

## The Limits of Leadership: Challenges to Apostolic Homeostasis in Luke-Acts

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*The Twelve are not the only numbered group of Christian workers or leaders in Luke-Acts. There are two others, the Seventy and the Seven. These outsiders have often been overlooked, and their work is usually portrayed simply as extending that of the apostles. On a careful systemic reading, however, the relevant passages in Luke and Acts are open to a different understanding of leadership in the early church, which at the same time raises questions that bear on tensions in the authority and leadership of the church today.*

As in the other gospels, the Twelve play a prominent role in Luke-Acts. They are chosen by Jesus and demarcated from the unnumbered disciples who followed him, a point made explicit in the third gospel (Luke 6:13; see also Mark 3:14-16).<sup>1</sup> The Twelve, also known as “apostles” (*apostoloi*, a term found most often in Acts; see, for example, 1:2, 2:37, 4:33, and 5:18),<sup>2</sup> are the chosen few who remain by Jesus’ side during the early days of his Galilean ministry (Luke 8:1; see also Mark 4:10) and who are commissioned by him to emulate that ministry (Luke 9:1; see also Mark 6:7; Matt. 10:1-2, 11:1).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as with the other evangelists, when Luke mentions Judas Iscariot, he is designated simply as “one of the Twelve” (Luke 22:3, 47; see also Mark 14:10, 43; Matt. 26:14, 47; John 6:70-71).

Unlike the other gospel writers, however, Luke also makes specific mention of at least two other “numbered” groups, *the Seventy* in

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<sup>1</sup> See D. L. Bock’s commentary, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 1:540.

<sup>2</sup> Even in Acts, however, the phrase “the twelve” is still used (6:2).

<sup>3</sup> See also J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1991): “Himself sent to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal, Jesus sends the Twelve to proclaim the kingdom and to heal (p. 115).”

Luke 10 and *the Seven* in Acts 6.<sup>4</sup> This raises a key question: Why does the evangelist mention these two additional sets of disciples, especially since their time on the Lukan stage is fairly brief? If the initial choice of the Twelve from among the masses is, for Luke, a “conscious and calculated” one,<sup>5</sup> then what purpose do these “others” (Luke 10:1) serve in his “orderly account?” Furthermore, what is their relationship to the Lukan Twelve with regard to leadership in the nascent church?

This article explores the notion that the Seventy and the Seven, far from being peripheral to Luke’s narrative, are marked out by the evangelist as persons who fulfill Jesus’ commission to preach, heal, and exorcise (Luke 9:1) *precisely at those points when the Twelve appear unwilling or unable to do so*. A systemic examination of the relational connections between the Twelve and these other numbered sets in Luke-Acts may suggest the necessity for a reconsideration of the roles of all three groups in Luke’s account. Following a brief overview of methodological considerations, this article focuses on the events leading to the rise of the Seven in Acts, similarities between passages involving the Seven (Acts 6-8) and the Seventy (Luke 9-10), the role of the Twelve in Luke-Acts as guardians of the community’s equilibrium, and the threat posed by the other numbered groups to that equilibrium. Finally, the conclusion explores the possible relevance of a systemic reading of apostolic leadership in Luke-Acts to current struggles involving the Christian community in general and the Episcopal Church in particular.

### *Methodological Considerations*

It is helpful to explore such terminology as “numbered sets,” “relational connections,” “systemic examination,” and “equilibrium.” While the dictum “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” is an ancient one, in more recent years the connectedness of persons and social groupings has formed the basic focus of study for systems theorists.

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<sup>4</sup> Concerning the question of whether *duō* is part of the original text, see the discussion in B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 150-151. It makes little difference for our purpose here whether *duō* represents an addition to, or deletion from, the original text. More relevant for our purpose is the assumption that Luke’s primary reference here is the nations of the world in Genesis 10, numbered as seventy in the Masoretic text and seventy-two in the Septuagint (LXX).

<sup>5</sup> See also Bock, *Luke*, 541.

In brief, systems thinking “deals with data in a new way . . . focusing less on the cause-and-effect connections that link bits of information and more on the principles of organizations that give data meaning.”<sup>6</sup> Even as systems thinking has developed from the interactions of ideas from several diverse fields,<sup>7</sup> it has also given rise in recent years to several specialist approaches, including communications theory, conflict theory, and group process theory. Most of these approaches, however, share the key foundational assumptions that all parts of a system are interconnected, that understanding is only possible by viewing the whole, and that a system and its environment have an effect on one another. Taken together, these assumptions point beyond analysis of constituent members (of a group or set) to exploration of a more dynamic and complex world of networks and boundaries. In terms of biblical exegesis, a systems methodology does not supersede more traditional textual analysis. Indeed, systems theorists are quick to declare that speaking in terms of systems and networks is but one way of approaching the reality being studied. How, then, may it prove helpful in an exploration of apostolic leadership in Luke-Acts?

In brief, systems analysis can help us take into account relational connections between persons and groups—Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy, the Seven, as well as onlookers and opponents—that might otherwise be overlooked. More specifically, because of its focus on relational connections, systems thinking draws attention to the effects of *change* on such connections. Why is it that small alterations within a system are usually allowed, as long as the structure, vision, and boundaries of the system itself are left unchallenged? In systems parlance, this is known as the principle of *homeostasis* or relational equilibrium. As a common illustration of this, the autopilot technology of an aircraft permits minor course corrections without changing the overall destination itself. When we read a text only in non-systemic ways, we can easily follow in the path of previous commentators who, for the most part, have failed to inquire why other numbered groups are introduced in Luke’s account if the Lukan Twelve are indeed ful-

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<sup>6</sup> E. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Systems in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guildford Press, 1985), 15. For a more detailed analysis of systems thinking in relation to biblical exegesis, see C. K. Robertson, *Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed history of systems thinking and its applications in family and social group research, see C. B. Broderick, *Understanding Family Process: Basics of Family Systems Theory* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993), 3-35.

filling their apostolic call.<sup>8</sup> A systems approach does not offer new answers to old questions as much as it suggests a new level of questioning altogether. New paradigmatic queries can then be explored through more traditional forms of exegetical analysis. Thus, we can examine how, in the Lukan account, the Seventy and the Seven respectively are connected with the Twelve and with Jesus himself, as well as what their presence on the scene might mean from the evangelist's perspective in terms of change and discontinuity.

### *A Positive Picture?*

The earliest chapters in the book of Acts appear to present a very positive picture of the apostles and the nascent messianic community that develops around them. Indeed, four things should be noted about the work of the Twelve in the early chapters in Acts.

First, the apostles clearly exercise a ministry of proclamation and power to which they were earlier commissioned—but mostly failed to perform—in Luke 9. Apostolic proclamation comes in the form of two public addresses (Acts 2:14-36, 3:12-26) and testimony before the Jewish rulers and elders (4:8-12, 5:29-32). Theirs is a basic message, a *kerygma* concerning the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2), with “the day of the Lord” prophesied by Joel (Acts 2:17), Samuel, and others (3:24), directly linked with the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>9</sup> In Peter's sermons, the implicit message of Luke 4:18-21 (the Isaian Servant) becomes an explicit pronouncement about Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah. Along with proclamation, in chapters 2-5 we see that the title of the work, *The Acts of the Apostles* (*praxis*), is well deserved, for Peter, John, and the rest of the Twelve are indeed living conduits of “wonders and signs” (2:43, 5:12). These include being understood by people of different languages on the day of Pentecost (2:7-8), healing a crippled man at the gate called Beautiful (3:2-8), pronouncing a death sentence which immediately comes to pass on two deceitful church members (5:1-11), and exorcising demons (5:16). The last, it should be recalled, was a sore point for the Twelve

<sup>8</sup> See also E. H. Marks, *A Wandering Jesus and Wandering Disciples: A Study of Luke 9:51-10:42 as the First Sub-Unit of the Travel Narrative* (UMI Dissertation Series, 1995), 276.

<sup>9</sup> For more about the specific nature and form of the apostolic *kerygma*, see C. K. Robertson, *The Kerygma of Billy Graham* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Worldwide Press, 1987).

in Luke 9-10, as others accomplished what they appeared unable to do (9:40, 49, 10:17). Furthermore, even as a hemorrhaging woman once touched the hem of Jesus' cloak and was healed (Luke 8:43-44), so in Acts 5 the sick are laid out in the street in order to have Peter's shadow fall on them (5:15). The formerly silent and impotent Twelve now give their testimony "with great power" (4:33).

Second, it is clear in these early chapters in Acts that the power behind the Twelve is the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who had anointed and empowered Jesus. With the exception of the choosing of Matthias in Acts 1 (about which more will be said below), there is little doubt that the words and works of the Twelve from Acts 2 onward are due not to their own cleverness or ability, but to the promised Spirit of God. Indeed, the very first miracle following the Spirit's dramatic descent on the Twelve and their upper room companions is a creative reversal of the events of Babel in Genesis 11. The Pentecost audience asks, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" (Acts 2:7), having heard and understood in their own native tongues the proclamation of the Twelve. The result is "amazement" and some perplexity (2:12) on the part of the listeners, the former word being the same used in Luke 8:56 (immediately before the commissioning of the Twelve) to describe the reaction of the parents of a dead girl after Jesus brought her back to life.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the bold confession of Peter and John after the healing of the lame man, appears to fulfill Jesus' prophecy concerning divine inspiration for the apostles upon their arrests (Luke 21:12-15): "I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (21:14). Even so, the Jewish authorities hear Peter and John and recognize the two as "uneducated and ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). Here also are strong echoes of the mixed response to Jesus following his initial, controversial message in his hometown synagogue: "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' they said" (Luke 4:22). The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus to proclaim, to heal, and to exorcise (Luke 4:18). Now that same Spirit is empower-

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<sup>10</sup> A possible parallel is found in Philo, a first-century Hellenistic Jew, who speaks of the ancient Hebrews' "utter amazement" in response to a divine flame that became "articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience." See also Philo, *On the Decalogue* 46-47. For more on this analogy, see note 488 in M. E. Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995), 311.

ing the Twelve, as Peter is quick to confess: “It is not by our own power or piety” (Acts 3:12).

Third, the Twelve experience great results in their mission, in terms of both the numbers of converts (2:47, 5:14) and their devotion (2:42-44, 4:32). Calvin Miller’s poetic retelling of the events of Pentecost captures well the spirit of the Lukan scene: “The day was long and lovely, and substance slept with a thousand hearts by fall of night; it was the dawning of the Age of the Invader.”<sup>11</sup> In the opening chapter of Acts, in what may be called the second Lukan commissioning of the apostles, Jesus promised them an empowerment by the Holy Spirit. As in the gospel narrative, they again registered confusion, asking if this was the time when God would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Their thoughts about Jesus and his mission, even after the events of resurrection, were still quite limited, confined to “Davidic messiah, powerful warrior, skilled politician, liberator, and king.” It should quickly be added, however, that this way of thinking is evident in many of the Jewish writings from the same period. Again and again there was a focus on the much-prophesied regathering of the tribes that had been deported and dispersed throughout the known world from the time of the Babylonian Captivity through the advent of the Roman Empire. Thus, the Pentecost converts in Acts 2, Jews and Jewish proselytes drawn from many cities and regions throughout the Roman Empire (2:9-11), seem to represent the beginning of the restoration of the glories of Israel.

Fourth—and this is the crucial point in understanding the Lukan introduction of other workers like the Seven—all the preaching and miraculous signs of the Twelve, and all their subsequent success in those early chapters of Acts, occur *within Jerusalem*. Returning to the apostles’ question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, Jesus’ response, as always, shows how far off the mark they are. After a warning about the inability to predict God’s timing, Jesus goes on to replace their ethnic/religious myopia with a much broader vision: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). Jesus’ words are as provocative as they are prophetic, for although the events of Pentecost in Acts 2 appear to illustrate beyond doubt a spiritual empowerment, the converts are all Jews or Jewish proselytes. There is great success—but only within the

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin Miller, *The Song* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 43.

confines of the apostles' own vision of a restored Israel. It is not insignificant that the other major event in the first chapter of Acts—following the ascension and commissioning of the apostles—is the selection of a replacement for Judas. If the symbolism behind the need for a twelfth apostle is not clear enough, Peter's speech and Scripture quotations brings the point home: "Let another replace him." Lots are cast, and Matthias joins the eleven. The interesting thing is that no mention is made of the Spirit's involvement in the decision-making process. Most commentators through the years have defended the election by lots as a necessary step before the Spirit could descend on Pentecost upon the newly reconstituted Twelve. No one questions whether Luke instead might be suggesting that the election is simply part of the apostles' misguided focus on the restoration of Israel. Much attention is given to the need for, and appointment of, a twelfth apostle, yet after this Matthias never appears again in the Lukan narrative. What is reported in the next few chapters is apostolic success, but as was said above, the success is entirely within the boundaries of Jerusalem and the temple. Thus, Luke reports that the believers are continually blessing God, and he explicitly states that they do so "in the temple" (Luke 24:53). Similarly, they begin a new routine of breaking bread in private homes, while still spending time each day in the temple (Acts 2:46). The healing of a lame man occurs at the "Beautiful Gate" as Peter and John are going "up to the temple at the hour of prayer" (3:1). Peter addresses the people at Solomon's Portico (3:11, 5:12), and after their release from the authorities, the Twelve return daily to the temple (5:42). Later, during the persecution that follows Stephen's death, all the disciples are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, taking the message of Jesus with them—all, that is, but the Twelve (8:1). Having once been told to wait in the city (Luke 24:49), the Lukan Twelve do just that! One may quickly argue that, according to Luke, Jesus himself spent time teaching each day in the temple (Luke 21:37). Although this is true, in that same chapter, Luke reports the prediction by Jesus that the temple itself would one day fall (21:4-6). Furthermore, Jesus' apostolic commission in Acts 1 includes the challenge to move beyond Jerusalem "to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). J. B. Tyson is correct to note that "the ends of the earth" points toward Rome in the Lukan narrative;<sup>12</sup> how-

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<sup>12</sup> J. B. Tyson, "The Emerging Church and the Problem of Authority in Acts," *Interpretation* 42 (1988), 133.

ever, although the message of the early church does finally find its way to Rome, it is not the Twelve who take it there. It is as if the new wine of the gospel, intended by the Lukan Jesus to be taken to all the world, remains held by the apostles in the old wineskin of temple worship.

### *Enter the Seven*

From the very start of Acts 6, a noticeable change begins to take place in the life of both the community and its leadership. Even as the Twelve are operating successfully in the relational network around the temple, problems arise between the “Hellenists” and the “Hebrews.” The descriptors used here by Luke leave later readers with more ambiguity than clarity regarding both the exact nature of the conflict and the identity of the players involved. Are these Jewish Christians from outside Palestine, much like Joseph Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36)? Are they, as non-Palestinian Jews, less impressed with the temple as a focal point, as appears to be the case with Stephen in Acts 7? Does the problem concern the distribution of food (as in Luke 16:21 or 17:7-8), or funds (as in Luke 19:23; Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15), the latter making sense if this verse is linked with the distribution of financial proceeds in Acts 4:35? Whatever the answers to these queries, three things are fairly clear.

First, this is not a case of outside agitators, as Paul later faces in the Lukan account (14:1-2). The dispute is *within* the boundaries of the church. “Hellenists” are mentioned twice more in Acts. In 9:28-29 Paul attempts unsuccessfully to argue his case with the Hellenists in Jerusalem; they, in turn, respond with an attempt on his life. In 11:19-20, believers from Cyprus and Cyrene who have been scattered all over following the incident with Stephen (see below) preach not only to the Jews, but also to the Hellenists. From these brief appearances, we can state that although we do not have a definitive answer as to who these Hellenists are, we do know that they are somehow viewed by Luke as distinct from another relational network, referred to as the “Hebrews” in 6:1 and “Jews” in 11:19. It is not improbable that Luke means, by his term, Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora.<sup>13</sup> In any case, in none of the three cases mentioned above are Hellenists as a re-

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<sup>13</sup> The Seven all bear Greek, not Hebrew, names, which has led many to speculate that they themselves might have been Diaspora Jews. Stephen’s critical words about the temple in Acts 7 at least suggest that he was not a Palestinian Jew.



lational system viewed in contradistinction to Christian believers as a relational system. Acts 11:19 includes both “Jews” and “Hellenists” as Antiochenes who are not yet believers, while 6:1 lists both “Hebrews” and “Hellenists” among “the disciples.” So, while chapter 6 leaves us with several unanswered queries, one thing we do know is that the idyllic community of Acts 2:42-47 is not quite as harmonious as previously implied. A problem existed concerning unequal care for insiders.<sup>14</sup> Inasmuch as no other distinction is made here between the various widows, who are all alike in their need except for the Hebrew-Hellenist labels described above, it may be said that some kind of relational distinctions—and subsequent intracommunal tensions—exist amongst the Jerusalem believers.

Second, the role of the Seven is differentiated from that of the Twelve *by the Twelve*. The apostles declare themselves unwilling to handle the dispute directly, and instead challenge the congregation (and, implicitly, the complaining Hellenist members of the congregation) to choose seven men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to fulfill the task of “serving tables.” Modern readers may be puzzled at the job requirements for what appears at first sight to be a menial task. Table service, however, is highly symbolic for Luke, who consistently uses “authority over material possessions as a symbol for spiritual authority.”<sup>15</sup>

The key requirement to be an apostle and witness (*mártus*) to the resurrection, Peter asserted, was that the person had to have accompanied Jesus “from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us” (1:21-22). An insider, as it were, was needed to replace an insider. Regarding the situation in Acts 6, Luke notes that “in those days” the Twelve suggest that the people, implicitly the Hellenists, appoint seven men from among themselves. These, then, would be “insiders” in their particular relational network, appointed to respond to complaints arising from within that particular system. While this decision has at times been commended for its wisdom, it is interesting to note that the actions of the Lukan apostles in this instance actually perpetuates the distinction between the two relational

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<sup>14</sup> Chrysostom notes: “Observe how even in the beginning the evils came not only from without, but also from within,” adding, “this was no small evil” (*Homily on Acts* 14).

<sup>15</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 111.

systems of the Hebrews and the Hellenists. Whatever positive light we put on the apostles' statement in 6:2, the fact remains that the Twelve refuse to engage personally in the work of table-service, which moves into the hands of the Seven.

Even if we consider the Seven's task in the narrowest sense, related only to the issue of the disproportionate widows' allowances in Acts 6, the fact remains that the Seven—at least in the persons of Stephen and Philip—immediately set themselves to the same task of proclamation as the Twelve, with one crucial difference. While the Twelve retain their custom of daily prayer and worship at the temple, Stephen instead challenges the very need for the temple. Likewise, while the Twelve remain largely in Jerusalem, Philip moves quickly beyond the city's geographical and socio-religious boundaries to evangelize an Ethiopian eunuch, only to be whisked farther afield once more by the Spirit. This does not negate Jesus' commendation of the Twelve in Luke 22:28 as those who stood by him in his trials, yet even this statement comes on the heels of Luke's report of bickering amongst the Twelve regarding who was the greatest (22:24) and Jesus' subsequent challenge to be as those who serve at table (22:27).<sup>16</sup> Jesus served at table and welcomed all into table fellowship with himself, and now the Seven are charged to serve at table, that there could be unity within the church.

Third, it is possible to hear in the stories of Stephen and Philip resonances of the events from Luke 9-10.<sup>17</sup> As in Mark's account, Luke 9:10-17 follows the return of the Twelve from their mission with their complaints about the inability to feed the vast crowds listening to Jesus (9:10-17). Here we see these apostles, as it were, asking Jesus

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<sup>16</sup> P. K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30* (SBL Diss. 138; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1994), 248-251, who further links imitation of Jesus' table service with following him in his passion and death, something that is readily displayed in the martyrdom of Stephen, the table-server.

<sup>17</sup> Similarities between the death of the protomartyr, Stephen, and the passion of Jesus have been noted by several commentators. Luke T. Johnson, for example, notes in *The Acts of the Apostles* that "the succession of events leading to Stephen's speech imitates the sequence of Jesus' passion" (p. 112). See also J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (*Anchor Bible* 31; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 59. As early as Cyprian, this connection was made: "It behooved the first martyr of Christ thus to be, who, forerunning the martyrs that should follow him in a glorious death, was not only the preacher of the Lord's passion, but also the imitator of His most patient gentleness" (*Treatise* 9.16). William H. Willimon succinctly says in *Acts*: "Jesus' followers die like Jesus" (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1988), p. 65.

to refuse a kind of table fellowship to the masses. Luke records a short and direct response from Jesus: “You yourselves feed them” (9:13). In much the same way, the appointment of Stephen and the rest of the Seven occurs within the context of complaints about distribution, and once again the complaint is met with a challenge: “Select from among yourselves seven men of good standing” (Acts 6:3). In other words, “You handle it!” There are further parallels between Luke 9-10 and Acts 6-8. As Stephen stands before his accusers, his face transforms into something like the *prósōpon* of an angel. While many other analogies and comparisons have been drawn, including the account of Moses’ shining *prósōpon* in Exodus 34:29-35,<sup>18</sup> it would still seem fair to say that even as Stephen’s own death corresponds with the “departure” of Jesus (Luke 9:31), so the martyr’s altered *pósōpon* mirrors the glorified visage of the Lukan Jesus in Luke 9:29.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, *dóxa* (glory) is a theme in both accounts (Luke 9:31 and Acts 7:55), although what Peter, James, and John—the inner circle of the Twelve—saw “in anticipation, Stephen now saw realized.”<sup>20</sup> While they saw their Master standing with Elijah and Moses (*sunestōtas*, Luke 9:32), Stephen sees Jesus standing (*estōta*) “at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). The apostles’ foretaste in Luke 9 prefigures, as it were, Stephen’s visual feast in Acts 7. In both accounts, too, there is a formulaic temporal transition, marking the end of the episode and the beginning of its aftermath. As mentioned above, following the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke diverges

<sup>18</sup> From Tetullian onwards (*De Resurrectione Carnis* 55), connections have been drawn between the appearance of Stephen’s face “like the face of an angel” and the altered visages of Moses and Christ. See also M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (H. Greevan, ed.; London: SCM, 1956), 110, 207, n. 1; and J. Bihler, *Die Stephanusbeschichte im Zusammenhang der Apostelgeschichte* (MTS 1/30; München: Max Hüber Verlag), 17-18, who speaks of Stephen as “geisterfüllter Visionär.” See also Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Beyond the biblical allusions in 2 Cor. 3:12-18 and 2 Pet. 1:16-19, there is also the later account in Acts of Paul 3 of the apostle at times having the face of a man, and at times the face of an angel. R. Bauckham notes that, despite analogies between the respective accounts in Acts and Acts of Paul, “they are not sufficient to prove dependence.” From “The Acts of Paul as a Sequel to Acts,” in Bruce W. Winter, ed., *The Book of Acts in its First-Century Setting* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993), 1:112. For another Christian account of altered appearance, see Martyr. Poly. 12.1.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 210. See also Martyr. Carp. 39.

from Mark and Matthew and makes a point of saying that “in those days” the inner circle of the Twelve were silent, telling “no one of the things they had seen” (9:36),<sup>21</sup> an interesting statement in light of the Lukan Jesus’ call to “proclaim the kingdom of God” (9:2).

As we have also seen, although they had been granted “power and authority” over demons and diseases (9:1), they prove themselves impotent when confronted with a possessed young boy (9:40). In the midst of this disappointing denouement to the awesome wonders just seen, the Twelve encounter the first of many rejections to come, this time in Samaria, even as Jesus set his *prósōpon* towards Jerusalem and death (9:51-55). Following a similar pattern, but with a significant difference, “on that day” (8:1) following Stephen’s heavenly vision and death, the Hellenistic Christians—the remainder of the Seven from 6:1-6 as well as their converts—experience persecution and a forced *diasporá*. Yet far from being silent in the midst of such adversity, the scattered believers instead travel “from place to place, proclaiming the word” (8:4) and enjoying great success, beginning in Samaria! When Peter and John now return to the region which previously had spelled failure for them (in Luke 9), they are greeted with a flourishing mission resulting from the work of Philip, another member of the Seven (Acts 8:5-14). In place of the impotence before demons and diseases in Luke 9, in Philip’s ministry in Samaria there are healings and exorcisms (8:7), “signs and great deeds of power” (8:13). For Luke, the Samaritan mission becomes the “first step outside Jerusalem,”<sup>22</sup> with converts finding their way in and being fed with spiritual nourishment. The parallels between Luke 9-10 and Acts 6-8 may be summarized:

LUKE	ACTS
Ministry in Galilee (chaps. 5-8)	Ministry in Jerusalem (chaps. 1-5)
Problems of food distribution (9:10)	Problems of distribution (6:1-4)
Response: “You do something” (9:13)	Response: “You do something” (6:3)
The appointment of the Seventy (10:1)	The appointment of the Seven (6:5-6)

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 225, asserts that the apostle’s silence was most likely due to “fear and lack of understanding.” In any case, it is important to note the absence of Jesus’ command to stay silent (see also Mark 9:9 and Matt. 17:9).

<sup>22</sup> See also Johnson, *Acts*, 150.

Altered <i>prósōpon</i> (9:29)	Altered <i>prósōpon</i> (6:15)
Moses and Elijah talking (9:30)	Moses/other OT figures in speech (7)
Glory— <i>doxá</i> (9:31)	Glory— <i>doxá</i> (7:55)
Jesus standing (9:32)	Jesus standing (7:55)
No need for <i>skānas</i> (9:33-36)	No need for <i>skānā</i> (7:44-50)
“in those days” (9:36)	“in those days” (8:1)
Silence about what they had seen (9:36)	Proclamation of the word (8:4)
Inability to heal or exorcise demon (9:40)	Healings and exorcisms (8:6-8)
Moving towards Jerusalem (9:51)	Moving away from Jerusalem (8:1)
Rejection in Samaria (9:51-56)	Reception in Samaria (8:4-25)

In both cases, a relational system outside of the Twelve is doing the very work that Jesus commissioned the apostles to do: proclamation, healing, and exorcism.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the Seven, we see the beginnings of movement away from Jerusalem and the temple, in contrast to the life and work of Peter and the Twelve. As for the relationship between the Twelve and the Seven in Luke's account, there is some ambiguity. In Luke 9:49-50, the apostles are rebuked for their clear unwillingness to welcome other helpers; in Acts 6:1-6 they confirm the appointment of the Seven, although their motivation for doing so remains unclear. What *is* clear is that the Twelve appear to be confined by their own limits.

### *The Problem with Peter*

An obvious objection at this point involves the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. Does this not present a very positive image of the leader of the Twelve embracing the burgeoning gentile movement? After all, following the introduction of the Seven and the account of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1-31), Peter once again moves to the forefront in Luke's account, paralleling Jesus' ministry in healing a paralyzed man (9:32-35; see also Luke 5:17-26) and raising a young woman from the dead (9:36-43; see also Luke 8:40-42, 51-56), only then to be involved in the evangelization of Cornelius's household

<sup>23</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 410 makes the point that in Luke 10, the Seventy are commended by Jesus for great success in the work of healings and exorcisms, even though this is not an explicit part of their job description in Luke's gospel, as it is for the Twelve.

(Acts 10). Interestingly, this story, which receives such prominence in Luke's account, overshadows the evangelization of the Antiochene gentiles that Luke reports immediately thereafter (Acts 11). This is despite the fact that it is at Antioch that we read that the system which would be called "Christian" differentiates itself from its environment for the first time. Several things, therefore, should be said about the story of Peter and Cornelius.

First, the prominence given to the event should not alone suggest that this is the key breakthrough in the mission to the "nations," nor that it shows the Twelve's (in the person of Peter) embracing of that mission. James D. G. Dunn has noted that the Antioch movement was so important that it had to be "securely interwoven into the history of the movement's steady expansion," and confirmed by very carefully communicated apostolic approval.<sup>24</sup> Wiens, too, has pointed to the story of Cornelius as Luke's way of showing some continuity between the Jerusalem apostles and the actual proselytization being done by other workers in Antioch.<sup>25</sup> The question to ask is why Luke presents Peter's eventual acceptance of gentile evangelization in the person of Cornelius with such care and time, and immediately before the events recorded in 11:19-21, if Peter and the Twelve were truly open to this mission.

Second, the connection between the story of Peter and Cornelius and that of Jesus and the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10) has not been lost on scholars.<sup>26</sup> Yet Gagnon, in particular, notes the emphasis in both stories on the worthiness *in Jewish terms* of the respective gentile officer to receive what has been asked of Jesus/Peter,<sup>27</sup> thereby stressing the continuity between the emerging church and its Jewish roots. The church, in this sense, remains a Jewish mission which happens to welcome certain gentiles, as long as they fulfill key requirements by that Jewish system ("an upright and God-fearing man who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation," 10:22).

<sup>24</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 153.

<sup>25</sup> Delbert L. Wiens, *Stephen's Sermon and the Structure of Luke-Acts* (N. Richland Hills, Tex.: BIBAL Press, 1995), 130.

<sup>26</sup> See especially G. Muhlack, *Die Parallelen von Lukas-Evangelium und Apostelgeschichte* (Theologie und Wirklichkeit 8; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979), 39-54.

<sup>27</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Luke's Motives for Redaction in the Account of the Double Delegation in Luke 7:1-10," *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994): 122-145, at 129-130.

Third, as we consider the fact that Luke's gospel alone contains more than 500 allusions to the Old Testament, it is fairly clear that whatever the evangelist's ethnic-religious heritage,<sup>28</sup> he was well acquainted with Israel's Scriptures and made more than passing reference to them. It should come, therefore, as no surprise that the story of Peter in Acts 10 likely has scriptural precedent, namely in the story of the reluctant prophet Jonah. The latter received God's commission to proclaim the need for repentance to those whom he considered unworthy of such mercy, and thus he fled to Joppa. In Acts 10, we find Peter bar-Jonah in a house in Joppa when he receives in a vision the call to eat "unclean" foods, a suggestion Peter quickly rejects. The image of Peter, when viewed in light of possible allusions to Jonah, is not necessarily as positive as some would like to argue. Yes, Cornelius and his household hear the gospel through Peter, and he even stands up for this work in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), but it does not mean he embraces this work. Indeed, as will be noted below, following the council, Peter and the rest of the apostles disappear from the Lukan account, as an outsider to the group—Paul of Tarsus—begins the wholehearted task of reaching out to "the ends of the earth."

Following the Peter and Cornelius story, in 11:19-26, there is another Lukan transition. Having heard the Jerusalem network proclaim that God has given *even the gentiles* the repentance that leads to life (11:18), Luke reminds us of that other emerging network of believers who had been scattered after Stephen's martyrdom (11:19; see also 8:1-4), many of whom proclaim the gospel *without hesitation* to "Hellenists" as well as to the Jews (11:20; see also 6:1). No longer is there an inequity in "distribution" (of the word); in Antioch, the believers display a oneness in the midst of ethnic diversity that was not even true of the Jerusalem church. It should not come as a surprise that at this point, in this place, in these circumstances, the believers gain a new name: Christians. The Twelve had commissioned the Seven to a specific task (help bring about more equal distribution and thereby silence the dissenting Hellenists), and the latter had now fulfilled that task, albeit in a much broader sense than that probably en-

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<sup>28</sup> E. E. Ellis lists several arguments for a Jewish background for Luke, despite the longstanding tradition of gentile identification. See his *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 51-53. See also C. A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 45-78.

visioned by the Lukan Twelve, acting as a catalyst for radical change to the entire existing system.

Predictably, there is a reaction by the existing system itself in later chapters, first in the form of the instructions from James and the Jerusalem elders and apostles to gentile believers in Acts 15, and then in James's suggestions to Paul and his company in Acts 21. It is interesting to note the systemic role of James as the one who exercises homeostatic leadership in the emerging church. In other words, after the Twelve have established a fairly stable relational system in Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts, James enters the scene as one who holds a steady course over things, despite the destabilizing actions of the Seven and those who follow them (most notably Paul). The term "destabilizing" is used here because, although the actions of the diaspora disciples (8:1-4, 11:19-21) helped increase the church's numbers, they also brought in the gentiles in large numbers, thus upsetting the balance, the equilibrium that existed among the Jewish followers of the Way in the shadow of the temple.

It may be argued, then, that the Seven represent the beginning of fulfillment of the apostolic commission to go *beyond Jerusalem*, a process which turns a significant corner in Antioch, marked by the movement's new name, and the system itself is transformed from Jewish subset to something else altogether.

### *Possible Connections*

This article has used a systemic approach in order to explore in a fresh way questions regarding challenges to the apostolic leadership in Luke-Acts. Reiterating what was said at the start, this approach in no way is intended to supersede traditional exegetical examinations of the texts, but rather to complement and expand such analyses, adding yet another voice to the ongoing scholarly conversation.

Beyond textual study, however, it might be of interest and value to ask whether there are lessons to be learned in our time and in our situations from Luke's treatment of apostolic and extra-apostolic leadership. In short, does a study of first-century leadership offer applicable points for a twenty-first-century church? Certainly, it is neither wise nor justifiable simply to lift "timeless truths" from their distinctly ancient Mediterranean, and here specifically Lukan, milieu and drop them onto any one of a number of contemporary Western denominational communities, such as the Episcopal Church in the USA. Far



too often, a disregard for the wholly disparate contexts of the world of the New Testament and our own world has led Christian believers to create or reinforce “biblical” positions that are, in fact, unsubstantiated by a deeper, more careful study of Scripture.

Having said this, there are appropriate ways of approaching the Lukan text with an eye toward our own situations. As has been suggested in this article, far from being simply a modern social scientific instrument randomly thrust upon ancient texts, a systems methodology by definition respects the unique context of its study even as it raises questions of stability and change within that particular context. Certainly, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the situation of Hebrew-Hellenist tensions and challenges to apostolic leadership in Luke-Acts and that of modern struggles in the Episcopal Church over issues of same-gender unions and alternative episcopal oversight. Modern management analysts assert: “In challenging times, leaders typically don’t just need to keep the same train [of thought] with a few minor tweaks, but rather come up with more revolutionary visions.”<sup>29</sup> For the Twelve, it was difficult first to move toward Jerusalem (in Luke 9-10) and then, once safely there and enjoying a successful ministry, to move away from it (Acts 1-8). It was difficult for them to deal directly with problems in a relational system that was “outside” their own, as in the case of the Hellenists.

Today, we are not struggling with Hellenists in our midst; we are, however, wrestling with profound questions of stability and challenges to that stability within our own system. It can be argued, therefore, that it is both possible and prudent to explore how Lukan-reported responses to Lukan-reported dilemmas within the Lukan system might prod our own thinking concerning issues in our relational environment. Just as we can discuss the merits and drawbacks of the rise of extra-apostolic leadership in the form of the Seventy or Seven, and the counterresponse of the Twelve or the Jerusalem elders headed by James, we can consider the ways in which our own parochial, diocesan, and national structures reflect homeostatic tendencies specific to our time and traditions, and examine both the merits and drawbacks of extra-official challenges to, and counterresponses of, recognized leadership.

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<sup>29</sup> G. G. Dess and J. C. Picken, “Changing Roles: Leadership in the Twenty-First Century,” *Organizational Dynamics* (Winter 2000): 20.

More than this, an honest recognition of the differences between the systems, separated by a vast gulf of time and culture, can provide a necessary check to the tendency on the part of many today toward analogous readings of the biblical texts. At one time or another, both “conservatives” and “liberals” (these terms themselves usually being inappropriately ripped from their ideological and theological-political contexts) have seen themselves as “Hellenists” neglected by an established leadership. Unfortunately for any group, such a clear-cut analogy cannot be supported on its own. Instead, the wisest course for all concerned might be to consider the ways in which we as individuals or groups display tendencies of *all* the various Lukan players, depending on the time and circumstance. As in sermons on the passion gospels, when we are asked to consider the ways in which we see Pilate or Peter or Judas or Jesus or the crowd in our ourselves, we can also study the Lukan stories of community governance and consider the ways in which we play the role of the Hellenists, or the Twelve, or the Seven, or James, or Paul in relation to others at any given moment. In other words, rather than pigeonholing ourselves or our opponents into one unchanging role—hero, villain, martyr—we can examine the many and complex currents in ourselves and in our interrelational encounters.

Finally, it is important to note that a systemic reading of Luke-Acts reveals not simply one, but many relational networks or systems, each of which carries its own set of perspectives on roles and interrelationships. As long as the Twelve understood the Hellenists as a separate relational network from themselves, it made perfect sense to appoint a separate group of leaders, the Seven, to be insider leaders to their separate system. In many ways, the Lukan Twelve had more in common with Palestinian non-Christian Jews living in Jerusalem and worshiping in the temple than with Hellenist followers of Christ from the Diaspora. Thus, their actions in Acts 6, as noted above, simply perpetuated their view of belonging and systemic identity.<sup>30</sup> We might well consider anew the labels and identity markers that we hold most important to us, asking ourselves honestly to which group do we belong. The answers to such inquiries might indeed clarify our own approaches to leadership, authority, stability, and change.

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Luke’s hero Paul, more than anyone else in the first century, would do all in his power to create an inclusive understanding of the Christian system (Gal. 3:28).