

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [January 29, 2008](#) issue



"You say 'meek,' but your records say 'passive-aggressive.'"

©The New Yorker Collection 2007 Mike Twohy from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

Win-win: Jean Vanier, who started the L'Arche communities for the disabled, tells a story about a young man running in the Special Olympics who had a chance to win a gold medal in the 100-meter race. Before he got to the finish line, he saw one of the other runners slip and fall. He turned around and helped up the runner who had fallen, and then they both ran to the finish line—sacrificing winning a gold medal for solidarity with another (*Encountering "the Other,"* Paulist).

Sobering studies: StepUP is a ten-year-old program at Augsburg College in Minneapolis designed to help students with a substance-abuse problem get through college. In order to get into the program, prospects must be accepted by the college, be in a recovery program and have had six months of sobriety. The students in StepUP live together in a substance-free dormitory and are expected to attend a 12-step program twice a week and meet regularly with licensed alcohol or drug counselors. Students who relapse are dismissed from the program, although not necessarily from the college. In the ten years, 84 percent of students in StepUP have remained clean (insidehighereducation.com, December 18).

Mysterious ways: If you want to impress someone with your theological erudition, you might invoke the ancient Latin phrase *errore hominum providentia divina*, which means that divine providence works through human sinfulness. James A. Sanders argues that this aphorism provides a good summary of the Bible, for “it is clear that there are few if any models for morality in it but a multitude of mirrors in which to see ourselves. And one is struck by how many blatant sinners and nonbelievers there are in it through whom God worked.” Sanders also reminds us that sometimes God works through secular institutions rather than religious ones (*Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Winter).

Homecoming: Homesickness is a longing for a lost place, and nostalgia is a longing for a lost time, according to Susan J. Matt (*Journal of American History*, September). The yearning for a lost place or time has probably been with us from the beginning of human history, but the words themselves didn’t come into use until the 17th and 18th centuries. American perceptions about home and homesickness have shifted over time. Soldiers who got homesick during the Revolutionary War were castigated, but Civil War soldiers who became homesick were treated sympathetically because that era had a romanticized sense of home. The ideal of home also shaped Americans’ image of heaven, especially with the experience of rootlessness that came with the settling of the frontier. Former generations believed the afterlife was a solo journey, but in the 19th century heaven increasingly was portrayed as a homecoming that reunited families separated in this life. Today Americans tend to think of homesickness as separation anxiety experienced mostly by children.

Made in China: China will soon have a printing plant that will produce more Bibles than any other site in the world, despite the fact that the country restricts religious freedoms. Amity Printing, a joint venture between a Chinese Christian charity and the UK-based United Bible Societies, already prints about 800,000 Bibles each month. The company is about to open a plant outside Nanjing which will have the capacity to produce more than one Bible every second. It is estimated that by 2009 the plant will supply one-fourth of all new Bibles in the world (UPI).

Angelic messenger: The Archdiocese of New York has sent coloring books to about 700 parochial schools with drawings that warn students about sex abuse. In one drawing an angel warns of an online predator; in another, an angel suggests that a child should never be alone in a room with a priest. The coloring book supplements prevention curriculum that was mandated in 2002 by the U.S. Catholic bishops (*Newsweek*, December 10).

Tough mind, tender heart: Pura Vida Coffee is structured as a for-profit company that markets gourmet organic coffee. But it is operated as a charity. It aims to provide living wages to farmers and a high-quality product to consumers and then plow profits into health and education programs for families and children. The company is one of a growing number of hybrid businesses—part business, part philanthropy—sometimes called “for-benefit” companies or “B companies.” Perhaps the best known B company is Newman’s Own, actor Paul Newman’s food company, which gives all its profits to charity. The idea of blending bottom-line business skills with a social cause is drawing the attention of investors and foundations attracted by the idea of self-sustaining charities. Some B companies even provide shareholders with dividends. According to one study, “mission-related investing” has increased by 16 percent over the past five years (*New York Times*, December 23).

It’s better to give: People who give money to charity were 43 percent more likely than nongivers to say they are “very happy” with their lives, according to the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. The study also found that people who did volunteer work were 43 percent more likely to be happy than those who did not volunteer. A separate study at the University of Michigan found that people who gave money away were 68 percent less likely to say they had felt hopeless in the past month (*New York Sun*, December 28).

Kudos: Jason Byassee, Century assistant editor, won the 2007 American Academy of Religion award for best in-depth reporting on religion for news outlets with less than 100,000 circulation. He has also recently had two books published: *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Eerdmans) and *Reading Augustine* (Cascade Books).