

Century Marks

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Photo op: In 2003 President Bush asked Congress for \$15 billion to address the AIDS pandemic in developing countries. But it's not evident the money will reach the victims. According to Helen Epstein, at least 60 percent of U.S. foreign aid never leaves the country. It is spent on overhead. Much of the money that actually makes it to African countries is consumed by "ill-conceived projects designed by foreign technocrats with little sense of African realities." Since U.S. aid is as much a political as a humanitarian act, the funded programs are driven to produce impressive numbers. Small, community-based organizations that are particularly effective at working with AIDS orphans are not being funded. Said one South African AIDS worker, "When the Americans come, we sing, we dance, they take our picture, and they go back and show everyone how they are helping the poor black people. But then all they do is hijack our projects and count our children" (*New York Review of Books*, November 3).

For the social good: The *Washington Monthly* (September) has come up with its own ranking of colleges and universities, based on three criteria: the social mobility of a school's graduates, evidence that the school advances knowledge and drives economic growth, and a school's promotion of an ethic of service. Only three schools in *U.S. News & World Report's* well-known top-ten ranking made it onto the *WM* top-ten list: MIT, Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania. Though Ivy League schools dominate the top rankings in other surveys, only Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania made the *WM* top-ten list. Making *WM's* top ten were (in order): MIT, the University of California–Los Angeles, the University of California–Berkeley, Cornell, Stanford, Pennsylvania State University, Texas A&M, the University of California–San Diego, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Michigan.

Intelligent design? Bryan Rehm is one of the parents who sued the Dover, Pennsylvania, school district over its requirement that intelligent design be taught as an alternative to evolution in the ninth-grade biology class. A former science teacher in the district, Rehm claimed in court testimony that some of advocates of the regulations have accused him of atheism. "They don't know that I'm the co-director

of the children's choir at church, or that I run the music at the second service, or that my wife and I run Vacation Bible School," he said. He maintains that intelligent design is not credible science, and that evolution does not explain away the existence of a divine Creator (beliefnet.com).

Intelligent response: Also testifying in the intelligent design court case in Pennsylvania was John Haught, Georgetown University theology professor, who argued that science asks how whereas religion asks why. He noted that there are different ways of explaining the boiling of water. One could say that water boils due to rapid vibration of water molecules (the how question). Or one could say that it boils because someone desires a cup of tea. Both are legitimate accounts. But it is a mistake to bring up the subject of wanting tea when studying molecular movement, just as it is wrong to say "It's the molecular movement" rather than "I want tea" (*York Daily Record*, October 1).

Happiness is: "Happiness, as opposed to pleasure, is a life well lived, one that honors the important, not just the urgent," according to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. He points to numerous studies that confirm his contention. One indicates that happiness increases with altruistic engagement. In another, subjects were given a list of 20 different factors that potentially contribute to happiness; financial success was the only option that the respondents consistently rejected (*To Heal a Fractured World*, Schocken).

Happiness isn't: Respondents to a survey settled on \$10,000 as the amount that would solve their problems. "No doubt about it," says Roy Waddle: "if I were handed \$10,000 of happiness, life would turn rosy. For about ten minutes. That's how long it would take for me to spend it all—for a new roof, a Greek isle cruise, a handful of charities, and the retirement kitty. Then it would be gone. And I'd return to daydreaming about the next \$10,000" (*Against the Grain*, Upper Room Books).

The patriot game: Pat Tillman, the NFL football player who volunteered for the Army Rangers after 9/11 and was killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan, was hailed by many as a paragon of patriotism. Pundit Ann Coulter called him "an American original—virtuous, pure and masculine like only an American male can be." But it turns out that Tillman did not exactly fit the mold that Coulter and others put him in. One of Tillman's army buddies reported that Tillman called the Iraq war illegal and said that one of his favorite authors was the leftist Noam Chomsky. Tillman's family is pressing the Pentagon on why it took the military five weeks to disclose that his

death was due to friendly fire (*Nation*, October 24).

Called to teach: When James M. M. Hartwick surveyed public school teachers in Wisconsin, he discovered that 24 percent strongly agreed and another 34 percent agreed with the statement, “I have been called by God (felt a deep knowing and sense of mission) to teach” (*Calling: A Journal for Leaders Who Nurture Vocation*, Fall).

Executive excess: According to a report from the Institute for Policy Studies, the ratio of average CEO pay to worker pay increased from 301:1 in 2003 to 431:1 in 2004. If the minimum wage had risen as fast as CEO wages have since 1990, it would stand at \$23.03 an hour rather than \$5.15. The report concludes that CEOs for defense contractors profiting from the Iraq war are experiencing large salary increases (FairEconomy.org).

Bring teaspoons: Folk singer Pete Seeger once built a schooner called the *Clearwater*. He used it to take people on Hudson River excursions to enlist their support for cleaning up the river and its beaches. Although it was a small endeavor, Seeger likened it to a seesaw with one end anchored to the ground by a basket of rocks, while activists were at the other end using teaspoons to slowly fill a basket with sand. Some day the balance will tip and the rocks will be sent flying into the air. People will ask: “How did that happen so quickly?” It was because of “us and our damned little teaspoons” (interview in Studs Terkel’s *Hope Dies Last*, as reported in *Trinity Seminary Review*, Fall).

They said it..

"As a historian, I reconstruct Jesus as a peasant with an attitude. As a Christian, I believe that attitude to be the attitude of God."

—New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan (DallasNews.com, October 20)

"You were made by God and for God, and until you understand that, life will never make sense."

—One of the quotes that will appear soon on Starbucks coffee cups—this one from Rick Warren, megachurch pastor and author of the best seller *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Gannett News Service)