

# *Library Management as Pastoral Care*

DAVID W. KIGER

**M**anagement of a theological library has the potential to be a transformative exercise rather than a transactional process. The theological library is uniquely disposed to be a place for transformation because it allows space for pastoral care as both curricula and operational guidelines. A pastoral approach to management would not necessarily focus on control for the sake of the institution but instead pay attention to the flourishing and agency of the individual. For library management to create a pastoral lens, space for the transformation of the internal person must be available. In an era where efficiency and productivity often overshadow human concerns, the theological library stands as a unique institution poised to prioritize the flourishing and agency of individuals. In this chapter, I argue that by adopting a pastoral approach to management, theological libraries can create spaces that nurture the holistic growth of their staff, patrons, and supporters. The chapter begins

with an overview of management theory, highlighting the need for a pastoral approach, and then discusses Henri Nouwen's three dispositions that can shape the management of a theological library.

In her work on management theory, Lisa K. Hussey notes that the main theories of management concern two principal ideas: motivation and control (2019, 1). Management theories try to discern the best avenues for individual employees' motivation and use that motivation to control the circumstances of the library's work. These two ideas engage in the history of management theory, in which management principles focus on how to get the best productivity out of an employee or system. Some management theories emphasize what is best for the organization, so the focus is on productivity, while a natural inclination is often at the expense of human capital. In their discussion on the history of management, Moran and Morner note three current and emerging approaches to management. The three approaches are "an increased emphasis on quality; a growing reliance on evidence-based management and big data; and the development of a more employee-centered workplace" (2018, 29). While these trends allow for greater attention to the needs of the labor force, even in systems where a person is seen as important, their individual personal importance is seen within the context of the organization's goals and purposes, not in their individual humanity.

Persons filling management roles within a theological library must be concerned with the well-being of multiple audiences: those who work at the library, those who use the library, and those who support the library. These audiences are important not because of their role in the library structure, but because they are human beings. When library management views people through a pastoral lens, they become concerned with the dignity of people. The human person is composed of external and internal elements. Human beings have thoughts and ideas that are internal to themselves. These thoughts and ideas are sometimes expressed externally through words and actions, but at other times, these thoughts and ideas are cultivated within the interior person. A theory of pastoral management relies on the cultivation of the inner person as an essential element of library operations.

One of the greatest services libraries offer is space for reading and study, connection to resources and people, and internal reflection and dialogue. This latter space, the space for internal reflection, is often forgotten but absolutely crucial. As a scholar of human dignity, Donna Hicks notes, "I have learned that lack of self-knowledge—not

of our individual, unique qualities, but of a broader dimension to self-understanding—is our greatest collective ignorance” (2018, 29). Relating this thought to management, Hicks suggests that organizational culture requires a type of insight into “how to develop healthy relationships with people and about what it takes for all of us to grow and flourish” (2018, 47). A theological library offers such a space, where the person matters as a person and is then able to reflect on their thoughts and ideas.

The management of a library embracing this approach requires a focus on what Allison Pugh has called “connective labor.” In a recent work on the importance of attention to the human person in the workplace, Pugh describes “connective labor” as the pastoral work of connecting with another human being, and she emphasizes that this labor is often unaccounted for in discussions about workplace productivity. Pugh defines connective labor as “the forging of an emotional understanding with another person to create valuable outcomes” (Pugh 2024, 16). Connective labor finds practical application in the realm of ministry. In Henri Nouwen’s classic book on the nature of ministry, *The Wounded Healer*, he suggests that three dispositions should guide what he calls “Tomorrow’s Leaders:” the ability to understand and articulate inner events, the capacity for compassion, and the ability to be “contemplative critic[s]” (2010, 41).

These three dispositions also serve as a guide for the management of a theological library. For the remainder of this chapter, I connect each disposition to a pastoral practice to show how pastoral care informs the management of a theological library. Each disposition and theme highlights the importance of the human person in the management system.

## *A Non-Anxious Presence to Help Articulate Inner Events*

Leadership and management are fraught with anxiety. Anxiety about budgets and space, and how best to manage conflict and people, are all constants in managing a library. Some of these anxieties are amplified in a theological school setting. For a library manager, this challenge is one that is deeply internal to the person but has the potential to be expressed in external ways. Managing in such an

environment requires attention to one's internal conflicts and struggles. To be non-anxious demands reckoning with the anxieties one holds. When a manager is able to defer their own anxiety and keep it apart from those who are managed, a transformational experience occurs. A non-anxious presence leaves space for another person's anxiety. Such a presence acknowledges the real challenges of the situation but is not a victim to the worries that the situation presents. If the library manager is able to articulate their own anxieties, then that manager can help others do the same so that those anxieties lose their power.

Managing a theological library with a non-anxious presence creates space for listening to real and perceived procedural problems from library staff, patrons, and administration. A non-anxious presence allows for the person to be authentically themselves and to create the internal space for the person to learn and manage their own anxiety through articulating their own stresses. Nouwen suggests that "those who can articulate the movements of their inner lives, who can give names to varied experiences, need no longer be victims of themselves" (2010, 42). Errors made due to stress and anxiety are often compounded because of an individual's internal narrative about themselves and the situation. By being a non-anxious presence, the library manager focuses on the person instead of the problem and helps the vision of the library to be defined by hope, rather than by the confusion that anxiety brings.

## *Compassion in the Face of Change*

Library management is in a constant state of change. There are new technologies, new workflows, new resources, new employees, new administrators, and new patrons. Something is always changing and new. When the COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on in-person schooling and universities and seminaries were forced to attempt distance education, libraries still needed to provide services and so still needed to be managed. Coming out of the context of the pandemic, Morrissey and Roberts suggest that a trauma-informed pastoral care model should serve as a management model, especially for student workers (2024, 77). Such a model emphasizes the need for compassion for student employees who are first and foremost people. The management of a theological library enacts pastoral care with

compassion and sensitivity to change because human beings are constantly surrounded by change.

As Nouwen states, “For a compassionate person nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying” (2010, 45). Nouwen goes so far as to equate compassion with authority. In so doing, he highlights that compassion as authority focuses on the humanity of all people, and suggests that compassion as authority allows leadership to bring out the best in people. The library does not exist apart from people, and so people must be the priority of managing the library. One guiding pastoral practice is that of compassion, especially in the face of change. When changes occur for the employee, the patron, or the collection, the library manager can approach the situation with rigidity or compassion. Compassion emphasizes the humanity of the people involved and acknowledges the personal and internal challenges that are present in such a situation. Practically speaking, this means management handbooks and documentation need a constant evaluation of how the procedures apply to the people within the library. This means that rules, which are established for the good of the organization, should be imagined through the lens of the people involved and their humanity. When policies are envisioned through a lens of compassion for the person, policies will necessarily be augmented and personalized for the people involved.

The COVID-19 pandemic threw into sharp relief the volatility of our world. In a world awash with change, people need to experience compassion from people in management systems. Managers ought to practice compassion as a form of connective labor in order to acknowledge and meaningfully connect with the shared humanity of the people with whom they work. Such connection emphasizes the importance of the human person for whom the library exists.

### *Contemplative Criticism to Focus on Human Flourishing*

The connective labor of library management with a focus on pastoral care creates what Pugh calls “three threads of connection” (2024, 42). First, dignity is established between the parties. Second, the two parties are bound together as people who matter as people. Third,

connective labor leads to a “greater understanding of self and other” (Pugh 2024, 48). These threads are themselves an act of what Nouwen calls “contemplative criticism” (2010, 47). Each thread focuses on connecting to the human being for their dignity and value as a person. There is a rich theological tradition of *cura personalis*, which focuses on the care of the whole person as a way of practicing ministry. This same type of care becomes critical of systems that seek to exploit and deny another’s humanity. Focus on the care of the person allows library management to criticize elements of institutions and cultures that devalue the person.

In their study on the pastoral role of school librarians in England, Shaper and Streatfield suggest that librarians need to articulate this role as valuable to the library management to receive credit for their personalized way of operating a library (2012, 74). Such a personalized and pastoral approach to management emphasizes human flourishing. Whether it is for a library employee or a library patron, the goal of an interaction should be the betterment of the person. By its nature, management in such a posture is outside of societal norms that seek to promote organizational health, or that focus solely on productivity. Library management that focuses on human flourishing leaves space for transcendence in a world that is concerned with immanence.

## Conclusion

There is a tendency in the modern world for people to prefer the immanent and, as a matter of course, remove the societal need for the transcendent. This way of thinking has had an impact on the modern Western world and has, in part, led to transactional ways of moving through the world. People do not treat others as people, but as means to control the end. The human being is not viewed in a way that allows for transcendence to break in and impact. Such an approach can readily be seen in the world of management. An organization wishing to be more productive might ask employees to work more for less pay or might search out nonhuman automated ways of accomplishing the task. With each growth of technology, there is a fear of the loss of human work.

I would suggest that theological libraries and their work are more than subject-specialty libraries. A theological library creates a

community that is drawn together by more than an academic interest in an intellectual discipline. A theological library serves as a locus of pastoral care where information retrieval is as much about the inner person as it is about the content of the subject under study. A theological library invites and encourages the element of faith in the intellectual process; such an invitation establishes and builds a faith that seeks understanding and inclusion. The management of such a library ought to focus on the human being as a person, and as such, must begin from a non-anxious, compassionate, and contemplative posture. In this way, the whole person can be understood and acknowledged as a person, and the library can be a place for transformation instead of mere transaction.

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