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Foreword

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Delight and Responsibility

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Scholars, as you may have had occasion to observe, tend to take ourselves very seriously. Yet most of us became scholars because, as children, we liked to read. Scholarship is a luxury and a privilege. To get a quick sense of this, imagine a society that had to choose between maintaining its scholars or its garbage collectors. Yes, scholarship is a luxury and a privilege. For this reason I have treasured the following quotation for many years. “All the genuine deep delight in life is in showing people the mud pies you have made: and life is at its best when we confidently recommend our mud pies to each other’s sympathetic consideration.” I had this quotation lettered and placed in my office; it offended those who took themselves very seriously. Yet delight and seriousness are not antithetical. This quotation is from J. M. Thorburn, and is quoted by the eminent twentieth century philosopher, Susanne Langer, at the end of her preface to that profoundly serious book, *Philosophy in a New Key*. Because scholarship is a luxury and a privilege, it should be engaged in with delight and responsibility.

This volume honors two teachers who exemplify delight and responsibility. The Graduate Theological Union has been blessed with the generous guidance of Judith Berling and Arthur Holder, both of them faculty members and Deans. Not knowing their respective fields in any depth, I cannot comment on the quality of their scholarship, but I commend them enthusiastically as teachers and as human beings.

From what I have observed and heard from others, both Arthur and Judith exhibit a combination of delight and seriousness in the form of great generosity of spirit. Generosity of spirit does not mean accepting shabby work, an attitude of “anything goes.” Rather, for a teacher it is located in the effort of imagining how a student’s work could be, should be, improved. Often, a gap occurs between criticizing a student’s work and suggesting how it could be strengthened. Students have often already done their best, and do not know how to bridge that gap. I have been involved in student examining committees with colleagues (not at the GTU, of course!) who point out flaws in students’ work without suggesting how the inadequacy could be addressed. Helpful suggestions are much more work for faculty than simply saying “this doesn’t fly,” and Arthur and Judith, in different fields, have in common both the ability and the generosity to act as “critical friends” to students.

Intelligence and a strong sense of humor also characterize both Arthur and Judith. In the academy, intelligence is to be assumed but — in case you haven’t noticed — a sense of humor is not. Similarly, evident pleasure in their task of teaching conveys something important to students. Learning, I think, is contagious; it is carried in the delight teachers take both in their subject and in the students with whom they work. In short, I believe that it is necessary, and sufficient, to be faithful to the “genuine deep delight in life.” Augustine, the historical author from whom I have been learning for fifty years put it this way: “Delight is, as it were, the weight of the soul. For delight orders the soul ... Where the soul’s delight is, there is its treasure” (*De musica* VI. 11.29).

Margaret R. Miles was the 5th Academic Dean and is Professor Emerita of Historical Theology at the Graduate Theological Union. Before returning to the GTU in 1996, she was Bussey Professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School, where she had taught since obtaining her Ph.D. in Systematic and Philosophical Theology from the GTU in 1977.