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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

Stuart and D'Esta Love

EDITORS' NOTES

We are pleased to open the year 2000 with an issue on the book of Revelation guest-edited by David Lertis Matson, a member of the *Leaven* editorial board. Recently, David accepted the invitation to serve the Westwood Hills Christian Church in Los Angeles. Prior to this move, David served as assistant professor of Bible at Milligan College in Milligan College, Tennessee (1995–99). David's educational experience includes Pacific Christian College (B.A.), Pepperdine University (M.A.), and Baylor University (Ph.D.). His heart for ministry and scholarship is already evident to our readers by the issue he edited for *Leaven* on Luke-Acts. He has served churches in California and Texas. His writings include a book, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (Sheffield, 1996), as well as a number of book reviews and articles. Married for twenty-one years, David and his wife, Mary, are parents of three children: Bryce (14), Brandon (12), and Brooke (6). David is committed to unity efforts among all three branches of the Stone-Campbell movement. He was raised and educated among Christian churches/churches of Christ, attended Pepperdine University, and served on the staff of a Disciples of Christ congregation. As Matson states, "I have my 'foot in the door' in all three branches of our movement." That is evident as well by the editorial work in this issue—all three branches of the movement are represented.

STUART & D'ESTA LOVE

If ever there was a time for *Leaven* to devote an issue to the book of Revelation, now is the time. Much has been written and said in recent months about the dawning of a new millennium and "Y2K." The November issue of *Newsweek*, for example, ran a cover story entitled "Prophecy: What the Bible Says about the End of the World." The December issue of *Bible Review* reported that over 460,000 Web sites currently on the Internet mention either "year 2000" or "millennium." Even the film industry, it seems, has caught the apocalyptic bug. Arnold Schwarzenegger's latest film was appropriately entitled *End of Days*. In much of this discussion, of course, the book of Revelation figures prominently.

Unfortunately, the book of Revelation suffers much in the translation. On the one hand, few thoughtful preachers will even tackle it, and those preachers that do usually end up restricting themselves to the "safe" portions of the book. On the other hand, the book of Revelation figures so prominently in the end-time speculations of some preachers and teachers that the book seemingly functions as a canon within the canon, along with the books of Daniel and Ezekiel. This dual penchant for disuse and abuse is the unique fate of Revelation. In contrast, this issue of *Leaven* intends to encourage a responsible use of Revelation, to give readers a greater degree of confidence in interpreting a book that suffers, strangely, from both neglect and obsession in the church.



An interview with Professor M. EUGENE BORING begins our issue. Professor Boring is a well-recognized scholar in the field and author of the widely read commentary on Revelation in the Interpretation series, published by John Knox Press. He offers a perspective on Revelation that, unfortunately, is only rarely encountered in popular treatments of the book. This perspective, generally termed historical-critical, prepares us for the first major section of the issue, namely, the value of seeing Revelation within a historical context. Knowledge of the book's first readers and their symbolic world is enough to convince many thoughtful readers of Revelation that the book may have more to do with those first readers' time than with ours. RODNEY WERLINE, for example, shows us that Revelation, as a type of literature, was not unique in the ancient world. Thus the key to understanding Revelation is not the daily newspaper but a familiarity with the apocalyptic genre and the type of thought and literature that it represents. Moreover, it becomes important in the process of interpretation to discover how readers in the past interpreted the book so that we can benefit from their insights as well as learn from their mistakes. CRAIG FARMER helps us do precisely that by guiding us through the history of exegesis on one of Revelation's most enduring images: the Babylonian harlot of Revelation 17–18. One historical community that has particularly benefited from the encouragement Revelation offers, of course, is the African American church. ALFRED DARRYL JUMPER adds to the historical matrix by showing how the book of Revelation has functioned to inspire and sustain hope for the African American community, both past and present.

But understanding Revelation involves more than just history. There is also theological meaning to be ascertained from the text, which our second section seeks to uncover. One of the chief areas of theological concern, of course, has been christology: how is Jesus presented and understood on the pages of Revelation? Contrary to the early Luther, who once claimed that "Christ is neither taught nor known in it," NANCY CLAIRE PITTMAN believes that Revelation offers a rich and variegated picture of the exalted Christ, who functions not only as the major character in the narrative but as the source of the revelation itself. A second area of interest is that of discipleship. Here, LOREN STUCKENBRUCK offers the challenging thesis that Revelation was written not so much to respond to a social crisis as to provoke one. It is largely an affluent church, he claims, one given to social and economic compromise, to which John the Seer writes.

For most people, however, the contemporary significance of Revelation is paramount—how does the book of Revelation relate to today? The third section of the issue thus turns its attention to three areas of contemporary relevance: worship, preaching, and ethics. Noting the dominant role of worship in the book, BRUCE SHIELDS believes that Revelation vouchsafes a reality of Christian worship invisible to the naked eye. LARRY PAUL JONES explores the relevance of Revelation for preaching, centering his thoughts around five core convictions of Revelation's theology that "may challenge us as much as the symbols and images used to convey them." And last, I myself offer some thoughts on the difficult task of interpreting Revelation's vituperative language, language that we all too easily use without perhaps conscious or critical reflection. The issue closes with book reviews, a worship piece by J. LEE MAGNESS, and an article by DAVID SMITH.

As guest editor, I am personally gratified to hand this issue over to our *Leaven* readers. Not only is the content reflective of substantive scholarship (all our writers have earned doctorates in their fields) but, for the very first time, the writers themselves represent all three branches of the Stone-Campbell heritage. Their convergence here on the pages of *Leaven*, I think, represents a significant ecumenical achievement and a testimony to the journal's growing influence. Together, may we become better disciples of the suffering and exalted Christ and "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev 14:4).

DAVID L. MATSON, Epiphany