

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [March 9, 2004](#) issue

Price of peace: When Kathleen Lee Turner witnessed a friend's daughter being baptized, she was stunned at how quickly the baptism was over and how easily the service segued into announcements. But that was not as shocking as when, later in the service, following the singing of a patriotic hymn, the senior pastor prayed, "O Lord, be with our country, our president, our military. We pray for peace in the world. We really do. But not at the expense of our way of life . . ." At first Turner felt physically ill, but upon further reflection she had to grant that the pastor was at least being honest: don't we all want peace so long as it is not at the expense of our way of life? (*Weavings*, March/April).

Give it up: While author Julie Salamon was riding home on a crowded subway one afternoon, an elderly, tottery couple got on the train. Salamon herself was standing next to three seated men: two able-bodied white men and an older black man with a cane. When Salamon suggested to these men that they might give up their seats to this older couple, the black man with a cane offered his. No, she said, she had in mind the other two men. Then it came back to her: earlier in her life, when she was visibly pregnant and would enter a similarly crowded subway train, the people most likely to offer her their seat were (in descending order): women with children, women without children, old men, Hispanic men, African-American men, and last, younger or middle-aged white men. "The most privileged were the most insular," recalls Salamon. Caring individuals, she concludes, are those who most identify with the needs of others (*Rambam's Ladder: A Meditation on Generosity and Why It Is Necessary to Give*, Workman).

Body language: Posture during prayer is significant, according to Jürgen Moltmann. The prone position signifies subservience; the person is making himself as small as possible, expressing his dependence upon God. The kneeling position, with head down and eyes closed, assumes an attitude of contrition, unworthiness and helplessness. But some figures in catacombs at Naples and Rome show Christians standing to pray, heads raised, with eyes open and arms outstretched. Such persons, says Moltmann, are free persons with an attitude of great expectation, both

ready to receive and to embrace; it is the stance in which to pray, “Come, Creator Spirit.” Moltmann thinks it is no accident that this is the prayer stance used by many Pentecostals. These three stances could even be used in progression while saying the Lord’s Prayer (*The Source of Life, Fortress*).

Big Macs yield big bucks: The 60 top donors in the U.S. gave \$5.9 billion to charity last year, compared with \$4.6 billion in 2002. The largest giver in 2003 was Joan Kroc, heir to the McDonald’s fast-food empire. Kroc, who died of brain cancer in October, left bequests totaling \$1.9 billion, including \$1.5 billion to the Salvation Army and \$200 million to National Public Radio. For the second year in a row, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, reportedly the richest person in the world, was not on the list (*Chronicle of Philanthropy*).

An epiphany: The Church of England has decided that the wise men may have been neither wise nor male. For liturgical purposes, it encourages the use of the term “Magi” to call attention to the exotic nature of these foreigners who visited the Christ child. No word on how many there were (Associated Press, February 11).

Not left behind: Tyndale House, an evangelical book publisher, has printed nearly 200,000 copies of a book tied to Mel Gibson’s controversial movie *The Passion of the Christ*. A Tyndale representative says the book is getting a boost from an unprecedented number of churches that are buying out entire theaters for viewing the movie. Tyndale hopes churches will buy the book in bulk. Tyndale also published the Left Behind series, with 40 million copies in print, not to mention comic books and other spinoffs—grossing \$100 million (*Publishers Weekly*, February 10).

Passion for *The Passion*: The National Council of Churches offers these suggestions for group and individual reflection on the movie *The Passion of the Christ*: read at least two Gospel accounts of the Passion; read a reputable introduction or commentary on the Passion narratives that deals with the religious and political context of the Gospel writers; reflect on whom Jesus was speaking of when he prayed, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (the Roman authorities? the Jewish religious leaders? the disciples who fled? all humanity?); discuss in a group how the Jews are portrayed in the movie and how Jesus himself might respond to the portrayal; explore concrete ways of building better relationships with Jewish people and institutions (www.ncccusa.org).

Hold the apple: Researchers in Toronto discovered that after only one week of consuming the “Garden of Eden” diet, healthy adults significantly lowered their total cholesterol level and their level of bad cholesterol (LDL) without decreasing the level of good, or HDL, cholesterol. The key to this diet—which includes only vegetables, fruits and nuts—is the high level of fiber, with up to 70 grams of nuts consumed each day. Although most people couldn’t adhere to such a diet over time, going back partly “toward Eden” is a feasible alternative (University of Toronto News, February 17).

Captive audience: The pilot of an American Airlines flight from Los Angeles to New York City asked the Christian passengers to identify themselves by raising their hands. Then he suggested that the other passengers talk with the Christians about their faith. The pilot, a Christian just back from a weeklong mission trip to Costa Rica, made himself available for conversation after the flight. One conversation was with representatives of American Airlines, who were investigating the incident (*USA Today*, February 9).

Uncovered: Ever wonder who writes the anonymous, often five-star book reviews posted at Amazon, the online bookseller? A weeklong glitch at Amazon’s Canadian site allowed users to see the names of the reviewers. Not surprisingly, many of the glowing reviews were written by family members or friends of the authors or even the authors themselves. Some of the negative reviews were written by persons with questionable motives (PW Daily for Booksellers, February 17).