

Century Marks

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Just justice: The Navajo Nation has about 28,000 criminal cases in its court system each year, and has prison space for only 220 people at any given time. In most cases respected leaders in the community meet with the accused and their victims with the intent of bringing about healing in the relationship. Family members of the accused also join in, as it is assumed in Navajo culture that they share responsibility for the actions and should help find solutions. Whereas Western jurisprudence is typically about deciding what happened, who did it and how they should be punished for their actions, the Navajos are concerned about “the effects of what happened. Who got hurt? What do they feel about it? What can be done to repair the harm?” (Christopher Phillips, *Six Questions of Socrates*, Norton).

Proof for God: After Albert Einstein died 50 years ago, some friends suggested that Princeton University establish a chair in Jewish studies in his honor. The directors of his estate objected, arguing that Jewish studies meant nothing to Einstein. Though he was ethnically Jewish, religion played very little role in Einstein’s life. Still, he believed in God, and he rejected quantum mechanics because he thought God does not play dice with the universe. Einstein was so moved once by a concert conducted by Bruno Walter, with Yehudi Menuhin as soloist, that Einstein said to Menuhin afterward, “Now I know there is a God in heaven” (Norbert M. Samuelson, “Science and Spirituality,” in *The Quest for Liberation and Reconciliation: Essays in Honor of J. Deotis Roberts*, Westminster John Knox).

The other theory of relativity: According to Einstein, “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind” (from *The New Quotable Einstein*, Princeton University Press).

Chances are: The human mind isn’t very good at calculating the odds of danger. When asked how much risk of a terrorist attack they would they be willing to take before canceling a pleasure trip, more than half of respondents said they wouldn’t go if the odds were higher than one in 100,000. Given that level of risk avoidance, people should not drive, walk the streets or hold a job, according to Richard Restak (

Poe's Heart and the Mountain Climber, Harmony Books). The mind also tends to exaggerate the likelihood of rare dangerous experiences—and fears are often enhanced by media attention. A few years ago swimmers on the East Coast stayed out of the water for fear of shark attacks, though the chance of an attack was one in 94,900,000. Swimmers faced a greater chance of death from skin cancer, drowning or being struck by lightning.

Final exam: A joke has been circulating about Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, touted by some as a papal candidate. As head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he has been known as a stiff disciplinarian of theologians. The story is that Cardinal Ratzinger and two other theologians died about the same time and appeared simultaneously at the pearly gates and had individual meetings with St. Peter. The other two theologians each came out of their meetings shaking their heads and saying, “How can I have been so wrong?” Then it was Ratzinger’s turn. After an even longer session, St. Peter came out saying, “How can I have been so wrong?” (*New York Times*, April 8).

How times have changed: No British prime minister ever attended a papal funeral before, but Tony Blair showed up at Pope John Paul II’s funeral. For the funeral of the prior pope, John Paul I, President Jimmy Carter sent his mother. But this time President Bush was there, along with former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The archbishop of Canterbury had to postpone the wedding of none other than Prince Charles so that Charles could pay his respects to the pope. Commented the *Guardian* (April 5), “It’s as if the Reformation had never happened.”

Hair-trigger alert: Thirty-two Nobel Prize winners have issued a statement urging nations with nuclear weapons to take their lethal loads off hair-trigger alert. Signed by former South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, among others, the statement notes that “thousands of nuclear weapons in the U.S. and Russia are on launch-on-warning status, and the megatonnage involved remains more than enough to destroy civilization and perhaps the human race.” They urge all nuclear powers, including Israel and North Korea, to move toward nuclear disarmament (*Progressive Web site*, April 8).

Cheery environmentalism: Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals is trying to get evangelicals on the environmental bandwagon, sort of. He calls his effort “creation care,” citing Genesis 2:15 for support, but he doesn’t want to link arms with environmentalist groups like the Sierra Club—for four

reasons. Environmentalists, he claims, opt for big-government solutions, they're in alliance with population control movements, they keep "kooky religious company" (that is, pantheists), and there is a "certain gloom and doom about environmentalists" (*New York Times Magazine*, April 3).

Thanks, but no thanks? Howard Dean, chair of the Democratic National Committee, has been trying to convince evangelicals that there's room in the Democratic Party for them. In reporting on this effort, *Christianity Today* (April) refers to a meeting of Hispanic Democratic leaders at which the vice chair of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus tearfully asked whether the Democratic Party would still welcome lesbians. Dean leaped off the stage, ran to the woman, and with a hug assured her that lesbians are welcome. "That's why I am a Democrat," he said. *CT's* writer concluded that such hugging will make many evangelicals say, "That's why we are not Democrats."

Smut glut: What used to be available only in the back corners of newsstands and in seedy adult outlets has now gone mainstream. Pornography is available on cable and the Internet—and it's coming soon to cell phones. One of the big porn profiteers is Rupert Murdoch, who promotes conservative political causes. In addition to owning the Fox cable network, he owns DirecTV, which makes \$200 million a year in pay-per-view pornography, and HarperCollins, which published porn star Jenna Jameson's bestselling book, *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* (*Boston Globe*, April 14).

No tenure for God: God only had one major publication, written in Hebrew and Greek, which wasn't published in a refereed journal; some even doubt God wrote it. It may be true that God created the world, but what has God done since then? Besides, the scientific community has had a hard time replicating the results. God rarely came to class, just told students to read the book. Some say God's Son actually taught the class. Although there were only ten course requirements, most students failed the tests. God's office hours were infrequent and usually held on a mountaintop (adapted from Beliefnet, March 31).