

Open hearts, Augustine's antisemitism, and more reader feedback

Letters & Comments in the [July 2025](#) issue

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Open hearts

I read Peter Marty's column about Eden Murphy, a teenager born with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, with an ache in my own heart ("[A heart broken open](#)," June). Wow. I was immediately in prayer for Eden's recovery, with thanksgiving that I myself am alive. Last August, I had three heart attacks and almost died each time. During my five-week hospital stay, I had pneumonia, quadruple heart surgery, a pacemaker defibrillator installed, and 15 days of COVID. Even with the love of my wife, family, and friends and the care of doctors and countless nurses, there were lonely nights of despair and depression. I felt the pang in my heart—would I survive?

As I write this, my heart again goes out to Eden. I am impressed by her faith in the midst of her challenges: "I have no luxury of stopping. So I press on in hope." This hope is essential for her and for me.

—Rob Morrison

Jackson, NJ

Augustine and antisemitism

I'd like to add one theme to James K. A. Smith's double book review, "[Is slavery integral to Augustine's theology?](#)" (June). It is also important to examine Augustine's concept of the perpetual servitude of Jews to Christians, especially in light of the instrumentalized antisemitism inherent in the Heritage Foundation's Project Esther and its use in suppressing free speech in the United States.

Augustine says in his *Answer to Faustus*, "The Christian faithful sees well enough the subjection that the Jews merited when they killed the Lord for their proud kingdom." In *The City of God*, he clarifies his belief that God placed Jews in perpetual servitude

to Christians, claiming that “the reason for [God’s] forbearing to slay [the Jews] . . . is for fear that they should forget the Law of God and thus fail to bear convincing witness [to the Church].” He further states that the old covenant from Sinai “is of no value except in so far as it bears witness to the new covenant.”

These statements come long after the period when early Jewish followers of Jesus engaged in vigorous arguments about their beliefs and customs in the wake of the destruction of temple-based Judaism. They represent, I think, the beginning of supersessionism and Christian supremacy.

—Barry Stees
Long Beach, CA

Pauli Murray’s legacy

I knew nothing about Pauli Murray before reading Kelly Brown Douglas’s column (“[Pauli Murray’s song of hope](#),” June). Right after reading it, I turned on the television to a documentary about Murray. It felt like divine intervention. I cried through much of the documentary. I cried for her struggles to be recognized, to be credited and accepted as the genius and human that she was. I cried angry tears because I had never heard her name, because men used her logic to win battles she spent years preparing for. Tears of fear also ran down my face, as I realized that many people in this country want to erase all progress for human rights and to revert to the world Murray tried her best to course correct.

I’m going to share Douglas’s column widely. The world should know Pauli Murray, so that no one can erase her legacy.

—Angela C. Johnson
Atlanta, GA

The power of camping

I was pleased to read Meggan Manlove’s article “[Kindled in the wild](#)” (June), which explores the impact of church camping. Having been involved both as a young camper and later as a pastor and camp counselor, I looked forward to the insights

Manlove would offer. While I appreciate the article, I was a bit disappointed that it was so heavy on research and so light on experiences.

I recall with joy several summers at Dunkirk, a camp owned and operated by the Evangelical and Reformed Church (now part of the United Church of Christ) on the shores of Lake Erie. Bright spots include vigorous singing after each meal, stories from a Honduran missionary, some glorious adolescent encounters with emerging sexuality, and quieting vespers. It all made for times of personal enrichment and spiritual pondering.

My pastoral experiences as a camp counselor were mostly canoe camps, traversing more than 100 miles of the Susquehanna River in northeast Pennsylvania. We reassigned paddle partners every day so that each camper experienced each of the others. We took turns setting up the toilet tent—an umbrella and a tarp, suspended from a tree—and provided brief homilies on respect for personal privacy. On the final day we shared about the first impressions we each had of one another and how those impressions evolved over the week.

Manlove's article did help me realize that I could have offered more spiritual growth opportunities as a counselor. I might have emphasized the wonders of creation and introduced the idea of spiritual journeys, perhaps with one reiterated scriptural text throughout the week. As the article suggests, perhaps our evangelical colleagues have discovered much more purpose to Christian camping than we have.

—Bill Seaman
Davidson, NC

Death as redemption?

I like [Katherine Shaner's challenging essay](#) about Weird Barbie in the Sunday's Coming email for the Third Sunday of Easter. But in [the following week's email](#) she takes the usual path of viewing death as the ultimate show of loyalty to Jesus: "John's Jesus redeems Peter with the reminder to readers that Peter's loyalty this time followed Jesus to death."

I do not think Jesus would have wanted Peter's death to be what redeems his doubting. John's Gospel has a thing about doubt, which has been used by the born-

again sects to beat people over the head to prove their faith and salvation again and again. These churches are also at ease casting out people who “backslide” and thus fail to prove their worthiness. But look at what Jesus says: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. . . . And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me” (John 6:37–40).

John’s Jesus seems to be saying that it is up to the Father who comes to Jesus and that any who do will never be driven away. In other words, once given, you cannot be ungiven. In Acts, Peter finally gets what Jesus was saying, and I believe that his work creating communities of mutual love is what brings full circle his disloyalty before the crucifixion. In fact, had Peter followed Jesus to death at that time, he would not have been alive to help show what it really is to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

—Joella Critchfield
Burnaby, BC, Canada

Editors’ note:

To sign up for the Sunday’s Coming lectionary emails, visit christiancentury.org/sc.

Encountering a writer

I discovered [Alejandra Oliva’s writing](#) a couple of months ago in these pages. I’ve since read her book *Rivermouth*, followed her writing elsewhere online, and heard her speak at the Tucson Festival of Books. Every time I encounter her I’m left wanting to know more of what she is thinking and writing about. What a gift she brings as she weaves themes of yearning, fear, hope, grace, and presence with the lives she encounters.

—Margaret Gramley
Sedona, AZ

Imitating the Spirit

Meg Giordano's reflection on what I read as *imitatio Spiritus* empowered by Christ's love ("[The imitation of the Spirit](#)," March) was incredibly timely: I was just finishing Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *Spirit and Salvation*. Giordano's linguistic musings on "self-aware agency" are a pleasure to consider alongside friendship with God and a startlingly familiar experience of having the Spirit ask, "What do *you* think we should do?" This is a call to liberation-mindedness, to sharing agency with the vulnerable others all around us, just as the Spirit does with us.

In my own journey, the overwhelming siren call of the Spirit brought the beginning of healing for my body and soul, while also cracking open my heart in deeper compassion for others. Compassion is bound to happen when self-protection crumbles to the tune of the Lover of our souls. But it turns out I cannot contain the full measure of the Spirit's generosity in my limited human body. In being broken open for others, I was lured past compassion into the misunderstanding that I had to release all my resources all the time.

Giordano's article might well shake some of us out of complacency, to hook the conscience as the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the vulnerable for the relief of sharing a little of our agency. Others of us must be shaken back into rest, and others shaken toward wiser activities and rhythms. All these are the Spirit's work. I now realize that the Spirit's healing and melting my heart was only the beginning. My heart had been broken in so many ways that needed far more attention than I gave it in order to sustain heartbreaking ministry.

My imperfect way of imitating the Spirit these days means hovering over the chaos without fixing it in an instant. Imitating intercession rather than interaction. In reflecting further on Giordano's proposal, I'm relieved to find that imitating the Spirit is not limited to those with great strength and agency.

—Jazmine Lawrence
Wolfville, NS, Canada