

End-of-life choices, the physics of faith, and more reader feedback

## What we've heard from our readers

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

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### Choices at the end

Thank you to Rachel Rim for providing words that pastors can use (“[Natural death and Christian love](#),” June). This could be pivotal when speaking with families before they reach the decision point to either prolong a loved one’s death or “love them back to God.”

My prayer is that many pastors will be blessed by Rim’s article as they discuss choices that will one day likely be needed. Singing hymns, praying psalms, and recognizing that angels are there to accompany loved ones in their transition—these are holy ways of saying “I love you” and receiving God’s peace in the moment.

—Marta Wheeler  
*Omaha, NE*

### An early obit

I appreciated reading Peter Marty’s column “[What we live for](#)” (June). I would like to think that my spiritual obituary will read: “He was saved by grace. He was used by grace. Anything else was his own damn fault.”

—Donald Zappone  
*Austin, TX*

### Is anyone Christian?

The June editorial (“[When Christians do unchristian things](#)”) brings to mind the question of whether *any* of us hold claim over the title Christian. That is a question Søren Kierkegaard spent the majority of his life asking. Take, for example, the following quote from his personal journals: “Every day I must begin with the concern: ‘Are you in fact a Christian?’—for of course today an event could perhaps arise in which it became clear that you are no Christian.”

Kierkegaard felt that the Danish state church of his time was a hypocritical institution that preached values it itself did not live out in everyday life. He scorned the “priests, who by falsifying the definition of ‘Christian’ have, for the sake of the business, obtained millions and millions of Christians.”

Kierkegaard believed there are great theological dangers in purporting someone to be not a child of God (an attitude he diagnosed as “despair”), but—contrary to the editorial—he saw it to be of great “upbuilding” nature

to tear away the cozy blanket one wears when they call themselves a Christian. To Kierkegaard, if all it means to be a Christian is the brief kindling of one's fire for an hour every Sunday, whereafter one moves on into daily life, the title is nothing more than a platitude. Thus, participation in the sacraments indeed confirms belonging, but belonging does not confer complacency.

Just 48 days before he died, Kierkegaard came to a conclusion: "It is altogether true: I am not a Christian." Kierkegaard lived his entire life with immense guilt over the reality of his personal sin; it was a lens through which he viewed the world. He endeavored to turn it into a mirror, which he would hold up to society to make the fact "manifest that others are even less Christian than I am." If Kierkegaard were alive today, I believe he would pursue the exact same answer: that none of us is really as Christian as we think we are.

—Erik Paul Bergren  
*Geneseo, IL*

### **Make it plain?**

Please convey to Amy Leach what a great thing it is to read her lectionary columns (April). Long may she write! It's not often that I get to laugh out loud when reading about the Bible. Even better, I get to come away with insight, wisdom, and humility.

The world is indeed wonderfully resistant to clichés. That said, I do hope Leach will temper her cautionary tales in the *Sunday's Coming* newsletter regarding too much devotion to clarity. I plan on acquiring a copy of *The Clear Word Bible*—as a great example of what not to do. But that still leaves the question of what to do. What vision should I make plain so that today's runners may read it?

I will consult my Confusing Word Bible first and foremost. Thank you to Amy Leach for that reaffirmation. But I will also consult her tablets. We need more prophetic poets like her.

—Scott Stapleton  
*Minneapolis, MN*

**Editors' note:** Sign up for the free weekly *Sunday's Coming* newsletter at [christiancentury.org/sundays-coming](http://christiancentury.org/sundays-coming).

### **Worship for the rich**

I appreciate Melissa Florer-Bixler's column "[Has worship become a luxury good?](#)" (May). It gives us a worthwhile reminder that the church is losing its connection with working-class people. Maybe there is a larger issue: The church should not see itself as a vendor of religious goods and services but instead as a mission.

Certainly the church does not exist primarily to serve those who attend worship. "The Church exists by mission," said Emil Brunner, "just as a fire exists by burning." Thanks again to Florer-Bixler for the provocative and important perspective.

—Steven K. Brown  
*Sunbury, OH*

Florer-Bixler asks whether worship has become a luxury good. She concludes that we have some work to accomplish and, until then, “the bus schedule will continue to decide who meets God on Sunday morning.” The word *attendance* and its variants are repeated throughout the piece, linking church participation with the ability to attend services at the church’s location.

We are the body of Christ. A body is not a static being, confined to a space. Let’s make that real. Maybe we ask if we can hold worship services where people can more easily attend, such as the parking lot outside the box store Florer-Bixler mentions in her column. Why can’t the body of Christ gather in spaces where people are—instead of expecting them to jump through time-consuming, costly hoops to come to a fixed structure?

—Susanne Rainier  
*Mount Laurel, NJ*

### **The physics of faith**

Peter Choi’s recent column reminds me of something helpful I learned when I studied physics years ago: What is dynamic is far more challenging than what is static (“[The room next door to faith](#),” May). When it comes to faith, it is so easy to assess a person as if their faith is static; are they *in* or *out*? But the reality is that for any of us, any faith we have is dynamic. It is moving.

What is really important is what direction I am moving in. Evaluating whether someone is in or out is not that hard. Just give them a list and see if they check the correct boxes. Assessing in what direction someone is heading (and discerning a helpful way to interact with them) takes time and a willingness to listen. So I strongly agree with Choi that “Tell me more” are extremely important words.

—Gary Nielsen  
*Holland, MI*

### **A literal ascension?**

I thank Rachel Mann for rehabilitating the ascension as good news by invoking poetry’s power of metaphor, especially that of a John Donne sonnet (“[Holy uprising](#),” May). I will long remember these sentences: “Donne breaks open an unexpected vision of ascension in one word: He calls it an ‘uprising.’ This word has an older, literal sense: literally rising up toward heaven. But of course it also means a revolt, a revolution against what is and has always been.” That’ll preach!

But I’m puzzled why she spends so much space defending “the biblical accounts of Jesus Christ” as “unequivocal.” She confesses that poetry “keeps the flatness of facts . . . from destroying vision.” She admits that even “if Donne affirms a literal aspect to ascension . . . this matters only insofar as it represents a revolution in being human.”

Miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension are all powerful metaphors for expressing Jesus’ decisive significance for us human beings—that his testimony to the gift of God’s unconditional love for us and its claim on our lives is the way of salvation. Defending their factual historicity only distracts us from experiencing their saving significance.

—John A. Wright  
*Austin, TX*

### **Gender identity and love**

I want you to know how much I appreciate Isaiah Lewis's essay ("[Reading Aquinas's five proofs as a trans man](#)," May). I have two grandchildren who don't fit the cisgender cookie-cutter identity. One identifies as nonbinary so as not to be relegated to the secondary status imposed by their birth certificate, self-presentation, and position as a soprano soloist. Their sibling is increasingly gender fluid in every possible dimension. Both are unconditionally loved and supported by their family and religious communities. Yet I fear for them in these mean-spirited times.

Lewis's honest, thoughtful, brave essay has given me insight into their lives (and my own). I am so grateful that the century published this.

—Roger G. Talbott  
*Jackson Heights, NY*

I was moved by Lewis's piece. Ten years ago I became a widow, and that experience led me to the holy comfort that Christ tells us of in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. Since God cannot be the unjust judge, I associate God with the widow—a state of oneness, replete with the firm will of persistence.

All of us die, one at a time. All of us are surrounded by myriad injustices. My relationship with God, like Lewis's, unfolded within a context of severe challenges. From age 7 to 11, I was sexually abused by my dad. There was a great deal to forgive over many, many years. I am now 84 years old.

I can now say with Lewis that I too have "experienced a kind of joy beyond words" with the "divine reality." Beautiful! Julian of Norwich said that God looks on us "with pity and not with blame." It's true.

—Roberta Nobleman  
*River Vale, NJ*