

Century Marks

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Belated reconciliation: In 1525 Protestant Reformer Ulrich Zwingli preached against the Anabaptists, setting off persecution, exile and martyrdom of the more radical reform group. In June, representatives of these two Protestant groups met for a conference of reconciliation at the Grossmunster Church in Zurich where Zwingli was pastor. Leaders of the Reformed Church in Switzerland expressed regrets for the persecution of the early Anabaptists, and representatives of the Mennonites accepted the confession, assuring the Reformed folk that Mennonites no longer see themselves as victims. A memorial to Felix Manz, an early Anabaptist leader who was drowned in the Limmat River, was dedicated (MWC New Service).

Divine details: Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots, & Leaves* (Gotham) deserves its place on best-seller lists for its hilarious insistence on punctiliousness in punctuation—no small order for those who never even learned the proper rules for punctuation. In the fourth century St. Basil the Great made a similar plea—on theological grounds—for careful use of the smallest building blocks of language: “Those who are idle in the pursuit of righteousness count theological terminology as secondary, together with attempts to search out the hidden meaning in this phrase or that syllable, but those conscious of the goal of our calling realize that we are to become like God, as far as this is possible for human nature. But we cannot become like God unless we have knowledge of Him, and without lessons there will be no knowledge. Instruction begins with the proper use of speech, and syllables and words are the elements of speech. Therefore to scrutinize syllables is not a superfluous task” (*On the Holy Spirit*, 1, 2, translated by David Anderson for St. Vladimir's Press).

Knowledge of God: Most American Christians don't understand the God of Muslims very well, but the larger question, according to Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge, is whether we understand our own God. In a Trinity Sunday sermon preached at Duke University Chapel, Rutledge said that as an itinerant preacher she gets into every kind of mainline church around the country. She's noticed that ever since the beginning of the Iraq war most of these churches pray for the American armed forces, but few say prayers for Iraqi civilians and almost none pray for Iraqi enemies.

“What does this say about our knowledge of our own God?” Rutledge asks. “Was it not Jesus who said, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful’” (sermon at www.cfba.info).

Remember the children: Richard Feacham of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria believes it essential for churches to be involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS. For one thing, churches are major providers of health care around the world. Churches should be especially in the forefront of responding to the needs of children orphaned by AIDS. From 2001 to 2003, the number of AIDS-related orphans increased from 11.5 to 15 million. The UN Children’s Fund projects that there will be 50 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa alone in six years (United Methodist Communications).

Where Rome meets Athens: Just in time for the Athens Olympics, the Vatican has opened an office to promote ethical values in sports. Pope John Paul II, an enthusiastic athlete who continued to ski and hike in the mountains in the early years of his papacy, has deplored the commercialization of sports and doping by athletes. The new Vatican office will encourage church participation in sports at the parish, national and international levels, celebrating athletics “as a means of integral growth of the person and as an instrument of service to peace and the brotherhood of peoples.” It will also support the “witness of Christian life among athletes” (RNS).

Unslovenly: According to a European Union survey, Slovenians are the busiest of all Europeans, with women putting in eight hours and 47 minutes each day and men seven hours and 44 minutes. The Germans, typically considered industrious, came out at the bottom with about seven hours of work each day for men and women (Redeye, July 28).

Speaking of work: According to the Harris Interactive poll, Americans on average forfeited three vacation days in 2003, up nearly 50 percent from the previous year. Americans already receive far fewer vacation days compared to people in Canada, Australia and European countries (*the wag* e-newsletter, August 4).