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# BULLETIN

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# On Getting Acquainted with a Theological Library

by Donald W. Dayton

I am told that beginning theological students often find the library a foreboding and alien institution, one that yields its treasures very reluctantly and resists all efforts to penetrate its mysteries. As a long time inhabitant of theological libraries, I would like to report that all such rumors and impressions are false. Theological libraries are basically benign and generous institutions, willing to cooperate with all who show enough respect for them to spend a little time getting acquainted. Let me make a few suggestions that might ease those first awkward moments and help lay the foundation for a long and fruitful friendship.

(1) Many seminaries and graduate schools now provide some sort of library instruction. If your school offers a course in theological bibliography or research method, see if you can work it into your schedule as soon as possible. It may seem like a large investment of time and effort, but it will repay you many times over—in both time saved and better grades. (I spent a year on a library science degree; although I no longer work as a librarian, I do not regret that time. It has already been more than repaid by the way that training has facilitated my own research and work.) If a full course is not available, there may be orientation lectures or some other introduction to the library. If so, do not miss the opportunity. Do not assume you already know enough about libraries, especially research libraries. At the very least, your school will have some sort of library handbook of basic information. Ask for it and devour it.

(2) If your library does not provide formal instruction or help, find some other way to get the information and skills. One of your first purchases as a seminary student should be *The Literature of Theology: A Guide for Students and Pastors*, by John Bollier (Westminster, 1979). This annotated guide to over 500 basic books and reference tools valuable for the study of theology was first developed for a course in theological bibliography at Yale Divinity School. Simpler and more oriented to library work is *Using Theological Books and Libraries*, by Ella V. Aldrich and Thomas Edward Camp (Prentice-Hall, 1963). This is quite dated, and unfortunately out of print, but your library should have a copy. More directed to search procedures for writing a research paper is *Library Research Guide to Religion and Theology* (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1974), by the reference librarian at Earlham College, James R. Kennedy Jr. If you cannot find it, get your librarian to order it or ask your bookstore to get you a personal copy. Another helpful pamphlet, though its "list of basic reference books for the theological student" is now dated, is the *Writing of Research Papers in Theology: An Introductory Lecture* (2nd printing by the author, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1970). This is the basic lecture that John Warwick Montgomery used to give to new students as librarian at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

(3) Block out some time, perhaps an afternoon, to get acquainted with the eccentricities of your own library. Use whatever guides are available. Just explore! Locate the "reserve book" collection of limited circulation items in heavy demand for course use, and take time to learn the special rules governing that collection. Identify the "reference" collec-

tion of books that must be consulted within the library. You will not be able to miss the main collection, but remember that special collections may also exist, such as audio-visual, microform, vertical file (pamphlets, etc.), rare books and so forth. Make a point of locating the periodicals, both current and bound. Are the bound periodicals in your library filed in the general collection of books or kept in a separate location and arranged alphabetically?

(4) Spend some time getting familiar with the classification scheme used in your library. Small schools, sometimes associated with a college, may still use the Dewey Decimal System, which should be familiar to you. If yours is a very large library, or one associated with a university, it will probably use the system of the Library of Congress (LC), a combination of letters and numbers that is more complex and discriminating; or your seminary may use a special scheme designed for theological libraries, like that of Union Theological Seminary. Standardization and computerization are pushing everyone toward the Library of Congress System and a more pragmatic approach that sees the classification scheme merely as a location and retrieval device. But all classification schemes still have a logic to them that tries to bring together material on the same subject and to arrange the collection in some sort of coherent pattern that permits browsing—if you know how it works and are still allowed into the stacks. Your library has probably posted somewhere an outline of the scheme—or may provide a handout that

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you can examine. Browse through a couple of sections, perhaps the New Testament section or the area devoted to your own denominational history, to see how the scheme works. Pay special attention to the "call number" that locates each item, noticing any special "location indicators" (usually at the top of the call number) like "tapes," "microform," "rare book," "reference," and so forth.

(5) Spend some time with the card catalog. You may think that you understand it, but there are some unexpected kickers, especially in a theological library. More and more card catalogs are "split" with the subject cards pulled out and filed separately. Remember that the card catalog provides access to the collection basically in three ways: (1) title, (2) author (which may be an organization or some other body responsible for publication), and (3) a variety of subjects, depending on how complex the book is. "Subject headings" are the hard part because libraries often do not use the common expressions you may expect. Learn the special subject heading language. Ask for help if you have difficulty, or use the big red book often placed near the catalog, *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress*. That book is the "bible" by which librarians assign subject headings. It provides cross references (often repeated in the card catalog) from more common expressions to the ones used by libraries. The most troublesome area in the card catalog is the complicated section under the heading, "Bible." The subdivisions will go on for drawers in even the small-

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est theological library. Use this heading only as a last resort—or spend some time getting acquainted with the subdivisions and arrangement, which will vary from library to library. Also get acquainted with the information on the cards. You might learn more than you expect about a book by noticing how prestigious the publisher is, by looking at the “descriptive notes” in the middle of the card, by noticing the subject headings (“tracings” at the bottom of the card), by checking to see if it appears in a scholarly series, and so forth. And do not forget that the author card is a good source for birth and death dates.

(6) Once you master the card catalog, be sure that you understand its limitations. It is, in effect, an index only to a given collection. With the explosions of information and rising costs, not even the largest libraries can buy everything. What you need may exist elsewhere, and most libraries now have networks by which they can borrow such material for you, especially as you get involved in more advanced work. Learn to start not with the card section, but with broader bibliographies found in standard reference works, in basic studies of the subject, or in separately published bibliographies. Check the sub-heading “bibliography” under your subject heading in the card catalog. Take a look at John Graves Barrow’s *Bibliography of Bibliographies in Religion* or John Coolidge Hurd’s *Bibliography of New Testament Bibliographies*. Learn to ask first what has been published, and only then whether your library has it. Ask for help. Your library has access through computer link-ups and awesome reference works to much more than is kept on the premises. Unless a lot of special and very expensive care has been lavished on your card catalog in the form of “analytical” subject entries, multiple authorship works will not be indexed there. Get acquainted with the new *Religion Index Two* and other works that index such volumes.

(7) Give special attention to the periodical collection, both current and back files. It will take some time to get acquainted with all the journals in the various fields, but spend some time browsing on a regular basis until you begin to know your way around. Particularly important are the various periodical indexes. You have probably used the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*. Now you need to master such specialized indexes as *Religion Index One (RIO)*, formerly *The Index to Religious Periodical Literature*, which is the most important (in part because it now provides abstracts of the articles indexed), or the more evangelically oriented *Christian Periodical Index*. These two are also important because of the indexes to book reviews found in the back of each volume. (Take a look, too, at the more frequently published *Book Reviews of the Month*.) There are also more specialized indexes, like the *Catholic Periodical Index* or the series inaugurated by Princeton’s Bruce Metzger (*Index to Periodical Literature on the Apostle Paul*, *Index to Periodical Literature on Christ and the Gospels*, etc.). And if you do serious work in biblical studies, be sure to get acquainted with *Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus*, an annual bibliography in biblical studies. If your li-

brary does not have a given periodical, your librarian has ways of getting hold of it, probably through some “union list of serials” for your area.

(8) Spend some time browsing in the reference collection. There are encyclopedias and dictionaries on all sorts of specialized subjects. They provide basic overviews of various questions as well as a preliminary bibliography. Get your own set of *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* and reach for it regularly. Get in the habit of consulting the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and the *International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, which has a more evangelical perspective. Do not neglect works like *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *Hastings’ Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, etc. One could go on indefinitely, but take some clues from the reference books cited above in section two. Get your own copy of Frederick W. Danker’s *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (Concordia), the best guide to reference works in biblical studies. Several seminaries have put together annotated lists of reference books. See, for example, *Resources for Research*, by the librarians at B. L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390.

(9) Ask for help. Start with the reference librarian, if possible, but do not be afraid to go to others. Even though most theological librarians are over-worked, they will usually be glad to help, especially if questions are intelligent, revealing some preliminary work and some grasp of what the whole process is about.

(10) Finally, start to build up your own library. My favorite guide is *Essential Books for a Pastor’s Library*, now in its fifth edition and published by Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. That covers all areas of theological study. *The Minister’s Library*, by Cyril J. Barber (Baker, 1974), with four published supplements updating the volume through 1980, may also be of help. Barber gives more attention to practical matters like organizing your library, although his annotations and theological warnings are often annoying and he tends too much to model the pastor’s library after the seminary library. *TSF Bulletin* readers are more likely to be helped by Mark Lau Branson’s annotations and suggestions in *The Reader’s Guide to the Best Evangelical Books* (Harper & Row, 1982). Consult also the various booklets and reprinted bibliographies listed on order forms published occasionally in *TSF Bulletin*. More serious students and collectors may want to request from Blackwell’s (Broad Street, Oxford, England OX1 3BQ) a copy of their new 1982 catalog of “Theology and Church History.” This listing of over 100 pages indicates what is currently available in most theological disciplines, although with an emphasis on scholarly rather than popular materials.

Understanding library systems, discovering bibliographic helps and wisely building your own collection will be ventures that will serve you for years to come.

#### **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE**

The 1982 Annual Meetings of the AAR/SBL will be held in New York, December 19–22, 1982. In addition to the usual array of papers, discussions, panels and receptions, TSF subscribers may be interested in the three sessions sponsored by the Group on Evangelical Theology, which is chaired by Mark Lau Branson. The sessions will include as topics and participants: “The Use of the Bible in Theology” (Clark H. Pinnock, James I. Packer, Robert Webber, John Yoder, Gabriel Fackre, Donald Dayton, Robert Johnston); “New Approaches in Evangelical Biblical Criticism” (Raymond E. Brown, Robert A. Guelich, Robert H. Gundry, Richard N. Longenecker, John T. Meier, James A. Sanders); and “Narrative Hermeneutics in the Light of Recent Research,” a roundtable discussion requiring advance registration and preparation (Grant R. Osborne, Gerald T. Sheppard, Anthony C. Thiselton). Inquiries about and registrations for these annual meetings should be sent to Scholars Press, P.O. Box 2268, Chico, CA 95927.

#### **INSTITUTE FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH**

The IBR annual meeting will occur in New York on the afternoon of December 20, 1982. Following the members’ luncheon and meeting, Bruce Waltke will present a lecture on “The Schoolmen: Hermeneutics Reconsidered.” For more details, contact Carl Armerding, Regent College, 2130 Westbrook Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W6.

#### **EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

The ETS will hold its annual meeting December 16–18, 1982 (just prior to the AAR/SBL) at Northeastern Bible College in Essex Falls, NJ. The theme for the meetings is “Biblical Criticism and the Evangelical.” Included among plenary sessions will be a reply to Robert Gundry’s new commentary on Matthew (with response by Gundry), papers by Norman Geisler, Robert Stein, Edwin Yamauchi and John Jefferson Davis, and a panel discussion with Clark Pinnock, Robert Johnston and Ronald Nash. Also of interest will be a plenary panel on evangelicalism and anti-semitism, including J. Ramsay Michaels, Robert W. Roth, Belden Menkus and Richard V. Pierard. For more information write Simon Kistemaker, Reformed Theological Seminary, 5422 Clinton Blvd., Jackson, MS 39209.

#### **WELLSPRING SEMINARS**

Many students and pastors have benefited greatly from the retreat ministries of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. Best known through the writings of Elizabeth O’Connor, the church provides resources and direction for the inward journey (meditation and community-building) and the outward journey (mission). Many orientation sessions and special workshops are held throughout the year. For information, write to Wellspring, 11301 Neelsville Church Rd., Germantown, MD 20874.