Theological Libraries in Central and Eastern Europe

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Introduction

It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to discuss in one short paper theological libraries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)[1] with their needs, challenges and opportunities, so I am bound to either repeat in review fashion already known clichés or generalise on certain issues without differentiating how they apply to each of the various theological libraries in particular. Central and Eastern Europe are blessed with a rich diversity in cultures and languages, with a variety of denominations and contrasting church structures, with a breadth of library activities in theological schools and a variety of methods libraries use to get their work done. Perhaps one can speak about needs and challenges of libraries in a particular country, but even this would not take into account all the local differences, the specifics and management structures of individual libraries, and their different funding situations.

Because we are dealing with libraries of theological schools, the contexts will vary even more widely. These schools each seem to require an individual analysis; they are influenced by local circumstances, by denominational attitudes, by the fact that their budget is based on donations and not on governmental support, by the attitude of the school's leadership toward the library and what importance the library is given in the overall educational process[2] and many other factors. Often the decision

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1. The term "Eastern and Central Europe" is not quite clear and is being used in different ways. Still carrying Cold War connotations Eastern Europe is thus understood as the post-Soviet territory while Central Europe which covers several countries of the former Warsaw Pact; such as Hungry, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Often other countries are included in this term, such as Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav states, Albania, which more precisely should be called South Eastern Europe. It is interesting to note that at the end of the 18th century Europe was understood in its northern and southern parts, but not with the division into East and West (Virkus, 2003).

2. One will usually encounter statements such as the "library is at the centre of the educational process", but what practical consequences follow from this? In what ways is the library central in the institution? Does it become obvious, for example, in the quality of staff hired to work in the library, in the budget allocated to the library, in an

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making process does not take place in the library, but by a faculty representative without library training who has received the responsibility for the development of the library. One can thus not expect any uniformly informed perception of library issues and standardised ways of dealing with them - each school and library develop their own survival mechanisms. Some schools have a well functioning Library committee and emphasise team leadership, others do not and, if the library has more than one employee, library management usually mirrors in the library structure the leadership structure of the school.

It is, nevertheless, possible to list some issues that are common to theological schools in Central and Eastern Europe and point out several aspects that cause problems and need to be addressed in order to advance theological libraries in this part of the world. In this article I will only selectively mention some issues from the past that still have implications for today and then move on to three aspects of library work, view of technology, personnel and resources, that I consider crucial at this moment of development in theological libraries of Central and Eastern Europe.

1. Issues from the past and implications for today

Central and Eastern European countries used to have good public and research libraries, often holding multiple copies of books, especially textbooks. They were well supported by the state that promoted a culture of the book - emphasised literacy, subsidised prices for books, organised reading clubs and other literacy supporting activities in libraries.[3] Since the breakdown of communism, the situation has changed dramatically. Funding for libraries has dropped tremendously, which means libraries have had to cut back staff, cannot perform all of their previous services or purchase new books and periodicals. Many of these countries are at the moment going through a phase of "pure capitalism", less socially balanced than in countries who had professed capitalism for some time. Only profit-making enterprises survive in pure capitalism - libraries do not make a financial profit[4] and are overrun by the developments. Libraries in theological schools encounter similar problems; they are perceived as a large black hole that takes up much money from the (constantly limited) budget but returns no visible product, at least not immediately.

Censorship and the suppression of religion under communism meant that there were no or very few theological libraries. So when in the early 1990s the Iron Curtain fell and theological schools and their libraries received a chance to develop, often they started from scratch. To be sure, theological schools did exist before (Orthodox, Catholic, and some Protestant schools) and theological literature was being published - openly as well as underground, in the countries themselves or in the *diaspora* - but not in sufficient numbers and/or quality to stock a theological research library in

emphasis on self-directed learning that takes place in the library instead of scheduling the days full with one-way lectures, in how intimately teachers are familiar with the library collection and are using it themselves? It has been often observed that libraries in CEE often have a "rather marginal status" in the overall university power structure, without "any tradition of liaison with academic staff' (Pors and Edwards, 126; see also Pejova, 2002). Theological schools seem to continue this mentality.
The statement by Raymond Morris, former librarian of Yale Divinity School, may sound somewhat idealistic, but it does underline this issue: "Few indices point more accurately to the health of an educational institution than its attitude toward its library, and the sacrifice it is willing to make for it", quoted in Trotti, 158.

3. See, for example, a report on Bulgaria by John Pateman "Libraries in Eastern Europe: then, but not now", *Focus on International and Comparative Librarianship* 29/2 (1998):110.
4. Consider, however, the UNESCO White paper on information literacy in developing countries, prepared by Zdravka Pejova, where it becomes abundantly clear that "lack of knowledgeable, skilled and efficient use of information [which libraries, if equipped well, can provide access to and teach how to use]...directly affects productivity in all spheres of life and work - in education, research, business, administration". Insufficient attention to develop strong libraries and information centres now, be it in theological or business and governmental institutions, will prove very detrimental later.

the national language. This scarcity of theological materials in national languages remains depressingly obvious today and a significant change is not foreseeable in the near future.[5] Thus CEE theological libraries continue to encounter serious problems in acquisition; the output of publications in national languages, especially in the area of religion, is quite low and often these are (well or less well done) translations from other languages, devotional materials, fiction or poetry. The latter sell better and in higher numbers. If libraries acquire English language theological materials, they struggle with insufficient finances as they need to pay in hard currency; it is difficult to select valuable materials and catalogue books in a foreign language. They often also question whether they appreciate such an influx of English language textbooks and with it the dominance of Anglo-Saxon theology, which may be quite different from their religious tradition.[6]

One observes quite a different attitude toward information in CEE countries when compared to Western Europe. Before the recent changes, information was not for sale, it was not a marketable service. Information had "cultural value" but was not and often still is not considered "an economic good" (Virkus, 2003). This is clearly seen in copyright laws; in CEE countries they were user-orientated, guaranteeing more rights to access and use of information for readers without expected payments. The laws attempted to ensure that information would be freely circulated, with the idealistic expectation

that knowledge can and will change society, boost development, improve lifestyle, provide enjoyment. This is not like in Western Europe where laws give a strong position to the owner (usually not even, the author but a publisher who purchased the right to the information from the author) who makes economic profit from it. The European Union is now forcing countries that have joined the Union to adopt different laws and some have already done so (Haavisto, 2000).

Theological libraries in CEE struggle with these changes both for economic and ideological reasons. Their mission is to enable students and faculty access to valuable and necessary information, but they often cannot afford the cost it takes to purchase multiple copies of a textbook that students cannot afford on their own, or materials produced in good quality in the West (books, periodicals, electronic resources). In their ethical understanding the user is still central and should be entitled to have affordable access to study materials, especially if we speak about training in theology and for ministry. Because access to information is considered a human right in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they question whether it is ethical for Christians to create economic barriers for their fellow sisters and brothers by pricing materials so high. It must be said in defence of Christian organisations in the West that more often than not they are very willing to waive or reduce payments and grant permission for photocopying materials, if asked. Much listening and learning of and from each other's attitudes to information and copyright still needs to be done so that Christians can understand the reasons for certain laws and learn ways of dealing with information that are acceptable to the producers of information.

5. Many of these problems were voiced during the January 2005 Conference for Theological Librarians held at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. Over fifty participants from countries of Eastern, Central and Western Europe as well as from North America discussed their experience in theological libraries and learned from each other. The papers of this conference have been published at the website of BETH (Bibliothèques européennes de théologie) at http://www.beth.be.

6. It has been recognised that the spread of the English language, not least through the ubiquitous teaching of English as second language, includes as "part of the agenda, consciously or subconsciously, ... something like linguistic imperialism". English language is perceived as "a means of communicating a whole value system" (Cripps 2004).

2. Developments in Information Technology

In the past libraries in Central and Eastern Europe, both theological and state libraries, fell far behind comparable libraries in the West because of a poor technological infrastructure. Investments in technology in these countries were made for the purpose of defence, but not for cultural or developmental purposes. Technology was "unavailable, unaffordable, and discouraged" for political reasons (Virkus, 2003). On the one side, communist ideology was afraid that access to technology would enable access to Western ideas. On the other side, Western governments prevented Eastern block countries from obtaining newer technology so as to prevent them using it in military ways. This Cold War mentality resulted in disadvantages for and stagnation of developments in civil areas, including libraries.[7]

Although technology, including that for libraries, is more easily available now and some of it has even been developed in the national contexts, it often remains unaffordable and less fully developed than that in other areas. Western foundations have given much money to automate national and some university libraries, but especially smaller and private school libraries, including theological libraries, have a long way to go. Often, either due to lack of knowledge and/or experience with technology or because they depend on the decision of the donor who pays for the library software, libraries end up with programmes that are not really suitable for their setting or don't "speak" their national language. At times academic libraries in CEE purchase software designed for elementary schools in North America which does not have the full features needed for adult learners and, on top of this,

librarians have to learn a foreign language to be able to operate the library software.[8] Another way that is sometimes chosen to save costs, to speed up or maximise, as is believed, the automation process is to design "home grown" software. Although at first it seems very attractive that the library can influence all decisions as to the system's functions, interface and other aspects, in the end, this often turns out to be "the most expensive way".[9] The creation of library software requires an experienced expert team that has learned from previous mistakes and that is not testing its new and extraordinary ideas on your library. The team needs to not only design the system but to provide long-term service with follow-up improvements, which is often not the case with an ad hoc group of enthusiasts put together for the sole purpose of designing library software. There are many problems librarians encounter with homemade library software. One of the most serious is that it is not possible for a small library staff to have bad enough experience to make good suggestions to in-house software developers about the functions needed in a good library software package. Only a group of highly experienced librarians working together with a group of similarly experienced software developers will have the breadth of knowledge to include all or at least most of the functionality needed. A library with a homemade system has no colleagues to turn to for an exchange of frustrations and delights about the same software. It also has no user group to get in touch with when problems appear in the homemade system. Homemade systems, in virtually all instances, lack adequate documentation for end users. There will

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7. "Lack of access to electronic information was especially dramatic in medicine, which appeared to Western visitors in small countries in the beginning of the 1990s to be tens of years behind modern developments" (Simon and Stroetmann, 1998:24).

8. Many librarians in CEE do speak surprisingly good German, English or French, but for many language is an obstacle. My own experience in the library at JETS with a foreign language software has not been quite easy. Although most of the interface features are translated into English, some aspects still remain in Dutch, which is not very helpful if the problem that one is trying to solve is connected with exactly this feature! It is also difficult to figure out the advice from the Helpdesk that from time to time comes in Dutch instead of English.

9. Compare Drobikova's presentation on "Library Automation".

be no manual explaining how to make use of the functions that were included. If the employees who developed the system accept new jobs, there is also no one who can 'trouble shoot' and provide technical support. Many more potential problems exist for homemade software but this short list will make almost anyone aware of the dangers of this approach.

It is interesting to observe that, although many countries of Central and Eastern Europe had developed their own national ways of organising materials, in recent years many of them are in the process of adopting Anglo-Saxon ways of operating a library, not because these are better but because they are more widely known and their use has spread more easily, not in the least by way of the English language (Walravens, 1999:935). Library software coming from USA or the United Kingdom has gone through several generations of development and has integrated previous experience. It is often cheaper because there is more competition and more of it is produced and sold; there are more machine-readable data and ways of cooperation in data exchange. CEE libraries are pressed by the need to automate as quickly and at the least possible cost and so choose their software and ways of operation according to market principles. In this way they lose some of their distinctiveness.

Technology is one of the areas where theological libraries in CEE can and, pressured for economic survival and quick automation, should cooperate, for example, in exchanging information and experience about library software and the automation process, in creating networks and consortia to purchase the same software, in exchanging machine readable data, in forming consortia to licence electronic databases. The above is a very brief and non-exhaustive list of possibilities but can give an understanding that much can be achieved by inter-library cooperation. Cooperation between libraries in general and theological libraries in particular

has, unfortunately, not been a priority in CEE in the last 10 years for various reasons: little perception of its value, a competition for donors, distrust that, in a time of tremendous and quick changes, the other side will (be able to) keep the agreements, or cooperation terms, uneasy feelings about cooperation because during communism it was forced upon libraries on state terms. Nevertheless, many ways are open here to underline that theological libraries are part of the one body of Christ, they are connected in one mission and one cause. Working together they can not only achieve more - the pragmatic reason for cooperation - but also demonstrate the love of God and its power in conflict resolution, in overcoming differences and difficulties, in crossing denominational and national barriers - the witness and missional aspect of cooperation. The moral, and sometimes idealistic, commitment to cooperation will be severely tested by the realization of the efforts and costs it takes to reach out to other libraries, but it will also underline the unity of their mission.

Some Western foundations have, via requirements attached to their donations, "pressured" CEE institutions to cooperate with each other. Caidi, in a study of state libraries of four CEE countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) describes four different (non-linear) stages of cooperation that CEE libraries have experienced during recent years:

1. Artificial, or forced, cooperation during the socialist regime;

2. Reistance to get involved in any large scale cooperative projects (because it resembles too much the centralised model) and the attempt to modernise libraries on one's own;

3. Directed cooperation, cooperation initiated by foreign foundations and/or state agencies having identified some common goals of libraries;

4. Voluntary cooperation, which sometimes developed upon the withdrawal of foreign and state finances (2003:103-117).

In my observation, some theological libraries in CEE have found their way into voluntary, maybe even self-initiated, cooperation on a local or regional level but it is still much less intensive or effective than cooperation between, for example, the faculty or academic leadership of the same theological schools. Probably, the philosophical framework is still missing to understand the importance of the library and the necessity of regional and inter-denominational cooperation between libraries.[10] Many libraries, however, continue at stage 2, either because of lack of vision, or lack of time and/or resources for cooperation.

While libraries that have already gone through the automation process and use electronic resources have a more differentiated view of technology and are aware of the different kinds of problems that technology creates, for many libraries it is probably still true that "expensive information resources remain heavily under-utilized" (Pejova). These will only mean something if people (staff and readers) can effectively employ them as useful instruments, that is, if users receive continuous training, if hardware is regularly updated, if there is some cooperation between academic and library staff as to available resources and their potential for use in teaching and learning. When an investment has been made in a library to purchase and install excellent library management software and/or excellent bibliographic databases for faculty and student use, it is imperative that the leadership of the theological school provide staff and time for all to be trained in the

10. One can list many examples of faculty cooperation of organisations, such as the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS). the Euro-Asian and the European Evangelical Accrediting Associations (EAAA and EEAA respectively), but only a few events specifically dedicated to library cooperation.

use of these resources. It is necessary for this training to be repeated each year with new students and new faculty but it is also important for continuing staff and students to review library resources each year since new things will almost certainly be available and they may even have forgotten how to use what is already available. It is also important that there be a good reason for each of these purchases. If teachers do not give assignments which require the use of the precious resources of the library, there was no reason to buy them in the first place. Cooperation between teaching staff, leadership and anyone with influence over the curriculum can make sure the library has what is needed to support the curriculum and that the resources, once purchased, are actually used by both faculty and students.

3. Library Personnel

The question of personnel in theological libraries is a difficult question for almost any theological school. What kind of people are being hired: are they primarily people and service orientated or goal orientated? What kind of training do they have: professional training in librarianship or are they trained in theology as they have to work with theological materials and serve theology and ministerial students? How much love for and experience with technology do they bring? What is different about theological librarianship: is it a specific ministry or is it not more of a ministry as a Christian accountant would have in a theological school? Sometimes these questions receive an extensive discussion but the person that would fit the ideal answers is not available or not affordable. Sometimes these questions are dismissed as unnecessary (because no real ministry is envisioned for a librarian) and the difficulties arise when a person is hired who does not fit with and/or is not able to fulfil the mission of the library.

We need to affirm that librarianship in a

theological library is a ministry in its own right. It also provides support to multiple other ministries. Traditionally, librarians were perceived as stewards and guardians of the treasures from church history handed down from previous generations and collected in a library. Although this certainly does not sufficiently describe the function of a library, librarians are, in a sense, quite literally "surrounded by a cloud of witnesses"[11] who have left their testimony of how they have understood God and his people, life in community and the Christian calling to extend the kingdom of God. Librarians need to help people to engage with these witnesses by making materials available, by managing the current information overload in such a way that they order the best available materials and then manage (classify, catalogue, process, circulate, retrieve, reshelve, repair, etc.) these materials for the use of all readers and scholars, and by teaching skills for finding and evaluating necessary information. As good stewards they will acquaint readers with new trends and enable them to discern these developments while also encouraging learning from past testimonies. Their position amounts to gatekeepers of knowledge and much more. Administrators of theological schools will need to decide whether they employ librarians who are skilled to open rather than close, to encourage learning rather than repel from discoveries; who help to wisely discern rather than passively withdraw to their offices. The search for, selection of and then support of the librarian in her central role should receive as much prayerful attention as the search, selection and support of the theological teaching staff.

Someone has remarked that "librarianship tends to recruit people who are interested in materials rather than in people, who are introvert rather than extrovert, and whose ultimate career aspirations lie in management rather than in direct operational involvement" (Coleman, 1981:67). The great temptation for librarians, usually under work load pressures, is to become material orientated rather than people-centred. For a theological library, which together with teachers and other staff is engaged in spiritual formation, not storage and management but service and providing access to materials are the first priority. Librarians are needed who are aware of and think ahead about students and faculty needs, create active links between people and materials, offer hospitality in sharing what they have collected, in breaking down personal and institutional barriers that hinder access to information, in inviting readers into their own space. They are visible and active beyond library walls, they maintain contacts with faculty, students and staff and are able to speak to academic issues from the perspective of the library. They are at the intersection between theology and library, and those who are intimately familiar with both areas will certainly be more effective.

Using the image of the body from 1 Corinthians 12, Peterson (2001:231) has compared the ministry of theological librarians as that part which is the "memory in the Body of Christ". This has never been so true than in contemporary Eastern and Central Europe where, after the break up of communism, national churches and Christians are developing valuable theological materials in national languages. These need to be collected and preserved for several reasons. First of all, to enable wider use and access, in view of the tremendous scarcity of theological works in national languages. They are also needed for future reference for historians, for the second and third generation of churches in these countries, for international researchers. Not the least, these materials are invaluable for the process of global theologizing when local theologies inform and enrich theologies from other geographical locations and religious traditions.

11. This expression is taken from "The theological library: in touch with the witnesses" by John Boone Trotti, 157.

While theological schools in the West, if they are seeking state or other accreditation, have often been forced to employ professional librarians to meet expected standards, professionalism has not been a major issue in Central and Eastern European theological schools. Most of the theological librarians in these schools have either no or very little library training, although many do have at least some theological training, which is not necessarily a requirement in Western theological schools. Often library work is done by long or short term volunteers, wives of theological teachers, graduates from the school's theology programme who have an inclination to organize and manage materials. These people often come with much enthusiasm, love for books and for people who need to use them, with a deep dedication to the work. The disadvantages, however, also can not be overlooked. Because they have no or little training, it is difficult for them to keep up with new developments, they often have the feeling that there is a problem, that something is not as effective and efficient as it could be, that the mission of the library could be realised in better and fuller ways but they don't know what it is and how to change things. Under work pressure and with the feeling of not being as successful as they could be the initial enthusiasm may quickly turn into disappointment.

While requirements for a professional librarian in Western theological schools have caused a trend to a One Person Library with the budget covering only one paid librarian who has to cope with all of the library work more or less effectively, Central and Eastern European libraries are still able to pay several, though untrained, staff.[12] This may change soon, depending on economic developments and personnel costs rising also in the East. CEE librarians will then be even more under pressure to be efficient and get more things done more quickly, to meticulously organize their day and be proficient in multi-tasking.

4. View of Resources

As mentioned above, librarians have always been perceived as collectors and stewards of knowledge handed down through the centuries and created anew in each generation. Libraries were considered storehouses of information and the bigger a collection a library was able to assemble the better and more successful it was considered to be.[13] Materials were purchased with the expectation that users would one day (if not immediately) need to use them. When certain programmes were taught or introduced in a theological school, the library needed to provide the necessary materials to support these programmes and supplement them each year with new materials.

The shift to a different model of librarianship came in the West in the 1980s when, due to an explosion of information that became available year after year, a simultaneous explosion of costs for books and journals, and a stagnation of library budgets, libraries could not afford any more to purchase all the valuable information that they perceived necessary for their educational programmes. In Central and Eastern Europe, the shift came somewhat later, after the collapse of communism, when libraries received free access to a much broader range of materials but no longer had either the budget nor infrastructure to purchase them. Theological libraries in CEE, as mentioned before, have always faced a depressing lack of serious research materials in national languages; they are often not able to buy even what they consider essential, and this situation will not change in the foreseeable future.

12. To Western librarians and administrators libraries in the East seem to be overstaffed, with a "lack of a customer focus and the lack of a market orientation...still struggling to achieve the necessary culture change" (Pors and Edwards, 125).

13. See the excellent article by Kane on "Access versus Ownership" in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Studies.*

The shift has often been described as a shift from the principle of ownership to the principle of access, from purchasing materials "just in case" someone would need them to maing materials available "just in time" when they were requested (Moahi,2002:341-9).Technological developments during the last twenty years took away the urgent necessity for libraries to store all materials in their own facilities and gave libraries a position of one "link in a network of shared resources" (Kane, 2003). Materials are available online on the Internet, they can be scanned and e-mailed to the user, materials from electronic databases can be disseminated very quickly and efficiently. The shortage of materials, for example in CEE, can be addressed with many other creative methods besides just collecting and storing (like in a museum): "the access/ownership dynamic encourages us to look at ourselves more creatively: we need to focus more on function rather than organization, on content rather than medium, and on services rather than tradition" (Anderson 1991:7). Sharing of resources is also less costly than when each library purchases the same materials themselves.[14] It is not helpful to consider these two principles as "either-or", they need to supplement each other and balance out each other's weaknesses. Although libraries may be able to purchase fewer materials, they can today provide access to a much broader range of documents than ever in history.

This shift causes changes not only in the acquisition of materials but in almost any area of library work, but first of all a change in attitude, in priorities, in budget decisions. The priorities will shift to making materials

available, or to concentrating on providing "integrated information services via any and all media" (Pejova, 2002) more than on collecting and managing books and periodicals. Service, then, means knowing and anticipating the needs and questions of readers and building up experience in responding to them, that is, knowing the potential of neighbouring libraries, whether and where materials are available in different formats (e.g. electronic sources), creative thinking in the establishment of active links between materials and people, a commitment to servicing all users of the library. To really exploit the technological revolution librarians in CEE need to stop being depressed about that which is not available to them for purchase, and think of their collection as being the whole universe of knowledge stored anywhere in the world to which they need to find the code for access. Internet sources, if properly selected and evaluated, can in the same way belong to the library's holdings as materials held in the nearby library to which readers can be sent or the materials which can be ordered into one's own library. The librarian's new job, then, is to be a detective, a hunter, a manager and navigator of knowledge, and a proactive planner.[15] Although the library does not "own" some materials, it is responsible to provide the information about them: catalogue Internet sources, provide links to OPACs of other libraries, develop the Library website as a portal, or gateway, to available information. Students and faculty can be great helpers in the process of finding and selecting electronic sources: students because they are often more technologically minded than librarians and faculty because they have the professional expertise to help evaluate what is worthy of selection. If librarians fail to integrate electronic resources in the overall library collection, they will soon lose their readers and become helpless and irrelevant.

14. Bruce R Kingma and Natalia Mouravieva describe in their article "The economics of access versus ownership" a study conducted at the Library for Natural Sciences at the Russian Academy of Sciences in order to analyse the costs of the library's subscription to foreign journals and the costs for providing access to individual requested journal articles by interlibrary loan. The results of the study are very clear that the most cost-effective way to provide access to scientific journal articles within Russia is to allocated additional funding for international interlibrary loan rather than increase the number of foreign language journal subscriptions.

15. See the article by Virkus, 1995 "Cyberdetective, Infonaut, Knowledge Engineer, Cybrarian or What?" for a challenging and creative definition of a librarian who masters the technological revolution.

Especially in theological libraries of CEE cooperation as to acquisition and availability of sources has become indispensable. Much has been written in the West about cooperative collection development; however, the application of this principle has been very slow, if not impossible, in the East. Why not, in an already existing network of theological schools, assign to each school priorities in the acquisition of books and periodicals in a certain subject area? While each school will make sure they have the basic essential reference materials, one school will concentrate on research materials in church history, the other in contemporary theology, the third in Biblical studies, and the fourth in some other subject area. Because of specialisation, resources that would have been spent on each school purchasing identical materials will then go into serious research collections that can be shared with each other. Possibly, before such arrangements will become possible - because they require a lot of trust between the schools, much planning, some equity of funds invested by each school - some simpler steps can be taken. Why, for example, purchase the same book, periodical, CD-ROM if a theological or state library that is located in close geographic proximity already has it and it can be borrowed from that other library? This will encourage libraries to get to know each other's collections, for example, through Union lists of periodicals and on-line catalogues, to develop clear interlibrary lending agreements both locally and regionally and to make a commitment for cooperation. It will, however, also require some rethinking in the library: more staff time and finances will need to go into operating the interlibrary lending services, automation will need to be moved ahead more quickly so as to make information about one's collection available, and even the safety of postal services or other delivery services will need to be considered.

Conclusion

Theological libraries in Central and Eastern Europe often find themselves on a difficult journey, surrounded by a society that itself is going through a stressful transition. Although circumstances may be difficult they also bear many positive opportunities. Because often theological schools and libraries are designed almost from zero there is a chance to create something more contextualised and adapted to the current situation without being tied down too much with an already existing tradition. On the other side, there is much experience in state libraries and theological schools worldwide to selectively borrow from.

To be able to optimise their development and actually utilise the great opportunities that they have, theological libraries in CEE will greatly profit from an overall conceptual framework that would help to integrate different views of and experiences with information technology, perceptions of availability and use of resources, emphasis on service rather than creating storage places of information, tested and contextualised management structures, and many other factors. It is indispensable that this framework include cooperation with other theological libraries regionally and Europe wide. It seems that in the last 10 years most theological libraries have tried to survive and develop on their own, without sufficiently considering opportunities for cooperation, and this way limited themselves in their potential. It is hoped that the shadows of the past that hampered the willingness to cooperate will loose their influence and that creative and practical possibilities are found to bring CEE libraries closer together.

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