

Leaven

Volume 22

Issue 4 *Baptism, the Lord's Supper & Early Christian
Community*

Article 2

1-1-2014

Editor's Notes

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Recommended Citation

Love, Stuart and Love, D'Esta (2014) "Editor's Notes," *Leaven*: Vol. 22: Iss. 4, Article 2.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol22/iss4/2>

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

Little did I know at that time, the unforgettable day when I was baptized, of the incorporation I now jointly shared in the church as the body of Christ. I was a seventh grader in Ames, Iowa. It was Sunday (the Lord's Day for the Lord's people). We assembled on the second floor of a rented Elks hall, and that Sunday, like so many Sundays before we began our praise to God with a preparation of the room. We swept the floor of cigarettes butts and beer bottles from the previous night's reveling, set the chairs, draped a table with a linen cloth, and assembled together for our continued adoration of God in Christ. The oft-repeated worship service of singing, prayer, Lord's Supper, and sermon by Brother Anderson was followed by a customary invitation for anyone to be baptized. I stepped forward; my mother wept as she and others quietly heard my confession of faith.

But there was no baptistery on the second floor of the Elks hall. So we had lunch and the little congregation caravanned over wind-driven snowy, icy roads forty miles north to Webster City to a tiny church building with a baptistery. A phone call alerted our sister congregation of our coming. Quickly, several families got out their washtubs and heated water on kitchen stoves. It was a Sunday washday . . . not of clothes but of my sins. The hot water was poured into cold water at the building and I mercifully went under and came out of the tepid waters in the presence of the body of Christ of two churches. There was much rejoicing—and I didn't even know half of the people who were there! But it was a communal act made in the presence of God by God in Christ and I jointly participated with the church in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and glorification. I eagerly awaited the coming Sunday when, with my sisters and brothers, I too would eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord.

Lest we forget, human community with God is now in and through Christ. The Christian life is life "in Christ." Our vocation is a calling "into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1.9). In union with Christ it is a sharing in the life of the new age, partially realized in the present time and consummated after death. Our common state of being is to be "always with the Lord," a common life mediated by the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8.9–17).

Although every baptismal experience is unique to the individual being baptized, there is a communal aspect to it: the very act of baptism itself is communal in nature, literally involving more than one person (it is not possible to baptize one's self!) and signifying the recipient's immersion into the church family, the body of Christ. The focus of this issue of *Leaven* originates from the Pepperdine University Bible Lectures of 2014, which examined the theological theme of community (fellowship/joint participation) of the church in terms of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We begin with articles written for the *Leaven* Symposium. Not to be outdone by his father, **MARK LOVE** tells of his baptism in the frigid waters of the Yamhill River in Oregon. In that experience Love sees how his baptism is in line with the baptism of Christ. **DAVID LEMLEY** explores in his practical theology of baptism the possible dangers in our time of "the loss of our primary act of corporate worship explicitly affirming our identity and mission as God's baptized people." Turning to the Lord's Supper, **NAOMI WALTERS** asks how the Lord's Supper in Churches of Christ might be different if we considered biblical texts beyond the Last Supper as instructive for practice. And, finally, **PAUL BLOWERS** broadens our focus in a well-documented, well-written paper concerning the Eucharist's role in establishing and sustaining Christian communal identity functioning as a covenant renewal for the body of Christ.

Beyond the Symposium, **KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG** in a class setting affirms that her ideas of baptism in Acts have changed—that is, baptism, even though mentioned often in Acts, is only one aspect of a much

bigger story. **JOHN MARK HICKS** helps us to see that the three ordinances of baptism, the Lord's Supper and the assembly of the church are sacramental: they are divine acts of grace through which God encounters believers to transform them into the divine image by the presence of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

Two thought-provoking sermons come next. **JARROD ROBINSON** sensitively explores the topic of baptism through the lens of Galatians 3.26 and the question of gender in our churches today. **AMY BOST HENEGAR** opens our vision to the story of Naaman, familiar to many of us. She reflects on how Elisha teaches the mighty leader the much-needed virtue of humility by having him bathe seven times in the Jordan River.

Finally we close the issue with another wonderful liturgical reading by **LEE MAGNESS** on baptism and the Lord's Supper entitled "Wet Footprints."

Looking forward to the upcoming year, we will open 2015 with an issue on the *Thessalonian Correspondence* guest-edited by Jeff Miller of Milligan College. As this year draws to an end, we wish you a blessed holiday season and ask that you continue to keep *Leaven* in your prayers.

