Literature of Modern Theological Study in the Seminary Library

EDGAR KRENTZ

GRADUATE SCHOOLS OF THEOLOGY expect the same standard of library service as comparable departments in any university. Such standards are set by the curriculum of the local institution, the level of degree work offered, and the relation of the theological library to other libraries or library systems. The present brief article will discuss the literature of modern theological study on the hypothesis that no other library facility would be available outside of the seminary library. While European theological faculties have traditionally been tied to the universities, this is the exception rather than the rule in American education. Most seminaries are independent institutions that for all practical purposes must have libraries with collections that are basically self-sufficient.

Not many years ago theological literature could be described very neatly. For centuries theology had been divided into the classical divisions of exegetical (or Biblical) theology, historical theology, dogmatic (or systematic) theology, and practical theology.¹ Many manuals defining the province of each of these disciplines and listing the important works written in each area were produced. Some of these are still of immense value to the theological librarian, since they provide bibliographic verification for the older and rare material that a theological library must of necessity gather. The bibliography by Martin Lipen (1630–92) ² and the many writings of J. G. Walch (1693–1775) ³ are prized by theological librarians as good guides to early Protestant literature, while the many bibliographic aids given by J. A. Fabricius are also valuable. Their method has been followed by many later handbooks.⁴

There is, however, no such comprehensive handbook today that

The author is librarian, Pritzlaff Memorial Library, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

[201]
EDGAR KRENTZ

will provide an easy key to the basic material in theology. The reason is not too difficult to find. Such broad and sweeping changes have been taking place in theological education in recent years that not only is the literature of theology changing, but the whole understanding of theology and the concept of the nature of the ministry is changing too. Some years ago, even as late as the end of the second decade of the present century, the clergyman was felt instinctively to be, as George Herbert said, someone who “hath read the Fathers also, and the Schoolmen and the later writers, or a good proportion of all.” 6 Today the average parish parson is not evaluated by his parishioner in respect to his learning, but rather as to his ability to oversee the complex and sometimes frighteningly hectic program of an activistic parish. 8 Such changes in the concept of the ministry have inevitably affected the curricula of Protestant theological education and the literature of theological study.

Theologians have also been investigating the very nature and structure of theology. Such self examinations are not novel, of course. But the present age is characterized by answers that indicate changes in the entire approach to theological inquiry. After the debacle of World War II the theological world set itself to re-examine the fundamental axioms under which it worked. One axiom that was examined in Germany as a result of the history of the Church under National-Socialism was the relation of confessionalism (commitment to a prior doctrinal statement) and the necessary freedom of inquiry that any science demands. 7 As a result of the Bekennende Kirche movement in Germany under Adolf Hitler, confessional commitment has been emphasized more in recent years.

This inquiry broadened out into a questioning of the theological presuppositions that lay behind the systems of many current “theologies.” Much of this discussion has centered about the head of the emeritus professor of New Testament at Marburg University, Rudolf Bultmann. He has been attacked and defended with vigor for supposedly adopting the presuppositions of existential philosophy as taught by Martin Heidegger, leading, according to his critics, both to an under evaluation of the value of biblical language and history, and a false estimate of the nature of man. 8 Such concerns have led to a number of comprehensive investigations of the nature and function of theology, those by Hermann Diem 9 and P. J. Tillich 10 probably being the best known. Such inquiries have of necessity considered the relation of theological to scientific and philosophical truth.
This discussion in turn has led to both theoretical and actual changes in the grouping and relationship of the theological disciplines. Tillich, for example, distinguishes between historical and constructive theology. On the practical side the older divisions of theology (exegetical, historical, and systematic) are being more and more curtailed in the curricula of many schools by the demands of the more recently arrived disciplines of religious education, church administration, evangelism, pastoral counseling, and related areas. Each of these recent additions to the theological curriculum tends both to modify slightly the prevailing concept of theology and to affect the nature and depth of library resources in the school. Much of the literature in these areas, as in the corresponding areas in secular education, tends to be quickly outdated. The result is that these disciplines make a budgetary drain on the library far beyond their true place in the curriculum, unless careful acquisition policies are drawn up; furthermore, collections tend to become weighted down with more outdated and useless material, unless a severe policy of constant weeding is maintained.

All of the above mentioned evidences of self-examination and change on the part of theological teachers has not meant that theology as a science has been any less scientific or scholarly than corresponding disciplines in the humanities or social sciences. The rise of the historical critical method, first perfected in Homeric criticism by classical scholars in the eighteenth century, has had its effect on biblical and historical theology as it has on historiography in general and all the humanistic disciplines. The history of the growth of criticism in the method of biblical research has been well written up for both the Old and New Testaments by recent German publications. A reading of either work will show that the method used is as rigorous and sharply defined as the method of historical criticism in any humanistic treatment of a literary text. The resources demanded in terms of critical monographs by modern scholars, studies in literary form, masses of textual material contemporary to the text studied in the best critical texts, contemporary non-literary texts, philological tools, and the results of archaeology and cultural anthropology will be as broad for the study of the Bible or any of the great literary figures in the history of the church as for Shakespeare, Goethe, or Plotinus. While the dimension of faith is active in determining the presuppositions under which the theologian operates (as philosophic faith is in determining the presuppositions of the philosopher), the method
used by the theologian will be as rigorously scientific as the discipline will allow.

With this background on the changing nature of theological study and the scientific nature of theological research we shall try to point out some of the general characteristics of a good collection in modern theology. Some oversimplification must of necessity be present.

In the first place, theological literature ranges over a much broader field of interest than its name would suggest. While the average person thinks of learned commentaries on books of the Bible, ponderous tomes on doctrine, or heavily footnoted texts on the history of the church, the theological librarian today knows that he must develop collections of surprising depth in belles lettres, philosophy, and the behavioral sciences in order to have an adequate theology library. Union Theological Seminary in New York City has a professorship in the area of Christian drama. Names such as T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, Albert Camus, and Jean Paul Sartre are all familiar friends to theology library users. The dialogue between the sacred and the profane demands access to a large collection of works in the area of literature. George Orwell’s *1984* and Sartre’s *Flies* are both works with theological implications. Melville and Dostoevski are both necessary to a theological understanding of their age and nation. Theological professors often discuss the theological implications of modern literature or art. The literature of modern theological study demands the presence of such works.

The close tie between religion and philosophy has always been recognized, since the days when philosophy and Christianity were in conflict under Rome or in conjunction in the middle ages. Today two modern problems in theology make it imperative that theology libraries develop strong holdings in contemporary philosophy. The development of logical positivism with its concern for the nature of meaning has led theologians to discuss the nature of religious language, since theological truth in language could be justified neither by logical, analytical thought or empiricism. A whole literature has grown up, centering around J. Ayer and A. R. Newton Flew; the implication for the language of theology has yet to be determined.

The other problem in philosophy that has affected theological study and literature in recent years is that of historiography and the meaning of history. The distinction between theology and philosophy is, in many cases, an extremely difficult one to draw. The result is that theological libraries must develop quite complete collections in this
Literature of Modern Theological Study in the Seminary Library

area. Names such as R. G. Collingwood, Karl Löwith, and Erich Frank are, or should be, as familiar to librarians in theological seminaries as the names of those theologians who have busied themselves with the meaning of history. Of course, the traditional relationships between ethics and theology, between philosophy of religion and systematics, etc. have all continued. The result is that philosophy is still the handmaid of theology (or vice versa, depending on your orientation).

These examples given from belles lettres and philosophy could be paralleled by similar phenomena in areas of anthropology, psychology, sociology, and even public relations. In recent years theologians have tried to understand the relation between science as natural theology and theology as revelation rather than to carry on the old warfare between religion and the natural sciences. To sum it all up, theology has been taking seriously in recent years its claim to be one of the last, if not the last, of the great universal sciences (Wissenschaften) that passes in review the whole panorama of the knowledge and activity of man. Whether theology has been successful or irrelevant in this review only succeeding generations will know. It has placed tremendous weight upon the adequacy of library collections, representative of course, in all the areas of human intellectual activity.

The second general characteristic of theological literature in the more narrow sense is that the literature of theology has reflected the growing breakdown of the old distinctions between the various branches of theology. This is not due simply to the versatility of individual authors. One outstanding scholar, Adolf Harnack or Hans Lietzmann, for example, has often successfully combined the disciplines of biblical exposition and church history. There have always been men in the history of theology who have been able to master two or more theological disciplines in their scholarly life. Today however there are many books which one cannot neatly describe as falling under one discipline. The classification system of Union Theological Seminary in New York City allows for a distinction in classification between monographs which treat a topic from the viewpoint of systematic or biblical theology. Such a distinction is getting more and more difficult to maintain, since scholars in systematic theology are more and more using the methodology of biblical research and since New Testament scholars are turning to biblical theologies, comprehensive and systematic statements of the beliefs of New Testament authors or books. In both cases the methodology of the so called motif re-
search developed by such Swedish scholars as G. Aulen, A. Nygren, and their followers has had a great deal of influence. The recent debate over the philosophic presuppositions that lie behind Bultmann's demythologizing of the New Testament show that one cannot distinguish biblical from systematic theology by saying that the latter uses philosophic categories and the former does not. A similar rapprochement between systematics and the arts can be seen.

A third characteristic of recent theological literature is perhaps the cause of the second. The publication of Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* in 1918 was a clarion call to the world of theology that the historical critical method of biblical interpretation, especially as it was employed in *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* (methodology of comparative religion) had led theology away from regarding the Bible as the Word of God to a purely humanistic approach. Barth did not wish to have the church reject the use of historical criticism. However, he wished that it combine that method with an attitude of awe over and against the Bible as God's word to men. The discussion aroused by Barth's Romans led, in the thirties, to a revival of interest in the Bible and to biblically oriented theology. One by-product of this revival has been a great deal of writing and publishing on the authority of scripture, the relation of scripture and tradition, and the authority of the church. This discussion will undoubtedly go on for a number of years.

A fourth general characteristic of recent theological literature has been the spurt of interest in denominational heritages brought on by the ecumenical movement. There is a widespread revival of interest in the great figures of historic Protestantism. The Luther renaissance was signaled by the beginning of the Weimar edition of his writings in 1883. Similar projects have been undertaken in recent years with the writings of Jonathan Edwards, the sermons of John Donne, and the critical edition of Huldreich Zwingli. Methodism is rediscovering John Wesley and his theology. Equally important is the rise of interest in the period of Protestant scholasticism, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, among both Lutherans and Calvinists. Thirty years ago a work on some aspect of Luther's theology of the scriptures might well have been written; it is only recently that Protestantism was interested enough in Lutheran Orthodoxy of the scholastic period to produce a similar study for this period. What is remarkable about all this is that this interest in the figures of the past is crossing the lines, not only of denominations, but even of traditions. Anglicans...
have always maintained a healthy regard for their past. Today we discover that some of the most significant work on Luther in the English language is done under the guidance of a Congregationalist, Roland Bainton, in America and under the Methodists P. S. Watson and Gordon Rupp in England. On the other hand, it was a Lutheran seminary, Concordia in St. Louis, that invited midwestern professors of history and church history to a celebration of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559 last year and a Lutheran professor of Church History, C. S. Meyer, wrote the only volume of studies published in the United States commemorating the Settlement.

The ecumenical movement has also resulted in a renewal of interest in the forms and theology of liturgical worship among the non-liturgical denominations. Lutherans recently formed the Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts, which publishes the journal Response. Collections of sources and studies on them are being issued by both Roman Catholics and Protestants in an increasingly growing number. Along with this interest in Liturgical Renewal has come a growing concern for the designing of church buildings that are truly centers of worship rather than only auditoria for the hearing of preaching. All this is not without protest on the part of some, a protest that makes some of the most interesting reading in current theological literature today.

One final characteristic of current theological literature is the amazingly rapid growth of literature about recent archaeological discoveries. The Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumrân Scrolls) were discovered only a little over thirteen years ago. Literature on this collection of manuscripts and the group that produced it has been produced with amazing rapidity. Although the Gnostic library discovered at Nag Hammadi, near ancient Chenoboskion, in Egypt was discovered a few years before the Qumrân material, in 1945, the Coptic language in which these documents were written, together with the hoarding of the material by a small group of scholars, slowed down research on this material until just recently. There is little doubt that scholars will devote more time to this material in the next decade than to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Finally, the gradual publication of the biblical materials in the Bodmer papyri has aroused a great deal of interest among New Testament textual critics. It is likely that this specialized literature will remain primarily the subject of investigation by theologians.

Little has been said in characterizing theological literature about
the disciplines of church history and patristics. These disciplines have changed little in recent years. Literary output has, perhaps, increased. With the beginning of the new index of books and journals for patristics, this material becomes more accessible and valuable.35

In building a theological literature collection, the librarian faces a number of phenomena as he tries to develop an adequate collection of materials for graduate theological education. The foremost problem is the normal one of administering budgets that are usually less than adequate within the categories of substance and relevance so as to build a balanced collection that will support the curriculum, anticipate curricular developments, provide for research in theological subject areas, and provide an adequate amount of the significant material of the tangential disciplines. As the theological librarian faces this task he notices a number of things about theological publishing today.

By the nature of the case, the most hard and fast denominational seminary must have a non-denominational theology library. Fundamentalistic authors must be balanced by books produced by the writers who use scientific, historical, and critical methodology. Confessional positions should be ignored in evaluating the substance of material. Denominational ties should affect acquisition policies only in so far as a denominational library has the responsibility for preserving the history of its own church. Divinity libraries and librarians must be among the most ecumenical spirits in the world, as far as acquisition policies are concerned. There is no place in theological librarianship for theological thought control via selection policies.

As the librarian evaluates his task he discovers that since 1945 publishers have been engaged in a tremendous amount of reprinting of theological material. Great collections like R. G. Thwaites' Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, bio-bibliographical works such as De Backer-Sommervogel's Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jesus, the basic tools of biblical research, such as Hatch and Redpath's Concordance to the Septuagint are being reprinted at a rapid rate. These are only representative titles of a phenomena that is going on throughout the western world. Theology librarians who currently have the budget can obtain material that was only a dream twenty-five years ago. Much of this reprinting comes from the modern cry ad fontes, described above as a result of the ecumenical movement.

The linguistic poverty of American students generally is reflected in the mounting wave of translations being offered to the public. This has also affected theological publishing. Certain scholars have almost
everything they write in German or French translated rapidly into English. Examples are Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth. While this tendency bears testimony to weakness in American education, it must, like Moses' bill of divorcement, be accepted "for the hardness of" our students' minds. It raises problems for librarians with limited budgets. Should one purchase a French, Swedish, or German publication before it goes out of print or run the risk of never obtaining it on the suspicion that it is a likely candidate for the translator's mill? The difficulty only illustrates the common problems that theology librarians share with their academic brothers in the humanities.

Like all American libraries, theology libraries also were faced with filling in the gaps in their collections of literature published in Germany or other war torn countries between the years 1939 and 1948. Where possible, libraries that were prepared secured German agents to buy representative collections as rapidly as possible after 1945, considering the amount of duplication with existing holdings well worth the price of filling in large blocks of material available only in few copies. Many libraries are still working at filling in the literature from this period.

Theological librarians use a number of aids, especially in the selection of non-English language literature. The basic guide has for years been the Theologische Literaturzeitung. This is an invaluable aid for any theological librarian who can read German (the most basic foreign language for theological research and librarianship). Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, inaugurated a valuable service this year with the publication of Scholars' Choice: Significant Current Theological Literature from Abroad. Fifty of the world's outstanding theologians from England and the continent of Europe collaborate in selecting the basic titles in foreign theology. The library of Union Seminary coordinates their recommendations and makes the lists available twice yearly to Protestant seminary libraries. If all the lists are up to the standard set by the first issue, many theological libraries should have better and more balanced collections of theological literature than was formerly possible.

This article attempted to outline the various trends affecting theological literature today and their influence on library collections. Many of the problems and influences listed here, mutatis mutandis, are common to every academic library. No attempt has been made to say that any particular collection is the outstanding collection in America. The aim has been to show the breadth of literature needed
for theological research, the interrelation of theology and the humanistic disciplines, and the technical nature of theological literature.

Bibliographical Notes

4. A representative list follows:
   Kirk, K. E., ed.: The Study of Theology. New York and London, Harper, 1939. This is still a very useful volume, though its orientation is primarily English rather than American.
Literature of Modern Theological Study in the Seminary Library


15. For this reason the University of Chicago, in a departmental library system, designated Swift Hall Library (the divinity library) as the Library of Religion and Philosophy. Today such a concept, if applied strictly, would be too narrow.


17. The journal *Analysis* has also carried many relevant articles.


22. It is because of this necessary interaction with the humanities and sciences that the Niebuhr Report (see note 11, pp. 49-53; 68-71) recognizes the advantages of close affiliation of seminaries with universities and that the accreditation standards of the American Association of Theological Schools state that for work on the doctoral level a "library of a good university standard" must be available "in the immediate vicinity to faculty and graduate students," American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, *Bulletin,* 23:13, 1958.

23. What does one do, for example, with Nygren, A: *Agape and Eros.* London, S.P.C.K., 1953, which is both a study in biblical theology and a treatise in the history of doctrine?


26. The greatest single monument to this change of orientation is the *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament,* edited first by Gerhard Kittel and, since Kittel's death, by Gerhard Friedrich. 6 vols. Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1933-. Another two or three volumes should complete the project.

27. The debate has been carried on inside Protestantism and between protest-


29. Witness the nineteenth century publications of the Parker Society, the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, and many volumes in the Camden Society publications, The Hanserd Knollys Society (Baptist) published far less material.

30. Watson recently moved to Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston, Ill.


34. The amount of publication in these areas is matched by the work of classical philologians on the text of Menander's *Dyscolus*, also found in the Bodmer papyri and edited by Victor Martin.


36. Bartsch, H. W.: *Handbuch der Evangelisch-Theologischen Arbeit 1938 bis 1948*. Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1949, provided a useful key to what Germans themselves considered the most basic material. Unfortunately there was, to the author’s knowledge, no similar publication for French language material. This problem was shared with other disciplines, of course. A similar attempt to fill in the gap in another area was Kiessling, Emil, ed.: *Der Hellenismus in der Deutschen Forschung 1938-1948*. Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1956. While intended primarily for the classicist, it gave theology libraries excellent surveys of literature on ancient religion by Hans Herter and of research in the Oriental culture of the Near East by George Fohrer. Both of these guides have aided in book selection.