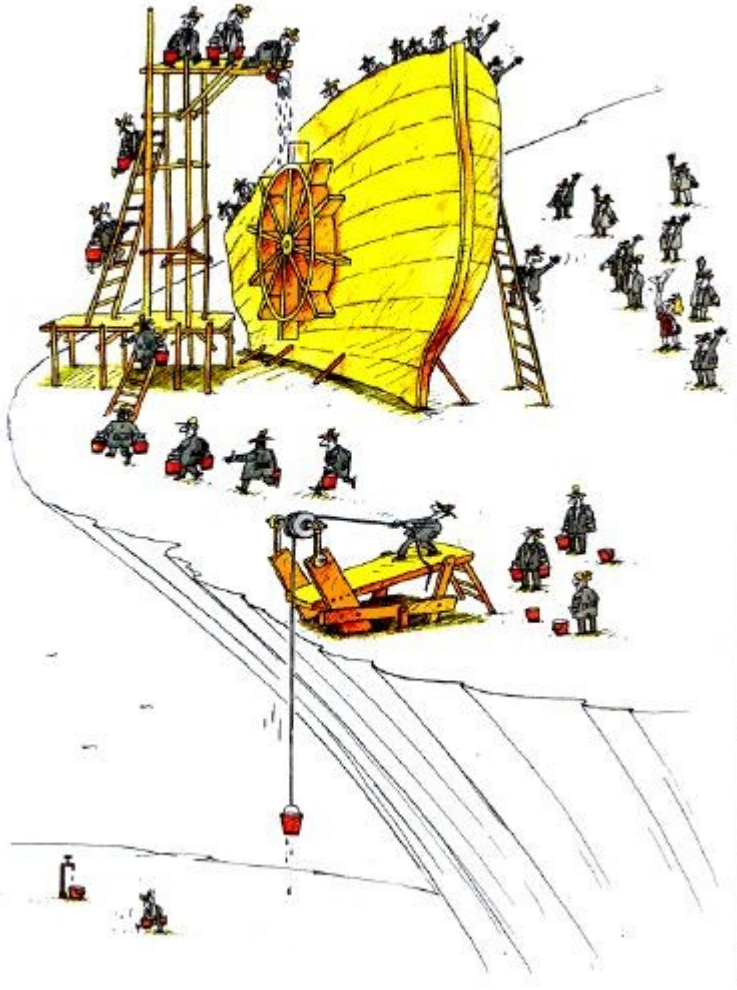


Century Marks

Century Marks in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue



Economy Pavel Constantin, Romania

Turnout: Many observers expected this year's presidential election to be marked by massive turnout by blacks and young people. What happened? The *Washington Post* (November 16) reports that black voters made up 13 percent of the electorate in 2008, compared to 11 percent in 2004, and voters under 30 were 18 percent of the electorate this year, versus 17 percent in 2004.

Prison exercise: At Kumla prison in Sweden, in a section of the prison called "the monastery," Father Truls Bernhold conducts 30-day retreats for prisoners—including

murderers and rapists—using the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola, the 16th-century founder of the Jesuits. Participants need not be Christians, but they do need to go through a rigorous application process to enter the program. The program has been particularly helpful at moving prisoners beyond self-justification and giving them insight into human nature (*Theology*, November/December).

Silent treatment: The popularity of contemplative forms of spirituality seems to represent the triumph of the introverts. But aren't extroverts spiritual in their own way? Nancy C. Reeves, author of *Spirituality for Extroverts*, reports that one extrovert said to her, "I don't know why silent retreats are so popular. Why spend all that time, energy, and money being bored?" Reeves thinks that extroverts can benefit from listening to God in silence, but she says extroverts need to move slowly into that practice, and that they benefit from nurturing their spirituality in relationships rather than in seclusion (*Presence*, September).

PowerPoint preaching? In an exchange in *Word & World* (Fall), Philip A. Quanbeck II says he uses PowerPoint in teaching, not in preaching. Preaching is a matter of persuasion and proclamation, and it can't be reduced to bullet points. An image or video clip will upstage the preacher and what she has to say. Andrew Root counters by arguing for some use of PowerPoint in preaching. The world no longer revolves around words, he says, and images are powerful. Preachers should use PowerPoint especially to connect with how young people experience the world. Yet images should be used only to complement words, and the words should come from the preacher, not from PowerPoint.

Between pulpit and pew: Anglican clerics in colonial Virginia frequently reprimanded their congregations for their lack of attention. The sight of congregants sleeping, talking, gazing out the window, ogling neighbors or using snuff was particularly disturbing, and occasionally ministers would devote a whole sermon to the need to pay attention in worship. Elevated pulpits gave the preacher a vantage point for keeping an eye on parishioners' behavior. But some lay accounts of church life in this period complain that the sermons were sleep-inducing (*Church History*, September).

Time to quit: When the head of the Republican Women of Otero County in New Mexico called Barack Obama a "Muslim socialist," she was asked to resign. When she refused, the rest of the board of the Republican women's group handed in their resignations (AP).

Abortion divide: A split is developing over abortion among American Catholic bishops. Mark Silk of the Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, calls this rift “an emerging civil war in the upper reaches of American Catholicism.” On one side are hardliners like Cardinal Edward Egan of New York, who says that abortion is “no less heinous than what was perpetrated by Hitler and Stalin.” Others argue that the antiabortion movement has failed to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and that it would be more effective to work on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies and on convincing women not to end pregnancies (UPI).

On God’s time: Pope John XXIII is well known as the pope who convened the Second Vatican Council. He is also the pope who stopped making Vatican staff members clock in for work. Once asked how many people work at the Vatican, he replied, “About half.” In an effort to increase productivity, Pope Benedict XVI is requiring all Vatican workers, including bishops and priests, to sign in for work by swiping magnetic ID cards through electronic devices (RNS).

Total depravity: Next year is the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Already a Swiss chocolate maker has created a special chocolate praline for the occasion, one that he thinks captures the essence of the Protestant reformer. “It’s not easy to represent theological ideas by using the taste buds,” acknowledged the master chocolatier. “But the key thing for Calvin is the glory of God, his excellence, his perfection. So we chose a chocolate that we chocolatiers find exceptional, rare and flawless” (ENI).

Blue state: According to the Web site Urban Dictionary, PEWS, or Post-Election Withdrawal Syndrome, is the “feeling of general depletion and emptiness in the few days after a presidential election.” It is “caused by the sudden withdrawal of any campaign coverage, sound bites, or pictures of babies being kissed.” It “may be accompanied by aimless clicking on news websites looking for something to read” (urbandictionary.com).

Environment report: This past summer the Environmental Protection Agency reduced the value of the average American life from \$7.8 million to \$6.9 million. Critics call it the “senior death discount.” In another move, a rule was proposed that would allow federal agencies to decide for themselves whether projects like highways, mines or dams will hurt endangered species. The rule would replace the current requirement that an independent scientific review be conducted (*Sierra*,

November/December).

Monkey business: Laurie Santos, a Yale psychologist who studies the habits of primates, has discovered that monkeys have a talent for dealing with money and trade, as well as a humanlike tendency to steal and deceive. Monkeys will steal food from an experimenter who is looking away from them, but not at them. They will steal food out of a box covered with jingle bells from which the ringing parts have been removed, but not from boxes with jingle bells that ring. Santos and her colleagues have taught some monkeys to barter. The monkeys are given 12 tokens in a wallet that they can spend any way they like. They've learned how to take advantage of "sales." When given a chance to buy apples or cubes of Jell-O, they'll buy an equal amount of each—until they're offered twice as much Jell-O for the same amount of tokens; then they'll buy more Jell-O than apples (*Discover*, November).