

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

THE ROLE OF A LIBRARIAN IN A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries are facing serious challenges arising from the education explosion--which is occurring from primary school to post-graduate level. In today's schooled society, librarians and other educators view libraries as institutions which facilitate access to education. Young people are demanding up-to-date problems. A librarian in a Christian institution can play a significant part in today's challenges.

One of the primary goals of a librarian should be that of strengthening the Christian education programme of the institution. To be genuinely effective in assisting the college in its mission, the library must be an educational resource centre to which teachers and students look for assistance. Two major responsibilities of a librarian are to build up an excellent collection of materials, and to see that the inflow of new books is prompt and continuous. The quality of the educational programme of a college is measured by its library.

The questions arise: What commitment does the librarian have to the mission of the school? How does he support the Christian objectives of the institution.

The librarian is responsible for the operation of the library and should be able to determine whether or not the library is attaining its goal of assisting in communicating the Christian faith.

BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

According to Wheeler, organizations are established in order to gain specific targets, goals, terminals or destinations.

In the same sense, libraries stemmed from the ideal of improving society, a purpose or goal widely accepted. Under the influence of this conviction, librarians assume that the

library is a potent factor in forwarding education, and economic and social progress. They see evidence each hour of each day that the library's materials are a positive influence in the thinking and in the lives of their fellow citizens.

All activities of the library are designed to facilitate use of resources—to move barriers, to invite use, to guide reading toward the goals of each individual. And as Ralph explains it, the modern library collects and organizes materials and makes them convenient and easy to use. In a sense, collection, organization, and distribution, interpretation and guidance are broad aspirations that represent a philosophical basis for the operation of the library.

Modern education demands that the library should set itself a clear and precise target. This is due to regular and rapid developments in many areas of knowledge as well as the growth of knowledge in general. The library plays a vital part in the learning process by assisting students in school work through making additional information available. It also contributes to satisfy the information needs of staff in their study, teaching and research activity. Broadly speaking, librarianship is concerned with the acquisition and systematic arrangement of material and information, and actively ensuring the ready use thereof.

In addition to books, the library selects and provides pamphlets, documents and other non-book sources in printed form; and films, tapes, discs, and other non-print recordings of knowledge and opinion. In order to meet these goals it is the library's objective to select, develop and maintain the qualified staff necessary to provide the collection and services. It is the obvious centre for all the variety of specially selected material, representative of the whole field of knowledge, to take the place of the limited textbook and the prescribed reader.

THE QUALITIES OF A LIBRARIAN WHO IS SERVING
IN AN ADVENTIST COLLEGE

The librarian is the key factor in the development of the library. He has to possess a fine character and a deep appreciation for books; Elmer Towns suggests that it should be someone who meets the following criteria:

1. **Christian Character**

A librarian must be a man or woman whose life shows Christ has redeemed him or her. He may be serving patrons who have never met the Lord, as well as new and even unstable Christian. He must have an interest and desire to establish and promote Christian literature.

2. **Cooperative Spirit**

Some might say a cooperative spirit is a part of Christian character, have the ability to work closely and well with other people. Without this quality any librarian is almost certain to fail, for all day he has to deal with a variety of persons inside and outside the library.

Helpfulness is a great asset, approachability and friendliness should be adopted, but this does not mean familiarity or consuming time in pointless conversation.

The librarian must be open to new ideas from faculty, friends, church leaders and even members, since the library will serve them all.

3. **An Appreciation for Books**

This qualification has a twofold meaning. The most helpful kind of librarian loves books for what they give him personally, but he is also knowledgeable about all kinds

of books for all types of people. Many librarians need to regain their basic conviction that their books, reading and study services are of surpassing social and educational importance.

The librarian should know how to inject people with the fever to read anything and everything good. He realizes that the library should be equipped to meet the need of everyone.

4. Organizational Ability

For users to have easy access to information sources, the library needs to be well organized. "All things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40 RSV). As stated by Wheeler, "Enthusiasm, buoyancy in the face of difficulties and disappointments, physical stamina, conviction as to the outcome, tireless persistence to get results, emotional resiliency, a degree of calmness and poise, frankness and firmness with tact and patience, some measure of consistency in ideas and decisions, and above all, courage to decide to undertake and persist until accomplishment--these are characteristics of a good librarian, though a paragon has them all." One of the assets and attractions of library work is that so many actual and potential librarians are blessed with many or most of these qualities; but the demand for such persons is always greater than the supply.

5. Initiative and Leadership

The librarian must have the ability to develop the staff. The library needs a broader and more open personality overseeing its operation. A successful librarian will be evident in comprehending needs, planning ahead, finding ways to get things in

motion, surmounting difficulties and getting results.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENTS: THE RIGHT AND
RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LIBRARIAN.

The first step in building a good library collection is evaluating the requirements and interests of the students, beginning with how well the current collection is meeting their needs. Or as Edward points out "The most successful librarians will be those who combine management knowledge with a true interest in people and their needs." It is essential to evaluate the development of a collection as it proceeds as well as at periodic intervals. It is also necessary to determine the development so that the best possible end result is obtained. Librarians should be very careful of what they keep in their collection.

Ellen G. White warns:

"Many of the books piled up in the great libraries of earth confuse the mind more than they aid understanding. Yet men spend large sums of money in the purchase of such books and years in their study, when they have within their reach a book containing the words of Him who to know aright is life eternal. Those only who gain this knowledge will at last hear the words, 'Ye are complete in Him.' Colossians 2:10."

Well-balanced book collections cannot be built up from haphazard book gifts. Only books that contribute to the goals of the institution belong to the library. Frequently Adventist academic libraries have grown haphazardly and are often in need of "pruning". Whether the process is called weeding or deselection, it should eliminate from the collection items that are: (1) inappropriate for collection in age, level, content, or student appeal; (2) worn out; or (3) an unnecessary duplication. A thorough weeding will make the total collection more attractive to students while simultaneously reducing the amount of time the librarian must spend organizing it.

THE INFORMATION NEEDS IN A CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION--

SELECTION OF LIBRARY MATERIAL

In selecting books for the library, the librarian, the teachers and the library committee should work together in bringing up all the necessary apparatus that comprise a rich variety of specially selected material. The librarian has the final decision about the library inventory, for he, after all, is responsible for the operation of the library and should be able to determine whether or not the library is attaining its goals of assisting in communicating the Christian faith. As one writer once said: "When choosing our companions, either in life or in books - but especially in books - we should remember that evil is more easily learned than good. What we read and see and hear becomes a part of our life, leaving its influence on our character." (9;111) To be an effective instrument of education the library must contain not only the right books but an adequate number of them.

Sister White (13) has given us some direction:

"Let all reading of this character be banished from your houses, let books that are useful, instructive, and elevating, be placed in your libraries and upon your tables."

The library should never be seen as the dumping ground of unwanted books, old outdated handbooks, shabby material or donations which are quite unsuitable for the purpose of the school library.

Quality school libraries are synonymous with quality education. Useless school libraries are an indictment against the educational system.

All too often, SDA school libraries are made up primarily of very old and musty books donated years ago by those who had no further use for them. Unless books meet a

current informational or recreational need of students or patrons, they should be removed from the school library, which is not the place for antiquarian books. If it hurts too much to discard these books, the librarian can take them home or give them away.

Using the correct criteria for judging books, any gift book offered to the school should be examined critically. If the book does not meet the desirable standards and does not contribute to the needs of the patrons it should not be accepted and should not be placed on the library shelves.

The librarian should prepare a list of books from which persons may select and purchase books as gifts to the library. With this list as a basis, the library can kindly but firmly refuse to shelve donations of books which do not enhance the library's purpose of communicating the Christian faith.

The work of our libraries should bear a different stamp from that borne by some of the most popular of our institution of learning. Many of the textbooks used in these schools are unnecessary for the work of preparing students for the school above. All school library material should be selected with utmost care and insight, in order to be representative not only of the school subjects but also of the whole range of man's knowledge and experience, and thus to make provision for all the possible school and spiritual needs.

In selecting books for the library, the librarian needs to take into consideration the present book collection, the user need and available funds. Secondly, in order to create a good library, the librarian must have a clearly defined policy of book selection, this will be very helpful in case the librarian has questions about specific items. This policy should have the approval of the Principal and the Library Committee. When selecting books for purchase,

every faculty member should be involved. The librarian should consult with teachers regarding books in their fields. He needs to balance the collection by including both secular books and Christian literature. The librarian should replenish his library with volumes of real and lasting value. "What food is to the body, books are to the mind." (9)

E.G. White (14) says:

"True education...has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the Harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers.

It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the joy of wider service in the world to come."

The curriculum in that particular institution also influences the selection of titles. At the same, there are fundamental principles which can be applied everywhere. Douglas (2) states the following criteria for judging books:

1. Is the subject matter suitable and desirable for young people?
2. In factual books, is the subject matter accurate, authoritative and up-to-date?
3. Will the subject matter tend to develop desirable attitudes and appreciation?
4. Does the subject matter interpret historical or modern life situations from a true and unbiased viewpoint?
5. Is the style of the book--vocabulary, sentence structure, form, diction--appropriate and effective for whom it is intended?
6. Is the format of the book satisfactory--in appearance, size, durable binding, opaque paper, wide margins, type, spacing between lines?
7. Are the illustrations satisfactory from a standpoint of text, of clarity, and of artistic value?

8. Is the author qualified to write in this particular field?
9. What is the reputation of the publisher in relation to the desirable books for school libraries?
10. Has the book been included in any recognized list or review of books suitable for school libraries.

It is the librarian's duty to select library material impartially, basing selection on the need of everyone in the community, irrespective of race, colour, creed, gender, age or political affiliation. He has to acquire materials that support or reflect a Christian world view.

Sister White also has this to say:

"The world is flooded with books that are filled with enticing error. The youth receive as truth that which the Bible denounces as falsehood, and they love and cling to deception that means ruin to the soul." She continues to say; "There are works of fiction that were written for the purpose of teaching truth or exposing some great evil. Some of these works have accomplished good. Yet they have also wrought untold harm."

Many of the popular publications of the day are filled with sensational stories that are educating the youth in wickedness and leading them in the path of perdition, this is all what Sister White warns us with.

There is a great need for us, librarians to separate bad reading material from what is supposed to enrich us mentally and spiritually.

DEVELOPING SERVICES WITH A CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

A Christian librarian should serve as God's instrument in presenting Christian values through up-to-date methods and material. He should also do as much as possible to assist in the process of research and teaching. As a service organization, the library exists to meet the

needs of its community.

Librarians can stimulate greater use of the library's resources and thus help to achieve the library's goal of being the main source of information on campus. A librarian must be prepared to answer all kinds of questions. His willingness to serve will facilitate access to the collection.

Actions, attitudes, methods, even the words of the librarians, are immeasurable factors for strength or weakness. Traits such as accuracy, approachability, cheerfulness, enthusiasm and interest constantly influence reader evaluation of the library. As Wheeler (12) points out: "one should look as though he is enjoying life and this work, and desiring to share his enjoyment."

A well-organized librarian will be able to create a beautiful library with an educational atmosphere, the place must be conducive to learning.

A librarian and his assistants can do much to give the library an inviting appearance.

Decorative touches on bulletin boards and walls should be evident. If available, paintings or appropriate pictures will enhance the room.

A few growing plants will add life to the library but do not neglect them!

Books should not be allowed to pile up; rather they should be reshelved each day. Weed out old issues of magazines and catalogs.

Librarians should not ignore their obligations of serving the public. There is an obvious need for the librarian's expertise to be recognized, accepted and acceded to. For this ideal to come true librarians must prove themselves worthy selectors.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the fact that in a learning situation, faith should also be integrated, librarians therefore should bring forth materials which will strengthen God's image. Through reading, the lives and characters of young people should be moulded and shaped up. The library in an Adventist College, being the centre of information should be able to meet the Christian objectives. Patrons should be exposed to a variety of the book collection. As product of Christian education a person should be able to grow towards a wide general knowledge of the world as well as Biblical Christianity.

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