

7-12-2023

The Biblical Worldview and Libraries

Gregory A. Smith
Liberty University, greg@liberty.edu

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The Biblical Worldview and Libraries, Part 1: A Group Discussion Process

 christianscholars.com/the-biblical-worldview-and-libraries-part-1-a-group-discussion-process/

By Gregory A. Smith

June 14, 2023



Editor's Note: This post is the first in a five-part series that will appear every Wednesday for the next five weeks.

Archives and libraries are known from manuscript and archeological evidence to have existed in the Ancient Near East long before the time of Abraham, and they clearly played important roles in the Greco-Roman world.¹ Although many biblical texts seem to imply the use of libraries,² direct references to libraries or archives are limited to Ezra 5:17 and Esther 6:1-2 (referring to collections in Babylon and Persia, respectively).³ With libraries scarcely appearing in the biblical record, a casual reader of the title of this piece might be inclined to think that the biblical worldview has little, if anything, to say about the contemporary institutions that we refer to as libraries. Through a series of posts that will follow this one, I hope to provide abundant evidence to the contrary.

My passion for integrating Christian faith with the theory and practice of librarianship⁴ is based in part on the influence of Carl F. H. Henry, who wrote 35 years ago:

There is not a sphere of learning and life that should fall outside the Christian vision. . . . The current condition of the secular milieu calls insistently for an exhibition of evangelical culture that confronts contemporary human alienation from God and man with a vital alternative. Never has the need for a culture enlivened by the moral law of God been more urgent than in our generation when social tumult obscures the very patterns of normalcy, and in fact champions the normless.⁵

If Henry was correct about the inclusiveness of “the Christian vision,” then there is a warrant for followers of Jesus to consider intentionally what the Bible’s teachings may imply for the sphere of library science. In this post, I describe a recent project undertaken to achieve progress in this area.

A few months ago, I made a brief presentation to the faculty and staff of my library, asking them to consider how a particular biblical doctrine—creation—might impact their approach to their work. I concluded by calling for volunteers who might be interested in forming a discussion group to explore

more thoroughly the connections between the biblical worldview and librarianship. Seven of my colleagues expressed interest and we convened on a near-weekly basis for much of the spring semester.⁶

The Bible is an extensive book—a miniature library, in a sense. Clearly, it would have been impossible for us to consider the entire biblical record as we sought to discern its relationship to our line of work. Nevertheless, I thought it important to ensure that our reflective processes took account of the essential elements of the biblical worldview. As a result, I decided to guide the group’s discussion by using four common “frames” of the biblical narrative: *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation*.⁷ Following is an overview of this model:

- *Creation*: Drawing on the Genesis account and numerous other biblical references, this frame encompasses the full spectrum of God’s creative work. Areas of focus include the creation’s properties, its revelation of God’s attributes, and its implications for a proper understanding of human society.
- *Fall*: This frame addresses the nature, extent, and consequences of humanity’s plunge into sin, as described throughout the Scriptures.
- *Redemption*: Focusing on God’s salvific purposes and acts, this frame includes themes such as covenants, Israel, the kingdom of God, the atoning work of Jesus Christ, and the mission of the church.
- *Consummation*: This frame encompasses eschatological themes such as the millennial kingdom, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, final punishment of the wicked, and God’s eternal dwelling with the redeemed.

I led the group through two weeks of structured reflection, writing, and discussion concerning each frame. The process generally followed this sequence:

1. Individual group members read from carefully selected reference sources to help them identify biblical texts relevant to the frame.⁸
2. Individual group members drafted theological propositions that might hold relevance for libraries, each accompanied by supporting scripture references.⁹
3. Group members voted anonymously to identify the most useful propositions formulated in the previous stage. An example from the *Creation* frame read as follows: “God granted humans dominion over the living world (Gen 1:26-28; 5:1-2; Ps 8:6-8).”
4. Individual group members drafted potential implications of the theological propositions for libraries.
5. Group members worked individually and collectively to refine the implication statements. One output from the *Fall* frame was this: “Because the world has set itself up in rebellion to God, libraries may be expected to encourage and celebrate the sinful actions and attitudes of the culture around them.”
6. Group members voted anonymously to identify the most useful implication statements.

The repetition of this process for the four frames led to the production of nearly 8,000 words of output, comprising theological propositions, supporting biblical texts, and implication statements. To aid in achieving practical value from the group’s work, I organized the implication statements under five

themes derived from published definitions of the word *library*:¹⁰

- Library Users
- Library Resources
- Library Programs and Services
- Library Roles
- Library Personnel

The group concluded its work with two weeks of oral discussion in which we examined the five themes in turn, in each case seeking to integrate findings from the four frames. The overall process proved to be rewarding and allowed for meaningful contributions from participants who differed as to age, extent and type of library work experience, and educational attainments.

Kurt Lewin is credited with stating that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory.”¹¹ Over the course of four coming posts, drawing on insights from the discussion group’s work, I will share how the biblical worldview provides remarkably practical theory concerning libraries, accounting for their existence across diverse cultures worldwide; plausibly explaining virtues, flaws, opportunities, and challenges; and prescribing principles through which Christians can advance God’s kingdom through library work.

Footnotes

1. For a broad introduction, see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra and Olof Pedersén, “Archives and Libraries,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 2:676–87, <https://doi.org/10.1515/EBR.archivesandlibraries>.
2. See, for example, 2 Chr 17:9; Eccl 12:12; Luke 4:17; Acts 7:22; and 2 Tim 4:13.
3. If one includes the Apocrypha, 2 Macc 2:13, referring to a library in Jerusalem, can be added to the short list.
4. Outworkings of such passion have included editing a book, *Christian Librarianship: Essays on the Integration of Faith and Profession* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002); compiling a bibliography of about 600 resources that address connections between Christian faith and the world of libraries and information; contributing various posts to this blog; and other efforts.
5. Carl F. H. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization: The Drift toward Neo-paganism* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 123–24.
6. I am grateful for each participant’s contributions to the discussion process. Those who consented to be acknowledged in this piece were Abigail Sattler, Andi Molinet, Angie Thompson, Anne Foust, Cole Laing, and Tami McDowell.
7. The first three frames are generally consistent across various proponents’ models. The fourth is alternately labeled as *New Creation* or *Restoration*. I introduced the four-frame model to the group by way of this source: Robert Robinson, “Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation,” video, September 30, 2015, <https://prezi.com/xmds-bf9r1tw/creation-fall-redemption-consummation/>. Reading two other resources informed my thinking as I undertook the role of discussion leader: Phyllis Crosby, “The Kingdom Story,” <https://www.christianunion.org/images/content/pdf/NYCU/kingdom-story.pdf>; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

8. Sources used at this stage included the following, among others: Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Topical Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000); Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020).
9. The goal was that resulting statements be consistent with historic Christian orthodoxy and broadly acceptable within the evangelical Christian community.
10. One brief definition that touches on all five themes is found in Michael Levine-Clark and Toni M. Carter, *ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science*, 4th ed. (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2013): “A collection . . . of materials in various formats . . . organized to provide physical, bibliographic, and intellectual access to a target group, with a staff trained to provide services and programs related to the information needs of the target group” (p. 151; emphasis in original).
11. Kurt Lewin, “Psychology and the Process of Group Living,” *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 17, no. 1, 1943: 118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1943.9712269>. Ironically, Lewin did not claim the saying as original, but attributed it to an anonymous businessman.

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The Biblical Worldview and Libraries, Part 2: Library Users

 christianscholars.com/the-biblical-worldview-and-libraries-part-2-library-users/

By Gregory A. Smith

June 21, 2023

This post is the second of a five-part series. The [initial segment of the series](#) described how I and seven of my colleagues at Liberty University met regularly in the early months of 2023 to examine the realm of libraries from a distinctively biblical worldview. Specifically, we considered the implications of four “frames” of the biblical narrative—*Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation*—for five library-related themes: users, resources, programs and services, roles, and personnel. Library users and information-bearing resources are arguably the most foundational aspects of a library.¹ This post develops a biblical perspective of library users, drawing on insights from the group’s discussion.² Scriptural support for the various claims appears in footnotes.³

The *Creation* frame conveys numerous insights about human nature that are relevant to the existence and use of libraries. According to the first two chapters of Genesis, the first humans—both male and female—were created in the image of God.⁴ Designed to do both physical and intellectual work,⁵ they were endowed as moral agents capable of relating to their Creator and to one another.⁶ Furthermore, they were commissioned as stewards over the created order and were directed to reproduce and fill the earth.⁷ By implication, Adam and Eve’s descendants were to build a society whose members managed the earth’s resources to God’s glory.

Throughout history, human capabilities and responsibilities have supplied the means and motivation for us to make sense of a God-ordered world. We seek to learn what is already known to him and we share our discoveries, experiences, and memories with others. Human existence is a process of inquiry that necessarily involves consuming and producing information. Libraries are well-positioned to support these activities. Not only do they furnish organized collections of human knowledge, but they facilitate connections between diverse users in a variety of ways: attracting us to shared spaces, hosting events that allow us to pursue common interests, informing us about community concerns, and providing access to resources that can help us to understand ourselves and others.

Sadly, the *Fall* frame makes clear that realizing our intellectual and relational potential is difficult because all humans—and thus all library users—are marred by sin.⁸ In our quest for knowledge, we often fail to reckon with the reality of our finiteness and our moral failings, preferring to accept self-deceptions rather than defer to the authority of a transcendent God.⁹ We tend to gravitate toward sources that confirm our own biases and preconceptions.¹⁰ Furthermore, although library services and programs draw us into proximity with others, we are prone to act out of selfish interests, thereby diminishing community rather than cultivating it.¹¹ Finally, we may be tempted to use the library’s resources or services for purposes that are inconsistent with our calling to love God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves.¹²

Combining the *Creation* and *Fall* frames, we can characterize library users as those in whom nobility and brokenness are mysteriously combined. Users are unquestionably libraries’ *raison d’être*, and library workers regularly derive deep satisfaction from serving those who exhibit curiosity, kindness,

and gratitude. However, users inevitably approach the library as broken people, and workers must anticipate and respond to patrons who are difficult, disruptive, destructive, or harassing.

The biblical narrative's emphasis on *Redemption* offers hope that libraries can somehow mediate common grace—and, in some cases, even the blessings of salvation—to those of us who use them. At a minimum, libraries seek to embody the reality that temporal benefits—even life-transforming ones—are accessible to every user.¹³ This is not to suggest that libraries exist on some exalted moral plane; as one Christian observer recently wrote, “Libraries aren’t safe, but they are good.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, followers of Jesus who work in libraries recognize that no user is beyond the reach of God’s redemptive power,¹⁵ and indeed seek to act and speak as agents of God’s reconciliation.¹⁶

The *Consummation* frame assures us that human existence extends beyond the grave,¹⁷ and thus that activities undertaken by and directed toward library users bear eternal significance.¹⁸ Christians who have been called to library work carry out their professional responsibilities with a mixture of lightheartedness and gravity, mindful of the impact that their words and deeds may have on the paths and destinies of library users.¹⁹

Paraphrasing C. S. Lewis’s “The Weight of Glory,” one might say that there are no *ordinary* library users—no mere mortals approaching a desk with a question. The nations, cultures, arts, and civilizations represented in library collections—these are mortal. But it is immortals whom library workers greet, assist, confront, and disdain—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. Such persons are not merely to be tolerated or indulged but are to be met with a real and costly love that is offered in spite of their faults.²⁰

As the preceding paragraphs have shown, the Bible speaks unequivocally to the nature of the human beings who are a library’s prospective and actual users. Readers who wish to explore this subject further may benefit from the following sources:

Ream, Todd C. “For or unto Me? Explorations of the Formative Potential of Libraries.” *The Christian Librarian* 62, no. 2 (December 2019): 81–97.
<https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2113>.

Strong, Cynthia. “Holy Listening in Reference Work: A Sacred Aspect of the Christian Librarian’s Calling.” In *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*, edited by Garrett B. Trott, 223–33. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019.

Undoubtedly, this post has raised questions without providing corresponding answers. I hope to provide more clarity on some of those issues in the remainder of this series. My next post will draw inferences from the Scriptures concerning the information-bearing resources that users access through libraries.

Footnotes

1. Users and resources certainly figure prominently in S. R. Ranganathan’s famed conceptualization of libraries, *The Five Laws of Library Science*, published in various editions: (1) Books are for use. (2) Every person his or her book. (3) Every book its reader. (4) Save the time of the reader. (5) A library is a growing organism.
2. Although I gratefully acknowledge my colleagues’ contributions to the discussion process, I take responsibility for the contents of all pieces in the series.

3. Given that the Bible scarcely acknowledges the existence of libraries (see [Part 1](#)) and provides no direct guidance concerning their operation, biblical references presented here and in the following posts should be taken with caution. In many cases, they indicate a mere contextual foundation from which a library-oriented implication may be derived.
4. Gen 1:26–27.
5. Gen 2:15, 19–20a.
6. Gen 2:16–18.
7. Gen 1:26, 28–30.
8. Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:23.
9. Jas 1:23–24.
10. 2 Tim 4:3–4.
11. Eph 4:17–19; Titus 3:3.
12. Ps 10:2–4.
13. Matt 5:45.
14. Emily Belz, “Libraries Aren’t Safe, but They Are Good,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2023, 58–63.
15. 1 Tim 1:15.
16. 2 Cor 5:18–20.
17. John 5:28–29.
18. Rev 20:12.
19. Matt 5:16; Phil 2:14–16.
20. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 53.

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The Biblical Worldview and Libraries, Part 3: Library Resources

 christianscholars.com/the-biblical-worldview-and-libraries-part-3-library-resources/

By Gregory A. Smith

June 28, 2023

This post is the third of a five-part series. In the [first post](#) I described how I met with a group of colleagues earlier this year to explore implications of the biblical worldview for the realm of libraries. Our discussion drew on four “frames” of the biblical narrative: *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation*. In the [second post](#), I drew on the group’s findings to outline a biblical view of library users. This post focuses on the resources to which libraries provide access.

Collections of information-bearing works—scientific, historical, creative, and more—are intrinsically associated with libraries. Interestingly, the *Creation* frame anticipates in at least three ways the emergence of an abundance of recorded works. First, Adam and Eve received a mandate to exercise responsible dominion over the earth’s resources.¹ Working to fulfill this assignment naturally leads to discovering, preserving, and transmitting information—more than can be managed through oral tradition alone. Second, curiosity and creativity are intrinsic to human nature; we are, after all, made in the image of the supreme Creator.² Third, creation is vast in scope and complexity, comprising not only our natural environment but also its potential to sustain a diverse social milieu.³ These factors ensure that there is no shortage of subject matter to be explored or of motivation to gain mastery over it.⁴ The amount of information produced by human actors over the course of millennia, but with increasing intensity in a digital age, is massive.

Whereas the *Creation* frame rationally accounts for the proliferation of books and media, the *Fall* frame explains why the information contained within such works is often misleading, inconclusive, and devoid of moral virtue, generally evidencing the brokenness of the world in which we live.⁵ Although absolute truth—God’s knowledge of reality—does exist, human ability to perceive it is limited because of the personal and systemic effects of sin.⁶ Much published information reflects a skewed, self-serving interpretation of reality. Not surprisingly, scholarship in the academic disciplines generally starts from humanistic, agnostic, or atheistic premises, never giving credence to the authority of the Designer.⁷ As a further consequence of the Fall, libraries operate in a physical environment where resources are scarce and prone to decay over time.⁸ When these factors are combined, they diminish the chances that library users will realize the learning potential latent in creation.

The *Redemption* frame offers hope that, notwithstanding sin’s profound effects, God is actively working in the world to mediate blessings to fallen people.⁹ This hope manifests itself in many ways, including the resources that libraries make available to their users. Expressions of God’s goodness to humanity may be found in medical literature that aids in the prevention and treatment of disease; in scientific studies that help people use the earth’s resources to sustain an ever-growing population; and in educational publications that enable teachers to foster the many possibilities associated with literacy and learning.¹⁰ Of course, divine grace is not confined to that which serves research or technical purposes. Poetry, fiction, musical recordings, films, biographies, and graphical works are a source of great enjoyment and can help to counter the ills of a cursed world.¹¹ All of these blessings tend to extend the duration of human life and/or enhance its quality; indirectly, they may create opportunities for people to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹²

Library resources can also play a role in furthering God's redemptive activity in its purest sense. The Bible—or at least some portion of it—has been translated into an ever-increasing number of languages. Additionally, a vast amount of published literature is available to aid in the interpretation of the Scriptures and the application of its truths to personal and collective life. Finally, as evidenced by this blog and the journal with which it is associated, Christian scholars have made significant efforts to produce resources that interpret the academic disciplines in ways that are faithful to biblical teachings.¹³ As the Scriptures and Christian publications are made available in libraries, they can help to advance the kingdom of God.¹⁴

The *Consummation* frame emphasizes that God will ultimately dwell amid those people who have gladly received him as King, forever satisfying them with delights that are consistent with his holy will. The joys of using a well-resourced library may supply a foretaste of what awaits the Lord's redeemed in a perfect environment. Perhaps, then, there is some truth to Jorge Luis Borges's assertion: "I had always imagined Paradise as a kind of library."¹⁵

Nevertheless, *Consummation* entails a sobering truth: that all people will give account to God for choices made during their earthly life span.¹⁶ Since eternal life can be found only through faith in Jesus Christ,¹⁷ it is important that publications rooted in biblical teaching be made broadly accessible,¹⁸ including through libraries. The principle of intellectual freedom, if applied equitably, will ensure that those who seek to learn about the Bible and the Christian faith can do so without difficulty. Of course, resources that reflect or describe other belief systems will also be present in libraries, and Christians may use them profitably to learn how to engage effectively with their adherents.¹⁹

The biblical worldview makes sense of libraries' existence. Furthermore, it anticipates the opportunities and challenges that arise when libraries seek to serve a diverse array of users with access to cultural media. Although many library resources may have questionable value, library collections generally play a variety of positive roles in society. Christians have an interest in using them and shaping their development.

In my next post, I will examine library programs, services, and roles from a biblical perspective. Readers who want to explore further the subject matter of this post may find value in the following sources:

Delivuk, John Allen. "The Biblical Concept of Remembrance and Some of Its Implications for Library Science." *The Christian Librarian* 37, no. 4 (August 1994): 99–103.

———. "Wisdom Literature and Some of Its Implications for Selecting Library Materials." *The Christian Librarian* 41, no. 2 (April 1998): 34–38.

Johnson, James R. "A Christian Approach to Intellectual Freedom in Libraries." In *Christian Librarianship: Essays on the Integration of Faith and Profession*, edited by Gregory A. Smith, 139–64. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.

Silver, Steve. "Faith, Freedom and Information: A Christian Perspective on Intellectual Freedom." In *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*, edited by Garrett B. Trott, 123–37. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019.

Smith, Gregory A. "The Cultural Mandate, the Pursuit of Knowledge, and the Christian Librarian." In *Christian Librarianship: Essays on the Integration of Faith and Profession*, edited by Gregory A. Smith, 28–39. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.

Footnotes

1. Gen 1:26, 28.
2. Gen 1:26–27.
3. Gen 1, esp. v. 31; Ps 104:24–26.
4. 1 Kgs 4:29–34.
5. Job 21:34; Matt 15:14; Rom 3:13–14; 2 Tim 3:8.
6. Rom 1:18–23.
7. Ps 53:1–3.
8. Rom 8:22.
9. Gen 12:1–3.
10. Acts 14:17.
11. Ps 104:14–15.
12. Acts 17:26–31.
13. 2 Cor 10:4–5.
14. Acts 8:30–35; Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 4:13.
15. Jorge Luis Borges, "Blindness," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 1999), 475. Borges made this statement in a 1977 lecture in which he described his nomination as director of Argentina's National Library. His poem, "The Gifts," which contains a similar line, reflected on the irony of receiving such an appointment around the time that he became functionally blind.
16. Matt 12:36–37.
17. John 17:3; Acts 4:11–12; 1 Tim 2:5.
18. Rom 10:13–14.
19. Col 4:5–6; 1 Pet 3:14–16.

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The Biblical Worldview and Libraries, Part 4: Library Programs, Services, and Roles

 christianscholars.com/the-biblical-worldview-and-libraries-part-4-library-programs-services-and-roles/

By Gregory A. Smith

July 5, 2023

In my [first post](#) in this series, I explained how I convened a group of colleagues to explore the implications of the biblical worldview for the realm of libraries, using a four-frame model of the biblical narrative: *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation*. Drawing on insights from the group's discussion, I outlined in two additional posts a biblical perspective of [library users](#) and [library resources](#). This post continues the trajectory, focusing on the programs and services that libraries provide and the roles that they play in society.

As I stated in the preceding posts, information-bearing resources and users are essential to libraries. However, a library that yields high value is one that purposefully enacts programs and services for its intended users. Stated another way, an effective library directs its efforts to unleash users' potential by increasing their capacity to use information resources to good ends.

The nature of a library's programs and services can vary widely depending on its clientele and mission, as suggested by the following examples:

- An elementary school library, seeking to instill a love for reading among young learners, purposefully segments its collection of books according to reading difficulty, making it easier for emerging readers to select appropriate titles.
- A university library partners with other units on its campus to embed digital textbooks in online courses, ensuring that all students, regardless of financial means, have access to needed resources from the first day of the semester.
- A corporate library, aiming to fuel a firm's pursuit of competitive advantage, provides knowledge management services to its researchers and executives.
- A liberal arts college library assigns librarians to support faculty and students in specific academic departments; such liaisons assist by developing collections, teaching information literacy, and assisting faculty members with literature searches.
- A public library's building and grounds offer vital Internet access in a rural area where many residents cannot obtain home broadband service.
- A seminary library in North America purposefully acquires and promotes theological literature from the global South, amplifying voices that students might otherwise never hear.

The *Creation* frame describes humans as morally responsible beings who have been gifted with intellectual, relational, and spiritual faculties, and who have been tasked by their Creator with a mandate to exercise dominion over the created order.¹ Managing natural resources effectively requires the application of knowledge. Discovering knowledge consumes time and resources. Information-bearing records play a critical role in conveying knowledge across space and time, thus reducing the need for important discoveries to be repeated. However, as knowledge proliferates over time, it becomes unwieldy and must be organized.

Although biblical revelation does not refer to God commissioning or approving the creation of libraries, it is not difficult to envision that, in an ideal environment, they might perform the critical function of equipping people to fulfill the charge of responsible stewardship within the context of an evolving society. Quite apart from scientific discoveries and the diffusion of technical innovations, libraries might transmit the cultural heritage that accrues as successive generations share wisdom, tell stories, and make music. Furthermore, by helping to establish connections between users around common points of interest, libraries might be expected to contribute to the sort of relational wellbeing for which humans were created.²

Perhaps more than anything, the *Creation* frame emphasizes that the created order owes its existence to the work of a Creator-King who is ineffably powerful, wise, and good; that what he has created exists for his purposes and glory; and that humans are to carry out dominion under his authority, seeking to extend his beneficent rule.³

The *Fall* frame, of course, violates the assumption of an ideal environment. As a result, in a world where sin and its effects are pervasive, it is reasonable to assume that decisions regarding library programs and services fall short of rendering due glory to God.⁴ Because the world has set itself up in rebellion against God, libraries tend to encourage and celebrate the sinful actions and attitudes of the culture around them.⁵ Interactions between a library's stakeholders—for example, users, employees, funders, and suppliers—reflect divergent values, leading to conflict.⁶

Users approach the library from a position of alienation—from God, the natural environment, self, and other humans.⁷ The *Redemption* frame conveys a measure of hope amid seemingly irremediable conditions.⁸ Library programs and services help to advance outcomes such as literacy, economic development, and physical and mental health, thereby fostering human dignity.⁹ In a complex and confusing information environment, libraries help users find what they need and learn to make discerning choices.¹⁰

Combining the *Fall* and *Redemption* frames, tensions become evident: Libraries offer abundant evidence that the natural and social worlds are dysfunctional, but they also document God's merciful intervention in history, without which the world would be darker still.¹¹ Nevertheless, although libraries seek to ameliorate the world's brokenness, they inevitably contribute to it as well.¹²

The reality of a pending *Consummation* calls for careful consideration of the choices that we make as consumers, producers, and purveyors of information.¹³ Accountability for such choices extends both to what we do and how we do it. Library workers who have experienced God's redemptive grace endeavor to serve his kingdom in the workplace,¹⁴ knowing that God will one day judge the quality of their work—including programs and services over which they have control—not by fallible human standards, but according to his perfect will.¹⁵

The *Consummation* frame imbues library work with dignity on at least two counts. First, libraries promote literacy and freedom of inquiry, by means of which users can gain exposure to the gospel. When people receive the gospel in faith and repentance, they are liberated from present bondage and future judgment.¹⁶ Second, libraries may prefigure the restoration of benevolent human dominion that was spoiled in the Fall. God has promised that he will ultimately renew all things and dwell among his people on earth.¹⁷ Michael Wittmer has described this future environment as one of joyous exploration, one in which libraries might plausibly play a role:

The new earth will be an exciting, interesting place to be. We will be always growing, always learning more about ourselves, the world, and God. We will never bottom out and become bored, for we will never know as much as God knows. There will always be some new joy to discover, some place to visit or revisit, some new dish to create, a new flower to breed, a new song to sing, a new poem to write, a new golf club to try out, a new lesson to learn and then pass on to someone else, some person to know more deeply, something new in our relationship with God. And this stretching and growing will go on forever.¹⁸

Library programs and services are the source of much social good and can even impart spiritual blessings. Although libraries in their present form, along with every other social institution, bear the marks of sin, they offer a glimpse of the whole-person engagement that will characterize the world to come.

The final post in this series will examine the people who work in libraries through the four frames of the biblical narrative. Readers who wish to look further at the subject of this post may find the following sources worthwhile:

Cardenas, Ricardo. "Public Libraries as Places of Hope." *Christ Animating Learning* (blog). October 24, 2022. <https://christianscholars.com/public-libraries-as-places-of-hope/>.

Filgo, Ellen Hampton. "Incarnational Librarians: Liaisons Moving into the Neighborhood." *The Christian Librarian* 65, no. 1 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2357>.

Nelson, Denise D. "In a Manner Worthy of God: Hospitality and the Christian Librarian." In *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*, edited by Garrett B. Trott, 66–75. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019.

Trott, Garrett B. "Faith, Librarianship, and Technology." *The Christian Librarian* 52, nos. 1–2 (2009): 19–23. <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1758>.

Footnotes

1. Gen 1:26–28.
2. 1 Kgs 10:1–9.
3. Gen 1:28–31; Ps 24:1–2; Col 1:16; Rev 4:11.
4. Gen 6:5; Isa 1:4–6.
5. Isa 5:20; Rom 1:28–32.
6. Jas 4:1–2.
7. Gen 3:16–19; Isa 59:2; Titus 3:3.
8. Jas 1:17.
9. Jer 29:4–7.
10. Prov 14:6–8.
11. Deut 10:17–18; Acts 10:37–38, 43; 17:26–28.

12. Eccl 1:13–18.
13. Eph 5:15–17.
14. Eph 6:5–8.
15. Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 3:11–15.
16. John 3:16–18; 2 Tim 2:24–26.
17. 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1–5.
18. Michael E. Wittmer, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 207.

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The Biblical Worldview and Libraries, Part 5: Library Personnel

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By Gregory A. Smith

July 12, 2023

This is the last in a series of posts that apply four frames of the biblical narrative—*Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation*—to the realm of libraries. As I explained in the [first post](#), the series is based in part on the work of a discussion group that convened in my workplace earlier this year. In subsequent posts I outlined a biblical view of [library users](#); [library resources](#); and [library programs, services, and roles](#). Here I explore a biblical perspective on the people—credentialed librarians and others—who perform the work needed to mediate access to information.

According to the *Creation* frame, God has acted through Jesus Christ to create all that exists, whether visible or invisible.¹ The created order brims with function and beauty, and humans, reflecting God's image, have natural proclivities for inquiry and creative expression.² In addition to creating a world worthy of exploration and placing human tenants in it to unlock its potential, God has endowed certain people with personalities and skills that are suited to library work. I count myself among those who find it enlivening to collect, organize, and preserve works of human knowledge, and to assist others who wish to consume and/or produce such works.

The *Fall* frame portrays the human condition as being thoroughly marred by sin. All people share in the reality of alienation—from God, the environment, self, and other humans.³ Therefore, library workers fail to deliver fully as responsible stewards of God's creation. Noble visions aside, library personnel sometimes perpetrate unkind or prejudicial treatment toward library users.⁴ Furthermore, library workers are particularly susceptible to engage library users in the pursuit of worldly wisdom rather than God's truth.⁵

The *Redemption* frame conveys hope for divine blessing in spite of the brokenness of self and society. I discussed in Parts 3 and 4 of this series how libraries whose mission is openly secular can advance God's gracious purposes in society; library workers who make no claim to faith in Jesus can, in his sovereignty, promote *shalom* to some extent.⁶ Nevertheless, redemption in its fullest biblical sense entails a personal transfer from darkness to Christ's kingdom.⁷ The remainder of this post explores that narrower angle.

As sinful people recognize the error of rejecting God and turn to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, they receive new life.⁸ Although personal salvation is based on entirely on God's grace rather than human works,⁹ it compels and enables good works among those who receive it.¹⁰ Following Jesus in the realm of library work, as in any other endeavor, entails submitting one's life to God's authority.¹¹ Such submission will normally manifest itself in respect for human authority;¹² however, in a case of irreconcilable conflict, divine authority must be recognized as supreme.¹³ Christians view their work as a venue for glorifying God, showing love toward others, and serving as agents of God's reconciliation.¹⁴ Even in professional situations where it is difficult or impossible to articulate gospel truth verbally, believers' lives should still be marked by evidence of divine grace.¹⁵

Although disciples of Jesus who work in libraries desire to exert redemptive influence in their workplace and in the broader library profession, the form and extent of such influence may vary widely. Libraries that support organizations with an explicit Christian mission will presumably present few barriers to faith-based expression and may even encourage active integration of faith and library service. However, libraries generally oppose—officially or unofficially—the overt application of religious belief in the performance of work, suggesting the need for Christians to exercise discernment as they seek to work for God’s kingdom in the context of library employment.

Displaying virtues such as joy, patience, kindness, and self-control amid the demands of library work should prompt little, if any, opposition from managers, co-workers, or patrons.¹⁶ Likewise, demonstrating moral integrity and professional excellence will generally meet with appreciation.¹⁷ Respectful relationships with co-workers are especially to be cultivated.¹⁸ These may sometimes flourish into gospel-oriented conversations. More often, though, they will subtly express the blessedness of life in Christ and help to expose the dysfunction that results from denying God’s existence and authority.

Christians who work in libraries do so amid directives, policies, and professional norms that sometimes conflict with biblical standards. When faced with pressure to conform, believers should humbly and prayerfully seek to avoid compromising their convictions.¹⁹ The goal is not to impose Christian ethical stances on others, but to provide paths for believers to live peaceably in society while remaining in good conscience before God.²⁰

Assurance of a coming *Consummation* impresses on followers of Jesus who work in libraries the need to conduct themselves daily with a sense of responsibility and expectation. The promise of a future resurrection implies that co-workers and patrons should be treated as people who will have an eternal existence.²¹ The certainty of ultimate judgment demands integrity in the performance of all dimensions of work²² and compels the communication of the gospel.²³ The pursuit of heavenly rewards takes precedence over worldly priorities such as wealth, comfort, position, and popularity.²⁴ Service to one’s earthly community is certainly not diminished,²⁵ but it is grounded in awareness of heavenly citizenship.²⁶

Readers who wish to think more deeply about serving Christ through library employment may find the following sources helpful:

Caudle, Dana M. “Christian Faith and Its Impact on Library Interpersonal Relationships and Professionalism.” In *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*, edited by Garrett B. Trott, 179–88. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019.

Gillie, Esther. “Loving Your Co-Worker as Christ Expects: Personnel Practices through the Eyes of Faith.” In *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*, edited by Garrett B. Trott, 154–69. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019.

Smith, Gregory A. “The Core Virtue of Christian Librarianship.” *The Christian Librarian* 45, no. 2 (2002): 46–51. <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1822>.

As discussed throughout this series, the biblical worldview accounts for the fact that libraries emerged in antiquity and have taken root in cultural settings throughout the world. It offers a plausible explanation for the reality that library users and workers alike are both noble and flawed. It acknowledges the ways that libraries contribute to desirable social ends even as they reflect and celebrate the illusion of humanity's independence from God. It recognizes that God has chosen to gift certain people with traits that serve them well in library work. Furthermore, it prescribes principles through which library workers who have experienced God's saving grace can advance his kingdom through their occupation. Although the Bible almost never mentions libraries directly, analysis of its teaching through the frames of *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *Consummation* shows that it is remarkably relevant to the practicalities of this enduring social institution.

Footnotes

1. John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–16.
2. Exod 36:1; Eccl 12:9–11.
3. Eph 4:18–19.
4. Jas 2:1–4; 3:7–9.
5. Rom 1:19–23.
6. Isa 44:24–28.
7. Col 1:13–14.
8. 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:4–7.
9. Eph 2:8–9; Titus 3:4–7.
10. Rom 6:22; Eph 2:10; 4:20–24; Titus 3:8.
11. Rom 12:1.
12. Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:18.
13. Acts 5:27–29.
14. 2 Cor 5:18–20; Gal 5:13–14; Col 3:17.
15. Jas 3:13, 17–18.
16. Gal 5:22–23.
17. 1 Pet 2:12.
18. Gal 6:10.
19. Rom 12:2.
20. 2 Kgs 5:18–19a; Dan 1:8–14; 1 Tim 2:1–2.
21. Dan 12:2; Acts 24:14–16.
22. Matt 12:35–36; 2 Pet 3:11–14.
23. 2 Cor 5:8–11; 1 Thess 2:8–9.
24. Matt 6:19–21; 1 Tim 6:17–19.
25. Jer 29:4–7.
26. Phil 3:20–4:1.

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