
Collecting Theological Literature Through Microphotography

THE PLACE OF THE RARE BOOK in theological study rests firmly on the historical nature of the Christian faith. Two thousand years of Christian history have given birth to an enormous literature of biblical study, of theological speculation and controversy, of historic events and movements, and of liturgical development. This literature has been recorded on all mediums and at all levels of artistic competence. Indeed, Bibles and liturgical books have been favorite subjects for the finest efforts of book makers in all generations. Christian scholarship involves a never ending sifting, examination and study of this corpus of written and printed material, resulting in fresh insights, better understanding, and a more precise grasp of historic fact. The more important titles have been printed and reprinted in many editions. However, in relatively few cases has the examination of ancient or contemporary sources established "definitive texts" which preclude or minimize additional study of ancient manuscripts or of rare books in printed form. A vast body of minor literature, essential for the study of the great pivotal works in theology or of important historical events, remains relatively inaccessible in scattered rare book collections.

Seminary libraries in America, by and large, do not own important collections of rare materials, which would make possible first hand, detailed study in biblical origins, in patrology, in continental church history, in the continental reformation and counter-reformation, or in other important aspects of church history and church events. The two seminaries associated with Harvard and Yale are in a favored situation in this matter. The Union Theological Seminary in New York has the great McAlpin collection of English theology from 1501 to 1700, a well known and much used source for the history of Puritanism and English literature. This library also owns substantial resources in

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other fields of Catholic and Protestant theology. The General Theological Seminary is attempting to build a basic research collection in the career of the Church of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as later. Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, New Jersey, carries its rare book strength into the eighteenth century, with a very rich collection of the writings of John and Charles Wesley and of their followers and opponents both in England and in America, essential texts for the careful study of the Methodist movement. Princeton Theological Seminary has great holdings in the English Puritan movement from 1550 to 1700 and also owns the personal and extensive early American pamphlet collection of W. B. Sprague, sources for his nine volumes of the *Annals of the American Pulpit*. This is a very incomplete picture and oriented entirely in the East, but it suggests the limited areas of rare book strength in American seminary libraries. Perhaps it should also be noted that some of the writings discussed earlier in this issue by R. M. Pierson under denominational resources are rare books.

With very few exceptions, the great religious manuscripts and printed books, distinguished by artistic excellence, primary historical importance, or a scarcity and quality which give them great monetary value, are owned by the great research libraries and such institutions as the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Henry E. Huntington Library and the Walters Art Gallery. Seminary libraries have limited capacity to buy in the rare book field and can only order the more moderately priced items in antiquarian book catalogs. No such library is able to buy consistently, as a policy, the many really important theological documents, of genuine research and exhibition value, which are offered at auction at Sotheby's and elsewhere each season. This lack of appreciation by seminaries as institutions of a proper role as custodians of the Christian tradition in its written and printed form, when that form has become so important as to be very expensive, will remain a fact of the seminary library situation for a long time to come. The seminary librarian must view with an acute sense of failure the performance of his proper duty by secular institutions who value religious books for their artistic, bibliographic or literary properties rather than for their basic character as religious documents belonging correctly in an over-all religious context.

While seminary libraries can not own large collections of rare religious books, seminary faculty members and advanced students must study them. In this situation, seminaries have come to rely more

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and more on microfilm for study and research. Two projects which will bring masses of such materials within the reach of seminary students are described in the following articles, the St. Louis University Vatican Library project and that of the Foundation for Reformation Research, Inc. Other similar projects might be described from this viewpoint. These two will, however, indicate the immense scope of this work and its great possibilities.

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