

Century Marks

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Jews and Muslims together: When a Jewish synagogue in Reston, Virginia, heard that a Muslim congregation was looking for space to rent for the observance of Ramadan, it offered its social hall. The imam, who grew up in Sudan, said that he had never met a Jew until he moved to the U.S. in his 20s and that his congregation's experience with the synagogue had shattered stereotypes. One member of the Muslim congregation said, "Next time I see a Jewish person, I will not look at them the same." The Jewish rabbi expects that the relationship between the two groups won't end with Ramadan. The imam and the rabbi are talking about taking a trip to the Middle East together. The Muslims will continue to hold Friday prayers at the synagogue (AP).

Timely thoughts: Because time is God's gift to us, we need to receive it with reverence and use it sacramentally, Kristen Johnson Ingram says. But how do we treat time sacramentally? "Is my desk an altar, is our dinner table a Eucharist, is this house a temple?" she asks. Not always, she admits, reporting how she and her husband had just argued over taking out the trash. Still, she believes God expects her to treat time with the same respect with which she treats communion. "God stands at the altar, consecrating time for my use, inviting me to eat the bread of hours and drink the cup of years, urging me to live, to age, even to die, so that time will then propel me into eternity" (*Weavings*, May/June).

God for a change: The Shona people of Zimbabwe have many names for God. Janice McLaughlin's favorite is *Chipindikure*, which means "the One who turns things upside down." It comes from the word *kupinduka*, which means "to be uprooted." Says McLaughlin, a longtime Maryknoll missionary: "What an amazing concept to explain God's presence in the often unwanted and unplanned changes that happen to us throughout our lives" (*Ostriches, Dung Beetles, and Other Spiritual Masters*, Orbis).

God, if you're there: While working in Iraq, journalist and avowed atheist Spencer Case felt an impulse to pray on two separate occasions. One time is easily explainable, he claims—it was when his camp was under attack by enemy mortars. The other occasion was when he slept under the stars in a desolate part of western Iraq and was struck by the contrast between the human-made chaos in that country and the beauty and order in the cosmos. It prompted him to pray this prayer: "Dear God, I have come to the conclusion you probably don't exist, but I've also come to the conclusion that any one view I hold may turn out to be mistaken, however unlikely the odds seem. So if you are there, if I am wrong, you know where to find me" (*Humanist*, September/October).

Charitable and socialized: Foreign correspondent Walter Rodgers spent several decades in countries that have national health insurance. Once his family was involved in a car accident in Britain and his son spent six weeks in a hospital with a badly broken leg. Although Rodgers wasn't actually living in the country at the time, all the bills were paid for by the British National Insurance System. The hospital charged him only \$35—for a crutch his son needed to hobble aboard a plane (*Christian Science Monitor*, September 16).

What terrorist haven? Paul R. Pillar challenges the notion that the war in Afghanistan is necessary in order to deny terrorist groups like al-Qaeda a safe haven. There are numerous unstable countries where al-Qaeda could establish safe havens, and the U.S. cannot secure them all. Besides, a safe haven isn't that crucial for terrorists. The most important preparations for 9/11 took place in German apartments, Spanish hotel rooms and U.S. flight schools. "International terrorist groups have thrived by exploiting globalization and information technology, which has lessened their dependence on physical havens," says Pillar, former deputy chief of the counterterrorist center at the CIA (*Washington Post*, September 16).

Martyr? A young Christian in eastern Pakistan was imprisoned on charges of blasphemy, and after two days of police questioning he was found dead in his cell last month. Local authorities claim he committed suicide, but a human rights group has found evidence that he was abused. The death comes amid a series of attacks on minority groups in Pakistan, including the burning deaths of six Christians in July and attacks against Christian houses and a church in March and June. Christians, a very small minority, are barred from running for president in Pakistan (*New York Times*, September 17).

Random acts of malice: Most hate crimes in the U.S. are committed by youths with no connections to hate groups. One researcher has classified the perpetrators of hate crimes into three groups: reactionists, who are interested in protecting their resources from intruders; mission offenders, who appeal to a higher authority as they attempt to eradicate what they believe is an inferior group; and thrill seekers, who are motivated by boredom, a desire for fun or a desire to feel strong. Thrill seekers constitute the largest group (*Chicago*, September).

The pope and the president: When former president Bill Clinton met with Pope John Paul II in January 1999, the pontiff scolded Clinton for the U.S. embargo against Cuba, calling it spiritual violence. Clinton welcomed the pope's concern for social justice and the poor, and the two discussed the widening gap between rich and poor countries. Alluding to the demise of the Soviet Union, the pope said to Clinton, "You have been a twin all this time. Now you must learn to live as an orphan." John Paul suggested that without the Soviet Union to restrain it, the U.S. needed prayerful wisdom in order to set an example for the rest of the world (Taylor Branch, *The Clinton Tapes*, Simon & Schuster).

On knowing God—or not: Theologian Michael W. DeLashmutt encourages his students to think about knowledge of God as a form of human knowing distinct from sense perception (like the awareness of being hungry) or objective knowledge. Knowing God, he says, is more analogous to knowing a piece of music, which involves participation in the music. "Like the knowledge of music, the knowledge of God is a kind of knowledge which can never be fully attained. It is a knowledge which always leads to a kind of unknowing" (*Expository Times*, September).

Look up: "I'm a Frisbeeterian. When I die, my soul goes up to the roof and gets stuck there" (recently spotted bumper sticker posted at beliefnet.com).