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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

It is our pleasure as editors of *Leaven* to introduce the guest editor of this issue on *Human Sexuality*. Jack Holland is Professor of Christian Care and Counseling and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee. He is married to Heather Holland, who serves Emmanuel as its chaplain.

Jack initiated the idea of exploring human sexuality in an issue of *Leaven*, seeing the need to help Christians bring theological reflection to their understanding of this important topic. Most of the contributors have not previously written for *Leaven*; we appreciate Jack introducing them to our readers. We feel certain that their articles and reflections will create interesting and helpful conversations among our readers and the churches they serve. We are grateful for Jack's contribution as guest editor.

Our final issue for 2008 is dedicated to the Pepperdine University 65th Annual Bible Lectures, the theme of which is the *Sermon on the Mount*. We are also turning our attention to 2009 and look forward to issues on *Micah*, *Theology and Science*, and *Restoration Emphases in World Missions*.

We appreciate your support of *Leaven* and ask that you continue to remember us in your prayers.

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

JACK HOLLAND

Long before the specifics of this issue of *Leaven* began to take shape, I mentioned to a colleague from another institution that I was formulating a proposal on the topic of human sexuality. In jest (mostly, I think) the friend responded with the question, "You do have tenure don't you?" This somewhat cautious quip has remained, at least in the back of my mind, throughout the process of compiling this collection of articles: "Is there anything here that might actually threaten anyone's career?" But more than considering any possible risk in this discussion, I remain intrigued by the thought that conversations about sexuality might somehow be troublesome. Certainly, there are other controversial topics that deserve a cautious approach, but that such a basic fact of human existence as sexuality might cause angst may support the very need for such a discussion.

As Richard Beck points out "We don't talk much about human sexuality at church. And we don't spend a great deal of time thinking theologically about sex." Additionally, it often seems that when we do have the conversation, we focus primarily on the moral prohibitions that we believe in. Thus, we often fail to construct any positive perspective of what a righteous sexuality might be like. We more easily know how to prescribe what it is not. Perhaps this issue can encourage conversation toward a sexuality that focuses not just on the rightness or sinfulness of certain behaviors, but on the divine gift of sexuality and how as Christians we can celebrate its goodness in ways that witness to a sexually preoccupied culture.

The authors of this collection thus offer their thoughts not as conclusions to the discussion but as talking points to encourage serious reflection on this important aspect of our humanity. We do so from a perspective grounded in an attempt to describe a theologically sound, healthy and holistic sexuality. While much of our secular culture aggrandizes this one aspect of life, we attempt to write with the balanced belief that sexuality is a part of life, not the sum of life. In this regard the authors of this collection were encouraged to broaden

their discussion and to help us think about the place that sexuality might have in our churches, in our families and in our personal lives.

Richard Beck offers a foundational discussion on the topic, presenting what he refers to as a psycho-theological description of the usual emphasis on sexual purity. The reader may well find this work to be paradigm-shifting, as the discussion opens the possibility for concerned Christians to attend to the sometimes dichotomous messages of sex as something to be enjoyed/sex as something that is condemned. **Ryan Starr** thickens the discussion with a treatment of the Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa's teaching on virginity. It may at first seem illogical to include the topic of celibacy in an issue on sexuality, but this article places virginity at the center of what it means to live in a community of believers. **Laura Buffington** incorporates some of the richness of mystical spirituality by helping us to think about the connections between the human longing to be loved, God's love, redemption and romance. Perhaps it is in the longing for companionship that God's love can finally overwhelm all our desire.

With **Jason Bembry's** presentation on the love languages in the Songs of Songs, an oft-confusing text is made practical, yet not merely appropriated as a marriage manual. Instead we're encouraged to appreciate the value of this collection of poetry from the Near East, its place in the canon of scripture, and its revelation of God and intimacy between lovers. **Eddie Parish** brings an important discussion to sexuality in marriage, proposing that sexual intimacy involves more than romance and sexual pleasure. Rather, genuine intimacy is grounded in one's willingness and capacity to be responsible for oneself, while also risking the vulnerability of allowing oneself to be truly seen. In a discussion of the disturbing short story "The Secret Sharer" by Joseph Conrad, I attempt to recast the assumptions of a diagnosis of sexual addiction in the cases of ministerial sexual indiscretion into a consideration of relationship integrity. The sage contribution of ninety-year-old **Leroy Garrett** is offered from his place of seasoned wisdom; it is a testimony to the vibrant lifelong love that is only discovered in a life of disciplined fidelity, forgiveness and openness to the journey.

For the minister seeking to introduce the topic of sexuality into the life of the congregation, **Alan Handman** describes the incorporation of the Jewish teachings on love and marriage. This rich body of literature may have something important to say to modern marriages as we face the often inauthentic sexuality of contemporary culture. As usual, readers are blessed by a piece from **Lee Magness**, on this occasion through a beautiful and lyrical presentation of the Song of Songs, as a man and woman celebrate their love and attraction for each other. I also offer a brief and admittedly personal review of some of the important literature that readers may want to consider in delving more deeply into the topic of human sexuality.

