

Reading Eugene Peterson, the wellness-to-fascism pipeline, and other reader feedback

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

Published on November 26, 2025

Reading Peterson

Thank you to Katherine Willis Pershey for reminding all of us to read Eugene Peterson (“[Please, liberal Christians, read Eugene Peterson](#),” November). My journey is very different from hers. I was reared in Pentecostal evangelicalism, with more than a hint of fundamentalism. I left behind the Pentecostalism and fundamentalism but continued to identify as an evangelical for most of my pastoral life (that has changed in recent years).

As a young pastor, I was enthralled by the church growth movement, and the church I served was growing steadily. Then I discovered Peterson and gradually realized that I wanted to be a shepherd, not a manager, mathematician, or manipulator. The trajectory of my ministry changed. Before long, I found a spiritual director (and still have one in my retirement). I learned to listen to the rhythms of the Christian year and to ancient worship patterns. And Peterson became my good friend on the journey, for which I am deeply grateful.

—Harry J. Heintz

Henrietta, NY

Wellness-to-fascism pipeline?

Stewart Home’s book *Fascist Yoga*, which you recently reviewed, sounds like a trendy waste of time (see “[What does White Christian nationalism have to do with yoga?](#)” November). We can credit the inhumanity of Trump’s madness for an outpouring of copy about fascism, some of it important and some of it trivial. The Home book might be either of these things or neither. But the title certainly is eye-catching. I’m surprised no one in search of a quick profit has written “Vegetarian Fascism,” given the number of Nazi leaders who apparently eschewed eating meat. It is insulting to the intelligence of your readers to assume that they would find such facile connections enlightening.

I’ve read the century for years. I find much of the writing thoughtful, and I don’t expect everything in the magazine to please me—I enjoy being challenged to think outside my comfort zone. But I worry that the century is moving toward a more sensationalistic tone. “The only crime is to be superficial,” remarked Oscar Wilde. I hope you don’t risk it.

—Norman Weinstein

Boise, ID

The editors respond:

Fascist Yoga is certainly a book title crafted to provoke. But the phenomenon the book details is quite real: it's well documented that right-wing Americans and Europeans have been embracing natural wellness practices, yoga among them. See our 2021 feature article by Rebecca Bratten Weiss, who wrote the Home review ("[When localism becomes nationalism](#)," August 25, 2021). For academic research on the subject, look up Rachel Carbonara, a social sciences postdoc at Princeton University.

Church trauma

Thank you to Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans for her well-researched article "[A growing landscape of religious trauma](#)" (November). It is critically important to name the lifelong harm inflicted on people raised in high-control faith groups. During tender brain development years, a child is learning trust (in both self and others) and self-talk. When I was young, at my church where women were banned from pastoral ministry, the liturgy asked us to confess aloud, "I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess . . . and justly deserve Thy temporal and eternal punishment." Later in life, when I was turned away from communion because of my beliefs, I was told by the pastor that "love requires him to keep from the Lord's Table those who don't trust in God's inerrant and infallible Word."

Over the years, this degree of theological and cognitive dissonance—asking me to love a God who views me as a miserable sinner, to trust a God who sees my uterus as an impediment to ministry—fed a bone-deep shame, sadness, and anger, resulting in a dangerous distancing from God. Fortunately, strong voices from family, wise clergy, and theologians like Rachel Held Evans, Anne Lamott, and Padraig O'Tuama helped anchor my storm-battered boat. But the relationship between neuroscience and faith is inseparable, so I have accepted the reality that for the rest of my life there will be parts of church and theology that trigger me. Buddhist nun Pema Chodron gently reminds us, "We need self-compassion to stabilize our minds." God's tender whispering holds me now. I'm grateful to Elizabeth Evans for speaking to religious trauma, as well as to growth and healing.

—Tara Meyer Dull
Oak Park, IL

Silence and voice

I just read Rachel Mann's column in the October issue ("[The silent, suffering God](#)"). I am so moved by Mann's words (always) and by this story (today), and the part of me that strives, for its own reasons, to cling to my own autonomy and agency and voice yells out to Mann across God's brilliant abyss: Hang on there, Sister! Don't go down into those depths of silence, even if you imagine that's where you will find God! Because lo, I am small and selfish and need your dear, honest, and very articulate voice.

—Mary Barnett
Middletown, CT

Mosquitos in the mission field

Robby Waddell's poem in the October issue ("[This Is My Blood: A Liturgy for Brother Mosquito](#)") was thought-provoking! I have at times pondered the role of mosquitos in a perfect world, but as a former missionary

physician who has seen countless people, including my daughter, suffer the symptoms of malaria—and having myself experienced dengue fever—I don’t hesitate to squash Sister Mosquito when she alights upon my arm.

Speaking of my missionary experience, it pushed me into deconstructing my evangelicalism, and your magazine has helped with my reconstruction. Thanks for all you do!

—David Drozek
Athens, OH

Editors’ note:

As poetry editor Jill Peláez Baumgaertner explained in her commentary on this poem in our Poem for the Week newsletter, only female mosquitos bite humans—hence David Drozek’s reference to Sister Mosquito. Sign up for our poetry newsletter at christiancentury.org/poetry-email-signup.

Baffled by Israel

Samuel Wells’s final column expresses something I have felt for almost 40 years (“[Dear Israel](#),” October). My husband and I lived in Israel in 1979 and 1980 while he taught at Tel Aviv University. I studied Hebrew full time, then had a baby. We returned to our home in Seattle filled with admiration for Israelis—their courage, intelligence, innovation, perseverance in the face of opposition, and deep grounding in the ethics of Judaism. But beginning in the late ’80s, I was stunned and baffled by the excessive Israeli response to the intifadas. My incredulity deepened with the construction of the obscene wall between the West Bank and Israel. Then the destruction in Gaza—even more obscene. Thank you, Sam Wells, for your helpful and articulate columns for so many years. And thanks for ending with a column that expresses my thoughts and feelings so clearly. I just read it to my husband, and we cried.

—Lynne Baab
Seattle, WA

Who’s the scapegoat?

I was pleased to read Lyle Enright’s illuminating piece “[Postliberalism and the romantic lie](#)” (October). Like the author, I am saddened to see René Girard’s work used to justify right-leaning thought and policy. But unlike Enright, I am not scandalized by this reading of Girard, nor does it perplex me.

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard asserts the supremacy of Christianity. His view is explicitly supersessionist: the scattered insights of the Hebrew prophets are perfected in the revelation of Christ. He’s even more damning about every other religion and about modern secular beliefs—the book lumps them into an undifferentiated mass noteworthy only for the repetition of sacrificial violence. He further laments modern political projects that allow for abortion, end-of-life care, and the recognition of trans people and sexual minorities. He views these as modern pagan practices that subvert the lessons of Judaism and Christianity. Allowing for them, he argues, is an affront to Christians who attempt to hold traditional views.

It’s the tried-and-true conservative argument for religious freedom dressed up in sophisticated theoretical drag. At no point in the book does Girard separate the message of Jesus from the institution of Christianity, a

brehtaking omission for someone whose thought is otherwise exquisitely nuanced.

Here Christianity is the perfect, blameless scapegoat. I worry that Girard himself bought into the romantic lie that Christian identity is a back door out of responsibility for one's participation in violence and persecution. This is dangerous because identifying with the blameless scapegoat allows Christians to see the mote in their neighbor's eye without seeing the log in their own.

I want to keep Girard, because his insights into scapegoating are too relevant to discard, especially right now. But to do that I don't just need to read Girard against right-leaning thinkers. I need to read Girard against Girard.

—Lucas Hergert
Deerfield, IL

Goodbye to Sunday school

I share Stephanie Perdew's nostalgia expressed in "[The rise and fall of Sunday school](#)" (September). I too began my discipleship in one of those musty basement classrooms. By the time I was an adult, they were empty. I don't know whether Perdew is serious about relaunching a children's Sunday school class as a retirement project, but I fear nostalgia cannot bring these classes back, not even if we dust off the old flannelgraph. The good news, as Perdew notes, is that innovative congregations have moved on from children's Sunday school in favor of new approaches to children's catechesis. Intergenerational groups, the Narrative Lectionary, and other approaches are engaging children of all ages—as well as their families.

—Joseph Allison
Edmond, OK