

“Progressive” Christianity, adoption, and more reader feedback

What we’ve heard from our readers

Letters & Comments in the [May 2026](#) issue

Published on May 1, 2026

“Progressive” Christianity?

Although Stephanie Perdew makes many cogent claims in her column “[Why I don’t like the label ‘progressive Christianity’](#)” (April), I’m wary of her claim that progressive Christianity is largely embedded in capitalism. When Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers, is he not aiming for integrity, honesty, inclusivity, and justice—values that encourage striving for continuous improvement in humaneness rather than financial success? I wish Perdew had been more specific.

As a human secularist and lapsed Lutheran-EpiscoPresbyterian, I believe that the term progressive indicates the challenge of always moving toward that which is good, right, and salutary—and that which is breaking constraints that would hold us back. God knows we don’t need bigger, better cathedrals to accomplish that. We simply need bigger arms and hearts to embrace our fellow humans regardless of nationality, skin color, gender, educational degrees, and, yes, religious affiliations.

—Alinda Wasner
Beverly Hills, MI

Perdew’s column is a challenge to those of us who identify as progressive Christians, but I’d like to say why I unapologetically embrace the label. I identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA community. I identify theologically as feminist, queer, liberationist, process-oriented, and more. I acknowledge the Bible as containing stories of myth, spiritual truths, and wondrous imagination. I believe that all of humanity is a reflection of the Divine. As a progressive, I side with the poor and the least among us. When Perdew characterizes people like me in terms of liberal politics, I decry that as false.

I don’t like how the word *Christian* is being subverted by nationalists and those perverting the message and way of Jesus. Sometimes I identify not as Christian but as a follower of the teachings of Jesus. Likewise, the term *progressive* may not be applicable to me in a few years. But other useful terms, like *radical* and *reformer*, are implied by the label *progressive* as well.

—Mark Makowski
Sun City, AZ

Perdew’s column solidified my own resistance to claiming the label “progressive Christian.” For me the term is uncomfortable because it makes me feel like I’m giving side-eye to those stuck, non-progressive Christians. I don’t like setting myself apart from conservative or traditional believers. My beliefs are a potluck, some of which I haven’t had time yet to spelunk. Perdew’s incisive, thoughtful explication of the label’s roots and branches persuade me fully to trade it out for an equally thoughtful description of my actual loves and commitments.

—Patty Jenkins
Burbank, CA

Stephanie Perdeu responds:

The letter writers describe what *progressive* means to them individually, and I'm struck that the appeal to individualism is itself embedded in the liberalism from which *progressive* springs. Just as with the churches I served, individuals posit that the word means any liberative, beautiful thing we say it means. Still, this appeal to individual usage evades reckoning with the term's specific history and harms.

Alinda Wasner wishes I'd been more specific in substantiating my claim that the roots underlying progressive Christianity are entwined with liberal capitalism. She cites Jesus cleansing the temple to illustrate a gospel economics. But there's no historical through line from the temple to today's Protestantism. I'd point Wasner to Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* for the history and then to Kathryn Tanner's *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* for a Protestant theological engagement along the lines I'm suggesting.

At the center of adoption

Mario Koym-Garza's article "[My queer, infertile fatherhood](#)" (March) is entirely about his perspective as an adoptive parent, with no consideration for how it might land for adoptees, a consistently marginalized group. By publishing this essay the century is perpetuating the church's long-standing harm toward them.

Children are not a gift. Of course, all children, adopted or not, are wonderful. But birth parents don't give them as gifts, as if adoption were merely a transactional barter. An adoptive parent's gift language is a clear signal: The parent is centering themselves, not the adoptee. Koym-Garza presents adopting as a means of addressing his own needs, not his child's. This matters because it fails to recognize the lifelong losses for adoptees and birth families that are inherent in all adoptions.

Koym-Garza also portrays his daughter as a healer amid his infertility grief. It's supposed to be touching that his adopted toddler metaphorically leads him "to the water" at church. Many will surely gush over this, as our society loves this kind of adoption story. The adoptee used to bring healing is a common trope in the media and in the church.

Sadly, it's also a common situation adoptees find themselves in, with unhealed parents and reversed caregiving roles. It should never be a child's job to take care of a parent's pain. Children in this scenario grow up isolated, stuffing their own valid emotions, and over time they often end up thinking something's seriously wrong with them.

The essay is painful for adoptees and potentially insulting to birth parents. Voices from both groups are widely available, and I hope the century will see the opportunity there to do better by adoptees.

—Sara Easterly
Vashon Island, WA

Mario Koym-Garza responds:

Family is not something you have but something you do. I was raised to understand family—by birth or by choice—not as a way to secure comfort or status but as the primary place where we learn to give and receive love. By love I mean the concrete work of seeking another person’s good and ordering one’s life around their welfare. My desire for family is not a project of self-completion; it’s a desire to pour myself out in love for a particular person and to be joined to her first family, if they will have us, as part of that work. That conviction has guided every step of our discernment about whether and how to adopt.

I share Sara Easterly’s concern about the ways adoptees and birth parents are turned into tropes, instruments of healing, or props for tidy testimonies. Churches have indeed contributed to that harm through sentimental narratives that erase the real losses present in adoption. In this essay, however, I am not claiming that my daughter healed my infertility or completed me. My grief over infertility is ongoing; no child, adopted or not, should bear the burden of making a parent whole. What I describe instead is how my daughter’s ordinary act during worship reminded me, even amid unresolved grief, that I am not alone and that I remain called to create a world of love for her.

I use *gift* in a theological sense: the unexpected grace of being invited into a relationship I did not and could not earn or demand. My daughter and her birth mother are not possessions or solutions to a problem but people to whom I am bound in ongoing responsibility and love. Gratitude for that invitation does not deny the losses and asymmetries that accompany adoption.

In the context of a short, first-person reflection on queer, infertile fatherhood and faith, I do not attempt to narrate my daughter’s story in detail or to offer a full theology of adoption. That restraint is intentional: as she grows, my husband and I hope she will tell her own story on terms she chooses.

I am grateful for adoptee and birth-parent writers helping churches speak more honestly about adoption, including Kristin T. Lee’s January 2024 article in *Christianity Today*, which urges Christians to “recogniz[e] that [adoption] originates in brokenness” and to present a wider range of adoption stories. I hope those voices continue to be amplified alongside reflections from adoptive parents who are trying, imperfectly, to love our children well.

The editors respond:

Over the years we have published numerous articles about adoption, from a variety of perspectives. Our [December 2023 cover story](#) by Haley Hudler, an American international adoptee from China, may be of particular interest.

Who joins mainline churches?

Thanks for the articles on evangelicals entering or reentering the domain of mainline Protestantism (“[Reconstructing in the pews](#)” and “[Four things mainline churches should know about exvangelicals](#),” March). It is much too early to call it a trend, but even a trickle in that direction is worth pondering for future implications.

With so much controversy over the use of the word *evangelical*, I am not always sure what the returnees mean when they say they used to embrace it. I wonder, too, whether there is something about evangelicalism they are still seeking. Seeking relief in a new community from personal abuse seems to be the common denominator for some; for others, according to these articles, it is an explicit embrace of grounding the faith in a prophetic witness to justice. Both pursuits are understandable—but is their original desire to be evangelical being fulfilled

in their mainline church choices?

More importantly, as the numbers of the evangelical influx grow, will mainline churches be sufficiently motivated to find a path back to their traditional evangelical roots? Mainline leaders still seem to prefer to soft-pedal that heritage, only to fall victim to the more precarious liberal mainline versus conservative evangelical political divide. It seems to me that the better course would be a return to teaching the Reformation history of a rich evangelical piety that is both warmhearted in spirit and socially relevant in action and service. It was that tradition that won the geographical frontiers for our circuit-riding forbears. Maybe a timely recovery would enable the churches of the north to experience the same vitality that keeps partner churches of the south thriving with their overt evangelical outreach.

—Robert J. Harman
Milwaukee, WI

I have subscribed to the century on-again, off-again, mostly on-again, for the last 15 years. In the last several I have seen a decided increase in the number of articles written by or about people who have moved from conservative branches of Christianity to the more progressive or liberal kinds that the century reflects. I get it: I was ordained in the Conservative Baptist movement and now attend a United Methodist church. There's much to consider in this pilgrimage, but often, as I read these essays, their authors' tone comes off as triumphalist, or at least self-congratulatory, that they've finally seen the light and now enjoy the more open and accepting atmosphere that mainline groups offer.

Would the decline in membership of the mainline be even greater if not for this pilgrimage from right to left? In other terms, transfer growth is surely something to applaud, but what about evangelistic growth? Would not Methodist founder John Wesley ask, Why don't you have a message that people find to be good news?

—William W. Klein
Littleton, CO