From Collections to Connections: Theological Materials in Finnish University Libraries

Dr Jussi Hyvärinen and Rev. Dr Matti Myllykoski

Information specialist at the University of Eastern Finland Library and Chief information specialist at the Helsinki University Library, Finland

Introduction

The current Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki is the direct descendent of the faculty founded in Åbo (Turku) as part of the Royal Academy in 1640. In 1829, after the great fire in Åbo, it became part of the University of Helsinki. The seminary library of the faculty became later the Theology Library, which, in turn, was integrated into the Helsinki University Library, when all big and small libraries of humanities and social sciences were brought under the same roof in 2012. Back then, the collection of the Theology Library included about 90,000 volumes, while the total collection of the new library amounted to approximately 1 million volumes. The classification system was left intact. The printed collections were reduced by removing a great number of duplicate copies. In practice, however, this kind of one-copy-only politics as a guideline for unifying the collections could not be realised without significant compromises. Thus in Helsinki, there is one library for humanities, law, education, and social sciences, and the collection of the former Theology Library has become a part of it; instead of a theological collection, we must rather talk about theological materials, which are intertwined with other materials of the Library.

The School of Theology at the University of Eastern Finland consists of two study programmes: Western (mainly Lutheran) Theology and Orthodox Theology. It was preceded by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Joensuu (2002– 2009). The theological collection of the university is mainly located in the Joensuu Campus Library, which was founded in 1969. Theologians have never had a separate Faculty library in Joensuu; it has always been a part of the main library, the signum system of which is based on the Finnish version of UDC. In the Joensuu campus Library, the theological collection is located in the same facilities as the collections of humanities, philosophy and social sciences.

As UEF offers studies in both Orthodox and Lutheran theology, the library's collections must meet the needs of both disciplines. The original core of the theological collection consists of collections received from the Finnish Orthodox Seminary in 1988, the Finnish Orthodox Public Library in 1993, and the Finnish Archbishop Johannes in 2000. Therefore, the theological collection contained predominantly Orthodox material until the university started to offer education also in Western theology in 1997, which increased the acquisition of Lutheran studies significantly. Since then, maintaining the balance between Western and Orthodox material has been one of the library's special tasks.[1]

Our Concept of Collections is Changing Dramatically

Before the turn of the millennium, the collections of the university libraries as well as theological seminaries and faculties consisted of mainly printed books, journals, and microfilms, but also included some CD-Roms. In the past two decades, however, most journals have become electronic; e-books are preferred to printed books, which are sold in large packages so that one book costs about 20 cents per year. (We also see a move away from traditional/permanent collections: libraries do not own their books but rent them.) Great thematic databases have outdated most collections of old books; national libraries and other institutions in Europe and elsewhere have digitised their cultural heritage and made much of their collections openly accessible. This Open Access movement has been fruitful in promoting modern scientific work openly

accessible for everybody. These developments have revolutionised all libraries, including those serving scholars and students in various fields of theological studies.

In 2012, when Helsinki University Library was recreated in the Kaisa House, the digital revolution of collections in the field of humanities and theology was only just beginning. It had, among other things, a display area for recent acquisitions of printed books in the lobby. On the seventh floor of the building, there was a large area for printed journals. Some five years later, both areas had shrunk into a tiny space and become almost unnoticed. As the space costs are growing and e-books are bought in masses, the printed collection that is still preferred by a minority of users – particularly those specialising in classical studies – is slowly diminishing.

The same dramatical change can be seen in UEF Library collections as well. When the union of Joensuu and Kuopio University Libraries was established in 2010, both students and scholars of Theology preferred print books and avoided using e-books if possible. In ten years, e-books have become the dominant form in book acquisitions, and customers have understood the advantages of accessing e-books remotely. In addition, the amount of subscribed print journals has decreased significantly.

The Helsinki and Joensuu University libraries prefer to rent e-books in bulk packages. At the same time, the continuing rise of operational costs has led to space problems with traditional printed collections, and both libraries are in the process of dramatically reducing these. The books removed from the collections are sent to the National Repository Library in Kuopio, from which loans can be delivered quickly. The articles are delivered in digital form (pdf), and the circulation of the printed books is also smooth. The main bulk of the repository collections consists of scientific books from the 1970s to the 1990s. This is a functional system both for the libraries and the customers.

As a result, the National Repository Library is slowly becoming the central library for printed books. However, there is a challenge of how to make the existence of these collections better known to customers and how to make borrowing from it an uncomplicated process, so that the National Repository Library becomes a seamless extension of the libraries' own printed collections.

As for the great university libraries, we cannot talk any more about 'a collection' and even less about specific collections. Therefore, it is hard to estimate which

materials of the university library belong to the realm of theology, and such information and all ensuing statistics, which were ingrained in the life of traditional theology libraries, have become ridiculous. E-books are a particularly striking example. Now that e-books are mostly bought in packages, which change in composition and subject weighting all the time, we can only talk about materials that serve the whole academic community. The openly available digital libraries such as Internet Archive, Gallica, and institutional repository portals such as Core (COnnecting REpositories; The Open University, United Kingdom) and Base (Bielefeld Academic Search Engine; Universität Bielefeld) are beyond our concept of individual or specific themed collections. Now the challenge for librarians is to make all these great resources known to scholars and students.

Furthermore, the concept of so-called 'collection policy' has become problematic: can we as subject librarians decide this since a collection does not exist anymore? In the past, we used to discuss the qualitative criteria for our printed collections, but now the sheer volume of journals, books and databases has taken the lead. In many university libraries (in Helsinki, but not in Joensuu), patron-driven acquisition (PDA) has become a favoured model of library collection development, particularly for e-book collections. Scholars use the offered materials according to their present needs, and those materials which remain unused drop out of the package offered by the provider, without a librarian's curation. In Helsinki and Joensuu, we also use a so-called e-form, which enables scholars to order books that they need. For some years, it has been customary to order, as far as possible, all requests as e-books. In past years, theologians have annually made some 13% of all the proposals (which amount to about 3000 requests); they seem to be slightly more active than their colleagues on average are. It is evident that more active scholars profit from this service, potentially at others' cost.

As the e-book has taken over the market of scholarly literature, so too the space costs of our libraries are rising significantly. We feel pressured to move towards a full digital library without any printed books at all. This development will be slow and not completely inevitable; some of our customers insist on having printed collections.

In 2020, a great number of Finnish academic libraries – including our libraries in Helsinki and Joensuu – have introduced Alma, a novel service platform, which greatly improves on local digital catalogues. On the new platform, all search terms

produce results from available web materials in comparison to the printed materials preserved on library shelves. These web materials mostly belong to databases purchased by the library, but the Alma platform also harvests some results from Open access databases in the net.

Acquisition Challenges

In the university libraries of Helsinki and Joensuu, much of the materials that serve the research, education, and study of theology are acquired independently of the efforts of the subject librarian. In the case of PDA, the subject librarian has become one of the clients: s/he can always join in and influence the content of the database by choosing and using books.

University libraries buy journals in large packages, and it is difficult to avoid overlaps between the fixed packages that are offered. In these take-it-or-leave-it situations, librarians specialised in acquisition deals always have the chance of dispensing with one particular deal and ordering the non-overlapping journals separately, but this is always the much more expensive option than taking packages and ending up with double (or triple) for several journals. Furthermore, increasing subscription costs have a negative impact on collection development; if the library wants to subscribe to a new resource, it often has to dispense with something else.

For theological journals, AtlaSerials is the single most important – and thus indispensable – database. However, more than a third of these journals are also included in deals that are made with other companies, particularly with EBSCO – which, in turn, is even more problematic because Atlas is an EBSCO database. The advantage of AtlaSerials is in its wealth of materials and archives that date back to the earliest issues, so is still worthwhile, even allowing for duplication.

As regards journal databases, a special challenge to the UEF Library is that the School of Theology is significantly smaller than the Faculty of Theology in Helsinki; there are approximately 470 graduate students of Theology and 75 postgraduate students at UEF. The Faculty in Helsinki has a total of nearly 1,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students; around 150 Masters of Theology and some 15 Doctors of Theology or Doctors of Philosophy graduate from the Faculty every year. The teaching and research staff numbers in Helsinki Faculty are around 100. Because of this, the number of potential users of, for example, Acta Sanctorum, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, or Luther's Werke in digital format, is smaller in UEF than in Helsinki University. A smaller library has more pressure for deciding which ones of

many expensive databases are worth subscribing to; but even if AtlaSerials does not belong to the most used databases at the library, it is necessary for students and researchers of theology.

Another question concerns drawing the line between ecclesiastic/confessional and scholarly publications in acquisition policy. University libraries focus their collection policies on academic research. Theological libraries contain publications that are not research but research material: Holy Scriptures, catechisms, ecclesiastic pamphlets, sermons, etc.; it is not always easy to decide what should be included in the collection. However, as the Finnish Ministry of Education has defined the education of Orthodox theologians as one of the national special tasks of UEF, the library seeks to acquire for its collection practically everything that concerns the Orthodox Church, even if the amount of Orthodox theologians is quite small compared with students and researchers of Western theology.

Keeping the Scholarly Community up to Date

The development of digital library collections, open access publications, scholarly web pages, and various social media platforms have made it difficult for scholars to be aware of all sources of information relevant to their scholarship. As in many other fields of study, scholars studying theology often rely on their social networks, Google Books, academia.edu, ResearchGate and other Internet platforms. For a subject librarian, it is often challenging to easily inform them of Open Access journals and books, institutional repositories, and various materials digitised by national libraries and other institutions around the world.

Since autumn 2019, the Faculty of Theology in Helsinki has stopped using e-mail postings to all staff and moved all communication to a web page. This makes it difficult for the subject librarian to provide the faculty members with direct information about new acquisitions, database trials and other matters. UEF Library has similar challenges: e-mail posting is not a desirable form of communication, and it is uncertain how much time staff have for reading Library homepages and blog postings without a prompt. An intermediate form of this is social media-like platforms like Yammer, where it is possible to provide information both to the intrafaculty group and the library group, which many theologians follow.

We are concerned about how to keep the university community up to date, but also how to reach other theologians such as Lutheran and Orthodox priests, teachers,

and church musicians, who would like to utilise university library collections in their work. In Finland, university libraries provide their services not only to the scholarly community, but also to all citizens: libraries are open to all and anyone can get a library card without being a student, lecturer, or researcher, and every citizen can use our information service. There is, however, one problem: all customers can borrow print books, but remote access to e-articles and e-books is available only to university students and staff; other people can use them only in the library. From this point of view, the transition from printed collections to the electronic library has led to inequality. One solution to this problem is to give information about open access publications on library homepages.

Not only has the concept of the collection become obscured, but library services have also experienced a change as well. It was easy for a researcher to perceive traditional library services such as collection services, customer services, and publishing services. Now the services offered by the library also comprise information retrieval instruction and courses, support for research visibility and research evaluation, parallel publishing, research data management, and so on. This diversity of services raises the question of the role of the subject librarian. Traditionally, a subject librarian has been seen as an expert and administrator of collections in his/her field, and he/she was expected to attend to all services relating to his specific area. However, this role of 'jack-of-all-trades' becomes near impossible, especially when digital services provided to researchers require more and more specific expertise. What matters, ultimately, is being reachable; students and scholars must know who to approach when it comes to questions about printed and electronic collections.

Questions about the Future

Is this the future of European theology libraries? Will they be integrated into university libraries? Will they lose their collections and start to build up connections instead?
When theological libraries become more and more digital, will it become an attractive option to create networks of individual theological libraries that share the costs of all toll access materials they use?
Will theological libraries become more and more digital spaces without printed books (like UCL in London)?
What will be the role of the subject librarian? How could we be prepared for a change? How could we master the future of our profession?