

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [June 1, 2004](#) issue

Quagmire? The Center for American Progress has a plan for getting the U.S. out of the quagmire of Iraq. For starters, the Bush administration should convene an international summit to develop a consensus on political, security and economic arrangements. An interim international group should provide oversight for Iraq until the elections scheduled for January 2005. In the meantime, troop levels should increase to meet the security challenges on the ground, with NATO in command of this stabilization project. An Oil Trust Fund should be established, run by Iraqi governmental and nongovernmental representatives, which would channel Iraqi oil revenue toward rebuilding the country. Whatever the exit plan, the U.S. needs to give up absolute control, and the Iraqi people themselves need some hope about their future.

Conservative with principles: “When there is no penalty for failure,” says columnist George F. Will, “failures proliferate” (*Washington Post*, May 11). Why, he wonders, has no one “lost his or her job because the president’s 2003 State of the Union address gave currency to a fraud—the story of Iraq’s attempting to buy uranium in Niger? Or because the primary and only sufficient reason for waging preemptive war—weapons of mass destruction—was largely spurious? Or because postwar planning, from the failure to anticipate the initial looting to today’s insufficient force levels, has been botched?” Will concludes: “Failures are multiplying because of choices for which no one seems accountable.”

What Arabs see: Al-Jazeera has fast become the most important television network in the world, albeit not the largest. Started in 1996, it claims some 45 million viewers (CNN is available on 170 million sets worldwide). Some of its Western critics claim the network aims to incite Arabs, but an Al-Jazeera producer says the mission is to “educate the Arab masses” to the fact “there is a world around you. You are still sleeping.” Lieutenant Josh Rushing, an American marine featured in a documentary just released on Al-Jazeera (*Control Room*), defends the network, including the gruesome images it broadcasts from the war in Iraq. “In America war isn’t hell—we don’t see blood, we don’t see suffering,” he says. “Al-Jazeera shows it all. It turns

your stomach, and you remember there's something wrong with war" (*Village Voice*, May 11).

My spiritual director says . . .: Deborah Smith Douglas thinks it is trendy in some mainline Protestant circles to mention one's spiritual director—all the better if one's director is a Roman Catholic sister of a rigorous religious order like the Carmelites. Douglas, herself a Protestant spiritual director, wonders why feminist and other critiques of the professionalization of the ministry aren't applied to the practice of spiritual direction, which also can be hierarchical and unilateral. She suggests Protestants should explore the spiritual resources in their own tradition, such as Reformation understandings about mutual accountability, community discipline and the priesthood of all believers, as well as pursue the ancient practice of spiritual friendships, which are more mutual and intimate than a relationship with a director, yet still corrective and supportive (*The Praying Life: Seeking God in All Things*, Morehouse).

Bright faith: Popular Christian writer Madeleine L'Engle, when interviewed by *Newsweek* (May 17), said those who think believing in God is anti-intellectual are not very bright, since it takes considerable intellect to believe in God. She also said she is against "narrow-mindedness. I'm against people taking the Bible absolutely literally, rather than letting some of it be real fantasy, like Jonah." She looks at the Bible story of David as a novel. "Faith is best expressed in story," says L'Engle, who is working on a book on aging.

Food fight: Rats don't naturally get fat, according to Kelly Brownell, coauthor of *Food Fight* and director of Yale University's Center for Eating and Weight Disorders. But give a rat an abundance of classic American junk food and it will bulk up, just like the 65 percent of Americans who are overweight or obese. He says a war must be waged against the American food industry, especially for the sake of children. He'd ban fast food, snacks and soda from public schools. Advertising of junk food aimed at children would be regulated. He also advocates a federal tax on high-fat and high-sugar foods—scornfully referred to by some as the "Twinkie tax." Although libertarians cry foul at any government attempt to regulate the food industry, Brownlee points out that the government has intervened before in situations in which individual responsibility was wanting, such as by requiring immunizations and use of seatbelts (*Yale Alumni Magazine*, March/April).

Taken for a ride: Some Asian Americans are offended by a Southern Baptist Vacation Bible School curriculum using a theme and image that they say promotes stereotypes about the Japanese. Called “Rickshaw Rally,” the curriculum is built around a race in Japan and features children running through the streets of Tokyo and climbing Mt. Fuji. Promotion of the curriculum comes in a container that looks like a box of Chinese takeout food. Promoters of the curriculum claim it is based on trips to Japan. Critics say they are offended that an outdated stereotype, a symbol of classism and colonialist exploitation, is being used to introduce Japanese culture. At least one group of Southern Baptists in New England decided not to use the curriculum (*Chicago Tribune*, May 3).

Still counting: The debate continues on how many Christians there are in China, with counts ranging from 45 million to almost twice that number (the majority are Protestant). What’s clear is that the numbers have been growing in the past 20 years and that the expansion is the result of indigenous Chinese evangelization. Some Chinese Christians envision spreading the gospel beyond the borders of China (*Newsweek International*, May 10).

Strange bedfellows: Prominent Israeli rabbis have begun speaking out against Israel’s economically and politically profitable alliance with conservative evangelical Christians. The rabbis fear the evangelicals’ real intent is the conversion of Jews. The rabbis also are concerned that these pro-Zionist evangelicals align themselves with the most extreme Israeli rightists and oppose any compromises with the Palestinians, such as the U.S.-backed “road map” to peace launched last year. Some evangelicals channel millions of dollars to support projects in Israel, as well as lobby for Israeli causes with the U.S. government (*Associated Press*, May 10).

Left out in Kalamazoo: When President Bush made an appearance recently in Kalamazoo, Michigan, a group of students from Kalamazoo College was denied entrance to where the president was speaking despite the fact they had gotten tickets ahead of time from the Chamber of Commerce. They were targeted as potential threats by other Kalamazoo students, the Kalamazoo Republicans, since some in the excluded group had previously engaged in nonviolent political protest. Under threat of arrest, they were led away from the site by police.