

Century Marks

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Let them hold bake sales: The repeal of the estate tax (which the Senate rejected June 8) would hurt charitable organizations since it would eliminate an important incentive for giving: donations reduce the amount subject to the estate tax. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that if the estate tax hadn't existed in 2000, charitable donations that year would have been \$13 to \$25 billion less (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 7).

True (Muslim) believers: In response to the foiled terrorist scheme uncovered by Canadian authorities, Canadian Muslim leaders are speaking out against Muslim extremism. A group of 120 imams issued a statement praising Canada for the opportunities it offers to Muslims, and saying the nation should be repaid with thankfulness and sacrifice. "Anyone who claims to be a Muslim and participates in any way in the taking of innocent life is betraying the very spirit and letter of Islam. We categorically and unequivocally reject such acts," the statement says. Canadian Muslim and Arab groups have called for the government to hold a summit to work at a coordinated approach for dealing with extremism. A Toronto mosque was vandalized after the plot was uncovered, and Canadian Muslims fear a backlash against them (www.caircan.ca).

On the other hand: Preachers, teachers and bloggers who only cite sources with which they agree do a great disservice to their audience, argues Michael D. Coogan (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June). It is a particularly risky strategy when using the Bible to support one's position on social issues, since the Bible does not speak with one voice on all matters. For instance, the Pentateuch says that the sins of parents will be visited on their children to the third and fourth generations, a perspective that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel counter (Jer. 31:30; Ezek. 18:20). While Coogan might have pondered whether both perspectives could be paradoxically true, he does make the point that we often learn the most from those with whom we disagree.

From dust to dust: Theologian and avid gardener Vigen Guroian has told his family that he wants to be buried in the soil he works in at his place in Culpeper, Virginia. "It's against the zoning laws," his son objected. Guroian says: "Sneak me out at night. No one will know." His son replies, "Dad, they'll want to know where you went." Counters Guroian: "Tell them he is in Paradise" (*The Fragrance of God*, Eerdmans).

Green evangelicals: Evangelical voters, it is assumed, are motivated by issues like abortion and gay marriage, but 40 percent of evangelicals claim to be political moderates who are as much motivated by "AIDS in Africa or melting ice caps as partial-birth abortion and lesbian couples in Massachusetts," according to Amy Sullivan (*New Republic*, May 29). Two races this fall in which abortion is a neutral factor could be decided on environmental issues, with help from moderate evangelicals. The Senate race in Pennsylvania pits incumbent Rick Santorum against former state treasurer Bob Casey. Both are opposed to abortion, but Santorum has opposed the Kyoto Accord and the Climate Stewardship Act, while supporting drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In the 15th-district congressional race in Ohio both candidates are prochoice, but the Republican candidate has an abysmal record on environmental concerns, according to the League of Conservation Voters.

Second coming of Billy Graham? Some people predict that Rob Bell, the 35-year-old pastor of the Mars Hill nondenominational church in Grandville, Michigan, will be the next Billy Graham, rather than Graham's son Franklin. Bell's church, which meets in a converted shopping mall, is one of the fastest growing churches in U.S. history, drawing more than 10,000 people each week. Another 30,000 people download the services each week from the church's Web site. While preaching an evangelical message, Bell also encourages social outreach: on a recent Sunday,

without advance planning, the congregation raised \$500,000 for AIDS relief for a village in Africa. Bell, who is making an innovative series of religious movies (called Noomas, from a phonetic spelling of *pneuma* or “spirit”), has at least one thing in common with Graham: they both graduated from Wheaton College. When confronted with the comparison to Graham, Bell said that he’d be deeply suspicious of anyone who has a clever response to such a claim (*Chicago Sun-Times*, June 7).

As the Spirit moved: Traditionally, Pentecost has been a national holiday in France, but this year the government stipulated that people should work instead—without pay. Wages earned on this “day of solidarity” were to go to care for the elderly. When the people started grumbling about the directive (labor unions called it “forced labor,” the Roman Catholic Church lamented the likely loss of a holy day, and the tourist industry protested that it would lose revenue without the three-day weekend), the government backed off, allowing managers to decide whether Pentecost would be a holiday (*Christian Science Monitor*, June 6).

God squad: The Colorado Rockies baseball organization wants players with character, and that appears to mean they are looking for evangelical Christians. (But why do they only have two African Americans on their roster?) At least three major league teams are sponsoring promotional “faith days,” appealing to church groups with discounted tickets and the prospect of entertainment by Christian musicians and speakers (www.thenation.com, June 2).

Page turners: Rodney Stark, sociologist and author of such books as *The Rise of Christianity* and *The Victory of Reason*, says the best advice he received in graduate school came from his teacher Philip Selznick. If you write two finished pages a day, Selznick maintained, that adds up to two books a year. Stark admits he’s content to write one book a year. “I never sprint,” he says (*Historically Speaking*, March/April).

Will you still need me? Paul McCartney, who wrote the song “When I’m Sixty-Four,” turns 64 this month. The Beatles recorded the song in 1967, but McCartney wrote it as something of a joke some eight years earlier when he was about 16 (*Chicago Tribune*, May 28).

Wacky world department:

- Though Pat Robertson’s CBN Web site claims that Robertson has leg-pressed 2,000 pounds, sports authorities say that is impossible. The leg-pressing record for football players at Florida State University is 665 pounds less (AP, May 30).

- A man, shouting that God would keep him safe, was mauled and killed by a lioness when he lowered himself into the animal's enclosure at the Kiev zoo (*Yahoo! News*, June 5).
- Ann Coulter, pundit of the right, may have crossed a new line when she said of 9/11 widows that she's "never seen people enjoy their husbands' deaths so much" (in *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, Crown Forum).