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Kimberly Rae Connor teaches at the University of San Francisco. She is entering her tenth and final year as editor for the Academy Series.

The Academy Series is unique among the book series sponsored by the American Academy of Religion and published by Oxford University Press as the only series devoted to publishing books that originate as dissertations. The AAR takes seriously its role in promoting the development of emerging talent and has set aside the Academy Series to feature the best and most original work emerging from graduate programs in religious studies. Since the only criteria for consideration is that a work excels in scholarship that originates as a dissertation, the range of topics eligible for Academy Series recognition is very broad and inclusive of the diversity and vitality characteristic of the field.

Forty seven titles in the series are currently in print, including fifteen published in the last decade since AAR partnered with Oxford University Press; another fifteen or so manuscripts are in various stages of review and production, indicating how attractive the series remains to professional scholars beginning their careers. A quick glance at some recent titles gives one an idea of the scope of topics chosen for Academy Series recognition. Books by series authors range from Christian classics (*The Concept of Divine Persons in Saint Gregory of Nyssa's Works* and *Paul in Israel's Story: Self and Community at the Cross*) to contemporary Buddhism (*Negotiating Race and Religion in American Buddhism: Burmese Buddhism in California*); from feminist theology (*Meeting God on the Cross: Feminist Contributions to Christology*) to ancient Islam (*Origin and Development of the Ibadi Imamate*). Series authors have explored the religious dimensions of literary writers (*Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*) and considered the relevance of neglected literary theorists (

A Theology of Criticism: Balthasar, Postmodernism, and the Catholic Imagination
); they have dived deeply into the spiritual aspects of personal and social challenges (*Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*
;
God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom
; and
The Ethics of Animal Experimentation: A Critical Analysis and Constructive Christian Proposal
) and considered the ways modern life is changing our religious practices (*Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission*
and
Coming to the Edge of the Circle: A Wiccan Initiation Ritual
).

The benefits for the editor in this scenario are substantial, ranging from the immediate pleasure of helping individuals establish their academic reputations and advance in their careers to the ongoing intellectual stimulation of participating in a larger conversation with people all over the world on topics of actual and lively concern to communities everywhere. Helping to shape conversations in the field in ways that are generative and make a lasting contribution to religious studies (and the lives of individual authors) is immensely gratifying. So, too, is encouraging and championing first-time authors, finding strategies to guide them to express their best thoughts and establish their careers through the publication of their first book. And for an educator like me who is teaching at a school without a graduate program in religious studies, reading the most recent work out of graduate school helps me to stay current and inspired by the developments in religious studies.

The main challenge for the Academy Series editor, as for most editorial positions, is identifying qualified peer readers and reminding them to fulfill their obligations. The stakes in publishing these days are very high and authors deserve to have their work reviewed in a timely manner, but often we find readers who are very recalcitrant or who make promises they find themselves simply unable to fulfill but reluctant to abandon. If nothing else, my experience with the Academy Series has strengthened my resolve to actively participate in the peer review process as long as I am an academic and to persuade my colleagues to do the same.

The demands of peer reviewing, like editing, cover a spectrum of possibilities and problems depending on many factors, including the editor's model for the job, the personality of the author, and the shape of the manuscripts. Some manuscripts arrive for publication consideration in immaculate condition, already well-revised and setting forth a compelling argument in clear prose. Others will be raw dissertations that require a substantial amount of revision before they can be sent out for review. Some authors simply want the editor to be a gatekeeper, while others want every line to be edited in every chapter. Some want

encouragement and hand-holding, yet others want a simple business relationship. Sometimes I'll have a dozen manuscripts in the pipeline; other times I'll have none. There are few consistent patterns to observe or formulas to apply as the job is as varied and idiosyncratic as the manuscripts and authors themselves. Yet for every writer, I try to adopt a job description ably set forth by prose stylist [James Thurber](#), "Editing should be a counseling rather than a collaborating task. The tendency of the writer-editor to collaborate is natural, but he should say to himself, 'How can I help this writer to say it better in his own style?' and avoid 'How can I show him how I would write it, if it were my piece?'"

This principle notwithstanding, there is one piece of advice I offer every writer, no matter how prepared. It is a simple dictum from [Isaac Bashevis Singer](#), "The waste basket is a writer's best friend." In writing, as in much of life, less is more; yet this is a difficult principle to advance among recent graduate students who have sweated to become proficient in a content area and who are almost desperate to demonstrate that ability. But as Marianne Moore advocated, "a writer is unfair to himself when he is unable to be hard on himself." When authors understand and apply the power they have to shape their language towards simplicity and clarity, the editorial task becomes especially rewarding and like a good coach I can refrain from calling the play and simply sit back and enjoy the game. Play ball!

For more information on the Academy Series and tips on how to turn your dissertation into a book or to submit a manuscript to the Series, please consult the [AAR website](#).