What About the Aqueduct?

Does Decolonizing the Library Mean Deaccessioning Augustine?

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ABSTRACT The Public Services Interest Group invited three panelists to respond to three broad questions pertaining to decolonizing theological libraries: What are you doing, what could/should we be doing, and what would you do (in an ideal theological library/seminary/school of theology)? In addressing these questions, the panelists discussed what decolonizing looks like in their respective contexts, collection development, collaboration with faculty, and desiderata for further change.

INTRODUCTION

Theological librarians have become more aware of some of the more complex and troubling aspects of the Western Christian heritage represented by many of our institutions and collections. Such trends compel us to ask challenging questions, such as "How do we recognize which voices are missing from our collections?"; "How might we (in collaboration with faculty?) encourage students to encounter some of these missing voices, while also ensuring they develop a familiarity with theologians of traditionally recognized historical significance?"; and "When might de-colonizing our collections run the risk of censorship?" Given constraints in space (i.e., library shelving is finite) and time (students do not have time to read everything), "How do we prioritize?"; and "Who should decide?"

   In this session, three panelists Kris Veldheer (Director of the Paul Bechtold Library, Catholic Theological Union), Yesan Sellan (Chief Librarian, South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies), and Dan-

iel Smith (theological librarian and educator) responded to these and similar questions, subsumed under three broad three headings: *What are you doing?*, *What could/should we be doing?*, and *What would you do (in an ideal theological library/seminary/school of theology)?* The presenters prefaced these remarks with a few brief points of prolegomena, and we ended the session with a question-and-answer session.

PROLEGOMENA

Before responding to the questions noted above, the panelists clarified and emphasized three points. First, while recognizing the terms *decolonial* and *postcolonial* commonly represent different contexts, the former is largely used in Latin American contexts and the latter is more commonly used in Asia and African. In this session the panelists used the terms synonymously. Second, the panelists wanted to emphasize that decolonizing your library is an iterative process that constantly requires reexamination, not a simple matter of getting rid of a few particularly offensive books. Finally, for those who might be wondering, "Why this session? Why are we doing this?" we have two basic reasons: First, for many of us, this is a matter of justice, that we are seeking to heed the voices of those that have too long been silenced as a way of "casting the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly." Second, for many of us who care deeply about the church and see our work as service to the church, it behooves us to pay attention to the voices of our brothers and sisters in places in the world where the church is vibrant and growing.

THREE QUESTIONS

In responding to the questions posed in this session, the panelists centered their discussion around three broad questions, each addressed in turn by each panelist:

What *are* you doing?
- What does decolonizing look like in the context of your theological library and/or institution?
- How do you familiarize yourself with the works of theologians from the majority world and other under-represented voices?

What *could/should* we be doing?
- How do we recognize which voices are missing from our collections?

- How might we better connect the students, faculty, and guest researchers at our libraries with the works of scholars from the majority world and other under-represented groups?

What *would* you do (in the best of all possible worlds)?

- In an ideal theological library/seminary/school or theology, how might you imagine a collection and course of study that encourages students to encounter some of these missing voices, while also ensuring they develop a familiarity with theologians of traditionally recognized historical significance?

Question 1: What *are* you doing?
What does decolonizing look like in the context of your theological library and/or institution?

Kris Veldheer

My very presence up here is a colonial act because I have the privilege to travel, I have the privilege of being a library director. And that is something that I need to acknowledge in the approach that I bring to my work. But in my library of context, I see myself as having three roles: I am a keeper of knowledge in that I keep books or whatever knowledge is these days; I am a producer of knowledge because I produce knowledge that goes to my students and I work with my students in producing their knowledge; and I am a provider of knowledge, in that I provide them with books but also the context in which they work. At CTU, what I'm working on is not to bring stuff out of the collection without giving it a lot of thought. So, I'm not going to do just a bit of deaccessioning of Augustine from the library. But rather I am trying very, very hard to ask people from different places to literally contextualize things, asking my students in my keeper role, "How does your culture see these texts?" because many of them have been taught through these texts. Because of the spread of the Western colonial way of doing education, I see that some of the students I work with who are from parts of Africa and Asia know the classics better than I do. And they can quote Augustine chapter and verse, and I can't. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to take some of that stuff out, but rather to help them understand how they work with it.

And then also help them, in my secondary role as a producer of knowledge, to produce knowledge with them. This means asking,

"How does their context interrelate with the sources?" It also means checking my own beliefs about what are good sources. People come to the reference desk every day, and they look around and they say, "Give me good stuff." I don't. I can't do that anymore. I can't give them the good stuff. I need them to work with me on finding the good stuff, helping each other identify what will work for their context.

Finally, in my role as a provider of information, I work very, very hard to make sure that the library's materials, and not just the materials but also the way we do business, incorporates what works for them. So that's what decolonizing looks like. A lot of what we're going to do in the future at CTU has to do with the fact that I just finished my DMin on decolonizing and post-colonial thought, specifically, about knowledge and justice in colonial and postcolonial thought in the library. So stay tuned; we're rolling stuff out.

Daniel Smith

When I think about decolonization, I think about some sort of intentional decentering. I also think of partnerships with marginalized communities, which oftentimes means making space, stepping aside, because I know that people who look like me have been at the center for a very long time and have formed what libraries look like. I think it's also a matter of perfect, purposeful, deep listening, to students, to faculty, to staff to those who are using our libraries, to see how they understand their work, and how that can intersect with, inform, and enhance what we're doing in the library. I also think that it involves some difficult acknowledgments of things that we've done wrong, and things that we're continuing to do wrong. As people of faith, it also involves repentance, and maybe a covenant to do something new, to act in new ways or to turn in a new direction.

One thing I've I tried to remain very cognizant of is featuring diverse works in library displays. When you're doing a certain display theme, it's easy to gravitate toward major theologians and biblical scholars. But sometimes you have to go out and look on OCLC, on WorldCat, and see what folks are reading. This may involve intentionally purchasing items for your display. It's so easy to rush and haphazardly put things together and just find whatever is available in the collection and move on. But I think if we're intentional about decolonizing our collections and enhancing them, it may mean that we need to take that time to plan a little bit more in advance for our displays, and to purchase content that may augment and supplement what we already have.

Another thing I have found helpful is befriending students. If you're involved on social media, I find that a lot of our students, especially our doctoral students but also some of our more advanced master's students, readily share what they're reading. I have found that very helpful, particularly because oftentimes they may be reading something new, something we may not have in our collection. I also have tried to pay attention to interlibrary loan requests because that tells me some of the gaps we have in our collection and I realize we should have that material too, because our students (and faculty) are clearly interested in it. In conjunction with befriending student groups, I also try to join some of the local seminary groups, because I find that students often share the type of reading that they're doing, the thoughts that they're having, and the type of research that they're engaging in. Whereas a research consultation with someone gives me a limited view into that one person, being around student groups gives me a new perspective or enhances the things I know about students' research. We have quite a few centers on campus, so I have also tried to work intentionally with some of them, such as the Center for Asian ministry, the center for Latina Latin X ministry, and a sacred work, which is an LGBTQ student group. Listening to and partnering with those folks, I think, is very helpful for me, not the least in this work.

I have also been part of some specific projects that I think have been helpful around decolonial work. For example, some of the libraries where I've been before had artifacts present in the library that have complicated histories. In one of my previous positions, the library had a mummy on display. Working intentionally with faculty, staff, students, trustees, and external constituents, we began to explore what it meant to have these artifacts and how we should move forward. Things like land acknowledgments are another example. We're continuing to wrestle with that sort of reality, but it's an intentional part of the decolonizing work that needs to be done. Something else we do all the time as librarians, reviewing course syllabi to see what required and supplementary readings are being assigned, can also provide opportunities essential for decolonial work. By this, I mean that decolonial work should be done individually; it's something that should be done collectively in a community because we all bring perspectives and can enhance that work. I'm currently fortunate to be on the Atla Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and I'm looking forward to some of the work that we'll be able to do there. These are, of course, just a few things that I've done intentionally around decolonial work, but I hope that that's helpful.

Yesan Selan

Let me come to the point: What does decolonizing look like in my own contexts? Being a librarian of the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian studies, I see we have a greater responsibility as an institution to become the voice of the voiceless, by keeping our library collections balanced and strategically adding resources. For example, if a scholar needs a resource that costs five grand, asking who also has done similar work as we do here. Forming close connections with research scholars has helped me understand their own bibliographical needs and seeing what they have collected so far, also has helped me understand how to supplement my library resources, so that research needs are met. In my local library context, we have networks that also help me to keep the resources that are to be heard by many. As my fellow panelists mentioned, quite often Asian libraries largely depend on western theological resources. As an institution, we have a center, for which I was a coordinator for some time, to support efforts to produce indigenous scholarly works. We hosted seminars, conferences, and workshops and as a result a couple of titles were published. This was a collaborative effort among scholars and librarians.

I seek to ensure that my library collections reflect Asian thinking, impulses, and close collaboration with faculty members and their teaching. Faculty and other stakeholders help me understand their needs as they try to address their own research needs. And I also consciously seek to include publications that are coming from some of those places in the northeast where hardly anything is available, as well as works from the underrepresented areas, like tribal communities and works on women's studies, are being strategically added to our library collections. So, as an institution, we have a larger responsibility to the wider scholarly community, just as, as a librarian, I have a responsibility to keep my faculty informed. And in return, they consciously work on their course offerings to reflect Asian thinking.

How do you familiarize yourself with the works of theologians from the majority world and other under-represented voices?

Kris Veldheer

I think I could answer this question in three ways. First, I have publishers who found me; I didn't find them. I have a publisher in Delhi,

who regularly emails me a list of things. It's a fairly Catholic organization. They allow me to order from them directly and pay them directly in US dollars, which is kind of unique, and get material printed in English, but all the books come from that context. That not only supports how I want to do some of my collection development, but also supports other voices, and other forms of publishing. I think that is really important, and I am looking for similar situations, for example, with publishers in Central and South America, but I can't find them as readily. So that's my first thing: trying to find publishers or book distributors outside of my usual sources. In developing a relationship with a publisher in India, and I will use them regularly to get material from that part of the world, rather than order something similar from Oxford.

Second, I am privileged to have a faculty who travels widely. This year, some of my faculty will be in Australia, New Zealand, and lots of parts of Asia. I have a standing commitment to them: if they bring me something back from those trips, I reimburse them for the material. So periodically, books just trickle in from the four corners of the world because as faculty members are traveling, they're finding books in their areas of study, what's important to them, but in different voices. That's something that is still in development, but it's really cool to do that. And in some ways, I do the same thing with students. CTU comprises 40% international students, or students who were born in the United States, but were raised in ethnic communities living in the US. So, I tell our students, if you bring me something from your community, I will do my best to get you reimbursed, if you don't want to just outright donate it to me, because I believe those voices need to be represented in the collection. So that's a couple of ways I do it this.

Third, in terms of representing and familiarizing myself, I made a commitment to CTU to go to AAR/SBL every year. Mostly I go because it allows me to shop with my faculty. I take them to the Exhibit Hall floor, and I receive texts and emails throughout the entire conference about things they are finding and things they are hearing from other parts of the world in the sessions they attend. This helps me globalize the collection. It helps me rub shoulders with publishers and find out who's doing cool stuff, who's adding new editors from Africa or Asia. And even if they are not a Catholic voice, I want to talk to that publisher. I have one in particular, Langham, that I stop by every year because they do good stuff. And, they have cool stuff.

Langham, while mostly evangelical, also pulls a lot of Catholic material out of Asia that I can use. My library isn't exclusively Catholic, but you can't have "Catholic" in your name without having Catholic resources on your shelves. So, those are the three main ways that I'm working around the fact that about 70 to 80% of the books that I buy are all from European and North American publishers. So that's some of the ways I work with getting books that are not from the big publishers, if you will.

Daniel Smith

Elaborating on some of the things I said a little bit earlier, when it comes to partnering with faculty, I have been fortunate to work with faculty from many diverse perspectives and backgrounds. And I have found that it's really helpful to intentionally partner with faculty in this work. For the most part, I've always found faculty to be very friendly, especially when you're asking about their research. And as you're engaging with their research, you want to find ways of supporting them as well as their students and the research that they're doing. That has been really helpful for me when it comes to familiarizing myself with decolonial work. But it also is a way of beginning to familiarize myself, and continuing to familiarize myself, with theologians and majority world theologians. One of the things I find most helpful is taking or auditing classes, and I hope that most of your institutions offer this benefit. It allows me to keep abreast of what's happening in the theological and religious studies worlds, and it also gives me connections with students and faculty. Those of us or who have been in seminary or earned another degree know that as you look through the course catalog there are only so many classes you can take. So now when I see a class I always wanted to take, I have the opportunity to take and enhance my overall learning in general.

Like Kris, I take the chance to explore publishers' websites and take time to just flip through all those catalogs they send us (I feel like they spend so much money and paper on those) to see what's happening, to see where the conversations are. Hopefully we all have some time, maybe probably outside of work, to read some of the articles and books around things like decoloniality, decolonizing libraries, decolonial theology, decolonial Biblical Studies, etc. As I always tell my students, always look at the bibliography, because that's where you're really going to find so much to enhance your conversation.

You can see who authors are in conversation with. I usually then go back and ask, "Do we have those people in our collection? Do we have anything written by this person, let alone that particular resource?" I find that sort of work very helpful for me.

Yesan Selan

As I have to process my responsibility as an individual, so also, as an institution, we have two responsibilities: to make other voices heard, and to produce indigenous scholarly works for the use of the rest of the world. This is one reason the Center was established: to encourage the publication of works by indigenous authors. How do I familiarize myself with the world's key sources? I rely on my faculty, colleagues, my research scholars, and the institution's and organization's publishers, who closely work with me in many ways, because I represent both the library and my institution. I help them by hearing about what they do, and they help me let their voices be heard outside of their local contexts through conference announcements, the publication of the literature, and so on. Our faculty members also consciously ensure their student consult books by Asian authors, and if they have any issues, the library plays a major role in procuring resources for them, including efforts to conserve and/ or publish such resources.

Question Two: What *could/should* we be doing?
How do we recognize which voices are missing from our collections?

Kris Veldheer

I laughed, because I have asked myself that question, a great deal: "Who's not here?" or "Who's not at the table?" From a collection development standpoint, I have become a real fan of evidence-based acquisition, because it allows me to see what my students are using. Mostly right now I'm doing it through JSTOR. At the end of the fiscal year, which is the end of the academic year, I get a list from JSTOR of which titles got the most hits. This allows me to see which titles the students really like and want. And I'm assuming because of the diversity within my own student body that I'm going to get some gems or jewels that they really want. I can't tell you who has been picking these, but if a particular title gets 40 hits or whatever, it's high on my

purchase list. And we usually go right down the list from JSTOR unless we've already bought it. So that's one kind of tool.

As I mentioned above, a publisher I use a lot for voices from other parts of the world is Langham. I like them because they're small, but they also have editors in different parts of the world who are indigenous to those areas. Langham is out of Britain, and they do great work for me, even though they are not from traditions that I traditionally represent.

What else are we doing to prevent missing voices from the collection? I'm engaging with students from different contexts and watching how my students interact with the library. A quick example, the other day I was in the library on a Saturday which is not normal for me. The Saturday student worker was there. I walked in expecting to see this person behind the circulation desk, which is where traditionally I would have thought I would have found them. Instead, I found them sitting on the couch eating Doritos. We allow food in the library, so that's not my issue. My issue was the fact that this person was sitting on the couch eating Doritos and chatting with a colleague, and not behind the circulation desk. They're both Catholic Sisters from the same part of the world and they were just having a great conversation. There were a few other people in the library, wandering in and out. It dawned on me, watching them sit there talking: What is missing not only in terms of voices in the print collection, but missing from the work of the library? What is the relationship between these two people that is going on here? And why does somebody have to sit behind the circulation desk to do good circulation and mind the library? After all, every time a new person came in, the student worker engaged with them and she made eye contact with them. And so, it caused me to check my own expectations and my own Western ideas that they should be behind the desk. And when I was done, and as I was leaving the library, I wished her and her friend a good day, and said, just lock up when you leave. And she said, yes and I knew that she would do that. It's those little encounters about what's not only missing from our collections, but what's missing from our experiences, that I think for me at least inform the way I think about building my collection. I can't get rid of certain voices in the collection, and I cannot find all the publishers I really, really want. So what other ways can I build a collection that will work, or allow access to a collection through different eyes? In sitting on the couch eating Doritos, the Saturday student worker re-

minded me that there is more than one way to do the work. I think that is important for me at least, it's always really important to ask myself, what am I learning from somebody else?

Daniel Smith

As I was preparing for this panel, I was reminded of the fact that I have found utilizing social media, particularly places like Twitter, or hashtags or groups where there are there's often sharing of resources, very helpful for me. I can think of the ways that I benefit from folks who are in critical librarianship and some other things like that. So, I encourage us to think about places where those sorts of resources exist.

I also wonder what it would look like to gather together annually as theological librarians from across the world. What would it look like to partner with librarians who are outside the United States? I think that could be a really helpful way of beginning to evaluate our collections and to learn what we could or should we be doing. I think that would provide a valuable perspective. While I'm sure some of us are doing that kind of thing on an ad hoc basis, in one-on-one conversations or in small groups, I wonder what it would look like if we were more intentional or what it might look like in a larger context.

As Kris mentioned, I try to keep abreast of decolonial series as more and more publishers like Lanham have series that are dedicated to decolonial work. I find it very helpful to see what's forthcoming, and who's publishing in these series and then maybe looking for other work that they've done as well.

Finally, I don't know if it's the case at your institution, but I find that as our international student population continues growing working with international students, and intentionally asking them for suggestions has been really eye opening for all of us. I have often asked them, "What is missing here?" or "What do you wish we had, that we don't have?" Sometimes the students seem surprised to have been asked that question, but even if they don't necessarily have an answer, it has started a conversation, and sometimes students have come back to me and said, "You know, you remember that time you asked me about like what I wish you had in the library, you know, this, this is something that I wish that we had." So, it opens that sort of conversation and helps them see themselves as partners in this sort of collection development journey, because I think that that's an essential thing.

Yesan Selan

Well, at my institution, we especially seek close collaboration with the faculty members, since they are the ones who are directly involved in what is happening in their own teams. Understanding the developments that are happening while we seek to fulfill the faculty members' needs helps me understand what is missing in my own library collection. So, I periodically review my collection and the collection development policy and ask, "Does this address the needs of our researchers in a specific way?" So, my research scholars also help me as they come with their own needs. As my friends and fellow panelists rightly mentioned, and they're the ones who would say, what they wish to have in libraries. Sometimes, you know, it may be too hard for us to purchase everything, but it is still has been very helpful for me. The close connections with these networks probably show which organizations produce literature and who is producing scholarly works.

My second tip would be: look at how many publishers of Western publications there are, yet very few publishers would give you a place or consider your publications. So many scholarly works come from the genius of the majority world, and I would I wish to see one day the majority of the publishers offering works by scholars in the majority world. This would require close collaborations between majority world institutions and organizations and those in the Western world.

How might we better connect the students, faculty, and guest researchers at our libraries with the works of scholars from the majority world[1] and other under-represented groups?

Kris Veldheer

I wish it had been a smaller question. For me, part of it is looking outside of religion and theology to other disciplines. For example, I've added some titles to the collection lately, that have to do with things like indigenous research methods, or Aboriginal research methods, drawing on the work of the indigenous communities in Canada, and some of the communities in Australia and New Zealand, I'm sure there are others I have yet to find. There are some African scholars I have found, and of course, Latin American, but just how do I choose which ones I get? So, I'm trying to represent other voices but those are some that I found from other disciplines, and I want them in my

collection. I want them because not only do they speak to other ways of doing things, they also are underrepresented. I have students, particularly in our DMin program, from around the world, and because it is an online program, or mostly online program, I need to have a collection that represents their contexts and I need to connect them with those kinds of resources. I also am leaning very much into the work of Atla, and how they've diversified the database and include full-text materials. That has been proven very, very helpful for me, allowing me to connect my students from a number of different contexts with scholars in other areas.

I don't necessarily like the word "underrepresented groups," because for me, in my colonial context, I have a hard time understanding who is underrepresented because in my mind, everyone is underrepresented. So how do I also pull in all those voices, including underrepresented groups in the context of the United States such as people of color, but also LGBTQ, into the library's collection?

Daniel Smith

Oftentimes, when I'm working with a student who schedules a research consultation with me or is asking for research assistance, I find that over time, it's because they've exhausted themselves. It's not because they have no idea what to look for, or where to look; a lot of times, they've done a lot of research already and they've already found some resources. Yet, for some reason, they're looking for more. It could be that they're looking for more diverse perspectives, or they're looking just to see if they have found what they need to find. So, a lot of times, I'll ask students when they reach out to me, if they're comfortable, to share what they have found already with me because this helps me get a sense of what they're finding and where those gaps might be. I might encourage them to think, as Kris was mentioning earlier, What about a more interdisciplinary perspective? Or what about this scholar? Have you thought about this? Sometimes I find that introducing such questions validates students as researchers and encourages them to go just a little bit further.

As I mentioned earlier, I wonder what social media hashtags might exist around decolonial collections and decolonizing libraries. I wonder also what it might look like, for example for those who create metadata for the catalog and for those of us who are in public services, or access services, or doing some sort of reference and instruction work to identify subject headings that are decolonial, or, as

Kris says, from the non-majority world. Are there some shared subject headings that can be really helpful, that we could utilize more, and that we could point students towards? Because sometimes you can click on these links and expand your search to see what other libraries might have. I wonder if that might be a valid partnership and a valid way of enhancing how we expand students' research and make them more aware of what else is out there.

Yesan Selan

Because ours is a relatively small institution, but it is still engaged in serving postgraduate and doctoral level research institutions, I enjoy close connections with faculty, students, and research scholars from my own and other institutions, and such close connections help me better understand their contexts and their own research needs. Regarding subject headings, as my friend rightly said, we do have this local classification giving due importance to the grouping of the resources, enhancing the visibility of resources that sometimes can get lost in the larger collection. So, we do have special arrangements for these indigenous voices, and special subject headings, and also alerts that I set up with the students and faculty members, to closely connect with them. My local library context network has helped me understand some of the unique challenges they face, and we try to address some of these in our own situations so the solutions that are used are made available in other libraries as we try to emulate some of the best practices that are used in other libraries.

Question Three: What *would* you do (in the best of all possible worlds)?
In an ideal theological library/seminary/school or theology, how might you imagine a collection and course of study that encourages students to encounter some of these missing voices, while also ensuring they develop a familiarity with theologians of traditionally recognized historical significance?

Kris Veldheer

If I ran the zoo, there would be enough money in the budget to be able to provide research resources such as Atla databases, to anyone who wanted them or needed them. I say that because there are groups in my school, for example, African cohorts, who can't get to my library website or even Atla's databases not because they are

not available, but because they don't have the bandwidth. It doesn't work for them, so I end up having to go through all sorts of hoops to try and equip them. And so if I ran the zoo, I would figure out ways to better equip the students who need the resources and have the financial resources to think about whatever it takes to deliver what the students need.

Daniel Smith

In an ideal world, if money and time were unlimited, I think that I would try to find ways of creating some sort of exchange network. I work predominantly in the United Methodist world, where we have the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities, often called IAMSCU. I would think that something maybe exists for a lot of a lot of us. I wonder if there would be a way of intentionally creating some sort of librarian network within that, so that we can be more intentional about exchanging resources because as Kris has said, it's so hard to find some of these resources. And I think that if we had that more intentional sort of grouping or partnership, it might be helpful. One more thing: I wonder with all of Atla's OER work, if there could be something that we do around that, that would supplement this sort of decolonial commitment or intentionally incorporate lots of international and diverse perspectives.

Yesan Selan

I wish to see one day when the library catalog is visible, and the indigenous voices are visible and accessible, like a digital repository, or in portable devices. I want to see books by Asian authors getting your attention, or being recognized by publishers in Europe and North America who would recognize them and help them get published. That would help the indigenous voices of the majority word be widely known and vice versa, help the works of Western authors be more readily accessible in Asia. We would also try to keep a balance that would help all the categories of users in the library.

ENDNOTES

1   *Majority World* is an alternative term for *Developing World, Global South,* or *Third World.* It describes countries in Africa, Asia, South and Central America and the Caribbean more geographically accurately and less pejoratively than other terms. *https://toolkit.risc.org.uk/casestudy/majority-world-or-minority-world-further-education-case-study/*