

Briefly noted

News in the [July 13, 2004](#) issue

U.S.-based Muslim organizations have decried the beheadings in June of two foreign workers by extremists in the Middle East. The slaying of Paul Johnson Jr., an American engineer in Saudi Arabia, and Kim Sun Il, a South Korean interpreter in Iraq, were both met with sorrow by Muslim American leaders. Despite injustices suffered by Muslims in the world, “two wrongs don’t make a right,” said Mahdi Bray, executive director of the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation in Washington. Like the Muslim Public Affairs Council, based in Los Angeles, the ten-year-old Council on American Islamic Relations condemned the “senseless violence” and said such acts do not benefit Islam or Muslim people.

Defeated in his campaign for an acknowledgment of Europe’s Christian heritage in the new European Union constitution, an angry Pope John Paul II has accused EU politicians of cutting off the continent’s roots. The pontiff spoke on June 20 to fellow Poles in St. Peter’s Square, thanking their nation as a leader in the cause. Leaders of the enlarged EU formally approved their first constitution June 18 at a meeting in Brussels. All 25 countries must ratify the constitution for it to take effect. The charter upholds religious freedom but does not contain the explicit reference to Europe’s “Christian roots” sought by the pope in a tireless two-and-a-half-year campaign.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation has filed suit against officials of President Bush’s faith-based initiative, saying their actions unconstitutionally favor religious organizations. The complaint, filed June 17 in U.S. District Court in Madison, Wisconsin, questions federal funding of faith-based groups as well as the national and regional conferences sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives. Defendants named in the suit include Jim Towey, director of the office; executives of similar cabinet-level offices; and several members of Bush’s cabinet. “President Bush has made very clear that we’re to level the playing field, not to favor faith-based groups,” Towey said to Religion News Service.