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**Intellectual Freedom and the Bible College Library**

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# Intellectual Freedom and the Bible College Library

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## Author Note

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Abstract

A number of evangelical Christian authors have grappled with the subject of intellectual freedom—few, though, in the context of Bible college libraries. The secular concept of intellectual freedom is incompatible with Bible colleges in that it is absolutist and shuns any standard of morality. Theological, educational, and pragmatic factors indicate that Bible college libraries should provide access to a broad range of information resources, irrespective of the positions they espouse, except to the extent that such openness poses a serious threat to the fulfillment of their sponsoring institutions' mission. To this end, Bible college libraries should take positive action to create, publicize, and administer appropriate policies and procedures, and otherwise demonstrate their commitment to mission-oriented intellectual freedom.

# Intellectual Freedom and the Bible College Library

According to the American Library Association (ALA, n.d.),

> Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored. (p. 1)

The ALA (1996) explains its position on intellectual freedom in the *Library Bill of Rights* (*LBR*), a document that claims to provide guidance for all libraries:

> I. . . . Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
>
> II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

Intellectual freedom is commonly considered to be a core value of librarianship (ALA, 1995; Gorman, 2000, pp. 89-90). Nevertheless, it is probably the greatest point of tension for evangelical Christians in the library profession. A review of the literature suggests that evangelicals hold to three basic views on the subject:

1. Evangelical faith affirms intellectual freedom, with few (if any) limitations. In this view, libraries should generally not proscribe on the basis of content or viewpoint. Davis (1985/2002) represents this position.

2. Evangelical faith requires believers to seek to impose significant restrictions on access to information in libraries, especially those that are publicly accessible. This is the Christian view

that receives the most attention within the library profession (for obvious reasons). Incidentally, it is probably the least popular among Christian librarians. This view is propounded by Johnston (1981/1985).

3. Evangelical faith provides for structural pluralism, a view of society where diverse communities are free to decide on the standards that they will observe (and live with the temporal and eternal consequences). In this view, academic libraries (both secular and religious) provide access to materials with few (if any) limitations, in keeping with their broad constituencies and mission. However, public libraries and school libraries (especially Christian school libraries) are justified in omitting certain materials or restricting access to certain patrons (on the basis of age, parental permission, etc.). Johnson (1981, 1985, 1990/2002) is a proponent of this view.

Unfortunately, few authors have investigated the connection between intellectual freedom and the Bible college library. To the author's knowledge, only three have addressed the subject directly, and no one has done so in more than a decade (see review of related literature below). This deficiency is severe. There are more than 400 Bible colleges in North America. They are distinct from other institutions of higher education on several counts: (a) They focus primarily on undergraduate biblical and ministerial education; (b) they incorporate general education components in order to promote the development of an integrated worldview; (c) they seek to foster students' spiritual and moral development in a variety of ways; and (d) they require students to engage in practical ministry (Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges [AABC], n.d.; Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Gangel, 1980; McKinney, 1997, pp. 14-19).

This article will argue that Bible college libraries should seek to integrate the principle of intellectual freedom with the unique vision of the Bible college movement. In short, Bible

college libraries should provide access to a diverse range of information resources, including much which contradicts the doctrinal and moral positions of their sponsors. Nevertheless, they should not regard intellectual freedom as an absolute, but as an ideal to be pursued within the context of their institutions' mission; thus they should recognize that various factors may legitimately limit their communities' access to information. This, then, is an argument for upholding intellectual freedom within the context of community (Johnson, 1990/2002, pp. 159-160). The parameters of this position will be delineated later in this article.

The argument will be structured as follows: (a) review of related literature; (b) the incompatibility of the secular concept of intellectual freedom; (c) theological, educational, and pragmatic rationales for mission-oriented intellectual freedom; and (d) implications for managing collections and access in Bible college libraries. The intended audience includes Bible college librarians, faculty, administrators, and trustees, as well as intellectual freedom advocates at large.

## Review of Related Literature

A growing body of literature discusses the philosophy, history, and operation of the Bible college—whether in relation to a specific institution or the Bible college movement as a whole. This corpus includes numerous books, periodical articles, dissertations, and other documents, most of which are sympathetic to the Bible college. Literature published by the AABC does not often address library concerns, and never, to the author's knowledge, evaluates the viability of intellectual freedom in Bible college libraries. Studies on this subject are scarce; relevant information is found almost exclusively in *The Christian Librarian [U.S.A.]*.

Several Christian librarians have evaluated intellectual freedom and censorship as general principles, without application to a particular type of library. Doerksen (1990) concluded that

Christian librarians should support the concept of intellectual freedom avidly, though not to the extent advocated by the ALA. Specifically, he objected to “the myths embedded within the ALA definition”: absolute freedom and neutrality (p. 110). He proposed that Christian librarians should weigh censorship decisions according to the principles of truth and love. Sauer (1993) began with a controversial assumption: “Censorship is a natural part of the communication process . . .” (p. 48). Having concluded that the right to self-expression is God-given and inherently limited, he identified six levels at which censorship appropriately occurs. Finally, he introduced the concept of “just censorship,” a mean between “the evils of unfettered expression and totalitarian thought control” (p. 51).

At least two researchers have conducted surveys to discover Christian college libraries’ policies and practices vis-à-vis intellectual freedom and censorship. Hippenhammer (1993) surveyed members of the Christian College Coalition and Bible colleges whose librarians were members of the Association of Christian Librarians. Survey questions dealt with (a) the existence and nature of policies for handling challenged materials; (b) support for the *LBR*; (c) the nature, number, and outcome of recent challenges; (d) selection of materials on controversial subjects; and (e) definitions of intellectual freedom. Among other findings, this study showed that respondents differed widely in their policies and practices, and that material was most often excluded because of its sexual content.

Hippenhammer (1994) complemented his 1993 article by (a) listing the titles of works challenged in Christian college libraries; (b) comparing his survey results to those of four other censorship studies; and (c) drawing conclusions regarding the application of intellectual freedom in Christian college libraries. His conclusions included the following: (a) Intellectual freedom is consonant with the freedom of choice inherent within the gospel; (b) collection policies should

address the selection of controversial resources; (c) libraries should collect materials because of their “social, educational and/or moral value” (p. 46), not necessarily because they favor the institution’s views; and (d) libraries should implement formal challenge procedures.

Sullivan (2000) reported the results of a survey regarding the use of Internet filtering in Christian college libraries. Her study yielded the following key findings: (a) 76% of respondents had an “acceptable use” policy or honor code in place; (b) 41% of respondents were using a filtering system or service; (c) 48% of institutions with filters were satisfied with them; (d) types of content most often filtered included pornography (100%), violence or gore (67%), and racism or hate (57%); (e) the use of filters caused both students and faculty to be “irritated or angry” at 14% of institutions represented; (f) Internet use restrictions were prevalent on campuses where there was no filtering; and (g) decisions to implement Internet filtering were often made by administrators, sometimes without input from librarians.

Other researchers have proposed guidelines governing the acquisition of, or access to, information resources in Christian college libraries. Sauer (1989) challenged Bible college librarians to develop broad collections. Specifically, he advised collecting in four realms: “integrative Bible study, the professions, the liberal arts, and the so-called life skills areas” (p. 40). He based his recommendations on two observations: (a) Many (if not most) Bible colleges aim to prepare leaders who integrate biblical and theological expertise, knowledge of contemporary affairs, and a range of practical and professional skills. (b) Some Christian liberal arts colleges are drifting from their spiritual moorings, a reality that should motivate Bible colleges to take the lead in faith-discipline integration.

Gates (1999) proposed three criteria for selecting library materials: morality, quality, and use. While not limiting his proposals to a particular type of library, his examples assumed the

context of an academic library where Christian principles could be followed overtly—a conservative Christian college. According to Gates, patron demand (i.e., use) should not be the dominant criterion in selection decisions. Rather, morality (defined as knowledge that is consistent with the Bible) should prevail. However, his selection model did provide for libraries to acquire resources containing false teaching in order to allow for their refutation.

Cobb (2000) proposed a rationale for using Internet filtering in the library at Liberty University. His argument consisted of the following points: (a) Liberty University's mission and philosophy statements contain overt references to students' moral and spiritual development. (b) Pornography has no redeeming value; addiction to it is incompatible with spirituality. (c) Filtering software blocks access to pornographic material in much the same way that libraries select resources to further educational goals. (d) Therefore, Liberty University is justified in using Internet filtering software. Cobb concluded his article by arguing that Christian libraries should evaluate professional standards from the perspective of Christian morality.

Finally, three librarians have authored studies addressing the application of intellectual freedom within the specific context of the Bible college library. In a 1981 article, Johnson argued that librarians serving in Christian institutions were justified in practicing a limited amount of censorship because of their educational, professional, and social responsibilities. Davis (1985/2002) responded to Johnson by propounding that intellectual freedom is consistent with elements of the evangelical worldview as well as the stated aims of Bible colleges. In a brief rejoinder, Johnson (1985) clarified that he opposed displaying a censorious attitude but allowed for individual acts of censorship.

Dahl (1988) reported the results of a survey of the intellectual freedom policies and practices of Bible college libraries across the United States. Her study, which essentially

evaluated responding libraries in terms of their conformity to the *LBR*, revealed that Bible college libraries are far from uniform in their approach to intellectual freedom and censorship. Dahl criticized harshly those libraries that violated the provisions of the *LBR*, and applauded those that upheld them despite apparent conflicts with their parent institutions' mission.

Johnson (1990/2002) eventually conducted a systematic evaluation of the ALA's intellectual freedom policies, finding them to be faulty on a number of counts and proposing an alternative approach grounded in the concept of structural pluralism. In the process of pursuing these goals, his study discussed the application of intellectual freedom within the Christian college library.

These studies make it clear that there is a considerable range of opinion and practice among Christian college librarians where intellectual freedom is concerned. Christian college libraries, including Bible college libraries, are more likely than their secular counterparts to acknowledge practicing some form of censorship (at least as defined by the ALA), and to consider such action to be consistent with their institutional philosophy and values. This fact notwithstanding, it seems that most Christian college librarians, including Bible college librarians, are probably committed to intellectual freedom in some form, though not necessarily that enjoined by the ALA.

## The Incompatibility of the Secular Concept

Many librarians consider absolute intellectual freedom to be inherent to professional practice. With this mind-set, they never approach a library asking if, or to what extent, it should uphold intellectual freedom. Dahl (1988) essentially evaluated Bible college libraries on the criterion of their adherence to the ALA definition of intellectual freedom. While her study

yielded valuable results, she failed to address a meaningful question: What approach to intellectual freedom is most consistent with the mission and philosophy of Bible colleges?

Christian librarians—especially those employed in Christian institutions—cannot afford to imbibe professional standards and values uncritically (Smith, 2002a). Rather, they must consciously evaluate their philosophy and practice from a Christian worldview (Smith, 2002a, 2000/2002c, 2002d). The secular concept of intellectual freedom is incompatible with the Bible college library on two counts: First, it is absolutist, making no concession to the ownership or mission of the library. Johnson (1990/2002) addressed this issue well:

> The LBR states categorically that it applies to "all libraries." In so doing, the LBR is claiming a higher authority than the owners of the libraries—it so emphasizes individual rights (i.e., library users) that it denies community rights (i.e., institutional owners). . . . [T]he LBR imposes an a priori obligation on both librarians and the institutions that own libraries. They may not exercise discretion based on situational factors. . . . These features demonstrate that the LBR is promoting an ideology which takes priority over other values and perspectives. (pp. 141-142)

Second, the secular concept of intellectual freedom shuns any standard of morality. On this view, librarians are in no way responsible for the material they make available to library patrons. Access to information is strictly a private matter, and librarians have no right to exercise restraint on behalf of their communities. But this view of intellectual freedom is incompatible with an institution committed to the integration of faith and life. Texts and images convey ideas, and ideas have consequences. Therefore, administrators, professors, and librarians are responsible, to some extent, for the information they make available to their campus community. Library resources and services should contribute to, not detract from, the moral and spiritual

growth of students and faculty (Smith, 2002e).

These two contentions do not imply that Bible college libraries should select only those resources that support their views—doctrinal, moral, or otherwise. Access to heretical, erroneous, shocking, and graphic materials does play a part in preparing students to fulfill their calling in a world marred by sin (Bob Jones University, 1990, pp. 17-21). However, Bible college libraries should formulate and implement a doctrine of intellectual freedom that is consistent with their institutional mission and their view of morality. These themes will be developed further in the "rationale" sections that follow.

## A Theological Rationale

The Bible nowhere addresses librarianship directly. For this very reason, perhaps, it is not too difficult to find supposed biblical support for one's preconceived ideas on many library issues. Therefore, one must exercise great caution when applying scriptural teachings to library practice. In many cases, intellectual honesty requires one to assume a position of balance between extremes. In the judgment of this writer, such is the case with the issue of intellectual freedom: The Bible provides a basis for free access to information, but there is also evidence that such freedom should be less than absolute within Christian communities.

The biblical case for freedom begins in the creation account, where God commissioned Adam (and, by implication, his descendants) to exercise dominion over nature (Gen. 1:26-28). Fulfilling this stewardship requires mankind to share information—including truth claims later found to be inaccurate—in an effort to learn the inner workings of the created order. The creation mandate thus legitimates some form of intellectual freedom (Johnson, 1990/2002, pp. 161-162; McDonald, 1979, pp. 13-14; Smith, 2000/2002b, pp. 32-33).

Human freedom—including, presumably, intellectual freedom—is also implicit in the account of Adam's fall into sin. God instructed Adam not to consume the fruit, yet he allowed him the freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience. Adam and Eve were free to accept misleading information from the serpent, but they could not escape the consequences of their choice to disobey God (Doerksen, 1990, p. 111).

The New Testament authors validated the principle of open inquiry in various ways. They appealed regularly to empirical evidence in the defense of their claims (Acts 1:3; 26:26; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; 1 John 1:1-3). Luke claimed that his gospel was based on the testimony of eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). Paul used his knowledge of contemporary literature (Acts 17:28; Tit. 1:12) and Greco-Roman literary forms to further his ministry.

Intellectual freedom is even implied in Paul's injunctions to local churches. The Roman Christians were free to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, sometimes in direct opposition to the practice of fellow believers (Rom. 14). The Corinthian prophets were to evaluate each others' teaching (1 Cor. 14:29). The Thessalonians were instructed to test all things and retain what was good (1 Thess. 5:21). In each of these cases, the church was expected to allow for the expression and examination of diverse perspectives on doctrinal and practical matters.

According to Davis (1985/2002), two basic theological realities—the sovereignty of God and the divine provenance of all truth—should motivate Christians to support intellectual freedom. Recognizing God's sovereignty in human history empowers one to believe that, whatever error mankind may pursue, truth and right will ultimately prevail.

Secure believers can make selection decisions, utilizing all the tools available, even if those decisions mean including materials that they strongly disagree with or even find

> revolting. Convinced of God's ultimate sovereignty, Christians can probably do this with much less anxiety—and possibly more enthusiasm—than unbelieving colleagues. (p. 134)

Accepting the divine provenance of truth relieves believers of fear and endows them with "an intellectual curiosity that is wide-ranging" (p. 134). Because all truth is God's truth, they find it worthwhile to read and collect resources whose authors subscribe to non-Christian views. This approach to truth has venerable precedents in Christian history. Augustine, the great fourth-century church father, defended the inclusion of works by secular authors in Christian libraries in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. John Milton, famed author of *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained*, defended the freedom of the press—and, by extension, the freedom to read—in his *Areopagitica*, published in 1644.

The theological basis for intellectual freedom is substantial, but it must be qualified by some important biblical principles, foremost among which is the nature of sin. Sin is endemic to the human race (Eccles. 7:20; Matt. 7:11; Rom. 3:10; 3:23; 5:12). It is inherently deceptive (John 8:44; Rom. 7:11; 2 Cor. 4:3-4), and it carries grave consequences (Deut. 30:15-20; Prov. 6:27-28; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Given the biblical view of sin, Bible college librarians would do well to assess the effects that their stewardship of books and media can have on library users' spiritual, moral, and intellectual development.

The biblical concept of truth constitutes a second limit to freedom of inquiry. According to Johnson (1990/2002), "*the biblical concept of intellectual freedom is freedom to pursue truth*—that is, God's knowledge of reality—with confidence in the ultimate complete coherence of all true knowledge" (p. 140). Christian freedom is not license; identification with Christ liberates believers from the bondage of sin to practice holiness (Rom. 6). Similarly, the

Christian's intellectual life must conform to divine design, being directed toward the apprehension of truth that ultimately belongs to God. In Doerksen's (1990) words, "Truth is greater than freedom; without it freedom does not exist (John 8:32). Truth is greater than choice; apart from it choices have no ultimate rationale. Truth is the standard by which all ideas must be judged" (p. 111). It follows from this that Bible college library collections will favor works that contribute to the discernment of truth. Materials that are primarily entertainment-oriented, especially those that are of questionable moral character, will be scarce.

Biblical references to the destruction of idols and other artifacts inimical to the worship of the true God provide a third argument for subordinating intellectual freedom to institutional mission in Christian libraries. Old Testament law specifically enjoined Israelites to eradicate the worship of false gods from the land of Canaan (Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Deut. 7:5, 25, 26; 12:1-4). Such acts of censorship were performed by Moses (Exod. 32:19-20), Gideon (Judg. 6:28-32), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:3-6), Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-20), and other Old Testament believers. Similarly, new Christians in Ephesus burned occult texts as an act of repentance (Acts 19:19).

It is significant to note that one does not find God's people attempting to cleanse heathen lands—Egypt, Babylon, or Rome—of their idols. Rather, purging extended only to the sphere where God had made His name dwell, whether the land of Israel, local churches in the New Testament, or the lives of individual followers of Christ. Therefore, these accounts have little to say about the removal of offensive materials from libraries that are supported by the general public. Nevertheless, libraries which purport to advance Christian truth and values, including those on Bible college campuses, should consider carefully the impact of their selection decisions on the spiritual and moral development of their patrons (Smith, 2002e, pp. 185-186).

## An Educational Rationale

The Bible college differs in its philosophy of education from other institutions of higher education. Its distinctive educational stance has implications for library practice, and particularly for the selection of information resources. In fact, the educational philosophy of the Bible college warrants providing access to information resources that diverge significantly from the theological, moral, political, and social views of the institution and its faculty. Nevertheless, the college's mission requires it to subordinate information access to the moral and spiritual dimensions of the learning process. Thus the educational philosophy of the Bible college is itself an argument for mission-oriented intellectual freedom.

Three arguments comprise the educational case for broad access to information in the Bible college library. First, academic libraries aim to document all points of view on controversial issues. According to Johnson (1990/2002),

> a major function of the library is to document the discoveries and viewpoints of those who are pursuing knowledge in the fields of study and topics of concern at the college. When a college community understands its library collection primarily as documentation, there is relatively little pressure for removal of materials because they are objectionable. (p. 66)

Similarly, Smith (2000/2002b) noted that

> libraries do not stock information-bearing resources because they are definitively true, but because they purport to convey truth. In other words, libraries collect books and other sources to document various positions on a given issue, affording researchers the opportunity to weigh the evidence and come to their own conclusions. (p. 33)

Second, Christians can benefit from the intellectual pursuits of secular thinkers. Sire

(1990) observed that

> the Fall did not obliterate human rationality; rather it twisted it so that in all our thought we are prone to error as the sparks fly upward. But even after the Fall there are more than vestiges of intelligence. John Calvin writes, “In reading profane [he means non-Christian] authors, the admirable light of truth in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator.” Then Calvin goes on to list the virtues of the pagan philosophers, rhetoricians, medical experts, mathematicians and poets, and concludes, “Therefore, since it is manifest that men whom the Scriptures term natural, are so acute and clear-sighted in the investigation of inferior things, their example should teach us how many gifts the Lord left in possession of human nature, notwithstanding of its having been despoiled of the true good.” (p. 94)

At first glance it might appear that the writings of non-Christian authors would be profitable mainly in the general education components of the Bible college curriculum. However, they prove beneficial even in the fields of biblical interpretation, theology, and church ministry—the Bible college’s specialties. Precise biblical interpretation is dependent on linguistic, archeological, and historical insights brought to light by scholars outside the faith. The theological enterprise draws on the insights of philosophy and is enhanced by study in disciplines such as history, psychology, biology, and physical science. The study of church ministry builds on research in a variety of fields: communication, education, psychology, sociology, music, anthropology, and more. In fact, “all truth is ultimately known to God and so may be called ‘God’s truth’ whether it be found in the Bible or elsewhere” (Holmes, 1983, pp. 8-9).

Third, Bible colleges aim to develop students’ critical thinking abilities (Ferris & Enlow,

1997, pp. 13-15). Bible colleges prepare students to minister in a world that is hostile to Christianity. Effective ministry training involves exposing students to error in a controlled environment. In this connection, Davis (1985/2002) asked,

> *On your campus are you simply an efficient administrator of a bibliographical warehouse or are you an intellectual provocateur—an intellectual subversive—who is providing stimulus to* all *users?* Although such a stance might well jeopardize the prevailing tranquility of a campus, it might elevate the quiet role of the librarian. Why couldn't the library sponsor discussions of controversial books, Christian or otherwise? listen to contemporary poetry, study recent significant motion pictures, suggest valuable reading for students? At least the library could cooperate with other departments or student organizations in doing this. (p. 137)

The educational philosophy of the Bible college clearly calls for access to information resources that document a broad spectrum of views on topics relevant to the curriculum. Faculty members recognize their debt to the contributions of secular writers and understand the educational benefits of stretching students' minds through exposure to worldviews contrary to their own. Yet information access at the Bible college can hardly be the same as on secular campuses, for the library's commitment to intellectual freedom cannot be allowed to surpass the institution's commitment to students' character formation. Trustees and administrators will probably consider some types of material (e.g., pornography) so harmful that they will forbid student access to them—whether in the library or elsewhere. In addition, the library will probably be expected to develop a "nurture-related collection" that is "decidedly Christian" (Johnson, 1990/2002, p. 150).

Interpreting intellectual freedom less than absolutely in the Bible college library is

essentially analogous to establishing contextually-based parameters on professors' exercise of academic freedom in the Bible college classroom (Johnson, 1990/2002, pp. 146-147). The American Association of University Professors, while favoring unlimited academic freedom, tolerates restrictions that are based on clearly stated religious viewpoints (Marsden, 1998; May, 1988, pp. 23-24). One can only wish that professional library associations would acknowledge the validity of limiting intellectual freedom in academic libraries whose parent institutions articulate precisely their doctrinal and moral boundaries.

Interestingly, the fact that church-related colleges impose restrictions on their own academic freedom actually increases the diversity of the academy. Discussions that are considered out of bounds in classrooms on secular campuses can take place in the halls of religious institutions (Marsden, 1998, ¶ 1-4; May, 1988, pp. 25-26). Similarly, Christian college libraries acquire a significant amount of religious literature that never finds its way into secular academic library collections for one reason or another (Ingolfsland, 1999). Imposing a uniform standard of bias-free collection management on Bible college libraries—by some interpretations, the intent of the ALA policy—might actually diminish the diversity of resources available in the world's libraries (Johnson, 1990/2002, p. 160). Thus the practice of mission-oriented intellectual freedom in Bible college libraries not only serves the ends of the institutions themselves but enriches the scholarly community as a whole.

## A Pragmatic Rationale

The case for practicing mission-oriented intellectual freedom also draws support from a number of pragmatic considerations. Arguments for broad access to information are essentially the same that would apply in any other library context. First, the library serves the needs of a

broad range of patrons (students, staff, and faculty), each with a distinct view of propriety. Library patrons differ in age, educational level, and marital status. Those who have children at home likely perceive materials differently than those who do not. What offends one patron's sensitivities may prove edifying to another. While this is not a rationale to eliminate all standards, it does create significant challenges for library administration.

Second, it is not feasible for the library to critique the content of each item that it acquires. While selectors consult reviews prior to ordering many books and media, they are not available for every item, and reviewers often do not share the perspective of the sponsoring institution. The library cannot examine in detail each item that is acquired; this would take an enormous amount of time, and the staff does not have the qualifications to evaluate sources in every subject area.

Third, the library receives some materials in aggregate form. In the print realm this includes periodical subscriptions, reference works, and monograph series for which the library has a standing order. The electronic realm is even more complex: The library subscribes to full-text databases provided by vendors. The vendors select the books and periodicals that make up such databases, and often do not provide means for libraries to suppress any of the databases' content. For better or for worse, the library makes its selection decisions at the aggregate level.

On the other hand, pragmatic concerns provide a rationale for limiting information access in the Bible college. This is most obviously the case in regards to the political fallout that can accompany acquisition of, or access to, highly controversial materials. While librarians should not be afraid to defend items that appear to some to be inappropriate, not every battle is worth fighting. It is of little value to the library (or to the institution that sponsors it, for that matter) to defend a controversial item if the process will likely result in a significant loss in funding or

public support. Convictions are certainly worth defending, but one must consider the wisdom of making a small concession concerning intellectual freedom ideals in the interest of pleasing constituents and perpetuating goodwill toward the library and its parent.

## Managing Collections and Access

Thus far this article has argued that mission-oriented intellectual freedom constitutes a philosophically defensible approach to managing information access in the Bible college library—more defensible, in fact, than the absolutist view of intellectual freedom commonly presumed to be appropriate for all libraries. If this premise is correct, then Bible college librarians must take their intellectual freedom responsibilities quite seriously. As the preceding discussion has shown, the library's information access practices are inherently intertwined with the institution's educational philosophy. Denying access to classes of material without sufficient justification diminishes the value of the institution's academic programs. On the other hand, if the library assumes a position of neutrality vis-à-vis information access, it relinquishes much of the role it can play in students' character formation (Smith, 2002e), essentially compromising the institution's *raison d'être*.

What can the Bible college library do to achieve the delicate balance of mission-oriented intellectual freedom? First, the library should resolve to provide access to a broad range of literature: evangelical Christian, non-evangelical Christian, and secular. According to Sauer (1989), Bible colleges should collect in at least four areas of knowledge: Bible, professional matters, liberal arts, and life skills. As Johnson (1985) explained it, Bible college librarians should be non-censorious in their general attitude toward collection development.

Second, the library should review its collection management policy to ensure that it gives

due attention to the issue of intellectual freedom. The policy should articulate the scope of the library's collection and access activities. In addition, it should establish clear procedures for patrons to challenge, and the library to evaluate, materials perceived to be inappropriate under the terms of the policy. Finally, it should correlate with institutional mission and philosophy and bear appropriate administrative authority (Hippenhammer, 1994; Johnson, 1990/2002, pp. 150-151).

Third, the library should distinguish between perspective and presentation in its evaluation of controversial materials. The library should provide access to all perspectives on the topics of concern to the institution's curriculum. However, it has the right to exclude materials that are unnecessarily inflammatory in language, pictorial content, or other features.

Fourth, the library should proactively educate constituents regarding its collection and access policies. The library's educational efforts should target students, faculty, administrators, and perhaps even board members and supporters. Educating constituents is admittedly a challenging task, but it is better to create realistic expectations from the outset than to work through the conflicts that can arise from misunderstanding of the library's aims.

Fifth, the library should enlist the aid of teaching faculty in the formulation and application of its intellectual freedom policies and procedures. Seeking faculty input in these matters is more than a gesture of goodwill; in fact, it can enhance the process by expanding the range of expertise and experience that support decision-making. Libraries should seek administrative endorsement of their policies; however, they should not, in this author's judgment, consult with administrators concerning the application of policy to specific situations. Consulting on the application of policy invites micromanagement and, ultimately, denies the professional competence of librarians and teaching faculty.

Sixth, the library may consider labeling or restricting access to materials that are particularly offensive or subject to misuse. Such concessions are usually not ideal, but may prove expedient in the effort to preserve the highest levels of information access tolerable within the parameters of a Christian institution's mission. Educating users concerning the library's selection policies is, of course, the best plan of action.

In conclusion, though the issue of intellectual freedom in libraries has attracted the attention of numerous evangelical Christian authors, few have grappled with the subject in the specific context of Bible college libraries. The secular concept of intellectual freedom is incompatible with Bible colleges in that it is absolutist and shuns any standard of morality. Theological, educational, and pragmatic factors indicate that Bible college libraries should provide access to a broad range of information resources, irrespective of the positions they espouse, except to the extent that such a policy is fundamentally at odds with their sponsoring institutions' mission. Finally, Bible college libraries should take seriously their intellectual freedom responsibilities, giving particular attention to creating, publicizing, and administering appropriate policies and procedures.

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