

1-1-1990

Editor's Notes

Mark Love
mlove@rc.edu

Lynn Mitchell

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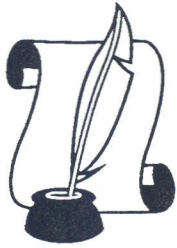


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Recommended Citation

Love, Mark and Mitchell, Lynn (1990) "Editor's Notes," *Leaven*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2.
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EDITORIAL

Lynn Mitchell

What language shall I borrow
 To thank Thee, dearest Friend
 For this Thy dying sorrow
 Thy pity without end?

This is my favorite verse from my favorite song in the whole world of hymnody. It captures for me the purest quality of what worship is; that is, the response of wonder and praise to God for who he is and what he has done. It does this better than any word, definition, or set of words I have yet encountered. At the same time it clearly discloses the problematic nature of worship itself.

Notice the implications: the poet who wrote these lines, and the singer who sings them, must do so with a look, or at least a feeling of perplexity, even bewilderment. What should bewilder the poor soul so? After all, cannot he or she just learn what to do and then do it? Why should someone as pious and astute as Bernard of Clairvaux (the author of these words) find himself groping for something to say or some way to say it? Sing, pray, give, teach, and observe the Lord's Supper — is not that all there is to it? Ah, but the content: sing what, how, when, why? Pray what, how, when, why? Give what, how, when, why?

Worship from the beginning of time has been a human groping, sometimes in the thick darkness of paganism, sometimes in the brilliant light of the Gospel — but always still a groping for some adequate way, some adequate form, some adequate language in which to express the awe, the fear, the joy, the reverence, the bewilderment in which we stand before the One With Whom We Have To Do.

As a Christian, Bernard of Clairvaux felt all these things and more as he stood in his imagination at the foot of the cross of Jesus and, with all the apparatus available to his profoundly devoted Catholic mind, he sought to devise a proper response to what he saw — to what it meant.

His feeling of inadequacy should slow us down a little, if not bring us to a grinding halt in the matter-of-fact, business-as-usual way in which we tend to approach this awesome business of worship. We need — all of us — to pause and reflect on what we are doing as worship and why we are doing it.

Some of the more beautiful and nostalgic memories from my childhood have to do with the wonder of worship. I first learned about Jesus in my mother's modest little church, the Northside Church of God in Harlingen, Texas. Their favorite song, sung Sunday after Sunday, was a perfect expression of their simple, unsophisticated faith:

O T'is Joy unspeakable and full of Glory
 Full of Glory, Full of Glory
 O T'is Joy unspeakable and full of Glory
 O the half has never yet been told

I have learned a lot since then. My faith has become more sophisticated, more educated — but it has seldom been more joyful. I hope to meet those folks someday (whom I have not seen in more than forty years), and I hope to be able to sing that song, or something similar, gathered with them around the throne of God.

The favorite song of the first Church of Christ that I went to was "There's An All Seeing Eye Watching You." That is not exactly the same feeling. But it was in that church that I experienced the joy of baptism while they sang, "O Happy Day, When Jesus Washed My Sins Away." It was also there that I experienced the joy of leading the singing and preaching for the first time

before I was a teenager.

A lot of years have passed and many things have happened since then, but the joy I experience in worship grows deeper as the assaults on joy become more serious and more profound.

It is in that sense of joy that I sing the most joyous song to me now: Bernard of Clairvaux's "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." "What language shall I borrow?" is Bernard of Clairvaux's way of saying "O Tis Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory."

The way one understands worship, the way one experiences worship, and the way one expresses it can change significantly during the course of one lifetime. The same kind of thing happens in the life of the church as a whole.

There is no really adequate way to praise God for His unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. Yet we are called as believers and as the Community of Christ to this praise. And we must do it in the best language we can beg or borrow. This first issue of *Leaven* explores this most basic of concerns for the People of God.