

Paul Fike Stutzman. *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011. 281 pages. \$32.

Paul Fike Stutzman, a licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren, is passionate about the experience of Love Feasts and convinced that their recovery can enhance celebrations of the Eucharist and better form Christian disciples. Part I is a detailed history of the Love Feast from the time of Christ through the modern day. Stutzman's work cuts across denominations and theologies through our shared history.

The book begins with a study of religious meal practices in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds and then moves to New Testament practices, focusing on footwashing (the term used most often throughout this book) and evening communal fellowship meals with Eucharist.

The Constantinian shift, to basilicas and ceremony and away from Love Feasts and footwashing, is for Stutzman the beginning of an "over-spiritualization" of Eucharist, by increasing focus on self and God but not others. "Over-spiritualization" may seem a harsh term for this shift in focus, but it is this understanding that motivates Stutzman to encourage recovering the earlier and fuller practice for the context of Eucharist in order to create stronger communities of disciples.

In the Reformation Anabaptists recovered "the ban," akin to Eucharistic confession and penance; the holy kiss and footwashing. Brief mention is made of connections to the Love Feasts in the Pietistic movement, the Moravians and early Methodists. The descendants of the Schwarzenau Brethren "can claim the longest continued practice of the Love Feast in the modern era" (147), beginning in 1708. The Love Feast always contained preparation, footwashing, a fellowship meal, the holy kiss, and Eucharist, often over a two-day span. According to Stutzman, many Brethren still hold the Love Feast during Holy Week and during the weekend of World Communion Sunday. Until 1958 Brethren only celebrated Communion within the context of the Love Feast (155).

Part II focuses on the benefits of recovering the Love Feast in our time and thus moves to theology, practice, and pastoral concern. Stutzman encourages the increased use of the Love Feast to give disciples experience in Christian submission, love, confession, reconciliation and thanksgiving. Here is where differences in theology may give some readers pause. While Stutzman makes a strong case for beginning with Christian submission, the abuses of the church in this area are legion and some people may have difficulty in hearing this as the foundational reason for recovering the Love Feast as a context for Eucharist. Footwashing embodies Christian submission through "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5.21) and as commanded in John 13, so that Christ may cleanse us from post-baptismal sin and teach us humble service, sacrificial love, and receiving. Handwashing for Stutzman does not offer the same embodiment of submission or of cleansing: "God continues to reconcile us to himself, whether or not we wash feet, but there is hardly a more powerful demonstration of this cleansing than footwashing" (225). Since Stutzman believes it represents cleansing from post-baptismal sin, footwashing should be practiced by baptized Christians only.

For Stutzman, the recovery of the Love Feast with its attendant practices of footwashing; the kiss of peace; confession of faith, sin, and praise; reconciliation with God and with each other; and giving thanks can enhance and deepen the taking of Eucharist. There is a brief practical discussion of frequency, venues, handling the kiss of peace "safely," and confessing sin privately and publicly. While the book promotes hospitality in opening the Love Feast to eating

with strangers, that is, the non-baptized, both footwashing and Eucharist are called “unique practice[s] of the family of God, and non-Christians should politely be asked to observe” (245).

In a time when many denominations and congregations are searching for new ways to “make worship more meaningful” *Recovering the Love Feast* offers an interesting complex of practices to consider—footwashing, a full meal, reconciliation with signs of love, and Eucharist. Each congregation will need to consider its own balance of foci and practices and its understanding and articulation of Christian submission. Perhaps as in Stutzman’s experience the Love Feast can work together in one extended ritual, or perhaps the various elements can provide their own foci at different times of worship and discipling. The reader will come away with a deeper understanding of these rituals that make up the Love Feast.

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