

Century Marks

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"I prefer shepherding one big sheep instead of a lot of little ones."

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Release defended: Jim Swire's daughter Flora was one of the passengers who died aboard Pan Am flight 103 when it was blown up over Lockerbie, Scotland, by terrorists in December 1988. But Swire has praised the Scottish government for releasing from prison Abdelbaset Ali al Megrahi Megrahi, the Libyan man known as the Lockerbie bomber. "I am a Christian," said Swire. "So I would hope that, even if I was convinced that Megrahi was guilty, my Christian compassion and forgiveness would extend to wanting to see him die with his family around him in Libya." Megrahi was returned to Libya because he has terminal prostate cancer (ENI).

Virtue of doing nothing: The best thing to do when someone harms you, says the Dalai Lama, is nothing—even in the case of small slights. Don't call attention to the hurt in order to shame the offender. Much of the pain in the world, says English professor Mark Edmundson, "comes from people passing on their own injuries, compensating for their belittlement, by sticking it to somebody else." It's a story as old as Adam. Injuries passed along are like a debt that gathers more interest with time (*American Scholar*, summer).

Bidding prayers: Basing his argument on 1 Timothy 2:1-2, John Calvin urged that Christians should pray not only for the well-being of other Christians, but for all people. He said that the apostle Paul “bids us to pray for the salvation of unbelievers, but also to give thanks for their prosperity and well-being.” And in a sermon Calvin declared, “When I see a person I must contemplate my own image there, and see and recognize myself in his person” (*Interpretation*, April, on the 500th anniversary of Calvin’s birth).

Extreme measures: Ross Douthat argues that the movement toward physician-assisted suicide has something in common with the American penchant for using extreme and costly life-saving procedures (*New York Times*, September 7). “In each case, the goal is perfect autonomy, perfect control, and absolute freedom of choice. And in each case, the alternative approach—one that emphasizes the limits of human agency, and the importance of humility in the face of death’s mysteries—doesn’t mesh with our national DNA.”

Pill popping: Sales of the antidepressant drug Cymbalta are up 14 percent since the summer of 2008. Unfortunately, some of the people who might benefit the most from the drug aren’t getting it. A study of homeowners in Philadelphia on the brink of foreclosure revealed that 37 percent suffered from severe clinical depression, yet nearly half said they were too poor to buy prescription drugs (*Toronto Star*, September 2).

Scapegoats: The collapse of Lehman Brothers investment bank and the unraveling of Bernard Madoff’s Ponzi investment scheme have led to a resurgence of anti-Semitism. A study by Stanford and Columbia researchers indicates that one in four Americans place a moderate or greater amount of blame on “the Jews” for the financial crisis, and another 14 percent place a bit of blame on them. Democrats were almost twice as likely to reach such a conclusion as Republicans. The research echoes a 2008 U.S. State Department report on global anti-Semitism, which declared: “More than 60 years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is not just a fact of history, it is a current event” (*Boston Review*, May-June, via *Utne Reader*).

Let’s talk: Deepak Malhotra thinks hostile countries should consider two criteria before setting preconditions for negotiation: One, is the other side capable of meeting the precondition? And two, will the precondition significantly limit the negotiating power of the other country? For Israel to insist that Palestinian violence must stop before negotiations begin is to ask the negotiators to promise something

they can't control, and it gives too much power and attention to Hamas. And to insist that the Palestinians accept Israel as a Jewish state means the Palestinians would be giving away leverage they couldn't recover if negotiations were to fail. "A wise foreign policy errs on the side of negotiation and removes as many impediments to diplomacy as possible," says Malhotra, author of *Negotiation Genius (Foreign Affairs, September/October)*.

Can we talk? Some professors at Calvin College want a discussion about academic freedom after receiving a memo from the school's board of trustees which said that it is unacceptable for faculty and staff to teach, write or engage in advocacy about homosexual issues and same-sex marriage. One faculty senate representative said the college usually follows a more bottom-up approach to such issues. Calvin College is affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church (*Grand Rapids Press, August 28*).

Nature calls: Biomimicry is an effort by scientists, engineers and designers to find green solutions to human problems by observing and learning from nature. The glue normally used for plywood is toxic, but Columbia Forest Products has developed a glue using soy flour that mimics the way mussels adhere to rocks underwater. A company in Denmark is seeking to make a water filter based on the water-shuttling pores in red blood cells that allow only water molecules to pass through the membrane. "The first step [in biomimicry] is to quiet human cleverness. Then we listen. Then we echo what we hear. And finally give thanks," says Janine Benyus, a leader in the biomimicry field (*The Sun, September*).

Minding your neighbor: Craig Fugate, the new head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is trying to get people to take responsibility for responding to disasters. "Who is going to be the fastest responder when your house falls on your head?" he asks. "Your neighbor." In his first meeting with FEMA staff, he asked how many have a family disaster plan in place. "If you're going to be an emergency manager, the first place you start is at home," he said (*Atlantic, September*).

Next prayer, please: We've heard about drive-in churches. Now the Chandler (Arizona) Christian Church is providing a 24-7 drive-through prayer booth, where putting in a prayer request is as easy as ordering a burrito from Taco Bell. And there is a drive-through chapel in Las Vegas where you can get married without leaving the comfort of your rental car (www.asylum.com, September 4).