

Century Marks

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Sing on: The military government in Fiji banned Methodists from holding their annual conference scheduled for late August, but the Methodists, who make up about one-third of the population, plan to defy the government and hold the conference as well as the hymn-singing contest that usually precedes it. The choral fest normally draws 10,000 singers. It is estimated that 20,000 to 50,000 singers will make their way to Suva, the nation's capital, this year (ENI).

Common ground: Sandra Steingraber and her husband decided to abort a pregnancy after an ultrasound revealed problems with the fetus. She now speaks before Planned Parenthood groups, Pennsylvania Mennonites, Michigan Calvinists and Utah Mormons on an issue she believes should unite pro-choice and pro-life folk: the dangers of chemicals like pesticides and solvents that can lead to unwanted spontaneous abortions—that is, miscarriages. To her pro-life audiences, she asks, “Could our collective failure to regulate reproductive toxicants represent a threat to fetal sanctity?” And to her pro-choice audiences she asks, “Could our collective failure to regulate reproductive toxicants represent a threat to reproductive rights—the right to bear a child that one has carefully planned for?” (*Orion Magazine*, July/August).

Out-of-control robots? Scientists involved with robotics and artificial intelligence are worried about the development of superhuman technology that can't be controlled and could cause a catastrophe. Some think that robots that can kill humans already exist—or soon will. Computer viruses could be created that can't be stopped. And what might criminals do with artificial intelligence? Humans might have to learn to relate to computer-driven technology with humanlike qualities. Asks one scientist: How would you like to relate to an instrument that is as smart as your spouse? (*New York Times*, July 25).

Respect matters: Studies reveal that those who are treated with respect by medical personnel have better clinical outcomes and express more satisfaction with their treatment. One study asked patients what it means to be treated with respect and found that it includes having one's needs attended to, sensing empathy from the professionals, being treated as an autonomous human being with freedom to make decisions, being kept informed and being treated with dignity. The study detected a subtle gender difference: men were more concerned about autonomy, women more about care and empathy (*Journal of Medical Ethics*, July).

Racial profiling: When President Obama was in the Illinois Senate, he worked on a racial profiling bill that led to state traffic studies on who gets pulled over by police. The latest study reveals a consistent pattern: 24.7 percent of white drivers who consent to a search of their vehicle have contraband, while only 15.4 percent of minority drivers do. Yet minority drivers were twice as likely to be asked to consent to a search of their vehicle (*Chicago Tribune*, July 26).

In black and white: In 1938 Horace White, a black pastor in Detroit, wrote an article for the *Christian Century* asking, "Who Owns the Negro Churches?" At the time, the only jobs blacks could get in Detroit besides housekeeping were at the still nonunionized Ford Motor Company. In order to get such jobs, blacks would have to present a letter of recommendation from their pastor. In return, pastors would receive contributions from Ford with the expectation that they would side with the manufacturer against the labor unions. Seventy years later Gloria Albrecht asks, "Who owns the white church?" And why is it that we are not outraged about the grinding poverty that still exists in this country? (*Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, spring/summer).

Social insecurity: In May the government said that the Social Security trust fund will be exhausted in 2037, four years earlier than was predicted a year ago. One of

the problems for Social Security is the exponential growth of executive pay, most of which exceeds the limit on income that is subject to the payroll tax, now set at \$106,800. Since 1982 the portion of wages subject to Social Security taxes has shrunk from 90 to 83 percent, and this figure doesn't even include other executive compensation such as stock options. If the earnings ceiling were lifted, the trust fund would be solvent for the next 75 years (*Wall Street Journal*, July 21).

Did you know? In the 1840s a major supporter of the idea that Jews should return to Palestine and become a nation with a "rank of honor among the nations" was a professor of Hebrew at New York University named George Bush. He was a forebear of the two American presidents with that name (*Times Literary Supplement*, July 17).

Say what? The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, the largest Jewish film festival in the world, has stirred up controversy by scheduling a showing of *Rachel*, which tells the story of Rachel Corrie, a young American killed by an Israeli military bulldozer as she sought to protect a Palestinian home in Gaza from being demolished, and by inviting Corrie's mother to speak. The Israeli consul general objects to the film and said that the presence of Corrie's mother "becomes a kind of emotional grandstanding rather than pursuit of a deeper insight" ([Daily Kos](#), July 21).

Doesn't have a prayer: Not all sports figures are pleased about the ubiquity of prayer in American sports. Former Baltimore Orioles manager Earl Weaver limited his team's time in prayer service. When one of his players asked, "Earl, don't you want us to walk with the Lord?" Weaver responded: "I'd rather you walk with the bases loaded today." And after a frustrating losing streak, Tony Muser, former manager of the Kansas City Royals, fumed: "Chewing on cookies and drinking milk and praying is not going to get [the job] done" (in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Religion and Sport*, published by Mercer University Press and coedited by Century contributor Gordon Marino).