

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [April 6, 2004](#) issue

For better or for worse: Intercultural and interracial marriages are on the increase, according to Marsha Wiggins Frame (*Pastoral Psychology*, January), and the trend is likely to increase. Differences can initially be a source of mutual attraction, but in time the couples have to negotiate different assumptions about religion, gender roles, money, sexuality and child-rearing. Couples tend to deal with their differences in one of four ways: submission of one to the other, compromise between the two, denial of real differences or active use of consensus methods to reach win-win situations. A worthy goal for the couple is the creation of a new identity for themselves, drawing on both cultures without either one needing to sacrifice his or her identity or values to the other. Of particular importance is agreement about religious and family rituals associated with meals, bedtime, life-cycle events and holidays. The couple can draw rituals from both cultures, and also adopt new rituals not associated with either person's background.

Travel guide: For St. Augustine, the study and interpretation of scripture had the simple goal of promoting love of God and neighbor, even though such study is difficult and exacting. Yet according to Karlfried Froehlich, Augustine didn't believe that scripture is the only means toward that end: some people exemplify the virtues of faith, hope and charity without aid of the study of the Bible or other books, he noticed. Nature, too, is a book of God. "Ponder heaven and earth religiously," Augustine implored his audience in a sermon. And there is truth to be learned from pagan cultures, even if ambiguous. Still, Augustine believed the scriptures were given by God as the privileged means of God's communication with humanity—to teach, delight and move us (*Interpretation*, January, on the legacy of Augustine).

Faith at work: Last fall a group of Amish young people in rural Ohio hid in a cornfield and pelted cars with tomatoes as they drove by. One driver came back with a shotgun and fired into the cornfield, killing one of the pranksters. The father of the young man killed was a friend of the alleged murderer. Afterwards, the youths wrote a letter of apology to the local papers in which they asked the whole community for forgiveness for their prank that turned deadly. The victim's family also forgave the

accused shooter, whose trial began in early March. “I had forgiven him before I knew who it was,” the mother of the deceased said (*U.S. News & World Report*, February 23-March 1).

Good question: At a public meeting in the early days of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, exalted claims were made about the society the revolution would usher in: ignorance would be overcome, poverty eliminated, sickness banished, and all human problems solved. Then came a question from the floor: “All very well, but what are you going to say to a mother whose child is killed in a street accident?” There was an awkward silence, then a solemn response: “Come the revolution, there will be no street accidents” (*Expository Times*, March).

Talk with the people: Hakim Hasan felt uncomfortable participating in a panel discussion on the economic forces affecting working-class people in the city. The usual suspects were present—academics and people interested in public policy issues—but none of the people being talked about. Very few academics have any association with poor or working-class people of color, Hasan says, and few people in either political party have any direct knowledge of what it takes to get a job in poor, inner city environments or of the struggles of the urban poor to pay the rent or take care of their children. Hasan, whose students at the Metropolitan College of New York are largely single parents and working women of color, has developed an Urban Dialogues Seminar Series. These seminars allow students on the front lines of social problems to converse with academics, public policy experts and community activists. Not only do the so-called experts learn from the firsthand experience of the students, but the students learn to value and build on their experience (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 12).

Chances are: According to Littlewood’s Law of Miracles (Littlewood was a famous mathematician), in the ordinary course of life a person should expect to have a miracle happen once a month, assuming that miracles happen in about one out of 1 million events. In any given day, an individual experiences about 30,000 different events, or roughly a million per month. Thus, we can expect a miracle to happen on a monthly basis. This, of course, begs the question: What exactly is a miracle? Do they happen merely by chance? Do we even notice them? (*New York Review of Books*, March 25).

Coping mechanism: The suicide rate among soldiers assigned to Iraq is 20 percent higher than normal. Steve Robinson, director of an advocacy group for veterans,

reports that at least 23 service members committed suicide in Iraq and six more killed themselves upon returning home. Robinson charges that the military's response has been: "Thanks for your service. Now go home and cope" (Center for American Progress, March 18).

No hanging chad: In 1842 an Indiana farmer nearly forgot to vote, but as it turned out the candidate he voted for as his state representative, Madison Marsh, won by one vote. In those days state legislators elected U.S. senators, and the next year, on the sixth ballot, and after changing his vote, Marsh cast the deciding vote for Edward Hannegan as senator from the state of Indiana. In 1846, when the U.S. Senate was sharply divided over whether to declare war on Mexico. Senator Hannegan was absent at the time. He was called into the chambers, and he cast the deciding vote for war. Consider how that one vote changed history, given that California became the possession of the U.S. as a result of that war (Rick Beyer, *The Greatest Stories Never Told*, HarperCollins).

Ronald the riveter: In an apparent move to conceal the loss of manufacturing jobs, the federal government is considering reclassifying fast-food workers as manufacturing laborers. That's on par with the government's attempt in 1981 to classify ketchup as a vegetable in school lunches. This move is ultimately self-defeating: fast-food workers will demand manufacturing wages and then their jobs will be outsourced (*New York Times*, February 20).