

Century Marks

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Snowstorms and power outages © Dave Granlund

Free meal: The challenge for the church, says Sara Miles, author of *Jesus Freak*, is to become a permeable body so that all kinds of people are coming in and going out. "Church is actually a place for people to experience *we*," says Miles. She says she needed "to be knocked around in the great rock tumbler of the church with people I didn't choose—because left to my own devices I'm gonna choose people like me." One of the remarkable things about the church is that it serves a meal—communion—that you can't buy, earn or deserve. It is just given away (interview on [Religion Dispatches](#), February 23).

Staying afloat: Most people assume that Noah's ark was an oceangoing boat with pointed stem and stern for riding the waves. But a 3,700-year-old document recently translated by a British Museum expert suggests that Noah's boat was circular. The ark didn't have to go anywhere, says the translator, it just had to float. The design suggested in this noncanonical document is still used today in Iran and Iraq to take animals across a river or to survive a flood (*Guardian*, January 1).

Under water: A brochure for the 2009 Financial Empowerment Conference in Atlanta stated, “Regardless of the media reports, believers are not subject to the recession.” But the reality is something different for believers in the prosperity gospel. An elder at a megachurch outside Atlanta said that the homes of between 700 and 800 families at his church are in foreclosure. Even before the recession a Baptist pastor in the area said he ministered to more than 100 former members of a prosperity gospel church. “People had been taught that if they gave money, they would be rich. But when they had a need themselves, they were abandoned,” he said. “When they came to us they were at the end of their faith” (*Harper’s Magazine*, March).

Talking to our enemies: Critics have said that the Obama administration’s efforts to engage U.S. adversaries is simply appeasement by another name. But Charles A. Kupchan, author of *How Enemies Become Friends*, argues that “long-standing rivalries tend to thaw as a result of mutual accommodation, not coercive intimidation.” To various degrees Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Myanmar have demonstrated interest in engagement with the U.S. Russia, in particular, has worked with the U.S. on arms control and has stepped up efforts to contain Iran’s nuclear program (*Foreign Affairs*, March/April).

By definition: After Joseph Stack flew a small plane into the IRS office building in Austin, Texas, the media and law officials refused to call it an act of terrorism, even though the act seemed to fit the definition of terrorism, according to Glenn Greenwald. “The term now has virtually nothing to do with the act itself and everything to do with the identity of the actor, especially his or her religious identity,” said Greenwald. A terrorist now means “a Muslim who fights against or even expresses hostility towards the United States, Israel and their allies.” The Council on American-Islamic Relations and other Muslim organizations have called this a double standard and asked the government to call the Stack attack an act of terrorism ([Salon](#), February 19 and CAIR news brief).

Saints in their time? Nineteen Catholic theologians and historians— 17 from the U.S.—are imploring Pope Benedict XVI to suspend the process for making Pius XII a saint. Until further research clarifies Pius’s record during the Holocaust, these scholars warned, moving Pius toward sainthood would disrupt Catholic-Jewish relations and make objective study of Pius’s legacy more difficult. Meanwhile, Pope Benedict approved Mother Mary MacKillop for sainthood. She is Australia’s first official saint. MacKillop was briefly excommunicated from the church for inciting her

followers to disobey the church. She was also known for helping the needy and for spreading Catholicism throughout Australia and New Zealand in the 19th century (RNS, *Wall Street Journal*, February 19).

Disentangling the Web: Over a trillion Web pages exist. But despite excellent search tools like Google, finding reliable and pertinent resources can be elusive. For people interested in religion and theology, Meriel Patrick of Intute, the Oxford University Computing Service, has pulled together a rather comprehensive list of Web resources. It includes library catalogs, bibliographic databases, collections of classic works and study tools. Reviews of many of the sites can be found at www.intute.ac.uk (*Expository Times*, February).

In the doghouse: World Watch estimates that more than half the world's total greenhouse-gas emissions comes from the methane from livestock, the clearing of rainforests for pasture and other emissions from animal agriculture. Two British researchers estimate that the annual ecological "pawprint" of a medium-sized dog is twice that required to build a Toyota Land Cruiser and drive it 6,200 miles. The pet's carnivorous diet is the main culprit. The researchers recommend having pets that are vegetarians, such as rabbits or chickens, and feeding pets leftover food scraps instead of manufactured food (*Sierra*, March/April).

Just in case: Virginia state legislators passed a bill preventing employers or insurance companies from placing microchips in humans against their will. Mark L. Cole, sponsor of the bill, was concerned that the devices could someday be the "mark of the beast" mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Says Cole: "My understanding—I'm not a theologian—but there's a prophecy in the Bible that says you'll have to receive a mark, or you can neither buy nor sell things in end times. Some people think these computer chips might be that mark" (*Examiner*, February 14).

Spiritual warfare: When a hooded gunman walked into her crafts store in Frisco, Texas, owner Marian Chadwick pointed a finger at him and declared, "In the name of Jesus, you get out of my store. I bind you by the power of the Holy Spirit." After a customer refused the robber's order to get down on the floor and Chadwick continued to rebuke him, he left the store cursing . . . Carl Black, a veteran cop in Houston, Texas, says that 17 years ago a thug who was resisting arrest suddenly dropped to his knees. Upon seeing Black's badge with the number 666, the thug said, "I ain't fighting with the devil" (*Chicago Reader*, February 18).