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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

The Pepperdine University Bible Lectures for 2013 featured the final writing of the New Testament, *The Revelation to John*. Accordingly, the *Leaven* Symposium explored this theme primarily through the ministry of preaching.

Let's begin with a few words about the writing itself. Characteristic of the apocalyptic genre found in both Jewish and Christian writings from the mid-third century BCE to the second century CE, the book of Revelation paints vivid portraits of an eschatological conflict that will culminate in the victory of God and the final defeat of all evil. The last writing of the Christian canon draws upon and echoes many diverse images including symbolic numbers, colors, and animals as well as angelic and demonic beings drawn from the literature of the ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, Greece, and Rome. The result is a complex book that has perplexed thoughtful readers through the centuries. Origen (185–254 CE) exclaimed, “Who can read the revelation granted to John without being amazed at the hidden depth of the ineffable mysteries, a depth apparent even to the person who does not understand what the text says?”¹ Jerome (345–420 CE) believed the writing contained as many mysteries as it contained words.²

However, in spite of its many difficult interpretive issues, it is evident that John was familiar with the conditions of churches in the Roman province of Asia. Christians may not have been facing widespread persecutions sanctioned by Roman authorities of the time, but these early Christians were endangered by various forms of oppression, such as being “slaughtered for the word of God and the testimony they had given” (6.9). One martyr—Antipas—is named in the message to the church at Pergamum (2.13). John himself is an exile on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1.9). However, this complex writing has a simple message—stand firm to your convictions, resist with “patient endurance,” (2.2, 19; 3.10) and at any cost do not, in the midst of social and political pressures, capitulate your faith or compromise your testimony. “Hold fast to the faith of Jesus” (14.12). In so doing, join with Christ and share with him in the victory of his death and resurrection. Ultimately only in God can Christ's followers turn to receive the meaning and guidance that strengthens them in their perseverance in the face of adversity.

We introduce the issue with the articles presented at the *Leaven* Symposium. **ROLLIN RAMSARAN** opens by asking the question, “How should we approach the book of Revelation?” His answer is to view the writing as “a performance composition that produces an empowering and shared ritual worship experience.” In doing so, the writing—by the “power of the Spirit”—is crafted to fortify community identity, provide a pattern of ethics, and reinforce life-giving and formative ritual patterns. **LANCE B. PAPE** asks, “What can Revelation teach us about preaching?” He affirms that the writing “should be viewed through the lens of what its literary form can show us about the task of preaching.” To this end we must remember that Revelation is an “image-saturated text” that is best “*directed toward the reader's imagination*” (his italics). Pape's approach, therefore, is to encourage preachers to follow the paradigm of the Docent, that is, “facilitate a visual encounter” so that “others see something more clearly and appreciate it more fully.” His conclusion illustrates his point as he recalls a priceless story of his classroom teacher at Yale Divinity School who mediated the model of the Docent in his final lecture on the Apocalypse.

1. *On First Principles* 4.2.4.

2. As noted in the Introduction to the “Revelation to John,” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 421 New Testament.

We follow Ramsaran and Pape with an example of preaching by **KATIE HAYS**. Hays first explores the present neglect by preachers and pastors of “reopening the eschatological conversation” in our time and in our churches. Having confronted us with that challenge, she provides the first sermon in a series of four that she preached from Revelation 5.1–14. **DAVID FLEER** concludes the Symposium papers with a sermon on the book of Jonah. However, Fleer does more than write a sermon. He adeptly leads us in the process of how he thought through the sermon and cataloged reactions he subsequently experienced in preaching it in different settings to various audiences. We believe that the Symposium pieces are worth the entire issue.

After these four articles we include three sermons. The first, given by **RICH LITTLE**, ably opened the lectures on Tuesday evening and set the tone for all of the subsequent sermons. The other two homilies were featured at the early morning worship services held in Stauffer Chapel. **JENNIFER HALE CHRISTY** bases her homily on Revelation 21.1–6. Images and metaphors flood our hearts and hearing as she envisions a new heaven and a new earth. **SARA GASTON BARTON** asks in a text from Acts 11, “Are we capable of becoming excited about how we may have been wrong?” “Look at the end of the passage,” Barton exclaims. “The circumcised believers in Jerusalem praised God...*because they realized that they had been wrong!*” (her italics)

These three sermons are followed by **JOHN YORK**’s address at the *Leaven* luncheon entitled, “Beyond our Sectarian Identity.” York ably explores not only “the apparently exclusivist claims of Jesus in John 14.6...but also “many of the competing narratives” in his own life. As we have come to expect, **LEE MAGNESS** provides another matchless liturgical reading based on the book of Revelation. The issue closes with two pieces: a liturgical article by **JOSEPH HORTON** that challenges us to experience the power of praying set prayers at fixed times and a book review by **Joshua W. Jeffery, Sr.** of Cassie J. E. H. Trentaz’s book, *Theology in the Age of Global AIDS & HIV*.

Continue to pray for *Leaven* as a ministry to our churches. We open next year’s volume with an issue on *Spiritual Formation*, guest-edited by Jackie Halstead, followed by the topic of *Gender Inclusion Among Christian Churches*, guest-edited by Jeff Miller of Milligan College.

