

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS RELATED TO THE FUTURE OF CSS AND ACTS

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I have delayed responding to Editor Paul Serwinek's December 17th request for thoughts and ideas about the proposed merger of our two Christian fellowships, mainly because plans for the future should be made by the "young" (less than nonagenarian) members. The future of any group grows out of and reflects its past cultural context and its historical developments of both positive and negative experiences. As one of many persons who participated in the formation and early history of both the Christian Sociological Society (CSS) and the Association of Christians Teaching Sociology (ACTS), I'll summarize some of that background as seen through the clouded lens of incomplete recollections and imperfect memory, then pass along some of my perspectives on current challenges and future opportunities facing Christian sociologists.

Historically the roots of Christian sociology extend to diverse interests connected with the development of the discipline of sociology itself. Christianity played a significant role in the thoughts of many of its founders, as noted in the stimulating survey and analysis by Heddendorf and Vos (2010). Much of the work of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and other stars is peppered with references and reactions to the Bible, Christianity, and churches.

Another indirect but important source of sociology was the theological and philosophical work that was later labeled as "the Social Gospel." One of its main goals was to resolve "the social problem" of urban-industrial society, poverty and its accompaniments. The work of Shailer Mathews, Walter Rauschenbusch, and others overlapped considerably with sociology and contributed to its growth.

Many goals of emerging sociology and the Social Gospel characterize CSS and ACTS. In the context of ultimate ideological commitment to the Christian faith, they share the same overarching mission. Nevertheless, each had a distinctively different primary or core audience, out of which came different focal activities and purposes.

The CSS emerged gradually over several years. Prior to its emergence, sociologists who were Christians presented a variety of Christianity-related papers and research reports at

sociological meetings, many of which were then published in various journals and books. Interactions at conventions led to informal relationships with a gradually increasing number of additional sociologists who were believers in Jesus Christ. Fellowship during meeting breaks, eating meals together, communications between conventions and occasional sharing of hotel rooms in order to reduce the costs of attending strengthened our friendships.

One eventual result was the sponsorship of informal devotional gatherings for Bible reading, discussion, and prayer during annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and other sociology-related gatherings. Open to all, they were publicized by word of mouth and bulletin board notices, both of which drew the attention of additional Christians and widened the circle of acquaintanceship with other Catholics and Protestants who shared a personal faith in Christ. The prayer needs we shared included a variety of ideological, theological, emotional, organizational, and pragmatic tensions that reflected the diverse contexts in which we worked or studied. All sensed a need for mutual support that now can be interpreted as a consequence of stresses and strains associated with one or another form of minority status.

Some of those tensions were imposed by developments within mainstream sociology itself. It then (even more than now) tended to treat all wholesome concomitants and effects of religious faith as a dependent rather than independent variable, thereby rejecting all of its positive influences while assuming the negative ones (dysfunctions) were the only valid effects of religious faith and practices. During the 1930s to the 1960s there also was a widespread belief that the process of secularization was slowly but surely replacing all religion with science and education. Openly agnostic and atheistic sociologists were eager to expose the faults and stupidities of Christian institutions and personnel, ignoring all of their positive contributions to personal and societal well-being. All of those blows against the faith encouraged prejudicial discrimination against every person whose self-identity was openly "Christian," reinforced the denigration of Christian faculty members and students, pressured believers to keep their faith silent, and contributed to the desire of many Christian sociologists to meet each other for help and encouragement

Meanwhile, on evangelical Christian campuses theology played a major role. Regarding social problems, the assumption was the individualistic belief that changing persons was the only way to change society. The discipline of sociology was tainted by its historical linkages with the Social Gospel, especially through theologian Shailer Mathews who played a strong role of support for the development of sociology at the University of Chicago. In the early twentieth century the strong approval of sociology by theological liberals who believed that changing society would change individuals and solve social problems compounded the typically negative attitudes toward our relatively new academic discipline and delayed its acceptance into the curriculum. Sociological disclosures of social influences on the faith that revealed negative as well as positive consequences of established institutions and practices became additional sources of the hostility toward our discipline and helped to make us outliers on campus.

Spiritually devout Catholic sociologists faced an additional concern in the mid-twentieth century, the progressive disintegration of the American Catholic Sociological Society (ACSS). More than by any other single factor, it was reinforced and hastened by the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II that "opened the windows" for members to participate in non-Catholic professional activities and associations. Some of them feared its admirable work of relating their faith to sociology (for which I had joined the group) and their faith-based sharing at annual ACSS meetings were being swept away. Those issues were among the mostly unheralded strands of motivations that contributed to emergence of the CSS as well as to the better known evolutionary transformation of the ACSS into the Association for the Sociology of Religion in which I was elected one of the early presidents.

During the same period, the Religious Research Fellowship (of which I also was a member) evolved into the Religious Research Association, and the drive to attain academic respectability for research on religion led to formation of the interdisciplinary Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (which I joined). Alongside, within, and sometimes with others besides me among the leadership of those groups were Christians whose cooperation helped to break cracks of openness to Christianity in sociology and related disciplines and whose fellowship with each other contributed to the emergence of the CSS.

In the formal organization of the CSS one person stands out as probably the most significant individual founder: The late George Hillery, a recent convert from atheistic agnosticism who strongly felt the need for fellowship with other sociologists who were believers in Jesus Christ. He and Margaret Poloma were foremost catalysts in its formation in 1972. Meanwhile, Tom Hood was a key person behind closely related activities in the Southern Sociological Society, while Margaret, the late Larry Ingram, and I (much less!) aided with supporting roles in the Midwest Sociological Society. (Articles in archived issues of *The Christian Sociologist* and *CSS Newsletter* will reveal many other relevant events and important persons whose names I do not recall at this moment.)

We all wanted both simplicity and economy to prevail. As a result, the organizational structure was very loose, unlike other professional associations. In the desire to include and serve economically limited faculty members and students, especially those in graduate school who needed to find or strengthen Christian faith but who also were already under financial stress, there were no dues. Instead the financial support was (and remains) voluntary donations and whatever postal, phone, printing, and other services could be legitimately "robin hooded" or otherwise allocated from the academic institutions of serving members. That policy of meeting expenses continued despite the no-charge mailing of *The Christian Sociologist* (now *CSS Newsletter*) to all who wanted to be on its mailing list.

As a recognized sociological organization, the CSS soon was allowed to schedule an evening session at each annual ASA convention. Its primary focus was devotional, social, and

evangelistic, not the professional presentation of papers to share research findings. It became a medium for helping Christian sociologists meet other believers. Participants shared a variety of experiences, including overt and covert attacks against them in academia because of their Christian faith and experiences of coping with anti-intellectualism in Christian churches. Their discussions and prayers encouraged attendees to cling to their faith, to share it more effectively, and to recognize more clearly the complementary relationships between sociology, interpretations of the Bible, and living ethically as a Christian. Other sociologists who were curious about Christianity were (and are) welcomed to these open gatherings, but to my knowledge there is no record of conversions, awakening an earlier faith, or other revitalizations that may have occurred as a result.

Most CSS gatherings provided spiritual encouragement to faculty members and graduate students who felt isolated when confronted by the stigma of prejudice against Christianity or their ideological and denominational brand of the faith. They were oriented toward meeting the spiritual needs of Christians in sociology, regardless of their diverse occupational settings in mostly academic teaching and research positions. The majority worked in "secular" colleges and universities that provided little or no workplace encouragement and support for believers in the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, at best practicing various degrees of tolerance for persons who, "despite their religion," acceptably satisfied the professional requirements of employment.

Many CSS members had sociological and other colleagues who denigrated Christianity, sometimes to their face but more often to students in classrooms with the complicity of either silence or implicit support of colleagues in their own or other academic departments. The Christian faith was sometimes a subtly used reason for denial of tenure but more often a hidden basis for discrimination. Many CSS members knew few or no other academicians who openly acknowledged faith in Jesus Christ, although they sometimes discovered someone who was a church member. Keeping one's faith undercover was a practice consistent with societal pressures to either ignore religious faith or politely remove it from public awareness by keeping it private.

My own program participation was limited, although I was a member of the initial CSS steering committee for several years. Eventually I resigned from that committee, partly under pressures of other responsibilities but even more because of my personal conviction that it ought to have the "new blood" of a rotating membership. Due to economic expenses but especially the costs of time allocation for attending ASA, I have attended very few of the ASA-sited CSS meetings since my nine-year department chairmanship at Marquette University ended in 1977.

ACTS emerged out of the CSS in 1976, much as if it were a subsidiary branch. Its basic ideology of faith in Jesus Christ was the same as that of the CSS, but its primary focus of attention was centered less on devotional fellowship and evangelistic outreach and more on intellectual issues like critiquing sociological theory from a biblical perspective and coping with various pragmatic, philosophical, and institutional problems that occasionally arose in the teaching of

sociology on Christian campuses. The majority of its members were employed in evangelical and other theologically conservative Protestant liberal arts colleges in which all, or at least the vast majority, of the faculty and administration were Christians, so little direct attention was given to attacks against the Christian faith. Our personal need for explicitly Christian fellowship was largely satisfied within our professional environment as well as through other congenial personal, church, and family contexts.

Because most of the initial constituents came from small Christian colleges that typically employed only one or at most two sociologists, a common concern was both fellowship with other Christian sociologists and the desire to strengthen the role and reputation of sociology on our campuses. The late Russell Heddendorf unquestionably was the founder of ACTS. I had met Russ many years earlier through our mutual membership and activities in the interdisciplinary American Scientific Affiliation, a Christian association that deals with perspectives and issues related to the sciences and Christian faith, so I was one of his helpers. As I recall the major needs he felt, they included his desire for feedback and support for coping with actual and alleged clashes of sociological concepts and theories with theology and the Bible, the minority status of sociology on campuses like his Geneva College, and practical dilemmas of confronting interpretations of the faith that emerge from theoretical and applied sociology and its frequent misconceptions in the classroom, church, and society.

Originally ACTS was called Sociologists Teaching in Christian Colleges (STCC). Later the name was changed to Association of Christians Teaching Sociology, partly because I as one member had moved to a Jesuit university and partly because the group was open to graduate students and others who were not located in Christian colleges.

The high cost of participation in CSS meetings was an important but unheralded contributor to the emergence of ACTS. Because CSS met at ASA conventions, the cost of registration fees, hotel lodging, and travel expenses amounted to sums that frequently exceeded the entire annual travel allowance of faculty members in small colleges. They in addition usually had smaller salaries than their peers in other colleges and no research grants to help with costs as even then did a few in universities with graduate programs.

ACTS meetings lasted for two or three days in contrast to the CSS's one and a half to two hours. They almost always were held in low-cost facilities of small colleges with dining hall meals and dormitory lodging. Alongside the relatively formal papers presented in its programs were extensive opportunities for informal conversations, some of which pertained to dealing with the foibles and follies of people and groups at the extremes of the continuum of Christian faith, whether behaviorally off balance or clinging to an ideologically extreme position near either the fundamentalist or the theologically liberal end of the Christian faith continuum.

Discussions following program presentations and conversations during mealtimes, the half-day or evening tours, and occasional other special events all contributed to ACTS's role

of making and strengthening friendships. The core of regular participants became a *gemeinschaft* looking forward to the next year's gathering, sometimes with intervening interactions as well, not merely a *gesellschaft*.

Interpersonal sharing often flowed to topics related to current news about religion in society at large, interpretations of the role of religion in national or international affairs, and personal experiences and dilemmas confronted in the classroom, church, or community. Common concerns included the need for help in coping with problems Christians sometimes face because of our discipline's research or theories, ethics, investigative methods, research findings, public relations, and sociology's falsely stereotyped reputation. Some also arose from their teaching-related reference groups, including students and their parents, college administrators, and politically or theologically value oriented pressures from board members, their denomination, financial supporters of their school, pastors, fellow church members, and nuclear or extended families.

Although every context and person is unique, the sharing of successful and unsuccessful experiences in dealing with tensions and conflicts usually brought illuminating insights, information, and encouragement, all undergirded by and accompanied with biblical and devotional sharing and conversational stories that strengthened personal faith and stimulated spiritual growth. (All of that helps to explain why among my numerous memberships ACTS has been my favorite professional group to attend even after my retirement from classroom teaching in 1991.)

To summarize, CSS and ACTS originated out of overlapping yet distinctly different needs. They had clearly contrasting sets of primary constituents whose jobs presented different intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs. Most CSS members were situated in non-Christian environments and worked alongside other sociologists while hungering for explicitly Christian fellowship. In contrast, most ACTS participants were employed in sectarian Christian settings that provided daily Christian fellowship but gave little opportunity to share professional concerns with other sociologists. Neither group was exclusive, so some of us were active in both groups. They had contrasting origins, dissimilar core objectives, and therefore different programs. Functionally speaking, ACTS is similar to an academic or scholarly wing of CSS.

Although organizationally separate, CSS and ACTS have always complemented each other in many ways. Despite their differences, the ultimate purposes of both were framed within a broader calling that contains at least two major subcategories of goals: (1) Helping Christians in sociology to be faithful stewards of their abilities, education, occupation or profession, and the gifts God gives to each unique member of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:1 - 13:13) and (2) growing personally toward deeper spiritual maturity (as described and measured in Ephesians 4:11-16 and many other Bible passages, not as appraised by merely subjective personal feelings). In my opinion, neither of those two orientations and objectives should be overlooked in the future structuring of "Christian Sociology."

Plans for the future of ACTS and CSS will emerge out of their past, yet must be continually adjusted to the ever changing technological, educational, political, social, and religious conditions and contexts of human society under the rule of our never changing God. CSS and ACTS must change to fit new circumstances or else slowly succumb as a result of the refusal to adapt, for it is impossible to survive without change. (To long remain in the same position when society changes is an unrecognized form of radical change.) Of course, my report and dreams alongside shared impressions about the past by others are not and cannot become normative statements about how they ought to change or what they ought to become in the future, but they can help to reflect the foundations from which they came.

What follows are a few overlapping questions and interlocking suggestions related to possibilities for future developments of CSS and ACTS as I see them. None are criticisms of the work of their current or past leaders. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of social research can help to find answers, but waiting for the completion of investigative studies must be used only for wise reorganization, not as a tactic to forestall or prevent desirable action. To each of my comments below and to the total set can be added *et cetera* because they are only tentative examples. (Probably most already are included in ongoing deliberations, but sometimes even the best planners overlook a few obvious possibilities.)

What are the sources of the dwindling membership of CSS and reduced participation in ACTS programs? Do they include diminishing publicity, a lack of recruiting, administrative inefficiency and flaws, or other programmatic defects? Are they a demographic correlate or consequence of dwindling numbers of sociologists interested in Christianity or diminishing percentages of students majoring in sociology, especially at the graduate level? Are fewer Christians entering our profession? If so, why and with what immediate and long-term consequences for the well-being of society and Christianity? Beyond the “health” of our two associations, do they matter?

Are Christian sociologists failing to demonstrate and communicate the ways in which sociology can be a distinctly Christian calling or ministry by its own career path or an enrichment to other occupations, whether explicitly designated as Christian service or not? Has sociology lost much of its appeal to students because the internships, recruiting, and publicity for other occupations have become so much more glamorous? Does it suffer from the almost complete lack of jobs outside of teaching and research that carry a sociology label? Are high school, college, and church advisors and the youth counselors in parachurch associations ignorant of the value of sociology?

Why do so many sociologists who are Christians, including some who are very prominent in our discipline, avoid identification with and participation in ACTS and CSS? Are they unaware of them or merely too busy with other demands and invitations or too heavily engaged in research or in other organizations? Do they believe our programs, publications, and other

productions have nothing to offer them? Might some dislike the wording of the CSS Preamble written decades ago by George Hillery and a few others to express its purpose? Do they believe (rightly or wrongly) that identification as a "Christian sociologist" would damage their reputation or diminish their influence in academia or society? Would they be attracted to membership if a new association is formed to sponsor more or different activities? Interviews with samples of them would suggest a wide variety of answers reflecting ideological, theological, pragmatic, reputational, economic, institutional, labeling, and other potential variables that could be helpful far beyond membership recruitment issues.

Is the proposed merger the best solution for current problems? What are the motivations, purposes, and goals behind it? Are they chiefly an issue of "power politics" with a desire to have a stronger influence in sociological and societal frames of reference? If so, precautions must be taken to avoid the unethical anti-Christian tactics that often characterize American politics. Do they include the hope of experiencing less overt discrimination and subtle prejudice and of winning greater respect for Christian sociologists out of self-centered needs for professional reputations or prestige? To what extent are they aimed at providing more and better services to society at large, to Christians in sociology, and to Christian ministries?

The current organizational structures of CSS and ACTS are very loose. If they are replaced by a successor association, how formal should it be? Ought it adopt a constitution and bylaws that clearly designate its objectives, qualifications for membership, a board of directors and other offices with limited terms and specified duties, procedures for their appointment or election, judicial procedures for resolving any problems or disagreements that might arise in the future, financial support including membership dues, auditing of financial accounts, other checks and balances, procedures for keeping and regularly updating membership records, provisions for receiving institutional donations of space and personnel, and other features of formal associations? Will providing its expanded services require an office and an executive director or manager?

A basic boundary-establishing issue is the definitional question of who is qualified to be a member, especially if "Christian Sociology" is used as a label. Usually *sociology* is easy to define, although its breadth with at least 80 major specialties, many of which include additional subcategories that comprise their own specialized fields of knowledge, is seldom recognized. All have many relationships with Christianity. Overlapping in varying degrees with all other branches of knowledge and with nearly all activities and institutions of contemporary civilization, sociology, like theology and the Bible, touches upon all areas of human life. It can be described as an interdisciplinary discipline.

Saying that resolves the question of whether sociology's linkage with *Christian* is a misnomer. But since it is not, how broadly or narrowly should the adjective *Christian* be defined for purposes of developing the current or new Christian sociology associations? Should it include 1) only Evangelicals, Charismatics, and Pentecostals, 2) any Protestant, Catholic, Eastern

Orthodox, or other sociologist who agrees to a creed or creedal statement (although recognizing that all summaries of Christian beliefs are imperfect), 3) anyone who answers "Christian" to the question "What is your religion?," 4) all who wish to be on the mailing list, or 5) some other delimiting descriptions?

Does treating the word *Christian* as an adjective in the title imply a bias that makes objectivity or honesty in sociological teaching, research, analysis, and applications impossible? In my opinion, not so because a solid grounding in biblical faith and ethics, which are actually parts of the foundation of "the scientific method," makes us better sociologists even though that viewpoint is contrary to the biased opinions of many people outside of our faith.

At the same time, however, I am convinced that making sociology into a propagandistic tool to boost Christianity is dishonest and inevitably leads to deceptive methods that violate both biblical and scholarly ethics. Doing so distorts the alleged *Christian sociology* into a product that is not worthy of either word in that label. Reporting only data and opinions that are obviously favorable to our faith is as incredibly reprehensible as the equally dishonest anti-Christian work of card-stacking atheists and agnostics. (A possible exception occurs if and when the one-sidedness is an open and prominently stated purpose.) Our Lord, who is THE TRUTH, wants us to be honest and truthful even if we thereby reveal the unrighteousness of hypocrisies and other sins committed by his followers, none of whom is perfect (1 John 1:8-10), occurring even in their efforts to overcome evil. The Holy Spirit guides us into truthfulness (John 16:13) when we seek it with "the mind of Christ" and live in accord with his teachings and example.

What activities and services would a merger facilitate? How could it satisfy the currently unmet needs and interests of Christians in sociology? Might it also sponsor or create new resources and agencies to help Christian sociologists enrich and expand their services and outreach? How would it relate to and help other Christian ventures?

A survey of current members of CSS and participants in ACTS to discover a complete picture of their felt needs and desired goals could help to answer those and other questions. If its findings are extensive and detailed, however, they might reveal such wide-ranging and diverse interests that it could be advisable merely to improve current structures and activities without a merger or else to develop several sections within a new organization, each focused on a major category of needs, interests, or ministries, all sharing an annual convention with numerous program options serving as a feasible alternative solution.

Eventually, the new organization could become an international or global resource clearinghouse that stores and disseminates information about sociological data and its members' skills. That would make them more available not only internally, but also to organizations involved in Christian education, missions, evangelism, and social ministries. Out of its informational services might emerge a research center to support the expansion of knowledge, as well as its preservation and distribution.

Facilitating good research almost always requires access to past work on the same and similar subjects. Therefore a repository of resources in and related to "Christian Sociology" would be an achievement with tremendous long-term benefits. It would aim to collect all past, present, and future work in and related to the subject, mainly books, monographs, research reports, news releases, interviews, videos, magazine and journal articles, and similar electronically stored and print materials from worldwide sources. It would include the background and roots of Christian sociology in philosophy and theology, its forerunners' contributions, the accomplishments of Christians in sociology, their experimental programs and research projects, critiques and reviews of their work, and so very much more.

Whatever its title, that resource center would preserve thousands of publications and reports from agencies and individuals around the globe. Some on surface might appear to be outdated or superficial, yet under the impact of perennial historical cycles of "relevance," many again will become building stones for future research and planning, either despite or as a result of shifting intellectual interests, culture changes, cross-cultural comparisons, and other circumstances, if they are preserved. Relevant papers presented at programs of ACTS and other organizations, many of them later published in a wide range of outlets, would be included in that repository alongside the records of pertinent research centers and scholars worldwide, not only in the USA, and not only those that carry a sociology label.

Among the center's potential clientele are representatives of numerous other academic disciplines besides sociology and of countless organizations with practical needs. Among them, at least for some of its specialized studies, are the CCCU, denominational and parachurch executives, missionaries in hundreds of global settings and agencies, other agencies promoting or analyzing Christian scholarship in academia, and individual scholars working in fields like History, Religion, Education, Biblical Studies, Ethics, Church and State, Historical Sociology, and Applied Christianity, to mention but a few.

Among its contents will be studies of the sociological foundations of Christian agencies and practices, church and parachurch growth and decline, successes and failures of programs to apply Christian social ethics, relationships between sociology and theology, biblical social ethics, social science and Christian faith, and countless other topics. Becoming one of the most important tools serving global Christendom, it also would contribute to the education of students and the research needs of faculty and visiting scholars on its host campus.

Another service the resource center could sponsor is the compiling, indexing, and periodic updating of an annotated bibliography on and related to Christian sociology, as well as building similar reference resources for many specialized domains of Christian scholarship and service.

One response to the proposal of such a repository is to say that its purposes are already covered by the libraries of Christian colleges, universities, and a few denominations and parachurch ministries. Those indeed are essential to good scholarship and research, but they all are faced by a significant danger. Due to the necessity of their staffs to periodically screen their

holdings because of space limitations, many seldom used materials that are or appear to be out of date are discarded. It therefore is important to establish a master collection of all books, articles, monographs, news reports, and special studies by past and present Christian sociologists and others for potential uses in our own and other disciplines, especially history, philosophy, religious studies, and similar fields of knowledge. Even relatively mediocre materials often become useful at a later date, so they as well as the rest of the collection should be permanently preserved, thoroughly indexed, and made accessible to scholars, at least until they are securely digitized for preservation under techniques that will survive the perilous fluidity of technological changes in electronic hardware and software.

At that center the leaders of Christian organizations, historians, sociologists, and other scholars would gain access to current and past research reports, theological and philosophical analyses of social research on Christianity, books and essays critiquing publications that deal with Christianity, ways in which Christian values influence quantitative and qualitative sociological work, contrasts and similarities of various Christian approaches to current political, social, and cultural issues with those of other religions (how much do Jewish, Muslim, and Oriental religious presuppositions, special interests, and actions differ from those of Christians?), and such other influences on the historical development of sociology and of Christianity as the Christian Bible, theology, and sociological theories.

The modified or new association should give direct attention to mentoring young and new sociologists, encouraging more publication of research reports, dissertations, and essays, supporting the *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* (JSIRS) by feeding good manuscripts to it, helping members publish their work in it and other journals, sponsoring the clearinghouse of resources and personnel in Christian sociology, and developing tools and techniques for stimulating research that can serve Christianity.

The public relations task of Christian sociology would be improved if the merger of CSS and ACTS would result in better publicity to spread awareness of its accomplishments and value. It could do that through more regular distribution of meeting notices and other events to the newsletters of other sociological, social science, and religion associations. Reports of newsworthy program contributions and articles could be sent to the Christian News Service (CNS), Associated Press (AP), and other news syndicates in addition to major Christian periodicals like Christianity Today with its string of electronic newsletters.

Eventually, the new organization may become **a research center** to stimulate, support, sponsor, coordinate, and possibly conduct needed investigations and disseminate their results. It could help to increase and improve investigations to strengthen the influence of the Christian faith as well as those that enrich sociology and general knowledge. Members might be more likely to win funding for research projects relevant to Christianity if they are approved by one of its committees.

What kinds of activities would facilitate the development of new cooperative ventures? Our society is favorable toward systematic research, so the Christian association might become a clearinghouse to which Christian agencies can turn when they seek competent sociologists to plan, conduct, or evaluate their research. Referral services could put them in touch with sociologists who have expertise in particular methods of investigation or specified areas of knowledge, such as the religions and cultures of global society, the findings of research on marriage and the family, the effectiveness of programs to rehabilitate parolees and reduce the incidence of crime in a community, and demographic variables and church growth or decline.

There is no end to the possibilities for original research related to Christianity and sociology. With or without a new research center, Christian sociological associations could help to stimulate creative studies and to coordinate identified needs for study with persons available to conduct them. When combined with academic seminars or classes in Research Methods or other relevant subjects of our discipline, small investments in research by Christian agencies often can yield big results.

Another potential tool to promote research is the development of organizational channels for stimulating and encouraging the publication of research reports and analytical articles by Christian sociologists. Often that may call for parallel versions of reports on the same study for placement in differently presented types of printed and electronic outlets because they have differences in style, vocabulary, topical interests, and other disparities that produce wide gaps between the professional journals and publications issued primarily for scholars and the clergy, those written for Christian laity, and those aimed at popular culture. Eventually, a new association might lead to the development of one or several cooperating centers that complement and enrich each other's Christian sociology studies and research.

Conclusion: To extend Christian sociology by establishing an agency with all of the kinds of services I've mentioned would necessitate a headquarters facility fully furnished with essential equipment and qualified staff members. Usually, such an establishment is beyond the capabilities of disciplinary associations like CSS and ACTS. It requires either the resources of a large and generous membership or the administrative support of a well-established educational or research institution or a Christian agency that gleans new funding from sources outside the bounds of its normal support. Foundation grants and the establishment of a not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation with the ability to solicit IRS tax-exempt contributions and legacies from thousands of donors might be the most logical financial solution for getting started.

Where is the college, university, or Christian agency that is willing to accept the challenge of sponsoring a Christian sociology center? Who is the Christian administrator, whether a sociologist or not, who is called by our Lord "for such a time as this" and who has the necessary interests, education, experience, organizational skills or ability to develop them, willingness to accept the challenge of starting small to build large with the faith and perseverance to see the project through to its self-supporting completion?

How soon and under what circumstances will the CSS and ACTS or their successor provide the moral, spiritual, and economic support necessary to strive to accomplish such broadly sweeping purposes and goals? Identifying and coordinating small or large decentralized components at numerous locations are important steps toward implementing the challenge. They could lead to major strides of progress toward the larger end, so keep up your good work, Christian sociologists!

But now this nonagenarian had better stop dreaming and watch others do the hard work!

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