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Spiritual Culture and the Theological Library: The Role of the Princeton Theological Seminary Library in the Religious Life of Theological Students in the Nineteenth Century

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Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, faced with a rising demand for ministers in the emerging republic of the United States, American Protestant denominations began establishing postgraduate theological schools to increase the supply of ministers as well as enhance the quality of ministerial education. Andover Theological Seminary, founded in 1807, was the first institution of this type. Princeton Theological Seminary was the second major school of this type, and many others quickly followed their examples. These schools developed curricula, pedagogies, and academic resources to support both the intellectual and spiritual formation of future ministers. Princeton's plan stated that the seminary was designed "to unite religion and literature; that piety of the heart which is the fruit only of the renewing and sanctifying grace of God, with solid learning."[1] This double objective—to train the heart as well as the head—was not unique to Princeton. Glenn Miller titled his book about the aims and purposes of antebellum American theological education *Piety and Intellect*.[2]

Among the most important resources required by these new schools were libraries. To pursue advanced studies in theology, both students and professors needed access to a good number of diverse books. Thus, theological libraries were, with varying degrees of success, developed during the nineteenth century to facilitate access to textbooks, to books that were expensive or difficult to acquire, and, eventually, to books that could be used for research.[3]

But were these libraries only for inquiring minds? Or were they in some way connected with theological seminaries' curricular concern for the heart? In this paper, I look at the collection, spaces, services, and uses of the theological library at Princeton and present some glimpses of the role that this theological library had in the religious life of seminary students.

One Hundred Years of Pursuing Piety

The rather wordy title of this paper alludes to two addresses that professor B. B. Warfield delivered to incoming seminary students at Princeton: "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary," from 1903,[4] and "The Religious Life of Theological Students," from 1911.[5] Both addresses are concerned with the issue of spiritual formation and explicitly refer back to the seminary's plan, approved in 1811 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

This plan aimed to articulate the design of a school that would be "a nursery of vital piety, as well as of sound theological learning."[6] To cultivate learning, the plan outlined a theological curriculum, stated the need for a faculty of at least three, and called for the development of "a complete theological library."[7] (The library part of the plan was never approved or pursued by the General Assembly, and development of a theological library was left to "the energy and generosity of the professors, officers, and friends of the Seminary."[8])

To cultivate piety, the plan prescribed two courses of action. First, during their course of study, students were expected to read "a considerable number of the best practical writers on the subject of religion." Second, a certain attention to piety was expected. Students were to study their Bibles and pray daily; attend worship services; and limit Sabbath reading, conversations, and meetings to matters concerned with practical piety. Professors were "to encourage, cherish, and promote devotion and personal piety" in lectures and recitations, through private conversations, "and by all other means, incapable of being minutely specified, by which they may foster true experimental religion, and unreserved devotedness to God."[9]

In spite of the profound theological and social changes that occurred during the nineteenth century, the plan for Princeton Seminary remained essentially unchanged; all of these instructions on piety can be found in the edition of the plan that was published in 1895.[10] Warfield's advice to seminary students one hundred years after the seminary's plan was implemented reflects a continuing concern for the subjective side of the Christian faith in the context of theological education at Princeton.[11] But how was this concern for spiritual culture related to the role of the library?

Collection

Princeton Seminary's plan stressed the subjective as well as the object value of reading. At Princeton, there were strong theological and philosophical foundations that linked reading and piety. For Reformed heirs of the Protestant Reformation, reading was viewed as an important means of grace—a way to personally encounter truth and experience salvation.[12] (Such encounters could be communicable: Edmund Bunny's *Booke of Christian Exercise* converted Richard Baxter, whose *Call to the Unconverted* converted Philip Doddridge, whose *Rise and Progress of Religion* converted William Wilberforce, whose *Practical View* converted Legh Richmond, whose *Dairyman's Daughter* became a popular and broadly circulated evangelical tract in the nineteenth century.) By the nineteenth century, reading was also viewed as a means for sparking "great and extended revivals of religion."[13] Tied to these theological convictions was the Scottish philosophical confidence in the common sense, which held that exposing people to truth activated their moral sense and encouraged moral action.[14] Facilitating access to the best devotional literature, therefore, was a significant step toward cultivating piety, and it is one of the first ways in which we should expect the library to have had a role.

In his "Spiritual Culture" address, Warfield recommends thirty-six specific titles and six additional authors for spiritual edification. He recommends works by Augustine, Baxter, Bunyan, Newton, Edwards, and seminary professors Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge. He also recommends Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* (in spite of its "Mariolatrous Romanism"), Thomas Brown's *Religio Medici* (in spite of its "bald Pelagianism"), and the devotional poems of Christina Rossetti (which Warfield claimed were "unsurpassed for elevation of feeling"). All but five of these titles and three of these authors were in the seminary library at the time of Warfield's address.[15] Of the nineteen of Warfield's thirty-six titles that were published before 1852, all but two were in the library by mid-century (as well as other devotional works).[16]

The first forty years of collection development at Princeton Seminary were uneven. The first priority was to acquire texts needed for teaching.[17] Purchases were modest, and the library grew mostly through donations—a pattern not uncommon for academic libraries in the early nineteenth century. By 1822, the library had grown to about 2,000 volumes and had been

moved out of Archibald Alexander's study into the seminary's first building. Growth over the next twenty years was unremarkable, and complaints from faculty and students persistently pointed out that the library was not being developed carefully or consistently. Professors complained that the library did not provide "the requisite means of investigation, either to the Professors or students."[18] In 1830, students added that the library lacked works on practical piety.[19]

During the 1840s, the financial conditions of Princeton Seminary began to improve as wealthy benefactors and ambitious alumni began generously supporting the growth of the seminary and its library. By 1852, the library had some 9,000 books and pamphlets; by 1900, it had nearly 90,000. As the collection was more intentionally developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was able to support the teaching and research needs of the seminary.[20] The collection was also, during this time, able to support the spiritual reading needs of the seminary. In the library's 1886 printed catalog, the entries under the division "Ethical Theology," "Practical Religion" run to ten pages.[21]

Space

The early interest in developing a theological library at Princeton included concerns for library space. The first seminary building, built between 1815 and 1820, provided two rooms for the library on the second floor. But soon after the seminary's books had been placed in their first public space, the seminary began seeking funds for a building for the library. Professor Samuel Miller wrote in 1822 that the seminary needed "a suitable building, for the reception

Figure 1 Engraving of the Princeton Seminary campus (1843)

of a large library . . . constructed as nearly as possible upon the principle of being proof against fire, while it should admit of being comfortably warmed."[22]

In 1843, Princeton Seminary published an engraving of its growing campus (see fig. 1). This rendering, based on a drawing that was made before 1833, illustrated that the seminary's concern for learning and piety translated into a need for space for a chapel, located in a building to the left of the seminary's main building, and the library, located in a building to the right of the seminary's main building.[23] Construction of a building for the chapel was completed in 1834, but plans for an additional building for the library were delayed.

Figure 2 Lenox Library, exterior (ca. 1860) and interior (ca 1900)

In "Spiritual Culture," Warfield says that preparation for the ministry must include a training of the heart, the hand, and the head—"a devotional, a practical and an intellectual training"—which "must be twisted together into a single three-ply cord." All the work done at the seminary, Warfield said, "may be made a very powerful means of grace . . . even the strictest grammatical study can be informed with reverence."[24] In his address "The Religious Life of Theological Students," Warfield asks, "Why should you turn from God when you turn to your books, or feel that you must turn from your books in order to turn to God? . . . there can be no 'either-or' here . . . [there is an] intimacy of the relation between the work of a theological student and his religious life."[25]

I think that the building that eventually was built for the seminary library must have helped those who aimed to do their work religiously—that is, in Warfield's words, "with a religious end in view, in a religious spirit, and with the religious side of it dominant in [one's] mind."[26] In 1843, James Lenox built for the seminary one of the first academic library buildings in the United States (see fig. 2). The exterior and interior gothic aesthetic qualities of Lenox Library, in contrast to the Grecian façade and meeting-house arrangement of the chapel, made the seminary *library* building the most inspiring space in all of Princeton.

This aesthetic sensibility extended to the second library building that Lenox presented to the seminary in 1879 (see fig. 3). Both buildings initially provided ample space for study. And, like ancient Greco-Roman libraries, their reading rooms were decorated with representations of revered authors, which were meant to invoke a literary tradition and inspire readers and writers.[27]
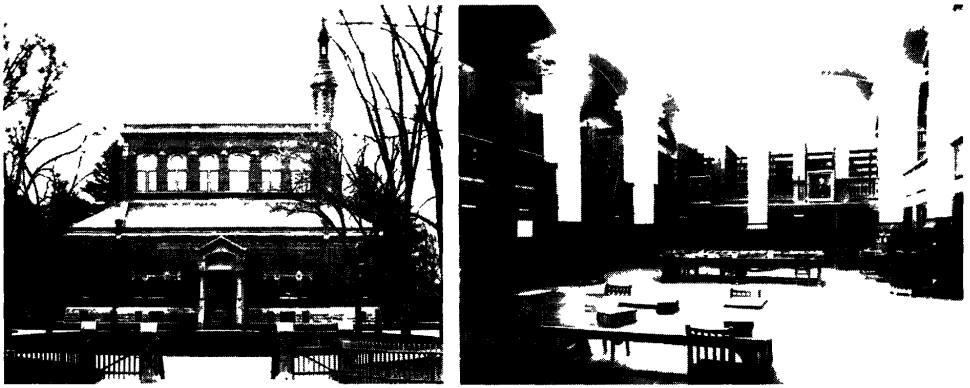
223

Figure 3: New Lenox Library, exterior (ca. 1879) and interior (ca. 1900)

Services

In his book *Letters from a Father to His Sons in College*, Samuel Miller wrote that "to ascend the hill of literature," students "must have guides."[28] Beginning with the inaugural address of Princeton Seminary's first professor, Archibald Alexander, the seminary's professors liberally dispensed bibliographic guidance for all fields of inquiry and interest.

Alexander, who was also the seminary's first librarian until his death in 1851, would easily have been able to direct students to titles in the seminary's library—especially when it was in his house. The two professors that served as librarians after Alexander increasingly turned over more and more of the library's operations to students. The first of these, William Henry Green, professor of Old Testament, nevertheless saw that the library was better cataloged and organized for access. His successor, Charles Augustus Aiken, professor of ethics and apologetics, also contributed to the development of the library by seeing its collection broadly strengthened. But in 1877, Aiken told the board of trustees that the library needed a full-time librarian. Such a person, he said, "might become an invaluable counselor and guide to the students in the use of the library."[29]

Later that year, William Henry Roberts became Princeton Seminary's first fulltime librarian. The service that Roberts rendered as a guide to the library's collection is exhibited in a pamphlet that he published in 1880, entitled *A List of Books: Intended as an Aid in the Selection of a Pastor's Library*. The arrangement of Roberts' titles followed the arrangement of the library, which he had helped Green establish when he was a seminary student. Under the heading of "Christian Life," "Ethics," seventeen devotional titles are mentioned, ranging from Thomas à Kempis to Charles Spurgeon.[30] Roberts published a second, slightly modified edition of this work in 1885.[31]

Robertts' successor, Joseph Heatly Dulles, published similar bibliographic guides in 1892, 1896, and 1921.[32] In an introductory note to two of these, both of which were entitled *One Hundred Books for the Minister's Library*, Dulles explained that his guide was intended "to meet the wants of the minister as a student of the Bible." Consequently, he states, "Devotional works . . . are not included in the list"—but, as if he could not help himself, he recommends two titles (Edward Meyrick Goulburn's *Thoughts on Personal Religion* and Austin Phelps' *Still Hour*).[33]

In 1895, the library committee provided the board of trustees with a nice description of the public service the seminary library needed. The library, they said, required "the presence of an experienced, skillful, and courteous librarian, ever ready to furnish information, make visitors feel welcome, suggest suitable helps, and direct to sources of information."[34] The services rendered by seminary librarians included directing students to sources of information for spiritual formation.

Use

The students' complaint in 1830 over the lack of devotional literature in the library reveals their demand for access to such works.[35] While it is difficult to know how *books* were actually used, library circulation records do provide a sense of how the *library* was used. These records show how often devotional literature, when it was in the library, was checked out.

The most heavily circulated books were those used in courses (e.g., textbooks and lexical aids), followed by books closely related to courses being taught (i.e., works of authors who were discussed or referred to in classes). But there was another class of materials that circulated: books connected with independent studies or interests. Piety was one of the most obvious and consistent of these interests.

During the academic year 1821/22, about 2,000 books circulated among the seminary's 80 students. Included among these were some particularly pious works, by such authors as Flavel, Jay, Bunyan, and Edwards.[36] During the 1850/51 academic year, only about 1,200 books circulated among the seminary's 147 students. The decrease in circulated academic books was most likely due to the increased space and opportunity for the use of books afforded by Lenox Library. The decrease in circulated devotional books was most likely due to the increased availability of such books through prolific religious publishers. By mid-century, the Presbyterian Board of Publication alone had published hundreds of titles, and printed thousands of copies of these, including works by Alexander, Baxter, Bunyan, and many other Reformed favorites.[37] Even still, devotional books by such authors as Alexander, Jay, Edwards, and Thomas à Kempis were being checked out from the seminary library.[38]

In 1879, in his librarian's report to the trustees, Roberts reported that 8,352 volumes had circulated that academic year among the seminary's 114 students. Seven percent of these books were classified under "Apologetics and Ethics."[39] About 10 percent of the books in this division of the collection were classified under "Practical Religion," but it is not evident how many of these titles circulated as part of Roberts's 7 percent. There is, however, a record of titles that circulated circa 1875, and among these are devotional works by such authors as Baxter, Bunyan, Hodge, and Rutherford.[40] It is clear that throughout the nineteenth century, some Princeton Seminary students did turn to the seminary library to support their devotional reading needs.

Conclusion

These glimpses of the resources, spaces, services, and uses of the Princeton Theological Seminary Library provide a sense of the role that this theological library had in cultivating piety. The library's collection made devotional literature available to students; the library's buildings provided inspiring spaces for reading; the library's librarians provided bibliographic guidance on spiritual resources; and the library's books on practical religion were used by students. These

observations suggest that the theological library did contribute to spiritual culture at Princeton Seminary and that it did have a role in the religious life of seminary students.

Endnotes

1 *The Plan of a Theological Seminary: Adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in Their Session of May Last, A.D. 1811; Together with the Measures Taken by Them to Carry the Plan into Effect* (Philadelphia: Printed by Jane Aitken, 1811), 4.

2 Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Intellect: The Aims and Purposes of Ante-Bellum Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

3 The most substantial study of theological libraries in the nineteenth century is Norman J. Kansfield, *"Study the Most Approved Authors": The Role of the Seminary Library in Nineteenth-Century American Protestant Ministerial Education* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1981).

4 Benjamin B. Warfield, "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary," *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (1904): 65–87.

5 Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Religious Life of Theological Students" (n.p., 1911).

6 *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: From Its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 455.

7 *The Plan of a Theological Seminary*, 10, 12–14, 18–19.

8 William H. Roberts, "Library of the Theological Seminary," in *The Princeton Book: A Series of Sketches Pertaining to the History, Organization and Present Condition of the College of New Jersey* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879), 329.

9 *The Plan of a Theological Seminary*, 13–16.

10 *Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America Located at Princeton, New Jersey: Adopted by the General Assembly of 1811 and Amended by Subsequent Assemblies* (Princeton: The Princeton Press, 1895), 15, 17–19.

11 W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1981), 154.

12 Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, "Introduction," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier; trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 32.

13 S. J. P. Anderson, *The Power of a Christian Literature: A Sermon on Behalf of the Assembly's Board of Publication* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 18.

14 Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 45–46.

15 B.B. Warfield, "Spiritual Culture," 79–85. For titles published before 1885, see *Catalogue of the Library of Princeton Theological Seminary: Part I—Religious Literature* (Princeton: C. S. Robinson & Co., 1886); for titles published between 1885 and 1901, accession details can be found on bookplates (when extant).

16 Catalogue of the Library 1852, PTS Library Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[17] The first books purchased for the library in 1812 were two Hebrew Bibles, two Hebrew lexicons, and six Hebrew grammars. Minutes of the Board of Directors, I:29, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[18] Ibid., III:61.

[19] Letter from a Committee on Behalf of the Students to the Board of Directors, 27 September 1830, Board of Directors Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[20] For example, all twelve texts recommended to students in Caspar Wistar Hodge's course on New Testament criticism are in the library's 1886 printed catalog. Casper Wistar Hodge, *New Testament Criticism: Lectures by Dr. C. W. Hodge before the Junior Class, Princeton Theological Seminary* (Princeton: Press Printing Establishment, 1880), [3].

[21] *Catalogue of the Library of Princeton Theological Seminary*, viii, 211–221.

[22] Samuel Miller, *A Brief Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States at Princeton; Including the Constitution of the Said Seminary, a Catalogue of Those Who Have Been Members, and a List of the Present Officers and Students* (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1822), 58.

[23] The drawing, which depicts a chapel rather different from the one built in 1833/34, is located in Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[24] "Spiritual Culture," 67–68, 73.

[25] "The Religious Life of Theological Students," 2.

[26] "Spiritual Culture," 73.

[27] Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 189.

[28] Samuel Miller, *Letters from a Father to His Sons in College* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1852), 12.

[29] Minutes of the Board of Trustees, III:364, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[30] William H. Roberts, *A List of Books: Intended as an Aid in the Selection of a Pastor's Library* (Princeton: Printed by C. S. Robinson & Co., 1880), 12.

[31] Four fewer titles appear under "Christian Ethics" in this edition. William H. Roberts, *A List of Books: Intended as an Aid in the Selection of a Pastor's Library* (Princeton: C. S. Robinson & Co., 1885), 14–15.

[32] Joseph H. Dulles, *One Hundred Books for the Minister's Library* (Princeton, 1892); *One Hundred Books for the Minister's Library* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1896); *Some Books for a Minister's Library* (Princeton, 1921).

[33] Dulles, *One Hundred Books* (Princeton, 1892; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1896), [2].

[34] Minutes of the Board of Trustees, V:202, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[35] Within three years of their complaint, a Princeton edition of the *Memoirs of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton* was published, with introductory paratexts by professors Alexander, Miller, and Hodge. *Memoirs of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton, Professor of Divinity in the University of St. Andrews* (Princeton: Baker & Connolly, 1833).

[36] Circulation Record 1821-1827, PTS Library Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[37] See *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Publication of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Presented to the General Assembly, May, 1852* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1852).

[38] Circulation Record 1849-1851, PTS Library Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[39] Minutes of the Board of Trustees, IV:14, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

[40] Circulation Records: Titles ca. 1875, PTS Library Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.