter, died. Most families in Darwin's time lost children, and he and his wife had already lost two in infancy. But Annie was his favorite child. Her death left him distraught and had more to do with his loss of Christian faith than did the evidence he found for evolution (*Third Way*, Winter).

**Did you know?** Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born on the same day, February 11, 200 years ago. Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Lincoln became president of the U.S. two years later. Both were late bloomers; they did not become prominent in their fields until age 50 (*Chicago Tribune*, February 8).

**Care giving:** Nathan Carlin notes that the word *cure* as we use it today is a synonym for remedy, but at one point it also meant to care for someone. If the medical profession is committed to curing patients in the narrow sense, then robotic nurses might well suffice in hospital treatment. Carlin wishes that medical professionals would adopt a more holistic “care-curing” approach, but he’s not optimistic that that will happen—which makes the caring work of pastors and chaplains all the more important (*Pastoral Psychology*, February).

**Saying grace:** “Father, we thank thee for these and all thy blessings” is the prayer that Marilyn Chandler McEntyre’s father prayed before meals. Her parents’ gratitude for basic provisions of life was informed by having spent years in India. McEntyre thinks that the prayers we pray before meals might express gratitude not only to God, but also to the people who produced and transported our food. “Who planted it, farmed it, made it, marketed it? Who reaps the benefits? Who pays the hidden costs?” are the questions we might ponder when we say grace (*Prism*, January-February).

**Career move:** Applications to seminaries and divinity schools are on the rise, as often happens in hard times. Schools as theologically different as Yale Divinity School and Dallas Theological Seminary have seen a 10 percent increase in applications. “Divinity school looks good, especially if there’s financial aid, and i-banking isn’t as attractive as it was a while ago,” says Yale’s dean Harold Attridge. After 9/11 and the last economic downturn, seminary enrollment increased 8 percent, according to the Association of Theological Schools (*Newsweek*, February 16).

**Crossways:** If you watched the Super Bowl game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Arizona Cardinals, you couldn’t miss seeing Steelers safety Troy Polamalu, a Samoan with hair that hasn’t been cut in seven years. You may have also noticed that he often crosses himself while on the field. He crosses himself from right to left because that’s how Orthodox Christians do it (the opposite of how many Western Christians do it). Polamalu and his wife are members of a Greek Orthodox church (

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 1).

**Neither snow nor rain:** The U.S. Postal Service recently floated the idea of cutting mail delivery back to just five days a week—which would create a special problem for some religious newspapers that print weekly local editions. Much of the material in these editions is about upcoming events and ministries, so timely delivery is important. The Dallas-based *United Methodist Reporter* sends out between 180,000 and 200,000 local church editions, and the loss of a day of delivery could undermine the journal's mission. The threatened decrease in service comes after a 2007 postal rate increase of as much as 20 percent for some publications (RNS).

**For people on the go:** One week's worth of evening prayer is on the two CDs that make up *My Evening Prayer: Seven Daily Services for People on the Go*—a sequel to *My Morning Prayer*, both from GIA Publications. The daily prayers are partly sung, with much of the music drawn from the Taizé community in France or from hymnody associated with Catholic liturgical renewal. A useful resource for commuters.

**Spin cycle:** The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials recently approved a national network of bicycle paths and lanes of over 50,000 miles. Called the U.S. Bicycle Route System, it will largely incorporate existing trails and roadways. The success of the system will depend on state highway departments and agencies that oversee roads and trails (*Bicycling*, March).

**Putting a face on Islam:** A new line of Muslim dolls is being marketed by a supermarket chain in Britain. The dolls say prayers from the Qur'an in Arabic and English. The creator of the "Talking Muslim Doll" says that as a child he didn't enjoy going to the mosque each day and learning the prayers. He hopes these dolls change that for Muslim children. Priced at around \$37, there is both a male and a female version (UPI).

**Smokes:** The level of nicotine dependence among smokers is at a 15-year high, with nearly 75 percent of people in smoking cessation programs categorized as highly nicotine dependent. Researchers can't explain this increase. One theory is that many smokers with lower levels of nicotine dependence have already quit smoking. Breaking the smoking habit is difficult not just because it is addictive, but because it tends to enhance other pleasurable activities, such as drinking a cup of coffee or socializing with friends, and makes unpleasant experiences more tolerable (*USA Today: Your Health*, February).