

Century Marks

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Wise men© David Fitzsimmons, The Arizona Star

How wide is God's mercy? One of Shane Claiborne's non-Christian friends asked if Claiborne thought the friend was going to hell. "I hope not," replied Claiborne. "It will be hard to enjoy heaven without you." If we "do not believe God's grace is big enough to save the whole world," says Claiborne, "we should at least pray that it is" (www.esquire.com).

Money and me: How were your attitudes to money formed? Ginger Anderson-Larson invites people to write a "money autobiography." She provides 30 questions that help one probe one's earliest memories and images of money. While the exercise is for personal reflection, she encourages people to share their money autobiographies with a friend or confidant. The underlying issue is: "What is God's desire for me in relationship to money?" (*Currents in Theology and Mission*, October).

Mixed blessings: The prosperity gospel, which promises that material prosperity will come to the faithful, may have contributed to the economic crisis, says Hanna Rosin (*Atlantic*, December). Sermons on the hope of divine blessing have encouraged people to take financial risks, like signing on to subprime mortgages and tapping out their credit cards. In some instances, banks preyed on poor people

through the church: pastors invited loan officers to speak at wealth-building seminars, and in exchange the banks would give \$350 to the church for each mortgage taken out. Foreclosure hot spots in the country are also areas where the prosperity gospel is popular: in the Sunbelt and in poor urban and exurban middle-class neighborhoods.

New earth: If the earth is going to be destroyed anyway, and a new earth created (Rev. 21), why should people care for it? Using that line of reasoning, some Christians have rationalized environmental degradation. The idea of the earth's destruction has come up regularly in Christian history, says New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham—but it is a Greek idea, not a Christian one. Bauckham sees an analogy between the new earth of Revelation 21 and the “new creation” (or person) of 2 Corinthians 5:17. Both texts point to a continuity between the old and new and are not about total destruction (*Christianity*, December).

Just say no to Uganda: After weeks of intense pressure from gay rights groups, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has condemned the “shocking severity” of proposed antigay laws in Uganda. The laws, if put into effect, would prescribe life imprisonment and in some cases death for homosexuals. Reports suggest, however, that the provision on the death penalty may be dropped. A number of U.S. religious leaders (including megachurch pastor Rick Warren) and gay rights groups have condemned the proposed Ugandan laws (ENI and *Newsweek*, December 21).

Church as crypt: For research she's doing in post-genocide politics, Sarah Kenyon Lischer of Wake Forest University visited a Catholic church in a small Rwandan village where around 5,000 people were killed in the 1994 mass murders. The church has been turned into a memorial to the dead. Hanging from the rafters and walls are the tattered, blood-stained clothes of the victims. Bones, including multiple rows of skulls, are displayed on the shelves, as well as victims' possessions. Above the skulls a sign reads: “If you knew me, and you knew yourself, you would not kill me” (*American Scholar*, Winter).

WHO done it: Conspiracy theories about swine flu are spreading. No theory may be grander than that of Austrian blogger Jane Burgermeister. She claims there is a plot to depopulate the U.S. through the distribution of tainted H1N1 vaccines and then transfer power to the World Health Organization, the United Nations and related organizations (*Discover*, December).

Throwing the baby out: Authorities in southern India are attempting to stop an annual ritual in which babies are dropped from a 30-foot temple onto a cloth below. Participants believe that the practice brings health to the children and brings the blessing of children to the parents. The ritual is a local one and doesn't comport with either Hinduism or Islam (*Telegraph*, December 11).

Jesus in court: Court officials in Jefferson County, Alabama, were skeptical at first when they encountered a potential juror who said her name was "Jesus Christ." But the 59-year-old Birmingham woman, who had her name changed in probate court, assured the presiding judge that was her name. Christ was called to jury duty for a criminal case but was excused because she was disruptive. Instead of answering questions, Christ was asking them. Efforts to reach Christ were unsuccessful (RNS).

Cover-up: When she was in the ninth grade, Husna Haq, an Islamic American, decided to begin wearing a hijab, or head scarf. She persisted in wearing it in the aftermath of 9/11, despite taking verbal abuse for it. To her the headscarf is not a sign of oppression, as many Westerners believe, but a symbol of her identity as a Muslim. It indicates modesty in dress and behavior, and it distinguishes between her public and private life. Rather than being antisexual, she said, the hijab channels sexuality into the home and marriage, where it belongs, and it actually intensifies sexual desire in marriage (CSMonitor.com, December 12).

Shattering glass ceilings: Danica Patrick, who has been driving Indy-type race cars since 2005, has signed a contract to compete in NASCAR races. And David Stern, commissioner of the professional National Basketball Association, says he believes it possible that a woman will be playing on men's teams within ten years. That would be the equivalent of Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball in 1947. The quality of the women's game has been improving in recent years, and recent rule changes in the NBA have tended to give the advantage to skilled players over strong ones. Ann Meyers Drysdale signed a contract with the Indiana Pacers in 1979 but was released before the season began (SportingNews.com, December 8, and SI.com, December 4).