

## INAUGURAL LECTURES

### WESTMINSTER AND WIKIPEDIA: THE WESTMINSTER SEMINARY LIBRARY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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I would like to begin by asking the question, “What images come to your mind when you think of a library?” In a 1982 lecture John Boone Trotti described one vision of the library in this way:

Some view the library as a monument, a symbol of learning, almost a fortress. . . . Like the grand living room, it is to set a tone, show taste, perhaps flaunt wealth—but not to be lived in, perhaps even to intimidate persons from entering—or at least being comfortable therein.<sup>1</sup>

A much older vision is the one found in the statutes drawn up by Archbishop Lanfranc for the English Benedictines in A.D. 1070. There we read:

On the Monday after the first Sunday in Lent, before brethren come into the chapter house, the librarian shall have a carpet laid down and all the books got together upon it, except those which the year previous had been assigned for reading. These the brethren are to bring with them, when they come into the chapter house, each his book in his hand. Then the librarian shall read a statement as to the manner in which brethren have had books during the past year. As each brother hears his name pronounced, he is to give back the book which has been entrusted to him for reading; and he whose conscience accuses him of not having read through the book which he had received, is to fall on his face, confess his fault, and entreat forgiveness. The librarian shall then make a fresh distribution of books, namely a different volume to each brother for his reading.<sup>2</sup>

A slightly less intimidating vision is that conjured by the splendor of the reading rooms of one of the great libraries of the world like the Library of Congress in Washington, the Library of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada, or the original “Round Reading Room” at the British Museum. All of these libraries

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<sup>1</sup> John Boone Trotti, “The Theological Library: In Touch with the Witness,” *Reformed Review* 35 (1982): 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

share a physical presence that promotes reflection and scholarship. Perhaps it was libraries like these that prompted Winston Churchill to write, “Nothing makes a man more reverent than a library.”<sup>3</sup>

People may increasingly think of a third and competing vision. In his book *Patience and Fortitude* Nicholas Basbanes describes a promotional video entitled *The Library of the Future*. In this video a man

makes himself comfortable in front of a personal computer and logs onto the website of the San Francisco Public Library. A digitized voice comes online and asks if any help is needed to choose from the lengthy menu of tempting selections. . . . [The man] answers in the affirmative, and presses the enter button on the keyboard. At this point an electronic fireball comes shooting out of the terminal, executes several spectacular loops in the living room and streaks out the open window.<sup>4</sup>

The fireball makes its way to the San Francisco Public Library where a robot-like figure takes the viewer on a virtual tour of the facility which features few books, but where the cyber tour guide refers frequently to “computers, the exciting era of instant communications . . . and unlimited access to electronic sources of knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> To be sure, there are competing visions here, and these are causing some people to ask if the notion of libraries as places of learning and scholarship is completely outmoded.

To pose our question in a slightly different way and in terms that are closer to home, I would like to ask, “Does Westminster Theological Seminary still need a library?” This may seem an odd question for me to be asking, but it does reflect the broader thinking and soul searching that is going on in the library world right now. Gregory A. Smith, Dean of the Integrated Learning Research Center at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, has recently written:

Academic libraries are in transition because of changes in higher education. Changes in the world of information are even more radical: the displacement of paper, the primacy of the search engine, the emergence of the digital lifestyle and innovative patterns of scholarly communication. . . . This environment of upheaval will pose both opportunities and challenges for academic libraries.<sup>6</sup>

The literature of librarianship is vast, and a good deal of it is being devoted to the issue of how libraries are responding to the explosion of information that has taken place in the digital age. When students can increasingly access the full text of books online, when Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, is becoming the first port of call for many people when they have an information need, it is appropriate to ask questions such as the following: Do we still need to pour scarce institutional resources into building a library? Is it possible that libraries

<sup>3</sup> Winston Churchill, “Hobbies,” in *Thoughts and Adventures* (London: Odhams, 1948), 228.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas A. Basbanes, *Patience and Fortitude* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 387.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory A. Smith, “Academic Libraries in Transition: Current Trends, Future Prospects,” *The Christian Librarian* 49 (2006): 101.

have served their day and generation? Has the world of scholarly communication so changed that we can dispense with libraries?

Before we attempt to answer these questions I would like to take some time to do two things. First, we need to conduct a very brief survey of how libraries have developed with particular reference to the relationship between the church and the library. Then, secondly, I would like to flesh out some of the specific challenges and trends that are facing academic and seminary libraries today.<sup>7</sup>

As Christian literature developed, it was recognized that there was a need to preserve and organize what was being produced. Early Christian libraries focused their limited resources on the creation, acquisition, and preservation of works of Christian theology. By the Middle Ages, libraries were actively collecting the works of Greek and Roman philosophers. There was a growing recognition that “there was much in classical literature which ministered to knowledge, particularly theology.”<sup>8</sup>

Many early monastic libraries were remarkably small. Use was strictly limited to the ecclesiastical community that owned the collection, and borrowing materials was not encouraged. To cite just one instance, the twelfth-century Abbot Ingulf of Croyland stated: “The lending of books, as well the smaller without pictures as the larger with pictures, is forbidden under the penalty of excommunication.”<sup>9</sup>

With the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century the amount of printed materials increased exponentially. This did not initially have much of an impact on how libraries operated. There remained a sense that access to the treasures of the past and the wisdom of the present was to be strictly limited.<sup>10</sup> Even in much larger libraries, such as that of the Vatican, access was strictly limited to the privileged few.<sup>11</sup>

As the Reformation dawned, the Reformers were quick to seize upon the value of the printed word as another method of spreading “The Word.” Related to this concern was the belief in the value of quality education. In his study of Calvin’s work in Geneva, Ronald S. Wallace states:

After he had succeeded in ensuring a secure place for the Word of God within the city, Calvin directed his attention to founding a university. From the beginning of his work as a reformer, like Luther and Melancton, he had been concerned about the schooling and catechizing of children. People had to be taught the elements of the faith, and they had to be able to read and understand the Word of God.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Those interested in tracing the history of theological libraries may consult the online source, *Theological Libraries Historical Sources* at <http://www.atla.com/sources/index.htm> (accessed 2 February 2007).

<sup>8</sup> W. H. Allison, “Theological Libraries,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1912), 336.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Muir, *The Frank Muir Book: An Irreverent Companion to Social History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 111.

<sup>10</sup> Basbanes, *Patience and Fortitude*, 121.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 97.

We should note that the stress on education was not just on the theological. Rather, Calvin and other Reformers welcomed the insights of other areas of human endeavor as well.

The Reformers explicitly recognized that the development of good libraries was important for the development of the church. Martin Luther was an advocate for libraries. He stated that “neither care nor money should be spared to establish good libraries especially in the large cities.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that what Luther and the other Reformers had in mind were libraries that would serve the laity as well as the clergy.

As the Reformation spread to other parts of Europe, so too did education; and with this education, wider access to libraries also developed. To cite just one example, the Scottish church was keenly aware of the need to battle illiteracy, and in this connection recognized the value of libraries. In 1705 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted a proposal by James Kirkwood, a former Scottish Episcopal clergyman, to set up small libraries in each parish in the Highlands. The plan was a watered-down version of Kirkwood’s initial proposal issued in 1669 which was entitled, *An overture for founding and maintaining of Bibliotheks in every paroch throughout this kingdom, humbly offered to the consideration of this present General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*.<sup>14</sup> Kirkwood’s original concept was that every parish in Scotland should have a library and that a union catalogue of all the libraries should be centrally maintained. While the idea of a union catalogue was not realized at this stage, parish libraries, along with the parish school run by the Minister, became a central feature of Scottish life.

Turning to the history of the theological library in North America, we note that its development mirrored the development of theological education. Three distinct stages have been noted, from the college-based training found at places like Harvard, to the “log college” and parsonage preparation where individual pastors took on the responsibility of training men for the gospel ministry, and then finally to the seminary-based training we know today.<sup>15</sup>

In an article tracing the history of the development of theological libraries in North America, Robert F. Beach notes:

Starting with the libraries of Harvard and Yale, the first printed catalog of the former’s library [produced in 1723] listed a meager 3,715 volumes. However nearly 60 per cent of the books were in the theological field. It is significant that the founding of Yale in 1701 grew out of a meeting of ministers in Branford, to which each man brought a cherished book from his own collection, thus forming the nucleus of the college library.<sup>16</sup>

So we see here that from the earliest times, there was recognition that library resources were needed to support the education of prospective pastors.

<sup>13</sup> Allison, “Theological Libraries,” 337.

<sup>14</sup> John Crawford, “The Community Library in Scotland,” *68th IFLA Council and General Conference* (2002): 2.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Beach, “Protestant Theological Seminaries and Their Libraries,” *Library Trends* 9 (1960): 132.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

During the period of parsonage-based education, library resources were strictly limited to what the local pastor happened to possess in his own collection. To be sure, some pastors were able to furnish their students with key resources but more often than not, these resources were limited. For example, one historian has noted that “the Reverend Asa Burton (1752–1836), Congregational Minister at Thetford [who] trained about sixty men, [had] an entire library [that] stood on one long shelf.”<sup>17</sup>

With the founding of the first seminaries, concerted attempts were made to build theological library collections that would meet the needs of students and faculty. While many of these early libraries would be considered weak by modern standards, librarians began to import large quantities of books published in Europe, and it has been noted that “the steady importation of German titles added much to the individual seminary libraries.”<sup>18</sup>

Another factor that contributed to the relatively slow growth of American seminary libraries is that North American presses were publishing relatively few theological works, and when they did, they were at a more popular level than the strictly scholarly. As Norman Jay Kansfield has noted, the primary output of nineteenth-century North American religious publishing consisted of “sermons, polemic works of theological controversy or biographies of famous churchmen,”<sup>19</sup> which, it would be fair to note, were often written in more worshipful tones than one would expect from more scholarly works.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, theological libraries were taking on a shape that would remain pretty much the same for most of the century. Collections were beginning to grow. Furthermore,

standards for cataloguing, classification, and indexing emerged. Public services such as reference and circulation had developed. . . . Librarians developed policies and procedures to handle the increased volume of scholarly literature being published and to facilitate the delivery of scholarly information to support the pedagogical research needs of the [seminary] model of education.<sup>20</sup>

As seminary libraries in North America grew, their development was shaped by two underlying principles or assumptions. Timothy Lincoln has argued that libraries were seen to be important firstly because Christians are people of the book: “Theological libraries matter because the Bible matters. Christians value an ancient collection of documents—the Bible—[and] it is because Christians have valued the Bible that they also value the vast literature of theological reflection based on the Bible.”<sup>21</sup> Lincoln is correct when he goes on to say that “to be a ‘People of the Book’ is to be a ‘People of Libraries.’”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Norman Jay Kansfield, “The Origins of Protestant Theological Seminary Libraries in the United States” (M.A. diss., The University of Chicago, 1970), 133.

<sup>20</sup> Jack W. Ammerman, “Jam To-morrow and Jam Yesterday, but Never Jam To-day: The Dilemma of Theological Libraries Planning for the Twenty-First Century,” *Theological Education* 40 (2004): 14.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy D. Lincoln, “What’s a Seminary Library For?,” *Theological Education* 40 (2004): 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Lincoln argues secondly that North American theological libraries were shaped by the belief that a good seminary library was always more than just the sum total of its collections. Rather, theological libraries needed to provide resources that enabled users to navigate the vast amount of available information.<sup>23</sup> The library that simply accumulated resources but did not provide proper access and instruction in the use of those resources was not doing its job properly.

If this is the background against which seminary libraries have developed, there is much evidence that times have changed. I would like us to reflect on a few of the key changes that have and are taking place right now, and that will have an impact on the way in which libraries provide service. First, there is clear evidence that information on paper is being displaced, at least to some degree, in favor of electronic information. Not everyone may like it, but the digital revolution is here to stay. Gregory Smith, to whom I referred earlier, notes that “every major category of information media . . . has become increasingly available in digital forms over the last 10 years.”<sup>24</sup> While I am not suggesting that the age of the book is over, it is true to say that information is increasingly accessible in digital formats.

One small, but nonetheless visible, manifestation of the shift away from paper is the disappearance of the traditional card catalog as a means of accessing the library’s collection. Instead of stately rows of oak cabinets with library staff busily filing cards in them, so that people can find out whether or not the library owns *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, there are now computers spread around our campus and available in our homes that provide us with this information. While some of us, perhaps out of nostalgia, still talk about looking something up in the card catalog, I venture to say that the day is not too far off when people will not know what a card catalog even is, and the phrase will become meaningless.

Although printed books continue to be published at significant rates, and I believe that this will continue, they are no longer the sole means of information. Usage patterns in the Westminster Library are reflecting this. In the academic year 2005–2006 some 37,714 books were checked out from the library here. In the same time period, 6,983 documents were viewed in the Early English books database,<sup>25</sup> 6,625 in the FirstSearch database,<sup>26</sup> and 2,533 in Early American Imprints<sup>27</sup> for a total of 16,141 document retrievals from the three major databases that we subscribe to. So the library’s investment in electronic databases is becoming a major source of information for our patrons, and I believe that this trend will continue.

In addition to this, there is a growing number of free websites that are being used for scholarly research. Google Books provides page images of older books

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, “Academic Libraries in Transition,” 103.

<sup>25</sup> “Current EEBO Statistics” (retrieved 12 February 2007 from <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/userlogs/stats.pl>).

<sup>26</sup> “OCLC Statistics” (retrieved 12 February 2007 from <http://www.stats.oclc.org>).

<sup>27</sup> “Usage Statistics for Westminster Theological Seminary” (retrieved 12 February 2007 from <http://stats.newsbank.com/stats/>).

that are no longer in copyright and select pages from newer material. Many prestigious libraries such as the Bodleian at Oxford, the Harvard University Library, and the New York Public Library are opening up their collections for digitization so that their resources will be available in unprecedented ways to a world-wide audience.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that concerns have been expressed about copyright issues surrounding the Google Books project. In a recent speech Thomas Rubin, who is the associate general counsel for copyright, trademark, and trade secrets at Microsoft Corporation, said this:

Google's chosen path would no doubt allow it to make more books searchable online more quickly and more cheaply than others, and in the short term this will benefit Google and its users. But the question is, at what long-term cost? In my view, Google has chosen the wrong path for the longer term, because it systematically violates copyright and deprives authors and publishers of an important avenue for monetizing [*sic*] their works.<sup>29</sup>

Less controversial than the Google Books project are the more specialized sites, like the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, which are making vast amounts of Christian literature available free of charge to anyone who has access to the Internet. If we could track the usage of these websites and many others like them, we would doubtless see that library patrons are turning to these sites in increasing numbers to meet their research needs. In fact, CCEL claims that their site is accessed by "several million . . . users each year."<sup>30</sup>

A second and growing trend is that libraries are redeploing their resources from the near total reliance on the ownership of local materials to purchasing access to shared resources. The two most visible examples of this accessing at Westminster are the Early American Imprints and Early English Books databases that I referred to earlier. Early American Imprints Series I provides the full text of thirty-seven thousand works published in America between 1639 and 1800.<sup>31</sup> Early American Imprints Series II provides the same access to 47,607 titles published between 1801 and 1819.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the Early English Books Online database contains over one hundred thousand titles published in the United Kingdom between 1473 and 1700.<sup>33</sup> All three of these databases and others like them are revolutionizing the way in which scholars and students do research. Without the concept of shared access to databases such as these,

<sup>28</sup> "Google Book Search Library Partners," <http://www.google.com/googlebooks/partners.html> (accessed 12 February 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas C. Rubin, "Searching for Principles: Online Services and Intellectual Property" (remarks prepared for the annual meeting of the Association of American Publishers, New York, N.Y., 6 March 2007, <http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/exec/trubin/03-05-07AmericanPublishers.msp> [accessed 7 March 2007]).

<sup>30</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/about> (accessed 12 February 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Early American Imprints Series I, [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p\\_action=help](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_action=help) (accessed 14 February 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Early American Imprints Series II, [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p\\_action=help](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_action=help) (accessed 14 February 2007).

<sup>33</sup> "About Early English Books Online," <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/about/about.htm> (accessed 14 February 2007).

scholars would have to travel significant distances to consult the works of the great libraries. Now, from the comfort of home, the world of great literature is increasingly available.

From the user's point of view, there may not be a world of difference between whether or not the information is taken from a book on the shelf or from one of these databases, but there has been a seismic shift in the thinking of librarians who have embraced and encouraged this change. It used to be the case that libraries were judged solely on the strength of their local holdings. This is no longer the case and, as a result, libraries are having to make decisions about just what percentage of their budgets they should be spending on these shared resources, rather than on locally held collections.

A third trend that is impacting libraries is the growing primacy of the search engine as a means of locating information. In the last ten years we have seen the growth of websites like AltaVista, Google, and Yahoo. Like it or not, they have replaced the library catalog as the first place many people go when they need information. To be sure, there are real questions about just how effective some of these tools are for finding quality information; but if we are being honest, I suspect that most, if not all, of us use them on a regular basis.

If there were any doubts as to just how popular search engines have become, Smith points out that we

need look no further than trends in the advertising industry in order to understand the significance of [the] on-line search in today's economy. [By] . . . mid-2005 . . . television, magazine, and newspaper advertising were in decline, while Internet advertising—tied largely to search engines—was expected to increase by 15% over the previous year.<sup>34</sup>

We might wish it were otherwise, but if the advertising industry has recognized and is harnessing the search engine as a growing method of choice for reaching their target audience, then those of us who care about how people do research should be taking careful note. We cannot afford to ignore the ubiquity of the search engine. Instead, we should be mining the search engines we use every day to provide access to quality resources. Librarians can also take some lessons from how easy it is to use search engines and translate these same principles into the systems that we use in our libraries. I mentioned the Wikipedia phenomenon earlier, and a further word about it is appropriate here. Launched in 2001, Wikipedia set out to be a free-content encyclopedia where anyone with access to the internet could contribute articles on any subject. By the end of January 2007, Wikipedia had over six million articles in over 250 languages.<sup>35</sup> Wikipedia's explicitly stated philosophy is that

unmoderated collaboration among well-meaning, informed editors will gradually improve the encyclopedia in its breadth, depth and accuracy, and that, given enough time, the truth will win out and even subtle errors will be caught and corrected. Thus,

<sup>34</sup> Smith, "Academic Libraries in Transition," 105.

<sup>35</sup> Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia> (accessed 28 February 2007).

Wikipedia allows almost anyone to edit, except for users banned for persistent malfeasance after a lengthy arbitration process. Similarly, almost every article can be edited; editing is sometimes temporarily disabled for a small number of articles due to persistent vandalism or unresolved disputes among contributors. Wikipedia has not declared any of its articles “complete” or “finished.”<sup>36</sup>

There is much to be said for the advantages of collaboration in scholarship and we need to be doing this in appropriate ways, but whether or not unmoderated scholarship is entirely trustworthy is another matter. This is certainly a different paradigm than carefully scrutinized research, created by scholars for scholars, for the service of the world. My concern here is that we are increasingly living in a world where people will look for information wherever they can find it and once they have found it, will accept all that it asserts. My concern is also that libraries need to do a better job of teaching that all information is not necessarily true or reliable.

Having sketched a little of where we have come from and outlined some of the trends and challenges that are facing us now, I would like to reflect on why Westminster still needs its library. Despite the fact that times have and are changing, there are a number of reasons why we still need a library and will continue to do so.

First, Westminster still needs a library because it provides a witness to the past. On one level, this is restating the traditional role of the library as the place where one can go to consult the accumulated wisdom of past generations. But it is more than this. Hebrews 12:1 reminds us that “we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses,” and it is part of the library’s role to keep us connected to the great Christian witnesses of the past. In a recent article Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, states:

The library is the teacher of what history has thought and how that thought stretches through the present into the future. Theological libraries are a testament that what we know now is not all that should be known; that in theological studies, the newest idea may not be the best idea. . . . Available space on the shelves reminds us that good scholarship always has more work to do, that new eras require new information, and that old ideas can lead to new forms of wisdom.<sup>37</sup>

It is the role of the library then to balance the view that says new ideas are always and necessarily better ideas. You will recall that when the Apostle Paul visited Athens he encountered a culture where “the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Times have not changed all that much in the intervening two thousand years, and it is all too easy simply to accept that the latest theological idea is the best idea. Rather, we continue to need the wisdom of past generations as we seek to serve the church and the world in the present. We need to

<sup>36</sup> Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia#\\_note-ListOfWikipedias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia#_note-ListOfWikipedias) (accessed 28 February 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Aleshire, “In Praise of Theological Libraries,” *Colloquy* 15 (September/October 2006): 2.

be conversant with and embrace our rich theological heritage and then be prepared to apply and live it out in the world in which we are living. A well-thought-out library collection then will enable users to learn about and hear the voices of the past, through the use of both traditional print and contemporary electronic resources.

Second, Westminster still needs its library to provide a window on a world of ideas that we might not otherwise encounter and interact with. Aleshire states that if “their collections have been thoughtfully developed, theological libraries hold views that the current faculty don’t hold and have information that the faculty don’t know.”<sup>38</sup>

In building its collection, the Westminster Seminary Library has chosen materials that reflect a range of theological traditions and beliefs. While we need to celebrate and foster the Reformed tradition that we all hold dear, we also need to be conversant with views that are different than our own. With the growing diversity of the world in which we are called to bear witness to the gospel, we need to know and be able to interact with many traditions. And so, even if library resources were to become scarce, as they have in the past, the library will continue to collect broadly in ways that will enable students and scholars to interact with the full range of theological ideas. To be sure, there is some risk here. But I believe that it is a risk that is worth taking. The risk is that we become so open to other views that we lose our own understanding of what we believe. This does not have to happen, however. I believe that we will be much better placed to debate and persuade others of what we believe if we have a proper understanding of other belief systems.

Third, Westminster still needs its library to be a place of learning and study. It is my hope that people do as much learning in our library as they do in the classroom or the café. It is a good thing that libraries today are much busier and even noisier than they used to be. Aleshire makes the point that “good libraries are increasingly people places. On many ATS campuses the library is a gathering place for students as well as a source of information.”<sup>39</sup> Given the age of the library facility we have, the environment is perhaps not as conducive as it might be for group study and conversation. Students manage to find places in which to exchange ideas, and I’m always heartened to see animated conversations taking place within the walls of our building. Many libraries are recognizing that the “Barnes and Noble” coffee shop culture is conducive to learning, as well as to buying books, and I hope that our library can increasingly be a place where our users are able to relax and feel comfortable while they learn.

Traditionally libraries have been seen as that part of the educational endeavor that collects, maintains, and provides access to the resources needed by seminary faculty and students. However, the library needs to be even more, which brings me to my fourth and final point. Westminster needs the library to be an increasingly active partner in the theological education of our students. One reason we

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

need to move in this direction is because our accrediting standards demand that we do so. We are required to demonstrate that we are teaching “information literacy skills” to our students. The Middle States accrediting standards say:

Several skills, collectively referred to as “information literacy,” apply to all disciplines in an institution’s curricula. These skills relate to a student’s competency in acquiring and processing information in the search for understanding, whether that information is sought in or through the facilities of a library, through practica, as a result of field experiments, by communications with experts in professional communities, or by other means. Therefore, information literacy is an essential component of any educational program at the graduate or undergraduate level.<sup>40</sup>

But even if we did not *have* to do this, I believe that we *should* be doing it. Our students must be given the tools they need so that they will be able to make sound research decisions, in whatever ministry or service for the church that they are called to. William Badke has rightly stated:

It is time to begin considering information literacy as a key element in the subject matter of seminary education, both because we live in an information age requiring information skills and because the complexity of systems and tools of information demand knowledge beyond that of simple library use.<sup>41</sup>

So the question for the library is, “How do we carry out this task?” The library needs to take the initiative in stressing the key importance of information literacy. We will continue to design and implement programs that will reach out to our users with the information they need. These programs may be packaged in the form of workshops and individual sessions in the library or on the web. All of our efforts in this area should fulfill the information literacy requirements of the accrediting agencies. These requirements state that we need to be helping students

- determine the nature and extent of needed information.
- access information effectively and efficiently.
- evaluate critically the sources and content of information.
- incorporate selected information in the learner’s knowledge base and value system.
- use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.<sup>42</sup>

However, it is unreasonable to expect that busy students will volunteer their time to learn information literacy skills in the abstract. Rather, the library needs to be actively involved in the classroom, precisely at the point where students can see how learning information literacy skills will help them to be better biblical exegetes, historians, theologians, pastors, and counselors.

<sup>40</sup> *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* (Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006), 42.

<sup>41</sup> William Badke, “Not Your One Shot Deal: Instructional Design for Credit Information Literacy Courses” (preconference workshop at the 57th annual conference of the American Theological Library Association, Portland, Ore.; published in *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 57 [2003]: 1-18; quote appears on 8).

<sup>42</sup> *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, 42.

I would like to challenge my colleagues on the faculty to think about how your courses are contributing to our students acquiring information literacy skills. The faculty and the library need to work together to insure that we are meeting our accreditation requirements and that we are preparing our students for a lifetime of learning, reflection, and ministry. I would also like to challenge students to see your education here as not just providing information for ministry, but rather as providing you with the skills you need for critical reflection and for making sense of an increasingly complex world. There is one final challenge for all of us. Information literacy, no matter how important it is, is not an end in itself. The knowledge and skills we gain must not simply become a means for us to exercise power over those who do not have the same skills or information. Rather, what we learn must be used ethically for the glory of God and the good of his church.

Westminster Seminary's library has had a long and honorable history, from the early days of books donated by the founding faculty to the days when it was possible, at reasonable cost, to purchase rare volumes from the era of the Reformation down to the present, when the library is increasingly providing information in various formats. Regardless of the era, the library has always had as its mission the bringing of people and information together. It is my hope that the library will continue to serve Westminster as a witness to the past, a window on a world of ideas, a place of learning, and a real partner in theological education.