

January 2002

## Theological Librarianship—Is It Ministry?

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Gregory A., "Theological Librarianship—Is It Ministry?" (2002). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 4.  
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# **Theological Librarianship** *Is It Ministry?*



**Gregory A. Smith**  
**January 2002**



## a Christian college librarian's view

Ernest Liddle explains that employment at a Christian institution offers opportunities for ministry that would be impossible in a non-Christian setting.

Ernest V. Liddle, "Why I Serve in a Christian College," *The Christian Librarian* [U.S.A.] 29 (May 1986): 44-46.



## seminary librarians' views

Molly Lyons discusses ways the staff of a seminary library can minister to its community of users.

Molly Lyons, "The Academic Library as Ministry: The Seminary Library," *Catholic Library World* 58 (July/August 1986): 34+.



## seminary librarians' views

Robert Krupp argues that librarians at evangelical institutions should carry out bibliographic instruction so as to portray “writing as a vehicle for Christian ministry.”

Robert A. Krupp, “Bibliographic Instruction and the Ministry of Writing: Exploring Some Possibilities and Resources,” *The Christian Librarian* [U.S.A.] 33 (August 1990): 105.



## seminary librarians' views

James Dunkly describes theological librarians as partners in the ministry of theological education.

James Dunkly, "Theological Libraries and Theological Librarians in Theological Education," *American Theological Library Association: Summary of Proceedings* 45 (1991): 227-31.



## Keck's survey results

Andrew Keck's essay, based on a survey of ATLA members, portrays theological librarianship as a ministry on five grounds:

Andrew J. Keck, "Information or Divine Access: Theological Librarianship within the Context of a Ministry," in *The American Theological Library Association: Essays in Celebration of the First Fifty Years*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Valerie R. Hotchkiss, and Kenneth E. Rowe (Evanston, Ill.: ATLA, 1996), 172-82.



## Keck's survey results

- its connection to theological education
- its relational character
- its occupation with religious materials
- its vocational nature
- its relation to church ministry





**its connection to theological education**

P1 Theological educators are ministers.

P2 Theological librarians are theological educators.

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C Theological librarians are ministers.



## its connection to theological education

“the [theological] library is an equal partner with classroom and field and shares mutually in the task of forwarding the institution toward its goals.”

Earle Hilgert and Elvire Hilgert, “The Librarian-Educator in a Theological School,” in *Essays on Theological Librarianship: Presented to Calvin Henry Schmitt*, ed. Peter De Klerk and Earle Hilgert (Philadelphia: ATLA, 1980), 120.



## its connection to theological education

“education does not . . . take place in the classroom alone. The library provides an essential context where the work of education, begun in the classroom, is completed.”

Paul Schrodt, “Theological Librarianship and Theological Education,” in *The American Theological Library Association: Essays in Celebration of the First Fifty Years*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Valerie R. Hotchkiss, and Kenneth E. Rowe (Evanston, Ill.: ATLA, 1996), 140.



its relational character

Pastoral work  
is relational.

Pastoral work  
is ministry.

Theological  
librarianship  
is relational.

Theological  
librarianship  
is ministry.



## **its relational character**

“All of this is to say, as I see it, that our jobs are carried on in the context of life, in the context of living things, primarily with persons, not inanimate objects. We are dealing with people in a very vital way.



## **its relational character**

We are dealing with growth in understanding, with the shaping of points of view, with developing and living philosophies, with the stuff which shall shape the promptings of conscience and ethical and moral perception.



## its relational character

We are dealing with situations which will fortify the will, which will shape character, and which will ultimately participate in the destiny of men.”

Raymond P. Morris, “Theological Librarianship as a Ministry,” *American Theological Library Association: Summary of Proceedings 7* (1953): 36.



## its occupation with religious materials

Theologian Roger Nicole made this comment to an assembly of Christian librarians: “As custodians of the records of the work of the Holy Spirit we have a task which has spiritual dimensions.”

Roger R. Nicole, “The Spiritual Dimension of the Librarian’s Task,” *The Christian Librarian* [U.S.A.] 25 (May/August 1982): 114.





## **its occupation with religious materials**

What he meant was that Christian tradition--interaction with Scripture and the Holy Spirit--is passed down through history in documents that are preserved in libraries (pp. 112-14).



## **its vocational nature**

67.8% of theological librarians who responded to Keck's survey reported that "theological librarianship (rather than other types of librarianship)" was "a vocational calling" for them (p. 178).



## its vocational nature

According to Keck, one respondent stated, “I entered theological librarianship on my way to ministry and after 10 years I realized I was already there . . .” (p. 178).



## its relation to church ministry

““Why did a nice guy like you leave the ministry?’ my family asked when I became a theological librarian [. . .]”



## **its relation to church ministry**

I wish to share with you my philosophy--no, better, my theology--of librarianship and the role of the library in theological education.



## its relation to church ministry

Far from having left the ministry, I conceive of my work and that of my staff as a ministry as well as an aid in multiple future ministries.”

John B. Trotti, “The Theological Library: In Touch with the Witnesses,” *Reformed Review* 35 (spring 1982): 157; emphasis added.



## conclusion

While theological librarianship is intrinsically service-oriented and religious, its practitioners will probably never be regarded as ministers in the same way as pastors, missionaries, or even Christian educators.



## conclusion

“When theological librarians perceive themselves as being in ministry, there is a theological and spiritual focus to their work that adds to their satisfaction and contentment in that they are engaged in both the ministry of their institution and the ministry of service possible through theological librarianship” (Keck, p. 181).