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Cover Page Footnote

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"For Or Unto Me?: Explorations of the Formative Potential of Libraries"



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Introduction

In October 2018, Susan Orlean, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and author of *The Orchid Thief* among other books, published *The Library Book* – a work whose most explicit focus rests on attempts to determine the source of an April 1986 fire that damaged a large portion of Los Angeles' central library. However, surely Orlean's reputation, conjoined with the allure of a whodunit, was not enough to vault such a book onto *The New York Times*' best-seller list. Something greater had to be at stake. Something in Orlean's book had to draw upon a thread of what makes us human and did so in a way that surpassed our simple desire for a good mystery.

In *The New York Times*, Jennifer Szalai (2018) argued Orlean's book "is about the fire and the mystery of how it started – but in some ways that's the least of it." In a review in *The Washington Post*, Ron Charles (2018) added that part of what we get in Orlean's book is history as "we learn how libraries have evolved, responded to depressions and wars, and generally thrived despite a constant struggle for funds." *Publishers Weekly* (2018) noted that in *The Library Book*, Orlean "doubles as an investigative reporter and an institutional historian in this sprawling account of the 1986 fire at the Los Angeles Central Public Library." In *The Los Angeles Times*, Carolyn Kellogg (2018) offered, "*The Library Book* tells the story of the mysterious fire that burned 400,000 books while also tracing Orlean's love of libraries, from trips with her mother to taking her son. Along the way, [Orlean] relates the unexpectedly colorful history and future of the L.A. Public Library."

Embedded in those personal details concerning trips with her own mother and son to the library is the larger purpose behind why Orlean wrote this book, why it appealed to us, and why libraries are essential to human flourishing. Prior to writing

this book, Orlean (2018) contended, "[she] had decided [she] was done writing books. Working on them felt like a slow-motion wrestling match, and [she] wasn't in the mood to grapple with such a big commitment again" (p. 92). However, taking her son to the library tapped into something woven deeply into her identity. Those trips "telegraphed [her] childhood, [her] relationship to her parents, [her] love of books" (Orlean, 2018, p. 92). Such memories also proved pivotal to her at that time as her mother, the one who "imbued [her] with a love of libraries" (Orlean, 2018, p. 92), was losing her memory to the slow yet unrelenting grasp of dementia.

Orlean (2018) thus committed herself to *The Library Book* as she found "The idea of being forgotten to be terrifying" (p. 93). In particular, she noted,

I fear not just that I, personally, will be forgotten, but that we are all doomed to being forgotten – that the sum of life is ultimately nothing; that we experience joy and disappointment and aches and delights and loss, make our little mark on the world, and then we vanish, and the mark is erased, and it is as if we never existed (Orlean, 2018, p. 93).

As a result, for Orlean (2018), "Writing a book, just like building a library, is an act of sheer defiance. It is a declaration that you believe in the persistence of memory" (p. 93).

While admirable, I believe something greater than the persistence of memory is at stake when one walks the stacks librarians curate. In addition, I believe something greater than the persistence of memory is at stake in terms of the vocation to which you committed yourselves. Orlean (2018) was right to assert that when we wander those stacks, "[We] know we are a part of a larger story that has shape and purpose – a tangible, familiar past and a constantly refreshed future" (p. 93). My unease, however, comes via a desire to press her argument even further – to elaborate in greater detail on the ontological impact – the impact on our very being – that libraries offer and the role you as librarians play in that process – a process of formation. *The Library Book* rightfully captivated its readers for these very reasons.

In order to come to terms with just what is at stake for the calling to which you have committed your lives but also to the collections you curate, I argue the formative potential of libraries resides in their ability to cultivate intellectual humility. Echoing the Apostle Paul, this side of eternity we need to be reminded that we see, but that we see dimly. We live in an age in which people communicate with great senses of surety. Need I provide examples concerning the present state of political discourse that seems to be fragmenting *ad infinitum* to prove that point? If we pause for just a few minutes, we realize that what we see on MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News cannot simultaneously be true. In particular, we realize such absurd expressions of surety may actually belie a haunting insecurity. Absent a sense of intellectual humility, what

would call us to be sure that what we know is true even if it means we must also acknowledge we may not be able to fully appreciate the breadth and depth of that truth this side of eternity?

With the words of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth as our guide, we will explore the formative roles libraries and librarians play in terms of helping us realize that we see, even if our ability to see this side of eternity is incomplete – an exploration that will take place in four parts. First, I will review some recent arguments concerning the value of libraries. Second, I will project some of those theories onto a few of the libraries dotting the Indiana landscape. Third, as noted, I will consider Paul’s words to the church in Corinth and, in particular, look in detail at his argument in 1 Corinthians 13:12 where he wrote, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Finally, I will think through the ways that not only the architecture and holdings of libraries matter but that the educators who care for them matter too.

Part I

Like my own field of higher education and a subfield near to my heart in the liberal arts, it appears volumes defending the significance of libraries have become more numerous in recent years. On one level, I view the existence of those volumes as positive as they help keep before the public what qualities define a library and why those qualities matter. On another level, I view the existence of those volumes as distressing as they harbor on varying levels an apologetic quality and thus leave me wondering whether, like the fields of higher education and the liberal arts, some sector of the population is questioning the value of libraries.

If a defense of libraries is needed, one could begin with one of the most recent volumes to serve such an end – Stuart Kells’ *The Library: A Catalogue of Wonders*. For a variety of reasons, Kells (2017) committed himself to becoming a bookman but soon learned that “Nearby universities offered no degrees in holistic bookmanship” (p. ix). As a result, he created his own course of study, “plucking units from literature, psychology, philosophy, art, curatorship, history, law, logic, [and] mathematics” (Kells, 2017, p. x). In the end, he argued, “he walked away with a book about bookselling, a master’s in book auctions, a doctorate in law, [or] the untidiest transcript in Christendom, and a bespoke qualification in bibliophilia” (Kells, 2017, p. x).

His love for books and his study of the home for so many of those beloved objects led Kells to visit a host of libraries. In the end, he “learned libraries are much more than mere accumulations of books” (Kells, 2017, p. xi). In particular, he found each library has an atmosphere uniquely its own. He even went so far as to argue a library is defined by its spirit, a spirit defined not only by the collections it houses but also

by efforts made by those who care for it in terms of "coherence, beauty, and taste" (Kells, 2017, p. xi). What then would our own personal libraries say about us?

However, such a question is not limited to the collections neatly lining the walls of our private studies or spilling out of our closets. Kells would argue such a question could also be asked in relation to the libraries entrusted into your care on behalf of a particular constituency. In those spaces, your input is woven into the input offered by any number of other colleagues both past and present. However, whether at home or at work, Kells would still contend our libraries speak to individuals who search for evidence of the virtues and vices we harbor and, often conveniently, think are not quite so evident even to the ones who know us best.

Exercising some personal vulnerability, the central fixture in my collection of books at home are winners of the Pulitzer Prize for biography – neatly lined up chronologically by year. I am ashamed to say I arguably collect those great works as more a means of self-motivation than an expression of desire to read a beautifully told life-story. In essence, they sit there, staring at me as I do my work, demonstrating that someone had to win the Pulitzer and, perhaps if I work hard enough, one day one of my own books could join those ranks. Kells (2017) noted, "Creating a library is a psychically loaded enterprise. In gathering their bounty, book-lovers have displayed anxiety, avarice, envy, fastidiousness, obsession, lust, pride, pretension, narcissism, and agoraphobia" (p. xi). Somewhere between the lust over professional recognition and sheer narcissism may reside the keys to understanding my own collection.

However, Kells also noted libraries do not just tell us something about the people who collect and care for them but also something about the people who use them. No matter how hard we may try, "libraries are not Platonic abstractions or sterile, hyperbaric chambers" (Kells, 2017, p. xi). In particular, "[t]hey are human places into which humans cry tears, molt hair, slough skin, sneeze snot, and deposit oil from their hands" (Kells, 2017, p. xi).

As a result, the most prized volume in my collection of Pulitzer Prize winners is Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin's *American Prometheus*. The research is meticulous, the prose is moving, and, no doubt, the sheer complexity of the person in question in J. Robert Oppenheimer is one whose natural disposition embraces complexity. However, what also makes that volume of great value to me is my older daughter Addison, when trying as a toddler to mimic her father's propensity to underline passages in books, unbeknownst to me made her own contributions to those pages. How many of us have obtained a text from a library book only to find contributions made by someone other than the original author?

One way to look at Kells' argument is to consider that we need libraries to house the forms of information for which books are best suited. However, their value goes much further as they offer windows, regardless of how large or small they may be, into the souls of the individuals who collected them as well as the individuals who use them. While Kells does not overtly make this argument, his line of thinking made me wonder whether the souls of those two groups are really as distinct from one another as we might otherwise think. My copy of *American Prometheus* will likely be a book I will always keep because of its ability to remind me that my own fits with the vices of lust over professional recognition and narcissism can be eclipsed by the virtues definitive of a father's love.

A more straightforward apologetic for libraries is offered by John Palfrey's (2015) recent *BiblioTECH: Why Libraries Matter More Than Ever in the Age of Google*. Currently serving as the headmaster of Philips Academy, Palfrey previously served as a law professor at Harvard University where he also directed the Berkman Center for Internet and Society. Palfrey (2105) began his work by contending libraries are at risk but that sense of risk is rooted in his belief that "we have forgotten how essential they are" (p. 7). Critics of libraries ask:

What's the purpose of a library in a digital age? [Or,] [p]ut more harshly [in the case of public libraries], why should we spend tax dollars, in tough economic times, on a library when our readers can instantly get so much of what they need and want from the internet? (Palfey, 2015, p. 7).

A considerable portion of the value of Palfrey's (2015) work came in his ability to note, "We keep having this debate because we have a simplistic and skewed view of why libraries matter. For most of us, libraries matter for one reason: getting information" (p. 7). As a result, how can libraries compete with the speed at which Google can supposedly provide us with all we need to know?

For Palfrey, and as I will argue in a related manner later, the significance of libraries is defined by qualities that challenge that very assumption on at least two levels. First, the value of libraries should not be defined by needs that individuals who visit them identify prior to doing so. In essence, the value of a library does not exist because a person knows he or she needs access to a particular title or, more broadly, an answer to a particular question, prior to his or her arrival and that the library will have that title or be able to provide an answer to that question. The challenge with such thinking is that it assumes library visitors know what they need as if they were customers interacting with a commercial vendor.

In essence, libraries are qualitatively different in their purpose from a local service provider. They do not serve customers and perhaps we should even revisit whether we should refer to the ones they serve as patrons. The existence of libraries, however

unfashionable such thinking might be in our individualistic culture, points to the very fact that people may not know what they need to know (or what they do not know). Regardless of how learned (or pointing to where I would like to take us today, virtuous) visitors may be when they enter, they should be qualitatively different when they leave because of an experience intentionally designed by librarians. Palfrey thus argued librarians should not be shy about the fact that they have an objective for the spaces they curate even if they do so as acts of trust on behalf of the communities they serve.

Second, libraries for Palfrey have a formative quality they exact on those who visit them and, in fact, should seek to exact on the communities they serve. That formative quality should thus be drawn from that particular objective. For Palfrey, that objective and thus the formative qualities of libraries should point all of us to how we can better serve one another as engaged citizens. As a result, "Libraries provide access to the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill our roles as active citizens. Libraries also function as essential equalizing institutions in our society" (Palfrey, 2015, p. 9).

As a result, Palfrey (2015) contended that "For as long as a library exists in most communities, staffed with trained librarians, it remains true that individuals' access to our shared culture is not dictated by however much money they have" (p. 9). Libraries are thus "core democratic institutions" (Palfrey, 2015, p. 10). The individuals who lead them need to possess a vision of the common good that they then seek to cultivate through the spaces and holdings they shape. Extending the logic of Palfrey's argument, one could thus assert that part of the reason our democracy finds itself in the shape it is in at the present moment – one defined, as I previously noted, by political discourse that seems to be fragmenting *ad infinitum* – is because the purpose we have ascribed to libraries is misplaced. For Palfrey, libraries exist to form citizens and do so in a way that is beholden to nothing other than the health of the communities they serve.

To conclude this part, Palfrey encouraged us not to think that the path forward for libraries is somehow shrouded in mystery. In fact, he argued "The key is very simple: to focus on what digital media make possible, not on what they undo" (Palfrey, 2015, p. 13). As a result, "We need physical libraries and digital libraries today. Physical spaces and digital platforms will both play an essential role in providing access to knowledge in democracies around the world in the near future" (Palfrey, 2015, p. 13). While some may argue again that the cost is high for doing both – if those individuals are still convinced Google is all they need, Palfrey contended the cost is even higher for not doing so.

If we don't maintain physical libraries, we will lose essential public intellectual spaces in our communities, places where people can meet face-to-face, and if

we don't build digital libraries connected to them, those physical spaces become obsolete as big companies such as Google and Amazon increasingly [strive] to meet our need for knowledge (Palfrey, 2015, p. 13).

Before closing this section, I briefly want to turn our attention to the work of Matthew Battles, a former colleague of Palfrey's at Harvard's Berkman Center. In a manner comparable to Palfrey, Battles contended libraries are as important as ever for the health and well-being of political structures such as democracies. However, he does so by taking a longer view – a view that transcends political structures such as democracies by stretching all the way back to Alexandria and then moving forward to the present day. Through all of those cycles of change, what Battles (2003) noted is “the very fact that the library has endured seems to offer hope. In its custody of books and the words they contain, the library has confronted and tamed technology, the forces of change, and the power of princes time and again” (pp. 214–215).

In the midst of the forces of change that Google and Amazon – to name only two – have unleashed, the challenges can seem insurmountable. Part of what Battles encouraged us to think about is that libraries, while they looked different in 200 BC Alexandria than in 2000 AD Marion, Indiana, are indispensable. Forces of change have come and gone and yet libraries remain. Doing so required that individuals who curate libraries make adjustments. What libraries do is constantly in need of adjustment in relation to the culture they are called to cultivate.

As a result, one thus learns from Battles' work that to tend to a library in medieval France was very different from doing so in colonial America. However, libraries and librarians played roles that were vital to the health and well-being of both cultures and during both periods of time. The physical look of libraries was different just as was the technology available to the librarians called to curate them. To note one example from our lifetime, how many of us – beyond the truly nostalgic – want to go back to using card catalogs versus computer-driven databases? Regardless, the underlying purpose of libraries to shape culture and provide information remains the same.

One can thus safely assume libraries and librarians will be just as necessary two hundred years from now as they were two hundred years ago. Undoubtedly, the libraries our descendants will visit will physically look different. In addition, while the technology available to your successors will also be different, Battles contended the underlying purposes they will serve will be the same. The failure to do so, a failure that is more at risk of being enacted by citizens and policymakers than librarians, “is not a loss of books but the loss of a world” (Battles, 2003, p. 213).

In one of his final pleas, Battles (2003) noted that

As in Alexandria after Aristotle's time, or the universities and monasteries of the early Renaissance, or the cluttered-up research libraries of the nineteenth-century, the Word shifts again in its modes, tending more to dwell in pixels and bits instead of paper and ink (p. 213).

Instead of fearing such changes, Battles offered we should look at them with a sense of hope in the enduring role libraries serve. As a result, "Such changes are part of that endless cycle of renewal for which the library has its readers to thank" (Battles, 2003, p. 214).

Part II

In order to give greater life to these arguments concerning the enduring value of libraries, I want to connect them with a few of the landmarks dotting Indiana and, in particular, St. Joseph's County and Grant County. St. Joseph's County is the home to South Bend, the University of Notre Dame, and the Hesburgh Library (or, more fondly known on football Saturdays as "Touchdown Jesus" as it looms over the north end of Notre Dame Stadium). During the recent effort known as the Campus Crossroads Project, the most expensive capital campaign in Notre Dame history, multi-use structures were added on all sides of the stadium with the exception of the north one as doing so would have blocked the view from the library into the stadium and from the stadium up to the library.

Named in honor/memory of the Rev. Theodore Martin Hesburgh, Notre Dame's president from 1952 to 1987, what was Memorial Library when it opened in 1963 was the largest university library in the world. When celebrating the library's 50th anniversary, Father Hesburgh (2013) argued that he "wanted in 1963, and still desire[s] today, for the Memorial Library literally to stand for the future of Notre Dame as a place of unmatched intellectual achievement, free inquiry, and providential contributions to [human]kind" (p. vii). In addition,

he wanted, and still desires, that this be in a context of a distinctive pursuit of truth that is recognized in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart [the primary site of worship on campus] and in Our Lady atop the Golden Dome [or Main Building]" (Hesburgh, 2013, pp. vii-viii).

In addition to serving as a means of staring down the lake effect snows that punish the Notre Dame campus in the winter, "Touchdown Jesus" or, more properly known, the "Word of Life" mural – defined by varying shades of granite – is the embodiment of that distinctive pursuit of truth. At the center is Christ but "With him are gathered the saints, the scholars, the scribes, and the teachers stretching down through time, who have dedicated themselves to the preservation of truth, the Word of Life, and the preservation of [the minds of humanity] to receive that truth"

(Sheedy cited by Schmitt, 2013, p. 70). The design of the mural by American artist Millard Sheets took almost two years to complete but that was just the beginning. Once each piece of granite was cut, they were put into place like a giant puzzle on the floor in what was then known as the Athletic and Convocation Center and now the Joyce Center. With great care, each piece was then lifted into place on the library's south wall.

A visit to the Notre Dame campus today would bring one into contact with one prong of Kells' argument – the argument concerning the efforts of librarians to think through the ramifications of, in Notre Dame's case, that image for the collection they cultivate. Due to the paltry nature of the university's holdings in 1963, a considerable portion of the library's shelves initially stood empty. Fifty years later, they are full, with great pressure now being exerted on the university's off-site storage facilities.

A visit to the Notre Dame campus today would bring one into contact with another prong of Kells' argument – the argument concerning the ways community members who are served by a library also leave their own contributions. On a more substantive note, a library such as the Hesburgh Library now includes within its holdings the theses, dissertations, books, and articles that were written by people who visited and utilized it. For example, did the time Alasdair MacIntyre spent in the Hesburgh Library contribute to his transition from being an Aristotelian to being a Thomist? Or, did the time Alvin Plantinga spent in that same space influence his thinking concerning warranted Christian belief? Both sets of efforts in the end made their way into their respective Gifford Lectures. Some authors leave clues about these spaces – generally authors who pay their debts in their acknowledgments – while others do not.

On perhaps a more frivolous note, I can recall wandering those same stacks and, in particular, being in the section that housed all of the books on Knute Rockne (of which there is no shortage and I am sure Notre Dame librarians have made it a priority to acquire all such titles). As I pulled books from the shelves, I noticed that one of them was made to look like a book and even bore a call number. However, it was designed to serve as a storage unit for what upon further examination was a small figurine of what I assumed was a saint.

Such a discovery made me wonder who had put it there. What was his or her purpose in doing so? Moreover, how many people had discovered it, and replaced it, over the years? I must confess I often visit that floor when on campus just to make sure of that figurine's enduring presence among the stacks. Regardless of whether those contributions are worthy of being deemed substantive or perhaps more frivolous, the collection housed in the Hesburgh Library is different today as a result of the activities it inspired on behalf of the individuals who visit it.

While images from Goodyear blimps do not capture these structures, Indiana is home to more Carnegie libraries than any other state – 160 out of the nation's 1,689 Carnegie libraries. In Grant County alone, there are two or three, depending upon how you count them. 3.3 miles north of us is the Marion Carnegie Library and 3.8 miles southeast of us is the Gas City Carnegie Library. 14.2 miles northwest of us and sitting at the intersection of Grant, Howard, and Miami counties is the Converse Carnegie Library.

About 125 years before Palfrey made his argument concerning the importance of libraries to the formation of citizens, Andrew Carnegie made a comparable argument and saw to it that his largest contribution to the public came in the construction of public libraries. In *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*, Abigail Van Slyck (1995), a professor of art history and dean of the faculty at Connecticut College, argued,

The timing of Carnegie's reforms is also significant in that it coincided with independent changes in the basic philosophy administration. The traditional understanding of the library as a treasure house, protecting its books from untrustworthy readers, was falling out of currency (p. 25).

As a result, "the library profession sought to use the public library to bring readers and books together" (Van Slyck, 1995, p. 25). Within that changing tide of support, Carnegie added his belief that libraries were essential to the cultivation of a learned citizenry. In essence, Carnegie "sought to establish town libraries that were free, ubiquitous, and accessible to those who shared his own character traits: industry, ambition, and eagerness to learn" (Palfrey, 2015, p. 2). That spirit is often associated with "The Laborer Who Thinks," a statue outside of the Allegheny Regional Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, portraying the working man reading a book while seated on an anvil with a sledgehammer at his side. As a result, Carnegie never believed the libraries he helped construct were philanthropic gestures. In the end, the citizens who visited them were the ones who, according to Carnegie, did the work.

"State and city governments had, by the turn of the twentieth-century, begun to accept as their responsibility to build, maintain, and staff hospitals and schools. But they resisted doing the same for libraries" (Nasaw, 2006, p. 605). In his biography of Andrew Carnegie, David Nasaw contended Carnegie himself sought to expand that sense of responsibility to include libraries. In particular, how Carnegie went about doing so reinforced his belief that the libraries he helped construct were not philanthropic gestures. In particular, he would "offer communities a building, on condition that they would fill it with books and tax themselves for its maintenance" (Nasaw, 2006, p. 605).

Some of those libraries were established as branches within a system in large cities such as Indianapolis that once had five Carnegie Libraries. Or, as in the case of Converse – presently a community of about 1,200 people, some of those libraries were built as the sole library in what would have otherwise been an unserved community. Regardless of their size or locale, in *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy*, Theodore Jones (1997) noted, "Carnegie was responsible for these public institutions of learning and entertainment and making them a key landmark on the American landscape" (p. 3). One could likely argue that an impression was made in comparable ways concerning what Americans believed was their responsibility in serving as informed contributors to public life.

Part III

With those details in mind, we will now turn more formally to the words of the Apostle Paul found in 1 Corinthians 13 and, in particular, in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Before doing so, I must also give credit where credit is due to a former colleague, David Riggs, who serves here at Indiana Wesleyan. He helped me understand the full value of this passage for the work we do as scholars and, in this case, what is at stake in the libraries to which we are indebted for our ability to do that work. In "What is Truth?" – a course he teaches to first-year students enrolled in the John Wesley Honors College – Riggs stresses both we see but that we see dimly – to miss either component in that assertion made by the Apostle Paul is problematic.

First Corinthians is the first of two letters by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth and canonized as sacred scripture. Here in Indiana a Corinth Church exists in Brownsburg, a Corinth United Methodist Church and a Corinth Congregational Christian Church exist in Muncie, and a Corinth Brethren Church exists in Twelve Mile.

The Corinth the Apostle Paul was addressing, however, was a commercial center in ancient Greece and at the time of Paul's writing was also the administrative capital of a Roman province. Despite its prominence, the church at Corinth was plagued with a number of moral and theological challenges that Paul addressed in the early chapters of this first letter. By the time Paul got to chapter thirteen, however, Father Paul Fitzmyer (2008) noted in the *Anchor Bible Commentary* that Paul's focus was on constructively charting "The More Excellent Way" in what is often referred to as a "Hymn to Love" (p. 487).

In that chapter or hymn, the overriding concern for the Apostle Paul was that he or anyone else for that matter may exhibit some form of excellence but if they do so without love that which was otherwise excellent is null-and-void. In essence, everything else is secondary to the love of God which human beings are capable of expressing. For example, in 13:1, Paul noted that if his speech bears an angelic

quality but he does not love, such speech would sound like the equivalent of a clanging cymbal. Or, in 13:2, Paul noted that if he possessed the discernment of the prophets but he does not love, such discernment amounts to nothing. As a result, Fitzmyer contended the love of God, love which humans are capable of expressing, is "the highest and unsurpassed gift of God" (Fitzmyer, 2008, p. 487).

In 13:12, the specific focus of our exploration, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." The now to which Paul referenced is the temporal world or existence this side of eternity in which we exist as finite and thus bear the marks of that finitude upon our various abilities. In his homilies on the Epistles to the Corinthians, John Chrysostom (1999), a fourth-century Church Father, argued, "God does not have a face, of course. [However,] Paul uses this image to denote greater clarity or perspicuity" (p. 136).

As a result, we must remember that the ability to see as characterized by Paul here means that we may continue to see. What is more important to remember, however, is the manner in which we encounter God, regardless of the sense or senses, will be greater than it is now. Now we are bound by our finite nature. Then, like God, we will no longer be bound in such a way. What we are able to see this side of eternity is qualitatively different from what we will be able to see in eternity. Now we see as humans see and, in turn, contend with the limitations humans possess.

According to Gregory of Nyssa (2005), *another fourth-century Church Father*, in eternity "we will grasp the beauty of inexpressible beatitude in an entirely different way and with a kind of joy that in the present the heart of man cannot conceive" (pp. 225–226). However, the challenge with our ability to see this side of eternity is "The divine nature transcends all knowledge and comprehension" (Gregory of Nyssa, 2005, p. 225). As a result, Paul resorted to using the image of a mirror but a mirror through which we see dimly. On the other side of eternity, we will see God in ways typified by a mirror whose condition offers a clear and perfect image. This side of eternity, because we see God as humans see, we see God dimly.

The author of Genesis noted in 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The image of God, that *imago dei* which we all bear and is definitive of what it means to be human, is what allows us to see God. As a result, we are all capable of coming to an awareness of God's very existence and of our calling in God's created order. However, what compels us to see God dimly is that this side of eternity the integrity of that very image is compromised by our depravity. When writing to the church in Rome, Paul declared in 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." While faith in Christ frees us from the condemnation we rightly deserve because of that sin, we still see this side of eternity as "in a mirror dimly." One day we shall understand fully

just as the one who created us understands us fully. For now, we bear the mark of that sin and thus see dimly.

While these details are all necessary if we are going to come to a sufficient appreciation of what the Apostle Paul offered us in this passage, we must be sure to hold two key components of it in tension with one another. We could stop short and simply become fixated on the fact that we see. Or, we could despair because we fixate on the dim nature of our ability to see. However, both are equally important in that we see and that we see dimly. We thus must be thankful that we, in fact, can see and thus employ such a gift in a responsible manner. Part of our exercise of that responsibility comes in the fact that we are incapable of seeing everything that exists. That recognition is then most aptly demonstrated in the intellectual virtue of humility – an ability simultaneously to appreciate that we know but what we know may not be all there is to know.

In *Proper Confidence*, Leslie Newbigin, a British missionary, theologian, and statesperson, argued that the pursuit of what we can know this side of eternity is reflected more in the giving of an invitation than in the communication of information. While what we are to communicate this side of eternity is true, such a possibility does not mean what we can communicate this side of eternity is all that is true. As a result, our pursuit of truth is the participation in “more than an unfolding of the purpose, which was otherwise hidden in the mind of God but is now made known to us through God’s revealing acts; it is also a summons, a call, an invitation” (Newbigin, 1995, p. 65). Such participation is incremental but the result is a recognition “of reconciliation, of atonement, and of salvation” (Newbigin, 1995, p. 68). Our appreciation of those realities, as initiated by God alone, can grow over the course of our lives. However, we will not fully appreciate all that is at stake until we transcend the limitations that keep us, for now, from seeing God in full. For now we can indeed see but do so dimly.¹

Part IV

In my estimation, libraries are crucial sites of formation by which individuals come to appreciate that not only do they see, but also that they see dimly this side of eternity. Learning we can see but that we do so dimly is essential for the cultivation of intellectual humility and, in turn, human flourishing. Too many of our contemporaries have either lost sight of the fact that they can see or never consider that what they see reflects something less than all that exists. Intellectual humility is thus the *via media* between these two paths that otherwise lead to the narcissism we all too often see afflicting our discourse concerning what it means to live in community. Please know I am not saying that visiting a library will heal all of our

1 A robust base of literature has developed in recent years concerning intellectual virtue and, in particular, intellectual humility. For example, please see Baehr (2011), Church and Samuelson (2017), Sosa (2011a), Sosa (2011b), and Zagzebski (1996).

societal ills. However, the physical spaces, the collections, and the staffs that define libraries are critical to the cultivation of intellectual humility, human flourishing, and thus the health and well-being of Christian institutions of higher education.

First, the exterior and interior spaces of libraries matter in relation to the cultivation of intellectual humility. We often assume the physical spaces we inhabit, regardless of their nature, do not matter or that somehow their only value is what they accomplish in terms of goals related to their size and the integrity of their construction. Such an understanding is driven by a belief that such environments serve as instrumental mediums housing what really matters in terms of resources and programming. When we explore that line of thinking at an even deeper level, we realize part of what is driving it is the belief that human agents are subjects who are separate and distinct from their environments as objects. In contrast, many philosophers, psychologists, and architects would argue human beings do not merely exist in the physical spaces they inhabit but they dwell.² As a result, those spaces inscribe meaning on us just as we inscribe meaning on them.

In order to appreciate the logic behind this argument in more concrete terms, we will now consider the renovation project Williams College undertook in relation to Stetson Hall and the construction of Sawyer Library.³ In order to gain access to Sawyer, one must enter Stetson, reinforcing the understanding that the efforts one undergoes in such a space have origins rooted in the past. After walking through a foyer designed to connect the two structures, visitors find themselves at a point where they can view below them a seemingly infinite array of resources. However, access to those resources is made possible by a series of bridges that connect components of knowledge that would otherwise seem disparate in nature. Along the way, visitors also find a series of spaces designed for collaborative interaction, reinforcing the idea that we may see less dimly if we work with others who share in our condition.

Second, the collections housed within libraries matter in relation to the cultivation of intellectual humility. Librarians obviously take the lead in terms of shaping those collections but beyond striving best to represent the disciplines offered on campus, what criteria do librarians use to evaluate works they may acquire? As noted earlier, the efforts made by librarians serving at the Hesburgh Library were implicitly guided by the 134-foot high "Word of Life" mural. What criteria guides your decisions? How often, for example, do you evaluate the collection you curate to determine whether it points individuals to the fact that they see but that they also see dimly? In what way does the shape of that collection point to the fact that we can know truth but that our ability to do so is incomplete this side of eternity?

² For more details, see Ream & Ream, 2005.

³ For more details, see Jackson.

This challenge may prove to be even more acute for librarians serving at so-called research universities where pressure may come to capture a universal representation of knowledge. Despite those pressures, librarians curating collections as vast as the Hesburgh Library, Harvard University's Widener Library, or even the Library of Congress would likely be the first to admit their collections are incomplete. One reason for that fact is no librarian has access to a budget large enough, the time needed, or the intellectual capacity to acquire – physically and/or electronically – everything. As a result, what governing logic determines what one should acquire, continue to include, or later discard? I would suggest that logic should point to the fact that we know but this side of eternity that what we know comes with limitations.

Finally, the staffs who define libraries matter in relation to the cultivation of intellectual humility. Such a virtue is essential to human flourishing and thus librarians play critical roles in advancing the health and well-being of Christian institutions of higher education. To begin, students – especially first-year students – need guides to help them realize that libraries and the structures of knowledge that libraries represent are places that, as emerging scholars, they belong. As their familiarity grows, students then need guides who remind them that their voices, whether spoken or in print, matter, that they can make arguments, and that they should start with the assumption that people will listen to them. Students need people who can walk beside them, support them, and challenge them as they refine what they have come to know.

Students also need people who can remind them that not only do they not know everything but this side of eternity they never will. When students first encounter such a line of thinking, their recourse may be to assume that if they cannot know everything, then they, in fact, know nothing. Here again is a point at which librarians are critical, as students need guides who remind them that they can see even if that line of sight this side of eternity is dim in nature. That process of recognition is the formative context from which intellectual humility grows.

However, librarians do not simply serve as educators for students but also as educators for faculty members. For all of their strengths, terminal degree programs harbor shortcomings of which we often go unaware unless we place those programs within the context of a line of thinking such as the one offered by the Apostle Paul. In particular, terminal degree programs tend to focus on forming reductive expertise. As a result, faculty can come to think that what they know in their respective fields is all that can or needs to be known. I would argue such a danger is a greater reality at so-called teaching universities where faculty feel little to no pressure to be engaged in on-going research efforts than at so-called research universities. Regardless of how rigorous the program, a terminal degree is the beginning and not the end and faculty need partners such as librarians in that ongoing process of learning.

In addition, that process of forming reductive expertise can often leave faculty members incapable of making connections between what they know and what others know. At this point, a terminal degree can also prove to be a hindrance. Faculty need partners such as librarians to help them realize that a critical part of the value in what they know comes when they get outside of their field and begin to learn how to integrate threads of knowledge. They need people who not only can introduce them to those other threads of knowledge but also to the individuals producing those threads.

Conclusion

The success of Susan Orlean's *The Library Book* is that it compelled us to realize libraries matter and that human flourishing is dependent upon their ongoing existence. While Orlean was not clear about the end of human flourishing and, in turn, about the exact role libraries play in its cultivation, she extended to us an open invitation to explore this concept. One response to that invitation is to allow the words of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth to serve as our guide. In so doing, I argued libraries and librarians play formative roles in helping us realize that we see. The recognition that our ability to see this side of eternity is incomplete is the ground from which intellectual humility and human flourishing grow. One response this side of eternity, however, is just that – one response. Others are needed and the question for you now is, "How will you respond?" †

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