The Comprehensive Theological Bibliography: What is its Future?

by Anthony D. Rogers

ABSTRACT: The article compares WorldCat's bibliographic records with prominent theological library holdings to establish a case that comprehensive or non-specialized publications under the LC classification "theology--bibliography" fell sharply after 1990. While many reasons might be given for this, two are examined in depth. First, theological interpretation/methodology shifted away from historical approaches to focus on new concerns and forms of scholarship. The sheer volume and numerous types of information that were published challenged the usefulness of the comprehensive theological bibliography. Second, technology radically changed the way people read and approach theology. New formats and information access points made the comprehensive theological bibliography obsolete. The article concludes with a discussion of the present state of bibliography, focusing on ways librarians and bibliographers might be able to create bibliographies going forward.

INTRODUCTION

> Bibliography is a subject which seems to interest few people these days. . . .[1]
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> Bibliography matters. Lists matter. Saying that here, to you, needs no courage.[2]

Theological bibliographies are diverse and appear in different forms and formats. For instance, there are universal or exhaustive bibliographies which attempt to list all material published in a specified period (largely a thing of the past); there are topical or thematic bibliographies which include articles, primary/secondary works, as well as esoteric materials related to a singular subject; and there are non-specialized or comprehensive bibliographies targeted at the general layperson, undergraduate, or early graduate student audience. As with all genres (or, rather, the subjective attempt to describe or classify genres), there are overlapping forms and unique features that fall outside reductive descriptions.[3]

Moreover, the composition of theological bibliographies ranges from a generic list of sources to an organized selection of foundational material or to a critical listing of materials judged by the author to be authoritative or exceptional in some way. Occasionally, the bibliographer provides annotations that further support a work's inclusion in the bibliography. Until recently, most professionally compiled bibliographies were available only in print; however, over the past decade there have been a growing number of online bibliographies maintained by librarians and bibliographers which generally follow one of the forms listed above.

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[1] Luigi Balsamo, *Bibliography: History of a Tradition,* trans. William A. Pettas (Berkeley: Bernard M. Rosenthal, 1990), 1.

[2] Modified slightly from Nick Mount, "Wielding Bibliography," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 87.

[3] See G. E. Gorman, "The Classification of Theological Literature: a Commentary and Annotated Bibliography," *International Library Review* 17 (1985): 203–31.

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While bibliographies serve many purposes beyond providing simple or annotated lists (such as finding aids, classification guides, teaching resources, organizing tools for theological knowledge, and so forth), the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed the rise and fall of the comprehensive or non-specialized print theological bibliography in the United States (LC: theology--bibliography).[4] Searches in WorldCat (e.g., theology--bibliography, religion--bibliography),[5] the Library of Congress Online Catalog, ATLAS (book search), online publisher and bookseller catalogs,[6] as well as theological library holdings reveal that indexing and acquisition of comprehensive theological print bibliographies steadily grew throughout the 1900s, reaching its highest point between 1960 and 1990. After 1990, however, the number of indexed and acquired (and therefore published) comprehensive theological bibliographies plummeted.

While the problem of quantifying publication totals has long plagued librarians, with no authoritative benchmarks for measurement, WorldCat and library records do allow for analysis by way of juxtaposing library acquisition and holding trends with WorldCat's more than 230 million records.[7] Moreover, since acquisition is assumed to be related to interest or perceived need, especially for bibliographies that in many cases are considered reference materials and/or collection development tools, consistent holdings patterns among multiple theological libraries should give us confidence that these numbers correlate to actual publication trends.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Barbour Library, for example, holds only four works listed under "su:theology--bibliography" published after 1990. Barbour Library has only three works under "su:religion--bibliography" published during this same period. These seven books contrast with the twenty-four theological bibliographies plus twelve religion bibliographies published and acquired from 1960–1990.[8] It also contrasts with the fifteen or so bibliographies acquired by the library in the first half of the century (see figure 1).[9]

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[4] Throughout the remainder of the discussion, "the theological bibliography" refers to non-specialized theological and religion bibliographies in print (book/monograph) format that fall under the LC classification subject "theology--bibliography" and were published in the United States (or U.S. titles). While determinations about what constitutes a comprehensive bibliography are subjective, illustrative key works for this article's purpose include Union Seminary's (New York, NY) *A Basic Bibliography for Ministers* (already in its second edition by 1960), Charles J. Adams' *A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions* (1965), Union Seminary's (Richmond, VA) *Essential Books for a Pastor's Library* (already in its 4th edition by 1968), E. Beatrice Batson's *A Reader's Guide to Religious Literature* (1968), Cyril J. Barber's *The Minister's Library* (1974), and John Bollier's *The Literature of Theology* (1979). More recent examples are John Jefferson Davis' *Theology Primer: Resources for the Theological Student* (1981), William Johnston's *Recent Reference Books in Religions* (1998), Donald Thorsen's *Theological Resources for Ministry* (1996), Clive Field's *Theology and Church History* (1990), Robert J. Kepple and John R. Muether's *Reference Works for Theological Research* (1991), Robert A. Krupp's *A Primer on Theological Resource Tools* (1990), John Glynn's *Commentary and Reference Survey* (2007), and David Stewart's revision of Bollier's *The Literature of Theology* (2003)—which led to my thinking about bibliographies.

[5] I must thank an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this article for pointing me in this direction.

[6] This includes Amazon, AbeBooks, Zondervan, Baker, Westminster John Knox, etc.

[7] See Anna H. Perrault, "Global Collective Resources: A Study of Monographic Bibliographic Records in WorldCat *OCLC/ALISE Research Grant* July 2002, http://works.bepress.com/anna_perrault/14/. While this report focuses on global publication trends particularly as they relate to collection development, the section detailing use of WorldCat and OCLC for collection and publication analysis is instructive.

[8] Theology--Bibliography and Religion--Bibliography combined holdings by decade at Barbour Library: 17 in 1960s; 8 in 1970s; and 11 in 1980s.

[9] Records were not entirely consistent with these materials; a perfunctory shelf count showed that many were from German and French publishers.

**Figure 1 – Barbour Library (holdings by subject)**
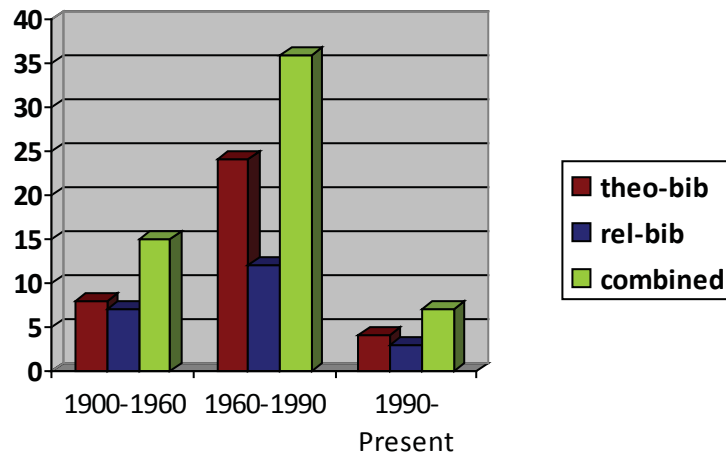
Even if we generously adjust for the remaining nine years of acquisitions, to match the thirty years between 1960 and 1990 (let us suppose four more bibliographies are published and acquired, doubling the number from the previous twenty-one), this still represents a greater than 65 percent decrease in bibliographies acquired by the library after 1990. Other prominent library holdings confirm this significant drop after 1990:[10] Speer Library (Princeton) 62 percent decrease, Pitts Theological Library (Candler) 69 percent decrease, and Drew University Library, which serves a slightly broader student population, 40 percent decrease.

Comparing these numbers to records in WorldCat reveals that a decrease of not less than 40 percent after 1990 is indeed on the mark. A search of "su:theology--bibliography" (limited to Books, *excluding* e-books), for example, shows a 57 percent decrease in indexed records from 1970–1989 to 1990–2009 (see figure 2). Comparing only the decade of 1980 with 1990, the percent change reveals a 65 percent decrease in print books (see figure 3). If we move backward from 1980, the number of indexed print bibliographies rises or remains at the 1980 level, also consistent with library holdings. Moving forward from 1990, in contrast, the number of WorldCat and library records progressively decreases.

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[10] Percent change of combined theology--bibliography and religion--bibliography holdings at selected seminary libraries between 1960-1990 and 1990-current (counted via online library catalogs, accessed 18 May 2011). I have tried to overlook serials and indexes, as well as account for duplicate entries (some of which I undoubtedly missed). Also, I am not considering budgetary issues/limitations.

Figure 2 – WorldCat (# of items)
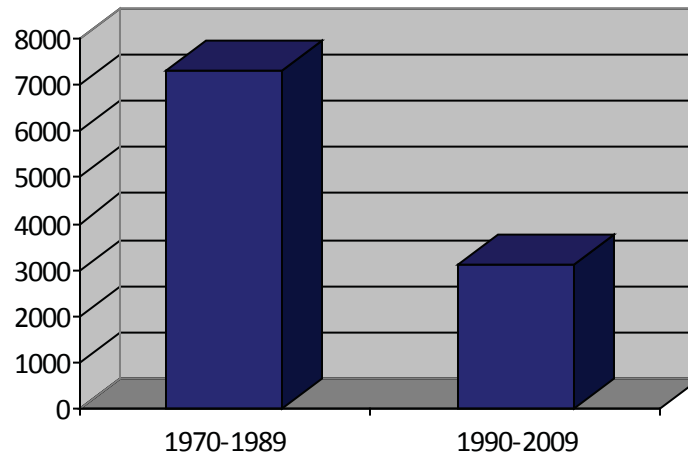
Percent change = 7306-3119/7306 = .57309 = 57%

Figure 3 – WorldCat (# of items)
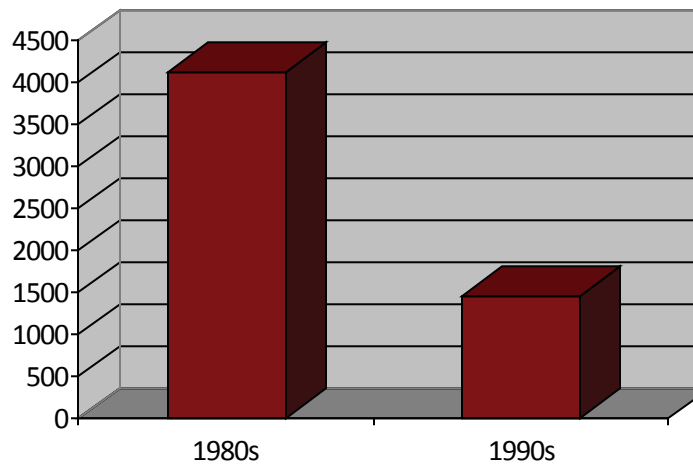
Percent change = 4122-1459/4122 = .64605 = 65%

But why?

The reason for the rise and fall of the non-specialized print theological bibliography might be attributed to the cumulative effect of historical-political developments, global-cultural changes, market variations, shifts in popular theological methodology/interpretation, classification trends,[11] research interests, economics, and technological developments, among other reasons.[12] For our purposes, I want to focus on two of these: shifts in theological methodology/interpretation and technological developments.

Shifts in Theological Methodology/Interpretation

Connolly C. Gamble Jr., in his 1962 address "Contemporary Challenges to Theological Librarianship," [13] calls for theological bibliographies to be "identified, described, and evaluated in the context of contemporary developments." His point is two-fold. First, Gamble wants each generation of bibliographer to establish indispensible bibliographies that reflect current theological perspectives. Second, he wants a correlation of bibliographic materials to contemporary fields and subject areas. These two points are ones that many librarians agree with. However, they imply something important about the composition of comprehensive bibliographies: they reflect the broader assumptions, perspectives, ideas, and literature popular in the field at any given time.

Yet, the very notion of favoring or privileging certain materials and viewpoints over others has come under scrutiny in the years following Gamble's address. Since the mid-twentieth century, in fact, there has been increasing opposition to dominant academic voices who were thought to be silencing and/or insensitive to a range of important concerns. This opposition has been the catalyst for a variety of new subject interests, specialized fields, and new disciplines within theology[14] itself. While similar opposition can be traced to ancient and medieval times, one must understand the predominant debates of the last century to fully appreciate the changes in theology and therefore theological bibliography today.

Following a long-standing debate about how to do theology, who was properly prepared for theological study, and what sources should be considered theological, the twentieth-century debate was largely driven by proponents of (1) a philosophical approach and (2) those who were influenced by a scientific approach. The former favored the questioning of the signification of religious words, actions, and artifacts. The latter argued that theology was the

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[11] While pertinent to this discussion, cataloging/classification difficulties and fragmentation deserve separate scrutiny.

[12] To my knowledge, there has been no systematic history written on this subject. For a history of bibliography and its development see Balsamo, *Bibliography*; Georg Schneider, *Theory and History of Bibliography,* trans. Ralph Robert Shaw (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1934); William Proctor Williams and Craig S. Abbott, *An Introduction to Bibliographic and Textual Studies,* 3rd ed, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1990); D. C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1994); Rudolph Blum, *Kallimachos: The Alexandrian Library and the Origins of Bibliography,* trans. H. H. Wellisch (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Neil Harris, text written as part of his course entitled "Introduction à la Bibliographie Matérielle" taught at the Ecole de l'Institut d'Histoire du Livre, Lyon, 5–8 April 2004. Online: http://ihl.enssib.fr/siteihl.php?page=55&aflng=en); Fredson Bowers, "Bibliography," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1960) 3: 539-543. See also Robert B. Harmon, *Elements of Bibliography: A Simplified Approach,* rev. ed. (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1989).

[13] In Melody Layton McMahon and David R. Stewart, eds., *A Broadening Conversation: Classic Readings in Theological Librarianship* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 292–97.

[14] "Theology" and "theological interpretation/methodology" are difficult terms to define and may cause difficulty in the remainder of my discussion. For our purposes, I refer to "theology," "theological studies," and "theological interpretation/methodology" as (comprehensive) unifying terms that encapsulate all theological disciplines, such as religious studies, biblical studies (New Testament/Hebrew Bible), ministry, world religions, theology (proper), missions, apologetics, preaching, etc., as well as those tools used within the disciplines. Concurrently, I'm referring to these terms in the context of an LC classification (i.e., theology--bibliography) and library science discussion, in which theology and theological studies/interpretation/method are also understood in a broader colloquial sense. Cf. note 4 *supra*.

uncovering of self-evident facts found in historical religious texts and artifacts. Naturally, there were many who fell between these two extremes (and a few who fell outside of the extremes).

Nevertheless, most scholars writing on the history of theological interpretation/methodology today argue that the most common theological research methods of the twentieth century were driven by a belief that one could impartially analyze historical texts and artifacts, ultimately leading one to history "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" ("as it actually happened")[15]—an idea put forth by the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke. As Elizabeth Clark observes, Ranke's belief in historical objectivity was welcomed by many American scholars. In 1909, for example, George Burton Adams, then president of the American Historical Association, urged "colleagues to heed 'the call of our first leader' who had proclaimed that 'the chief duty of the historian is to establish *wie es eigentlich gewesen*'"[16]—a call that many in the field of theology followed.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, then, many theological bibliographies highlighted works influenced by this type of historico-theological methodology. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographies, commentaries, archaeologies, handbooks, critical editions, and lexicons, all written from an "impartial historical viewpoint," constituted the majority of works included in most comprehensive bibliographies. Even David Stewart's recent bibliography, which contains over 530 (print) references, overwhelmingly consists of these types of historical materials.

It was Charles Beard who famously argued in his 1935 "Noble Dream" essay, however, that one could not write history "as it actually happened":

> This theory that history as it actually was can be disclosed by critical study, can be known as objective truth, and can be stated as such, contains certain elements and assumptions. The first is that history (general or of any period) has existed as an object or series of objects outside the mind of the historian (a *Gegenüber* separated from him and changing in time). The second is that the historian can face and know this object, or series of objects and can describe it as it objectively existed. The third is that the historian can, at least for the purposes of research and writings, divest himself of all taint of religious, political, philosophical, social, sex, economic, moral, and aesthetic interests, and view this *Gegenüber* with strict impartiality, somewhat as the mirror reflects any object to which it is held up. The fourth is that the multitudinous events of history as actuality had some structural organization through inner (perhaps causal) relations, which the impartial historian can grasp by inquiry and observation and accurately reproduce or describe in written history. The fifth is that the substances of this history can be grasped in themselves by purely rational or intellectual efforts, and that they are not permeated by or accompanied by anything transcendent—God, spirit, or materialism. To be sure the theory of objective history is not often so fully stated, but such are the nature and implications of it.[17]

Yet, even before Beard's "Noble Dream" essay, thinkers such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) challenged the assumptions about language and signification. Emile Benveniste notes, Saussure realized "that language in itself does not admit of any historical dimension, that it consists of synchrony and structure, and that it only functions by virtue of its symbolic nature."[18] With the arguments of Saussure and Beard, the stage was set for scholars like

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[15] Quoted in Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9.

[16] George Burton Adams, "History and the Philosophy of History," *American Historical Review* 14 (1909): 236.

[17] Charles A. Beard, "That Noble Dream," *American Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (Oct. 1935): 76.

[18] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics,* trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1971), 4.

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) to declare war against historical objectivity, "against historicism, the historical context, [and] the search for origins."[19]

These arguments led to a radical rethinking about what reality is and how humans interact with it. Lévi-Strauss applied Saussure's linguistic critique to the field of cultural anthropology. His argument that culture is fundamentally structured by language—that is, by a system of verbalized symbols—brought about the "'de-naturalization' of the study of humans in their respective cultures."[20] Lévi-Strauss even deemed history to be myth. Later theorists, expanding on Lévi-Strauss' work, postulated that reality is constructed by language itself; it "is known only in and through its discursive construction, established through an intralinguistic system of differences."[21]

Following the connection between language and the construction of reality via the notion of "history," scholars set their sights on the political problem that written history is always *created* by the historian; history is always "history-for" the historian and those who agree with him/her.[22] Applied to the theological context, "theology" is always incomplete and partial, constructed by the writer who is bound to certain cultural-contextual constructions of reality. Later theorists determined that the notion of context included politicized understandings of social, racial, educational, and economic environs. Theology, then, was "theology-for" the theologian and those who agree with the theologian's methodology and political positions.

As the question of authorial meaning or authorial intent entered the debate, so did the radical questioning of what is a "text." Scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva understood "texts" as a weaving together of various discourses (i.e., "intertexuality"). In fact, for these scholars texts were produced by previously articulated words and texts (and therefore each word and text's context). This means that texts are a mere (re)writing of texts that came before; texts are traces of "other" texts that eventually blur into a political history of textuality that can no longer be clearly discerned or absolutely interpreted. All that remains is the (con)text itself; or, rather, as Derrida famously phrased it, "there is no outside-the-text."[23]

Finally, this questioning and blurring of interpretation methods, ideas, and texts led to dispensing the idea that there are clearly defined disciplines (e.g., Theology proper), each concerned with questions that can be objectively answered by an impartial or objective historical methodology. D. C. Greetham comments:

> And that is the other major change in the last fifteen years: the apparently purely empirical nature of textual scholarship, and especially its association with fixity, historical demonstration, and positivism, has been increasingly seen as just one of several available rhetorical modes; textual scholars have thus come to interrogate the very practices that they might earlier have thought to be inevitable or natural to the discipline, and thus textual scholarship has begun to theoretize itself [...].[24]

While these debates raged, the discipline of "theological studies" was evolving and expanding. Adventurous Ph.D. students of the 1970s and 1980s dabbled in the (non)methods of continental philosophy, quantum physics,

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[19] François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: The Sign Sets, 1967-Present* vol. 2, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 23.

[20] Clark, *History*, 47.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Claude Lévi Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 257.

[23] Jacques Derrida (trans. Peggy Kamuf), "Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (1989): 873. See also Clark, *History*, 130–45.

[24] Greetham, *Textual*, x.

cultural studies, gender/sexuality studies, postcolonial studies, and so forth.[25] Historical materials were still being published by a large number of tenured and established theological scholars, but there was an emerging middle group who wrote with a nod toward "history as it was," but incorporated a more self-reflective, broadly academic, theory-driven, politico-cultural discourse into their work.

By the 1990s, the result of these methodological changes was a new era of theological scholarship, one that looked dramatically different than the history-centric scholarship of the past. Scholars turned their attention away from history and common or traditional theological themes to focus on very narrow subjects and concerns not generally thought of as "theological," relating them to current events or biblical texts. This in turn led to an explosion in the number of specialized titles now published under the increasingly generic subject heading or genre of "theology" or "theological studies."[26]

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Concurrent with the methodological shifts occurring just before 1990, there were also many changes in technology.[27] As early as 1960, larger university libraries across the United States started to develop and integrate automation and computer networking systems. The University Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), for example, was the first major research library in the country to have an online catalog, in 1978.[28] A few years later UIUC was one of the first to run a state-wide online library network (comprised of more than 2,400 libraries by the 1980s).[29] Many of the major library vendors appeared around this time (e.g., Innovative Interfaces in 1978, Sirsi in 1979, Dynix in 1983), and they began marketing new cataloging software and database systems.

It is no surprise, then, that by 1985, ATLA members were participating in similar projects with annual conference sessions devoted to new media (e.g., video laser discs)[30] and development of library computer systems.[31] Digitization, new preservation projects, and indexing of theological resources was underway at many libraries, and in 1990 many ATLA members were interested in OCLC's new online reference service as well as library vendors' other new products. By 1993, Internet access was available to consumers—the terms "world wide web" and "surfing the net" had already been coined—and ATLA was sending representatives to the National Information Standards Organization (NISO). By 1994 ATLA had established an in-house Technology Advisory Committee.[32]

The modern search engine also emerged in 1994 and 1995. Yahoo, closely followed by Lycos and AltaVista, foreshadowed Google, which was introduced to the cyber world in 1997. Advances in network speeds, digitization, and new e-reader formats (such as Adobe's Portable Document Format or PDF released in 1993) led to the

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[25] See e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

[26] Bowker, for example, notes that book production (hardcover and paperback) in "Religion," which is synonymous with the use of "theology" in this article, went from 4,702 in 1993 to well over 14,000 by 2004. By 2009, Religion titles grew to over 20,000. See http://www.bowker.com/en-US/aboutus/press_room/2011/pr_05182011.shtml; http://www.bowkerinfo.com/pub track/AnnualBookProduction2010/ISBN_Output_2002-2010.pdf.

[27] Much of what follows is a summary of Walt Howe's and the Internet Society's (ISOC) histories of the Internet. See Howe's "A Brief History of the Internet," http://www.walthowe.com/navnet/history.html, and ISOC's "A Brief History of the Internet," http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/brief.shtml.

[28] See http://www.library.illinois.edu/geninfo/history.html#history.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Robert J. Kepple, "Library Applications of Video Laser Disc Technology," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 39 (1985): 99–101.

[31] Ronald E. Diener, "Library Computer Systems Considerations for the Design and Development," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 40 (1986): 148–62.

[32] See Myron Chase, "Report of the Technology Advisory Committee," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 48 (1994): 43.

anticipation of widely available online books. Tablet readers, only recently popularized, were even discussed back in 1995. The website known as NetLibrary (now owned by EBSCO) was released in 1998, with publishers such as McGraw-Hill investing in the venture. By 2000, Yahoo was using Google to power its search engine, not realizing that Google would consume more than 70 percent of search engine market share by 2009 (rendering Yahoo virtually insignificant).

In the 2000s, technology continued to get faster and, somewhat surprisingly, smaller. The failed Palm and Hewlett Packard handheld devices of 1999-2004 reappeared in the form of Apple's hugely popular iPhone a mere three years later. Meanwhile, Microsoft and Apple were churning out new versions of their computer operating systems every three or four years and were quickly developing enterprise and server solutions to compete with the Linux/Unix dominated market. These changes meant that all software companies, particularly those devoted to libraries, had to continually develop their marquee products and create new business models and pricing strategies.

More recently, independent software developers have been creating open-source software that allows users to do just about anything. Apple's iPhone and Google Android-based smartphones have virtual marketplaces devoted to open software development and distribution, each market hosting many millions of transactions and downloads. Many larger libraries, and a few theological libraries, have taken advantage of the open-source development space, creating specific applications such as mobile catalogs, mobile websites, and account applications ("apps") for their patrons. Leveraging these types of technologies has allowed faculty, librarians, and students to have access to increasing numbers of resources (ancient texts, obscure religious publications, archaeological artifacts, and so forth) with the touch of a button.

With ATLA librarians as well as the broader theological community adjusting to the major shifts in theological interpretation/methodology while simultaneously trying to understand and take advantage of major technological advances, it is no surprise that librarians and bibliographers turned their focus away from publication of print bibliographies; their priority was to modernize, upgrade, and create learning tools using more convenient and accessible media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY TODAY

The changes in theology and technology during the latter half of the twentieth century continue to affect publication of the comprehensive print theological bibliography. Current methods of theological study in many ways devalue the print bibliography (and will continue to do so) for a couple of reasons. First, a comprehensive theological bibliography can no longer cover the vast knowledge that current theological interpretation/methodology requires, even at a foundational level. The subjects, specialties, and corpora from which theological studies now draws has outgrown traditional print length treatment. Second, the ubiquity of the Internet and accessibility of digital media have fundamentally altered how bibliographies are compiled and published. The need for a comprehensive print theological bibliography is trumped by the ability to input any theological inquiry into Google or Bing and get thousands of results. To put it simply: the comprehensive or non-specialized print theological bibliography no longer serves as a useful model. But what about the future?

The publication and collation of many narrow (subject/topical/thematic) bibliographies, as well as short introductions with useful notations on the web, has been growing for a number of years. A litany of projects and formats could be named: blogs, wikis,[33] LibGuides, and better-known (among theological librarians) projects

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[33] See e.g., http://ancientbibliographies.libs.uga.edu/wiki/Scholarly_Bibliographies_Available_Online and https://www.zotero.org/groups/ancient_world_open_bibliographies/items. For example, peruse many of the entries published by the biblioblog community: http://biblioblogtop50.wordpress.com/.

such as the Wabash Center's Internet Guide to Religion,[34] Mark Goodacre's NTGateway,[35] and Charles Bellinger's extensive online bibliographies.[36] The main problem with these projects is threefold. First, they often lack shared knowledge and therefore almost always overlook library-specific, special collections, and archival materials.[37] Frequently these projects are maintained by one individual with a narrow focus leading to unintentionally missed resources. Second, end-users simply do not know and cannot keep track of ongoing projects; these projects rarely appear in databases, catalogs, or library websites; the web addresses tend to change over time; they are not easily found among web or catalog search results (when they are indexed at all); and the resources may or may not be kept current. Moreover, they are not associated with a curriculum or formalized learning process. And third, these bibliographies do not necessarily assist the reader in actually finding the material. For example, readers might know in what journal an article may be found, but they do not know where that journal exists or how to access it, especially if it is available only in a paid database.

Looking to the future, I can think of a few solutions to these problems, each pursued by individual institutions or via the formation of an open-source theological bibliographic consortium or bibliographic working group: that is, a proposed voluntary group of (ATLA) librarians who dedicate a portion of their time to creating, maintaining, and marketing a wide-ranging shared bibliography—a unified space where specialized bibliographies exist in a singular web medium (website/database) through which a user might be able to sort, search, or collate bibliographic resources based on a number of criteria (e.g., topic, general/overview, subject, discipline, author, location, format, etc.). Teaching, cataloging, reference, information literacy, and subject specialist librarians would be particularly well positioned to contribute to this group.

The first solution might be to embed links of the shared bibliography directly into online articles and e-books. I call this the "dynamic theological bibliography." The way I envision it working is that librarians/bibliographers work with database vendors, colleagues, and publishers to insert hyperlinks on certain terms or phrases throughout online publications or downloaded articles that link directly to the bibliography. The edited document could then be shared across member or database-subscribing institutions or even uploaded back into the database directly. A similar hyperlink approach appears already in medical databases such as PubMed (though admittedly, many of these are links to simple definitions). This would be especially helpful for required and introductory course reading/research material that is similar across seminary curricula.

A second solution, which is merely a less-complex version of the first, consists of a shared, searchable theological bibliography website. The website could be social in nature, allowing librarians, faculty, and even students to post bibliographic content. With this solution, instead of many different bibliographic sites/projects, we could encourage professionals and scholars to link from their own blogs, courseware, and social networking pages to one consolidated site (like Wikipedia or WorldCat for bibliographies). The working group, in this case an administrative group that reviews posted/uploaded content, could even provide direct links to free material or permanent links from WorldCat, Internet archive, or online booksellers where possible so users could find the closest location to borrow or purchase resources.

Obviously these solutions become problematic when referencing articles, e-books, and other materials that are available only behind pay-walls (e.g., EBSCO, JSTOR). These weaknesses could be mitigated, however, by a third solution. Using EBSCO's A-Z Journal List as a model, the shared bibliography could be hosted by database vendors thereby allowing direct authentication to online material for users of those institutions/libraries that

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[34] See http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide_headings.aspx.

[35] See http://www.ntgateway.com/.

[36] See http://lib.tcu.edu/staff/bellinger/biblios/biblio_list.htm.

[37] Often materials are excluded from comprehensive bibliographies because of their location (e.g., museum, archives, or special collections) and rarity.

subscribe. The bibliographies would be public facing (open to anyone), but for paid online materials, users would be asked to enter their institution or library name or browse through a list of institutions and be redirected to that institution's authentication page.[38] This would serve as a hybrid solution, allowing for as much finding assistance as possible across free and paid resources.

Other solutions come to mind. We might in fact already have a good starting place (i.e., Wabash Center). But any project of this magnitude would require a lot of work on the part of our profession. There are licensing, copyright, and legal hurdles. Vendors and publishers will have to buy in, which means they must benefit monetarily. Libraries must buy in, which means it must be easy, cheap, and not time consuming. Faculty must buy in, which means it must be beneficial not only to their students but to their own research. Moreover, there are questions of who will host and administer a bibliographic website (not to mention questions surrounding what the site would look like). How would a bibliographic working group be convened and sustained? Who could fill technical and programming needs the group might have? There are questions of how resources would be vetted. And, most importantly, there is the question of whether it is even worth the effort.

These are all questions I cannot easily answer and therefore I invite further input, suggestions, or solutions. Are we content with the publication of a small number of print bibliographies each year? Should we let the genre run its natural course, fading as a popular publishing trend of the twentieth century, and turn our attention to other projects? Or should we seek to reinvent the theological bibliography in an attempt to keep our communities educated by providing them with a virtual guidebook to current theological resources?

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[38] Oxford Bibliographies is a similar project, but it is a pay-only product through Oxford and is not open for public use. While a step in the right direction, closed products like this will doubtlessly send you to their own content whenever possible, even if a better resource is available—something contrary to what this article is suggesting.