

Century Marks

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Mind over matter: Once an outspoken critic of popular psychology, Paul C. Vitz thinks the discipline has changed for the better over the past 20 years as Freudian psychology, with its exaggerated claims to be scientific, has waned. Therapeutic psychology has recovered its humanistic roots, and may even be considered a subdiscipline of philosophy, as in the premodern era. Further, psychology has moved away from a preoccupation with traumas and pathologies—which tended to foster a victim mentality—toward an emphasis on traits (they could be called virtues) that promote happiness and well-being. Whereas religion was once viewed by many psychologists as infantile and pathological, research has demonstrated that religious people tend to be happier and healthier and to live longer (*First Things*, March).

Keep walking: Many churches have incorporated the labyrinth into Lenten and Easter rituals. Labyrinths are pathways painted on canvas (for portability); stained on floors; set in stone, terrazzo or brick; or mulched in grass. The designs follow the patterns of what is considered sacred geometry. The most popular form resembles the circular Chartres Cathedral labyrinth in France, built in 1201. “Ancient tradition in the French Gothic Cathedrals at Easter was for clergy to walk the labyrinth singing hymns and tossing a golden ball back and forth in the name of the risen Christ,” according to Lauren Artress, head of Veriditas, the World Wide Labyrinth Project. Through the ages, churches have used the labyrinth as a pilgrimage walk when the journey to the Holy Land was too dangerous to make. Many contemporary labyrinth trekkers say they are more comfortable with a physical walk than with sitting in church pews (RNS, March 16).

On not being spiritual: Eugene Peterson says that in his 45 years of pastoral experience, the most distressing question he’s asked is: “Pastor, how can I be spiritual?” His answer: How about starting by loving your husband or your kids? Even for the mystics, moments of rapture and ecstasy are rare and unexpected. The notion of being intimate with God is also misleading, he says. Intimacy with God is like any other form of intimacy: in marriage, for example, you don’t feel that intimate with your mate all the time. “Spirituality is no different from what we’ve

been doing for two thousand years just by going to church and receiving the sacraments, being baptized, learning to pray, and reading scripture rightly. It's just ordinary stuff" (*Christianity Today*, March).

Hail, Mary: In its cover story on the growing interest among Protestants in Mary, mother of Jesus, *Time* magazine (March 13) noted the *Christian Century's* cover story ("St. Mary for Protestants," December 14) by assistant editor Jason Byassee. *Time* interviewed Byassee and cited others associated with the *Century*: editor/publisher John Buchanan and editors-at-large Beverly Gaventa and Kathleen Norris.

Morality tale: In the face of mortality humans are inclined to think that their community and the life it supports will survive them. But a major disaster like the tsunami in south Asia, which destroyed whole communities, calls that confidence into question. The very culture and civilization we inhabit can be threatened, notes anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Some civilizations collapse through the progressive misuse of natural resources. The state of Montana represents such decline: at one point it was in the top ten states for per capita income; now it is 49th because of the decline of extraction industries (logging, coal, copper mining, oil and gas). And in a technological age an industrial accident or laboratory mistake can undermine a culture (*New York Review of Books*, Marcy 24).

Mysterious pew warmers: Merchants and trade associations regularly send anonymous shoppers to check on the quality of their stores. In April up to 100 people will be checking on London's churches. The mystery worshipers will evaluate the warmth of the welcome, the length and impact of the sermon, the style of music—and whether the service made them glad to be a Christian. The only clue to their presence will be their calling card, dropped into the offering plate and bearing the picture of a masked man in Lone Ranger pose. The London event builds on the success of mystery worshipers in places as varied as Copenhagen, Kampala, Bangkok and San Francisco. Critics have noted a preacher's squeaky voice, for example, or complained of elders who closed down a toilet while the mystery worshiper was still using it (*ENI*, March 7).

Joy at work: The archconservative *World* magazine has come to the defense of Lt. Gen. James N. Mattis, a U.S. Marine who has been under fire for saying: "Actually, it's a lot of fun to fight. It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right up front with you, I like brawling." *World's* Gene Edward Veith says that there is exhilaration and fierce joy in battle. Citing Luther's essay "Whether a Soldier Too Can Be Saved," Veith

concludes: "As in other vocations, so in the military, there is nothing wrong with enjoying one's work."

Not funny: The Newspaper Guild is giving its Freedom Award to the *New York Times* for its efforts to defend the confidentiality of reporters' sources. The award is named after Herbert Block, the famous political cartoonist. How odd of the Guild to give such an award to a newspaper that doesn't carry political cartoons or comics and once boasted that it would never hire a cartoonist because "you can't edit a cartoonist like you can a writer." "Cartoonists love irony," says Daryl Cagle, cartoonist for Slate.com, "but some irony is too much to stomach."

It's been 143 years, Lindsey: Explaining that South Carolina is still reeling from the Emancipation Proclamation, Senator Lindsey Graham said: "We don't do Lincoln Day Dinners in South Carolina. . . . It's nothing personal, but it takes awhile to get over things" (Atrios).

Taxing thought: You can tell a lot about a country by how it taxes automobile sales. In the Netherlands cars are taxed according to weight; in Germany, according to horsepower; and in the United States, according to sales price (*Rick Steves Travel News*, March).

Coming up empty: Thieves broke into an agency in Fostoria, Ohio, and made off with the safe. It turned out the safe was empty. And it turned out the director of the agency was pleased: she had been wanting to get rid of the safe, but it was too heavy to move (AP, March 9).

It is finished: On Good Fridays the Vermeer String Quartet has been performing Franz Joseph Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ* at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel, and each of the movements has been introduced with a meditation. Over 60 of the meditations have been published in *Echoes from Calvary*, edited by Richard Young (Rowman and Littlefield, 256 pp., \$24.95, paperback), which includes two CDs so readers can enjoy hearing both the meditations and the music.