

We want *Century* articles to be conversation starters

We're not asking readers to subscribe to a given writer's views.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [March 27, 2019](#) issue



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When people unfamiliar with the *Christian Century* ask me what I enjoy most about the magazine, I speak about what I hope they might also come to enjoy: its intellectual depth, spiritual breadth, and unwillingness to align completely with a particular tribe, identity group, or political party. We seek to publish reflective writing that's not the product of mental laziness or poorly reasoned thought. As our tagline suggests, critical thinking is dear to our self-understanding and editorial perspective. We prize disciplined writing that displays humility, civility, and integrity. Surely we don't get all things right all of the time.

We think of articles as conversation starters. If they prompt readers to explore topics they may not have contemplated in depth before, we view that as a success. Of course, we like fan mail. But we also appreciate fair critique.

When our editorial staff gathers around a table to discuss topics for upcoming articles and editorials, different perspectives percolate. We evaluate alternative viewpoints and push and pull at each other's assumptions. The end product, after multiple stages of editing, is a magazine that cannot easily be pigeonholed. Those who perceive the *Century* as holding a predictable editorial slant are probably less familiar with the magazine than are regular readers.

We recently ran an essay by Nadia Bolz-Weber celebrating shamelessness when talking with teenagers about sex ([January 30, 2019](#)). The emphasis of that article might be contrasted with one by Jennifer Beste in the very next issue discussing the moral challenges of a hookup culture ([February 13, 2019](#)). We're not asking readers to subscribe to a specific writer's viewpoint. We want to help people think critically about issues and to live faithfully through their daily choices.

I'm proud of an editorial we wrote last year on abortion and the politics of entrenched identity ([March 14, 2018](#)), which moved beyond the tired labels of pro-choice and pro-life. In another editorial ([July 4, 2018](#)), we lamented how white evangelicals have allowed a narrow political agenda to define their religious identity—and also noted that mainline Protestants are capable of making questionable political alliances.

It's precisely this mix of perspectives and argument that we want never to lose from our pages. I often think of a divinity school professor who liked to remind us that anytime we read a passage of the New Testament and immediately find ourselves on the side of Jesus, we've probably misread the passage. That was his way of knocking down presumptuousness, encouraging a reexamination of assumptions, and limiting our tendency to believe we have all things figured out. Similar desires guide the editorial judgment of every issue of the *Christian Century*. Enjoy this one!

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Conversation starters."