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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

I can remember Dr. Leonard Burford, the choral director at Abilene Christian College in Texas, leading hymns at the College Church of Christ when I was in high school in the 1950s. It seemed to me that at every service we were led in the hymn, "The Church's One Foundation." At that time, I preferred the gospel music of the Stamps-Baxter and Blackwood Brothers Quartets. Over time, however, singing that great hymn repeatedly drove home the importance of the church and Jesus Christ her Lord. The text is meaningful and worth repeating:

The church's one foundation
 Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
 She is His new creation,
 By water and the Word:
 From heav'n He came and sought her
 To be His holy bride,
 With His own blood He bought her,
 And for her life He died.

Elect from ev'ry nation,
 Yet one o'er all the earth,
 Her charter of salvation,
 One Lord, one faith, one birth;
 One holy name she blesses,
 Partakes one holy food,
 And to one hope she presses,
 With ev'ry grace endued.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
 And tumult of her war,
 She waits the consummation
 Of peace forever more;
 Till with the vision glorious,
 Her longing eyes are blest,
 And the great church victorious
 Shall be the church at rest.

In their opening remarks, our guest editors, C. Robert Wetzel and Philip D. Kenneson, indicate that recently there has been a resurgent interest in the nature and task of the church. For this we should be grateful, because this hasn't always been the case. Certainly, the recovery of the community life and mission of God's

people is vital and necessary. Thus, your editors felt it timely for an issue of *Leaven* to be devoted to this theme. Dr. Wetzel, President of Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee, and Dr. Kenneson, Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Milligan College, Milligan College, Tennessee, have read and thought deeply about the church for our time. We commend their analysis of the theme and choice of writers. Truly it is good to begin 2007 with an issue on the church.

STUART LOVE

Interest in the doctrine of the church, or ecclesiology, has been making something of a resurgence of late. Long the theological step-child in most Protestant circles, ecclesiology has more recently become the focus of considerable interest across the ecclesial spectrum. The missional church movement, the emergent church movement, the church planting movement—each in its own way has drawn attention to the need to examine our deepest theological convictions regarding the nature and mission of the church.

Although this renewed interest in the doctrine of the church has many sources, one of the most significant stems from a shift in theological anthropology. More and more Christians—particularly those in the West—are turning away from hyper-individualism and coming to embrace a more social view of the human person. Such a shift encourages us to examine closely the web of social relations that both form and express our very identities. As a result, Christians have good reasons to explore the nature of that unique social reality within which we are called to find our deepest identity—the body of Christ.

We open this issue of *Leaven* with two brief excerpts from **WILLIAM ROBINSON'S** *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*. Robinson (1888-1963), arguably the finest scholar produced by the British Churches of Christ, wrote elegantly and passionately about the nature of the church, reminding us that this divine fellowship is like none other. We hope those unfamiliar with Robinson's work will enjoy this theological appetizer enough to consider feasting further on his robust biblical theology of the church.

If Robinson's work reminds us that prominent figures in our Movement's past have dealt seriously with the doctrine of the church, the rest of the issue should confirm that there remain many voices among us today who believe passionately that the time is ripe to devote renewed attention to our understanding and practice of the church. One such voice is **JOE R. JONES**, Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics at Christian Theological Seminary, who offers us a rich proposal for understanding the church as an alternative community with a distinct set of discourses and practices. Jones' proposal seeks to honor those sensibilities of our theological forbears that remain sound while pushing us to see those places where there is still important work to be done. **LEE CAMP**, Associate Professor at Lipscomb University, takes up Jones' proposal and begins to flesh it out, using Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic work *Life Together* as a means of identifying some of the church's distinctive practices. Camp goes on to name some of the hurdles that our Movement faces in thinking of the church in terms of distinctive practices, then concludes with what he sees as "signs of hope" among us.

PAUL S. WILLIAMS is the President of the Orchard Group, Inc., a church planting organization in New York, and Editor-at-Large and a weekly columnist for *Christian Standard*. For many years Williams has paid keen attention to the methods of growth and management that have been adopted by many Christian Churches. In his essay, Williams reflects on his observations with an eye toward helping us understand what all this might mean for the future of the church. Although Williams acknowledges that some of these methods have likely led to significant numerical growth and vitality, he also expresses some worries about some of the trends he sees developing.

HENRY E. WEBB, Professor of Church History Emeritus at Milligan College, offers us an histori-

cal perspective on the subject, suggesting that some of the differences among the various branches of the Movement stem from different understandings of the nature and polity of the church. Whether this remains true in our own day, or whether we find ourselves sharing considerably more fundamental assumptions about the nature and mission of the church than those over which we differ, would itself be an interesting topic to explore further.

In an effort to put additional flesh on our discussion of the church and its distinctive practices, we asked several church leaders to reflect on what it means to be church in their specific contexts. **RUBEL SHELLY**, former minister of the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, does so under the title, "Church of the Second Incarnation." **BILL McDONALD** speaks from his experience as Senior Minister of the Crestwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lexington, Kentucky. Finally, several members of the Englewood Christian Church in Indianapolis discuss how crucial the practice of congregational conversation is to their life together. Our hope is that each of these brief vignettes will enliven your imagination as you consider afresh what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ.

Two articles in this issue helpfully point to a major blind spot we need to have exposed in our understanding of the church. As **SUSAN HIGGINS**, Professor of Sociology and Missions at Milligan College, pointedly notes, God's household has been dramatically reordered during the past century, yet this has been scarcely noticed among churches in the West, including those in our Movement. What would it mean for our churches if we began to see ourselves as part of a global movement of God's Spirit and God's people whose epicenter was no longer located in the affluent northern and western hemispheres but elsewhere in the world? Would we be willing to learn something of what it might mean to be the church from our brothers and sisters around the world?

As a modest step in this direction, we asked **B. J. MPOFU** to describe something of what it means to be church in Zimbabwe. As Vice-President of the World Convention, he is quite aware of the so-called "three streams" of our Movement in the United States, yet interestingly enough, these separations have either never existed or been worked through in his own country. Perhaps his account of the church will likewise enliven our imaginations as we seek to discern what it means in our day to more faithfully be the body of Christ.

JOHN SIBURT, preaching minister at Richardson East Church of Christ, contributes a sermon entitled, "What is Truth?" **LEE MAGNESS** has written a beautiful liturgical reading that invites us to reflect once again upon five rich scriptural metaphors used of the church. Finally, this issue closes with a book review article by **ADAM BARON**, a Master of Divinity student at Pepperdine University.

We are both grateful for the opportunity to work on this issue together, to work with these fine authors, and to work with Stuart and D'Esta Love. We hope and pray that God will take these humble offerings and use them to edify the church to his glory.

PHILIP D. KENNESON AND C. ROBERT WETZEL

