

Congruence: An authentic life

From the Editors in the [October 18, 2003](#) issue

"Thinking critically, living faithfully." In those four words we've attempted to describe this magazine. In placing this phrase under our name on the cover, we offer a clue to those unfamiliar with the magazine—who come upon it at a newsstand or discover it on someone's coffee table—as to what the Christian Century is about.

The phrase links two activities that don't always go together. Indeed, many people both inside and outside the church would set the two in opposition. Can one love God with heart and mind? Can Christian conviction and discipleship be accompanied by rigorous thought and a questioning mind? This magazine says yes: they can and they must.

Critical thinking and faithful living is abundantly represented in the person and work of Eugene Peterson, who last month delivered the annual Christian Century lecture. A pastor and biblical scholar, Peterson criticized the "consumerist" spirituality abroad in American culture, which is sometimes fostered in the churches themselves. He admitted his own temptation, as a pastor, to think competitively about other churches in town, and to look at new parishioners in light of how they could aid in congregational growth.

Peterson, best known for *The Message*, his 12-year project of translating the Bible into plainspoken contemporary language, exemplifies critical thinking on behalf of faithful living. In his Century lecture he offered this term for thinking about the spiritual life: congruence. An authentic Christian life, he insisted, is one in which there is congruence between the truths asserted and the life lived, and congruence between ends and means.

"We cannot participate in God's work but then insist on doing it in our own way," he said. "We cannot participate in building God's kingdom and use the devil's tools and nails. Christ is the way as well as the truth and the life. When we don't do it his way, we mess up the truth and we miss out on the life. Only when we live Jesus' truth in Jesus' way do we get Jesus' life."

Such congruence is not easily achieved, Peterson acknowledged. It arises from long, patient work. In the deepest sense, however, it is not our work at all, but God's work in us.

Combining "critical thinking" and "faithful living" is also not easy. Usually there is a creative tension between the two activities. The Century aims to do its part in joining the two in each biweekly issue.