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Editorial for Theological Studies (March 2011)

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From the Editor's Desk

Recently Michael, a prospective graduate student, visited the Marquette University campus to acquaint himself with our doctoral program and to see if he could imagine himself as one of us. Ushered into my Schleiermacher seminar, he found us discussing the introduction to the *Glaubenslehre.* (Anyone who has ever attempted to read the introduction knows that it represents perhaps the most daunting 120 pages of theological literature one is ever likely to encounter.) Michael had never read *any* Schleiermacher. Nevertheless, he entered into our discussion with zest and intelligence. The students and I were amazed that he was able even to follow the discussion, let alone make helpful interventions.

Reflecting on this experience, it occurred to me that perhaps one reason Michael was able to connect with the discussion is that the underlying question in all my courses is what the material teaches us about God and ourselves. In other words, my agendum is to enhance students' grasp of theological and christological anthropology: Who is God, and who are we who believe in God and *because* we believe in God? No matter how arcane some theological material might seem, I always push this question as one that students must be interested in, both personally and professionally. This is the crucial "so what?" question, a question common to us all as human beings, and a question that arises ultimately from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We all want to know what difference learning something makes, especially ultimately. Is this material worth the exorbitant investment of time, energy, and lucre? Convince me.

At the last meeting of this journal's editorial consultants, one of our number pointedly raised this very question. In a review of articles published the previous year in this journal, she found herself disappointed because the author of a particular article had not told her why this material makes any difference to anyone's life. Of course, we can all pose this question ourselves to whatever we read. But she had a point: Authors presumably know more about the subject of their writing than most of the rest of us do, so it should not be exceptional that they explicitly pose the question of relevance. As a service to readers and to the craft, authors have something of a moral obligation to give readers the benefit of their own, presumably deeper, reflection on how their particular subject pertains to human flourishing. And surely it is the editor's responsibility to ensure that authors who publish in this journal deal effectively with this question.

Let me reflect a bit on my assertion of this attendant moral obligation. I tie it in with Teilhard's noosphere, the web of human, personal relationship that, in his eschaton, stretches around the globe, binding soul to soul (*Phenomenon of Man* 241–42). Such a noosphere implies a moral interrelationship, a moral responsibility borne by everyone, every author, and especially the theologian who purports to tell us about God and about ourselves as believing in God. Most theologians probably know this about our craft, but I find it helpful to remind myself not to leave implicit what needs to be explicit for the sake of the church. As in a composition of place when entering into prayer, I, the author, should ask myself upon taking up the quill how what I am about to write stems from and clarifies the underlying theological, christological, and pneumatological anthropology of my essay. Out of what understanding of the God-human relationship am I writing? How will this essay be different because I lead, at least implicitly, with this question? Do I want to leave my readers scratching their heads and asking, "So what?" The aim in all my courses is to help students enter into Teilhard's metaphor so that they can explicitly

embrace the interrelationality/love-responsibility that the noospheric human reality images of our Creator.

We theologians believe that theologizing is the most meaningful thing we can do. After all, we have accepted the discipline as a vocation, not to serve ourselves but to serve the church and the world. John Allen, in his December 3, 2010, post to the *National Catholic Reporter*'s online blog, exemplifies such service: "Benedict XVI has moved concern for the environment from the avant-garde of Catholic life to the center. In *Light of the World* [the pope's just-published interview with Peter Seewald], Benedict argues that the church may be the 'only hope' for the earth, because it can penetrate beyond systems and policies into the individual conscience, where choices have to be made to change the way people live." In this view, Benedict is implying that Catholics must be in the forefront of serving the needs of people and of planet Earth, which we steward and on which our life depends—and surely this service holds doubly true for professional theologians who help the Church (and the world) reflect theologically on human experience in relation to God's desire for creation. Benedict wants urgently to engage with all churches and religions in the common project of caring for our common home. But he is surely right that the Catholic Church must explicitly be among Earth's leaders in providing motivation for conversion from self-centered, self-destructive consumption to other-centered, life-giving concern for a sustainable ecology for *all*. In this he is offering an answer to perhaps the weightiest "so what?" question of our time.

Back to Schleiermacher. Known as "the father of modern theology," he has left us an enormous body of profound theological works. Schleiermacher scholars know that he produced his entire corpus not out of airy, abstract interests but out of pastoral concern—he was, after all, a pastor throughout his entire professional career. Not only did he leave us thousands of sermons, but all his academic projects originated and were executed with one pastoral question in mind: How will this project help people pray better?—the ultimate "so what?" question. How will this lecture, this learned tome, help people's piety? How will it help people know and love God better, know and love one another better, and therefore image the Creator better, so that together we can engage in creative human community rather than in self-destructive rivalry?

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Editor in Chief