

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [July 27, 2004](#) issue

Sounds of silence: John C. Danforth, the new American ambassador to the United Nations, told the Senate during his confirmation hearing that when he was special envoy to Sudan he called together feuding Muslim and Christian leaders. Danforth, an Episcopal priest and former Republican senator from Missouri, reported that the Muslim leaders said: “Well, everything’s fine in our country, ” whereas the Christian leaders had “a bill of particulars about how they’d been abused.” Danforth thought it was a terrible meeting, but the Muslim and Christian leaders separately told him that it had been a wonderful discussion—and that the two groups had never met each other before. Though a strong proponent of separation of church and state, Danforth believes that religious leaders have a role in public life. In the hearing he asked: “Where are the religious voices in the world? This silence to me has seemed deafening” (*New York Times*, July 1).

Baptismal politics: When author Jimmy Breslin went with a friend to the baptism of an infant in a Catholic church on Long Island, the priest said that this young male would one day bring Christ to the world. And then, speaking directly to the baby, the priest said: “You must go out and stand up against abortions in the name of Christ and your church. You must stand up to these politicians who talk crap about abortions, stand up against this John Kerry who talks crap.” Later, Breslin’s friend challenged the priest on the propriety of making a statement against a politician during the baptism. “Oh, no, it was proper,” the priest said. “We have been ordered that at every liturgical ceremony, we must make a statement against abortion” (*The Church That Forgot Christ*, Free Press).

Let us part in peace: The evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* has added its voice to those saying it is time for the mainline denominations to amicably split, presumably over homosexuality. In a July editorial, *CT* said “a proactive separation, involving leadership of both the left and right, would keep anger to a minimum, minimize ugly property disputes, and, in a perverse way, demonstrate to the world that Christians can act civilly toward each other even in the midst of profound disagreements. Then each church can get on with its own version of the faith, and,

to paraphrase Gamaliel (Acts 5), see if one or both will prosper.” With an apparent twinkle in the eye, the unsigned editorial concluded that such a proposed split “is, in the tradition of the mainline, at least an idea worth dialogue and study.”

Middle ground: The late Hans W. Frei once said that what the church needs is a “generous orthodoxy,” theology that is part liberal like the *Christian Century* and part evangelical like *Christianity Today*. He averred that he didn’t “know if there is a voice between those two,” but “if there is, I would like to pursue it.” Kathryn Green-McCreight points out that Frei never defined the term “generous orthodoxy,” so she offered her own description. *Orthodoxy* is a trinitarian rule of faith that explains how the story told in scripture in component parts is to be arranged. A *generous* orthodoxy “is the willingness to give another voice airtime, the willingness and openness to test without immediate charge of wrongdoing, wrong doctrine, or incipient schism. Here, ‘generous’ means that we are to live together in Christlike submission to the other, which in itself at times like these can be a form of crucifixion” (“Feminist theology and a generous orthodoxy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57/1, 2004).

Good advice department: Marilyn Chandler McEntyre testifies that one of her dearest mentors is an 80-year-old woman “seasoned by a life full of incident and insight.” When McEntyre is anxious or hurt or angry, her mentor will say to her: “Honey, you can afford to let that go.” McEntyre thinks the advice is right on: she can afford to forgive; she can afford to wait awhile; she can afford to be gentle with another person (*Weavings*, July/August).

Enemy within: When Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff served with the U.S. Navy in Vietnam, his commander warned that they faced two enemies—an external one (the Viet Cong) and an internal one (what the war could unleash). War, says Resnicoff, is not only a danger to our lives; it is a danger to our humanity. “The problem isn’t that we don’t have good people in uniform. The problem is that war can turn even the best into different people.” True, there are no atheists in foxholes, “but foxholes can breed atheists, when those who see war’s nightmares lose all faith . . .” (*Christian Science Monitor*, June 28).

Not for preachers only: Chris Knights of England says that as a theological student he was confronted with two questions about preaching: Why preach? And how do you prepare to preach? On the first he has drawn a homiletical threefold conclusion: he preaches to glorify God, proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and

edify the people. On preparation for preaching, he has come up with a more professorial ten-point process: 1. Pray. 2. Read the readings. 3. Read about the readings in commentaries. 4. Develop a one-line aim. 5. Consider the context of the sermon (the congregation, type of service, stage in church year). 6. Prepare the sermon, testing it against the aim. 7. Pray again. 8. Preach. 9. Pray still again (Thank God it's over!) 10. Evaluate the performance, preferably with feedback from others (*Expository Times*, January).

More summer reading: Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* has had an impact on book sales, giving a boost to *House of Bush, House of Saud* (Scribner), whose author, Craig Unger, was interviewed by Moore for the film. Unger alleges that the Bush family has a financially beneficial relationship with Saudi Arabian royalty that, in turn, shapes American foreign policy. More unexpected is that film viewers have been trying to get their hands on *My Pet Goat*, the picture book President Bush was reading with elementary students on the morning of 9/11. The story, however, is from an anthology published by an educational publisher and is not available for individual sale. Moore's detractors have driven *Michael Moore Is a Big Fat Stupid White Man* (ReganBooks) into the top-20 best-seller list at Amazon.com (PW Daily for Booksellers, June 30).

Lights out: According to a report released by the General Accounting Office, the U.S. Congress's investigative arm, Iraq is in many ways worse off now than when the war began last year. Electricity is available fewer hours per day on average in 13 of 18 provinces compared to a month before the war started. The country's court system is more clogged than before the war, and judges are often the targets of assassination attempts. The new domestic security forces, poorly trained and underequipped, are experiencing mass desertions. The number of insurgency attacks jumped from 411 in February to 1,169 in May (Knight-Ridder, June 29).