ESSAYS
ON
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIANSHIP

PRESENTED TO
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One way to view the last decade of theological librarianship is to see it as a time in which the impulses of the Library Development Program as well as the earlier initiatives which created the Board of Microtext and the Board of Periodical Indexing were stabilized and extended.¹ These years should not be understood as a period of consolidation. They were vigorous years, years in which the influences of these three programs were felt in virtually all the institutions of the Association of Theological Schools and in not a few colleges and universities. In this same decade the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) inaugurated two publication series and established a new indexing tool, Religion Index Two. In these years the professional specialization called theological librarianship has reached a degree of sophistication which is both due in some measure to these earlier programs and is a credit to the generation of out-
standing theological librarians whose energies and ambitions initiated these programs.

One way to view the present situation of theological librarianship is to see the profession again at the threshold of significant new endeavors. We have been ushered to this threshold, in part, by past developments in the ATLA and, in part, by emerging demands of both librarianship and theological education. Already the broad shape of these new endeavors is apparent. There are significant programs afoot to bring the bibliographical description of theological collections into the emerging national bibliographic networks, a development most appropriate given the depth of resources contained in the theological libraries. There is an emerging concern to conserve and preserve large bodies of theological literature, even entire collections, which are likely to be fundamental to present and future research. There is a concern to integrate more fully the use of theological library resources in the processes of theological education—processes which must prepare men and women for considerable self-sufficiency in the marketplace of ideas and information. There is also a discernable concern to exercise much greater stewardship in the area of collection development. Probing questions are now being asked about what material should be acquired by theological libraries as well as how much material these libraries should acquire. These are not only pragmatic questions reflecting the present concerns for budgets and stack space, they are also questions about the very nature of the Christian record which will be available for students and
scholarship in the remainder of this century and well into the next century. There are other co-
ordinates shaping this new threshold and, while the general outlines are becoming clear, there is con-
siderable discussion and uncertainty about all the details.

In a time marked by such fertile possibilities it is important to reassess the fundamental assump-
tion and strategies of our profession. The challenge of this reassessment is to understand these funda-
mentals in ways that will be instructive for the emerging agenda. That is, the new formulation of the
questions has as much to do with shaping future developments as do the answers to the questions.

One such fundamental question or reformulation of a question is the focus of this essay. Simply put,
the question is: What are the collection development obligations of the theological libraries of the
United States and Canada? What is the scope of our obligation, what are its limits? What must our
libraries do to avoid being irresponsible, what collections can we leave to other libraries--libraries
in our own countries and elsewhere in the world?

The shape of this question is deliberate. The rapidly developing networks of library cooperation are
sufficient admission of the realization that no one library can any longer collect all of the litera-
ture important for a broad area of study. In the field of religion, or more specifically theology, the
possibility of single library self-sufficiency is now simply preposterous. The only way to raise
the question of collection development is to phrase
the question in collective terms. Yet, library cooperation is not the end of our concern, but rather the means for achieving what are all too often as yet undefined common goals.

The shape of the question also admits forthrightly that there are limits to what may reasonably be expected of our North American theological libraries and these limits must be recognized squarely. On the other hand, just as surely as there are limitations there are also obligations. There are collections over which we have special custody, collections which we must not fail to acquire and preserve. On some as yet undefined larger scale of cooperation, these are collections which the international community of Christian scholars must know are in the libraries of Canada and the United States.

There are other reasons why it is important to consider this particular question at this time in the development of theological libraries. A great many of our institutions of higher learning seem to be faced with a lengthy season of static if not reduced resources. Library budgets, even acquisitions budgets, will not escape the pruning that this scarcity will occasion. This problem is compounded by the unfortunate possibility that there may be educators among us who are willing to settle for less, even substantially less in terms of scope, method, and quality rather than maintaining a vision of what is essential and then finding ways to achieve these essentials with revised approaches and new strategies.

Another quite practical reason for considering the question of collection development responsi-
bilities is suggested by the rapidly developing computer networks for resource sharing. It is probably inevitable that when a new technology or a new application of a technology is highly visible, it will draw a disproportionate amount of attention. Certainly the technology and systems which are now helping libraries to share effectively bibliographic data and resources are bringing a veritable revolution to our libraries. Yet it is urgent to ask about the nature of the collections these systems propose to share. It is possible to find ourselves using highly advanced computer technologies to access and share mediocre if not badly deficient collections—a possibility no less ludicrous than using the Concorde to deliver third-class mail.

Furthermore, we need to face directly the question of collection development in that many of our institutions of higher education seem to have an unyielding preoccupation with management and planning by objectives. All too often educational objectives are short-range if not short-sighted. Such objectives are inappropriate for library collections. Indeed, even long-range objectives, if these do not extend more than twenty years, are insufficient for library collection development. In a very real sense, we are buying today the research collections of the next century. Collection development programs which are too narrowly defined in terms of present curricula and institutional needs will almost assuredly leave a legacy of severely impoverished resources for scholars of the twenty-first century.

Thus it would seem timely, some would say urgent,
to probe again the question of the obligations and limits of collection development in North American theological libraries. The method here is to propose a typology which characterizes theological libraries in terms of their collection development objectives. That is, the typology considers libraries rather than library materials as the point of focus. As with most typologies, the purpose of this proposal is to establish a vantage point, a perspective, which may illuminate the collection development problem in ways which other approaches render less clear. This particular typology, emphasizing its shift in perspective from material to library, responds to some particular stimuli present in contemporary discussions of collection development.

The first such issue is the nature of library cooperation itself. Libraries, i.e., institutions, enter into cooperative programs. The foundations of our thinking about library cooperation must be based on reliable ways of understanding our particular institutions. Furthermore, many theological libraries have adopted collection development policies based on clearly stated objectives. It is hoped that by addressing the larger question of our aggregate collection development obligations in the terms proposed here, individual libraries may be able to correlate more easily their present statements of objectives with a larger view of our common obligations.

Again, one frequently hears of the need for some means of ranking publications in terms of priorities that may be helpful in the day to day book selection process. Indeed, not a few collection development
policies include such priority classifications. The basic and still unresolved problem with such stratifications is that the application of these priorities to any body of literature is left to the individual bibliographer, and invariably librarians will apply these classifications quite differently. The problem is compounded in cooperative collection development in that the lack of uniformity is spread across a number of libraries, creating even larger potential for serious lacunae to appear in the collections.

It therefore seems at least possible that by identifying specific types of libraries and defining these types by the literature that they should collect, the basic question faced by selection officers is constructively altered. No longer does one need to assign a priority or ascertain a level of study before ordering a book. Rather, one need only determine if a given publication fits the library objective or type of library collection which is intended. This shift changes the fundamental context in which book selection decisions are made. It focuses attention on the anticipated results of the selection process rather than on the contents or suitability of a given bibliographic unit. It permits objectives to govern practice, rather than practice to dictate results. It is the process, in one way of thinking, that produces libraries rather than mere aggregations of books.

The proposed typology has both descriptive and prescriptive elements. It is not possible, short of an exhaustive survey, to know and accurately describe the collection development policies of some 140 ATLA libraries. Yet hopefully the descriptive
elements of the typology correlate favorably with actual policies as these have been reported and discussed in seminars and meetings of the ATLA. The prescriptive elements represent only the author's view. As such, they are intended as an invitation to other viewpoints rather than a benchmark statement.

The typology identifies four categories of collection development which govern ATLA libraries. An hierarchy is not intended. Each type of library has its own objectives and each has its own role to play in the larger picture of North American theological collections. One of the clearest results of analyzing our theological libraries by means of this typology is that the interdependence of these collections is readily apparent.

I. Primary Library Collection Development (Types I and II)

Curriculum support is the fundamental objective of what is here called primary library collection development. Libraries that view their objective essentially as curriculum support intend to buy material which classroom instruction requires and material students will need for papers or independent study. Such libraries also often acquire material which instructional officers require for their own class preparation and study but exclude most of the material scholars will need in order to pursue their own research.

There is, however, a second ingredient contained in the concept of curriculum support which a primary library collection development program must take into account. At any one time, the curriculum of a
theological school is only a momentary expression of a more comprehensive theological agenda. It is the seasonal flowering of a more deeply and broadly rooted enterprise of Christian thinking and study. This is not to say that one step removed from the stated curriculum of a theological school is an enterprise embracing the whole of Christian thought and history. Rather, it is to call attention to the fact that behind a given curriculum is a particular view or understanding of the contemporary demands of Christian theology. Behind a curriculum stands a school's sense of obligation to a heritage or tradition within the broader field of Christian history. This sense of mission is expressed, albeit variously, in the several disciplines of the theological curriculum, but to the extent that these disciplines are dealing responsibly with the shape of the Christian witness in our day, there is a common mooring for the several endeavors.

A library collection development program which seeks to support an institution's curriculum must also support this expanded understanding of the curriculum. Put more simply, course syllabi and reserve reading lists can never comprise the whole of a library acquisitions program. Often the bibliography and footnotes of faculty papers will not suffice. The collection development program of a library must respond to that broader range of literature which is nurturing faculty thought and teaching.

Within this somewhat extended definition of curriculum support, it is possible to identify two types of primary library collection development.
The first, Type I, fulfills its collection development obligation by confining its acquisitions almost exclusively to North American publications. Such a library will acquire only a minimal amount of European or other foreign publishing. Where non-American materials are acquired, these materials will probably be essential research monographs from Europe, perhaps from a country or a theological tradition with which the school feels an association. A Type I library probably acquires between 800 and 1,200 monographs a year and perhaps not more than 200 or 300 journals. For the most part such a library will not have unusual resources to share with other schools in a cooperative program and is likely to be highly dependent on other libraries for both primary and secondary material.

A Type II library will share the above characteristics plus one additional feature. In its program to cover the literature essential to the current theological curriculum, it would acquire much more material published outside of North America. Such a library would probably want to add most other English language material and certainly would buy more continental European publications. Such a library might have 300 or more standing orders to monographic series, and its total acquisitions program might almost double that of a Type I library. Nevertheless, its denominational or confessional heritage would be quite clearly visible in the library collection and, while it would strike scholars as a sound working library, it would not have distinctive research capabilities.
II. Documentary Library Collection Development (Type III)

In addition to its acquisition of secondary or scholarly publications at a level appropriate for Type II, Type IV or conceivably Type I, a Type III library is involved in collecting documentary literature. Documentary literature is acquired by libraries basically to provide a record, to demonstrate or explicate contemporary thought. This definition of documentary literature has two aspects. Some literature is documentary by its very nature or purpose, e.g., minutes, reports of meetings and conferences, statistics. The other aspect of documentary literature has not to do with the nature or intent of the literature but the purpose for which libraries acquire this literature and its long-term function in research.

Theology is unusual among the humanistic disciplines in that it produces both a highly technical and learned body of literature as well as a much larger body of semi-popular and popular literature which plays an important role in the life of religious people. Almost all theological libraries acquire at least some of this non-critical literature. It is not, however, the mere acquisition of documentary literature which classifies a library as a Type III or documentary library.

A Type III library collects both kinds of documentary literature, not on a random or representative basis, but with the purpose of fully documenting some particular topic in Christian life and thought--some particular movement, era, tradition, some piece of the whole. That is, to give substance
to the concept of documentary library collection development we need a full vision of our common responsibility. It is now most difficult to escape the conclusion that United States and Canadian theological libraries must thoroughly document the religious life and thought of the denominations and constituencies which sponsor the libraries of our theological schools. Thus, a Type III or documentary library is one that in pursuit of this larger objective is actively acquiring some broad segment of non-scholarly religious literature.

Now there are several problems connected with this proposition. The first, and perhaps most important, is the patently denominational character of the documentation program proposed. It is clear that not all religious life in North America is confined to churches and organizations related to organized denominations. Yet it is also clear that a great part of our religious life has been persistently denominational, and even if this is regretted by people of ecumenical persuasion, the fact remains that the denominational structure of Christianity is going to survive into the indefinite future. This being the case, a collection development program aimed at documentation must respond to the realities as they are. Surely from this perspective the religious life and thought of the denominations must be documented in our libraries.

Even this observation raises the question of the extent of the necessary documentation. Again, it is argued here that the libraries of the theological schools that have been sponsored by these denominations surely are obliged to provide as full a docu-
mentary record of their parent organizations as possible. That would appear to be the *sine qua non* of North American documentary library collections. That is to say, whatever else we may seek to do in our collections, the documentation of religious life is to be universally expected and thereby an essential obligation. The fact that our national copyright deposit libraries are acquiring almost all of this literature should not negate this responsibility. Collecting current documentary literature is but one part of our obligation. We must also see that this literature is preserved for scholarly use well into the future. It may be assumed that over the long haul special interest groups, i.e., the ATLA and its constituent institutions, will prove better and more thoughtful custodians of this literature than the large governmentally assisted libraries. Furthermore, our theology libraries, of course, will provide a much better bibliographic if not service context in which this literature can be studied.

It is the purpose of this paper to delimit materials that our theological libraries should be collecting. There are, however, three classes of literature not mentioned here, and thereby excluded from the imperative argued for the other literature in these pages, which need special mention.

There is admittedly a large body of religious literature which could be collected for documentary purposes which would not be captured in a denominational framework. That is to say, a good deal of religious life and literature exists at the extremities of organized religion, and while this is very important literature for understanding our times,
it is not certain that a denominational framework
is able to identify and collect this material.

The real question, however, is whether or not our
theological libraries ought to make a concerted
effort to buy this literature. This is not to ask
whether or not the literature itself is important
for understanding of Christianity, but only to ask
if collecting this material is an inherent obliga-
tion of the libraries of our theological seminaries.
The suggestion here is that it is not. Our libraries
need to respond to this literature in constructive
ways, but it is not demonstrably their obligation
to collect the material systematically or compre-
hensively.

In response to this literature some libraries
may choose to collect popular religion; some
libraries may do so as an extension of their efforts
to collect mainstream denominational documentary
literature. Another response would be for ATLA
libraries to seek allies in college and university
libraries. One or more such institutions may well
have an interest in collecting this literature,
especially if these institutions know that their
collections will not be competing with theological
collections and yet will fit a larger framework of
cooperative collection development. Surely the
theological libraries must exercise a concern for
this literature as diligent as they exercise for
the material they are collecting.

Manuscript material, while an exceedingly impor-
tant source of documentation, has not been mentioned
in these pages. To be sure, many theological
libraries are actively gathering and organizing
manuscript collections. The problems connected with manuscript collections, however, are sufficiently specialized to merit a discussion far more complete than is possible here. The work of denominational historical societies must be taken into account as well as state and even local historical collections. What is clear is that theological libraries must increase their stewardship regarding manuscript material even if this means encouraging other denominational instrumentalities to undertake this work. Yet by the very nature of manuscript material, it is likely that more and more of our theological libraries will need to undertake special programs to acquire, organize, and preserve manuscripts.

The documentary record for churches and religious life outside of North America raises an unusually difficult issue for our theological libraries. Considering the extent of the Christian community in Europe and in Asia and particularly the growth of Christianity in Africa, the preoccupation of North American theological libraries with literature published on this side of the oceans seems almost irresponsible. Yet we must ask what may reasonably be expected of our collection development in this regard.

In the first instance it is helpful to make a distinction between the documents of recognized church and ecumenical bodies and the semi-popular literature which sustains the religious life of Christians in other countries.\(^5\) Put this way it seems reasonable to expect that the ATLA libraries would be able cooperatively to collect the official documentation of foreign church bodies. Again, this
may very well be done on denominational lines and certainly cooperatively among the several schools of the same denomination. In essence, what is needed is a concerted program within our theological libraries to assure that the official records, reports, study documents and periodical publications of almost all of the world's churches are collected somewhere in the North American libraries. As ambitious (and perhaps naive) as this sounds, it would seem to be a minimal expectation in a time when Christianity is rapidly becoming more influential in the countries of the younger churches than it is in Europe and in the Americas.

Beyond this official leave of documentation, however, it is doubtful whether our libraries can provide much other systematic coverage. Individual libraries may choose to cultivate special interests, and to the extent that these acquisitions are reported in the national bibliographic networks, they will enrich our total available resources. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our North American libraries will simply not be able to document current popular religious life on the other continents.

III. Research Library Collection Development
(Type IV)

It is most unfortunate that, in American librarianship, the designation "research library" has become a coveted symbol of prestige rather than a somewhat onerous assignment of an unusual and often burdensome obligation. Furthermore, in a steadfast reluctance to address serious issues of quality, American librarianship has almost unilaterally associated research
libraries with collections of a certain size and rate of growth. Size and rate of acquisition do have something to do with the research which libraries may sustain, but only as these factors relate to available material and the depth of coverage required.

In the realm of theological libraries, a research library (Type IV) may be considered a special type of documentary library. That is, a research library is one which intends to acquire the scholarly literature essential to the history and development of all branches of Christian thought without regard to language, date, country of origin, and theological or denominational perspective. Practical limits, of course, govern each of these aspects, but as far as intention is concerned this type of library has nearly universal scope. This intention should not be taken to mean that such a research library is attempting to buy all of Christian literature. Exhaustiveness is not part of the definition for a research library. Rather, the focus is on acquiring the scholarly literature which has defined and is shaping Christian thought. This is by no means an easy agenda to pursue, and the officers of research libraries uniformly express considerable consternation about the nature and success of their endeavors. Nevertheless, this type of collecting is necessary for the well-being of Christian theology, and it is a role that some theological libraries in North America must fill. No university library or, for that matter, national library can or will attempt to undertake this obligation. If some of our theological
libraries do not do it, the whole future of Christian theology and understanding will suffer adversely.

IV. Uses of This Typology

As mentioned at the outset of this essay, our purpose was to reformulate the basic question of collection development in our theological libraries in a way that would help these libraries respond to the numerous challenges at hand in a truly thoughtful and responsible fashion. More specifically, it is hoped that this typology might help individual libraries identify more clearly their own role and obligation in the larger picture of theological collections in the United States and Canada. A close corollary of this expectation is the hope that the typology will prove of value to bibliographers and book selection officers as they make their day to day decisions. Here, the premise, again stated, is that a clearer view of the end result of book selection activity may be a better way to inform the day to day decisions that must be made rather than a classification or ranking of the materials themselves.

Another purpose of this typology may be to call our several theological libraries to an enlarged sense of responsibility for bodies of literature which are currently not adequately represented in our collections. Indeed, the call is not so much for an enlarged sense of responsibility for a body of literature as it is a call for a sense of responsibility to the international community of Christian scholars and theological schools. That is, when one seriously thinks of the international dimension of Christianity and particularly of the responsibility
of the American libraries within this international context, it becomes clearer that our prime obligation is to make sure that the literature reflecting our own religious life is systematically acquired and preserved.

It is hoped that this typology will demonstrate even more clearly than has previously been the case the areas in which cooperative library activity is needed. Certainly at the outer reaches of current library cooperation we can begin now to see the fact that almost all of our theological libraries are interconnected not only in their dependence on each others' collections, but also in their common goal of building an international research resource.

Finally, it is hoped that this essay will bring some measure of honor to the person whose celebration has occasioned its writing. Calvin Schmitt is an esteemed friend and counselor--a colleague with whom it has always been possible and fruitful to discuss the persistently difficult question of theological education and theological librarianship. It is a privilege to join his many friends and colleagues in offering him thanks, congratulations, and birkat Yahweh.

NOTES

1. The Sealantic Fund generously supported all three of these programs.

2. This essay consistently focuses on the theological libraries of the United States and Canada. Most of the individual members and all of the institutional members of the American Theological Library Association are from these two countries. Also, the focus is on the problems of Christian theology. This is not to imply that the problems
for other traditions are less significant, but only to recognize that the author has no basis in experience or training to address the questions faced by these traditions.

3. The "Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies" of the Resources and Technical Services Division of ALA define five levels of "collection densities": comprehensive, research, study, basic and minimal. See Library Resources and Technical Services 21 (1977): 40-47.

4. I have discussed this distinction as well as other aspects of collecting documentary literature at length in the paper, "Documenting Christianity: Towards a Cooperative Library Collection Development Program," read at the 1978 Annual ATLA Conference, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and forthcoming in print in the proceedings of that conference.

5. See note 4 above.