

Century Marks: Occupational hazards, etc.

Century Marks in the [July 1, 2008](#) issue



"Is 'oblivious' the same as 'undecided'?"

© The New Yorker Collection 2008 Michael Shaw from Cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

Occupational hazards: Although military chaplains do not engage in combat, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are taking a toll on chaplains. None have been killed but some have been wounded, and others have posttraumatic stress disorder, including Richard E. Brunk Jr., a 57-year-old Lutheran minister, who was wounded after serving in Iraq only a month. As a consequence of a blast in Baghdad during a service, he now must cope with brain trauma, posttraumatic stress and depression. About 10 percent of the army's 2,500 chaplains are in Iraq or Afghanistan at any given time (*New York Times*, May 29).

Not at this table: *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne reports that Douglas Kmiec was invited to speak at an event for Catholic businesspeople that included a mass. But Kmiec was denied communion. Kmiec, a former official in the Reagan

Justice Department, is a devout Catholic who is staunchly opposed to abortion. But he has endorsed Barack Obama for president, a prochoice candidate. Kmiec believes that the antiabortion movement needs to reconsider whether voting for prolife candidates is the only way to promote a culture of life. He likes the fact that Obama is calling for personal responsibility in sexual matters. A critic of the Iraq war, Kmiec also thinks Catholics need to consider other social teachings of the church (*Washington Post*, June 3).

Elective course: Miroslav Volf, Yale Divinity School theologian and frequent Century contributor (see p. 37), is scheduled to teach a course this fall at Yale with Tony Blair, former prime minister of Great Britain. Blair chose Volf to co-teach a course on faith and globalization after meeting with him and other Yale faculty in London. Blair, who recently converted to Catholicism, believes that faith must be rescued from those who treat it as irrelevant and from extremists who use religion for political purposes. Blair is also setting up a London-based Blair Faith Foundation to promote understanding between Judaism, Christianity and Islam (YDS news release and *Time*, June 9).

Poetic justice: Last winter some high school students in Vermont entered the home where poet Robert Frost spent many of his summers. Holding a raucous party, they smashed china, soiled carpets and burned furniture to keep warm. The damage to the historic site amounted to more than \$10,000. Part of the students' court-ordered punishment was to take a class on Frost's poetry. The teacher was Jay Parini of Middlebury College. Parini tried to connect Frost's poems to the students' lives. Among the poems he had them read: "The Road Not Taken" (insidehighered.com).

Providential seating? Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, was seated next to televangelist Pat Robertson at an ecumenical prayer service hosted by Pope Benedict XVI in New York City. Kinnamon admits that Robertson is not his favorite theologian, but asks: "Do I get to deny that he is my brother in Christ, any more than Pope Benedict can deny that I am his?" (NCC News Service).

Shoe leather: Ron Hunter, who coaches basketball at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, is taking his players to Nigeria this month to hold basketball clinics and to deliver nearly 200,000 pairs of shoes. This past season, Hunter responded to a challenge from Samaritan's Feet by coaching a game barefoot to encourage contributions of shoes for African children. Samaritan's Feet is a

Christian-based charity whose goal is to send 10 million shoes in ten years to children living in poverty (AP).

Praying at the pump: Rocky Twyman, a public relations consultant and a Seventh-day Adventist from Maryland, believes that the high cost of gasoline is a sign that the apocalypse is upon us. He's organized a movement called Pray at the Pump in which people at gas stations pray that the cost of gas will come down. When it was pointed out that prices keep going up, he replied, "I think through this crisis God is trying to call us back to depend on him more" (*Chicago Tribune*, June 2).

Speaking of high prices: Mamdouh Salameh, an oil economist who advises the World Bank and the UN Industrial Development Organization, says that the Iraq war has tripled the cost of oil. He estimates that a barrel of oil would cost around \$40 today rather than over \$120 if the war had not been waged. He claims that Iraq had offered the United States a deal three years before the war: in exchange for the U.S. lifting sanctions against Iraq, Iraq would have opened ten new giant oil fields with generous exporting terms. "But the U.S. had a different idea," says Salameh. "It planned to occupy Iraq and annex its oil" (*Independent/UK*, May 25).

You game? An interfaith television game show, in which Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh contestants compete against one another for cash prizes, is to be broadcast weekly from the London studios of the Islam Channel. The producer of the show says that two teams of four will answer multiple-choice questions—posed by the Muslim comedian Jeff Mirza—that test both general and religious knowledge. The show includes a home-or-away round in which contestants can answer questions on their own faith or on their opponents' for more points (ENI).

Meet me online: In an attempt to create a safe space online, two fathers have created an alternative to MySpace and FaceBook: christianspaceonline.com. Other social networking sites are notorious for attracting inappropriate content for children and youth, and users may be solicited for pornography. This new site monitors content and responds to complaints registered about objectionable material. The site, which was launched last November, had a slow start at first, but soon was getting as many as 100 new members each day (RNS).

"There's nothing wrong with microwaves or mobile phones—they save time. But God will ask you what you have done with the time that was saved."

—Egyptian Coptic monk Ruwais el-Anthony, who has lived at Egypt's St. Anthony's

Monastery for more than 30 years. (Reuters)

"It's what the nuns had always taught us: sing together, eat together, pray together."

—Novelist Ann Patchett, on not feeling like we have to be the leader of the pack (*What Now?* [HarperCollins], quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24)