

Sustaining a resource

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [July 10, 2013](#) issue



A few years ago an article on the Faith and Leadership website caught my eye: “Editors More Important than Bishops.” John Schmalzbauer, a sociologist who teaches at Missouri State University, was recalling an old saying in the Disciples of Christ denomination: “Disciples don’t have bishops; they have editors.” He went on to cite theologian William Placher, who described Protestant magazines as a key resource in the theological development of clergy and lay leaders.

Schmalzbauer said that it’s impossible to imagine the world of mainline Protestantism without the *Christian Century*. He referred to Elesha Coffman’s recent work (published as *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*), in which she argues that the *Century* united moderate-to-liberal Protestants and gave them a common identity.

But today, Schmalzbauer wrote, there is a chance that the *Century* and other Christian periodicals will not survive. He wanted to “call attention to the religious press in the same way that environmentalists call attention to clean air and water. Though Christian publishing remains a renewable resource, it must never be taken for granted.”

Several dynamics have converged to make print publishing particularly challenging. The costs of paper, ink, printing and postage remain high. More people are not reading print journals at all, turning instead to online sources—which they expect to be available at no cost. When the recession began in 2008, many people reduced their expenses—and magazine and newspaper subscriptions were among the casualties. Meanwhile, advertisers’ budgets were significantly slashed. Almost

everyone in the publishing world was affected by these developments.

Schmalzbauer noted that 613 periodicals ceased publication in 2008 alone, among them the venerable *Gourmet* magazine. *Newsweek*, a reliable source of news and opinion and a presence in my life for decades, stopped producing a print version earlier this year. *Pro Football Weekly*, a “Bible for football fans,” invested \$2 million in a digital magazine in an effort to survive. Readers loved the online version but didn’t want to pay for it, so the magazine had to close. Meanwhile, newspapers continue to experiment with various schemes for making a profit in the digital age.

My hope and goal is that those of us who rely on this magazine today will create the financial strength to guarantee that there will be a *Christian Century* informing Christian leaders in the future and continuing to stimulate critical thinking and faithful living.

To that end, we have launched [the Martin E. Marty Legacy Circle](#) and in this issue we celebrate those who have stepped forward to be the very first members. They have begun the process of providing a solid income stream to supplement subscriptions, advertising and annual contributions, ensuring the future vitality of this magazine, whether that future is in print or digital form or both—or something not yet imagined.

What better way to do that than by celebrating the enormous contributions Martin E. Marty has made to American religion, the academy and the church? Marty has been associated with the *Century* since 1956 and over the years has been the face of the magazine for many people as well as one of its most popular writers. His commitment to this magazine and what it strives to be is strong and deep. He has enthusiastically approved the concept of the Martin E. Marty Legacy Circle, and he and his wife Harriet have made a generous commitment to it. So have I and other members of the *Century* staff and board of trustees.

The idea is simple: include the *Century* in your will or estate plan. Honor Martin Marty and put your values, commitment and resources to work to support this good enterprise for all the days ahead.