

Speaking of money

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [September 19, 2012](#) issue



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My files are full of sermons on stewardship. I have always taken that aspect of Christian life seriously. So it came as a shock when people would say, “We know that you really don’t like to talk about money.”

Late in the game, I began to understand what these people were saying. They were saying that though it was good to hear my sermons on the theological significance of money, it is also important to know exactly what it costs to run the place—and I hadn’t talked about that. So I began to be more specific in the pulpit. I spelled out how much money was received and how it was spent, what the plans were for next year’s budget and how our giving compared to that of other churches.

When I assumed responsibility for the *Christian Century*, I found another challenge of stewardship. As I watched religious magazines and denominational journals close their doors and newspapers vastly reduce their operations, I saw with new eyes the financial challenges of publishing, especially in an economic downturn and at a time when people increasingly turn to the Internet, expecting news and information to be available there free of charge.

The *Christian Century* is an independent journal. It is not sponsored or funded by any other institution. Subscription income (from the print and web editions) is far and away the main source of our budget as we face the rising costs of paper, postage, rent and other expenses.

The *Century* has had a remarkably stable and loyal readership. Over the years the subscription base—which provides 70 percent of our income—has remained around 35,000. (Advertising, mostly from other nonprofits and from book publishers, supplies another 22 percent of our revenue.)

This means that in addition to needing subscribers and advertisers, we need people who believe enough in what we are doing to support us beyond the cost of a subscription. Already 4,500 people give us some amount annually. These donors have helped the *Century* to navigate some difficult financial times, create an award-winning online magazine and archive, and continue to offer its usual timely and lively commentary on Christian life and ministry.

In these years of intense religious ferment, when mainline institutions are being pressed to reconceive their mission, I believe the role of the *Century* is more important than ever. The *Century* has no special investment in the term *mainline* (nor in *oldline*, *liberal* or whatever substitute may be offered), but we are invested in the theological tradition that those terms seek to identify.

That is, we are invested in a tradition that engages honestly and critically with modern science, history and philosophy; that responds in informed and faithful ways to social and cultural issues; that is committed both to the central claims of Christian faith and to self-critical thinking about faith.

The mainline Protestant tradition has been crucial to the life of the church in this county and beyond, and the *Christian Century* has been a crucial part of that tradition. The pages of the *Century* continue to be the place where adherents of this vital tradition engage in debate, chart the future and share insight and inspiration for ministry.

A few weeks ago I received a letter from a longtime subscriber in Kansas who included a check for \$1,000. He said it was a gift to mark his 88th birthday and “a token of appreciation for what the *Century* has meant for me.” He added, “I know that my thinking has developed over time, and I’m sure that the *Century* has been a factor in this. Thank you for existing.”

If the existence of the *Century* is important to you, and if you think it is important for the church, I urge you to make a philanthropic gift today—and to make the *Century* one of the institutions and causes you regularly support.