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# The Meanings of “Innovation” in Theological Libraries: Bold Ideas or Empty Promises?

## Part 1: Examining the “Theological- Industrial-Complex”

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**ABSTRACT** The use of the term innovation in recent years has been widely debated, but also widely used in theological education. The question we are asking is whether innovation is inherently a set of “bold ideas” or merely “empty promises,” based on a systematic need to change environments for the sake of change, rather than the sake of need. In the first presentation, we will discuss the history of the term “innovation,” why it has become tied to technology, and what the underpinning power-structure of the “theological-industrial-complex” is and has to do with innovation in our theological institutions.

### **INTRODUCTION: INNOVATION AND ITS PLACES**

In our panel today, we will be exploring the ideas behind the pervasive narrative of “innovation,” or as we have asked: “bold ideas or empty promises?” In my section, I would like to ask a few questions about what constitutes “innovation,” and how it has played out in the common parlance of higher education, in the library scene in the United States, and in theological education. Specifically, I want to examine the relationship between “innovation narratives” and the variously defined Theological-Industrial-Complex, which I will detail for this paper shortly. What I will argue is that innovation and innovation narratives are often different and come out of a desire

and need by institutions and the greater community of theological education to demonstrate recognizable change and change agents, in order to express utility within those frameworks, whether or not their products are in fact innovative. Additionally, “innovation” is self-determined as either “renewed” or “effective” by the bodies enacting those changes and can be seen in its scalability—that of basic change (vs. basic language) and that of radical change (vs. radical language). As we look at these scenarios, we must ask the following questions: Is something *truly* innovative? And what does that mean? Is it world-changing? Or is it merely something that has been altered to appear different, new, renewed, or “innovative?”

The discussion here is around the notion that the system of guidance and control—the overarching Theological- or Christian-industrial-complex, which is fostered and built and sustained by structures of checks and balances—requires us to continually do new things. That is basically what life itself requires! But in this push for commodification of activities, and moves toward qualifying everything we do as progressively developing the next best thing, the question must be: are the innovations being driven by the desires of the working person, the librarian, the staff, the faculty, the students; or are they being driven by the corporatization of activities? Let us look at a general definition of the military-industrial-complex: “. . . a gridlock of military, political, and business interests that formed a self-benefiting association of preferential relationships that went against the public interest.”<sup>1</sup>

This may seem like a rather grim or at least uncharitable definition, especially in relation to how we are defining “innovation” and its roles. But it is worthwhile for us to recognize where our terminologies are coming from. Imagine, then, if we were to replace “military” with “theological” or “Christian,” how then might we understand this? And though the expressions have been used variously, I would specifically include the following terms to describe what constitutes the nature of the theological-industrial-complex, especially as we are writing about it today. These include: 1) the corporatization of theological education, ministry, and church organization; 2) the overuse of metrical, analytical, and assessment-oriented tools *without studied reflection*; 3) the expansion of business-based models into theological education and administration; 4) finance-driven theology and ministry and broad commodification of the church; and 5) technologically infused language that purports that it will solve *all* institutional problems.

I want to be very clear though—I do not suggest that any one institution, person, committee, administration, or other body is responsible or negatively affecting how innovation is impacted, approached, or promoted; rather, this is an open question to our community, which asks whether or not, and to what extent, we are driven by a systematic expression of business-theological-corporate design and the accommodation that pushes us toward this system and innovation. The language in libraries around innovation is relatively new, and seems to have arisen around the time of the commodification of education in the 1980s.

As we have considered these terms, and as we have looked at innovation as both an idea and an expression of our times, we will need to reconsider the origins of the term's development. As we'll see next, the concept of innovation is almost exclusively tied to an expression of technology. The changes in our language, as well as the evolution of our perceptions about newness, are rapidly altered and enhanced by our social and collective design, work, and thought. All of these ideas are part of our social and cultural existence.

## **THE GENEALOGY OF INNOVATION AND ITS CATEGORIES**

The key term in this presentation is “innovation,” and I would like to begin with one of the best treatments on this subject, which explores not simply the meaning of the word “innovation,” but critiques the deeper place and category of the term. That is to say, how has the idea of “innovation” been treated, how is the term of “innovation” understood, and why might the expression of “innovation” in society and broader culture be necessary for how we engage in developing new ideas and implementing these ideas in our social orders?

The work I speak of is titled “Innovation: The History of a Category,”<sup>2</sup> by Benoît Godin, a Canadian scholar in Montreal, who explores the intellectual history of the term innovation in the context of distinct fields of study (e.g. “technological innovation”) and questions the rise and entrenchment of such use in our social languages. Godin describes it as such:

Innovation is everywhere. In the world of goods (technology) certainly, but also in the realm of words. Innovation is discussed in scientific and technical literature, in social

sciences such as sociology, management and economics, and in the humanities and arts. Innovation is also a central idea in the popular imaginary, in the media and in public policy. How has innovation acquired such a central place in our society? ... This paper looks at innovation as category and suggests an outline for a genealogical history. It identifies the concepts that have defined innovation through history, from its very first meaning as novelty in the Middle Ages to the most recent interpretations in sociology and economics. The paper suggests a genealogical history of innovation through the following three concepts: Imitation → Invention → Innovation.<sup>3</sup>

Godin starts off with an intriguing review of this ever-increasing rise—perhaps even “obsession”—of innovation by citing scholarship of Helga Nowotny, who delves deeply into our social conditioning and energetic attention to the innovation obsession in our societies.<sup>4</sup> In the introduction of Godin’s article, we have the beginning of this issue and its assessment, which we should consider:

Briefly stated, innovation has become the emblem of the modern society, a panacea for resolving many problems, and a phenomenon to be studied. As H. Nowotny defines our epoch: it is a fascination and quest for innovation (Nowotny, 2008; 2006). The quest for innovation is so strong that some go so far as to suggest that drugs like Ritalin and Adderall, used to treat psychiatric and neurological conditions, should be prescribed to the healthy as a cognitive enhancement “technology” for improving the innovative abilities of our species (Greely et al., 2008).<sup>5</sup>

This assessment may be both astounding and commonplace—or rather, expected—because for many of us, it is a truism. We know that it is true, even if we think that it is problematic. Godin continues by evaluating the issues at hand with innovation with a series of questions about how to handle this assessment—with three necessary questions. Godin writes:

First, **why** has innovation acquired such a central place in our society or, put differently, where precisely does the idea of innovation come from? To many, innovation is a relatively recent phenomenon and its study more recent yet: innova-

tion has acquired real importance in the twentieth century. In point of fact, however, innovation has always existed. The concept itself emerged centuries ago. This suggests a second question: why did innovation come to be defined as **technological innovation**? Many people spontaneously understand innovation to be technological innovation. The literature itself takes this for granted. More often than not, studies on technological innovation simply use the term innovation, although they are really concerned with technological innovation. However, etymologically and historically, the concept of innovation is much broader. How, when and by whom did its meaning come to be “restricted” to technology? Third, why is innovation generally understood, in many milieus, as **commercialized innovation**? It is hard today to imagine technology without thinking of the market. One frequently hears of innovations that are marketed by firms, but other types of innovation are either rapidly forgotten or rarely discussed. By contrast, every individual is to a certain extent innovative; artists are innovative, scientists are innovative, and so are organizations in their day-to-day operations.<sup>6</sup>

Godin continues with a genealogical approach to the history of the term and how it has been utilized, appropriated, and charted throughout the last few hundred years, and what we are to make of this change. What can we make of this then? It is likely that the expressions of innovation, specifically how we use the term “innovation” itself, will continue to be linked to how we perceive technology in our societies—perhaps the most quickly changing thing in our world, besides political opinions and weather, is technology. With this all said, we need to understand that change and innovation can be good, but that there may be a greater force at work, as we’ve seen from these scholars, which coerces our operations, companies, and organizations into forced innovation.

### **CATEGORIES OF EXISTENCE: WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL-INDUSTRIAL-COMPLEX, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

The second portion of this research deals with how we understand this three-part term, and how it fits into the question at hand: what is innovation and how is it driven in theological circumstances with broader

society? We may look at different levels of influence in what asserts our need to explore and pursue innovation in our working environments; for instance, how do our departments engage with the idea of innovation? How do our libraries engage? How do our seminaries or larger institutions engage? These are *not* the theological-industrial-complex, but are components of the broader encompassing system, which this falls under. The issue at hand is not so much that we participate in pressing for innovation, because reasonably, innovation and its effects and changes are inherently *good and positive* expressions in our society. Rather, it is the compulsion and overarching narrative, as noted by Godin, related to the innovation narrative, and the systematic changes in perception over the last generations, that seem to have come out of the entwined social system we are calling the theological-industrial-complex.

We can turn to a listing of examples (Appendix 1) where I've detailed the various uses of terms: "theological/Christian/religious-industrial-complex" and how these terms are both utilized and viewed. For the most part, there is a negative sense attached to these terms, but this should not be conclusively determined. In some respect, the Eisenhower-inspired language—itsself comporting a negative tone of control and marginalization of our national interests—is a lexicon describing the necessary resources that guide, direct, and enhance the system of theological expression and practice in American higher education and congregational communities. Yet, within it, there is the underlying problem that comes with any large, sprawling, oft-unconnected, though related, enterprise—that is the thing about which we are speaking that has become an "imagined community" (to use Benedict Anderson's term) of theological education, educators, students, and staff, which is by its nature a blurred bureaucracy that simply functions on levels tied to business needs and demands. As we have moved more toward a world that is tied to metrics, assessments, and functional costs, return on investments, and other financial terms, our theological education becomes commodified in a way that cannot return to some glory days. There are, additionally, problems with this idea—that there was even such a pristine time of learning, which did not account for monetary or financially solvent needs in that theological learning space.

An argument I have heard among many educators in higher education is the very point about value of what is being learned and how it is

not something that can be justified by monetary value or metrics—it just is. Yet, even if this were the case—that classes or other activities were not monitored by metrics, analytics, and statistical analysis, as they are today—institutions, broadly speaking, have been looking at their numbers (of students, enrollment, payments/revenue, and costs across the board) since the beginning. It is merely the language that we use, and how elements of commodification have changed in the last thirty years—around the time when students began to demand of their teachers a more transactional relationship; uniformly, this is the time when many of my own colleagues began hearing complaints from students about such quid pro quo education. The line began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when faculty described accounts of students demanding good grades “because they paid for their grades through tuition dollars.”

The theological-industrial-complex, then, is a broad expression of the ethos, which drives a widely socially accepted notion of what we should be looking at as members of a capital-driven society—a society that values monetary gain, sourced from varieties of change and abilities to profit from that gain; and in that, innovation (or variations of that term) is positioned at the center of that place.

Now, this may be the more cynical position: that innovation is merely an aim at eventually finding a way for institutions and communities to increase their capital, but there is, if we want to look at this more humanely, a *humanistic* and *moral* component, which is to say that innovation *makes us better people*. We would hope that this is the more radical and truer reason. Yet, monetary gains, as part of any industrial-complex, are core aspects of the human condition, at least in how many people see their worldly survival and livelihood.

## APPENDIX 1: HISTORY OF THE EXPRESSION: “THEOLOGICAL-INDUSTRIAL-COMPLEX”

Feb. 21, 2003

A review of the film “The Magdalene Sisters” in the newspaper the Telegraph (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3590173/Sisters-without-mercy.html>):

“The asylum is a **theological-industrial complex** designed to extinguish any glimmer of free thought or will. Stripped bare of anything

resembling creature comforts, it's a place where inequality is regarded as a virtue. In a scene straight out of *Oliver Twist*, we see the sisters fatten themselves on sizzling bacon while the adolescents in their charge poke disconsolately at the thin gruel dished up before them."

**INTERPRETATION** Term used to express the power structure of the church, but also conveys sense of inequality between those in the system of power and those who are subject to its oversight and control.

#### **Dec. 6, 2004**

A blog called "Reading the Pictures" featured the use of the term (<https://www.readingthepictures.org/2004/12/today-sunday-morning-tomorrow-the-world/>):

"Really, the true God in America is unchecked consumption. As such, I can envision the denominational powerhouses taking to the airwaves to assert themselves as the new 'Chrysler's,' 'Ford's,' and 'Chevy's' of the Bush II generation. In other words: welcome to the rise of the **'Theological-Industrial Complex.'** (By the way, with all the controversy over this 'rejected' spot, you can't tell me the ad people for the United Church of Christ aren't thinking they've died and gone to heaven. Certainly, they are now guaranteed far more visibility than if the ad had been accepted.)"

**INTERPRETATION** Term used to express the role of American Christianity (or "Christianities"), including churches and their power in the American social and political systems.

#### **Dec. 29, 2006**

Use of "Christian-Industrial Complex" in blog online (<http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/riffs-122906-the-christian-industrial-complex>):

"Examples of the Christian-Industrial Complex are easy to see. The Women of Faith conferences, for example, rake in more than \$50-million per year and are part of a for-profit, publicly traded company. The Christian retail industry topped \$4.5-billion last year. (A bit of context: \$30 per month can support many pastors in developing countries. That means that Americans spend enough annually on "Jesus Junk" to support 250-thousand Third World pastors—for 50 years!)"



**INTERPRETATION** Term used to express the commodification of church-related and branded materials, whereby that industry then becomes its own economic and even political entity.

**April 21, 2011**

The blog “An Extroverted Quaker: Reflections of an ESFP who has fallen in love with Quakerism” used the expression in the following way (<https://extrovertedquaker.wordpress.com/2011/04/>):

“The implications of participating with non-Westerners on an equal footing in the theological process are staggering for Western theologians and the **Theological Industrial Complex**. One of the key difficulties shared throughout the compilation is that the average theological writing costs as much money as most non-Westerners engaged in theological tasks make in a year. Lois McKinney Douglas writes that ‘Far too many programs are being driven by pragmatic concerns related to accreditation, funding, recruiting, and the expectations of constituencies.’ [9] While Douglas was addressing the concerns for theological education, she adequately sums up the thrust of this book and the discussion by challenging those of us in the West to set aside the idols of power, privilege and national identity to serve humbly in submission to Christ and our brothers and sisters.”

**INTERPRETATION** Term used to express the Eurocentric and Western theological tradition that has driven many of the academic and political discourses around power and privilege.

**Dec. 5, 2011**

Zouch online magazine, article “Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon” Review, by David Eric Tomlinson (<http://zouchmagazine.com/gravity-rainbow-by-thomas-pynchon/#>):

“But it’s not all doom and gloom . . . Pynchon truly cares for his characters. If the global **military-theological-industrial complex** is one side of the story, the individual humans suffering under its oppressive weight are the other side.”

**INTERPRETATION** Term describes the sense that America and Americanism is an enterprise that is hand-in-hand with militarism and American Christianity as a brand or superstructure of society.

**May 15, 2017**

The online newspaper Commonweal used the term in an article titled “Letter from Rome: Who’s Responsible for the Benedict Complex?” by Robert Mickens (<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/letter-rome-124>):

“Even though some in Benedict XVI’s entourage have used the ‘pope emeritus’ to further their own personal agenda (and this is a serious issue), the **‘theological-industrial complex’** is not primarily a product of the theology of Ratzinger or his followers (the Ratzingerians),” Faggioli wrote.

**INTERPRETATION** Term describes the power and structure of the Catholic Church and especially as it is seen through different periods of Catholic leadership.

## Part 2: How Do We Talk About Innovation?

Kris Veldheer, Catholic Theological Union

**ABSTRACT** This was a presentation in three parts with the second part being about how we talk about innovation. Several points were raised, including the language of innovation and the myths of innovation. Finally, based on an article by Girish Rishi, three paths to innovation were highlighted, along with a number of lessons to be implemented, as well.

How do we talk about innovation? Is there a certain language of innovation? I think we give meaning to innovation when we attach it to something else, like innovative thinking or innovative practice; the implication being that innovation is making something new or different than it was before. So if innovation implies something new, then how do we describe it? How do we talk about it?

There are many myths about innovation, but three that stand out. First, innovation isn’t necessarily always about the new. You also don’t

need to be a genius to be innovative. Lastly, it doesn't matter how many innovative ideas you have, if they remain just ideas. Innovation requires action to take place. In that case, innovation is not a mystical act, but rather, I see it as a journey. I think once you start being innovative, you will find additional ways to continue to be innovative.

Girish Rishi, writing for *Forbes Community Voice*, identifies three paths to innovation: the Moonshot, the Pivot, and the Incremental.<sup>7</sup> For me, the Moonshot asks the big question, what has changed our industry? My first thought to that was the coming of electronic databases and how electronic resources have changed the way libraries work. On a different tact, the Pivot makes me think of what ways or means do we use to introduce innovation? I would suggest we use the Pivot when we offer a new service in the library such as remote reference or innovations in our online catalogs. Anything that makes it easier for our users, I see as an innovation. Finally, Rishi talks about the Incremental. For me, those are the little innovations that no one really notices or sees, such as slight upgrades to websites. If we think of using these different paths for innovation, I think we will be innovative in our libraries without even knowing it.

Finally, there are a number of innovation lessons you can implement in your own libraries. I will mention a couple that may not seem that innovative. The first is, that the responsibility for innovation is in the mirror. That means you. No one else knows your context better and is better poised to be innovative. Whether or not you follow any of Rishi's paths mentioned above or find another way, you cannot look outside to others to bring innovation. However, a second lesson of innovation is to expect the unexpected. When you think you are being innovative, your library users will think you are not, and vice versa. Even depending on the size of the innovation can bring unexpected consequences. So, be innovative no matter what style and means your innovation takes.

## Part 3: Culture of Innovation or Innovation of Culture?

Bob Turner, Harding School of Theology

**ABSTRACT** When we think of innovation, we often associate the word with digital technology, such as software, apps, and electronic books. Yet our view of innovation should not be limited to the stuff that we create, or that others create for us. Instead, we can think of innovation as the way that we creatively understand and apply our strengths to our workplaces. In this paper, I will argue that the creative use of our strengths, not the total remaking of our libraries, is the best way to adapt to the constant changes in our field and world.

I recently took the CliftonStrengths assessment.<sup>8</sup> CliftonStrengths rates your strengths out of a total of thirty-four. The lowest-payment package (\$20) will tell you your top five strengths. You can pay (\$90) and see all thirty-four of your strengths ranked. I'm not sure why someone would pay \$70 to see a full ranking of their weaknesses, but some might.

The assessment of strengths provides two pieces of critical information. First, it details the ways proper use of our strengths contributes to our best work. This is not particularly novel, but it is a reminder that our best work comes through our strengths and not the correction of our weaknesses. Second, it shows the ways improper (or immature) use of our strengths can often contribute to our worst work. It is not the case that our worst work comes when we rely on our weaknesses. Instead, it is more true that we often fail when we don't realize how to maturely and wisely apply our true strengths.

This is why I think theological libraries should exercise true caution when throwing around words like *innovation*. I'm not sure it is in our strengths. I'd like to propose that libraries are wise to honestly consider what it is that we have historically done well and then to build and capitalize on those things.

## GOOGLE AND LIBRARIANS

When I was in library school I once heard a person suggest that Google was nothing more than a bunch of library-types beating librarians to the punch on creating the world's largest index. Though bold, the claim had some validity. And it had no trouble winning over this particular room, packed with optimistic twenty-somethings who had an easier time envisioning themselves in a Silicon Valley coffee shop than at the circulation desk of Neglected Township Public Library. So, I get the appeal. But I don't think Google necessarily is something a community of librarians would have created. We can debate whether Google is the most robust index and catalog of information in world history. The difficulty comes when we recognize that Google is not just an index, but also the world's largest billboard—realizing the majority of its annual revenue through the sale of ads.<sup>9</sup> I'm not sure a librarian would have it that way. Let's be honest: half of our profession is uncomfortably hanging donor trees on the wall, much less surrendering the search page to ads for cat food and plastic surgery.

The Google comparison fails to appreciate the strengths of theological librarians. Have theological librarians contributed to some really significant indexing projects, such as Religion Index One, Religion Index Two, and the ATLA Religion Database? Absolutely. But these were not innovations in the way that we often associate with emerging technologies. Instead, these utilities appropriated known technology for use in the context of theology and religious studies. I might argue that theological librarians have excelled in *contextualization*, rather than *innovation*. It is why all of us are here in Indianapolis for ATLA, but probably missed out on Austin for SXSW. We aren't strictly innovators: we are experts in our respective contexts. We know our collections and our communities. Within theological communities we would even add that we understand a set of commitments. The short way of saying this would be that we understand our library's culture.

## THE CULTURE CODE

In his book *The Culture Code*, Daniel Coyle argues that three factors set great groups apart from all others. Groups who consistently excel provide: 1) a safe environment for everyone, 2) shared vulnerability, and 3) a clear message/mission.<sup>10</sup> I think theological libraries are wise

to remember that innovation is not on this list, despite the fact that it is one of the most frequent questions we get from the public (“So what are you doing about e-books and all that?”).

In fact, innovation is not a requirement to be successful in most fields. Some groups innovate (Facebook, Apple, FedEx), while others perfect things that have existed forever (Procter and Gamble, Whole Foods, Brooks Brothers, Starbucks, Chick-fil-A). It seems that if theological libraries want to deliver on promises, we’ll need to start thinking more about maximizing strengths and less about chasing innovation. This advice by Coyle fits well with that given a generation earlier by Jim Collins, which is that the move from good to great will come through appreciating our current strengths, rather than trashing everything and waiting to be rescued by an outsider messiah.<sup>11</sup>

I went ahead and listed some of our strengths: hospitality, circulating print collections,<sup>12</sup> physical meeting space, support for ministers. These strengths are not simply things we do well, but also part of our library’s culture. The other piece of our culture relates to how well we attend to these strengths. In order to evaluate this, I’d like to reflect on three recent developments in the Harding School of Theology Library and explore how they relate to our strengths and culture.

### THREE CONTEXTS

I wanted to establish our library as the leading theological library for the support of Christian leaders, particularly those in Churches of Christ. Yet this aim could only come from our strengths, since we are not strong at everything.<sup>13</sup> So, what does our particular culture think of when they think about the library? Collection strength, expertise in knowing that collection (much due to the work of Don Meredith and his encyclopedic knowledge of the collection), and support for ministers.

Early in 2018, I created a twice-monthly email resource called *Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers*. While hardly innovative, Footnotes builds on some of those strengths of our culture. It is high in content and relatability. I write it from the perspective of a minister who understands some of the stressors of needing to craft content on a weekly basis. The email is not, however, innovative. I mean, it’s an email. In 2018. And I’ve disabled any hope of people engaging with one another, as they would on Facebook. I’m not interested in building a community around it; people already have enough super-

ficial community. But the email has gained a broad following (450+ church leaders) who have given supportive feedback. I think it has been successful among ministers because it fills a need. I think it has been successful for our library because it aligns with our brand.

Our Admissions Office was looking for publicity for its Facebook page. We were interested in helping, but also eager to do something within the range of our brand. We typically use the Facebook Live videos for book reviews. We've also done a few interviews with professors and previews of items in our special collections. Videos regarding special collections have unquestionably been the most popular (according to page views, likes, etc.). While this might be creative, it is hardly innovative. We are simply speaking to an existing community using a universally known platform. Most of our videos average around a thousand views. That is pretty modest, but we get strong feedback, and it provides traffic to the school Facebook page.

Over the years, students have suggested we have coffee service. The fact is that we lack the foot traffic to justify a staffed coffee bar, and don't necessarily have the staffing or interest in making coffee throughout the day in a traditional pot/carafe style. So we tried to think of our culture. What connects coffee and how our community views us? We had card catalog cabinets that were not in use, but are really beautiful. We began serving single-serve pour overs from the drawers of these cabinets, merging creativity with some of the classic elements of old libraries. We were tempted to go larger with some ideas that required a significant financial investment and more risk. But again, we played to our strengths. We were convinced that our patrons would come and drink coffee, but were not convinced they would come to the library to drink coffee. Serving it from an antique made the whole project a nice fit.

Each of these three projects took our context seriously. What ways do they identify with our library? What do they expect from us? What can we reasonably offer? How does this advance our mission?

## CONTEXTUAL CREATIVITY

I think we find ourselves more interested in recycling than production. Most of what we've done built on something we had done in the past. *Footnotes* is a larger version of what my predecessor Don Meredith formerly accomplished with his Bibliographic Research Guides.<sup>14</sup>

Facebook Live is a video version of a blog, which is a digital version of a print column in the school newsletter of recent acquisitions. The coffee bar is obviously recycled. I'm not sure any of these are new ideas. But I'm also not sure we needed newer ideas. We just needed our ideas to be done better.

In that spirit, I'd like to propose that theological librarians leave the innovation to people in other fields. My hunch is they are better at it anyway. They have a different skillset, workforce, and profit motive. That does not mean we need to go backwards in time. Instead, I think we can consider ways we can be contextually creative. How do we appreciate our specific culture and its strengths? But then how can we creatively offer that tradition in such a way that it gains new meaning?

This notion of contextual creativity can have an impact on every aspect of our profession.

- How would our Special Collections websites change if we asked what is the most contextually creative way to present the documents?
- Do our Technical Services practices appreciate our specific communities? Do we employ folksonomies in our local catalogs that help our users navigate them?<sup>15</sup>
- I estimate (anecdotally) that about 25-30% of our New Books section circulates during the few weeks before we move them to the Stacks. I'm curious how we might use our social media to promote collections of other print books to enhance circulation.

There are certainly more ways contextual creativity can increase the quality and effectiveness of our efforts. As we enhance our appreciation of our specific cultures, we are better positioned to capitalize on our strengths and to make constructive changes that, although not innovative, will position us for a stronger future.

## NOTES

- 1 See definition at: <https://diagnosingemergent.wordpress.com/10-institutional-emergent-industrial-complex/>; see also work by C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 2 Benoît Godin, "Innovation: The History of a Category," in *Project on the Intellectual History of Innovation Working Paper No. 1*, 2008, <http://www.csiic.ca/PDF/IntellectualNo1.pdf>.



- 3 Godin, Abstract of text.
- 4 See Nowotny's works: *Insatiable Curiosity: Innovation in a Fragile Future* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010) and *Cultures of Technology and the Quest for Innovation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).
- 5 Godin, 5.
- 6 Godin, 5.
- 7 Girish Rishi, "Three Paths to Innovation," Forbes Community Voice, May 22, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestech-council/2018/05/22/three-paths-to-innovation/#57e82c681eb5>.
- 8 It was formerly called StrengthsFinder, <https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com>. It is one of these personality assessments that we don't want to take because we hear about them from our friends, and let's be honest: we don't really care how our friends perform on such things. It's like the Enneagram, which is like your cholesterol: it's nice to know your number, but that doesn't mean you want to listen to your friends talk about theirs.
- 9 For more perspective on Google's broader strategies, see Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).
- 10 Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018).
- 11 Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001).
- 12 Amy Fry, "Factors Affecting the Use of Print and Electronic Books: A Use Study and Discussion," *College & Research Libraries* 79, no. 1 (January 2018): 68-85.
- 13 For example, we have peer libraries in our tradition who have deeper holdings in their special collections, greater amounts of foot traffic due to being on undergraduate campuses, larger electronic database portfolios, better social media presence, and larger staffs.
- 14 <https://hst.edu/library/research-tools/>
- 15 A student asked me this week if we had a way of discovering what materials in our collection were written by graduates of the school. The answer is basically, "No." But it did seem like that would be a really nice catalog feature in the notes field or elsewhere.