

# Passages

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [May 19, 1999](#) issue

Institutions, like individuals, go through passages and need rites for them. We do not often talk about the inner life of the Christian Century, but when we have an editorial change, it seems right to observe the passage.

When this senior editor and, more significantly, the editor, reached three score years and ten, we stepped aside and made room for the new. Since I have been a moonlighter for 42 years, my segue was quiet.

James M. Wall's transition could not be so quiet. His leadership ensured the survival of the *Christian Century* in a time of change. The magazine adopted a wider view (into Catholic, evangelical and other worlds) and acknowledged more cultural expressions (such as film). Taking the magazine beyond a survival mentality, Wall brought a change in intention: he made the magazine more of a forum for discussion than an ideological platform, as some had seen it. So at a reception on April 30 we marked his move into the "senior contributing editor" role.

The big event, however, was welcoming John Buchanan to replace Wall. At the reception Buchanan paid generous respects to his predecessor. He set forth his approach to leading our organization while continuing to serve as senior pastor of strategic Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago.

The featured speaker of the evening was to have been Jesse Jackson, but he was doing pastoral work in Yugoslavia and was excused. David Wilhelm, a member of our board and a political leader active in the world of finance and any number of good causes, celebrated Wall without much roasting and Buchanan with (figurative) toasting.

It was a night for reminiscing. Dean Peerman and I thought back to three strong women—Cecelia Gaul, Marjorie Brown and Margaret Frakes—who as editors here years ago tutored us and raised our standards of writing and editing. We have mourned the passing of Cece and Marge, but we always counted on Christmas cards and occasional letters from Margaret.

Margaret, we have lost track of you. Dean has received no response to his last letter to you—and no answer to his phone calls. We are concerned, and hope you are alive and well. Margaret, in the fashion of most *Christian Century* editors, was living far beyond the threescore years and ten that the scriptures see as the days of our years. Founder Charles Clayton Morrison lived well into his 90s, and the editor who recruited Peerman and me, Harold E. Fey, lived to be 91. Perhaps a reader can help us pick up the Frakes trail, so that Dean and I and others can mark her place in the *Century's* history.

Back when Frakes, Gaul and Brown were active, women were not often at front desks in religious publishing. These three set marks that were not adequately noted in our rite of passage April 30. Let them be noted here once again. They and their works live on in the lives of editors they affected and in the development of the magazine you hold in your hands.