Defining ourselves positively

By Steve Thorngate
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From my church newsletter piece for this week:

> My life is thoroughly immersed in the world of progressive Christian faith. I work for the *Christian Century* magazine, moonlight at Holy Covenant, and study theology at a liberal seminary; my wife Nadia is working on becoming an Episcopal priest. Sometimes I don't talk to anyone outside this world for days on end.
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> When I finally do, I cringe if they ask about my work. People assume a lot about what Christians are like. And often, we left-leaners are quick to explain not what we are but what we are *not*: not fixated on others' damnation, not beholden to the Republican party, not antigay. It's an understandable impulse. It also makes it that much easier for others to define us out of the faith altogether: they are the ones who believe or do x, y, and z important things; we are the ones who do *not*.
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> The Barna Group, a religion opinion pollster, tends to define progressive Protestants this way, emphasizing who we are not. Recently, Barna released its annual survey on the most "Bible-minded" cities in America. One of their two factors: the Bible-minded believe the Bible's accurate, while the not-Bible-minded do not.
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> As many of us have protested and Facebooked and reaction-blogged, that's a pretty crummy definition. But how often do we liberals reinforce such a negatively defined view with our own talk about the Bible? We're non-literalists. We don't believe the creation story presents reliable scientific history. We don't think the Leviticus view of gender roles or sexuality is normative for us today. We don't use the Bible to condemn people. There are many, many things we do not do with the Bible.
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> What *do* we do with it?

Read the rest at Holy Covenant UMC's site.