

Authors respond to 'Theological Studies' report

Thomas C. Fox | Sep. 6, 2011

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The authors of an essay published in the June issue of a prestigious Catholic theological journal following a Vatican intervention say the essay underwent a peer review, though the recommendations of those peers to cut the piece eventually led to the Vatican move.

The *National Catholic Reporter* [reported in its Sept. 2 issue](#) [1] that the Vatican had pressured *Theological Studies* to publish the rebuttal essay on marriage, unedited and without undergoing normal peer review. That essay was a response to one published in the journal in 2004 in which the authors challenged official church teachings on the indissolubility of marriage.

The authors of the rebuttal article, Jesuit Fr. Peter F. Ryan and Germain Grisez issued a statement saying that *Theological Studies'* editing procedures, including the peer review, had been followed. The statement said, however, that in the process of the editing some of their key arguments were proposed to be deleted, weakening their theological positions.

NCR also reported in the Sept. 2 article that Vatican pressure on *Theological Studies* forced the journal to change editorial procedures. The journal in future issues will alert readers to articles that might not be viewed as upholding authoritative church teachings; it will also state current teaching on the particular issue when treated in the journal.

Theologians interviewed by *NCR* were critical of the Vatican interventions, which they said would undermine the credibility of the scholarly journal and lead to limiting dissent within it.

Following publication of the *NCR* article, Ryan and Grisez issued the following statement:

?When *Theological Studies*, submitting to higher authority, agreed to publish the complete and final version of the Ryan-Grisez article making the case for the absolute indissolubility of covenantal marriage, the editor requested and we provided the abstract that usually appears just before the beginning of the text. The page proofs we received, however, replaced our abstract with an unusual editor?s note: ?The article is a reply to one by Kenneth Himes and James Coriden published in our September 2004 issue. Except for minor stylistic changes, the article is published as it was received.?

?In our next note to the editor, we said: ?We?re concerned that the second sentence of what appears instead is misleading, for we did a great deal of work to respond to the criticisms proposed by the first group of readers assigned by *TS*, and we thank them in the final note of our article. If the reason for the change is to suggest that the article is being published under duress, we think it would be well to say that straightforwardly.? The editor replied: ?As to the abstract, I decided on this briefer form because what

you said in your abstract is repeated at the beginning of article, and I wanted to save space. I don't think the abstract as it stands is at all misleading.?

?What concerned us was that the editor's rejection of the first draft of the article, in May 2009, was accompanied by his ?lightly edited summary of the [three] referees' reports.? In August 2010, having received our final draft, the editor wrote: ?I am pleased to report that my editorial consultants have recommended that we publish your manuscript, but in a substantially reduced form.? That letter included comments from two referees along with the editor's proposed ?trimmed version,? from which were excised our arguments showing that much of Himes and Coriden's case is unsound and that Piet Fransen's interpretation of Trent on marriage, on which they rely, is based on false factual claims. Had *Theological Studies* not required a mandate from higher authority to publish the unexpurgated final version of our reply to Himes and Coriden, their publication of the article would have contributed to the journal's credibility as a forum for fair and thorough treatment of vital theological controversies.

?As for the quality of our scholarship, we ask only that readers of the two articles set aside the fact that higher authority had to mandate publication of the unexpurgated version of our article and judge for themselves.?

In response to the Ryan-Grisez statement, *Theological Studies*' editor in chief, Fr. David G. Schultenover, said he stands by the accuracy of the note he published before the Ryan-Grisez article. That editor's note read: ?Except for minor stylistic changes, the [marriage] article is published as it was received.?

It is not unusual for *Theological Studies* to publish a reply to an essay. Normally, however, such replies run half the length or less of the original essay. The Ryan and Grisez article, which ran the length of a full essay, became the exception.

Theological Studies has subscribers in some 90 countries. It has a Jesuit board of directors and more than a dozen editorial consultants who assist Schultenover by reading and helping to choose manuscripts. The journal typically receives some 200 unsolicited submissions yearly, of which only three dozen or so are published.

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Previous reporting:

- [Vatican pressures theology journal](#) [1], by Tom Fox

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