CHAPTER 6

Giving Libraries Their Due

A Call for a Morally Serious Process for Libraries in Transition

STEPHEN D. CROCCO, YALE DIVINITY LIBRARY

In recent decades, pressures and opportunities led many theological schools to dramatically reshape themselves and, by extension, their libraries. Budget constraints, novel degree programs, fresh approaches to teaching and learning, new kinds of students, changing space needs, and schools closing or merging have kept a growing number of libraries in states of transition. In most cases, these transitions led to a reduction in the size and the scope of library spaces and collections; only rarely have pressures and opportunities led schools to add space for libraries. In 2017, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) reported, "Since 2010, 27 schools (10% of the ATS membership) have merged, embedded, or otherwise affiliated. Embedded schools now represent about 39% of the membership. At the current pace, in a few years, the majority of ATS schools will be embedded" (2018, 10). Affiliations, for schools embedding portions of their institutions and for schools receiving those portions, are complex undertakings, even when things go smoothly. They involve extensive negotiations about faculty positions, severance payments, endowments, and governance. By embedding, schools that cannot survive or thrive on their own get new leases on life even if they struggle with a sense of loss and questions about their identity moving forward. For schools with adequate resources but without clear ways forward, embedding

provides opportunities to reposition themselves and play to their strengths. Receiving schools get an infusion of resources which could include students, faculty members, property, donor records, endowment funds, library materials, and the reputations of their new partners.

The argument of this chapter is that libraries facing major transition–such as being dismantled, radically reduced in size, or embedded in another institution–deserve more than a brief ceremony to acknowledge with gratitude the end of one library story and possibly the beginning of another. If the sentiments behind such ceremonies are real–and who in theological education does not profess love for libraries–libraries deserve something more. They need to be shown respect in the form of a morally serious process that guides the transition from beginning to end. Like any process, the one described here depends upon identification of specific issues in the transition, open communication about shared outcomes, preparation and planning, attentive follow-through, and evaluation. It also requires serious attention to the status of collections themselves.

In its simplest form, a *process* is anything that stands as a bulwark against wishful thinking and hasty decisions on the part of stakeholders–librarians included –who resist the hard facts of what is about to take place or who fail to see the potential of what should or could take place. A *serious* process is necessary because a sentimental fondness for libraries and a vision for what could or should take place in a transition can easily give way when hard deadlines and bottom lines come into play. A *morally* serious process stresses that there are issues beyond logistics–communication, planning, and follow-through–that have to do with the literature of theology itself and an obligation to preserve certain expressions of it. A basic question in a transition is not just what is possible but also what is desirable. Opportunities to combine historic and historical collections are rare and important enough to put claims of "Impossible!" on hold, at least temporarily. This may be the one occasion when two schools need to do the impossible, even if that means bringing other institutions and organizations into the picture. The process described here for libraries in transition lays out an argument to secure the best possible outcomes for the libraries, the schools, for theological education generally, and even for the literature of theology.

Libraries in Transition

The decision to dismantle, reduce, or embed a theological library raises a host of intellectual and moral concerns that stressed schools facing constraints and deadlines are tempted to reduce to logistics. Libraries in transition are particularly vulnerable to rushed planning and wishful thinking because they are rarely front

and center in anyone's mind other than the minds of the librarians. Given their sheer materiality and sophistication, libraries are the least agile parts of theological schools. For that reason, depending on the desired outcome, efforts to responsibly downsize or embed libraries may be the most complex and time-consuming parts of an affiliation process, though they are rarely seen that way by non-librarians.

This chapter is informed by my involvement with the embedding of Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS) into Yale Divinity School (YDS) in 2017. While the experience did not involve every aspect of transition faced by libraries, it offered enough to have some value as "lessons learned" or as an "after-action report." Leading up to the embedding, it was no secret that ANTS had financial difficulties. It seemed unavoidable that ANTS's campus would be sold and the Trask Library would need to be in a position where it could be vacated in short order, whether the school had identified a new future or not. Several years before its agreement with YDS, the ANTS librarian was instructed by its president to prepare the library for a future that was not yet foreseen. I came to the Yale Divinity Library (YDL) in the fall of 2015, just when conversations between ANTS and YDS began in earnest. Around then, high-level teams from both schools–presidents, deans, trustees, financial officers, and attorneys–met weekly and gave a great deal of attention to every aspect of an embedded relationship except the libraries. According to the ANTS president, that task was being handled by the school's librarian. The dean of YDS displayed a similar confidence in his librarian to make any arrangements necessary or desirable with the ANTS library. An agreement between the two schools was touch-and-go until late in the process. The YDL struggled to match its level of preparation with the likelihood of an agreement, which fluctuated considerably over time. By the time the matter was all but certain, ANTS made many unilateral decisions about its library services and collections. When the two institutions completed the embedding process in spring 2017, ANTS's extensive special collections and several thousand circulating volumes moved to New Haven. The ANTS library now lives and, in real ways, thrives in the YDL, which is greatly enriched by its materials.

Done well, a thoughtful affiliation process dignifies the closing of the embedding library as a separate entity, infuses life into the receiving library, and may give life to new and existing libraries throughout the world. Done poorly, an affiliation process will put the embedding and receiving libraries through unnecessary hardships and squander opportunities. An analogy may help. A library collection about to undergo a radical transition is like an organ donor who is about to die. The striking picture below, of surgeons surrounding a patient, illustrates the need to meld logistical and moral concerns.

(Shenzhen Evening News 2014)

Here bowing is a show of respect for the child who has just died and for his grieving mother. For the sake of the analogy, I also infer that bowing is a show of mutual respect and humility between the surgeons who have agreed to work together in the grim, but life-giving, work ahead. It may be that the bowing figure not wearing scrubs is looking out for the best interests of the patient even in death by ensuring that the wishes of the patient-as-donor and the donor's family are respected, or perhaps that person functions as a transplant coordinator whose job it is to ensure cooperation between the surgeons to maximize beneficial results. One of the ways people make peace with the untimely deaths of loved ones is to know that their organs gave life or health to others. Imagine the tragedy and scandal that would occur if a hospital wasted donated organs because they could not orchestrate the necessary surgical procedures, or, much more horrifically, if the declaration of the death of a patient was tied to the needs of a transplant surgeon. There is more to transplant surgeries than technique and logistics; gratitude, honor, thoughtfulness, and respect come into play. Without acknowledging the moral dimensions associated with life, death, and life again, something important is lost.

When an institution beloved by many is about to die, it makes sense to use the language of right and wrong in their moral senses, not just as descriptions of technique. A library, especially one that has been assembled, funded, and cared for over a long history, is a unique cultural treasure, a wonder–a miracle even. Large numbers of people still see libraries with visible stacks of books and comfortable places to read them as magical and amazing places. Jorge Luis Borges (1989) continues to be quoted widely: "I was imagining Paradise as a kind of library." Disposing of a library collection carries far more moral weight than recycling metal bookshelves or discarding old library carrels. Imagine the reaction if a school's administration, pressed by time to empty its library building, waited until 5:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning to load its collection into a line of dump trucks headed for a paper recycler. When word got out, the news would be met with howls of disapproval by students and faculty members as well as the surrounding community. Unhelpful sentimental notions–that books are sacred and that discarding them is akin to burning them–come into play here and need to be overcome. Of all people, librarians know that printed materials have a lifespan, after which point it is permitted and often necessary to discard or recycle them. But treating a library collection as paper to be recycled for the sake of expediency would be widely condemned as a moral outrage.

Communication about Goals and Outcomes

Given the pressures on transitioning libraries, it is surprisingly easy to avoid questions, let alone extensive conversations, about goals and outcomes. ANTS and YDS librarians did not have the time or bandwidth to consider the best outcome potentially available to them. Faculty members and administrators showed little interest in the question, perhaps trusting that the librarians would know the answers. The one exception was ANTS's well-known collection of Jonathan Edwards manuscripts, which was mentioned frequently in discussions about the benefits of the possible affiliation. A process-related solution is simple enough. Librarians should have some regular representation on the committee overseeing the transition between the two schools and serve on an ad hoc library transition team that establishes goals, budgets, timelines, and procedures for evaluation. In the event of an impasse, a transition committee can serve as an arbiter. Depending on the complexity of the transition, it may be advisable to identify a project manager with a mandate and a budget to oversee the project.

Communication and collaboration between a range of stakeholders plays to the strengths of librarians and mitigates their weaknesses. Librarians are smart and hard-working, but they are only occasionally miracle-workers. As early as possible,

a vision for what could and should be accomplished in the library affiliation needs to direct the way forward. Otherwise, expediency will dictate outcome and libraries will scramble. A faculty library committee–standing or ad hoc–would be a natural place to lodge the outcome question. Outcomes may have financial implications and an impact on facilities, so these decisions need to be coordinated with the larger committee.

It seems obvious that the librarians involved in an affiliation should lead the process, but it is worth noting that people skilled at working in libraries do not necessarily have the talent for dismantling or embedding them. If they have the talent they may not have the temperament to face overwhelming tasks, weighed down by the pressures of time and limited support. Even so, the day-to-day work and follow-through of embedding and receiving will lie with the schools' librarians. It also seems obvious that the two head librarians should run their own operations and make their own decisions, at least initially. But what does it mean for the process if the embedding library and its staff are destined to disappear from the picture? A process monitored by a library transition committee can ease potential bumps as the receiving library begins to assume control over the embedding library's materials–and it may be well before the moving vans show up. That scenario raises the potentially delicate issue of which institution is in charge and when. An embedding and receiving process puts huge demands on the two libraries, one of which is giving up something precious and the other is receiving, and perhaps being inundated by, something precious. It may be helpful to think about authority in terms of a sliding scale, where one librarian and library decreases while the other librarian and library increases. The affiliation process is not an instance of victim and victor, or of the rich taking from the poor. What it is, or what it should be, is an occasion where the embedding library is enabled to live again in a new, more stable, setting in the receiving library. Here the theme of resurrection is quite appropriate.

Preparation and Planning

Preparation and planning combine to form the foundation for showing respect to a library in transition. Every librarian knows that library work is detailed and complicated, but most others have little idea what goes on beyond the points of public service. In contrast, hospital transplant centers have skilled people, detailed procedures, and chain-of-command structures in place to anticipate, guide, and review decisions and actions. There are textbooks, codes of ethics, and best practices to guide activities and avoid pitfalls. Not surprisingly, there is little in the way of comparable literature and best practices for libraries in transition. For most

theological libraries, dismantling and embedding collections are rare events. It would be unusual that anyone on either campus had first-hand experience, though that will undoubtedly change as the number of transitions increases. Twenty-first century administrators might reasonably assume there are computer programs that easily and accurately compare the holdings of two libraries, making collection development decisions and changes to respective databases easy. While there are electronic tools, they rarely produce accurate comparisons simply, quickly, and inexpensively. There are many high-touch procedures that take place in the transfer of volumes from one institution to another. In a library affiliation, there are dozens and dozens of issues, projects, and decisions which need attention.

A simple checklist or its equivalent will emerge as an essential tool for libraries in transition because there are too many things to remember and too many sequences to account for. Circulating a checklist will have the additional advantage of raising awareness among administrators who are ignorant of a library's intricacies and the complexities of an embedding process. As the project winds down, the checklist could turn into a punch list so that everyone is aware of the work still to be done once the formal papers of affiliation have been signed. Checklists are invaluable tools that should be passed from library to library, built up, and refined as time passes. If libraries continue to be dismantled and embedded as ATS predicts, perhaps Atla could draw on its members to help libraries conceive of new visions for themselves, establish best practices, and help find homes for good materials that are not needed or wanted by receiving libraries. An Atla ad hoc library transition advisory committee that meets on an on-call basis might be a good idea.

For individuals waiting on transplant lists, there is often no telling when appropriate organs will become available. People waiting for organs need to be prepared to receive them. There is a lesson here for libraries in the current climate. The possibility of a library's transition requires more than thinking about a process; it requires preparing for one. Giving libraries their due means librarians and senior administrators paying serious attention to libraries that may be transitioning before they reach that point. How likely is it that an institution will close or affiliate? How likely is it that an institution may be on the receiving end of part of a collection? All libraries at risk of being dismantled or embedded have good reasons to get as ready or agile as possible. Most libraries have backlogs of things that need to be done, along with aspirational backlogs of things that would be good to do. With any scent of affiliation in the air, librarians could decide whether to keep tapes and CDs of every chapel and holiday service since the 1950s, long runs of bound periodicals readily available on JSTOR, multiple copies of official school publications, and long-outdated reference works, to name a few examples. Presidents whose schools may need to transition should advise campus offices to clean out closets and file

cabinets, sending specified kinds of materials to the school's archives. Before the need is urgent, schools could offer their libraries financial support for extra work-study students, temporary project archivists, and cataloging vendors to deal with materials that may have sat untouched for years.

A school that is a potential recipient of a library collection would also do well to prepare by addressing its own backlogs and materials of dubious value, freeing up space as it goes. It should also engage in thought experiments and planning exercises on how it might absorb a significant collection. Imagine a donor offering the most spectacular and useful collection a school could imagine, and all she wants to know is where you would put all 5,000 volumes. A receiving library could explore the feasibility of replacing regular shelves with a run of compact shelving, turning to donors who may be interested in special projects. Such planning might include identifying or creating some swing space for collections that may be received. YDL sent about 1,000 linear feet of bound periodicals to Yale's offsite library storage facility in anticipation of the possibility of ANTS materials coming to the YDL. Now that those materials have largely been absorbed, the space remains a permanent swing space for other collections and shifting projects.

In an affiliation, a newer school with a small library collection may use the opportunity to build up its numbers, while a school with a mature library may want or need very little. Many libraries in transition have large numbers of materials that are worth transplanting that are not needed or wanted by the receiving school. These materials warrant special consideration before being offered to a used book dealer or put on a book sale table. Schools with libraries facing a transition often struggle financially and may lack funds to support the work necessary to dismantle and embed their collections. Administrators may want to sell books to help pay some of the related costs. Trying to sell a library collection that cost hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars over the years will likely lead to disappointment. Even with the proliferation of new theological schools in North America, there appears to be little or no market for entire library collections. A used book dealer who specializes in scholarly items may be interested in selecting a thousand choice volumes from a collection, leaving the remainder for a book sale table where proceeds will return dimes–if not nickels–on dollars. Proceeds from these sales may be enough to pay the scrap paper dealer to haul away what is left.

Instead of going the sales route early, a school should consider donating useful portions of its library to educational institutions in the Majority World and use the occasion to raise funds from alumni/ae proud to see their beloved library being used in such a thoughtful way. An even better development opportunity would be to send a somewhat intact library to a partner school overseas. There the library will live again, as deeply appreciated as it ever was, and may become one of the largest theological libraries in the country almost overnight. Keep in mind that

dated materials, picked-over collections, and titles geared to a North American context are generally out of place overseas, the principle being that theological students and faculties overseas deserve the same quality and applicability of materials as their counterparts in North America. Not all regular circulating materials are suitable or desirable for embedding or donating. Just as surgeons reject diseased or worn-out organs for transplant, some library collections can be said to be suffering from disease or old age. After years of budget cuts, excessive weeding to save space, sales of rare and antiquarian books, heavy use of the collection, etc., there may be little worth transplanting to a healthy library or donating to a library overseas.

Attentiveness to Follow-through and Evaluation

In this chapter, I have laid the responsibilities for logistics at the feet of a library transition committee–a committee that has a voice at appropriate faculty and administrative levels and access to a budget for the process. With a logistical structure in place, some of the moral dimensions of libraries in transition can come to the fore. Two schools seeking to affiliate are likely to have similar or compatible theological traditions, but that does not mean that their collections will be identical. ANTS and YDS are both mainline Protestant schools that are historically related to the congregational roots of the United Church of Christ. It was a safe bet that there was considerable duplication between the two libraries. However, since the United Church of Christ was made up of two other denominations with different European roots–Evangelical and Reformed–an affiliation between a school out of one of those traditions and YDS would have been a different matter. In the case of ANTS, the YDL was enriched by strong holdings in the areas of Baptist history, evangelical theology, and ministry–none of which were collection strengths at Yale. ANTS's special collections would have come to the YDL if nothing else did. Antiquarian books and pamphlets, manuscript collections, and institutional archives were a priority because of the overlapping history between the two schools that began when Yale president Timothy Dwight helped found Andover Seminary in 1806. Treasures from the ANTS collection included strong holdings in mission history that added to the YDL's renowned holdings in that area and a collection of Jonathan Edwards manuscripts, which are now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale.

A morally serious and respectful process needs to focus on an embedding library's "special collections"–a blanket term for materials kept in restricted areas and used by patrons under the supervision of library staff. Special collections

materials typically include institutional archives, unpublished collections of personal and organizational papers, photographs, rare and antiquarian books and pamphlets, and realia. Of these materials, pretty much everything but rare and antiquarian books and pamphlets are unique. Quite simply, that is why there is a moral obligation to preserve them somewhere. While the receiving library may be the ideal place, denominational historical societies or college or university libraries are also worth consideration.

The possibility of affiliation is also a good time to reassess a library's antiquarian and rare books. Many antiquarian books, even books hundreds of years old, are not rare and not monetarily valuable because they are not scarce. When so-called rare and antiquarian books can be readily found in other libraries or are available digitally from reliable sources, there may be good reasons to set aside a number for teaching purposes and displays and donate or sell the rest to libraries that can care for them. Things get complicated when considering the fate of rarely used books and pamphlets that are neither rare nor antiquarian. How do older and little-used materials impact a morally serious embedding process? The answer to this question varies with the goals of the receiving library and the amount of space it has available for collections. Does it see itself as a collection that primarily supports the curriculum and basic faculty research? Or does it aspire to support more advanced faculty research by holding primary source materials that often include obscure and dated books? Does it have or sense an obligation to preserve certain kinds of materials whether they are ever used? An example would be nineteenth-century materials from small immigrant denominations. A library may need to keep these items until they can be certain they are available in a library where they will be held in perpetuity or as microforms or in reliable electronic formats.

Final Thoughts about the Moral Status of Collections

For a brief time, it was a serious question whether the YDL would take anything from the ANTS library other than its special collections. Following that path would have made things much easier, though the YDL would have missed out on many good materials. In instances of affiliation where minimal materials are embedded or sent overseas, the question of what to do with, say, 50,000 volumes, is a daunting one. There will be a time for book dealers and friends-of-the-library book sales. Even the most determined and conscientious efforts to find homes for materials will end with a call to a paper recycler. But, after sending materials overseas and before getting the friends of the library to set up a monster book sale, the morally

serious process described in this chapter points to one more thing. An underlying assumption of this chapter is that the literature of theology contains within itself a moral imperative to be preserved for posterity. Otherwise we lose the voices of those who preceded us in the faith. Libraries are places where those voices are kept and treasured. Being reasonably certain that unwanted materials are preserved somewhere is one way we honor our parents in the faith. It is how we honor the history of scholarship to which all theological schools are committed to some degree.

Admittedly, the task of identifying materials that might be at risk of being lost is almost impossible with the pressures associated with an affiliation process. Perhaps the most that can be done is to assign someone to identify pockets of obscure, dated, quirky, scarce, and/or local publications among the remaining materials and verify that they are held somewhere. If they are unique or truly scarce, their rarity provides the justification and obligation to preserve them. When all is said and done, this may be the ultimate test of a morally serious affiliation process that gives libraries their due.

It was no surprise that ANTS and YDS held a public service to sign papers of agreement to celebrate their new relationship. I do not recall that anything was said about the libraries on that occasion. I wondered what might count as a suitable ceremony of appreciation for the new, merged library collection. A recognition service in the library? A lecture by a faculty member familiar with ANTS's history? YDL decided to celebrate the occasion by doing an exhibit featuring the history of ANTS. Looking back, the most appropriate way to respect the ANTS library–and the YDS library for that matter–may have been to bow when entering the library as a sign of respect for the great written traditions of the Christian faith that theological librarians are privileged to collect and study.

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