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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

Stuart & D'Esta Love

With this issue on Ministry in Luke-Acts, we continue to move toward a fuller realization of *Leaven's* mission as "a publication of ministry for churches of the Restoration heritage." Over the past year, we have included writers from Christian churches as opportunity afforded us and have benefited from a growing fellowship with leaders such as Leonard Wymore, Charles E. Cook, and H. Eugene Johnson. Now we are taking steps to better fulfill in our time a symbolic meaning of Luke's statement that "all who believed were together" (Acts 2:44), in that this issue is edited by **DAVID LERTIS MATSON** of Milligan College. David is not a stranger to Churches of Christ. After graduating from Pacific Christian College in Fullerton, California, he pursued a Master of Arts degree in New Testament studies at Pepperdine University. Our faculty learned to appreciate his commitment to both the academic study and the application of God's word. From Pepperdine, David went on to earn a Ph.D. at Baylor University. His dissertation, "Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation," was published by Sheffield Academic Press in 1996 and was reviewed in our last issue, *Preaching*. You may remember David's article in our *Lord's Supper* issue entitled "Breaking the Bread, Breaking the Veil: Recognition of Jesus at Emmaus." His studies in Luke-Acts have prepared him well to serve as guest editor of this issue. As you read the various articles, please keep in mind that those written by **J. LEE MAGNESS**, **ROLLIN RAMSARAN**, and **JAMES STREET** are contributions from teachers in educational institutions related to Christian churches. **BARRY L. BLACKBURN**, a member of the Churches of Christ, teaches at a college related to those churches as well. **RANDALL D. CHESNUTT**, **GREGORY E. STERLING**, **KENNETH L. CUKROWSKI**, and **JOHN O. YORK** have their religious roots among Churches of Christ. In addition, **CHARLES R. GRESHAM**, author of the Restoration study entitled "Bicentennials and What They Teach: Reviewing the Influence of Walter Scott," is a retired professor of Kentucky Christian College, Grayson, Kentucky. Finally, our book reviews are authored by members of Christian churches. To all our writers we say, "Thank you." By the time you receive your copy of *Ministry in Luke-Acts*, one of your editors will have attended a planning and fellowship meeting sponsored primarily by the gracious work of **LEONARD WYMORE** and **DR. ROBERT WETZEL**, president of Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee. We will tell you more about this meeting in our next issue, *Christian Ethics*, edited by **KATHY PULLEY**.

Editor's Notes

One way to appreciate the impact that Luke's Gospel has had on Christianity is to try to envision what things would be like without it. Can we imagine Christmas without shepherds or a baby in a manger? Liturgy without any Magnificat, Gloria, Benedictus, or Nunc Dimittis? A church year without Ascension or Pentecost? How many favorite Bible stories would we lose? Zacchaeus, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan . . . all would be gone forever.

These words, expressed in a recent survey of scholarly opinions on Luke, underscore the important role that the Lukan writings have played in the life and worship of the church. This recognition alone justifies devoting an entire issue of *Leaven* to a pair of writings that comprise the largest contribution to the library of the New Testament from the hand of a single writer—the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Yet another reason presents itself as well. Churches of the Stone-Campbell heritage have always had a “warm spot” in their hearts for Luke, particularly his Acts of the Apostles. A Lutheran woman studying at one of our graduate seminaries once remarked to a colleague of mine how much time Lutherans spend studying Romans and how much time we “Christians” spend studying Acts! Of course, there is always more to be gleaned from an author as gifted as Luke, who functions widely as historian, theologian, and literary artist.

While the articles in this issue reflect Luke's diversity, they do tend to fall under three broad headings. The first section asks our readers to read along “with the text,” interpreting Luke from the standpoint of his writings as a whole (what I have called “Surveying the Text”). **LEE MAGNESS** draws our attention to a story that many of us learned as children—Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus. In keeping with a growing number of scholars who appreciate Luke not only for the history he writes but also for the stories he tells, Magness adeptly probes the meaning of the fig tree in the story as a symbol of repentance and conversion for Luke. Have you ever wondered why Luke even mentions this tree? According to Magness, the tree serves as a play on words that underscores Zacchaeus' identity as a defrauder. “The point is not where Zacchaeus was but what he was,” says Magness, “and what he was was highlighted by where he was.” I have a feeling that we will not read this story as children's literature anymore!

One of the most prominent themes in Luke's writings is the work and activity of the Holy Spirit. So pivotal is the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts, for example, that some have even suggested that a more descriptive title for the book might be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” But how does Luke conceive of the Holy Spirit, especially when the Gospel of Luke is taken into account? **BARRY BLACKBURN** suggests that the work of the Holy Spirit unfolds in three distinct stages: the period of preparation for Jesus' ministry; Jesus' ministry proper; and the period of the church, when the Spirit empowers, sustains, and guides the disciples in their witness to the ends of the earth. If we are serious about evangelizing the nations, asserts Blackburn, then we must proceed “with the sure conviction that the Holy Spirit, by the various means and strategies of his own choosing, will illumine our path, lift up our drooping hands, and strengthen our weak knees.”

So far, we have just a taste of the richness of Luke's style and substance. Where can we go to explore further these and other aspects of Luke's work? **RANDALL D. CHESNUTT** provides the readers of *Leaven* with a kind of “Lukan road map,” surveying some of the classic works on Luke-Acts as well as some of the more recent trends in Lukan scholarship. The organization and comprehensiveness of his treatment make this guide a “user friendly” tool in the hands of potential interpreters of Luke.

The second section asks our readers to peer “behind the text” in an effort to understand various dimensions of Luke's social world (what I have labeled “Socializing the Text”). Why does Luke write his two volumes in the first place? What kinds of factors were at work that led Luke to write the way he did? According to **GREGORY E. STERLING**, Luke writes a distinctly “apologetic” history of the church, responding to negative perceptions of the early Christian movement with a powerful defense of the faith. If Sterling's thesis is correct, it poses a serious question for the church today: How should the church go about maintaining that fine balance between seeking a positive estimation from outsiders and not allowing our values to be reshaped by the larger (secular) culture?

Another social reality looming behind the text of Luke is friendship. Friendship was a deeply embedded concept in ancient times that operated according to certain fixed conventions, particularly that of reciprocity. **ROLLIN RAMSARAN** believes that Luke transforms the pervasive friendship patterns of his day. In Luke's distinct vision of social reality, God is the true friend who cares for the disciples' needs, calling them to a “Jesus-shaped” practice of

friendship that extends across social and economic barriers. A special challenge thus presents itself to those who claim to be “friends” of Jesus today.

Being sensitive to Luke’s larger social world also helps us to understand the pastoral activity of Paul on the pages of Acts. Taking his cue from ancient writers familiar with the practice of “psychagogy” (the care of the soul), **KENNETH L. CUKROWSKI** locates Paul within the broad psychagogic tradition by noticing the various ways in which he is depicted as caring for the churches he founded in the course of his many travels. For Cukrowski, the example set by Paul in Acts should challenge churches today to think about investing as much time and energy in the practice of nurture as they do in the practice of conversion.

The last section gets the text of Luke out “in front” of our readers with three sermons that focus on God, worship, and the birth of the church (hence, what I call “Sermonizing the Text”). **JAMES STREET** shows how the familiar parables of Luke 15 correct a then popular “elitist” conception of God by portraying a God who actually prefers the company of the lost. **JOHN O. YORK** does some cor-

recting of his own as he challenges the church to understand the meaning of the familiar “new wineskins” passage in Luke not simply as the substitution of new “forms” of religious expression, but fundamentally as a new attitude of the heart that is characterized by openness to God and others. Finally, **LEE MAGNESS** offers an extended choral reading of the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, a service that is sure to inspire and enliven whenever it is proclaimed.

If the texts of Luke and Acts form an indispensable part of our Christian faith and heritage, it is my sincere prayer that this issue contribute in some small way to the ongoing witness of these documents in the life of the church today. As the great third-century Christian scholar Origen pointed out long ago, Luke addresses Christians in every age as “Theophilus,” the “friend/lover of God” specifically addressed in Luke’s two volumes (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). May your love for God increase as you probe the pages of this issue.

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