

Century Marks

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Multiple choice: In the past year Edward Hoagland has received the Eucharist from the cardinal of Milan, witnessed Mother Teresa's beatification by the pope in Rome, held hands with a circle of Quakers in Vermont, and attended Methodist, Episcopal and Pentecostal churches. "I liked the architecture of the pope's basilicas, the rationality of the Quakers, and getting hugged by the Pentecostals, with whom you could at least share a good, unshamedfaced cry." However, he admits that "with our twelve-step programs and church hopping, we're like characters in search of an Author. . . . People shop around for a credo to believe in: not just Adam Smith's atavism or New Age narcissism, but an idealism marked with faith and logic, and a limber minister to explain the details" (*American Scholar*, Winter).

Time after time: When Professor David Wang asks his students how they'd respond if they were sentenced to eating oatmeal the rest of their lives, the thought of such tedium wakes them up. Some say they'd rather die. It is part of the human predicament that "managing tick-tock time can be a tiresome affair," says Wang. But the cliché that "times flies when you're having fun," conveys a genuine insight—that it is during moments of sensual pleasure that we forget time, get lost in it, perhaps even get a glimpse of eternity. Art—beauty—can do that to us: "When art is experienced, time comes to a standstill. At least it becomes experientially *elastic*." Art, a gift from our Creator God, is a harbinger of eternity, "where by definition there is no tick-tocking" at all (*Mars Hill Review*, Issue 24).

Socratic method: An era in which public schools are slashing programs and "no child left behind" is focusing on tangible results would seem an inauspicious time to introduce philosophy into the high school curriculum. But Jim Kasmarek, a basketball coach turned philosophy teacher in Wisconsin, sees it differently: "If you're going to teach these kids how to be thinkers, how to analyze information, and how to be better readers, philosophy only enhances their performance on these [standardized] tests." Kasmarek, who has been awarded the Governor's Award for excellence in teaching, is working on his third philosophy textbook for high schoolers. Attendance in his classes has tripled since they first began. "Teenagers by nature question, and

if you don't allow them to question then you're saying that questioning has no part in learning," Kasmarek says (*The Humanist*, January/February).

Abridged version: At a meeting in Chicago of evangelical Christians who want to add eliminating poverty to the list of moral values that need expression in the political arena, a man stood up holding a Bible from which he had cut every passage that addresses poverty. Observing that there was not much left of his Bible, he said: "I challenge anyone in the room to take their Bible and cut out every verse about abortion or gay marriage, and we'll compare Bibles" (*New York Times*, January 30).

Tackling torture: During confirmation proceedings for Alberto R. Gonzales as U.S. attorney general, more than 225 religious leaders—including Christians, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs—signed a letter objecting to his role in developing a narrow definition of torture, which allegedly created the conditions leading to prisoner abuse at Abu Graib and Guantánamo. The letter challenged Gonzales's assertion that some people are not subject to the protections of international law, and urged support for protecting fundamental human rights (*Baltimore Sun*, January 31).

A really inclusive church: The United Church of Christ announced that Jesus' message of extravagant welcome extends to all, including SpongeBob Squarepants—the cartoon character that has come under fire for allegedly holding hands with a starfish. The UCC's welcome is in response to accusations by James C. Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, that the popular SpongeBob and other well-known cartoon characters are crossing "a moral line" with their stress on tolerance. The cartoon characters are featured in a video sponsored by the We Are Family Foundation, to be distributed to U.S. schools in March (United Church News, January 24).

Family ties: At least 18 U.S. senators and dozens of House members, including seven of the 41 new House members, are relatives of other prominent politicians. Name recognition, political connections and, consequently, access to campaign finance money are working in their favor. Children in political families are often brought up with the expectation that they too will pursue politics. But another trend has wives occupying positions vacated by the death of their husbands (*Washington Post*, January 23).

Mere money: When C. S. Lewis's estate was probated, it had assets of a mere £50,000, less than his estate now receives on a monthly basis for the sale of books,

film rights and other items. *The Lord of the Rings* author J. R. R. Tolkien left an estate that was three times larger than Lewis's (*Star and Dagger*, Spring).

Going to his head: On eBay Andrew Fischer of Omaha, Nebraska, auctioned off his forehead as advertising space. For one month, his forehead will carry the logo for a snoring remedy called SnoreStop, for which he received over \$37,000 (*Chicago Sun-Times*, January 26).