

### Summer Reading Assignment for Theology II: Church History

The Book of Acts tells the story of the earliest days of the Church and so provides an apt beginning for the study of church history. Over the summer, read the introduction and Acts 1-9 along with the notes and commentary printed below the text. The remainder of the book will be covered in class in August and September. Below is a set of study questions to assist students in understanding the Book of Acts and its significance for the history of the Church.

Students are to prepare responses to these questions, and be ready to hand them in for credit on the first day of class. All questions should be answered on a separate sheet of paper using complete sentences. Any direct quotations from the text, including notes, should be enclosed in quotation marks and given a proper citation.

#### Introduction to the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible:

1. According to St. Jerome, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is \_\_\_\_\_."
2. Identify and describe the four different senses of scripture.
3. What are the criteria for Biblical interpretation set forward by the Catholic Church?
4. Briefly explain what each of the following icons indicates in the textual annotations: the book, the dove, the keys.

#### Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles:

1. Who is traditionally recognized as the author of the Acts of the Apostles?
2. At approximately what date was the Book of Acts written? What evidence supports this dating of the text?
3. Why might Acts be called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit?
4. According to the introduction, what is Luke's intention in writing the Book of Acts? Why might this be significant for church history?

#### Acts 1:

1. What three significant events occurs in Acts 1 and 2 (Hint: See the outline on p. 15)? Give a brief description of each and explain why they are significant for understanding the book of Acts and Christian history?
2. Read the note on 1:8. What is the etymology of the word witness? To what Old Testament passages does this word refer? What does this reveal about the meaning of Christ's words to the apostles in this passage?

#### Acts 2:

1. What was the original meaning of the feast of Pentecost for the Jewish people? How is the new law of the Spirit related to this earlier understanding of Pentecost? Why is Pentecost especially significant in the Book of Acts?

2. Provide two examples of scriptural evidence in the Book of Acts that indicate Peter's special place among the apostles (Hint: see page 21). Explain why each example shows Peter's special role.
3. Consider the following passage from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it...This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world...is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him (CCC 816).

What does this passage suggest about the relationship between Peter and the Church in Acts and the Church as it exists today?

#### Acts 3:

1. What does the leaping of the man healed by Peter and John signify? Why is the healing of this man by the apostles important for understanding the Book of Acts?
2. What does Peter argue in his address to the people in Solomon's portico?

#### Acts 4:

1. What happens to Peter and John as a result of the healing of the lame beggar?
2. Who are the Sadducees? What is their view of the resurrection from the dead?
3. What is the significance of Peter's description of Jesus as "the stone which was rejected by the builders" in Acts 4:11? To what does this passage refer?
4. Compare the descriptions of Acts 2:43-47 with Acts 4:32-36. What do these passages reveal about life in early Christian communities?

#### Acts 5:

1. How are the actions of Ananias and Sapphira similar to or different from the descriptions of life in early Christian communities at Acts 2:43-47 and Acts 4:32-36? Why do you think that this story is included at this particular place in the Book of Acts?
2. Word study: How is the term *ekklesia* used in Greek literature? How is it used in the Greek Old Testament? How does the New Testament use the term?
3. What happens to the apostles in chapter five?

#### Acts 6:

1. Who were the Hellenist member of the Jerusalem Church? Who were the Hebrew members? What conflict arises between these groups and how is it resolved?
2. What does the phrase "laid their hands" mean in Acts 6:6? What does it indicate about the seven who are chosen to serve in Acts 6:1-7?
3. (Acts 6-7): Why is Stephen arrested? How is Luke's account of Stephen's trial and death similar to the trial and death of Jesus?

#### Acts 7-9:

1. Outline Stephen's speech to the council, making note of its main features. Considering its structure and its main points, explain why you think Luke included this speech in the Book of Acts.
2. When does Saul first appear in Acts? Why is the context of his appearance significant?
3. What does the phrase 'laid waste' mean and why is it significant to understanding Saul's attitude toward Christians?
4. What events lead Saul to change his attitude toward Christ and Christians?