

Editorial

Celebrating Ten Years of this Journal, While Pondering this Pandemic

Welcome to a very special issue of the *Journal of Sociology and Christianity*! This issue celebrates the tenth birthday of this brainchild, or, if you prefer, the tenth anniversary of this marriage, or even, God willing, the second decade of this mission. It marks passage past a notable milestone in this publication's journey from a stirring vision to a maturing reality, now distinctively filling a growing need in academia. Many Christian scholarly journals have siblings that bear close familial resemblance, but *JSC* is a youthful lone child shouldering the mantle of advancing in academic journal form the long legacy of intersection between Christianity and sociology. Some of *JSC*'s life story to date is recorded by its founder, Joshua Reichard, in his contribution to this issue.

To commemorate this singular occasion, we have dispensed with the usual research articles, commentary essays, and book reviews that together comprise normal fare for this journal. We have instead called on all ten members of the *JSC* Editorial Board to offer short reflections on the intersections of Christianity and sociology in their own lives and careers, and/or reflections on what intersections they see occurring currently in scholarship or public life. What they have delivered here, organized alphabetically by last names, is a rich assortment of approaches and foci that provides readers with a glimpse of the personalities currently behind this journal. While it is informative for readers to peruse the purposes of *JSC* on the opening page of its website, and even scan the names and affiliations of the Editorial Board members listed there, it is far more instructive and even inspiring to hear from them personally. While many fine articles, essays, and book reviews have been published in *JSC* by contributors from around the world in the 2010s, these are the stewards of *JSC* taking it forward into the 2020s.

We *JSC* editors have assembled this compilation of our reflections at (what we pray will be) the peak of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. By any measure, this historical moment begs both sociological and Christian analysis. The fundamental questions of sociology include, What is the nature of a particular social phenomenon? What are the constituent elements? What are the categories and/or types? What actually happens? By what process? Under what conditions? Due to what causes, and with what consequences? This pandemic is obviously at root a physical phenomenon, a physical virus, but there clearly are

also myriad economic, political, and cultural factors—social factors—not only contributing to it and facilitating it, but driving it. For example, globalization is conventionally viewed as having three faces—the economic, the political, and the cultural—and all are plainly in play in this pandemic. How it is being transmitted, interpreted, communicated, and managed is sociological.

What might the long-term societal effects and consequences of this pandemic be? What effect will enacting socialist practices to rescue capitalist economies in crisis have for the kind of economic structures and systems that will be valued and adopted in the future? Having now witnessed how readily air pollution lifts and air quality improves in direct response to economic slowdown and travel shutdown, will we let the earth, and each other, breathe well again? Will America, the last hold-out in the Global North, come to recognize health care as a universal human right to be provided by government, instead of a commodity to be sold by private corporations for profit to only those who can afford it? Furthermore, will the very nations of the Global North who initiated and benefitted most from globalization accelerate their current withdrawal from globalization by fast-tracking their increasingly protectionist policies, simply because they have the power to do so? Will they abandon the comparatively powerless, exploited, and under-developed nations in the Global South to fend for themselves?

Culturally, will the supreme Western value of individualistic personal freedom to “live and move and have our being” as each may wish be restrained by finally recognizing that our actions do in fact affect and infect others? Will we come jointly to recognize that “my right to swing my fist ends at your nose?” Will we re-construct society on the basis of co-operation instead of competition, on mutual responsibility instead of mutual release, on long-term collective interest instead of short-term self-interest? Will we become our sibling’s keeper? Moreover, will practices of self-isolation and social distancing alter notions and practices of community? Whereas social distance has facilitated the exploitation of “others” on the other side of the world, those out of sight and therefore out of mind, could social distance become a virtue instead of vice? Might we downsize the scale of social life from the global, to the national, to the local, and thereby save the human race from the over-sized, self-destructive practices it has adopted?

We will no doubt also hear various competing Christian analyses of this pandemic. Some may simply pronounce it an “act of God.” But to what end? For what purpose? Is it test? Is it punishment? Is it call? Others will observe particular manifestations of human finiteness and fallenness in human responses, the worst of humanity manifest in the blaming, defiance, and opportunistic greed shown by some sorry souls. Still others will note the image of God in human responses, the best of humanity manifest in the empathy, compassion, and collaboration shown and practiced by many ordinary people, Christian and non-Christian alike. What all Christian observers will have in common are the reference points underlying

interpersonal and collective moral imperatives of Christian life being brought to the fore through this pandemic.

And it is precisely at that ground level of morality that Christianity and sociology intersect. It is not possible to study sociology for long before sensing a profoundly moral undertone and powerful moral imperatives implicit in much of its analysis, despite the “value-free” posture first proposed by Max Weber. Not so ironically, the sociological descriptive “is” vigorously informs the Christian prescriptive “ought,” and sociological description often also tempers otherwise hasty and trite Christian prescription. Furthermore, good prescription is often already implicit in good description; a good description is often already halfway to a good prescription. Indeed, the task of Christian prescriptive social ethics begins well only where the task of descriptive sociology ends, only when we have done our homework about social reality well. Of course, Christian moral imperatives are understood to be divinely mandated, not merely socially constructed. It is one thing to plead for certain actions because they protect and promote the well-being of society; it is quite another to insist on those same actions because God commands them. What is striking, even apart from the current pandemic, is the common call to certain social virtues that sociology and Christianity share. Pondering the potential consequences of this pandemic only accentuates them.

Therefore, the task that lies before both sociology and Christianity, as well as this journal, is not cloudy or unclear. After too many word plays on 2020 bringing 20/20 vision, may we together look to, and move into, the future with greater sociological conceptual clarity and greater Christian moral commitment. Won't you join us?

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