Thomas E. Phillips
Claremont School of Theology
Digital Theological Library
director@digitaltheologicallibrary.org

Grace, Justice and Access to Knowledge
A Different Future for the Theological Library in Theological Education

Theological education for most Methodists in John Wesley's day and into the mid-nineteenth century consisted of reading Wesley's works and publications. Wesley famously provided inexpensive abridged versions of many of the theological works which he deemed the most significant for Methodist readers. The mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of the "theological library" within Methodism. This change involved the acquisition and preservation of thousands, then tens of thousands and eventually hundreds of thousands or even millions of print books and journals in secure locations with restricted access. With their local circulation, these libraries were designed to support the professors and students at a single institution. The mid-twentieth century saw the standardization of relatively rapid and efficient interlibrary loans (ILL) to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between libraries and their authorized users. This model of theological librarianship created a great chasm between the "haves" with access to these libraries and the "have nots" with no access to these libraries. Of course, this deficit of knowledge was precisely the kind of graceless inequity which the Oxford-trained Wesley was seeking to mitigate with his publishing activities.[1]

It's a Mad, Mad World

In the contemporary setting, the model of theological librarianship inherited from the Cold War era still reigns supreme with two important twists. First, with the exponential growth of large for-profit publishing companies, the division between the "haves" and the "have nots" has intensified. The contrast between access to contemporary theological scholarship on the campus of a North American, university-based divinity school on the one hand and a clergy training center in central Africa on the other hand is truly overwhelming. Likewise, even within the 13 UMC seminaries in the US, the information disparity between students at the sister institutions can be stark. Second, the recent rise of online and hybrid models of theological education has created a great information deficit for non-residential students who have limited access to the print legacy in their campus library. Even in the age of the digital delivery of content, many students' access to recent, high quality, peer-reviewed and scholarly content is severely restricted—especially book content. For many institutions, the cost of supplying appropriate graduate level resources to non-residential students is simply prohibitive.[2]

If one believes—as Wesley apparently did—that access to knowledge is a means of grace and if one believes that justice demands—as Wesley again apparently did—broad access to

---

[1] On Wesley's publishing efforts, see Brian Shetler, "Prophet and Profit: John Wesley, Publishing, and the Arminian Magazine," *Methodist History* 53:2 (January 2015): 85-100. OA version: http://archives.gcah.org/ bitstream/ handle/ 10516/9735/Methodist-History-2015-01-Shetler.pdf? sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[2] For a succinct overview of the evolution of Methodist education, see John T. Smith, "Methodist and Education," *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* (ed. William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings; New York: Routledge, 2013), 407-30.

knowledge as an issue of economic justice, then the existing model of theological librarianship must undergo radical realignment. Not only must theological librarianship change, but much broader changes in the publishing and distribution models for theological scholarship must also be adopted. Theological education today needs to reappropriate Wesley's passion for disseminating the best theological scholarship to the masses in an economically feasible manner. The current model of theological scholarship and librarianship fails miserably in this regard.

In short, I judge the current approach to theological libraries as unjust (the poor are underserved), inefficient (most non-residential students are underserved), unsustainable (it costs way too much) and unWesleyan (too many people are excluded from the means of grace). If I'm correct—and "unjust, inefficient, unsustainable and unWesleyan" are fair evaluations of our current system of scholarly communications in theological education, then let's use those terms as an epitaph on the tombstone of traditional theological librarianship and resurrect something much better in its place.

What's the Telos?

If we are trying to reinvent something with as many vested interests as theological libraries and theological education, we need to be clear about the end goal. In this case, the end goal is to provide the means of grace (theological literature) to everyone. We want the bi-vocational pastor in Alabama, the aspiring young woman in Kenya and the stay at home dad in Belize to have access the same content as the privileged white male professor (and dean) at Claremont School of Theology.

Let's be clear about this: the *achievable* goal is for every person on the planet to have equal access to the full body of theological discourse. *This is a problem of will, not of wallet.* We need to change all of the default settings!

"Achievable"… Really?

There is already more than enough money in the system to achieve this goal. Let me say that again: There is already more than enough money in the system to achieve this goal. The challenge to be overcome is not financial; it is conceptual. We need to think very differently about how we create, collect, discover and curate theological content. Let's follow a piece of theological scholarship through the existing system for creating, collecting, discovering and curating knowledge and then follow that same idea through a future system for creating, collecting, discovering and curating knowledge—a future system that is viable even as we speak.

Creation of Content

In the current system, scholarly content is typically generated in this manner. A professor takes a sabbatical—paid for by her institution. That professor researches the topic using proprietary library content—again, paid for by her institution. The professor writes up the results of that research on a computer—yet again, paid for by her institution. The professor presents preliminary versions of her research at expensive professional conferences—paid for by her institution. Then, when the whole process comes to fruition and the professor has completed the research project, the professor gives the product of this labor and expense to a proprietary press, which then sells that content back to the very institution which funded the entire creative process that produced the work. In the case of book-length works, the professor sometimes gets minor royalty payments from the publisher based on the number of volumes sold. However, let's be honest. No one writes scholarly books for the royalties.

This system made some sense in bygone decades and centuries when the means of production, printing presses, were rare, expensive, and required a deal of expertise to use. None of those conditions exists in the present digital age. Today, the means of production are no longer a choke point. Nearly everyone has access to the means of production, an internet enabled device.

What if we followed the same process of knowledge creation, but we handled the end product very differently. What if we published the article through an Open Access journal, like those hosted at the Open Library of the Humanities or the Directory of Open Access Journals? Or what if we uploaded the manuscript to the Internet Archives or our institutional repository instead of giving it to a publisher to place behind a pay wall? What if our schools created the same kind of editorial boards and systems of peer-review that the various publishers use to ensure quality, but we simply delivered the end product to an open access location? What if we told our professors that they could not serve on the editorial committee for any proprietary press? What if we said that for tenure and promotional purposes, only service on freely accessible, web-based publications would be counted? What if we said that the institution would—as an ethical commitment—say that only scholarship which are available to our bi-vocational pastor in Alabama, to our young woman in Kenya and our knowledge thirsty dad in Belize would be counted toward tenure and promotion? Would that not produce a more just, more efficient, more sustainable and more Wesleyan system of scholarly communication?

Collection of Knowledge

In the current system, scholarly content is typically collected in this manner. A school hires a librarian; that school also builds an expensive building; then that librarian proceeds to fill that expensive building with expensive content purchased from for-profit publishers—and, lest we forget, those for-profit publishers got all of that high priced content given to them by the professors at the schools that are being forced to buy that content back from the publisher. At any rate, once acquired, this proprietary content is made available to the institution's students, faculty and staff—sometimes to alums and a few others, but almost never to the general public. The stuff is way too expensive to put at such risk.

Of course, in the contemporary world, the publishers have developed a twist on this system. They have begun marketing digital content. In this version of the game, the publishers provide exactly the same hosting service that any freely accessible web site would provide—except they both keep outside eyes from seeing the information and they charge the institution to buy back the content that the institution's professors created. The only added value from the publishers is the pay wall that prevents most people in the world from accessing this means of grace.

Let's be clear. We are paying publishers to restrict access to the means of grace. Let's imagine a gracious world without pay walls.

Curating the Content

In the current system, scholarly content is typically curated in this manner. That local librarian who was hired to buy back the faculty's scholarly output works really hard to maintain "local holdings" records of the content to which that institution's library has access. Some of that content is found in legacy print collections and some of it is found in leased or purchased digital content. On the one hand, most of the dead tree books were processed long ago and so the initial costs have already been absorbed by the institution (although the true carrying costs for a print

book is generally estimated between \$3-\$4 annually).[3] The carrying costs for proprietary digital content, on the other hand, is growing rapidly, increasing at an average rate of 6% per year, or more than twice the rate of inflation.[4]

Regardless of how one assesses the carrying costs for one's library, the local librarian(s) work tirelessly to maintain accurate records of "local holdings," content that is available to that institution's "patron group," usually the institution's students, faculty and staff. Librarians—and I am one—are strange creatures. They brag about the size of their "local holdings" the way that fishermen brag about the size of their last big catch (with much of the same aptitude for exaggeration).

What if we thought differently about curation? What if we quit replicating so much effort across so many institutions? What if we acknowledged that "local holdings" is a silly anachronism in the digital world? What if we said that we would maintain one catalog of "global holdings" for everyone in the business of theological education? What if we said "we're not going to take it anymore!" How about deciding that we're not going to waste another penny on "local holdings." Instead, we are going to direct all of our resources toward curating open access global collections?

Now, to be clear, I am *not* talking about firing our librarian(s) and turning our library curation over to Google or GoogleScholar. I am talking about having our librarian(s) work intentionally, diligently and relentlessly to curate—select, make discoverable and maintain—a high quality global theological library. (In library speak, I am talking about creating and maintaining high quality MARC records for OA content and not relying upon the marketing ploy of Search Engine Optimized (SEO) language.)

Discovering Content

In the current system, scholarly content is typically discovered in this manner. The library patron searches the local holdings in the library's integrated library system (ILS) and finds print and digital content which have been locally curated—no doubt, at great expense. Of course, we all know that no library has everything of interest in its local holdings, so patrons and reference librarians often use WorldCat to discover additional content. ILL is often then called upon to supplement the local holdings, but the discovery is largely focused upon the convenience of local holdings.

But what if we thought entirely differently? What if we created a single discovery system for all religious studies content? What if the idea of beginning one's research with "local holdings" became as silly as sitting at home by the phone, waiting for an important phone call in 1970s fashion? What if everything was located in one shared global system that was available to everyone on the planet—and which every librarian helped to maintain? Of course, even with such a global enterprise, local librarians would be allowed to customize collections to meet local needs.

I am not crazy.

---

[3] On the true cost of print versus digital collecting, see Paul N. Courant and Matthew "Buzzy" Neilsen, "On the Cost of Keeping a Book," *Collections for 21st Century Scholarship* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Resource Information, 2010), 81-105; available OA: https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/pub147.pdf.

[4] On the inflation rate for ejournals—which has been twice the general rate of inflation for the last several years—see Stephen Bosch, Barbara Albee, & Kittie Henderson, "Death by 1,000 Cuts: Periodicals Price Survey 2018," *Library Journal* (April 23, 2018). Available Open Access: https://lj.libraryjournal.com/2018/04/publishing/death-1000-cuts-periodicals-price-survey-2018/.

Let me reiterate what I said earlier. All of this is achievable. There is already enough money in the system. This is not a problem of finances, it is a challenge of the will, not of the wallet.

Let me explain what Claremont School of Theology has done to move toward this new future.

(1) ***Formation of a Poor-Person's Institutional Repository:*** CST uploaded over 1,000 of its Ph.D. dissertations to the Internet Archive (total cost: $0) and made those dissertations freely available to the world via the web.

(2) ***Formation of Claremont Press:*** Claremont has established an academic press for religious studies. Claremont has published ten peer-reviewed books and has others in production. Claremont Press books are available for sale in print on Amazon and other venues, but they are also available through Open Access (free on the web). And note, recent academic studies have shown publishing books in OA formats does not negatively impact the volume of traditional print sales.[5]

Of course, not every school needs to form a press, but the technology certainly exists for scholarly societies, denominations and coalitions of schools to form OA presses.

(3) ***Formation of the Digital Theological Library:*** In January 2016, CST formed a separate 501c3 not-for-profit corporation, the Digital Theological Library (DTL). The mission of the DTL was to enable CST (and other partner schools) to acquire more digital content at lower cost through joint licensing of digital content. The DTL now licenses over 350,000 ebooks, over 20,000,0000 journal articles indexed at the article level, over 22,000 journal titles and over 150 individual databases. The DTL aggregates the digital content of 8 seminaries (CST, Denver Seminary, Evangelical Seminary, Gordon Conwell Seminary, Hartford Seminary, Lexington Seminary, International Baptist Theological Study Centre and Singapore Bible College). All 8 schools operate one shared ILS for curation, discovery and retrieval of digital content, lowering both the cost of librarianship and of content.

(4) ***Formation of the Open Access Digital Theological Library:*** In June 2018, the DTL launched the Open Access Digital Theological Library (OADTL). The mission of OADTL, operated by the not-for-profit Digital Theological Library, is to make all open access content in religious studies (and related fields) discoverable and free for everyone, everywhere through a single search experience in a non-commercial environment.

Expanding on the OADTL

Because the OADTL so clearly embodies the kind of future that I have laid out for theological librarianship, let explain this project in more detail.[6]

---

[5] On the impact of print sales for books that are published in open access form, see Lara Speicher, "Does Publishing a Book as Open Access Affect Print Sales," *The Authority of New Technologies* (2016): https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/42723/Speicher.pdf?sequence=1.

[6] Nearly all of the following discussion of the OADTL is taken from the forthcoming article by Thomas E. Phillips, Ann Hidalgo, and Drew Baker, "Introducing the Open Access Digital Theological Library (OADTL): Creating the World's First Entirely Open Access Library in Religious Studies," forthcoming in *Theological Librarianship*.

What is the OADTL?

The OADTL is the world's first (and only) fully open access library powered by the cataloging, search, discovery and retrieval capacity of OCLC's WorldShare Management System (WMS). The OADTL is web based—both born digital and exclusively digital—but it is not merely a web site. The OADTL uses an Integrated Library System (ILS) to curate and deliver its collections. The OADTL's splash page houses the OADTL's instance of OCLC's WorldShare so that patrons can conduct advanced searches which draw upon metadata from WorldCat.

What can be found in the OADTL?

As of September 28, 2018, the OADTL was drawing upon over 500 open access collections in the WMS knowledge base (over 350 of these collections were created by the DTL staff). These collections contain over 135,000 ebooks, over 3,000 journal titles and nearly 2,000,000 articles indexed at the article level (nearly 200,000 of which are full text and peer-reviewed).

Here are a few examples of the OA book collections curated by the OADTL:

Ancient Near East Monographs (SBL)	18 titles
Ancient World Digital Library	168 titles
Assoc. of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) Papers	18 titles
Bloomsbury Open Access 2013	24 titles
Brandeis University Press OA Books	39 titles
Cambridge Open Access Books	23 titles
De Gruyter Open Access ebooks	1492 titles
AA Big Book (English, Spanish, French)	3 titles
Theological Commons (Princeton Seminary)	28,562 titles
Andrews University Religion Dissertations	200 titles
Baylor University Religion Dissertations	44 titles
Asbury First Fruits	207 titles
University of Chicago Oriental Institute	433 titles
Liberty University Dissertations & D.Min. Projects	421 titles
The MET ebooks	400 titles

The list could be extended, but this list illustrates the type of collections contained in the OADTL. The OADTL curates content from:

Publisher websites (e.g., Brill, de Gruyter, Gorgias)
University Presses (e.g., University of Chicago, Brandeis, MIT)
University Repositories, especially dissertations (e.g., Baylor, Andrews, Liberty)
Scholarly Societies (e.g., SBL, ARDA, Numismatics Society)
Museums (e.g., MET, American Museum of Natural History)
Libraries (e.g., Library of Congress)
Stand-alone publications (e.g., *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *AA Big Book*)
Public Domain collections (e.g., Theological Commons, Hathitrust, Internet Archive)

The OADTL's collection policy allows for the curation of ebooks from any source which meets the following criteria:
(1) relevance (content must be relevant to religious studies broadly defined);

(2) stability (content must have permalinks);

(3) Open Access (the OADTL does not link to pirated content); and

(4) OCLC catalogued (the OADTL does not currently do original cataloging).

The OADTL collects content related to all religious traditions without discrimination. Presently, content from Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism are more fully represented than content from other traditions. The OADTL collects content in all languages supported by OCLC. All collections created by the OADTL staff are fully customizable (local librarians can activate the entire collection or select individuals titles from the collections).

Who can use the OADTL?

Because the OADTL's mission is to provide these resources to everyone, anyone with internet access can use the OADTL for free. Users are asked to register for an account, but these registrations are anonymous and registration simply allows the librarians to generate more granular and specific usage statistics.

Because it uses OCLC's management and delivery tools, the OADTL has almost unlimited capacity and it invites all people to use the resources as much as possible. Feel free to add the OADTL to your a-z database list, to provide the link to your alums, and to encourage increased use in any manner you wish.

How was the OADTL built?

The OADTL was built using the collection manager in OCLC's WMS. Libraries which use that ILS can activate many of the OADTL collections by searching for the prefix "DTL OA" in the knowledge base. The collections with this prefix were created by OADTL librarians. The OADTL uses a two-step process. One librarian creates the collection, then a second staff member checks each link to ensure that the link goes to the correct content and that the content is available through OA form at that site.

The ebooks have been more carefully curated by the OADTL librarians than has the journal content. The metadata for the article indexing has come entirely from third parties (like the Directory of Open Access Journals). We regard the metadata and linkage for ebooks as highly reliable, but the metadata for articles as somewhat less reliable.

The OADTL does not practice censorship in any form. There is no ideological filter imposed on OADTL collections.

Patrons who discover problems while using the site can contact us using the contact link on the site.

Who funds the OADTL?

The OADTL is funded by the Digital Theological Library (DTL), a 501c3 not-for-profit corporation which manages digital resources, both OA and proprietary, for Claremont School of Theology, Denver Seminary, Evangelical Seminary, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary, International Baptist Theological Study Centre (Amsterdam), Lexington Theological Seminary and Singapore Bible College. The DTL originally curated these OA resources for these seminaries. Then, in keeping with the values and mission of these seminaries (and with the approval of the DTL board), the DTL decided to provide this content to the global community without charge by securing a separate instance of OCLC's WMS to disseminate OA content.

The OADTL is currently seeking outside foundation and endowment assistance to increase the pace of content curation in the OADTL. The more that you and your constituencies use the OADTL, the easier it will be for the OADTL to secure additional funding to fulfill its mission of making all open access content in religious studies (and related fields) discoverable and free for everyone, everywhere through a single search experience in a non-commercial environment.

Is the OADTL permanent?

The DTL is committed to managing the OADTL in perpetuity and to do so without ever imposing any sort of pay wall. The DTL will maintain this open library permanently with or without external funding, because the members of the DTL share a *moral commitment* to make high quality, OA content discoverable to the global community.

Can other librarians participate in the OADTL?

The OADTL uses professional librarians (who work at the sponsoring seminaries), student workers, and library interns to create its collections. Librarians (and non-professionals) who share the DTL's moral commitment to free dissemination of high quality content can support the OADTL by

(1) using the OADTL;

(2) encouraging others to use the OADTL;

(3) suggesting content for inclusion in the OADTL;

(4) volunteering to work in OADTL collection curation (remotely from anywhere on the planet); and/or

(5) making tax deductible contributions to the OADTL (the DTL is a federally registered charity; any donations will go to pay librarians to develop more OA collections within OCLC's knowledge base).

No, really, I am not crazy.

The CST Library, which is staffed by a group of four extraordinarily gifted and committed professionals, by an army of marvelous student workers and by me, has established an institutional repository, an academic press, a shared digital library (exponentially expanding CST digital resources) and the world's first fully open access, OCLC powered, library, *while cutting the library budget by over $200,000 annually.* Again, I say: There is already enough money in the system. This is not a problem of finances, it is a challenge of the will, not of the wallet.

Change is Tough

We are indeed talking about profound changes. I suggest three steps in this process of change.

First: Have the Ethical Conversation (Frame the Issue Correctly)

If you are convinced the time for change is now, that the current "unjust, inefficient, unsustainable and unWesleyan" system of theological librarianship must die, the time to act is now. You must convince your dean, your president, your librarian(s) and your faculty that the system must change. However, you need to frame the conversation correctly.

Speak in ethical and theological terms. The current system unjustly separates the majority world from the means of grace (the current system is "graceless"). The current system

exists for the benefit of the publishing industry. It places a pay wall between most of the world's population and scholarly output; people are cut off from the means of grace for the sake of industry profit. Why should the justice-minded scholars who produce the content perpetuate this system by giving their scholarly work to for-profit corporations? This issue of access must be framed in moral terms. If you allow your scholarly output to be placed behind a pay wall, you are cutting people off from the means of grace. When the issues are framed in moral terms, then the imperative for change becomes clear. Once scholars feel the moral imperative for change, the issue moves from the "whether or not" stage of decision-making to the "how" stage of decision-making.

Second: Establish the Telos (Clarify the End Goal)

Talk with your constituencies and make sure that everyone sees the value of a fully open access world for theological discourse. Get as many as people as possible on board and create systems of incentives for those who move toward the desired *telos*.

Third: Set Specific and Measurable Intermediate Goals

Set clearly defined goals for immediate, 1 year, 3 year, 5 year and 10 year benchmarks and who will be responsible to implement and monitor changes. The most important step is to begin reallocating resources and incentives.

- Incentivize faculty member to publish Open Access.
- Incentivize every faculty member to serve on editorial boards for Open Access publications.
- Require your library to invest an ever increasing portion of its budget curating OA content and making that content discoverable.
- Create an institutional repository (use the free Internet Archive if necessary).
- Have your librarian get involved with the OADTL.

Together we can create a "just, efficient, sustainable and Wesleyan" system of librarianship in religious studies, but only if we jointly commit to killing off the existing beast. If Wesley were alive today and seeking to dispense the means of grace through the creation of a Methodist theological library, it would look nothing like our existing theological libraries. It would look like the OADTL.