

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [September 7, 2004](#) issue

Indiscriminate love: In August 1998, Sam Bowers, a former Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was finally convicted of a crime he had committed over three decades earlier. In 1966 Bowers and some fellow Klansmen torched the house of Vernon Dahmer. The fire killed Dahmer and injured one of his three children. Dahmer's offense was that he had allowed black people to pay their poll taxes in his grocery store. At the 1998 retrial of the case, a newspaper reporter was surprised to see that Will Campbell, a maverick Baptist preacher known for his civil rights activism, had befriended both Dahmer's widow and Bowers himself. The reporter asked Campbell why he befriended both a murderer and the widow of the victim. The ever-salty Campbell replied: "Because I'm a Christian, G-dammit!" (Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*).

Art for God's sake: Aesthetic taste, argues T. M. Moore, is a spiritual gift and discipline that should be cultivated by the Christian community. This is a particular challenge in a postmodern art world in which beauty seems totally relative to individual perception. Beauty in Christian thought has been linked to God and God's creation. The very character of God is beautiful; and to understand what beauty is, we need to look for beauty in nature, God's own artistic creation. With so much ugliness all around, the Christian community, where God is known, has a particular vocation to recover a sense of beauty. "The Christian believer's mandate to glorify God in all he or she does . . . certainly includes the duty of nurturing promoting, and preserving a sense of divine beauty," says Moore. If we Christians fail to take up this spiritual duty of nourishing aesthetic taste, then we are partly to blame for the ugliness and decadence in contemporary culture (*Theology Today*, July).

Crashing the party: At the retirement banquet for Bishop C. Joseph Sprague of the Northern Illinois District of the United Methodist Church, guests observed a young man assiduously noting who was present, and photographing and tape-recording every speaker. Sprague recognized the man as John Lomperis, a staffer for the Institute for Religion and Democracy, an organization that regularly assails what it terms the "leftist" stances of mainline Protestant denominations. Lomperis works for

Mark Tooley, the director of the IRD department that focuses on United Methodists and that for the past eight years has especially hounded Sprague. When asked why he was attending the event to honor the bishop, Lomperis insisted he had a right to be there because he is a United Methodist. When pressed, however, he said he belongs to an “evangelical ecumenical” church, not a UMC congregation (*The Reporter of the Northern Illinois Conference*, August 13).

Secretary of peace: Dennis Kucinich, congressman from Ohio and former Democratic presidential candidate, has introduced a bill in Congress that would establish a Peace Department with a cabinet-level post in the executive branch of government. The Department of Peace would “advise the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State on all matters relating to national security, including the protection of human rights and the prevention of, amelioration of, and de-escalation of unarmed and armed international conflict.” So far, there are only several dozen congressional sponsors. Critics say the proposal is naïve and unrealistic, especially in a world of terrorism. But Walter Cronkite has come to its defense, arguing that naïveté is on the side of those who believe that military force and the U.S. policy of preemption will alone make us safe. He asks: “Wouldn’t it be an advantage to have a peer of the secretaries of defense and state whose primary responsibility it was to develop the methods and means of peaceful conflict resolution and to offer peaceful alternatives in the councils of war? Wouldn’t it have been an advantage in the run-up to the Iraq war to have had a cabinet officer whose department was responsible for training U.S. personnel in human rights, conflict resolution, reconstruction and the detailed planning necessary to restoring a durable peace; in short, to do what was so disastrously absent when our forces rolled into Baghdad?” (King Features Syndicate).

Speaking of peace: The World Council of Churches is calling for an International Day of Peace on Tuesday, September 21, in conjunction with the UN’s International Day of Peace and the WCC’s own Decade to Overcome Violence program. Resources, including prayers, can be found at www.overcomingviolence.org.

Pass the offering plate: John and Sylvia Ronsvalle have estimated that it would take \$70-80 billion annually to meet basic human needs worldwide through projects for clean water and sanitation, prenatal and infant/maternal care, basic education, immunizations and long-term development. Although that sounds like a lot of money, the Ronsvalles claim that if church members in the U.S. would increase their giving to 10 percent of their income, that would generate an additional \$86 billion

for such projects (from Empty Tomb, Inc., via PreachingToday.com).

An inerrant text? Peachtree Editorial and Proofreading Service of Georgia is one of a kind—it specializes in proofreading biblical translations. “Bible readers are less forgiving of errors because they expect perfection in the Bible text,” according to June Gunden, who with her husband, Doug, cofounded the business. Despite the best efforts of proofreaders, errors still persist. Here are some of the more notorious errors in the history of the transmission of the biblical texts:

- Blessed are the place-makers (instead of “peacemakers”), Matthew 5:9.
- Thou shalt commit adultery, Exodus 20:14.
- Go and sin on (“no” is missing) more, John 8:11.
- Let the children first be killed (instead of “filled”), Mark 7:27.

Bible sales in 2003 reached nearly \$140 million, an increase of 8 percent over the previous year (*Chicago Tribune*).

Just joking: A priest, a minister and a rabbi walk into a bar. The bartender looks up and says, “What is this, a joke?” (beliefnet.com, August 17).