

Century Marks

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Sad character: In an address at Yale Divinity School, former secretary of state Madeleine Albright reported that soon after 9/11 she was on a panel with Elie Wiesel, writer and Holocaust survivor. Wiesel asked the panelists to suggest who was the unhappiest character in the Bible. The answers ranged from Job, because of the trials he faced; to Moses, who was denied entry into the Promised Land; to Mary, who witnessed the crucifixion of her son. Wiesel himself thought that God was the most unhappy biblical character because of the pain he must feel in seeing his children fight, abuse and kill each other in his name (quoted in *Context*, June).

Be it resolved: *Jubilant* is the word United Church of Christ pastor Dale Rosenberger uses to describe his response to news from his Connecticut conference that there would be no resolutions for action at the fall annual meeting. The plan instead is to focus on relationships, dialogue and deeper understanding. Rosenberger wondered if such an approach might carry over to the denomination's general synod. Alas, it is not to be: 22 resolutions are already in the works. "Does anyone else groan inwardly with sighs too deep for words at this prospect?" asks Rosenberger (ColleagueOnline, June).

Moratorium on politics: John D. Roth, professor of history at Goshen College in Indiana, has observed that the usually peace-loving Mennonites are as divided politically as the rest of the nation. So he's calling on Mennonites to take a five-year break from partisan politics and to instead engage in spiritual disciplines that might inform future political activity. He wants a Christ-centered politics that directly engages the hungry, the homeless and the dispossessed, and he'd like to see Mennonites work at sustaining the marriages around them (*South Bend Tribune*, June 2; www.goshen.edu/news).

Advanced planning: A living will may not have helped in the Terry Schiavo case. "If family members are angry and litigious, no legal document is going to keep them from going to court," according to the *Harvard Health Letter* (June; see also www.health.harvard.edu/LW). Having a living will and designating a health care proxy are important, but they're for exceptional cases. Most of the time health care professionals and family members, using common sense and compassion, arrive at humane decisions about end-of-life issues without referring to those documents.

Liberal believer as prophet: The late James Luther Adams, who taught at Harvard Divinity School, liked to refer to himself as an evangelical Unitarian. Chris Hedges says that 25 years ago, while a student at HDS, he heard Adams predict that in the future liberal Christians would contend with Christian fascists who would not sport swastikas but would cloak themselves in the language of the Bible, carry crosses and chant the Pledge of Allegiance. Their first target would be the homosexual community (*Harper's Magazine*, May).

Friend or foe: Bernardine Dohrn took special interest in the revelation that former FBI official Mark Felt was the "Deep Throat" informant during the Watergate era. In the 1970s Dohrn was a member of the Weather Underground, a radical antiwar movement. Felt was in charge of the FBI's efforts to break up the movement. Oddly,

both Felt and Dohrn opposed the Nixon administration and were willing to use illegal means to accomplish their goals. "I don't find the need for good guys and bad guys anymore," says Dohrn, director and founder of the Children and Family Justice Center at the Northwestern University School of Law (*Chicago Tribune*, June 6).

Voodoo economics: At least 10,000 Nigerian women have been forced into prostitution in Western Europe. Many of these women come from Christian backgrounds, but faith in the power of voodoo (or juju) is still strong in the West African culture, and it is often used by prostitution traffickers to convince these young women that if they flee, their families will experience sickness and death. A mission group from Illinois called Lost Coin is trying to convince these women that voodoo has no control over their lives or circumstances. One Nigerian official says the government needs such faith-based groups in the fight against the sex trade (*Chicago Sun-Times*, May 22).

The Oprah effect: Local reading groups have become so popular that mainstream book publishers are taking notice. Publishers have not only moved toward providing Web sites and online reading guides for books popular with reading groups, but are also in contact with such groups about the types of books they like to discuss. Writers have discovered that going on publicity tours and doing books signings doesn't suffice: they must engage the reading groups they hope will adopt their books for discussion. The advantage to publishers and writers is the potential for increased sales and a longer shelf life for books such as Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (*Publishers Weekly*, May 23).

Reading religiously: Religious books, which increased in sales by 11 percent in 2004, are on course to increase another 9 percent this year. Surprisingly, the average age of buyers of religious books is 38, and the largest age group (representing 28 percent of buyers) is between 25 and 34 (*Publishers Weekly*, May 23).