

# Century Marks

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Blinkered by TexasJohn Cole, The Scranton Times-Tribune

**Back to basics:** Sister Joan Chittister to Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams: “What really interests you most about the spiritual life?” Rowan Williams (after a pause): “I find myself coming back again and again to the meaning of ‘alleluia’” ( *Uncommon Gratitude*, Liturgical Press).

**Yes they can:** All 107 members of the first senior class at Urban Prep Academy for Young Men, a charter school in Chicago, have been accepted into four-year colleges. This is a remarkable achievement considering that when they entered Urban Prep four years ago only 4 percent could read at their grade level and 82 percent come from low-income families. The students were assigned college counselors on day one, and they took a field trip to Northwestern University before they even began their freshman year. Their school day is longer than the state norm and they have had to take more than twice the usual credits in English. School counselors intend to stay in touch with the college-bound students through the summer and into the first years of college ( *Chicago Tribune*, March 5).

**No vote:** When he taught at the University of Notre Dame, Stanley Hauerwas was a member of the Broadway United Methodist Church in South Bend. John Smith, the

pastor, made it known that he thought the church should celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday. So the congregation studied Eucharistic practices over the centuries, including John Wesley's perspectives. Hauerwas, who was chairing the worship commission, brought a recommendation to have the church vote to celebrate the Eucharist every week. But Smith said, "You will not vote on this issue." Hauerwas thought Smith was out of his mind, since this was the change he wanted. Smith said the Eucharist represented the unity of the church, and if some in the church weren't ready for the change, the unity would be betrayed by holding a vote (*Hannah's Child*, Eerdmans, forthcoming).

**Confessions:** With a campaign called "The Light Is On for You," Catholic leaders have sought to encourage people to make use of the rite of confession. The effort includes offering Wednesday evening hours for confession, rather than just the traditional Saturday afternoon hours. Confidential confessions can still be made to a priest in a screened confessional box, but parishioners can also make appointments with priests for face-to-face confessions. The church is fighting an uphill battle. Three-fourths of American Catholics don't participate in confession at all. Since Vatican II many Catholics have relied on private confessions to God or the penitential rite in the mass (*Boston Globe*, March 10).

**End of Buddhism?** The normally placid Dalai Lama angrily accused China last month of attempting to "deliberately annihilate Buddhism" by "putting [Tibetan] monks and nuns in prison-like conditions, depriving them of the opportunity to study and practice in peace" and subjecting them to a re-education campaign. He also accused China of increasing troop levels and restricting travel in Tibet. In response, the Chinese government said that the Dalai Lama is trying to foment violence by calling for independence in territory China believes belongs to it. The Dalai Lama claims that he is only seeking regional autonomy for the Tibetans as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution (AP).

**Homeland security:** Jihadism "has no single center of gravity," says Thomas Rid, hence "it has no single vulnerability" that can be attacked. One form of jihadism is concerned only with local matters. Another type, seen especially in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Europe, is a form of organized crime engaged in narcotics and other illicit activities. Then there are global jihadists of which al-Qaeda is one group (with waning influence). While the threat of terrorist attacks will persist in the foreseeable future, success against terrorists will be measured less by the number of troops sent to Afghanistan or by military campaigns and more by the number of terrorist plots

thwarted (*Wilson Quarterly*, Winter).

**What a waste:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that Americans throw away more than 25 percent of all the food produced for domestic sale and consumption. A 2004 study at the University of Arizona puts the figure closer to 50 percent. A family of four throws out about \$590 worth of food each year. This is food that could be used by the poor. Moreover, the food that ends up in landfills wastes the resources of water and oil that were used to produce it. And once in the landfills, the wasted food generates methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in trapping heat in the atmosphere (*Scientific American*, March 3).

**What's in Suriname?** If you have wanderlust, yet care about human rights and the effect of travel on the environment, the Ethical Traveler recommends trips to these ten destinations: Argentina, Belize, Chile, Ghana, Lithuania, Namibia, Poland, Seychelles, South Africa and Suriname. "The ten destinations . . . offer not only scenic beauty and memorable experiences, but also set a positive example in the areas of environmental protection, social welfare, and human rights," according to *Earth Island Journal*. No Asian country is included, because of "irresponsible development, human rights abuses, and a lack of strong environmental policy" (*Utne*, March-April).

**Barking congregants:** Tom Eggebeen understands the need for some of his congregants to step out of services from time to time. His church, Covenant Presbyterian in Los Angeles, holds Sunday evening services in which people are allowed to bring their dogs. No cats or other animals are permitted. These services are part of a national movement among churches recognizing the close bond between people and their pets. More churches are offering animal blessings and memorial services and grief counseling after the loss of beloved pets. Sometimes the dogs will bark in the service, says Eggebeen. Singing "Amazing Grace" seems to settle them down (*State Journal-Register*, March 6).

**Beck's world:** Fox News TV host Glenn Beck urged his audience to leave congregations that refer to social justice or economic justice. "Look for the words 'social justice' or 'economic justice' on your church Web site," he said. "If you find it, run as fast as you can." Bread for the World has invited people to sign an online petition to Beck that reads: "Economic and social justice are central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Quit using your bully pulpit to spread misinformation and fear by comparing faithful Christians who care 'for the least of these' to Nazis and

communists” ([Bread for the World](#)).

**All the rage:** A 2009 study at Colorado State University discovered that drivers who display bumper stickers exhibit more road rage than those who don't. It doesn't seem to matter what the bumper stickers say. People with stickers like “Practice Random Acts of Kindness” or “My Student Beat Up Your Honor Student” tended to be more hostile behind the wheel than those with no stickers (Jack Bowen, *If You Can Read This*, Random House).