Church History 80:2 (June 2011), 360–362.
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doi:10.1017/S0009640711000564

# *Editing at Duke*

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My first subscription to *Church History* was in 1965, which came about the same way many people first began receiving the journal in those days—Ray Petry, our medievalist in graduate school at Duke University, recommended that anyone who was interested join the ASCH in order to receive the journal.

Many of us had used the journal over the years of divinity school and graduate school, but we probably would not have subscribed without (1) Dr. Petry's encouragement, and (2) the fact that we could receive it free for two years as graduate students—the Society's longtime policy to encourage graduate students to affiliate with the Society.

The material inside those pale blue covers was much more interesting than the graphic design of the journal: no color, no pictures, no special features—just articles and book reviews. Of course, that is the heart of the journal today, just as it always has been. But many more features have been included over the last generation or so: illustrations in the articles, movie reviews, forum discussions, newer cover designs, and different typography. Of most importance, however, has been the broader range of articles with stress on the connections, as the new subtitle reads, between "Christianity and culture."

When the journal came to Duke, we decided to try an experiment in mutual editing, with four editors, rather than just one or two (as at the University of Chicago)—Elizabeth Clark, Hans Hillerbrand, Grant Wacker, and I. We had interesting preliminary conversations with both the folks at Chicago and the printer/publisher, Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. One of the main complaints of the graduate student assistant at Chicago concerned the tedious method of preparing the text for the printer, entering all the printing codes for italics, paragraphs, quotation marks, subheadings, and so forth. When we visited the plant in Ephrata, we discovered that they could not only convert Microsoft Word documents into publishable text (with no need for codes), but they could also bypass several stages of preparation for printing. Rather than the procedure of compositing (setting type), pasting up galleys, producing negatives, burning plates, and finally printing, they had the

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640711000564 Published online by Cambridge University Press

capability of reading the computer diskette in the print room and then printing without the previous intermediate steps.

The possibilities introduced by the capability to print illustrations also brought some interesting problems. Of course, once we let it be known that we could print illustrations, everybody started sending in scads of pictures (much of it amateur photography), some of which were only tangentially useful in supporting or furthering the thesis of the article. Many of them were of unacceptable quality for print reproduction (we began photoshopping most of them, but some were beyond restoration). Once we got on the same page with the publisher, in terms of proper resolution, acceptable quality, size, and so forth, then the most difficult task became negotiating with authors concerning how many and which illustrations could be used.

The most interesting unforeseen problem, however, was copyright permissions. I will never forget going to downtown Durham with Grant Wacker to talk with an expert in copyright law about the pictures we were using in the journal. If you think health care legislation is complicated, try to unravel some of the copyright acts. One of the more interesting cases came up within a few months of that first visit. An article about a Roman Catholic girl, who, although in a coma, was the source of many miraculous healings, included two proposed photos of the bedridden girl. When we started thinking about who to ask for permission, it became obvious that the answer was neither simple nor obvious. Was it the photographer? Was it the newspaper in which the photographs first appeared? Was it the person photographed (or in this case, her family)? In the end, if I remember rightly, we received written permission from the photographer and the newspaper, and held our breath. There were other touchy cases as well, including some authors who had acquired illustrations from Italian archives that would not respond to enquiries about permission to reproduce. In some cases, we were advised to do the best we could to solicit permissions, and if they were not forthcoming, to take that as implicit permission. (Again, hold your breath.)

Then what happens if someone does happen to sue the journal, or (in particular) the editors? That question brought up the potential need for liability insurance to protect the editors from personal law suits. Grant and Henry Bowden went around the barn several times, discussing the pros and cons. Grant has always been a worrier, as most of you know. I do not know how many times he called me between six and seven in the morning, groaning about some decision we had made in the editor's meeting the day before, saying that he had been up most of the night thinking about what he now considered to be a wrong decision. I do not know how many times I have said, that has been decided; you were there and voted for it; forget it and move on.

Reading and discussing the articles themselves was, of course, the most interesting task of the editorial board. Several principles arose that seemed

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new but, upon reflection, seemed obvious—for example, Liz Clark's insistence that any article that dealt with material in foreign languages should not cite sources in English translation. Another occasional problem was the sticky situation that arose when one of us encouraged someone to submit an article that turned out to be inadequate. Most articles, it should be noted, do result in suggestions from the editors for improvements or minor alterations—if there are too many problems, or if it is of substandard scholarship, it is very easy to reject. But if such an article is one that has been solicited, then it presents a predicament. How many times do you send it back for revision? How do you inspire someone (sometimes a senior scholar) to take the assignment seriously and spend more time bringing it up to par?

One of the minor things that fascinated (or should I say frustrated) me most was the fluctuation in the flow of book reviews—sometimes there was a glut, sometimes there was a draught. There is no way to predict when people are going to finish book reviews: no calculation based on when they received the book, or what effect the rhythms of a semester might have, or how holidays fit into the scheme—it is a total mystery. Somehow, there always manages to be some reviews, even though some unscrupulous folks commit just to get the book (without producing the review). Yes, believe it or not, there are some of those types around. And when they are your friends, it is not only very hard to write them pleading notes, but especially difficult to write that final note that to tell them, okay, no more books for you, friend. Fortunately, most people do a decent job getting a good review done in due time.

*Church History* has given us all a great deal over the years—good articles, useful reviews, even some good advertisements. It has also given some of us a chance to learn a little more than perhaps we bargained for in terms of the inner operations of such a journal. But the experience as editor was well worth the time and effort, and above all else, presumably was helpful to the scholarly life of colleagues, known and unknown, around the world.

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