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Séan P. Kealy, C.S.Sp.

# “THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE MULTITUDE OF BELIEVERS WAS ONE”

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AND THE SPIRITAN MOTTO

Séan P. Kealy, C.S.Sp.

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### Introduction

In composing the Acts of the Apostles, Luke has given us one of the most exciting books in the Bible. It is worth repeating E.J. Goodspeed’s comment:

*Where, within eighty pages, will be found such a varied series of exciting events – trials, riots, persecutions, escapes, martyrdoms, voyages, shipwreck rescues – set in that amazing panorama of the ancient world – Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Rome? And with such scenery and settings – temples, courts, prisons, deserts, ships, barracks, theater”. Has any opera such variety? A bewildering range of scenes and actions (and of speeches) passes before the eye of the historian. And in all of them he sees the providential hand that has made and guided this great movement for the salvation of mankind. (Quoted in Robert Smith’s review of Krodel’s Acts in Interpretation, July 1988, p. 302).*

*...has given us Spiritans  
our often quoted motto  
Cor Unum et Anima  
Una (One heart and one  
soul).*

The title of this article is a literal translation of Acts 4:32. *The heart and soul of the multitude of believers was one.* This has given us Spiritans our often quoted motto *Cor Unum et Anima Una* (One heart and one soul). An exploration of this text and its context in the Acts of the Apostles can bring to life again the spirit of the early church and the challenge this holds for today’s believers and especially for Spiritans.

Our text recalls the four “marks” of the Church, as highlighted in the Nicene Creed and expounded especially in Luke’s Acts. For Luke, according to John Carmody, et. al., *Exploring the New Testament*, (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1986 p. 221):

*...both assumes and forwards the notion that the Christian community has four marks that have become classical: oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Naturally, he suggests these marks appear more clearly in Acts than in the Gospel, since the Gospel is more concerned with the second phase of salvation history, where Jesus is more*

*...the community is open to all people willing to accept its message...*

*important than the Church. Still one can see even in the Gospel an assumption that the community which Jesus initiated has its center in this one Lord and his Spirit; that the community's doctrines and sacraments nurture holy life in the kingdom of grace; that the community is open to all people willing to accept its message and in fact is spreading rapidly throughout the world; and that the community derives from the twelve, the original witnesses of Jesus, who participated in the second period of salvation, when the most crucial things happened.*

### **The Augustinian Tradition**

Very little reference to Acts from the first five centuries has survived (see J. Cramer, 1838 and P. Stuehnenberg, 1987). Valuable is Chrysostom's *Homiliae in Acta* (11:1-328, P.G. 60: 13-384), fifty-five sermons preached in Constantinople, c.400, where he repeated his well-known complaint that Acts was little known in the Church:

*To many persons this Book is so little known, both it and its author, that they are not even aware that there is such a book in existence. For this reason especially I have taken this narrative for my subject, that I may draw to it such as do not know it, and not let such a treasure as this remain hidden out of sight. For, indeed, it may profit us no less than even the Gospels, so replete is it with Christian wisdom and sound doctrine especially in what is said concerning the Holy Ghost. Then let us not hastily pass by it, but examine it closely. Thus the predictions which in the Gospels Christ utters, here we may see these actually come to pass.*

*...Augustine quotes this passage more than 50 times...*

According to Francis Martin, who edited the *Ancient Christian Commentary* on Acts (Inter Varsity Press, Illinois, 2006, p. 55) our text comes from the favorite of the summaries in Acts among the early interpreters as is evident from "the sudden abundance of available commentary." Thus Augustine quotes this passage more than 50 times in his writings often "to show the binding power of love among believers as a reflection of the love of the Trinity":

*Others such as Basil and Chrysostom, reflect on the peace of mind that comes from seeing nothing as one's own or on how it is simply the truth about this present life. One can catch a glimpse of the enthusiasm of the Fathers as they contemplate Luke's description of what Christian community can*

*be. Those of one heart can be separated in body but not in affection (Fulgentius). They are as one born of the same mother (Bede). What belongs to God belongs to all (Cyprian) so they lacked nothing (Chrysostom). To show that they were willing to trample on covetousness, they laid their possessions at the Apostles' feet. They laid up treasures where there can be no loss (Arator). The spirit of Barnabas, the son of encouragement, was empowered by the Spirit of consolation (Bede).*

*Particularly important for our Spiritan text is... The Rule of St. Augustine...*

Particularly important for our Spiritan text is the tradition of St. Augustine, or more precisely *The Rule of St. Augustine* based on his own community at Hippo. There is in fact a long history of debate concerning *The Rule of St. Augustine*, which, over many centuries, proved to be adaptable at different times and places to quite a number of congregations. This development produced three basic texts; the regulations for a monastery, the Precept (for men) and Augustine's *Epistula* 211, which is addressed to women. After monastic life in N. Africa came to an end, the Rule was little used until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it was adopted by the Augustinian Canons, especially at St. Victor in Paris, a precursor of the University of Paris. Then it was used by the Dominicans, the Augustinian Hermits/Friars, the Premonstratensians, the Lateran Canons, the Servites and later by the Ursuline and Visitation nuns. It was a time when the Papacy was insisting that newly founded religious orders should be based on existing rules such as the *Rule of St. Augustine*, known for its sanity and adaptability.

*It was a time when the Papacy was insisting that newly founded religious orders should be based on existing rules...*

What is interesting is that the Rule is grounded on Gospel values and based in particular on Acts 4:32 as it insists that: "*The main purpose for your having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart*" (1:1). The community of Augustinian Canons at St. Victor in Paris were with the Cistercians expressions of a passionate 12<sup>th</sup> century evangelical awakening. However, they were not precisely a monastic order but ordained clergy, who desired to live the common life of poverty/celebrity/obedience to a superior but without withdrawal from the world. It was quite natural that, somewhat uncritically, such communities returned to the guidance of St. Augustine who, himself, probably did not compose a formal community rule. Some 36 sources and commentaries on Acts from the High Middle Ages (1100-1350) have survived but are unstudied, often fragmentary and unpublished. However, more than 150 societies follow the Augustinian Rule today with its characteristics of love and discretion, common life, authority,

*...above all, Acts wished to describe a picture of the real Christianity...*

*...an important way for talking about the life and consciousness of the Church in every age.*

abstinence and care for the sick. It is by this Parisian tradition that the Spiritan *Rule of Life* has been influenced.

### **The Background of 4:32 in Acts**

The aim of Acts was to defend the early Church against the accusation of political subversion and to show its essential unity in its world-wide mission. But above all, Acts wished to describe a picture of the real Christianity and to show how it spread from Jerusalem to Rome. The early chapters of Acts, in fact, contain some seven summary descriptions of the early Christian community (2:42-47; 4:4; 4:32-35; 5:12-16; 5:41-42; 6:7; 8:1b-3). Scholars such as G. Theissen conclude from the considerable number of *hapax legomena* involved that Luke did not formulate the summaries freely. Others came to different and even opposite conclusions.

The first summary is a somewhat idyllic Lucan composition (2:42-47) which describes their devotion to the teaching of the Apostles, to a communal way of life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. These four chief elements of early church life are an important way for talking about the life and consciousness of the Church in every age. Luke has begun Acts 2 with the Pentecost experience, then Peter's sermon explaining the events, and then a summarizing overview of the way of life of the baptized in Jerusalem. He then describes the impression which the community made on those around them. Reverential awe characterizes each, and (for the first time in Acts) miracles are worked. They lived together and held all things in common as "*they ate their food with glad and generous hearts*" (2:46). Luke describes the Jerusalem community's "*spontaneity, harmony and unity, its devotion to prayer and Temple worship*" (Fitzmyer, *Acts* p. 268). This description of glad and simple hearts, respected by all the people, is a foil to the scandal and squabble in chs.5-6. Some scholars attribute these summaries to Luke himself with 2:42-47 emphasizing the spiritual community of the believers, 4:32-35 emphasizing their material community and 5:12-16 showing how the community developed through the apostles' signs and wonders.

The brief second summary (4:4) continues the idea of increasing numbers (to about five thousand) found in 2:41.

The third summary (4:32-35) is introduced with the striking description of the believers "*one in heart and soul*" and concentrates on how their possessions are dealt with in the community, so that "*there was no one needy among them*" (cf.

*...the advice of Gamaliel  
did not save the Twelve  
from scourging.*

Dt. 15:4). It pictures the community's common ownership of material goods (see 2:42-47) "*Everything they owned was held in common*" (4:32) with an insert on testimony to the risen Christ.

The fourth summary (5:12-16), which follows the account of Ananias and Sapphira, describes the idyllic community, meeting "*with one mind*" (1:14; 2:46; 4:24) and its bulwark, the Twelve, responsible for distributing the money. It concentrates essentially on the miracle-working of the apostles and stresses their charismatic power to heal the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits. The result was that from the Patristic period until Luther, the Church considered usury to be immoral and quoted Levitical texts to prove it.

The fifth summary (5:41-42) describes how the advice of Gamaliel did not save the Twelve from scourging. Yet, they return to the community rejoicing. The community meets each day in the temple and in homes (2:46), teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Messiah (2:36, 42).

The sixth summary (6:7) uses the word *disciple*, which becomes the normal word for the increasing members of the messianic community. A surprising remark is that "*a great many priests*", despite the constant opposition from the priests (4:1, 6; 5:17, 21, 24, 27; 6:12; 7-1), became members – the Qumran Essenes were quite critical of the Jerusalem priests, who amassed money and wealth by plundering the people (1QpHab. 9:4).

The seventh summary (8:1b-3) describes the execution and burial of Stephen and the result, "*a great persecution of the church in Jerusalem,*" so that the Jerusalem Christians, especially the Hellenists, flee the city. This adversity leads to the fulfillment of 1:8, as the expelled go about preaching the word.

*...the Jerusalem  
Christians, especially the  
Hellenists, flee the city.*

**"The heart and soul of the multitude of believers was one"** (4:32).

With this generalizing summary, Luke idealizes the time of the apostles' ministry in Jerusalem, while concentrating on a community of goods as evidence of unity of heart and soul. Like the summary in Acts 2:42-47, it shows that the formation of community is one of the primary results of preaching, the gift of the Spirit which led to conversion. Some six times Luke describes the early Church in Acts as unanimous – *homothumadon* (1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). In Paul this is the goal to which the Christian community must work (Romans 15:6; 16:17-20; Phlm 17; Phil 1:27-8).

Heart and Soul are often found together in the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy 6:5 “*with all your heart and with all your soul*” (Note also Dt. 10:12; 13:4; 26:16; 30:2, 6,10, etc). Together they describe the inmost seat of the human person. The Greek phrase “*one soul*” (*mia psyche*) is found in the Septuagint translation of 1 Chronicles 12:39.

The heart, which suggests to many of us the affective life, is in Hebrew the seat of the intellect, the inside of a person in a much wider sense and the integrative center associated with wisdom (*hokmah*) and knowledge (*da’at* – Prov. 2:2; Deut. 29:4). It is the source of personality, the place of key choices and the mysterious action of God, where in fact one meets God.

Soul is the inner person separable from the body – in Hebrew it is *nephesh* and in Greek *psyche*, words which can be translated as *person* or *life*.

*The heart... is the source of personality, the place of key choices and the mysterious action of God, where in fact one meets God.*

These words bring to mind such common Greek moral proverbs about friends as “*friends have one soul*” and “*the goods of friends are common property*” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9:8,2; Cicero *De Officiis*; Plutarch *On Brotherly Love* 490 E.) Such sharing “*in common*” is mentioned by a wide variety of ancient writers, including Euripedes, Menander, Theophrastus, Martial, Cicero and Seneca. Aristotle did not accept that common ownership of property would lead to harmony. Neither did he believe that common property would be looked after properly (*Politics* 2.1.8-10).

Luke is perhaps suggesting that the early Christian community is fulfilling the ideals of both Jews and Greeks alike. Some scholars insist that phrases like “*one soul*” would remind Luke’s original readers of the idea of friendship which was prevalent at the same period in the Greco-Roman world and is found in Cicero and Pythagoras. Writings like the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas examine much further than Luke, the deeper relationship between union of heart and soul and the community of goods. Surprisingly, Luke carefully avoids describing the early Christians as *friends* and neither does Acts employ the vocabulary of love. The Essenes were described in like manner by such observers as Philo *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 85 and Josephus J.W. 2:122:

*Riches they despise, and their community of goods is truly admirable; you will not find one among them with greater property than others. They have a law that new members on*

*admission to the sect shall hand over their substance to the order, with the result that you will nowhere see either abject poverty or inordinate wealth; the individual's possessions join the single substance which belongs to all as brothers.*

*...new members on admission to the sect shall hand over their substance to the order*

In the Qumran Community Rule (1QS 6:13-22) it says that after a candidate's probationary year, his property and earnings (2 words in Acts 2:45) are to be handed over to the one in charge but not amalgamated with the goods of the community until the successful completion of a second year of probation. Community of goods was a hallmark of some Greco-Roman philosophical associations. Total community of goods is found in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* but not in the *Damascus Document*. *The Damascus Document* insists that the salary of two days a month at least, are put into the hands of the *Mebagger* (Inspector) and the judges, who will distribute it to the orphans, the needy, the poor, the dying old, the prisoner of foreign people, girls who have no protector, unmarried women who have no suitor. Luke is concerned more than the other evangelists with the rich/poor divide and both the danger of owning property and the beatitude of poverty (6:20,24; 16:13, 19-31) in both of his volumes. He interprets it in the light of Dt. 15:4 on the exclusion of poverty in Israel, as he describes the community in action. The actual phrase "*heart and soul*" is not found in pagan Greek literature but seems to be a development of the *shema*, Dt. 6:5 (LXX); also Dt. 10:12; 11:13; 13:4; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; also Jer. 32:39; Ez 11:19; 1 Chron 12:39. For some scholars the notion of sharing with those of unequal rank is rather Jewish than Greek.

*Luke is concerned more than the other evangelists with the rich/poor divide...*

**Two examples** (a positive and a negative) are given from the well-to-do in a community of more than 8,000 to show how Jesus' followers lived their ideal of one heart and soul, especially holding all things in common (Note the similar teaching in Did. 4:8 and Barn. 19:8). The first is Barnabas from Cyprus, a Levite – Luke will describe many priests (from the tribe of Levi) coming to believe in Jesus (Acts 6:7). Later Barnabas will accompany Paul as a missionary to Cyprus (Acts 13:1-4).

In the second example of Ananias and Sapphira, many readers and commentators are often shocked by the immediacy and severity of the punishment for something which was purely voluntary (Acts 5:4 and 2 Cor 9:7) in contrast to Mt. 18:15. One wonders why Peter is so harsh in not offering the pair an opportunity to repent. Can God really be like this? There is

*One wonders why Peter is so harsh...*

an allusion to the sin of Achan (Joshua 7) who kept back some of the booty which had been dedicated to Yahweh. In contrast, at Qumran (1QS 6:16-24) such property deception is severely punished, but not, however, by death. The reference to the young men recalls the word for junior members at Qumran. Ananias and Sapphira seem to have deceived the Holy Spirit and also the community with a pretense of generosity without suffering. We are told that Satan entered into Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit – here we find the first use in Acts (5:11) of the term “*Church*.” Peter recognizes the deception and denounces Ananias for lying not to human beings but to God (5:4). Yet he explicitly tells Ananias that he was not obliged to sell his property and that neither was he obliged to give any of it, whether all or in part, to the Apostles. This leads to salutary fear in the Church in contrast to the consolation which resulted from Barnabas’ action. According to Fitzmyer, if the incident “*makes us uncomfortable, it should. For one it deals with money*” and Luke of all the gospel writers gives the strongest description of the dangers of money (cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, p.320). However in Acts we no longer find the vocabulary of poor/rich but those in want (4:34) and the infirm (20:35). Further there is no program for eradicating the poverty of the masses or even slavery. According to R.E. Brown:

*According to Fitzmyer, if the incident “makes us uncomfortable, it should. For one it deals with money”...*

*No story captures better the Israelite mentality of the early community. The Twelve were meant to sit on thrones judging Israel (Lk. 22:30); here through Peter judgment is exercised on the renewed Israel. In the O.T. (Josh 7) Israel’s attempt to enter victoriously beyond Jericho into the heart of the Promised Land was frustrated because Achan had secretly hidden for himself goods that were to be dedicated to God. His deception caused God to judge that Israel had sinned and needed purification. Only when Achan was put to death and his goods burned could Israel proceed as a people who had to be perfect as God is perfect. So also the renewed Israel has been profaned by the deceptive holding back of goods which were claimed to have been contributed to the common fund (An Introduction to the New Testament, New York, Doubleday 1997, pp. 291-2).*

One interesting suggestion is that the well-known Semitic hymns in Luke – Acts, the *Magnificat* (1:46-55), the *Benedictus* (1:67-79), the *Gloria in Excelsis* (2:13-14) and the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32) were originally Jewish hymns of the Jewish Christian Anawim community so prominent in Acts 2-6. This was a community filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking prophecy (Acts 2:18). According to R.E. Brown, who concludes that

the idealism of Acts exaggerates (“all goods”), (*The Birth of the Messiah*, New York, Doubleday, 1993 p. 354n.46):

*It is not reasonable to consider these Lucan summaries as totally fictional idealization. Luke’s description of the structure and ideals of the Jerusalem community comes remarkably close to what we know of Qumran structure and ideals, and so Luke was describing a way of life that was entirely plausible in early first-century Judaism.*

*...no writer in the New Testament speaks as bluntly concerning the use of material possessions as Luke, apart from the Epistle of James.*

Nevertheless, Brown, (p. 287) in a comment on Paul’s reference to poor Christians in Jerusalem for whom he was collecting money (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 16:1-3) asks a very incisive question: “*Did such “Christian socialism” impoverish the Jerusalem community?*” Unfortunately, as scholars have pointed out, the Gospels and Acts do not contain any explicit examination of poverty. Nevertheless, no writer in the New Testament speaks as bluntly concerning the use of material possessions as Luke, apart from the Epistle of James. We do not know how long the rather idyllic life, described in Acts, lasted. In his special Lucan material, Luke suggests a two-fold attitude toward material goods; a moderate attitude of assistance to the less fortunate (Lk. 6:30; 16:1-8a) and a radical attitude recommending the absolute renunciation of all wealth (14:33; 16:13; 6:20 ff). I always find it significant that the first “row” in Acts concerns the neglect of poor widows (Acts 6:1), the type of argument which every Christian Church should have. I am surprised by the rather unsubstantiated claim of James D. G. Dunn (*Unity and Diversity In The New Testament*, Second Edition, London, SCM Press, 1990, p. 324):

*It is almost certainly written within the context of such eschatological enthusiasm that we have to understand the so-called ‘community of goods’ (Acts 2:44f; 4:32-37) – that is, not as a careless enterprise (they disposed of their capital goods, not merely their income) on the part of those who anticipated many years of evangelism ahead of them, but as a policy which disdained the needs of the present age in view of the imminent end of the present age itself.*

Rather, it seems solidly based on the teaching of Jesus as in his Jubilee vision (Lk 4:16-30) and in such texts as Lk 5:11, 28; 8:3; 9:3; 10:4, 12:21,33; 16:9, 27-31; 18:28, not to forget 1:46-55; 6:20-26; 16:19-26. In such texts, Luke directs his advice to the rich members to distance themselves from wealth in the

danger of falling away from their faith. Whereas the disciples are pictured as quarrelsome in Luke's Gospel (8:46-48; 22:24-27), in Acts they act as a unified group (2:14; 5:29; 6:2-4).

The Heidelberg scholar Gerd Theissen finds three possibilities in dealing constructively with riches in Luke: total renunciation of possession (Lk 5:11,28; 9:3; 12:22); giving away some possessions (8:1-3; 16:1ff; 19:1-10); and the communism of property in the primitive community:

*Luke wants to put not the rich, but everyone under an obligation to support one another.*

*The ethics of possession in Luke – Acts has been interpreted in different ways. Does Luke require only those in office to renounce their possessions, while others need engage only in charitable activity? Is he writing for a situation in which many people had lost their possessions as a result of persecution and is now pleading for people to share what they have? Is he formulating an appeal to the rich for donations with an exaggerated rhetoric? None of this fits his ethics of possession. Luke wants to put not the rich, but everyone under an obligation to support one another. He knows that the ideal of sharing possessions cannot be practiced without difficulty. His last statement on the topic is probably his own recommendation. Paul in his farewell speech presents himself as a positive example in saying that he works with his own hands to earn a living – and to have the means of supporting others. For it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:32-35) (Gerd Theissen, *The New Testament*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2003, pp. 116-7).*

*...the early Christian communities had different types of economic solidarity.*

Clearly for Luke, one of the main characteristics of the first ideal community on Jerusalem was a sharing of possessions, where each received according to their need. Luke aimed not only to comfort and encourage the poor but to challenge the rich with the blunt demand to provide for the needs of all in a radical redistribution of possessions. Luke was concerned to show that the teaching of Jesus was no mere ideal but also practical. The early Christians were model Christians who, when tensions arose, were practical and concretely willing to work through them without dividing (6:1-7; 10:1-11:26; 15:1-35; 21:17-26). The later chapters in Acts seem to show that such practices were not universal and perhaps did not endure. It seems evident that the early Christian communities had different types of economic solidarity. Jesus' own lack of selfishness and his concern for others was not always realized. Yet Luke insists on holding up an example of the challenge of Jesus for later generations (Lk.

18:18-30). While Jesus can be described as *absent* in Acts, yet in a very real sense he is present with his challenge throughout the whole book.

### **Conclusion: The Parable of the Lifesaving Station**

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it as a sort of club.

Fewer of the members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired life boat crews to do this work.

The mission of lifesaving was still given lip-service, but most members were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the lifesaving activities personally.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick, some had skin of a different color, some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

*Some...felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.*

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal pattern of the club.

But some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded.

*...some members insisted  
that lifesaving was their  
primary purpose...*

If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but now most of the people drown!