

Century Marks

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Restorative justice: Mapule Ramashala, a black South African, was verbally harassed when she moved into a white suburb. Some youths tried to burn down her house. But after police arrested 12 youths for the crime Ramashala refused to press charges. Instead, she met with the parents of the youths, telling them that she assumed they would organize the community to help her rebuild her house. She arranged for the youths who were charged with arson to perform community service. And she met with them periodically to see what was happening in their lives and to check on their progress in school. The community rallied around the task of restoring Ramashala's house and came to accept her into the community (*Religion & Theology*, volume 15).

Word and sacrament: Physical acts like kissing or hand shaking convey more than words can express. "Sacraments are like that," say N. T. Wright. "They are actions that speak, that communicate beyond words." Sacraments energize Christians for mission in the world. Meeting Christ in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine should lead to seeing his face in our needy neighbors. But the sacraments need to be accompanied by proclamation—without the Word, it is not clear what the splashing of water, the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine mean (*Reformed Worship*, September).

Baring their parts: In June a clothed priest celebrated mass with a congregation of nudists in the Netherlands. The service was organized by a Christian organization called Gan Eden (Garden of Eden). The mass sparked such a protest by other Christians that a subsequent nude mass was canceled and the group took down its Web site (*Third Way*, November).

Speaking of sacraments: It's probably inevitable that it would come to this: the online Eucharist. Thomas Madron, a former technology company CEO and now a United Methodist pastor in Nashville, has built an interactive Communion site (holysacramentontheinternet.com). "There's a whole long list of people who just simply can't make it regularly to a church—for example, people in the military, or people whose jobs require them to travel a lot, or students." Anne Foerst, a Lutheran theologian who teaches computer science at a Catholic university, says that the sacrament "cannot be simulated. The experience is not about you and the Eucharist. . . . If you can't make the time to experience the community, then why do you need the sacrament?" ("On Faith" at [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)).

Hard copy: Yossi Garfinkel, an Israeli archaeologist, has discovered what he believes is the oldest known Hebrew inscription. It appears on a 3,000-year-old pottery shard. The discovery in July suggests that biblical accounts of the ancient Israelite kingdom of David could have been based on written texts. A teenage volunteer discovered the curved shard bearing five lines of faded characters in the ruins of an ancient town on a hilltop south of Jerusalem. Garfinkel said the relic offers strong evidence that the ancient Israelites were literate and could chronicle events centuries before the Bible was written (*International Herald Tribune*, October 30).

Squatters' (divine) rights: Rafael Sánchez has done field study on a Pentecostal community of squatters in Caracas, Venezuela. To these Pentecostals, the occupying of an empty, 12-story building in what was once a posh part of the town makes good theological sense. The world really belongs to God, but the devil has taken it over, and Christians' job, as agents of the Holy Spirit, is to take back what really belongs to God. "You know, if we do not occupy spaces we do not receive blessings from the Holy Spirit," says the leader of the community (*Public Culture*, Spring).

Real people: People look for leaders who are authentic, says Danny Strong, not ones who are flawless or, worse, hypocritical. Bill Clinton had the reputation of being a womanizer and George W. Bush mangled the English language and came across

as lacking intellectual curiosity. But Clinton didn't pretend to be a saint, nor did Bush pretend to be a scholar. Both of them struck the voters as more authentic than their electoral opponents. The most authentic candidate for the presidency in the past eight years may have been John McCain—until the 2008 election. And the Al Gore who presents himself in *An Inconvenient Truth* might have gotten elected in 2000 (*Men's Health*, November).

Religious smear campaign? Elizabeth Dole, in a failed bid for reelection as senator from North Carolina, ran an ad that identified her opponent, Kay Hagan, with the Godless Americans Political Action Committee and suggested that Hagan is an atheist. Hagan sued the Dole campaign in an attempt to get her to withdraw the ad, and she ran an ad of her own accusing Dole of violating the commandment against bearing false witness. Hagan is an elder and Sunday school teacher in a Presbyterian church. Her only association with the PAC was to have attended a fund-raiser held by a member of the PAC's board (AP).

Deprogramming: British officials are devising a scheme to use imams to help deprogram extremist Muslims in the prison system. Eleven percent of prisoners in Britain are Muslim, which is more than three times their proportion in the general population. Among these Muslim inmates, 90 are serving time for acts related to terrorism (UPI).

Take this job: If you hate your job, finding another one might not be the answer, says psychologist Judith Sills (*Psychology Today*, November/December). Instead, try a change of attitude. She encourages people to focus on the "sweet spots of your day." A doctor who rages at the requirements of managed care and the fear of malpractice suits might try to focus on the one patient he helped that day. Keeping a daily list of things that were positive can help too.