

EDITORIAL

The late sociologist Dr. Russell Heddendorf played a pivotal role in “calling” me into sociology and a new way of seeing. He believed that the central task before the Christian sociologist was one of identifying what he called *Hidden Threads* – points of resonance between sociological ideas (often developed outside of a faith perspective), and concepts, both manifest and latent, located within the scriptures. For Russ, the identification of a new *Hidden Thread* was exciting, and frequently represented new depth of understanding for the sociologist and student of the scriptures alike. He understood that “... sociology will, on occasion, unearth the same social principles found in Scripture” (Heddendorf, 1990, p. 10). His concern was that “... many Christians often separate the Christian principles for behavior from the sociological and lose the inherent richness and truth found in both sets of axioms. Worse, there will often be an attempt to use Christian principles to justify behavior inconsistent with either set of principles” (p. 10). As Canadian singer/songwriter Bruce Cockburn sings, “It depends on what you look at, obviously, but even more it depends on the way that you see” (Cockburn, 1991). This perspectival challenge exists on both sides of the theology/sociology coin – and, of course, a coin cannot have only one side.

This third issue (Vol. 2, No. 1) of the *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* represents an important step in this integrative effort. In this issue the journal’s voice is brought into sharper focus, and efforts toward the scholarly task of revealing Hidden Threads are evident in both explicit and implicit ways.

A compelling article by Ines W. Jindra, Robert H. Woods, Diane M. Badzinski, and Janell Paris examines the ways that conversion narratives offered by college students are influenced by factors like gender, age, religious denomination, and time passed since conversion. In their exploration they employ a variety of theoretical frameworks including Deborah Tannen’s *genderlect style theory* and a *social constructivist* perspective to guide and interpret their findings. Their research underscores the complexity of the interactions between various social factors and the ways in which people construct and understand their own conversion narratives.

Steven Mittwede develops what he calls *The Dirty Hands Dilemma* – a term which describes the tensions existing between the morality Christians profess and the way they actually get things done in the political sphere. With an engaging writing style, Mittwede identifies several important tensions, recommends ways that the Christian involved in politics might maintain integrity, and reminds us that we desperately need the “seasoning” that the person of faith might bring into the realm of dirty dealings.

Kenneth Schmidt, in an article that brings new theoretical depth to sociological insights on alienation – an increasingly salient topic in a postmodern world – develops more nuanced ways of understanding the intersection between the self and social alienation in a complex world by utilizing the neo-Thomistic approach of Jacques Maritain. Among other things, he works to rectify the omission of the spiritual element from previous sociological analyses of this topic.

In the fourth and final article, Brent Brantley draws on the mimetic theory of Rene Girard, in an effort to explain how both Christians and Muslims view hostility and manage conflicts. The word mimetics refers to imitation, and mimetic theory suggests that people desire what they see others desiring. After providing a compelling biographical sketch of Girard, to help the reader contextualize the mimetic approach, Brantley encourages the reader to understand conflicts between Christians (the West) and Muslims as rooted in mimetic rivalry. Until such conflicts are understood in this way, scapegoating and

other hostile and inflammatory engagements will continue to escalate.

The scholarly work contained in this issue calls us to reexamine the social worlds we construct and maintain. Engagement with this “prophetic” work, we hope, will encourage a godly discontent with things as they are – and instead help us envision the world as it should be, as it can be, and as it must be. It is important work. And it is in the service of this prophetic vision – a vision of a more just world – that these articles are offered for the common good.

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Works Cited

Cockburn, B. (1991). *Nothing but a burning light* [Audio Compact Disk], New York: Columbia.

Heddendorf, R. (1990). *Hidden threads: Social thought for Christians*. Dallas, TX: Probe Ministries International.