

Honest storytelling, rules for preaching, and more reader feedback

What we've heard from our readers

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

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Moved by honesty

Thank you for publishing Isaiah Lewis's "[Reading Aquinas's five proofs as a trans man](#)." In my opinion it is no less than creative genius for him to combine these two topics as the means of conveying his personal story of coming to wholeness with God. It is not so much that I can identify with Isaiah; indeed it would be difficult for me to do so as a cisgender man. I am simply moved by his convincing honesty about the challenges he has faced and how he dealt with them. I am grateful to Lewis for his authenticity and the courage to tell his story.

—Herb Evert
Cottage Grove, WI

The preacher's first commandment

Three cheers for Peter Marty's eight proposals for "[Preaching in partisan times](#)." There is one more, however, that should be added to his list, one that could even stand alone: Focus on loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5 is not the only time we read that directive. What does it mean? How do we do it?

Too many of us fall into the trap of thinking we must preach that God loves everyone and therefore, for the sake of imitation, we make that our priority as well. But our primary response to the good news of God's love is to love God back. Our priority must be the love and joy we can have in building that relationship. Hymns remind us of that, but preaching is needed as well.

The first commandment is not, "Be like Jesus."

—Kristin D. Anderson
Roseville, MN

A broken president

I agree completely with the premise of your May editorial ("[The president's brokenness](#)"), and I'm glad to see the case laid out so clearly. I have said for a long time that if Trump were not president, I would have so much compassion for him. He is one of the most broken human beings I've ever encountered. Reading about his early years and his monstrous father, it's easy to see how he came to be the way he is.

However, he is in such a position of power that his brokenness is doing incalculable harm to individuals and to our country. It has also aided people around him who saw someone they could manipulate to further their own agendas. Those people are not incentivized to stand up against him and take steps to remove him from office. But I'm not sure our democracy can survive two more years of his presidency.

—Grace Cangialosi
Ruckersville, VA

I appreciate your thoughtful, relevant commentary at this time. This editorial is typically good, and it's astute in its diagnosis of Trump: "Much of his wake of destruction is directly attributable to the ungoverned id of this deeply broken man." You are also right to connect "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19) with "the powers and principalities" (Eph. 6:12).

I'm a progressive though biblically orthodox Protestant pastor. We progressives are hesitant to talk about spiritual evil. But Jesus' temptation in the desert is something I can't psychologize. I think this central story includes spiritual evil, and it's personal. And I think Trump has succumbed to spiritual evil. It's not a full explanation, nor is it one I can talk about without being mistaken for a strict literalist or Christian nationalist.

—[Name withheld due to spouse's immigration status]
Brooklyn, NY

Mark's tomb narrative

I appreciate both articles that address the ending of Mark at 16:8 ("[Trauma at the tomb](#)" and "[For Mark, Easter begins in trembling](#)," April). But I am surprised that neither B. G. White nor Danielle Tumminio Hansen mentions the possibility that the original ending may have been lost or even intentionally mutilated.

I understand that there's scholarly consensus that verse 8 was indeed the original ending of the gospel. Still, it seems careless to not even consider other possibilities.

—Steven K. Brown
Port Charlotte, FL

Thank you for publishing Hansen's article. It serves as a poignant reminder that while trauma can be an overwhelming reality, there remains hope within the suffering of Christ.

—Santiago Reales
Mt. Airy, NC

Jesus' death and us

I read Brandon Ambrosino's online column ("[What does the death of Jesus have to do with me?](#)") with great satisfaction. I realized that I'm not the only one talking about the death of Christ without bringing up *appeasement* or *substitution* as an explanation. I was taught growing up that Jesus took the punishment in our

place, and I always wondered, *Is our God so angry that he must punish someone—anyone—to get it out of his system?* I agree with Ambrosino that Jesus died because of us, because his goodness was more than we could stand to watch. But I believe God in Jesus saw the cross on the horizon long before it happened. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explains the scriptures that predicted it.

So, I see Jesus' death and resurrection as part of a larger plan. God's love for humanity is implied or declared openly throughout the Bible, and humanity continually snubs it. I think the intended outcome of Jesus' death was to show just how much God loves us. God loves us enough to allow us to commit the worst spiritual crime in history and then forgive us for doing it. We continue to snub God's love, and God continues to love us.

I look forward to reading more of Ambrosino's thoughts in future columns.

—Michael Slayter
Woodbridge, VA

Pro-life Christianity?

Thank you for the review of Rebecca Bratten Weiss's *The Books That Made Us* ("[Deconstructing the Catholic imagination](#)," April). I'm an old timer. Back in the late '50s and early '60s, I read G. K. Chesterton and was hooked. Later I read Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, and others.

One thing stood out in Samuel Martin's review: Bratten Weiss's "feeling pressured to vote for the Republican candidate because of the abortion issue." The abortion issue has been complicated and misunderstood, to the point where many Christians aligned with the so-called pro-life movement, calling for human law to intervene and force people to deliver babies. We can do better. We *have* done better. Social spending cuts really cut; they hurt badly. And they go hand in hand with tax cuts that make the rich richer. We end up with a system in which some must give birth in jail cells with no medical help and a soundtrack of guards' derisive laughter.

No more pro-life. No more laws where medical help should be. Life comes first, not lucre.

—Jim Lein
Minneapolis, MN

More on "progressive Christianity"

For several years now, our congregation has intentionally used the descriptor "a progressive church in the South." When I ask new members how they found our church, the two most common searches are "gay and affirming church" and "progressive church." Whatever its theoretical liabilities, the term is doing real pastoral work.

In practice, I've never encountered someone who emphasizes the "progress" in progressive Christianity. Like many idiomatic descriptors, the word functions as a signal rather than a literal program. It gestures toward a cluster of commitments—like welcome, inclusion, and theological openness—that may be imperfectly defined but are nonetheless widely recognized.

I share Stephanie Perdue's concern that congregations sometimes use "progressive" aspirationally rather than truthfully ("[Why I don't like the label 'progressive Christianity,'](#)" April). But *abusus non tollit proprium usus*: the misuse of a term does not negate its proper use. No shorthand (liberal, conservative, evangelical) fully withstands scrutiny. All become wiggly under pressure yet remain meaningful in lived contexts.

More to the point, I think Perdue's critique overstates the extent to which progressive Christianity is captive to liberal political philosophy. In my experience, progressive communities are often deeply self-scrutinizing about capitalism, colonialism, and state power, sometimes more so than other ecclesial expressions. The term can just as easily signal proximity to social-democratic or solidaristic Christian ethics as to anything like uncritical neoliberalism.

Which leaves me puzzled by the column's conclusion. To suggest we should abandon "progressive" until it becomes sufficiently disentangled from its philosophical liabilities risks a kind of self-canceling standard. If the term is always already compromised, then no community could ever responsibly claim it, despite its clear usefulness in helping people find communities where they can belong.

More importantly, the telos of Christian life is not progress in any political sense but conformity to Christ. If "progressive" helps name communities attempting, however imperfectly, to embody that life in practices of inclusion, repentance, and justice, then it is doing theological work as well as pastoral work.

—Clint Schneklath
Fayetteville, AR