

Century Marks

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You've got power: Every human being has power. So the question for humans is, How should we use our power? All temptation, claims Bennett J. Sims, retired bishop emeritus of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, lures us toward using power to dominate rather than to serve others. Jesus' temptations to power are archtypical: in the wilderness he was tempted to dominate nature, to engage in self-aggrandizing acts and to engage in empire building. Conversely, Jesus' miracles used power to heal the sick, mend the broken and bring order where disorder prevailed. The temptation to use power for domination is especially poignant for leaders, for "*all leadership is the exercise of power*" (*Why Bush Must Go*, Continuum).

Fierce goodbye: Jami was an active, outspoken, fun-loving teen who dreamed of becoming a holistic healer. She went to a botanical school, took a spiritual trek to Nepal, and was living by herself in a tent on an organic farm in Hawaii when she became very depressed. After going home, at the age of 21 she took her life. Psychiatrist Kay Jamison, from Johns Hopkins University, says that depressed young people become experts at hiding the symptoms of their illness. They want to fit in and have fun like everyone else, so they may succeed at camouflaging their pain. Jami's story and the stories of other families dealing with suicide are told in the documentary *Fierce Goodbye: Living in the Shadow of Suicide*, to be shown on the Hallmark Channel on August 22 (www.fiercegoodbye.com).

Be there: One of the most difficult experiences for many folk is visiting friends who are very ill. They worry about what to say, afraid that they might say the wrong thing. But just showing up is the most important thing. Rabbi Harold S. Kushner once said: "At some of the darkest moments of my life, some people I thought of as friends deserted me—some because they cared about me and it hurt them to see me in pain; others because I reminded them of their own vulnerability, and that was more than they could handle. But real friends overcame their discomfort, and came to sit with me. If they had no words to make me feel better, they sat in silence (much better than saying, 'You'll get over it,' or 'It's not so bad; others have it worse') and I loved them for it." Visiting the sick can help them feel hopeful, and

hope is a vital ingredient in the healing process (beliefnet.com).

Just a war: Two days before the war in Iraq began, Tom Frame asked a group of students at Melbourne University: “Is the proposed war against Iraq just, or just another war?” At the time he thought it was just, and he was the only Anglican bishop in Australia to support his government’s decision to join the U.S.-led coalition. Now that no weapons of mass destruction have been found, Frame thinks it was just another war, and he says he continues “to seek God’s forgiveness for my complicity in creating a world in which this sort of action was ever considered by anyone to be necessary.” Before similar action is ever taken again, he believes that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s questions must be answered: “If we are going to make preventive action, or war, part of our response to these new threats, what are the rules? Who decides? Under what circumstances? Did what happened in Iraq constitute an exception? A precedent others can exploit? What are the rules?” (*The Age*, June 18).

Stepping up to the plate: Carlos Delgado, a Puerto Rican who plays baseball for the Toronto Blue Jays, drew boos recently at Yankee Stadium for his quiet protests of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “God Bless America” has been played at Yankee Stadium at every game since September 11, 2001, and the players usually come to the top of the dugout or stand in silence on the field. Delgado stays on the bench or disappears into the dugout tunnel. Yankee fans booed him when he came to bat and chanted “USA! USA!” when he made an out. Delgado thinks the war in Iraq is “the stupidest war ever” (Associated Press).

Score one for God: It is not unusual for sports teams in America to have a group prayer before a game. But does God really care who wins or loses? Does God take sides? Might God enjoy a “well-executed double play,” regardless of which team makes the play? These and other questions related to sports and religion were batted back and forth at a recent conference at St. Olaf College, a Lutheran school in Minnesota. Bruce Benson, St. Olaf’s campus pastor, made a compelling distinction between athletics and sport, with the former standing for humanistic and Christian values and the latter for competition that can corrupt institutions. “Sport is whether you win or lose. Athletics is how you play the game,” he said. “Sport is about glamour. Athletics is about beauty. . . . Sport creates stars, crowds, mobs and gangs. Athletics creates teammates and community. Biblical religion is uneasy about the first. It loves the second” (*Star Tribune*, June 28).

Passion passion: Which Hollywood figure wrote that “the story of Christ, more particularly the story of the Passion, told without recourse to theatrical sentimentality or to Hollywood overtones . . . might accomplish much in these times”? Not Mel Gibson. It was Orson Welles in a 1940 letter to religious leaders, right before his greatest work, *Citizen Kane*, was released. Twice in his career Welles aspired to produce a movie on the Passion. One version was envisioned as a western (*Chicago Tribune*, July 20).

Anonymous Hindus: D. Preman Niles, from Sri Lanka, reports that his father, D. T. Niles, and Karl Barth were once arguing about the appropriate stance of Christian theology toward world religions, including Hinduism. The elder Niles asked Barth how many Hindus he actually knew personally. Barth said: None, but that is beside the point (From *East and West: Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press).

Dart on target: John Dart, news editor for the *Christian Century*, won the American Academy of Religion’s award for best in-depth reporting of religion among news outlets with fewer than 100,000 subscribers. Dart was cited for stories in 2003 on faith in the movies, interfaith relief to Iraq, the question of who belongs in Jesus’ family, stress as a cause of pastors leaving ministry, and progressive Muslims. The judges noted that Dart chooses provocative topics and makes exceptional use of scholarly sources, yet is accessible to the common reader.

Fill up with turkey grease: A plant in Missouri that will transform turkey remains from a nearby Butterball Turkey slaughterhouse into high-quality fuel is scheduled to open in the fall. The processing plant, which has been successfully tested, is projected to produce 500 barrels of oil daily. Only 15 percent of the BTUs generated will be consumed in the production process (*Discover*, July).

Bizarre or what? In a ceremony held in Washington, with members of Congress looking on, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon donned a crown and declared himself humanity’s Savior and Messiah . . . Hundreds of Muslims have gone to a clinic in Germany where, according to a Web site, a messiah was being breast fed by his once-deceased but “resurrected” mother (*New York Times*, June 24 and 25).