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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'Esta Love, Stuart Love

Why is the Lord's Supper an important topic for **Leaven**?

First, its observance has long been an essential worship practice among churches of the Restoration Heritage. This tradition is grounded, for example, in Paul's words to the Christians at Corinth "that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed " took a loaf of bread and a cup, gave thanks, and as he ate and drank with his disciples declared, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . . ." He then commanded them, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:25).

Second, we believe that the Lord's Supper like baptism and the preaching of the cross is an event in which the living presence of Jesus is received and experienced by believers. Many of the contributors to this issue of **Leaven**, in their various articles and reflections, affirm the reality of the living presence of Jesus in the eating of the fellowship meal. This emphasis has not always been and in some cases is not an accepted understanding among our people. We invite you to consider this possibility and reflect on its importance for the life and worship of the church.

Third, we believe there is a need for a renewal of our understanding of the theology of the supper. For example, its weekly observance may have become for many no more than a ritualistic routine which can lead to a spiritual numbness. On the other hand, the need for renewal is a current emphasis within American Protestantism. For example, an entire issue of **Interpretation** ("Eucharist" 48/1 (1994)) was devoted to the theme. Jack Dean Kingsbury in the editorial preface writes, "Today, the recognition is growing, certainly among Protestants, that not only the preaching of the Word but also the celebration of the Eucharist is central to the faith and life of the church" (4). J. Frederick Holper appeals to the need for liturgical renewal on the basis of recalling "the period of the early church." Protestant worship, Holper also affirms, needs to move to a pattern in which the preaching of the Word" leads "to the celebration of the Eucharist" (61). Holper's approach is designed not to focus on the Lord's Supper alone, but to improve "the life of the congregation as a whole" (61). He calls for a more frequent observance among Protestants. Thus, while others are finding renewal in part by partaking of the meal more often, we must find renewal in the midst of our established weekly practice.

Fourth, we believe the Lord's Supper is inseparably linked to Christian ministry and Christian ethics. Worship is tied to fellowship and practice. Out of the central witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus, God calls us in the supper to be his people, that is, to remain loyal to the covenantal promise we have made: to love one another and to carry forth God's love in the world.

Accordingly, this issue of **Leaven** is not about "an item of worship." Rather, it is about the fellowship meal that unites us with the risen Christ. It is about the meal of commemoration of the death of Jesus on the cross in its saving power. It is about the meal that is inextricably bound to the sacrificial service of the life of Jesus in word and deed. It is about the presence of the Lord Jesus in the life and work of the church today. It is about the unity of our past, present and future service in Christ as we wait for his imminent coming at the end of the age. It is about our covenant loyalty to God in Christ and to one another as we proclaim Jesus Christ as our risen Lord to the world. It is the meal that portrays what it is to be Christian. It is about ministry among our churches.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer may sum up our goal for this issue of **Leaven** when he states in **Life Together**,

The fellowship of the Lord's Supper is the superlative fulfillment of Christian fellowship. As members of the congregation are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord so will they be together in eternity. Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and his community is complete. The life of Christians together under the word has reached its perfection in the sacrament.

Now, a few words about articles in this issue which we divide into three categories: 1) Early Christian thought and practice pertaining to the supper; 2) theological and practical resources pertaining to the supper; and, 3) other ministry resources not related to the Lord's Supper.

Early Christian Thought and Practices Pertaining to the Supper

John Mark Hicks uses the biblical theme of "covenant" in his study of the Lord's table. The article sets the tone for the issue as Hicks anchors his thought in redemptive-history and strives to revitalize the experience of the Lord's Supper in our fellowship today. **David Lertis Matson**, a guest writer who teaches at Milligan College, writes about the meaning of "breaking bread" in the writings of Luke and Acts. The story of Jesus as both guest and host in the meal at Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is a pivotal event in Luke's treatment of meals. Matson ably demonstrates the theme of table fellowship in the ministry of Jesus and the early church, a fellowship and celebration in which the risen Lord is present and reveals himself to us.

Matson refers to the early house churches as the places where early Christians worshipped. But what do we know about these meeting places? What impact did spatial arrangements in homes have on early Christian worship? **John McRay's** article, "House Churches and the Lord's Supper" explores these questions through archaeological, social-historical and New Testament evidence. Beginning with the home as the "basic cell of the Christian movement" McRay sets forth how that space impacted the size of churches and the way the Lord's Supper probably was observed. Finally, **Philip Slate** in an article entitled "The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day" explores why Sunday is so important as the appropriate day for Christian worship and the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Theological and Practical Considerations

W. Royce Clark affirms that since the Lord's Supper takes its meaning from Jesus' death it is essential to take seriously the themes of love, mercy and justice—especially justice—on earth and in this world as the social application of Jesus' role as the servant of God. In a different vein **Gary Holloway** addresses a practical question historically. Does something happen in the observance of the supper? In keeping with the best of our Restoration heritage Holloway encourages us to see that in the eating of the supper our faith is nourished by the presence of Christ. **Elmer Prout**, in his inimitable way, explores what it means for the Church to "Proclaim the Lord's Death Until He Comes." We especially commend the communion meditation by **David Crawford**. His effort is an excellent example of unsolicited writing for *Leaven*. We hope his example will encourage others. Finally, **Craig Churchill** carries on the tradition begun by Ron Tyler in providing our readers an excellent and readable "Readers' Guide: Literary Resources for the Lord's Supper."

Other Resources

Topics other than the Lord's Supper are included. **Tim Kelley** writes for us again. This time he explores the character of Judas in the Fourth Gospel. Was Judas truly free to resist? How many times have our members and/or students asked penetrating questions about free will and predestination? **Mike Casey's** editorial feature on Restoration Biographies has a guest author. **Darrell Buchanan** provides a fascinating biography on "The Life and Times of Jenny Kidd Trout." Finally, book reviews of works by Dallas Willard, John Beaudean, Jr., and Gordon Fee are done by **H. H. (Bo) Simeroth**, **Mark Love**, and **Markus McDowell**.

A Few Words About Leaven

Our next issue will not build around a particular theme. A number of excellent articles await publication including articles by John O. York, Rob McRay, June Breninger, Barry Sanford, Thomas Olbricht, Dan Anders and John Free. We also want to include an index of Volumes 1-3. It should be mailed in November or December. Many thanks to Craig Bowman who helped D'Esta and me while we were in Florence this summer. Next year's Pepperdine Lectures will feature the book of Job. Our issue growing out of the lectures should be excellent. Several issues are in various stages of development. Have you renewed your subscription? Do you know someone who should be reading *Leaven*? We need your support and your prayers!