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Editor's Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'Esta Love and Stuart Love

This, the final issue of *Leaven* for volume 23, is largely based on the 2015 Pepperdine University Lectures on the Letter of James, appropriately entitled *Faith/Works*. Filled with moral precepts of a more or less traditional and wide-ranging character, the letter has been compared to Israelite wisdom literature as set forth in writings like the book of Proverbs or Ecclesiasticus, or *The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach*. This is so, but who can deny that when James speaks of the sins of the unbridled tongue (1.26) and the difficulty of taming the tongue (3.1–12) he echoes the moral antagonism of Israel's prophets of the eighth or sixth centuries BCE. Surely, this is true when he addresses "favoritism" (2.1–8) or charges that if works don't accompany faith, it is proof positive that such faith is dead (2.14–26).

James had difficulty in being accepted as New Testament scripture. It was received only slowly, first in Alexandria in the third century CE, in the West in the fourth century CE, and in the Syrian church in the fifth century CE. It is well-known to many that Luther questioned its canonical status. One evening at a conference of New Testament scholars I sat next to a Lutheran scholar as an oral interpretive recitation was made of the entire book of James (sometimes that's what scholars do for pure enjoyment after a day of hard work). I commented to my friend how impressive it was to hear the book of James aloud in one setting to which he replied, "Yes, that's true, but it can't compare to Paul." My friend would no doubt agree, however, that New Testament scholarship today has a greater appreciation of the writing's theological outlook and its emotional practical emphasis. James cared deeply about the active faith of the Christian community to which he wrote, warning that Christians cannot live double-minded lives—that is, we must choose to follow God rather than to befriend the world (1.8; 4.8).

Let us now introduce the articles. **DARRYL TIPPENS** opens the issue with a provocative article on the tongue. He asserts that "the well-being of the people of God depends on how people used their words." For James, language is a "life-and-death matter." James knew that words have the power to kill—as did Sirach who wrote, "Many have been killed by the edge of the sword, but not so many as by the tongue" (28.18).¹ What would James and Sirach say, Tippens asks, if they "saw our electronic devices, which empower us to drop destructive words in a million different places at the speed of light"?

Next, **JEFF MILLER** takes up the topic of favoritism that is condemned both in the Old Testament (Lev 19.15; Ps 82.2) and in James, chapter 2. Not only is partiality counter to God's character (Job 34.17–19; Acts 10.34), but James points out that it is demonstrated especially by the treatment of the poor by the rich (2.1–7). This truth leads Miller to an eschatological insight: if we expect the crown of life in the future we need to attend to the eschatological present, which includes the issue of poverty and wealth. "For James, Christians act in the present like they will act in the future."

To fill out our trilogy of expository articles we are blessed by a study of faith and works by **JAMES McCARTY III**, who opens by referencing a number of problems individuals have and have had in interpreting and applying the writing to our milieu. However, he asserts and ably supports the notion that "James is not a problem because the author disagrees with or contradicts Paul," a belief mistakenly held by some. Instead, McCarty notes that the two actually "have much in common when it comes to the social implications of God's kingdom and the life of the Church" and agree that "faith without ecclesial justice is not true faith at all"—although McCarty asserts that "James goes further in his critique than Paul does."

1. All quotations from Sirach come from the Revised English Bible.

We then have **SARA BARTON** demonstrating how three times James uses a literary stock character from ancient Greek literature to illustrate the character of arrogance. James dismantles the attitudes of arrogance on display by connecting them to the major theme of his writing: the love of one's neighbor as one's self. To complete our articles related to the book of James we include a liturgical reading by **LEE MAGNESS** based on the teaching on faith and works (2.14–26) “as the interpretive key to other passages in James.”

Next, **KELLE MARSHALL** and **MASON MARSHALL** review Thomas E. Bergler's book, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*. This important study done by Bergler under George Marsden “tries to explain how American Christianity became juvenilized.” Bergler defines *juvenilization* as “the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages.” If only preachers and church leaders of the Stone-Campbell heritage would read Bergler's findings and act accordingly!

At the *Leaven* luncheon earlier this year, **KEN DURHAM** poignantly confessed to struggling with “the bind and crunch” of being *simul praedicator et peccator*— “preacher and at the same time a sinner.” In that address included here, he shared how he found encouragement and empathy in the recorded struggles of Jacob and Paul as well as in more recent writings and lyrics. In the end, Durham recognized that as a preaching peccator, “I am not merely called to *tell* the story of Jesus and his love, I am called to *be* one of those gospel love stories”—but, in the words of Horatio G. Spafford, ““My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the Cross and I bear it no more!””

We close the issue with two sermons. **CLAIRE DAVIDSON FREDERICK** uses the Cornelius story of Acts 10 to affirm that God is at work behind the “walls” that separate us. She applies this insight to her work behind the walls of the Tennessee Prison for Women in Bordeaux, providing assistance and resources to incarcerated women for creating redemptive songs of life and faith and hope. In “On Being Special,” **RICH LITTLE** demonstrates that what it meant for Christians in Peter's time to be a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people” is quite different from the example of the American church today: “we've fought so hard not to aliens and strangers that we've missed God's purposes for us found in being aliens and strangers.”

As the year comes to a close, we ask you to continue to pray for *Leaven* and look forward to **DAVID LEMLEY** being our guest editor for the first issue of 2016.

