

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [December 14, 2004](#) issue

Zero tolerance for torture: In 1989 Sister Dianna Ortiz, a missionary teacher among the Mayan people, was abducted and tortured by Guatemalan security forces whose boss was an American. After he raped her, a policeman said to her: “Your God is dead.” But more than God died, she says—both she and her ministry died. But she came back to life, and out of this traumatic experience something else was born in her: a commitment to speak truth to power wherever torture is condoned and practiced. Torture is practiced by more than 1,500 governments, she says, including our own. She estimates that more than 500,000 torture survivors live in the United States alone, and that from 1,000 to 10,000 torturers reside in this country. Torture, she says, is also terrorism. “Under no circumstances is it part of *counter*-terrorism. It does not counter it; rather, it perpetuates it” (*Spiritus*, Fall).

Doubt about doubts: Paul Tillich argued that “doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.” But two researchers, using data from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, have concluded that people who have doubts about their faith tend to be less satisfied about their health and experience more depressive symptoms, compared to those with more certainty about their faith. Not everyone responds to doubt in the same way: indeed, individuals who are more involved in their congregations, especially those with formal roles in the church, appear to have more difficulty coping with religious doubts. It stands to reason that people who are more engaged in their faith and carry formal responsibility for their religious community get more meaning and sense of identity from that engagement, thus also having more to lose if doubts challenge their religious convictions (*Sociology of Religion*, 2004, vol. 65:1).

Gandhi, not guns: One of Yasir Arafat’s last visitors before he became ill was Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas Gandhi. He had a simple message for Arafat: put down the gun and take up Gandhi’s method of nonviolent resistance. According to Eric Weiner of National Public Radio, so far the intifada has gotten the Palestinians nowhere; a new method is needed. A nation like Israel would be a good candidate for use of Gandhi’s strategy of *satyagraha*, for it considers itself morally

accountable. Nonviolence in some ways is a more difficult strategy than violence, Weiner admits, and many Palestinians might die in the process. But “pictures of unarmed Palestinians lying down before bulldozers about to raze their homes or marching up to the gates of Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza . . . would be powerful images that could do more to advance the Palestinian cause than 100 suicide bombings” (*Christian Science Monitor*, November 15).

Run from the border: Canada has a law that makes it permissible to charge anyone with a war crime, even those outside Canada. A columnist from the *Toronto Star* (November 16) ponders whether George W. Bush should be charged the next time he sets foot on Canadian soil. The writer argues that the invasion of Iraq violates the Nuremberg tribunals and the United Nations Charter, and that prisoner abuses in Iraq and the detaining of POWs at Guantánamo Bay violate the Geneva Accords. One problem: heads of state are immune from prosecution when in Canada on official business. So officials would have to wait until Bush is out of office and on a fishing trip to Canada.

Front lines: Brian Stewart, award-winning Canadian journalist, admits that when he started his career he had nearly abandoned Christianity and thought the church a rather tiresome irrelevance. But after years of covering news all over the world, he now says: “I’ve never reached a war zone, or famine group or crisis anywhere where some church organization was not there long before me . . . sturdy, remarkable souls usually too kind to ask ‘what took you so long?’” When he and a friend from the BBC broke the news of the great famine in Ethiopia in 1984, for instance, TV coverage was given the credit for saving millions of lives. But, says Stewart, he went to Ethiopia only because church and aid groups on the ground there foresaw the famine and begged the media and the world to take notice. “My own experience has convinced me that Christianity is best shared with others,” he says. Besides, “Christian work on the front lines infects those around them, even those who are not Christian, with a sense of Christ’s deep mystery and power” (speech at the 160th convocation of Knox College, Toronto).

A house divided: Tyndale House has sold 42 million Left Behind books, a sensationalist series of novels that contends born-again Christians will be raptured into heaven, while the rest of humanity faces an Apocalypse. But now the evangelical publisher has launched a counter series, written by Christian radio host Hank Hanegraaff, who believes that the Book of Revelation describes first-century persecution of Christians under Emperor Nero, not some future tribulation of

nonbelievers. Tim LaHaye, coauthor of the Left Behind series, was not amused when Tyndale asked him to debate Hanegraaff in a promotion of the new series (*Time*, November 22).

Collaboration wanted: FASTEN (Faith and Service Technical Education Network) is a Pew Charitable Trusts initiative that seeks to equip faith-based social providers, public administrators and private philanthropies to work together more effectively to renew urban communities. Toward that end, FASTEN is sponsoring a contest for faith-based organizations and churches that are operating effective social service programs with tangible outcomes, and doing so in partnership with some entity outside the faith community. Ten \$5,000 prizes are being awarded (www.FASTENnetwork.org).

Deep ditch: *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, a book sold at the National Park Service bookstores at the Grand Canyon, maintains that the canyon was formed 4,500 years ago as a result of Noah's Flood. A compilation of writings by creation scientists, the book was edited by Tom Vail, who, with his wife, operates Canyon Ministries, which conducts tours with a creationist perspective. Most geologists maintain that the canyon is some 6 million years old (*Time.com*, November 17).

Don't ask, don't tell: Comedian George Carlin says he went into a bookstore and asked where the self-help department was. The clerk responded: "If we told you, it would defeat the purpose" (*Publishers Weekly*, October 18).