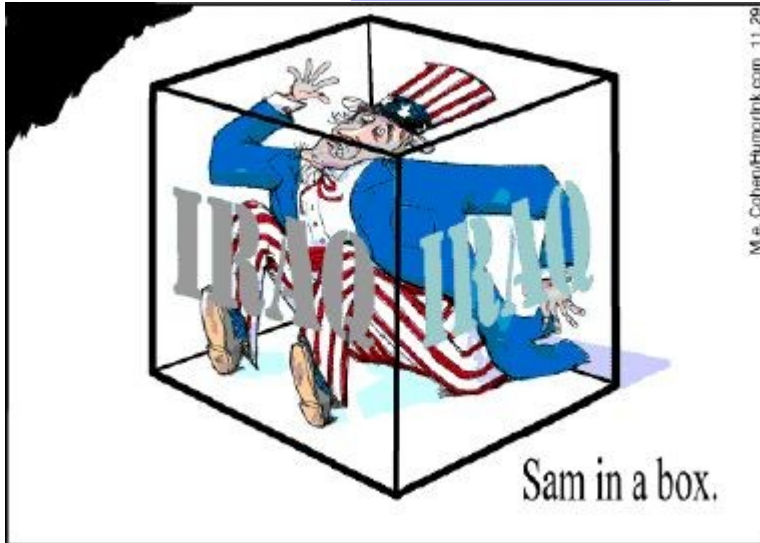


Century Marks

Century Marks in the [November 29, 2005](#) issue



M.e.Cohen, HumorInk.com

Profiles in courage: Most of the contemporary Catholic theologians profiled in the October issue of *Theology Today*—Jacques Maritain, Henri de Lubac, Bernard Lonergan, John Courtney Murray, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edward Schillebeeckx and Joseph Ratzinger—were at one point considered controversial and worked under a cloud of suspicion. Fergus Kerr, a Dominican who introduces these profiles, argues that “they belonged to a generation of Catholic theologians who believed that there would be no new life in the Christian body without participation in the Passion of Christ. Amazing as this may seem to us now, [these] theologians . . . regarded their suffering, both physical and intellectual (inflicted by church authorities), as a necessary element in their vocation.” One of the group, Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), experienced initial rejection of his dissertation at the University of Munich because it was judged to be academically defective and to betray a “dangerous modernism.” With revision, however, it was eventually approved.

Chicken soup for the soul: Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) was not only one of the greatest Jewish philosophers ever. He made his living as a physician, and many of his insights into health seem very modern. He understood, for instance, psychosomatic causes for disease and advocated a “healthy mind in a healthy

body.” He also promoted preventive medicine, with a theological rationale: “Someone who is ill cannot serve the Lord properly.” Moreover, he was sensitive to environmental causes of illness, and particularly warned about the dangers of pollution in urban areas. Finally, he believed that chicken soup has curative powers (*Judaism*, Winter/Spring).

Burnt offerings: Utilizing the thought of Jacques Ellul, Noah J. Toly argues that moderns have made a god of technology and are willing to make human sacrifices to it. One such sacrifice is the result of climate change and the environmental crisis that, according to the World Health Organization, “already claims the lives of more than 150,000 people every year, a tragedy faced by a population consisting largely of poor children in Africa, Asia and Latin America.” Says Toly: “While Israel was prohibited from offering its children as burnt sacrifices to Molech, our technological society stands ready to offer our neighbors, children, grandchildren, and God’s good creation as burnt sacrifices to Mammon in the fiery furnace of earth’s future climate” (*Christian Scholar’s Review*, Fall).

Hot air: Environmental groups haven’t made much progress in getting Congress to address global warming, but they may be getting a formidable ally. The National Association of Evangelicals is circulating a proposal to pressure legislators to place mandatory controls on carbon emissions. NAE leaders consider the environment a values issue and say there is a biblical mandate to care for the earth (Gen. 2:15). However, Senator James M. Inhofe (R., Okla.), who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, has resisted efforts to place mandatory controls on greenhouse gases. An evangelical himself, Inhofe calls warnings about global warming “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.” John Green of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life says that an NAE policy statement on the environment could have an impact on Congress, but the bigger test is whether it would influence evangelicals in the pew, who tend to favor environmental protections but are skeptical about environmentalists (*New York Times*, November 7).

Death to the death penalty: As part of a national campaign to end the use of the death penalty, a statement opposing the death penalty will be unveiled by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in mid-November. Says Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington, D.C.: “We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. We cannot defend life by taking life.” Trends show that support for the death penalty among lay Catholics is declining, coming more into line with the bishops’

position—while the gap between clergy and laity is widening on abortion. A Zogby poll indicates that Catholic support for the death penalty declined from 68 percent in 2001 to 48 percent in 2004. Another analysis of Catholic opinions indicates that support for the death penalty dropped from 72 percent in 1999 to 57 percent in 2005. Cardinal McCarrick acknowledges that theology doesn't seem to be driving this downward trend among laity. Rather, it is more the consequence of the number of cases in which convicted inmates have been proved innocent after DNA testing (*USA Today*, November 8).

Variable lens: In a November 3 *Rolling Stone* interview with Bono of the band U2, Bono reported that in 2001 only 7 percent of evangelicals felt called to respond to the AIDS crisis. Bono took it upon himself to meet with evangelical leaders to implore them to get on board in responding to the “leprosy of our age.” The response surpassed his expectations; even Jesse Helms publicly repented for the way he had thought about AIDS. “I’ve started to see this community as a real resource in America,” says Bono. “I have described them as ‘narrow-minded idealists.’ If you can widen the aperture of that idealism, these people want to change the world. They want their lives to have meaning. And it’s one of the things that the Democratic Party has missed out on.”

Kudos: Articles first published in the *Christian Century* have been included in *The Best Christian Writing 2006* (Jossey-Bass) and *The Best American Spiritual Writing 2005* (Houghton Mifflin). In the former are Richard Lischer’s “Odd job” (April 6, 2004) and Bill McKibben’s “High fidelity” (March 23, 2004). McKibben’s article is also included in *Best Spiritual Writing*, along with Harvey Cox’s “Best of intentions” (November 30, 2004) and Thomas Lynch’s “Passed on” (July 13, 2004).

Gulp: After a protest from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, a youth group at an Assembly of God church in Florence, Alabama, agreed to stop the practice of swallowing live goldfish. The pastor wrote to PETA saying, “My views are a reflection of yours. We love God’s creatures and would never want to show them harm.” In response, PETA sent the youth a basket of Swedish fish gummy candy (Associated Press, October 26).