

# Century Marks

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**Exercise your willpower:** A person working on a difficult puzzle will spend eight minutes more on it if given a bunch of cookies to eat rather than raw radishes. The reserve of willpower is depleted more quickly with the radishes, because most people have to will themselves to eat radishes. However, the part of the human brain where willpower resides is like a muscle: it can be strengthened through exercise. According to Sam Wang, a neuroscientist at Princeton, an exercise as minor as brushing your teeth with the nondominant hand for several weeks will increase your reserve of willpower, which can then be used for other tasks (*Discover*, March).

**Practicing forgiveness:** During a time when she found it difficult to forgive others, Evelyne Lein was offered this suggestion by her pastor: think of the people toward whom you feel bitter and pray for each one: “In the name of Jesus Christ, I forgive and bless you.” She found that thinking of people with whom she had tense relationships came rather naturally. She also found that she had to put herself into the “forgiving chamber” at times when she found it difficult to forgive herself. We all suffer, she says, when we don’t forgive (*Spiritual Life*, Spring).

**Thanks to Darwin:** Mark A. Throntveit and Alan G. Padgett of Luther Seminary argue that Darwin's work frees us to read the Bible on its own terms and helps us to realize that science and the Bible have different, and not necessarily conflicting, agendas. "Science seeks answers to questions of *what* and *how*, while biblical interpretation seeks answers to questions of *who* and *why*." The Genesis accounts of creation are less about the origins of creation and more about the ordering of chaos and forming of relationship with us humans (*Word & World*, Winter).

**The other guy:** In this year that Americans celebrate the bicentennial of the Abraham Lincoln's birth, the Church of the Epiphany, an Episcopal parish in Washington, D.C., is remembering a different Civil War president—Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America. Davis rented a pew at Epiphany from 1845 to 1861, while he was a member of Congress from Mississippi and secretary of war. "He was a man of faith, but he certainly was on the wrong side of history," says Tripp Jones, a member of Epiphany and the church's archivist. Jones has written a play, "A Place of Healing," based on Civil War-era letters, diaries and other documents, which the congregation has produced twice (RNS).

**God by another name:** Christians in Malaysia are not allowed to use the word *Allah* in their publications, but they say that *Allah* is the only word in Malay for God. They explain that they have used this word for more than 100 years and that it is allowed and widely used in Indonesia and by Christians in other Muslim countries. After a lengthy court battle, in February the Malaysian government decreed that a Roman Catholic newspaper could use the word *Allah* if it included a warning on the front page that the newspaper is for Christians. But this decree was soon reversed because of fear that Muslim groups would vent their anger at the government in upcoming elections. Christians make up 9 percent of the Malaysian population (ENI).

**Been there:** America's first stock exchange was under a buttonwood tree at the foot of Wall Street. And the exchange's first collapse took place in the spring of 1792. The bubble that burst was the result of actions by financier William Duer, former assistant secretary of the treasury, land speculator and army contractor. Duer tried to corner the market on government-sold securities. He resold them to others, including wealthy Europeans, with the promise that they would double their money in six months. When the collapse came, Thomas Jefferson estimated that the loss in the economy was equal to the value of all the buildings in New York City. But "the appetite for a fast buck was not purged from the American psyche" (*American Heritage*, Winter).

**Done that:** The collapse of Enron in 2001 was a sign of things to come. Enron was engaged in a shell game, trading energy commodities while making losses appear as gains. Two years before the collapse, CEO Ken Lay, since deceased, made \$42.4 million and was one of the highest-paid executives in the country. Lay was first an executive in another oil company, then took a job as a federal energy regulator, working himself up to the post of undersecretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. After he went back to the private sector, he was well placed to take advantage of the deregulation of the energy industry by President Reagan (Alan Axelrod, *Profiles in Folly*, Sterling).

**Five percent difference:** Composer-conductor John Adams estimates that 95 percent of a musical performance in the Western classical tradition is dictated by the notation on the page. But what a difference the 5 percent can make with skilled musicians whose performances have their own singularities (*Hal lelujah Junction*, see BookMarks, p. 48).

**Gaza effect:** The war in Gaza this winter has emboldened pro-Palestinian groups on American university and college campuses. Emory University, where about a third of the undergraduates are Jewish, hosted an "Israeli Apartheid Week," including the controversial Norman G. Finkelstein as a speaker. Finkelstein was denied tenure at DePaul University for his criticisms of Israel. Students at other universities have demanded that their institutions divest of investments in Israel, set up scholarship funds for Palestinian students and support Palestinian education in Gaza. This new activism has not been without turmoil. A pro-Palestinian display at Cornell was vandalized. On the other side, the Israeli consul general of Israel, speaking at a public event at San Jose State, was prematurely escorted by police from the auditorium when tensions built up during a question-and-answer period (insidehighered.com, March 6).

**Write on:** Researchers have known there are health benefits from journaling, whether the writing is about good experiences or traumatic ones. Researchers at the University of Missouri concluded that it doesn't take much writing to matter: they saw results after only two minutes of writing for two days (*British Journal of Health*, October 30, 2007).