

Introduction

DOUGLAS L. GRAGG

One of the most important responsibilities of librarians and archivists is to ensure that the collections they and their predecessors have assembled on behalf of researchers are preserved for ongoing use. This volume of the *Theological Librarian's Handbook* presents essential information and recommends additional resources for fulfilling that responsibility effectively. It is not conceived as a comprehensive textbook but as a kind of “field guide” for busy librarians. A strong emphasis throughout is on the importance of collaboration with partners who have special expertise in this area.

The chapters were prepared by an international group of experienced practitioners for the benefit of theological librarians around the world, especially those who have had only limited access to information or training in this area. The focus is on the preservation of physical collections since the preservation of digital assets requires

a rather different set of skills and tactics and is worthy of a volume of its own. *Digitization* of physical resources that are rare or have become fragile receives attention in the volume as a tactic for preserving originals while providing sustainable access to surrogate versions.

The first four chapters introduce the most important *principles and practices* for protecting physical collections against deterioration and destruction. Chapters 5-8 then offer four *case studies* describing actual instances of real or imminent danger to collections in theological libraries or archives and how staff responded. A final chapter identifies *additional resources* for further study. The emphasis throughout the book is on references and resources that are available to everyone online, though a few important resources cited are available only in print.

Principles and Practices

In Chapter 1, **Erin Mollenhauer** provides a clear and concise overview of the entire topic, covering the most common types of physical material held in libraries and archival collections and how to maximize their longevity. In Chapter 2, **Amanda Maloney and Elena Bulat** take a more detailed look at photograph collections in particular because even many seasoned librarians need more knowledge about the features and proper care of historical photographs. In Chapter 3, **Ezra Choe and Beth Farwell** build on the first two chapters with more information about the equipment and collaborations involved in climate control, especially in managing temperature and relative humidity in spaces where collections are stored. In Chapter 4, **Karl Stutzman** wraps up this section by addressing how the preservation of collections can be managed even by those in a small institution with limited staff and financial resources.

Case Studies

In Chapter 5, **Laura Monneau** describes how she and her colleagues at the Catholic University of Toulouse responded to a mold outbreak that affected a significant portion of their print periodical collection.

In Chapter 6, **Amanda Maloney and Elena Bulat** describe how they assessed potential risks to the onsite microfilm collection at Harvard Divinity School Library and outline the recommendations they offered based on their findings. In Chapter 7, **Lehel Molnár** describes a collaborative project to digitize unique and historically significant materials held by the Hungarian Unitarian Church Archives in order to preserve the original materials and make their content more broadly accessible. In Chapter 8, **Natalie Bishop and Mariah Hamby** describe a similar project to digitize rare and fragile hymnals held at Gardner-Webb University, especially those in the unique shape-note tradition.

Additional Resources

In Chapter 9, **Priscilla Anderson and Lauren Telepak** complete the volume with an annotated list of resources for those who want to learn more or tackle problems in their situation that are not touched on directly in this volume. Most of these resources are available online, some in multiple languages.

