
Protestant Missions Collections

Past, Present, and Future

Christopher Anderson, Yale Divinity Library

Matthew Baker, Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary

Brian Shetler, Drew University Library

PANEL SUMMARY

Collections documenting the history of Protestant missions are of great and ongoing interest to a wide range of researchers. Global in scope, they capture histories and perspectives often not otherwise available and support learning and scholarship in disciplines such as history, anthropology, and religious studies. Yale Divinity Library's Day Missions Collection, the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary's Missionary Research Library, and Drew University Library's Methodist Missions Collections together comprise a significant amount of primary source material documenting this history. The three collections have related but distinct provenance and there continue to be new acquisitions that are processed and made available for researchers and students. The panel included curators and managers of these collections and considered the background, current uses, and future possibilities of missions-related collections within and beyond the fields of religion and theology.

The three main themes addressed were a) provenance, b) current uses, and c) future directions for collecting and research. Anderson, Baker, and Shetler each offered a brief sketch of how the collections arrived in their current repositories, were processed and made available over approximately 150 years, and how their provenance, and the significant cultural, intellectual, and institutional changes over that period, has impacted the collection (e.g., for preservation or description issues). The presenters then described some of the uses to which these collections had been put for instruction, outreach, and programming, offering specific examples from the contexts of Yale Divinity School, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, and Drew University. Finally, they reflected on recent examples and approaches to collection building in the current market and

on a range of projects and research programs that have integrated missionary materials.

This panel addressed librarians, students, and scholars working with theological, religious studies, or related collections and institutions, particularly where the documentation and study of colonial legacies is a primary concern for researchers, faculty, and students. It emphasized the need for critical engagement—for instruction, management, outreach—with complex and high-interest primary sources.