Chapter 3

ROLES OF THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Introduction

Libraries play particular and essential roles in theological education. In fulfilling these roles, libraries not only serve theological education in its localized institutional dimensions, but also serve the churches apart from their seminaries, secular learning, and general cultural understanding. It is unlikely that theological libraries will play roles in the future envisioned by this project that differ substantially from the roles they now play and have played in the past. Yet educational styles will change; procedures, technologies, and delivery systems will change; and the media acquired and serviced by libraries will expand. These changes will modify and enlarge the roles played by theological libraries.

This chapter looks first at those essential and primary roles which libraries serve, however well, in all theological schools. The second section of this chapter considers certain roles which the theological libraries fulfill collectively and then considers ways in which these roles will be modified in a future marked by rapid technological innovation.

Primary Roles of Theological Libraries

There are five fundamental roles played by theological libraries.

1. Libraries represent the tradition of theological thought and religious practice.
2. Libraries reflect the intellectual and cultural pluralism of theological inquiry.
3. Libraries extend the instructional curriculum of the seminaries.
4. Libraries shape new knowledge.
5. Libraries teach students and eventual ministers patterns, resourcefulness, and skills for life long continuing professional education.

These roles are not altogether distinct—on a day to day basis most libraries fulfill them almost interchangeably. These roles may
even appear to be differences of emphasis and perspective within an unified and comprehensive understanding of a theological library. Yet it is helpful to clarify these respective roles in order to see more clearly their interrelationships.

Representing the Tradition

The first role of the theological library is to give students in the here and now deliberate access to the thought and recorded activity of people in other places and of earlier times. Admittedly this access is restricted by the considerable accident of the survival of ancient texts and the conventions of typography and book production. Nevertheless we have yet to devise a more effective, commodious or universal means of placing the present in thoughtful communication with people of distant times. Now, of course, non-print media and, increasingly, electronic media are playing a major role in theological education and the transmission of religious understanding. Theology as a reflective activity with a certain passion for the historical community of Christian faith cannot survive without this communication and, correlative, neither can education which is theological. These observations are not meant to be soft-minded or nostalgic. There is a toughness, even abrasiveness, about the fact that the Christian past will not let go of its present and that its present is both international and inter-confessional.

The library is that agency of a seminary which grounds theological education in these dimensions of religious experience. Practically and strategically no other instrumentality of an educational institution can fulfill this role with equal competence and persistence. There is an historical tradition of theology as a discipline which should be represented, in varying degrees of fullness,

---

22 There appears to have been significant growth in theological library holdings of these media over the past decade although the means of reporting this growth are not well refined. Throughout this report library materials must be understood to include these important non-print resources.

Roles of Theological Libraries

in every theological library. This tradition contains the texts and commentaries which continue to receive major discussion in current theological discourse.\(^\text{24}\)

Of course, how each seminary conceives of this tradition depends in some measure on its own confessional or theological heritage, and it is important for each seminary to shape its library collection by this heritage. Yet the common heritage of Christian thought and at least part of the diverse richness of a particular tradition should be accessible in each school. The quality of a theological library will be determined in part by the fullness of the religious tradition represented in its holdings.

The focus here, however, is on the representational role of the theological library, specifically its role as representative of the past. The difficulty in clarifying the library's role in this regard is precisely the difficulty in understanding the relation between the treasure of a past religious tradition and contemporary theological work.\(^\text{25}\) It is not that the entire past is fully present or useful to contemporary theology, but that there is a certain unpredictability about which currents of the past are, and how they are, important for the modern task. What is certain, and this by way of description rather than prescription, is the dialectic between the present community of believers and past communities of believers will continue to be at the heart of theological education.

Preserving the Fullness of Religious Life

The second role of a theological library is to preserve a proper dimension of diversity to the intellectual ethos of the theological school, that is to assure the intellectual pluralism manifestly present in the history of theological reflection. This is unavoidable if a

\(^{24}\) A certain consensus on this point lay at the heart of the Library Development Program (see p. 21). What was remarkable in this program was the readiness with which some eighty theological schools embarked on collection enrichment around a common bibliographic source, *The Theological Booklist*, edited by Raymond P. Morris, (Theological Education Fund, 1960).

\(^{25}\) A terse, but helpful statement of this problem is offered by John Yoder in his response to Robert N. Bellah, "Discerning Old and New Imperatives in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 19:7-29 (1982). See 30-35 for Yoder's "Response."
library presents the historical texts of a theological tradition with a sense of objectivity. Libraries maintain in a community of scholars those texts and the significant commentaries on those texts that have shaped and are now shaping theological thought. It is the nature and provenance of those texts which assures the pluralism at issue here. Nevertheless, apart from the accidental diversity which an historically conditioned collection will produce, there is an intentional role served by libraries to bring balance and an appropriate catholicity to a seminary. Even schools with a determined confessional posture should expect their libraries to hold literature from the wider oikumene of theological reflection and religious practice.

Similarly, libraries are often found to hold literature of movements and topics before they make their presence felt in the curriculum or the faculty. It is not uncommon for schools to discover that their libraries are already well prepared to support the study and teaching of emerging topics or new specializations before curricular developments in the field were effected. This often is true for current documentation as well as for historical materials. Libraries probably are the most interconfessional and transdenominational component of a seminary. This is an essential role for libraries to serve and a role they are well equipped to serve.

Supporting the Curriculum

In practical terms the two library roles already discussed support the overall curriculum of a seminary. Furthermore, these two roles complement each other. Collections which give a school grounding in the historical texts are built with a certain view of central theological concerns within the wider stream of Christian tradition. Collections which intend to document the diversity of religious life, if they are developed over time, more and more approximate collections built on the historical and contextual model.

In recent years, however, the library role of serving the programs of an institution has taken on a somewhat narrow and restrictive connotation. Some institutions have viewed the library as a supporter of the curriculum primarily as a learning resource
 Roles of Theological Libraries

center. The focus of such a library often is not on the tradition itself or on the diverse expressions of theological inquiry but on the immediate documentation needs of the curriculum. A library operating in such a mode is supporting the programs of the school but more in terms of a scaffold than a sturdy foundation. This is a less than sufficient understanding of curriculum support, an understanding which should not be encouraged as a primary or exclusive goal of library development.

A library supports the curriculum both by providing the documentary foundation for theological teaching and study and by extending the curriculum. This extension takes place in several ways. A library extends the range of topics which a student, indeed a faculty member, may study. Whereas the schedule of classes offered by a school is aimed at general needs, library resources may support individual interests even if these be narrow or highly specialized. The library also sustains much more intensive and exhaustive study of certain topics. It is fully possible, indeed perhaps necessary or even preferable, for some schools to offer primary instruction in selected fields essentially on the basis of library resources. Some schools may the better respond to emerging educational trends by relying more on libraries and less on incremental faculty appointments.

Libraries support and extend the curriculum of a school in another important way. Persons using a library even in a careless or naive way learn something about utilizing the resources of a library. Used properly, libraries teach highly useful research methods. To facilitate this use, many schools offer students and faculty bibliographic instruction and administrators apparently want their libraries used ever more effectively. While much of this bibliographic instruction is focused primarily on assisting students in their work as students, full instruction in the use of a library should concentrate on the informational and study needs of persons engaged in professional practice. Much seminary teaching is conducted on the basis of common reading of prescribed texts, but surely this is not the manner in which study and learning in ministry takes place. Thus the library leads the teaching cur-

26 Carroll, 112, 118.
riculum in inculcating methods, techniques, and patterns for self-reliant continuing education. The emphasis must be precisely on independence, self-reliance, and continuity.

Such preparation for life-long learning for service in the ministry must pervade a seminary curriculum and may not be based exclusively in the library. Yet a certain practical wisdom indicates that the library and its staff must be active partners in this preparation. Librarians increasingly will be well prepared to provide leadership to faculty as well as students in the complex enterprises of information and document access. Locating and exploiting documentary and informational sources is learned by guided experience. This learning also is progressive—each satisfactory experience prepares one for a more advanced undertaking. Library personnel should be highly qualified to assist this type of professional education. This is a valued ingredient in the library's role of supporting and extending the curriculum of a seminary.

**Shaping New Knowledge**

A critically important role of the theological library is to sustain research and to shape new knowledge. New knowledge, of course, does not come only from diligent study of new or hitherto unstudied texts, nor is it being suggested that the accumulation of these sources necessarily produces such knowledge. What is at issue here is that research is the most effective means of generating fresh insight and new knowledge; in addition for theology, as for the humanistic disciplines generally, texts form the foundation of research. To fulfill this role some theological research libraries have acquired unusually rich and detailed collections. Research libraries have attempted to provide comprehensive documentation of important authors, topics, and chronological periods. Rare books, tracts, and early as well as scarce periodicals have been collected. Variant editions, minor authors, manuscripts, highly ephemeral sources of all types also have been preserved. The non-print media now being generated and actively acquired by some libraries will be important research sources in the future. The imaginative and energetic gathering of all of these sources constitutes an essential ingredient of research and is a role that at least
Roles of Theological Libraries

some theological libraries must fulfill if theology itself is not to atrophy.

Summary of Primary Roles of Theological Libraries

In summary, libraries serve several essential roles in theological education. These roles include

1. grounding an institution in the Christian tradition by keeping before the school the texts of fundamental importance in religious thought;
2. maintaining the fullness and diversity of religious thought and life in the work of a given school;
3. sustaining the teaching curriculum of the seminary by extending the range and scope of topics which may be studied in a school;
4. preparing students for continuing professional education; and
5. providing the research resources which may nurture new understanding and new knowledge.

Even to identify these roles is to suggest a simplification of the ways in which libraries actually fulfill these roles. In practice the boundaries between these roles are blurred. There is a symbiosis between these roles to such an extent that most scholars take the interaction between them as axiomatic. They are isolated here so that their particular focus, their particular contribution to theological education, may be understood.

Collective Roles of Theological Libraries

Theological libraries fulfill these primary roles individually and locally, over the past several years they frequently have done so in cooperation with other libraries, but these primary roles

97 Ninety-five schools (65%) report that they are part of at least one cooperative library program. (See tabulation of questions 36 and 27 in Chapter 8 and Appendix A. All subsequent references to our survey results will cite the appropriate question.)
have collective dimensions as well. The collective dimensions of theological library service grow out of local library resources and services. But the relationship between local library functions, even those local library functions which are being cultivated by means of library cooperation, and the collective roles is not well understood. The importance of these collective roles will become the dominant factor in library development in the next two decades.

The collective dimensions of theological library service have to do primarily with collections and resource development. Institutions develop library resources to support their own educational and research programs. That these resources may benefit scholars or programs in other institutions is accidental, although unavoidably and benevolently so. Simply illustrated, by adding to the book collection which serves a given institution, a library also is acquiring some part of the total library resource available for study in North America. Preserving, for example through microfilm, a badly deteriorated nineteenth century treatise needed by a local doctoral student assures the availability of that title for all students. When this collecting or preserving activity is reported in the common and widely accessible bibliographic systems it becomes, de facto a collective resource.

Institutions also exhibit a certain pride of ownership which in the case of libraries is exhibited when a library acquires a book or manuscript of unusual value or rarity and which will be of interest to a great many scholars outside of the given institution. Underneath this pride of ownership is a self-interest which wants the scholars of that institution to have access to the best materials covering the widest range of topics. Great library collections are the result of this benevolent self-interest cultivated over many decades. The local institutional aspect of the library's activity is highly visible, indeed, self-apparent. The second aspect of library resource development usually is accidental and seldom represents a self-conscious decision or strategy. Except from a few and infrequent vantage points, it is almost invisible.

The unintentional, accidental, and faintly visible features of this phenomenon should not obscure its importance. The pressures since 1901 which, for example, have created the National Union Catalog of Books in the US and Canada tacitly recognize that the
aggregate of library collections in North America is something greater than the sum of their several parts. Likewise, one of the driving forces in the development of large computer based bibliographic systems is the realization that each item in each library is part of a greater whole which can and should be available to the benefit of any qualified scholar. That this perception has taken hold of academic librarianship generally should serve only to heighten its importance for those institutions intensely committed to the transmission of religious faith.

Neither should the accidental and faintly visible nature of this collective responsibility obscure the possibility of an appropriate coordination of effort. It is crucial to keep this collective perspective sharply focused. The challenge of theological library development in the next two decades is to bring a measure of intention and purpose to this collective enterprise. That local library resources are a part of a larger reservoir of documentation has always been the case whether or not the fact has been properly understood. What is now at issue is to cultivate ways in which an inescapable phenomenon may be planned or coordinated, at least among willing institutions, to achieve a goal of greater benefit and higher quality than accident may achieve. As difficult as it may be, our schools need to find ways to delineate and clarify these collective results so that they might properly inform local library development. For what is certain is that the collective good is only nourished by local strength. What gives collective library resources value is not the pooling of weakness but the sharing of complementary strength.

Libraries and Life-Long Education for Ministry

A special role which libraries serve locally and collectively is to support continuing education. Libraries, including theological libraries, have long played an active role in extension education.28

28 Two special instances of long-standing are the Zion Research Library (Boston), founded in 1920, and the Kesler Circulating Library for Rural Ministers (Nashville), founded in 1936. Both of these libraries offered specialized mail services to accommodate persons who did not have access to theological library resources and the Kesler Library continues to do so.
There is, however, renewed interest in this function of libraries spawned in good measure by two primary factors, (1) significant advances in electronic communications, and (2) the growing need for extension education both for clergy and laity. Because of this renewed interest, the dramatic impact of computers on communications generally, and the substantial contribution computers already are making in the theological libraries, this role needs amplification and clarification.

Computers are heavily used in theological schools for such applications as basic accounting and payroll and they also are heavily used for library bibliographic applications. What characterizes library computer applications is that for the most part they may be part of larger national and even international networks. The theological libraries have prudently postured themselves in the mainstream of bibliographic networking and data sharing—they have postured themselves strategically for extension education in widely accessible modes. Already 86 theological libraries register their bibliographic data in large computer data banks and by 1990 another 25 libraries plan to do so. While somewhat fewer theological libraries are converting their older cataloguing records to a computer readable format, this is a highly important undertaking which also will aid the extension services which libraries may provide. Furthermore, the extremely valuable indexing work of the Index Board of the ATLA is in machine readable form for work done since 1975. Plans are being made to convert older information to machine readable format as well.

These developments mean that students and ministers already have access even through personal computers to a vast array of bibliographical information, not to mention actual documentation, in the field of theology. To some extent these are interactive files in which the user can modify and refine his or her query and exercise some selectivity over the quality and quantity of the output.

The missing piece is the efficient and inexpensive conversion of

30 Questions 8 and 13.
31 Questions 11 and 12.
printed text to machine readable text. Such conversion, however, is of the highest importance to major library and information development centers and it likely will be a reality by the end of this decade.

Taken together these developments indicate decisively that our theological libraries will be at the center of extension education over the next two decades. The essential pieces are in place, their convergence and synergy will produce significant results.
Chapter 4

MATERIAL RESOURCES FOR LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The resources required for excellent theological libraries are many and varied. They consist of physical resources including buildings and equipment; personnel resources; material resources including non-print and electronic media; supportive resources including networks, training programs and coordinating structures; and bibliographic resources. These resources are required in most if not all local institutions, some are required for regional or national cooperation. The interdependence of these resources is considerable and the interaction between them is complex. Furthermore, this analysis of resources required for theological library development must be viewed in light of one overarching consideration—library effectiveness. In our survey the most important need of theological libraries is for their services to be more effectively integrated with the teaching and research programs of the seminaries. This and the following chapters identify the

Ordinarily, one would expect bibliographic resources, i.e., the cataloguing, classification and related resources essential to every library, to be included in this analysis. Such a discussion is wanting because no present or reasonably anticipated needs in this area were detected in our study. The questionnaire results indicate that there has been considerable movement and adjustment in bibliographic systems in recent years. The pattern is for theological libraries to align themselves with the major bibliographic systems and utilities operating in North America. There seems to be no significant dissatisfaction with the systems being used, nor with the utilities and networks used to disseminate these resources. In fact, it may be a significant benefit that many theological libraries are participating in the major bibliographic networks. While these systems are not altogether ideally suited to the religious disciplines or professional education, they offer advantages of uniformity, economy and general accessibility. In any event, the trends towards the use of these systems by theological libraries witnessed over the past decade is not likely to be reversed. Moreover it is doubtful that a specialized bibliographic system for theology and education for ministry will or should be developed.

Question 70. This concern also was highly ranked in the "Transition Study" (Carroll, 112, note factors 12 and 13).

It is difficult, however, to judge the cause and background for this concern. Librarians responding to our survey indicated that their first and most important need was to strengthen local library holdings. Of library related factors, respon-
Material Resources for Library Development

major resources which our theological libraries will need in order to fulfill responsibly their several roles in theological education and addresses ways and means by which these resources may be secured.

Collection Development

Theological librarians report that one of the very greatest needs is for strengthened collections. One reason for the high place given this need may be budgetary. Fifteen percent of the libraries report that their acquisitions budgets have declined over the past five years, and another 64.5 percent report that their acquisitions budgets only have kept pace with inflation. Yet there are reasons to suspect that this picture is more pessimistic than it seems. Inflation has averaged 7.7% a year between 1977 and 1982. The cost of domestic scholarly books has grown at about the same rate, but the cost of serials has been growing, on the average, 13% a year. Thus, unless book budgets have grown in excess of the rate of inflation, there has been real decline in the acquisitions programs over the past several years. Eighty percent of the libraries may have experienced this decline since 1977. Furthermore, these recent years have been a time of real growth in student enrollment.

...idents to the Transition Study gave first importance to developing criteria of library adequacy. Moreover, their concern for library use was coupled closely with a concern for the deployment of new library and educational technologies. The response to the Project 2000 questionnaire suggests that inadequate, insufficient or inappropriate collections account for less than desirable library usage, whereas the response to the Transition Study suggests that either the misappropriation of library resources or the lack of newer technologies contribute to less than desirable library usage.

34 Question 70. This need, ranked by mean score with 1 indicated the first or highest need, registered 1.46. The only need ranked higher (1.47) was for more effective integration of library services with the teaching programs.

35 Question 28.

36 The Bowker Annual, 1983 (R.R. Bowker Co.: New York, 1983), 386-388. The GNP deflator has been used to calculate the rate of inflation.

Another important reason for the widespread concern for the strength and quality of theological library collections is that these libraries now are facing obligations which require substantially enhanced resources. In both size and quality library collections respond to many and varied pressures. Book publishing, research interests of students and faculty, degree programs, especially advanced degrees, subjects embraced by the theological curriculum, educational style, student enrollment, financial support for theological education, and inter-institutional cooperation are but some of the factors which produce pressure on library collections. Many of these factors have changed significantly in the past several years and it is equally certain that many of them will continue to change. Theological library resources must adapt to these pressures and this adaptation most certainly will demand fresh resources.

The third major reason for strengthening library collection resources now owes to the peculiar computer assisted environment of libraries. The fact that a majority of theological libraries now regularly use machine readable bibliographic records is becoming the determining factor in all library development. It is now possible to know in detail and nearly instantaneously the holdings of a great many libraries. It is possible to know in detail and instantaneously books that any number of libraries are ordering. It is now possible to coordinate acquisitions and collection development to any desired level of precision. Furthermore, geography is not an effective barrier to this coordination. These facts mean that the theological libraries now have the capability of coordinating and thereby extending the benefit of their library resources in ways which truly would enrich all theological study in North America. To use this computer technology only to monitor routines or to report substantially similar library collections would be to waste a valuable education resource. The true benefit of this technology should be to marshal constructively the particularity and imagination of our several theological institutions.

The following discussion identifies two major areas in which new and special material resources are needed: the need for special collections, and the need to preserve older materials. These are broad areas of need, embracing several fields and methodologies.
Material Resources for Library Development

These are needs which will affect, albeit in varying degrees, virtually all theological libraries. Individual libraries must respond to these needs with imagination, but also these are needs which will need to be addressed by coordinated action.

**Special Collections and Resources for Research**

The theological library collections of North America appear to be too narrow and too homogenous given both the historical dimensions of Christianity and the contemporary context in which theological education takes place. The theological libraries must develop collections of greater depth and wider breadth than presently is the case. Another way of stating this need is to say that many, perhaps even most, theological libraries should be encouraged to cultivate some collections of special focus—some special depth while at the same time they must broaden the scope of Christianity embraced by the collections.

There are few truly outstanding libraries capable of supporting specialized theological study. Only 57 libraries report special collections of national merit that are being developed currently. Of these libraries, fully 37 collections receive less than six percent of the annual acquisitions budget of their respective libraries. By contrast, only nine schools are spending 20 percent or more of their acquisitions budget on cultivating specialized research collections. In spite of these notable exceptions, the number of outstanding specialized study and research centers in our seminaries is unusually small given the general vigor of theological education in North America.

**Documenting North American Religion**

The first significant need in our theological libraries now is to acquire intensively the literature documenting the rich pluralism

---

38 Questions 25 and 26. Another 22 schools report having such collections which are being developed currently. National merit was defined in the questionnaire collections which would attract students or visiting scholars for the specific purpose of using the library resources.

39 Question 26.

40 It is important to recognize that some denominations have established historical collections of considerable distinction apart from the seminaries.
of North American religion. This pluralism has roots which are denominational and theological, but also are regional and cultural. Above all, it is historical. Our analysis suggests that this richness may not yet be adequately or appropriately represented in our libraries. If the materials documenting this pluralism are not collected in depth, substantial portions of Christian thought and practice will be inaccessible for study and understanding by future generations of scholars and believers.

It must be noted that we are not here arguing for a new isolation or denominationalism in theological education. Rather, we recognize the particularity and vitality of the several traditions which comprise the face of modern religion. The value both historically and currently of these traditions must be affirmed in library collections no less than in the classroom and in research.

Practically speaking, because much of the literature important for this documentation was generated in the nineteenth century, it is still available for acquisition, although the following section of this report dealing with preservation suggests that the time in which such collection development work may be done is relatively short. Also, practically speaking, no one or even a few large libraries can be expected to gather most of this material. The landscape is too vast and the bibliographic problems too complex for only a

41 The contemporary importance of this fact is amply attested in Carroll's study, 116-118.

42 This point was registered strongly in the consultation involving the university related and research theological libraries. The issue here is the dependence of these research libraries on smaller, particularly denominational, libraries. In both holdings and collecting scope these libraries have very wide interests. Many of them acquire current material world wide and maintain active retrospective purchasing programs as well. Yet, these libraries are keenly aware of three salient facts in this regard. First, they simply cannot acquire all of the material of likely let alone potential interest to theological study in North America. Second, they might be able to acquire more of this material if some measure of coordination among their collecting programs were possible. Third, they need to rely on denominational libraries and denominational historical societies for specialized materials emanating from specific religious communities and traditions. What appears to be at issue here is the fact that the more a library tends to acquire, the more it is aware of its limitations and what it cannot acquire. Advanced research knows few limits and places unusually heavy burdens on research libraries.
few institutions to undertake this work. Moreover, most often it is
the schools that are closest to the various traditions, which are at
the wellspring of the pluralism, that most confidently can identify
and collect the crucial documentation.43

We conclude, therefore, that the theological libraries must be
encouraged and enabled to inaugurate and strengthen special col-
lections documenting North American religion.

Documenting Third World Religion

Not only is there much pluralism in North American religious
life which still wants documentation, Christianity is now being
influenced by many vectors which also call for increased special-
ization in our libraries. The intersections between Christianity and
other religions are creating significant and sometimes highly
technical documentation which does not appear to be widely avail-
able to North American scholarship. The importance for Chris-
tianity of religion in primal societies has been gaining the atten-
tion of North American scholars, but the necessary literature is
not widely held. The work of lay movements and basic Christian
communities surely will have greater influence in our seminar-
ies and must have better documentation. Yet even these important
concerns must give way to the second major field in which the
libraries must strengthen their collections.

By the end of this century it is probable that the population
center of Christianity will have shifted to the southern and eastern
hemispheres and that the majority of the world’s Christians will be
either African or Latin American.44 It is impossible, of course, to
predict the full impact this phenomenon will have on North Amer-

43 The strategic importance of the seminaries in this regard is underscoring
by the new Acquisitions Policy Statement No. 7: Religion of the Library of Congress
(adopted February 22, 1984). This statement recognizes that the Library of Cor-
gress also depends on denominational libraries to acquire many important reli-
gious materials. See also Stephen I. Peterson, “Collection Development in Re-
ligion in the Library of Congress,” Summary of Proceedings of the Annual Confer-

University Press, 1982), 4, 778.
ican theological education, but some influences are reasonably certain. Initially, theological students will need to be better informed about life and history of the non-western churches. In time theological initiatives emerging from Third World thinkers may shape a good deal of the general theological curriculum. We may hope also that substantial new partnerships between churches new and old will be forthcoming.

These observations appear to be straightforward—even self-evident, but when they are translated into library services they become more turbulent. The need for new resources for our study and understanding of Christianity in the Third World will be felt at several levels. Initially our libraries will not be content with the basic level of Third World documentation which many of them now find adequate. Students will want much more detailed and much more thorough documentation. Also, they will need more historical literature in order to understand and interpret contemporary Third World theologies.

These same pressures indicate that our libraries will need to provide access to more sophisticated materials on non Christian religions. Especially for the study of African Christianity, theological libraries will need solid collections on Islam and the anthropological and sociological literature dealing with African traditional religion. The challenge will be to secure eventually the depth and balance of documentation for these areas which most of our libraries now attempt to have for western Christianity.

Providing these resources will be an essential obligation of our schools and monies for acquiring and cataloguing these resources will need to be found, most likely within local institutions. Because we are talking about material basic to emerging curricular needs, little inter-institutional resource sharing, except in highly structured consortia, will be effective. Technically libraries will need to develop new and often more complex mechanisms for acquiring

45 Third World is not an altogether felicitous or accurate designator, and the areas the term usually embraces, Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, have little in common. What makes it convenient for our purposes to refer to these regions together is that these areas are producing indigenous theological and ecclesiastical initiatives which are of increasing importance and interest to Christians in the Western or North Atlantic (European and American) countries.
and cataloguing these materials. The temptation will be to distribute limited resources over a wider spectrum, thus reducing overall the depth and eventually the quality of available sources.

At the research level the documentation of Third World Christianity poses more strenuous problems for North American libraries and scholars. Not the least is precisely our tendency to think of the Third World in monolithic terms, yet Christianity in the countries and regions embraced by this term is a diverse phenomenon with a history and a presence that reflects the extreme cultural disparity of the regions and countries themselves. It is this particularity which must be documented in research collections. So much of the material which is closest to the life of the successor churches is ephemeral and fugitive. Few theological libraries are prepared to acquire this type of material. When it is acquired, it presents substantial problems of organization and description. Vernacular languages are difficult, shared cataloging often will not be available, and the physical condition of the material may be poor. Yet without this documentation, North American scholars will be disadvantaged in their understanding of the thinkers and churches which will be shaping much of the world’s Christian witness.

In short, compared with the historically variegated expressions of Christianity in North America and the diverse international contexts in which Christianity is practiced, most theological libraries of North America appear to be too homogeneous. It is not that the library collections overlap or duplicate each other precisely, rather it is that the existing collections are differentiated within too narrow a view of Christianity and its historical and cultural complexity. Fresh initiatives must be taken to enrich the resources of our libraries in ways which accent this complexity with depth.

This is a responsibility that must be shared by many institutions, even by schools not offering advanced research degrees. But

---

46 Major research universities have area study programs and the libraries of these schools often have material which will be important for theological study. Thus, the problem of providing research resources for Third World Christianity will be compounded by the need to collaborate closely with these other institutions.
this is not only a pragmatic argument. It is surely true that the large research libraries cannot document every field and every current of Christianity, let alone religion, with equal quality. Yet the traditions and particularities which brought many of our seminaries into existence define precisely the foci around which these special collections may be established and enriched. That is, many of the seminaries which would not have large general research collections nevertheless are well postured to establish the intense special collections which will sustain advanced research.

We conclude, therefore, that our schools must be encouraged programmatically and financially to establish and strengthen specialized collections and research collections. These collections must document the vigor of religion in North America and must pay special attention to world Christianity. This is an arduous task and it cannot be done quickly. Nevertheless, it must now be pursued with a diligence at least equal to the care with which our generalized and homogenized collections have been built over past decades.

The Continuing Need for Older Materials

At the same time that theological libraries will be called upon to enhance their special collections they will continue to need older material much of which is becoming unavailable due either to scarcity or deterioration. While some of our libraries still need to acquire, albeit in highly selective ways, retrospective materials, the focus of this section is on the preservation of deteriorating material already in our libraries.

Paper and book binding inevitably will deteriorate. Heat is the primary cause and light accelerates the process. Acidity of the paper is a contributing factor and these forces combine in ways that are complex. Nevertheless, the process of deterioration is relentless. The result of these factors is that as many as 49 percent

---

47 Robert L. Feller, “Thermochemically Activated Oxidation: Mother Nature’s Book Burning,” PLA Bulletin, 28:232-242 (1973). These forces also bring deterioration to the other media now found in many libraries. The care of these materials is fully as important and difficult as for print materials.
Material Resources for Library Development

of most of the books in our libraries have a physically useful life of only 50 years.\textsuperscript{48} By this measure even books published in the early years of this century are approaching the upper limits of their physical usefulness. A study conducted at Princeton Theological Seminary showed that the majority of monographs in the collection of Speer Library published between 1820 and 1930 were both highly acidic and very brittle.\textsuperscript{49} In a subsequent study conducted by the ATLA, titles published within a narrower time frame, i.e. 1860-1929, were identified as urgently in need of preservation.\textsuperscript{50} With much attention focused on the technical issues of deterioration, it is important to gain a clear fix on the nature of the preservation issue and its significance for theological education.

The first important factor is the sheer loss of substantial portions of recorded documentation. If the North American theological libraries sustain their present rate of growth over the next two decades, these libraries will increase their holdings only by 30 percent. That is, 70 percent of the printed and manuscript resources which will be available in our theological libraries at the turn of the next century are already in our collections, but are by definition candidates for advanced deterioration.\textsuperscript{51} Stated bluntly,

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 233.


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Collection Analysis Project Final Report}. Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Theological Materials, American Theological Library Association: 1981. This study determined that perhaps 218,000 titles published between 1860 and 1929 are held in ATLA libraries and are prime candidates for deterioration. This figure should be increased by at least 20 percent to include material published earlier in the nineteenth century. Also, it is imperative that similar estimates be made for periodical titles and volumes (see below p. 48 ff.).

\textsuperscript{51} The relationship between the age of books and the extent to which they are used enters this discussion. This relationship, however, is most complex. Older books are used less than newer books, but there are many variables affecting this phenomenon and in many cases use tends to flatten out to infrequent, but steady use. The most useful summary of this problem is Herman H. Fussler and Julian L. Simon, \textit{Patterns in the Use of Books in Large Research Libraries}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
Theologians and theological students in the next century very likely will have reduced documentation from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from which to do their work.

It is not, however, simply the reduced stock of surviving materials which gives concern, rather it is the fact that the decades which produced these writings will be little and perhaps inappropriately understood. While it is too soon to ascertain what importance future historians may attach to the Christian witness of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it may be assumed that the loss of substantial sources from these decades will reduce future understanding of Christian history and tradition. Quite probably the nineteenth century—the century in which the seeds were planted that have in significant measure brought Christianity to many Third World countries—will be viewed with an importance akin to the sixteenth and perhaps even the first centuries of the common era.

The fundamental issue facing theological libraries is not loss as such, but the transmission of religious understanding and, finally, Christian faith. Preserving older and deteriorating materials in our theological libraries must be done if these libraries are to continue to serve their basic functions in scholarship in its service to the transmission of Christian faith.

Strategies for Securing Material Resources

In the next two decades theological libraries will need to develop and strengthen material resources in two ways.

1. Special collections, particularly collections which will strengthen the documentation of American religious pluralism, must be established and undergirded. Also deliberate attention must be given to strengthening holdings from and about non-western Christianity.

2. The preservation of older materials must be assured.

These collection enrichment objectives will be achieved only as the result of years of diligent librarianship and strong institutional support. There are, however, steps which may be taken now to facilitate long term library development—steps that local institu-
Material Resources for Library Development

tions can take which will strengthen both their resources and the collective resources. The following proposals and strategies address the resource needs already discussed and suggest structures necessary for collective actions.

A Theological Library Collection Profile

The theological libraries of North America must have an accurate and sophisticated profile of their collections and their collecting.52 This is the essential foundation for resource planning and enhancement. Its timely preparation will benefit all areas of resource development more than almost any other enterprise. A theological library collection profile would serve several purposes.

1. First, and most significantly, a collection profile would encourage local institutions to assess the fundamental scope and effectiveness of their own efforts and it would be indispensable for realistic long range resource planning.

2. Using rigorous criteria, it would identify outstanding collections. Conversely it would assist the identification of neglected areas and areas of needless overlap.

3. It would assist the identification of collections in urgent need of preservation.

4. It would become a baseline to assist librarians and other academic administrators in fiscal planning and financial development.

5. It would facilitate the orderly expansion or contraction of library acquisitions.

6. It would have major value as a reference and referral tool for researchers.

The collection profile must analyze existing collections and more significantly current collecting practices. Only in this way may trends, strengths, and lacunae be determined. Once devel-

52 This need has recently been recognized in university libraries with the establishment of the National Collections Inventory Project of the Association of Research Libraries. See ARL Newsletter, 117 and 118 (1983).
oped, such a profile should be maintained as a dynamic tool, constantly updated and regularly evaluated. Initially it might include only ATS member libraries, but subsequently other important religious collections should be added. Eventually it would become a planning resource for all the North American library community.

**Machine Readable Bibliographic Records**

Already 66 percent of the theological libraries are using the services of a computer-based bibliographic utility. This figure will grow to 76 percent within five years and 84 percent within a decade. In fact these estimates probably are conservative and the bibliographic systems of virtually all theological libraries will be computer-based by the end of this decade. The importance of this development cannot be gainsaid. Apart from internal efficiency and effectiveness, machine readable bibliographic records constitute the essential building block for all significant inter-library cooperation. Wherever possible, libraries should be encouraged to accelerate their movement into the computer environment.

Nearly as important, however, is the need to convert older bibliographic records, almost exclusively contained in card files, to a machine readable format. This activity is not being pursued aggressively in the theological libraries. Fifty-six percent of the libraries report any active retrospective conversion work and only 35 percent report that they are doing this work on a comprehensive basis. More disappointing is the fact that only five percent of the libraries report that they are converting records of special subcollections. It is these collections which must be given the first priority in any retrospective conversion program. While the theological libraries generally have been irresponsible in reporting their holdings to the National Union Catalog, reconversion of records to a machine readable format should not be used as a

---

53 There may be, however, compelling reasons to include denominational historical societies and archives in the phase of the work as well.
54 Questions 8 and 13.
55 Question 11.
mechanism to redress this problem.\textsuperscript{56} Rather, any monies and effort available for retrospective conversion of bibliographic records should be devoted first and foremost to records describing special collections and collections likely to contain scarce or unique materials. In this way the growing coordination of collection development may be extended by making the records of past special collection development work more accessible. This, of course, will be of substantial help to scholars, but also will be instrumental in helping institutions shape their current and prospective collection programs.

\textit{Planning for Third World Documentation}

For many theological libraries an increase in the acquisition of Third World materials will raise serious questions of policy, practice, and funding. There are legitimate questions about the limits of collecting Third World documents as surely as there is a need for this collecting to be strengthened.

What is needed at this critical juncture is a study which would address these several concerns with thoroughness and foresight. A basic objective of such a project would be to assist local institutions to plan for their reasonable needs in this field. The project should address the following considerations:

1. The bibliographical resources presently available and currently being developed in North American theological libraries should be assessed.\textsuperscript{57}
2. A scholarly assessment of the material that is likely to be needed by theological study and research over the next several decades must be undertaken. This work should be done in close consultation with scholars specializing in Third World topics.
3. A coordinated program of resource development should be established. In particular an effective balance between what local institutions reasonably may be ex-

\textsuperscript{56} Questions 20 and 21. See also note 93.
\textsuperscript{57} This assessment should include the special area collections in university libraries.
pected to provide and what must be provided in major research oriented collections must be achieved.

4. A training program is needed for librarians and bibliographers to strengthen the procedures and processes through which Third World material may be acquired efficiently.

5. An agency to coordinate continuing resource development and sharing in this field must be established.

Because library needs for Third World materials is closely related to curricular adjustments and faculty research interests, this project must be interdisciplinary, involving at a minimum theologians, historians, librarians and perhaps denominational officers. Its initial phases may require two or three years of work, but its results will affect theological education and affect it profoundly well into the next century.

A Preservation Program

The preservation of theological library material must be given high priority in local libraries and in coordinated programs. As argued above, this is urgent in spite of the ambiguous survey evidence for preservation. Only 49 libraries (34%) reported that they have an active preservation program in operation and regional and national preservation programs were ranked quite low among local library needs. The money spent 1981-82 for preservation accounted for less than six percent of acquisitions budgets. More positively, in response to a survey conducted by the ATLA, some 70 libraries committed themselves to provide more than $400,000 to initiate a preservation program. This is a sufficient base of concern to make a major preservation program among theological libraries feasible. The need, viewed from the perspec-

58 Questions 53, 55, 56, and 70.
tive of scholarship, makes it essential. Fifty-five percent of the libraries with active preservation program are facing severe stack space shortages within the next ten years.60

It is recommended that a fully viable, cooperative preservation program be established to assure the continued availability of texts important for theological study. The program must be established under auspices that will accentuate long term stability and productivity. It is important, moreover, to recognize the distinction between preservation work in a local library and the type of coordinated inter-institutional program being proposed here. Most local libraries have long recognized the need to care for materials in their collections. Indeed, Question 54 shows that many preservation and conservation measures are used actively. Most of these measures, however, are repairs and other short-term efforts to prolong the useful life of deteriorated or worn materials. These measures must be continued and wherever possible accelerated. Increasingly, however, it is now necessary to convert the text of deteriorated materials to a more durable format, usually silver-halide microfilm.61 The following discussion states why this conservation process is best done on a cooperative basis, i.e., via a preservation program. Two operating definitions will facilitate this analysis.

(1) A preservation copy is a reproduction of an original, which by virtue of its textual accuracy, technical quality, and demonstrated durability may supplant the original and, theoretically, all other copies of the original. The preservation copy, usually a master negative microfilm, must be stored under secure conditions and should not be reproduced except to make copies which themselves may be reproduced for use.

60 Based on a cross-tabulation between Questions 49 and 53.
61 The terminology used in the following discussion assumes microtext technology, but may apply also to optical disk or computer memory. The present state of technology assumes that microtext is the preferred medium for preservation, but optical disk technology may soon be feasible. It may be assumed that the next two decades will produce several acceptable preservation technologies and that these will be substantially compatible. Microfilm is a viable input medium for optical disk storage.
(2) A preservation program is a means by which one or more institutions systematically produce preservation copies, report the availability of these copies, and provide a mechanism for exchanging them.

A vigorous, long-term preservation program will provide substantial benefits to theological libraries. It should have the following goals.

1. Keep older materials generally available for scholarship.
2. Provide libraries with more facile access to many books and journals than is likely ever to be possible via interlibrary lending.
3. Extend the useful life of library buildings by use of highly compact media.
4. Reduce the need for many libraries to acquire older materials in original format.
5. Provide an effective means for sharing the significant resources of our outstanding libraries with other institutions.

There also are several principles which must be recognized in a preservation program. A viable and effective preservation program must be responsive to local institutional and library priorities. As Table 1 shows, institutions rightly feel a first obligation to preserve the important materials in their collections.\(^{62}\) This means that an effective program must be able to process material and requests from many libraries. Also, institutions give high priority to the preservation of materials not in their collections but which will aid their educational programs. These considerations suggest, furthermore, that schools may prefer to own preservation copies of items which they once held in original format.

A preservation master copy must meet the highest standards of quality and durability. A preservation copy is generated because the original copy is in an advanced state of deterioration. It is assumed that most if not all extant copies of the work are in or near the same condition and the existence of a preservation copy signifies that other institutions may dispose of their copies and

\(^{62}\) Question 58.
Material Resources for Library Development

**TABLE 1**  
**Preservation Priorities**  
Mean Score Ranking in Order of Importance (1 = highest)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of special collection material in your library</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of material of enduring value to scholarship held by your library</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of special collections reflecting the denominational and/or theological tradition of your school</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of special collections considered to be outstanding for theological study held in other libraries</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of material of enduring value to scholarship held in other libraries</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large preservation program aimed at thorough bibliographic coverage at least within predetermined guidelines</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

fulfill future need for the item in question by indirect access to the preservation copy. Preservation work in libraries is in fact a type of publication upon demand producing an extremely durable original. The preservation copy must be accurately described in the standard bibliographic systems.

A preservation program needs a reliable system for sharing information about the availability of preservation copies and a system for selling or loaning copies of the original.

Preservation work should not be viewed as a project with an expected *terminus*, rather it must be viewed as an almost indefinite enterprise. In some sense, libraries have always been engaged in at least a low level of preservation work. What is of moment now is the magnitude of the work facing libraries holding a century worth of highly acidic, brittle books. This long-term perspective should not make us casual about beginning systematic preservation work, but it must make us judicious in establishing such a program.

A preservation program cuts across the grain of normal institu-
tional instincts, hence stability, reliability and credibility are essential. A preservation program inevitably insists on a higher level of institutional interdependence than we would accept normally. Eventually, it brings one to give up resources which one may have cultivated with care, and for these resources rely on other institutions over which one may have no or only minimal control. What is more, there is a functional irreversibility in this process. Materials discarded in deference to a preservation copy may not easily if ever be recovered. Difficult legal matters pertaining to the ownership of preservation copies must be solved and stable leadership in this matter is mandatory.

In spite of the institutional and technical complexities of a preservation program, this work must be done. It may be the largest and most significant endeavor to date undertaken by the theological libraries. The ATLA has done careful collection analysis as preparation for such a program. It is now time for the parties vitally concerned about future theological scholarship to establish a library materials preservation program equal to needs of institutions and scholars.

Summary of Material Resource Needs

The theological libraries of North America are facing decades in which they again must enhance their collections. The need for this enhancement responds to curricular pressures, the international context in which theological education will be pursued, and the need to record and preserve vital documents from the past. The religious pluralism of North America, and particularly its denominational and theological particularism must be gathered with increased diligence. Libraries must be encouraged to develop special collections and collections which will sustain advanced research. Materials documenting Third World religion must be collected in greater scope and quality. At the same time, the preservation of older materials must be assured. In that none of these initiatives intrinsically is more important than the others, a high degree of intentionality and coordination will be required for the seminaries to meet these expectations.63

63 Resource development, especially financial resource development, will con-
Material Resources for Library Development

Three specific recommendations are offered to advance resource development in our theological libraries.

1. A research and planning project to prepare a theological library collection profile is now essential for subsequent resource development and coordination.
2. A research and planning project is needed to expedite the development of resources for the study and understanding of Third World Christianity.
3. A major inter-institutional preservation program must be planned and funded.

These proposals address the major resource development needs which the theological libraries will face in the next two decades. These proposals intersect each other at critical points but have their independent logic and value as well. Together they may move North American theological libraries well into the fore as shapers of theological study and education in the next century. Together they may also forge a new partnership, not only between scholar and library, but also between seminary and church.

...continue to be a concern for the large research theological libraries. Specialized materials are rather more costly than standard trade publications. The cost of foreign materials reflects international rates of exchange as well as the fluctuations in other national economies. When Christian theological inquiry moves into new or neglected areas, e.g., Christian relations with Islam, the corresponding impact on research library acquisitions budgets may be significant.

Furthermore, personnel costs are likely to accelerate abnormally. Most libraries have taken significant steps to reduce their technical processing costs, usually by using fully the services and products of the Library of Congress (see below p. 76 ff. and questions 2, 3, and 29.) Yet, there is a sense that the Library of Congress is acquiring less research material of interest to theology. This means, in direct ways, theological research libraries will need to spend more time and money to catalogue the unique research materials they are buying.

When the costs of major preservation work are added to these other expenses, the picture for the large research oriented libraries is not optimistic. They may anticipate years of severe budgetary pressure. Balancing these costs with rising needs and expectations will require unusually able leadership and exceptional cooperation from academic officers. New sources of funds will be needed for the research libraries to fulfill their essential obligations.