



September 11—Twenty Years on: A Reflection and Review

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Abstract

Over the twenty years since September 11, 2001, the *Journal of Religion and Health* has published sixteen articles and two editorials reflecting on various aspects of our reaction to the events of that morning. Within this article we review some of the various approaches authors presented regarding September 11. Other journals have approached it from their unique perspectives. Ours is the intersection of Religion and Health.

Keywords September 11 · Reflection

Introduction

As we prepared for this issue, we are experiencing COVID-19 around the world. Over four million people have died from the virus, and we are approaching 200 million who have been infected. Many feel betrayed about the lack of transparency with regard to the origins of COVID-19, similar to the sense of horror and anger in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the immediate impact felt by millions around the world.

When I was growing up one question which was regularly asked was “Where were you when you heard that President John Kennedy was assassinated?” Nearly forty years later, the question became “Where were you when you heard about the attack on the World Trade Center?” I remember it only too well. I had just arrived that morning in London from Jakarta. I was driving down Abbey Road, near the crossing made famous by the Beatles. I was listening to the BBC on the car radio. It was just before the 2 pm news [London is 5 h ahead of New York]. As the announcer indicated that the news was about to start, he stated that something unusual had

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occurred in New York and that while we were listening to the news, the newsroom would attempt to contact their New York correspondent. After the 5-min news, brief listeners began to hear the extent of what had happened; approximately 3,000 people from more than 90 countries were killed in less than an hour.

Since September 11

Since that fateful day, much has been written and more has been said. The US Government has held a commission; books have been written; articles have been penned both in the popular press and the professional journals. Since September 2001 at least two specialist disciplines have expanded or indeed been developed which clearly have an impact on our world in general and pastoral care in particular. These are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury (MI). Just searching in ATLA (American Theological Library Association) for the term PTSD produced some 296 articles¹. Continuing with a search in that database for moral injury produced 92 articles¹. In both cases, there is a stronger emphasis on COVID-19 than 9–11; reflective perhaps of the substantial number of articles now published internationally on COVID-19 in only 2 years (Carey et al., 2021).

Now twenty years later, this journal is marking the anniversary of what has become known simply as 9–11. Back in 2001, the September edition of this journal was “in-press,” so the next issue had a number of articles on 9–11. Ten years later (2011), *JORH* also featured a few articles reflecting on that anniversary. In total, thus far, *JORH* has published 16 articles, two editorials and this review, across four volumes (Volume 41, 50, 52 and 60; $n = 19$: Table 1).

Remembering the Past

So why would we wish to look back twenty years to those events on September 11? Clearly, part of the answer is attributed to George Santayana “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana, 2005).

It is not possible to discuss in detail all the articles published in *JORH* relating to 9/11. In general thematic terms, the articles can be grouped into four categories. The first focused on liturgical (Kansfield, 2002; Kelly, 2011). The second are reflective pieces (Hart, 2002; Schneider, 2002; Simon, 2002). The third group were those who tried to connect it to other events in recent history be it the assassination of President Kennedy (Halligan, 2002) or Hurricane Katrina (Owens et al., 2011). A final one focused on the chaplaincy impact especially as it applied to the temporary mortuary that needed to be established at the time (Swain, 2011a), and of course, we would now ask about whether those involved then subsequently experienced PTSD and/or a moral injury.

¹ Accessed 23 June 202.

Table 1 Journal of Religion and Health: September 9/11 publications

Author	JORH	Title
Leeming D	41 (2002)	Editorial
Halligan, F.R	41 (2002)	Remarks on September 11th, November 22nd, and Beyond
Kansfield, N.J	41 (2002)	An Order for Evening Worship, September 12, 2001
Heischman, D.R	41 (2002)	The Uncanniness of September 11th
Swain, S	41 (2002)	Ten Days Before Christmas 2001
Eng, E.L	41 (2002)	Recognizing Anxiety Disorders in the Aftermath of the World Trade Center Crisis
Hart, C	41 (2002)	The Tragedy of September 11
Leeming, M.A	41 (2002)	Remarks on Myth, Interpretation, and Violence
Moore, P	41 (2002)	True Security, September 24, 2001
Ulanov, A.B	41 (2002)	Terrorism
Schneider, B	41 (2002)	A Letter to Family and Friends, September 13, 2001, New York City
Simon, J	41 (2002)	Thoughts on September 11, 2001
Hart, C	50 (2011)	Editorial
Swain, S	50 (2011)	Chaplaincy at ground zero: presence and privilege on holy ground
Pivnick, B. A	50 (2011)	Enacting remembrance: Turning toward memorializing September 11th
Kelly, K. V	50 (2011)	Bereavement, doubt, and the loved body: A 9/11 meditation
Owens, D.P, e tal	50 (2011)	Healing and Hope in the Midst of Devastation: Reflections on Katrina in the Aftermath of September 11
Rorro, M.C	52 (2013)	Anointing 9/11
Cohen, J	60 (2021)	September 11—Twenty years on: A reflection and review

Some have overtly focused on the psychological impacts of the event such as Eng (Eng, 2002) who looked at the need to consider how anxiety became manifest after the event and in particular how carers such as clergy, chaplains, caregivers, and professional counselors reacted to the event.

One moving piece was one by Storm Swain (Swain, 2002) in a sermon she gave just before Christmas 2001. Swain juxtaposed the joy she had at a birthday party three years before on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center (with her birthday not long after the collapse of the World Trade Center) and being next to the rubble of the destroyed building and how a few, including a few firemen, celebrated her birthday with a candle and a donut. Her juxtaposition of the same day three years apart highlights how fragile our lives can be! Her text for that day was Matthew 11: 2–11 and in particular: “What in the wilderness did you go out to look at?” In those days, weeks, and months, each of us was in our own wilderness. What did we see? Did we see the evil of the perpetrators or the good of those who risked their lives to save others? It was out of these experiences that she developed a model of pastoral care grounded in theology and practice (Swain, 2011b).

One of the more unusual papers in the first issue was that by Margaret Leeming (Leeming, 2002) who tried to make sense of the events through a class she

taught on film at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Of particular note was how she used her class, and a variety of interpretations around Mohammad's Night Journey and Ascension as a way of understanding the variety of approaches in Islam which could be juxtaposed against the singular presentation of Islam in the West, especially after that momentous morning. This work is part of a wider effort to foster a more nuanced and informed engagement with Islam. While concerns about Islamic extremism endure in the face of ongoing political violence in many parts of the world, dialog between Muslims and non-Muslims that is rooted in mutual respect and understanding remains essential to promote moderation and peace.

In the days after September 11, Curtis Hart (Hart, 2002) was faced with a question that so many had during those days. The question was asked of him by a nun, Sister Regina, who challenged Hart with, "My faith has been shaken. Has your faith been shaken?" Obviously, it was not the doctrinal sort of faith but rather "less an intellectual assent to a particular creed or doctrine" but "more an affective or deeply felt reliance upon values, attitudes, and relationships that sustain and give coherence and meaning to life." And for most, their faith was at least challenged and probably shaken as well. For some, this might have been the inability to pray or meditate, and for many, it was a sense of the absence of hope, something that so many experience as part of their existential journey.

Memorializing

A question which has faced societies after catastrophic events is how society memorializes the event beyond those immediately impacted. With fewer and fewer people formally identifying in the West (at least) with organized religion, one of the challenges is finding meaningful ways to memorialize catastrophic events. For me, the first time I had to find expression for those around me was the explosion of the Shuttle just after "Lift-Off." As the hospital chaplain at St. Louis State Hospital, many who no longer viewed themselves as religious turned to me for help and guidance. I knew how to express it in faith terms, but nothing had prepared me to memorialize in a secular situation, with the additional complication of working in a hospital operated by the state with the underlying principle of the separation of church and state! The next time our society was challenged to find appropriate ways to memorialize an event was the death of Princess Diana, sometimes (at least in the UK) called the "People's Princess." Their answer, as it was also after September 11, was the sea of flowers placed before her home in Kensington Palace. It was the secularization of a traditional faith activity of flowers expressing sorrow around a death.

Ten years after 9/11, Billie Pivnick (Pivnick, 2011) offered some thoughts and reflections on that fateful time a decade earlier. I remember the televising of the memorial service at the end of October that year not far from the World Trade Center and led by the three clerics; a Catholic Cardinal, a Rabbi, and an Imam. It was the first of many interfaith led ceremonies down the years. Since then, physical

memorials have been established at all three sites—the World Trade Center; the Pentagon; and in the fields of Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

Epilogue

As we look back over the twenty years since September 11, and despite much ink devoted in this journal to the events of the time, and twenty years later, what has really changed? Just as in the days after 9/11 when parts of that world went into lockdown much of our world, at the time of writing, is also in lockdown due to COVID-19. The cause of the lockdown is different, but the divide between those who support one side (e.g., the autonomous rights of those opposed to masks/inoculation and social isolation, etcetera) and those on the other hand who support controlled measures (to prevent maleficent acts affecting the wider community), will always be at logger-heads. It seems that Santayana has been prophetic—Our worlds are still divided for we have yet to learn the lessons of history.

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