

Voices from the Margins: Contemplations on Diversity and Christianity in Social Work

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IN A DATED ARTICLE ENTITLED “SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL Work” (JSWE, Fall 2001), Scanlon and Longres suggested that “some groups are more disadvantaged than others” (p. 443). These disadvantaged groups include, but are not limited to, people from diverse populations like those of color, those who do not identify as heterosexual, those who may face physical and mental health issues, those who face communication barriers, and even those with religious beliefs and practices which may not fall within the broadest span of Christianity. Often times members of these populations are oppressed, victimized, marginalized, disenfranchised and underserved, even by those within the profession of social work as well as those within the community of Christian believers.

Both professional and religious values call us to carefully engage in a process that involves listening to their voices, speaking truth to power on their behalf, and addressing the needs of members of the aforementioned groups. Christian values, which can be found in various places through the Bible, are summarized in Luke 10:27, when Jesus said that our law requires us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Micah 6:8 notes that, as believers in God, we are required to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. These spiritual values coincide with those of our social work professional values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. The preamble to the *NASW Code of Ethics* (2017) states that the mission of the profession is to

“enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (para 1).

Yet, the existence of oppressive policies and practices in contemporary American society which negatively impact persons from diverse backgrounds suggests that we have yet to fulfill our mission in this area. Furthermore, and at the very least, the presence of such atrocities, like hate crimes against certain groups, challenges social workers to engage in dialogues amongst ourselves with members of these groups in an effort to gain greater insight into their experiences, perspectives, and needs. Finally, there is the specific challenge for Christian social workers to consider the similarities and intersections between their personal and professional journeys and those of others in the aforementioned groups.

In light of the need to consider specific intersections within groups of marginalized populations, we chose to veer from the traditional framework generally accepted by professional journals like *Social Work & Christianity* (SWC). This special reflective issue of SWC, entitled “*Voices from the Margins – Contemplations on Diversity and Christianity in Social Work*,” uses a more narrative approach as well as one that integrates traditional research with personal experiences to expand the dialogue about diversity. Authors were invited to share their personal and professional experiences related to difference and its impact on personal and/or professional growth. This issue also sought personal thoughts of how one’s Christian faith informs one’s advocacy-oriented practice on behalf of specific populations, one’s evolution in thinking surrounding diversity and difference, and experientially-based recommendations on how Christians could address the needs of a specific, diverse population.

In compiling this issue of the journal, we were able to review articles that spanned a broad spectrum of topics. While difficult to narrow the submissions, we selected articles that presented personal and professional experiences related to addressing the intent of the special issue. One unique feature of this special issue is the inclusion of poems which serve as book ends for articles that highlight the authors’ insights surrounding diversity. The articles between the poems give voice and validity to experiences related to the authors’ intersections with diversity within the academy, community, and special populations. More specifically, the authors of the articles discuss personal growth while in service, and challenge professional commitment to address variance related to gender and race, economic needs in communities, health disparities in specific geographic areas, and acceptance with marginalized groups.

It was a pleasure working collaboratively to ensure that this special issue came to fruition. Our hope is that the voices represented in the pages will challenge us to acknowledge our cultural biases, expand our advocacy

for specific marginalized groups, and accept our Christian mandate to dispel the hateful practices and policies that have disempowered groups of people from centuries ago to contemporary times.

References

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