

EDITORIAL

A journal is a kind of focused conversation. The arrival of a new journal, such as JSIRS, marks the beginning of a new conversation—one which occupies new social space and which brings new and specialized perspectives to bear on contemporary issues. When a journal is well established—when it has accumulated conversational partners over a period of years—the chief task of its editors, as they work to guide the conversation and preserve and refine the journal’s tradition, is one of sorting and excluding. The chief task of a new journal’s editorial staff looks more like a hunting expedition—it involves seeking out and inviting conversational partners to the dialogue. It is with this task in mind that we, the editors of JSIRS, together with Oxford Graduate School, are delighted to welcome the Christian Sociological Society (CSS) into fraternal relationship with us. According to Dr. Paul Serwinek, editor of the CSS newsletter and a member of their steering committee, “CSS was founded in the mid-1970s by well-known sociologist, Dr. George Hillery from Virginia Tech University. He had become a Christian several years before, and only at that time had he realized that there were many sociologists who were professed Christians as he had become. Dr. Hillery felt an association of Christian sociologists would benefit from a formal organization having a newsletter that was free of dues and open to all academics. Their newsletter could then communicate with and encourage fellow members. Hillery also recognized that sociologists with a uniquely Christian background could contribute to current research by noting through their scholarship that an interpretation of some research data could be enhanced by a Christian perspective, since a strictly value-free interpretation is theoretically impossible. Since its origin, the society has grown to hundreds of members throughout the US and internationally.” The society has as its purpose the publicizing of the unique Good News proclaimed by Christ Jesus. Welcome CSS!

This issue presents two feature articles. The first, *The Role of the Catholic Church in Polish Religiosity*, by Lucyna Stetkiewicz, a lecturer at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland, examines, through the lens of secularization theory, factors contributing to religious decline among parishioners in the Catholic Church in Poland. Her comprehensive and sweeping analysis concludes that despite significant changes in Polish society, including the lure of rampant consumerism, the RCC has failed to adapt in ways that help it remain relevant and responsive to the new social problems confronting people. In short, “... the RCC in Poland behaves as if it were its own gravedigger.”

The second article, *(Re)telling the Fragmented Story of Michal*, comes from Scott Monsma, Professor of Sociology at Northwestern College in Iowa. In this fascinating piece, Monsma applies his keen sociological imagination to (re)examining the First and Second Samuel accounts of Michal, the first wife of King David. (Re)thinking these texts using approaches from the

sociology of knowledge, and challenging the reader to think about the ways in which reality is socially constructed, Monsma offers a new and decidedly more sympathetic picture of Michal in view of her love for David, his apparent indifference, and with greater attention to the role that David's struggle for political position plays in the narrative. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the tension between our desire for interpretive certainty, and our need to hold loosely to our socially constructed and finite views which position the text in some ways, but not others. Monsma challenges us to be open to multiple perspectives on contested Biblical texts, engaging them in the context of an ongoing conversation about the text.

For the first time, JSIRS is featuring a review essay written by well-respected and prolific sociologist of religion David Moberg (emeritus, Marquette). Originally presented at the 2012 conference of the Association of Christians Teaching Sociology (ACTS), Moberg offers a review of Islamic scholar Abdus Sattar Ghauri's book *Muhammad (PBAH) Foretold in the Bible by Name and Some Other Prophecies*. The review, which also references another of Ghauri's books *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice, Isaac or Ishmael*, is presented in the context of a dialogue that developed out of Moberg's review of Ghauri's book. Accordingly, the essay offers a summary of major themes of the book, a critique of the wide-flung Muslim belief indicated by its title, and an account of their interfaith dialogue. The relationship that developed between the two religious scholars shows honest reflective criticism, as well as mutual respect. We at JSIRS wish to thank Mr. Ghauri for his willingness to share this dialogue in our publication.

Two book reviews round out this issue. The first, by Dennis Hiebert (Providence University College), examines Diana Butler Bass' *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*. The second, by Sherrie Steiner (Booth University College) is a review of Dennis Hiebert's new book, *Sweet Surrender: How Cultural Mandates Shape Christian Marriage*.

We hope you find this issue both illuminating and edifying, and we thank you for reading.

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