

Century Marks

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Witch-hunt? Three scientists who gathered evidence about climate change are being investigated by Joe Barton (R., Tex.), chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. These scientists contributed to a 2001 study that argued that human-produced carbon emissions are at least partially to blame for global warming and that the need to curb greenhouse gases is urgent. Barton, a Texan closely tied to the fossil fuel industry, has demanded that the researchers turn over information about their funding, the methods used in their research and their publications. Sherwood Boehlert, Republican chair of the House science committee, has called this investigation “truly chilling,” and said that it “seeks to erase the line between science and politics” (*Guardian*, August 30).

Holy sox: Of all major league baseball teams, the defending champion Boston Red Sox have the most players who claim the Christian faith—a dozen, plus an equal number of coaches and staffers. Before each game they gather for prayer and Bible study led by a chaplain from Baseball Chapel, an organization that serves all major league teams. The players’ faith reportedly has not been divisive, but has helped team cohesion. Says player Gabe Kapler, a Jew: “Everyone is very respectful of one another and what they choose to believe in.” The team’s cohesiveness was a factor in its come-from-behind victory last fall against the archrival New York Yankees, and in its sweep of the World Series with the St. Louis Cardinals. When asked if it was God’s will that the Sox win the World Series last year, pitcher Mike Myers averred that if he knew the answer to that question he’d be God (*Boston Globe*, August 31).

Life lessons: Until the 19th century, the teaching of history was largely for the sake of ethical instruction—to give examples to the young of good and bad action. This approach was challenged by German historians, who attempted to be value-free, but the older tradition prevailed in the teaching of Western civilization, which attempted to demonstrate the superiority of Western culture. According to Charles W. Hedrick Jr. of the University of California–Santa Cruz, the teaching of world history these days encourages cultural toleration and multiculturalism—so in that respect it is not value-free—but otherwise tends to be relativistic and to offer no vantage point from

which to make judgments. Hedrick argues that political ethics and history should be complementary. “Is factuality enough of a justification for the study of history?” (*Journal of World History*, March).

Morality tale: On the surface religion is thriving in Bosnia, says correspondent Noreen Herzfeld. The rebuilding of churches and mosques was given priority after the war. The 2004 Law on Religious Freedom gives religious communities legal protection that they didn’t have previously. And religion is taught in schools. Nevertheless, religious observance remains very low in all faith groups. The problem, says Herzfeld, is that religion was co-opted during the war for political purposes. Now people don’t trust religious institutions, and the religious conflict has made it difficult for religious leaders across faith lines to work together to resolve community problems.

Who will listen? Janice Brown opposes the death penalty, but she admits that when her daughter’s killer was executed in Texas, she experienced some relief: “I don’t have to deal with him anymore,” she says. Still, she had longed for an encounter with him, to ask him why he killed her daughter, and to impress upon him how devastating was her loss. Her requests for a meeting with him were denied. Instead, she was permitted to meet with another murderer, a man who said he would kill again if given the chance. She told the man about her daughter’s murder, and listened to him talk about growing up with an abusive father and about his youthful plots to kill his father. At the end, the man said he would never kill again. Brown feels he reached this conclusion because someone finally listened to his story (Ellis Cose, *Bone to Pick*, Atria Books).

For better, for worse: Poet Donald Hall says that “all marriages start in ignorance and many from need; what matters is what you do after you marry.” For a marriage to flourish, couples need a “third thing,” something the two can fix their gaze upon which provides “a site of joint rapture or contentment.” Children are the third thing for many couples. For Hall and his wife, poet Jane Kenyon, it was their pets, Hall’s grandchildren from his first marriage, nature, their church and, of course, their poetry (*The Best Day the Worst Day*, Houghton Mifflin).

Carpetbaggers: Christian Exodus is a movement of politically active believers who wish to establish a government that operates on biblical principles—as they interpret them. The group has its eye on several counties in South Carolina (it is mum about which ones), and hopes to have enough members move there for the group to take

over the city councils, school boards and sheriffs' offices. Their long-term goal is a takeover of the whole state. If necessary, they say, they will secede from the nation (*Los Angeles Times*, August 28).

Less talk, more action: Nations with the lowest church attendance tend to be more generous in giving to poor countries than those with greater levels of Christian observance, according to the third annual Commitment to Development Index published in *Foreign Policy* magazine. Out of 21 nations in the index, Denmark gives the most, yet has the lowest rate of church attendance—only 3 percent attend church at least once a week. Ireland, which has the highest rate of religious observance of the countries ranked, is 19th in giving foreign aid. “Where there is more preaching,” observed *Foreign Policy*, “there is less practicing” (Inter Press Service, August 23).

Church to go: Missed church last Sunday? Not a problem if you attend the National Community Church in Alexandria, Virginia, which started podcasting its services, available for downloading at theaterchurch.com. The number of religious and spiritual podcasts (or “godcasts,” as some call them) is growing. Although the use of this Web-based medium is largely fueled by evangelical churches and ministries, Odeo (odeo.com) lists podcasts by Buddhists, Muslims and Jews. Catholic Insider (catholicinsider.com), one of the most successful podcasts, was begun by a Dutch priest (*New York Times*, August 29). Beverly Dale, a campus pastor at the University of Pennsylvania, is releasing a weekly series of 90-second podcasts that draw from the Bible and address issues facing university students (feeds.feedburner.com/podgospel).

Strong constitution: If John Nichols could help the Iraqis write their constitution, he would have them erect a wall of separation between state and religion, preserve the rights of minorities, protect against abuse by military and police authorities and guarantee freedom of speech and the press. If he could reach really high, he would limit the power of corporate monopolies and other special interests that control politics, treat health care and good education as basic rights and provide a reliable electoral system. “But as an American,” says Nichols, “I should not worry about perfecting the Iraqi constitution before I go about the work of getting things right here at home” (the *Nation*, September 29).

Damned peacekeepers: If you haven't read the books, now you can play the video game based on the Left Behind end-time novels. To be called “Left Behind: Eternal

Forces,” the video game is set in New York City and features a battle between “the angelic Tribulation Forces and the demonic Global Community Peacekeepers.” The game maker, Left Behind Games, is hoping for an “E” rating, which is for ages six and up, or a “T” rating for ages 13 and up (PublishersWeekly.com, August 17).

They said it...

"Jesus our peace, if it happens that we lose confidence, you, the Risen Christ, cause a tiny flame to flare up in us. This flame can be quite faint, but already faith sheds its light in our night; and God's fire, the Holy Spirit, comes rushing in."

—Prayer of Brother Roger Schutz, founder of the ecumenical Taizé community in France, who was murdered during a prayer service in mid-August (*Mennonite Weekly Review*, August 29)

"Islam Condemns Terrorism, Islam Stands for Peace & Justice, Explore the Qur'an"

—Florida Turnpike billboard sponsored by the Florida office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations