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# Catalogers and Directors

## At Loggerheads or Mutually Advancing the Profession?

A Panel Presentation by

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Thomas Phillips, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California

Moderator: Richard A. Lammert, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**ABSTRACT** Especially in recent years, the future of cataloging as a part of the library profession has become a point of discussion. It seems at times that catalogers and directors are at opposite parts of the spectrum: catalogers holding on to cataloging because “that’s the way it’s always been done”; directors trying to make use of dwindling funds, and deciding that cataloging as we know it is not a major part of the future. So it seems—but is the appearance accurate? Are catalogers and directors simply saying the same thing in different ways and with different focuses, or is there a fundamental disconnect between the two viewpoints? The purpose of this panel was to bring together one cataloger and two directors to discuss precisely that topic.

The purpose of this panel was to give catalogers and library directors an opportunity to address how cataloging currently fits into the library profession. During recent times, there has appeared to be a growing rift in how catalogers and directors view the usefulness of cataloging to the work of libraries. In this panel presentation, each panelist had seven minutes to present his or her perception of the topic, followed by three minutes to provide any additional comments. The panel presentation was followed by questions from the attendees for the panelists.

**STEPHEN SWEENEY, DIRECTOR, CARDINAL STAFFORD LIBRARY, ST. JOHN VIANNEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

I believe that cataloging is a function that fits the definition of mystery. Cataloging is not mysterious to me; I have a good understanding of the process and workflows to be successful. Rather, I mean mystery as it relates to cataloging in the sense that this part of the profession is continually growing, expanding, and being lived into as it has evolved from AACR to AACR2 to RDA and what comes next.

Saint John Vianney Theological Seminary is the Catholic seminary in Denver, with 3.5 FTE in the library. We serve a population of about 120 FTE seminarians and approximately thirty faculty and staff. Our seminarian/student population is 100% residential, and all students have the occasion to use the library. Saint John Vianney (SJV) offers one nondegree program in the form of a propaedeutic year (it's named the Spirituality Year). The Seminary offers two philosophical degrees: a BA in Philosophy in affiliation with Regis University in Denver, and a BPhil degree in affiliation with the Angelicum in Rome. SJV offers to some students the opportunity to complete their philosophical studies by a nondegree "standard program" of coursework in philosophy. Two degree programs are offered in Theology: the MDiv program is approved and accredited by ATS, and the STB (Baccalaureate Degree in Sacred Theology) is offered via affiliation with the Angelicum in Rome.

The library is the result of 114 years of growth and the generosity of St Thomas Seminary. Library offerings include e-journals and some ebooks as well as the OADTL and EBSCO databases (as two examples). The seminary is very bound to the print text tradition; the library was able to take on a leadership role in the formulation and approval of the SJVTS Style Guide. A recently approved version of the Collection Development Policy for the library further suggests the seminary's reliance on print resources.

Now thinking about our topic at hand, the previous cataloger retired in 2017 after nineteen years of service to the seminary. Another person was hired, and she stayed until June 2018 when family and military obligations drew her family from Denver. From there, the library experienced a short gap in the position while a search was launched, which ultimately led to a new hire in October 2018. As

happens in so many small libraries, the qualifications of the person who ultimately was hired last October were pretty diverse—interlibrary loan services, cataloging, donations, volunteers, binding, and serials.

Looking ahead: Are directors expecting a guaranteed future for catalogers? In the perspective of a Catholic seminary library director, catalogers are an integral component in decoding the mystery of organization and arrangement of information. The belief was also expressed that there is a guaranteed future for libraries, and certainly for professionals to organize, arrange, and describe that. With that said, a future for catalogers as we currently know them is certainly not guaranteed. The mystery of describing information and creating access points to them is vital to the future of libraries.

**HEATHER HICKS, TECHNICAL SERVICES LIBRARIAN, SWBTS LIBRARY, SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**Catalogers vs. Computers.** Even in 2019, technology has not advanced enough to replace the cataloger. Specifically, computers are unable to perform cataloging tasks such as resource description as well as a cataloger and are completely incapable of performing other cataloging tasks such as subject analysis and authority control. Without the cataloger to provide the proper description, access points, and subject analysis, the resource would be hard to discover and impossible for the user to identify, select, obtain, or explore linked resources. Since these are fundamental to the operation of the library, the cataloger and cataloging are still clearly needed.

**So, catalogers are needed.**

**Are we current?** Yes. The tools (such as RDA or authority control) and goals (such as core or full-level cataloging) used by catalogers are the prevailing methods and expectations of library science—not catalogers' preference—but standards agreed upon by global library communities (such as the PCC) and bibliographic utilities (such as OCLC) to be successful methods of describing and organizing resources.

**Retire or retrain?** Ideally, directors would desire to equip their catalogers with new technology and the appropriate education

for application; while the cataloger, in turn, would also agree that this is wisdom for any profession, and would seek to stay informed and up-to-date.

**Tradition or access-driven methods?** Both. Applying LC classification numbers and subject headings consistently allows new resources to file most appropriately within the historical bibliographic universe. On the other hand, resource description has been redesigned to operate in an environment of relational databases so patrons can find resources through linked data with the most recent technological devices and platforms.

**Future of catalogers and the cataloging profession.** From today's viewpoint, directors will need both catalogers and new technology working in tandem to thrive in the future. Already, the cataloging profession has integrated a new technological role, one in which the cataloger utilizes, manages, migrates, and oversees advancements in technology including the uncertainties of technological flaws, actually creating a higher *demand* for catalogers and cataloging services. Since both directors and catalogers are working towards the same goal of fulfilling the mission of the library, we are not at an impasse but rather, in partnership.

### **TOM PHILLIPS, DEAN OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES, CST LIBRARY, CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

The relationship between catalogers and directors should begin with the institution's mission. The director's job is to translate the institution's mission into budgetary priorities for the library. This means providing access and discoverability to the content that the institution needs to support its educational mission to students and its research mission for faculty. The cataloger's job is to increase the discoverability of that needed content to the greatest degree possible in a cost-effective manner. Of course, what is needed in an institution varies widely. In most cases, the traditional print cataloger occupies a very small place within the current information economy and traditional print cataloging at the institutional level often does not stand up well to a rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

Director Tom Phillips argued that choosing not to have a cataloging librarian but instead a metadata librarian results from their library supporting the mission of the institution, which is primarily online learning and digital content. **Response:** Agree that the library should support the mission of the institution. Disagree that catalogers are unneeded when the content is digital: regardless of the medium of the resource (print or digital), the principles of organization remain the same and cataloging is metadata—just a more structured, traditional metadata.

Director Stephen Sweeney argued that catalogers are still needed to organize information but the role has come to include many other skills. **Response:** Agree that the cataloger's role is evolving—no longer exclusively just cataloging. In fact, the current Technical Services Librarian position that Hicks occupies includes public services and ILL support, book repair, binding, and serials.

## AUDIENCE INTERACTION

Following are some of the comments and responses that came from the open discussion following the panelists' presentations:

- There was agreement that the library should support the mission of the institution, but disagreement on whether or not catalogers are needed for digital content.
- There was agreement that the cataloger's role is evolving; catalogers are usually not working exclusively as catalogers. Personal examples include catalogers participating in ILL and assisting in library public services events.
- No matter whether the medium of the resource is print or digital, the principles of organization remain the same. Works need adequate subject headings (a commentary on Judges will be missed if it is not in English and lacks subject headings); and works need authority control (a patron can be frustrated when looking for Pastor Dan Cummins's book and getting books by the comedian of the same name because of lack of authority control).
- The Library of Congress still catalogs ebooks. If the leading national library sees it as necessary and not a waste of time, it is reasonable to conclude that e-resources require cataloging.