

“Bringing Dry Bones to Life”: promoting ourselves through our Special Collections

Jocelyn Morris

Abstract : The focus of this paper is special collections within theological libraries. Firstly the scope of the collections under consideration is considered, then methods of promotion and some restrictions are discussed. The paper concludes with some comments about the value of special collections to the promotion of the theological library.

Harrod's Librarians Glossary defines a special collection as:

'A collection of books connected with local history, celebrities, industries, etc. on a certain subject or period, or gathered for some particular reason, in a library which is general in character.'¹

This can be contrasted with Ruth Hughes' specific definition:

'Special collections is a broad term, and is applied to collections of both rare and special materials...we are talking about something that is important in aggregate. An individual volume of this special collection may not be terribly exciting, but placed with its companions it completes a unique picture.'²

Types of special collections include:

- Material which was published before 1800 including incunabula. Ruth Hughes asserts :
"You are safe in assuming that any book printed before 1801 is of scholarly value to someone".³
- Items gathered together by a single collector, and retained as a distinct set of works by the library such as the "A B Ellis" collection at the Australian College of Ministries library, owned by the Churches of Christ in Sydney. There are institutional collections held as a single entity within a larger collection and library.
- Material which is locked away because of its commercial value and is issued to library patrons under supervision. Items in this category are often limited editions, or rare items which are therefore irreplaceable.
- Items which are set aside in secure storage due to the sensitivity of their subject matter. The location may appear in the catalogue as 'Librarians Office'. Publications relating to astrology, the occult, witchcraft, wiccan or satanic topics may be vulnerable to theft if left on the browsing shelves.
- Special collections can include non-print and other formats of material. Examples of these are the reel-to-reel tape collection at the Camden Theological Library in Sydney and the Löhe Memorial Library's cabinets which display medals and medallions dealing with Martin Luther.
- Another category of material is treated as a special collection because of the particular intellectual content of the volumes. The liturgical notation books which form the basis of the Divine Service of St John Chrysostom are one of the most significant collections located within the library of St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College in Sydney.

Special collections may be accepted by the library as static, closed collections. Some libraries acquire additional material to expand the depth of the collection and fill any gaps in holdings.

- Some collections contain works in a single language, often given to the library as a single donation or as a deceased estate.
- A library may accept the personal library collection gathered by an individual in a variety of formats, including printed, unpublished manuscripts and non-print items.
- Most institutions maintain a set of publications and unpublished papers written by faculty members, institutional staff or people associated with the institution.
- The library may receive a deposit copy of dissertations, theses, and papers submitted to meet the requirements of awards conferred by the institution.

Consider your own collection ~ which of these categories are found in your library?



"Jonathan wanted a real library, but this is cheaper."

Wallpaper. [Liblaf One: cartoons for libraries. Compiled by Alan Bundy. Underdale, SA: University of South Australia, 1995]

Theological libraries have a significant custodial role in preserving and maintaining the heritage and faith traditions of the Christian church. The curricula of theological institutions attempt to portray where God's people have been on their pilgrimage of faith, and that journey has a past, as well as a present and a future. In order to describe that experience fully, all three dimensions of time are necessary to the story.⁴

It is important for us to know about the items in our care - their provenance, their content, their significance and how they relate to other material in the subject area, on the main shelves in our own collection and how they relate to other collections in the same city or country and other libraries of the same denomination and collecting scope.

Paul Schrodt puts it this way:

"Librarians... must not only study and acquaint themselves with the works within their charge, but they must be able to develop the significance of these works for their students, faculty, donors and friends".⁵

Intellectual access

If the material is a permanent part of the library collection and it is not to be weeded or sold, then it is vital that intellectual access to the material is available for all library users. As the material cannot be browsed, then detailed cataloguing records provide crucial information about the material to facilitate scholarly research.

Theological librarians need to be proactive in ensuring that people know the collection exists. There are a number of promotional strategies which may be used for special collections in theological libraries. Mary Catharine Johnson proposes a useful checklist⁶:

Audience	well-defined
Interest	relevant topics
Language	accurate, appropriate, concise, lively
Content and context	related to collection or institution's goals
Special Features	helpful
Design	logical, enticing, legible

Preparation for promotion

It is important for the library to provide information about the special collections. Details about access arrangements, composition, origins of the collection and restrictions are required. Extensive collections require their own specialised finding aids, providing description and scope of each component of the collection. These are the building blocks for promotion of the collection.

Librarians at St Mark's Theological Library in Canberra have developed a number of aids to support the use of the Tippett collection, which is held there. It is a significant research collection and now there is information available about this collection through a wide variety of media.

Promotion through presentation

The most obvious candidates for promotion of our unique or special collection will be the faculty of the institution. They are key stakeholders in the library, and it is important to enlist their cooperation. Lecturers with a thorough knowledge of their subject area may provide insight for the librarian in understanding the significance of individual items and what it means to have the collection in the library. As they come into contact with colleagues or supervise students, they can promote the collection over time.

Items from the special collection can inspire and enthuse students with the vitality of the past. For students embarking on theological study, the sense of continuity of the Christian tradition can empower them in their own studies.

There are times when faculty members or administrators may be keen to use the special collection as some kind of curriculum support for studies in a particular subject. They may argue that this in fact promotes usage of the collection.

Balance

However, as librarians we have a responsibility to balance preservation issues against access and curriculum support. The original material may require microfilming and we may need to set limits on the exposure of specific items. User education may be required in order to increase understand

ing of issues relating to handling and treatment of these particular items.

We need to be able to describe and explain the significance of the special collection and individual items, in terms which can be understood by different audiences. The way we present and describe individual volumes will depend on our listeners. Recently this writer gave presentations to the Council of Luther Seminary and also to the Retired Lutheran Pastors' Wives and Widows Association. Some of the same material was utilised in presentations to both groups, however the presentations were quite different.

Promotion through fundraising

Non-librarians see the most obvious use of the special collection is in connection with fundraising. Many people like the idea of these old books, distinctive material or special collections. They may know little about libraries, and virtually nothing about the actual items but they often show a particular interest in seeing the library "treasures". The uniqueness, the rarity, the beauty, the diverse forms, the bindings even the "bookish" smell of these objects captures peoples' attention. They quickly develop a connection with treasured works which have survived for hundreds of years, that have endured and outlived the people who owned them for a time. There is a sense of the continuity of the Christian tradition through the centuries which speaks powerfully to audiences.

Often it is people of power and influence whom we attempt to reach. If librarians want to persuade them to spend money on the library, we muster all available resources; we exploit these treasures in order to achieve the desired objective or necessary outcome. Special collections may be perceived by institutional administrators as marvellous assets which have political as well as scholarly uses.⁷

Size of collection

What about the size of the collection? Does that make any difference? There are some quite small but very significant collections, in theological libraries around Australia and New Zealand. The carefully developed collection which emphasizes specialised and comprehensive coverage of a specific subject can be of significant research value.

Gaps in collection

Special collections can even be promoted in terms of their gaps in holdings – larger libraries use this strategy regularly. It can be quite a successful ploy to appeal to stakeholders for specific items of major significance for acquisition. As an example, the University of Sydney sends regular bulletins to alumni seeking support for purchase of materials to be added to their special collections.

How can we find out about these collections? Where would theological libraries be without Coralie Jenkin's book *Collections of Religion and Theology in Australia and New Zealand*.⁸ Survey forms are tedious, but directories perform an extremely important function for researchers and librarians alike.

Almost forty years ago, Wallace Kirsop published what he described as "A Preliminary survey" of 'Sources in Australian libraries for the religious history of the 16th and 17th centuries'.⁹ Sadly, some of the collections investigated by Kirsop have since been destroyed. He decried the paucity of data concerning collections. Thirty nine years later, there is still a need for further research into

the special collections held in ANZTLA member libraries.

Non theological collections held within theological libraries

It is interesting to consider the rich non-theological collections of material held among our libraries. Theological librarians may realise that collectively we hold many fascinating treasures. Promotion involves making the wider library and research communities aware of these holdings.

Promotion through publication

Publications offer a more permanent record of outreach efforts and are able to reach a wider audience over a longer time period. Comprehensive details about the collection, its origins and collection strengths are published in monographs or journal articles relating to the subject area. Kim Robinson's article about the Moore College Library collections has found a wider audience through publication in the library literature, than just the theological library circle.¹⁰

Publicity

Promotion of the special collection within the broader library community may also involve tours and presentations about the collection to library colleagues at professional development sessions. There is an obligation to ensure the collection is listed in the directories and finding aids produced for libraries. Johnson suggests publicity should be directed to your library, your institution, your community, the public arena, subject literature and national literature.¹¹

Resource sharing

A rather unexpected and helpful promotion may be quite unintentional. It's a by-product of the work of other libraries and staff strongly committed to resource-sharing. In recent years theological libraries have undertaken ambitious conspectus evaluation projects, resulting in the publication of collaborative collection development documents, such as those published by the Sydney and Melbourne College of Divinity libraries. The data enables libraries and researchers to assess collections individually and in relation to each other.¹²

Promotion through the library website

Another forum for promotion these days is the library web-site. The special collection can be an attractive feature of the library section, with images of significant works. Effective website design can provide substantial information using appropriate navigation devices. Hyperlinks to related specialist collections, gateways to related collections and web listings of resources worldwide can be established through the website.

Duke University has extended this concept in their "Scriptorium" providing digital access to an ever-increasing number of ancient and fragile works. The goals of this project incorporate preservation and access objectives, however they also desire to "add value".¹³

An exciting new development for Reformation Studies is the Digital Image Archive developed by the Pitts Theology Library at Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta.¹⁴ Digital copies of original woodcuts from the Reformation period have been made available on the internet through this project.

Different Clientele

It is possible, even likely that the library patrons who use the special collection are quite a separate and distinct group. Consider as a case study, the special collection of church music held by the Veech Library at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. A number of researchers have come to Strathfield looking for works by early Australian composers since Mrs Kit Smith organised this special collection. They may never set foot in a theological library but are interested in these

special collection. They may never set foot in a theological library but are interested in these manuscript and printed scores representing a long sacred music tradition transposed to a new continent and context. Targeting these people requires different promotional strategies and usage of the collection depends on the librarian understanding the clientele and their information needs, in addition to their specialist knowledge of the material.



J. H. Modell

Top sacred [Liblastwo: cartoons for libraries.

Compiled by Alan Bundy.

Underdale, SA: University of South Australia, 1995. p85]

One of the long-term consequences of promotion of the special collection may be requests for material to be used for other purposes. The Löhe collection has been used by film crews and photographers for broadcasts and publications about Christianity in Australia. A wider audience is reached through involvement in these projects.

Friends of the Library organisations

“Friends of the Library” organizations are almost indispensable in building special collections. They not only bring special collections to the library but such groups are most helpful in purchasing so-called “luxury items” - that is, the important and rare books or sets which fill a real need, but which are too expensive or too specialized in character to find a place in the regular library budget.¹⁵ Each friend of the library is effectively a publicity officer.

Promotion through library events

Exhibitions can be extremely useful promotional opportunities. They may be quite elaborate, or simple small-scale displays - thematic, topical, historical and commemorative. Exhibitions promote interest in the library, works from the special collection are highlighted, they stimulate interest to increase donations, they offer wider exposure of the collections to members of the local library community who may refer patrons to your library.¹⁶ Issues to consider include security, lighting, appropriate labels and the special needs of visitors such as the elderly and disabled.

A M Scham’s book ‘Managing special collections’¹⁷ has an interesting chapter on public relations. Scham discusses exhibitions, receptions, social obligations, faculty relations, fellowships, publications, lectures and the media. Among Scham’s suggestions is this gem:

“Some older libraries still maintain oak walls, marble or stone fireplaces, crystal chandeliers, and a dignified setting for receptions. Even if the honoured guest has nothing to do with special collections, it is a means of attracting attention to your holdings”.¹⁸

Scham suggests that wealthy patrons may set aside a few thousand dollars each year to be awarded to outstanding young scholars in the field. This may be a challenge for some ANZTLA member theological libraries!

New Norcia Library

The collection at the Benedictine Abbey of New Norcia in Western Australia is an interesting case study of a special collection which has been effectively promoted. Access to the library is limited- even for the librarian. And yet, their catalogue has been accessible via the internet for some years, and scholars undertake research using the collections. The glossy annual *New Norcia Studies* disseminates the outcomes of research work based on the New Norcia collections. The New Norcia Lecture is an annual event, the Guest Speaker for this year's event being the Director-General of the National Library of Australia, Ms Jan Fullerton. We may have a wonderful collection of material which has been donated to the library. But promoting the collection may bring some problems.

Restrictions

There may be restrictions on access to specific parts of the collection or documents which relate to living persons. Certainly the Mitchell Library has many of these. There may be restrictions on publication – the consent of the donor or the copyright owner is required for publication. In other cases there are moral restrictions to which the library must defer; for example, politically unfashionable or ethnically sensitive material which is, nevertheless, important documentation representative of its era and origins.

Advocacy role

There may be a need for the librarian to act as advocate for the special collection. This duty is well-illustrated by Paul Schrodtt in this story:¹⁹

"...on the open shelf of an institution where I was working, I discovered an original 1582 edition of the Rheims New Testament. Upon pointing out the uniqueness of this volume to the librarian and suggesting that it should be sequestered from the general collection because of its value as a rare book, I was deeply saddened by the outcome of my discovery. After the administration was appraised of my find, the New Testament was promptly carted off to a local antiquarian bookseller for translation into the proverbial thirty pieces of silver. It seems appropriate to relate this story if only to illustrate how little a truly "rare book" may be valued by a banal administrator and to delineate how great an opportunity for education was lost by the action taken."

Schrodtt tells the history and significance of the Rheims translation and about the blood that was shed over this work. His conclusion is an impassioned plea:

" It is my belief that the sale of this Rheims New Testament for a paltry \$1500 represented an educational and administrative blunder which invites comparison only with the final financial transaction executed in the New Testament by Judas himself. It is my hope that this presentation and discussion may help preclude similar betrayals of our joint educational and religious heritage among the institutional members of ATLA".

A while ago I came across this interesting document on the internet, written by Daniel Traister,²⁰ whose essay commences:

"When I began to conceive of this paper, my point was simple and straightforward. Collections formed primarily to provide for the security of materials, but not for the convenience of users, cost too much for staff and housing, with too little return in frequency of use, easily to justify themselves in an increas

ingly tough library economy. Managers of such collections must seek innovative ways of increasing their functionality or expect to see these collections cease to exist”.

He raises major issues about the blocks and hindrances to bringing materials together with readers. He tells this story about...

the famous art historian Millard Meiss, long before he became famous. Just after he had completed his doctorate he stopped off in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale to see a particular illuminated manuscript. It would be in part for his studies of these that Meiss ultimately built his reputation.

But when he called for it, he was refused. This manuscript, it was explained, is too precious to be used; therefore, no one sees it. What -- the silly, brash, and youthful American asked -- are you keeping it for? Posterity, was the reply. Tell the Keeper that Posterity has just arrived, the undeterred Meiss is said to have responded; and-- whether because he or she thought Americans were posterity or simply because he or she had grown tired of arguing -- the French keeper agreed. Both the manuscript and Meiss were placed together in the reading room.

There, while examining it, Meiss felt a tap on his shoulder. Excuse me, came a timorous query from a graybeard behind him, but are you, by any chance, looking at Manuscript number so-and-so? Why, yes, said Meiss. Would you be very discommoded, the man went on, were I to look at it with you, over your shoulder? Not at all, said Meiss. They examined it together. When they had done, the older man covered the fresh, newly-doctored Meiss with thanks, telling him what an honor it was to be able at long last to have seen that manuscript, for which he had been asking for many years, and also to have seen it in such distinguished company.

But what, asked Meiss naively -- can possibly have prevented you from doing so before? Alas, responded the stranger, they never show this manuscript to just anyone. You, he continued, must be very distinguished; I am embarrassed to say that I do not recognize you. Who, me? I am Millard Meiss, and who are you? I, alas, comes the reply, am a mere nobody, just the Professor of Art History here at the Sorbonne.”

Traister asserts: A story such as this has a double edge. It warns the budding curators to whom it is told that they need to be careful about whom they keep out. But simultaneously it asserts their right to question those who want in. "Posterity!" we cry, "we" remind ourselves that we work at the sort of places whose curators and keepers and staffs are bastions of the old standards, preservers -- literal preservers -- of Culture.

Daniel Traister raises the question:

“If not for readers, then for whom are we saving all this stuff?”

Costs of Promotion

Public relations activities will be successful only if the library is fully committed to the promotion. While they will not cost as much as direct advertising, they are certainly not “free”. They cost time – time to organise, set up, contact people, and even the simplest display involves the cost of display materials, graphics. Yet even a relatively small-scale promotion can generate increased awareness and goodwill towards the library.

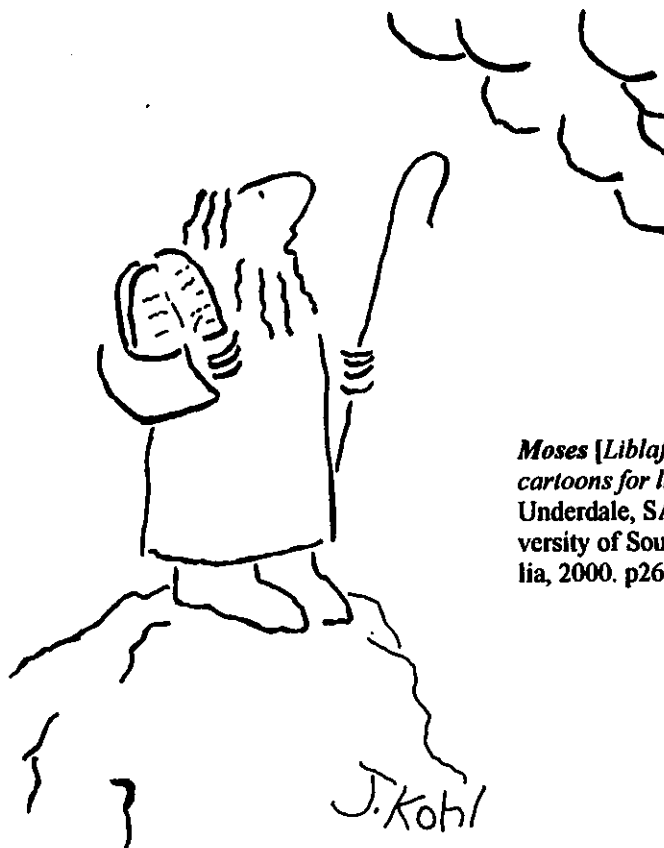
Significance of special collections

Is the special collection a total waste of effort, which draws the library budget away from other areas of operations? The books occupy shelf-space, they require conservation, they are time consuming, smelly and bookworms can be very unpleasant!

I am convinced of the value of special collections. The prestige and goodwill that they generate can be channelled into effective promotion of the library's services and facilities. With their bibliographic records accessible to the global community of scholars, special collections that have languished in obscurity known only to certain specialists, have the opportunity to emerge pre-eminent from within their institutional setting.²¹ The special collection within the theological library is generally hidden away from the world. These books when brought to light present an immediate link with not only the theological development of the past but also with the intellectual history of the West.²²

Traister concludes his polemical essay :

"America's special collections have a future - at least insofar as our colleges, universities, public libraries, and reading and writing have a future. The world in which these institutions and activities exist and persist, however, is changing radically, not in the direction of increased restrictions but towards expanded access and openness. Every study of the impact of the internet suggests that, even despite efforts to privatize intellectual capital, this is one of its most important outcomes - certainly in libraries".



Moses [Liblaf three: cartoons for libraries. Underdale, SA: University of South Australia, 2000. p26.]

"What about the copyrights?"

Traister forecasts a controversial future:

"Special collections will survive. Too much has been invested in them for them not to survive. But unless we who staff them demonstrate an imaginative willingness to come to grips with this fundamental drive towards increasing openness, I, for one, will anticipate not their thriving future but rather their increasing marginalization in the teaching and research processes they claim to support."

How do you think his remarks apply to ANZTLA member libraries?

I conclude with a quote from Jaroslav Pelikan:

"Our theological libraries give Christian voices of the past and the present the opportunity to speak". Pelikan goes on to insist on the necessity of listening to a wide variety of such voices:

"for we cannot predict and hence we dare not prescribe, the channels through which the Holy Spirit will shed illumination upon His word and upon His church"²³

Endnotes

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Jocelyn Morris
 Library Manager, Löhe Memorial Library
 Luther Seminary, North Adelaide SA.
jocelyn.morris@luthersem.edu.au