

Century Marks

Century Marks in the [May 5, 2009](#) issue



"Instead, let me be your investment advisor and get you eleven-per-cent return, year in and year out, regardless of market conditions."

© The New Yorker Collection 2009 Leo Callum from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

True confession: During World War I, Harry Emerson Fosdick published a prayer for the Germans: "O God, bless Germany! At war with her people we hate them not at all. . . . We acknowledge before Thee our part in the world's iniquity. . . . We dare not stand in thy sight and accuse Germany as though she alone were guilty of our international disgrace. We all are guilty." Charles Biddle, an American pilot, responded to Fosdick's prayer by pledging to kill as many "Huns" as he could, saying that "if Christianity requires us to forgive them I am afraid I am no Christian" (*Church History*, March).

The virtue of smallness: "The Big Takeover," by Matt Taibbi (*Rolling Stone* magazine, April 2), has been billed by some as the best explanation yet of the financial crisis. "What had brought us to the brink of collapse in the first place," Taibbi says, "was this relentless instinct for building ever-larger megacompanies, passing deregulatory measures to gradually feed all the little fish in the sea to an ever-shrinking pool of Bigger Fish. To fix this problem, the government should have slowly liquidated these monster, too-big-to-fail firms and broken them down to smaller, more manageable companies. Instead, federal regulators closed ranks and used an almost completely secret bailout process to double down on the same

faulty, merger-happy thinking that got us here in the first place.”

Reversing baptism: The National Secular Society (NSS) in Britain is offering “certificates of de-baptism” for people wishing to renounce the Christian faith. The society claims that more than 100,000 people have downloaded the debaptism certificates from its Web site and that thousands of others have ordered parchment versions at about \$4 a copy. The president of the NSS cites Pope Benedict XVI’s recent contention that the use of condoms does not help combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa as an example of church stances that lead to a backlash (RNS).

Heard on the street: Arab public opinion is often referred to metaphorically by the American media as “the Arab street.” The term has a pejorative sense, suggesting that Arab opinion is irrational and follows a mob mentality. Ironically, this expression may be borrowed in part from the Arabic language—though in Arabic the phrase is also used for public opinion in the United States, Britain and Israel. As used by the American press, “the Arab street” functions like small doses of arsenic in a water supply that over time becomes toxic, argue Terry Regier of the University of Chicago and Muhammad Ali Khalidi of York University in Toronto (*Middle East Journal*, winter).

Right to privacy: Online databases that maintain the records of criminals, sex offenders and unscrupulous doctors protect the public from harm. But there’s a downside to making this information public, argues Amitai Etzioni (*American Scholar*, spring): it makes efforts at reform by the accused more difficult. In many cases, people with this kind of public record can’t find housing or employment. Etzioni thinks that some measures could be instituted to protect both the public and the accused: databases should be required to be up to date and records should be sealed after seven years if a person has not committed another crime. Some information should be accessible only to police authorities and educational institutions.

Where’s the religion news? The coverage of religion news faces an uncertain future, given the news media’s state of flux during the economic crisis, said religion reporters at the annual meeting of the Religion Communicators’ Council. Cuts have been made in the number of reporters covering religion and in newspapers’ sections devoted to religion. The *New York Times* now has only one reporter covering religion at the national level instead of two. Also, the *Dallas Morning News* has ditched its well-respected weekly section on religious news (ENI).

We love you, wo/man: “We love our youth worker!” is a new campaign among churches in the United Kingdom. Based on a seven-point charter document that congregations are encouraged to adopt, the effort is to encourage youth workers to stay in their jobs longer and avoid burnout. The charter promises that youth workers will be given ongoing training and development, appropriate supervision and accountability, time for retreat and reflection, and a full day of rest each week (youthwork.co.uk/charter).

Be fruitful, don’t multiply: The average U.S. family has 2.1 children, but each of these children uses the resources of 9.4 children in low-income countries. In other words, from a consumption standpoint it is as though American families have the equivalent of nearly 20 children. *World Watch* (March/April) recommends that American families have only one child; if parents want a larger family, they should adopt. It also recommends having children later (ideally around age 30) so as to stretch out the generations and reduce the population.

Theology for buffaloes: Donald Shriver Jr. recalls when a publisher sent the library at Union Theological Seminary in New York a copy of Kosuke Koyama’s ground-breaking book *Water Buffalo Theology*. “I suppose that the staff assumed that Union had no program for teaching theology to buffaloes, for the book landed on a discard shelf outside the library door,” says Shriver. Soon afterward, Union named the book’s author its professor of world Christianity. Koyama died last month at age 79 (ENI).

Remember when: Memory-enhancing drugs could become the next popular pill for aging baby boomers. Some memory-enhancing drugs now in clinical trials could be available in four to five years. One of the challenges is to turn short-term memory into long-term memory. Chemical enhancement of long-term memory would reduce the amount of time and effort needed for learning new information, such as a new language. Sometimes, though, it is a blessing to forget some things (*Discover*, April).

Words for hard times: A new vocabulary has emerged to describe life in this deep recession: *furcation* refers to “going someplace while on furlough or combining paid vacation days with unpaid days.” *Staycation* means “staying at home because you can’t afford to travel during your days off.” And a *frugalista* is one who makes the necessity of being frugal into a fashion statement (UPI).