

Editorial

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This issue of the *Journal of Religion and Health* appears in the midst of our fiftieth anniversary year of publication. The idea for this *Special Section* arose out of conversations with my immediate predecessor in the Editorship, Donald Ferrell, beginning in the fall of 2010. Given that the timing for this issue coincided with the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, it seemed an altogether appropriate occasion to share reflection in these pages having to do with this cataclysmic event. It is entitled, simply, *Remembrance: 9/11*.

This theme is also in keeping with a precedent set in the *Journal* when it published in its Spring, 2002 issue (Volume 41, Number 1) a series of articles that engaged this topic in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. In both that issue and in the current issue, authors bring a variety of voices and perspectives on the event and now in its aftermath a decade later. The authors for this *Special Section* are all invited contributors. Three are current Editorial Board members (Kathryn Madden, Claude Barbre, and Billie Pivnick), three have been among our previous contributors (Kevin Kelly, Storm Swain and co-authors Donald Owens, Danny Schieffler, and Marc Kahn), and one (Heather Cereste) is new to these pages. Each has spoken truth about 9/11 and has done so through a variety of historical and psychological points of view. They have done so with integrity and eloquence. The reader is left to ponder their efforts without editorial comment or interpretation.

In the days leading up to the writing of this *Editorial*, I found myself remembering a sentence from William Faulkner. It arose from out of the place in the mind reserved for words of meaning from long ago. It is

Between grief and nothing I will take grief.
(William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*,
Random House, New York, 1939/1995, p. 273)

It appears in *The Wild Palms* (1939). These words are taken from one who is arguably the greatest American novelist of the last century. My recollection of it at first caught me by surprise until I understood the reason for its coming to consciousness. Each of our writers in this *Special Section* shares narrative truth involving grief in its various forms and

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representations. Among them are anger, traumatic loss, sadness, guilt, restlessness, and depression. They chose to write about these things. They needed to write about them to make sure we know what they saw and had discovered in relation to 9/11. They chose grief. They did not choose to retreat back into denial or nothing.

Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton has warned about the dangers of what throughout his career from his study of the survivors of Hiroshima *Death in Life* (1967) to his current memoir *Witness to an Extreme Century* (2011) he calls “psychic numbing”. Psychic numbing can be understood as a diminished inclination or capacity to feel that is prominent among those who have individually or collectively experienced immersion in cataclysmic loss such as those who survived the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, and 9/11. Those who undergo this immersion and become subject to psychic numbing demand opportunities to witness to their experiences of grief and traumatic loss. They need to do so for both themselves and others if they are to regain a measure of psychic wholeness. Though life may never be the same for them again, it can be in some measure repaired and made less lonely. It is my hope that this issue of the *Journal* provides an opportunity for such witness.

We know that William Faulkner went down this same path as he followed his muse deep into the dark passages of his own psyche. In so doing, he grappled with the historical memory of his native Southern culture with its stain of the original sin of slavery, its suffering in the Civil War and its aftermath, and its corruption at the hands of rapacious mercantile interests. He knew this territory very well. This journey was harrowing at points and often painful for both him and his readers. Thus, Faulkner witnessed to the South, and indeed to our country, about the dangers of any distortion of history and the avoidance of engagement with primal human conflict.

I like to think with this issue and its *Special Section*, and indeed throughout the years of the *Journal's* publication, that we have done our part in telling the truth through the presentation of sound and imaginative psychological essays and more recently quantitative research. And, following William Faulkner's stern and steady example, our contributors have done the hard work of assisting all of us in choosing grief over nothing.