

Century Marks

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Prophet without honor: Probably no Jewish theologian was better known or more highly regarded by 20th-century American Christians than Abraham Joshua Heschel. He was not so highly regarded by his colleagues at the Jewish Theological Seminary, however, according to his daughter Susannah. In an interview with *America* (June 18-25), Susannah said that due to academic pettiness and jealousies, her father was never able to deliver a sermon at JTS in his 27 years there (an honor that even some of his students were given). But his spiritual genius was recognized by others. A turning point was a positive review by Reinhold Niebuhr of Heschel's *Man Is Not Alone* (1951). Heschel and Niebuhr became close friends, and at Heschel's request Niebuhr delivered the eulogy at his funeral.

Missionary position: Although Darwin died an agnostic and is still assailed by conservatives for his groundbreaking work on evolution, cultural historian Mark Graham of Grove City College says that Darwin never was against religion. In fact, Darwin's first publication after his worldwide voyage on the HMS *Beagle* was a public letter defending missionary work in the Pacific. "The march of improvement, consequent on the introduction of Christianity, through the South Seas, probably stands by itself on the records of the world," Darwin wrote in 1836. Says Graham: "I don't think Darwin would recognize his defenders today and probably wouldn't

understand his attackers" (*Journal of Religious History*, reported in *USA Today*, July 1).

Give it a rest: Presbyterian pastor Pam Driesell points out there are two kinds of time: mechanical time and body time; we can go by the clock to know when it's time to eat or sleep, or we can pay attention to what our bodies are telling us about the need to eat or sleep. Driesell says that she attempted to deal with the demands of mechanical time by seeking some kind of balance, but in the course of her ministry her balance was often thrown off by unexpected intrusions. Now she prefers to think of time by using the metaphor of rhythm—she seeks a rhythm between productive time and Sabbath rest. To do this means learning the discipline of "stopping," just as God stopped creating the world after six days. The practice of corporate worship and other spiritual disciplines are essential to the rhythm of life, she says (Cloud of Witnesses audio journal, volume 10).

Unnecessary? Some liberals and even a few conservatives would like to see Vice President Dick Cheney impeached for abuse of power. But Sanford Levinson, professor of law at the University of Texas, wonders why we need a vice president in the first place. Before the 1967 ratification of the 25th Amendment, which established a procedure for filling vice presidential vacancies, the office of vice president was vacant a total of 45 years in American history, either after a VP succeeded to the presidency after the death of the chief executive or after a vice president died while in office (*Boston Globe*, July 1).

Getting Cheney correct: John W. Dean, a former counsel to President Nixon during the Watergate crisis, warns against underestimating Vice President Cheney: "It has long been apparent that Cheney's genius is that he lets George W. Bush get out of bed every morning actually believing he is the president. In fact, his presidency is run by the President of the Senate, for Cheney is its true center of gravity. That fact has become more apparent with every passing year of this presidency, and anyone who thinks otherwise has truly 'misunderestimated' our nominal president and his vice president" (findlaw.com, June 29).

Beknighted: Church groups in Pakistan and India have condemned Britain's decision to honor author Salman Rushdie with a knighthood, and they say the action risks inflaming hatred against Christians in their countries. Indian-born Rushdie angered Muslims in many part of the world with his 1988 book, *The Satanic Verses*. Accused of insulting Islam, Rushdie had to go into hiding after Iran's late spiritual

leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a religious edict, or fatwa, declaring a death sentence against the author. “The British government should have been more sensitive to the feelings of the Muslims. This is a very bad decision,” said Victor Azariah, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, an alliance of four Protestant denominations. “Such insensitive decisions will only worsen the anti-Christian feelings in the Muslim world,” Azariah said (Ecumenical News International).

Where would Jesus bike? Bicycling advocates in Chicago are seeking to close a network of boulevards on Sundays from May to October so they can be used by bikers, roller bladders and skaters. While the advocates have had little difficulty convincing civic authorities, they’ve met resistance from some churches along the route. The biking plan is designed after one in Guadalajara, Mexico, where seven miles of inner-city thoroughfares are closed to motor vehicles on Sundays. One of the pastors adamantly opposed to the Chicago plan comes from Guadalajara, though he left his home city after the program started. He is calling for a compromise—wait till Sunday afternoon to close the streets (*Chicago Reader*, June 22).

Batting for Jesus: In August the Washington Nationals will become the fourth major league baseball team to stage a Faith Night. Fans who pay an extra \$10 will be able to remain after the game to hear a concert by the band MercyMe, hear testimonies from some Nationals players, and visit booths for Christian colleges and other Christian organizations. Faith Nights are run by Third Coast Sports, which claims that its programs can draw an extra 5,000 to 15,000 people to major league events. After holding such an event last year, the Atlanta Braves decided not to let Focus on the Family participate again because it used the occasion to distribute literature comparing homosexuality to alcoholism. Some Jews have criticized these religious events at baseball games as being exclusionary. The Washington Nationals team is owned by the Lerner family, observant Jews who say they don’t want to offend people of any religion (*Washington Post*, June 28).

Better than 666: It was projected that Saturday, July 7 (07/07/07), would be one of the hottest dates for a wedding in recorded history. TheKnot.com estimated that 38,000 couples from its online community would walk the aisle that day, more than triple the 12,000 who wed on a typical Saturday in July. A number of religious traditions view the digit seven as a sacred number signifying fullness or perfection. The bridal boom on July 7 led to a severe shortage of ministers, photographers and

venues for the day. Wal-Mart came to the rescue for some: it gave seven couples all-expenses-paid dream weddings—in the Wal-Mart home and garden department (Religion News Service).

Learning again: Diagnosed with a heart ailment, Murray Sperber retired from Indiana University after teaching there for 33 years, and he thought he would miss teaching. When he came across a French language textbook he had used as a graduate student, he decided to relearn French. He found he learned French better than he had as a graduate student, which gave him a sense of accomplishment. “It turns out that what I love most about academe is not teaching but learning,” Sperber said (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 22).