CHAPTER 10

The Millennium Project

Nature, Environment, and Time in the Future of Special Collections: Considering the Case of Bridwell Library

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In preparation for writing this essay, I spent a long while thinking about the questions that concern theological and special collections libraries. Then COVID-19 hit and other considerations took priority in our lives and work. This pandemic brought up various thoughts that we had not really contemplated before, but one question in particular stood out, and that was: *How do we continue to work within a profession where our human presence has been central to our mission and livelihood, and yet, by its own virtue during a pandemic, we are forced to abandon that physical, human presence and adapt to an increasingly virtual environment?* Never in the history of special collections, I would imagine, has our profession had to ask such a question.

Several months into the pandemic, two other things prompted me to reconsider my understandings of collections, libraries, muse-

ums, and the whole enterprise of theological education in relation to acquisition practices. First, a road trip in early July around the American west brought me face to face with both our country and its variegated landscape—whether we call it *nature* or *environment*, the recognition that we exist in spaces that are tied to rock, soil, water, and air is fundamentally crucial to how we live and function in the world. And in that greater landscape, this country is made up of many different peoples, all of whom contribute in one way or another to the social fabric. In recognizing this more viscerally on the road, the relationship between people and places and what that means has become centrally important to my work and what I want to cultivate with colleagues.

Second, in good part due to this trip, I embarked on a research project to read more extensively in areas related to understanding that experience with the outdoors—fields like environmental history, nature writing, wilderness studies, environmentalism, and imperial ecologies. It occurred to me, while reading some of these works, that research about the history of the environment often had connections to the formation of empires and nation-states, which in turn manifested in the establishment, collection, cultivation, and maintenance of museums, exhibitions, and curatorial spaces—even gardens and landscaping around such institutions, which reflected the imperial designs of an empire.

Thus, I expanded my readings to include curation theories and philosophies, the histories of modern museums, and the social psychology of collections. As a result, many of these scholarly works prompted me to ask far more probing questions about my work and the role of the library. What does nature and the environment have to do with how we classify knowledge and categorize information? What do considerations about landscape and the imagination mean for how we devise our collections, or even perpetuate the histories invested in the institutions we have inherited over time? How do these considerations play into both the history of collection development policies in special collections *and* work with best practices moving forward? And what are the moral, ethical, and social implications of all of these considerations?

Simply answered, I firmly believe that a responsible library of the future (especially one that is *theological*, contains *special collections*, and has the support and backing of its parent institution) can and should strive to excel in its position of museum quality and, in so doing, must be ready to ask the tough questions—both about its

own history and legacy *and* about its role as a part of the environment. Though I have yet to understand fully and articulate satisfactory answers to my own questions here, they nonetheless guide me in attempting to understand better the meaning of the task at hand—specifically, preparing for the future with an eye on moving into the next half millennium, which, while sounding outlandish to some, is precisely what we need to do. Most of us are trained in historical sciences and do not think it odd to look back half a millennium but, because we have no evidence for the future, nor will we know what it holds, it is absent from our thinking. But this is where we must begin, and the so-named *Millennium Project* is a methodology to take us there.

The basic structure of this essay includes four parts. *Part I: First Considerations* will explore how we understand theological libraries and museums within the context of time and nature. By exploring the fundamental categories and language we use to talk about these spaces, my hope is that we can articulate a distinct vision for the future of both Bridwell and other institutions, especially around special collections. *Part II: Recognitions* looks back on the history of Bridwell, while reassessing the legacy of Decherd Turner, Bridwell's first director, whose vision and method of collecting must be recognized through an holistic lens, whereby the institutional role of the library really emerged into what it is today and can grow into tomorrow—an organic and encompassing entity that weds the theological library with the museum space. *Part III: The Future of Bridwell and Special Collections* speaks to both Bridwell's strategic plan for the coming generations and how special collections in other theological libraries may seek to plan and accommodate their own futures, while facing restrictive budgets and administrative constraints. *Part IV: Conclusion—Bridwell Library in 2520 CE* is a reflection on what can and cannot be predicted in such long-term planning but also seeks to articulate the ways that particularities of Bridwell's preparedness in the short-term may afford it a boundless future of growth and importance as an institutional library and museum.

Part I: First Considerations

A Story of Time

In the fall of 2019, I went with a colleague to meet the president of a local religious organization, who was well-regarded and well-known in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Our conversation was focused on the collection and preservation of archival materials related to the founding and history of the group and its association, which included a variety of materials from letters and journals to recordings on cassette tapes and VHS. As the conversation progressed, the president, who was extremely personable and interested in our assistance, paused and began to provide the context of his faith's view of the world—both this world and the next. He began to outline the plans for the community, its understanding of the philosophical, theological, and teleological enterprise that constituted a cosmic projection for his group in the city of Dallas. At one point he noted: "Most organizations have a three-, five-, or ten-year plan. For us, that is not enough. We look at the world and the universe in far more expansive terms—we have a five-hundred, one-thousand, and five-thousand-year plan." Both my colleague and I were more than surprised but had to reserve ourselves under the circumstances. Over the subsequent months, I thought more and more about this and recognized that, while this is not necessarily a *practical* consideration or imposition, it was something that had deep and ethical foundations in the way a community thinks about its descendants, children, and heirs. In many ways, this echoes the "seventh generation principle" of stewardship, which is commonly attributed to the Iroquois and is related to environmental sustainability. For seven generations into the future, we must consider what positive or negative impacts we will have on those who will come after us. In these circumstances, then, this conversation with a religious leader about the preservation of archives and the legacy of its collections was directly tied to a sustainability ethics of the world we had in front of us. Moreover, such a seemingly unusual game plan, which effectively looked centuries and even millennia into the future, echoed other traditions, such as those of Native Americans, which looked "only" 150 years—or seven generations—into the future.

Libraries and Theological Libraries: An Ontology

The theological library is something that has long been part of what we often describe as the "Western tradition," in great part because it reflects the heritage of the Abrahamic faiths. Most notably in the United States and Europe, the libraries that have represented Christian theological schools and seminaries, as well as Jewish and Islamic schools, have become part of this same tradition and evolved into what we know them as today. In the twentieth century, institutions of higher learning and their libraries have constituted singular structures of meaning, comprised of parts with elemental components: books, journals, shelves, tables, chairs, patrons, staff, faculty, and students. Times change and we add further elements to this form: computers, LED lighting, compact shelving, internet, wireless, digital reference, databases, maker spaces, info commons, and more. We adapt, we learn, we interact, we move ahead. What a library is becomes ever more elusive but also ever more understood, as it is the paradox of knowing it when you see it, while recognizing that there are many dynamic and new understandings of institutions and professions. Our ideas of tradition and traditional positions do not always remain but sometimes melt away into merged job responsibilities, downsizing, and changing needs in the workplace. New language and terms are used to describe a reorientation toward patron behaviors and the sciences of predictability: user experience librarians, embedded librarians, maker librarians, STE(A)M liaisons, GIS and data curation specialists, community engagement professionals, social media assistants, and market research librarians. Though these designations are not all likely to be found in the present theological library lexicon, some of them have been and may likely be adapted to in the coming years.

The ontologies (or, essential aspects of identification), then, of the theological library are about adaptability and change. They require us as library and theology professionals to make plans for sustainability as well as innovation in order to achieve the greatest flexibility and engagement with future students, faculty, staff, and donors. The ontological question, then, is not simply in the statement, "A library is…" but in the blended complexity of human diversity in the plural: "Libraries are… theologies are… and theological libraries are…" We cannot isolate ourselves into camps that do not allow for growth and creativity, since this would be the death knell for our libraries,

our institutions, and potentially our religious traditions. Theological libraries, then, exist and thrive on the principles of diversity—diversity of people, ideas, perceptions, representations, and meanings. How we articulate these considerations is part of the exercise we are called to undertake in this process of living and working in the world, and it is our responsibility to enact the ontological principles of the theological library in this process.

Museums, Library-Museums, and Collection Spaces: Some Considerations

Since 2007, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) provided the following as the definition for a bona fide museum:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

During the last couple years, though, with an increased move toward situating museums within frameworks that democratized, decolonized, and recognized marginal voices, a social and political redrafting of the definition took place, which caused further debate and less agreement. As John Fraser (2019) writes in his essay titled, "A Discomforting Definition of Museum," the move among members of the ICOM was to assert that museums play a more "activist role" in both their identity and their function. The updated recommendations for defining a museum in 2019 follow:

> Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to

> human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary well-being.

Bridwell Library does not have the word "museum" in its name, nor does it promote itself in those terms. But by either of these standards—the older ICOM definition from 2007 or the newer proposal from 2019—Bridwell Library could conceivably stylize itself as a museum. Due to its long history, generous backing, and thoughtful vision of strategic endowments, the library has not only managed to survive but to thrive through difficult times and to evolve into a space that is demonstrably more exhibitionary in the manner of a museum. Over thirty years ago, a major gift secured this fate and established a professional-grade exhibition hall with equally valuable exhibit cases.

With this expansion and remodeling, the library took on a more specific tone that could now be considered akin to the pedagogical and even sociological work of a museum. Yet, because the library was just that—a library that supported and fostered the needs of students and faculty—the museum qualities have been more in the background than the foreground. But this does not always have to be the case. The shared qualities of the library's functional quotidian efforts that support our patrons may be balanced by the unique holdings put on display, interpreted, and written about. Thus, to be more intentional about how we consider such a space, I prefer to describe the entity we call Bridwell a library-museum. There are two important components to this designation, namely the existence of major endowments and the extent and value of the holdings, together totalling more than most individual theological institutional endowments in the United States.

Another reason for considering the "museum" designation for a place like Bridwell is that the considerations and interests on a global scale of the ICOM similarly reflect the concerns and issues that theological libraries are dealing with today. Bridwell may not be overtly oriented toward solving the major issues of the world or demanding social justice in public ways, but that does not mean that we cannot continue to be good stewards of our planet and strive to make the world a better place. The spaces in which both the collections reside and the multitude of unique items are put on display are, by their very nature, political spaces because they reflect human thought and action. No matter how hard we try, even the most uneventful or in-

nocuous of activities, objects, or projects requires some level of political negotiation.

In sum, then, the understanding of a place like Bridwell can and should be considered through this more panoptic lens. It does not require some official action, per se, but is a reflection of reorientation of vision both by Bridwell itself and for its broad constituency. It is important, too, that we recognize that such a case is more of an exception than a rule but, that being said, there are ways in which such models can be established, grow, and thrive in other contexts, which I will detail in Part III.

On Nature: or, Library-Museum and the Artifices of False Boundaries

In William Cronon's masterwork of environmental history, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), the author introduces us to the imaginative enterprise of his youth, which dictated false projections that "cities are bad" and "nature is good." As he matured, he questioned many of his preconceived notions about Chicago and cities in general, especially as he reflected on the reasons for these ideas being tinged with the particularities of moral judgments from his youth—mostly drawn from the memories of gray clouds, smokestacks, and cold, wet urban landscapes set under the pall of dark skies. These were scenes that he had conjured and remembered in contrast to the bucolic scenes of Wisconsin farmlands, rural Illinois cornfields, and the majestic shores of Lake Michigan. The common denominator in this thinking was the concentration of people—how many or how few there were in a given area. But this was also about how, in that concentration, humans have constructed spaces, making them supposedly less natural. One of Cronon's key points has to do with our imagined concept of nature as an idea—something that demarcates how we think about spaces, create artificial boundaries, and articulate distinctions between those inhabited places. Chicago, after all, grew not in an isolated bubble but through the expansion of the Western plains, the tapping into resources like forests for timber and iron deposits for the railroads, and the use of agriculture and livestock to feed the burgeoning city. Similarly, the idea that either a city or a building, such as a theological library, is somehow distinct or separated from nature is an equal fiction—one that must be recognized and corrected, but also one that must be considered for how

it requires nature to establish, cultivate, and sustain human institutions.

Similar to Cronon's critique of nature was an earlier distinction made by the German biologist Jakob Johann Uexküll (1864–1944), who is attributed with first using the expression *Umwelt* (environment) as that which describes our perceived spatial-temporal surroundings (Uexküll 1926). Cronon and Uexküll provide us with distinct considerations for not just how we might think about environmentalisms or environmental histories broadly speaking, but about the very fundamental understanding of and approach to how we categorize the foundational elements of our world. As we look to the roles that libraries play, we naturally question what they have done historically as well as what they can provide for the future. Drawing on the proposals and considerations of thinkers like Cronon and Uexküll, these theories of nature, space, and environment may guide our reexamination of the library itself and then of the needs of special collections for future generations.

A further aspect of this consideration of nature and environment comes in the form of boundaries within the library and its collections—especially important as we change administrative structures, go through staff reductions and turnovers, or consider evolving operational standards and best practices. This, too, involves adaptability, but when we discuss the needs of special collections and archives, for example, the question arises now as to whether one of these categories is inherently part of the other or if they are inherently separate? This question may be obvious and easy to answer for some institutions, while for others it is more complex. For Bridwell, this matter has a long history. While it is fairly well-defined on the one hand, it requires more fine-tuning on the other.

To consider how we understand both nature and environment in the context of libraries, and particularly Bridwell, we must recognize specific uses of these terms and how they play out in both our preservation of the past and our more expansive look toward the future. What many library administrators understand very well is the necessity to build robust relationships with facilities and maintenance specialists and managers, because the physical relationship between a building's contents—especially the rare materials, the special collections, and archives—and its surroundings is crucial. The concepts of environment and nature are central to how we must understand our facilities. Immediately upon assuming my current position, the most pressing concerns were facilities issues. At every

library I have served, the facilities were absolute priorities on the lists of responsibilities. At Bridwell, the concern for making sure that all environments meet the standards for temperature, climate, and humidity, for example, are measures of what is necessary to maintain a space properly. When water seeped through drainage pipes, between gutters, and under windows, it was a major concern. In one case, water had come through a gap in the roof, and we were forced to perform an expedient mitigation and repair. But this plays into what Cronon discerns about nature: Was nature, which constituted the outside world of earth, flora, and the elements, somehow what required us from keeping it out, as we might all assume? Or, should it be embraced as part of the organic nature of the building itself?—not to let water "invade" the spaces of our stately building and precious contents, of course, but to recognize the animate nature of the library's physical, organic, and holistic relationship to the elements of nature. The building—like all buildings—is indeed very much an organic, moving, shifting, and perhaps even a pulsing entity. And while many readers of this essay may think it is a rabbit hole of a concern, what remains is a necessary truth about how we are able to best equip ourselves and our cultural institutions with the knowledge, tools, and approach to most effectively understand our buildings, our collections, and how they fit within the categories of nature and environment. In doing this, we recognize environments of space, culture, pedagogy, accessibility, and research, especially as they are connected to special collections. We must also consider and evaluate not only how the past and the trappings of an historical structure affect the present conditions of our collections but, even more importantly, how our actions today around building maintenance, upgrades, and renovations will affect the future of these collections in a building that should last a long time and protect its contents. Indeed, it is no secret that many buildings constructed today have projected "lives" of only twenty-five to fifty years, after which they will either need to be renovated or replaced. That approach to architectural design and sustainability has its own problems. For us, it is imperative that we act as the best stewards of our controllable circumstances, contending with operational costs in light of longer-term strategies of both the library and the greater institution. This, then, will support the visions we have for hundreds of years to come, not simply decades.

Part II: Recognitions[1]

Becoming the director of Bridwell Library was an honor but also a tremendous responsibility, which has taken some time to grow into. Equally, it is a position that requires a fair amount of patience for the consideration of the ontologies mentioned earlier. In this process of self-definition—of the institution, of the library, of the collections, of its identity—we collaborate to come to some consensus around our common goals. With these responsibilities, too, it is only right for us to recognize those shoulders on which we stand. Thus, the characters of those who established, gathered, cultivated, and enhanced the collections and the entire experience we call Bridwell (or, in some cases, "the Bridwell") should be held in highest regard for what they have provided and what has now lasted for more than seventy years. Eight directors and dozens of staff have been crucial to the success of this institution, and the earliest cultivators of the collections, especially Decherd Turner, have been recognized for setting Bridwell in a direction that allowed it to flourish and grow into what it is today.[2]

In the period before Bridwell's establishment, Kate Warnick's contributions as the first theology librarian (1924–49) fostered and led the library through times of development that made the theological library a respectable and cherished place. As the first director of Bridwell from 1950 to 1980, Decherd Turner established an encompassing and creative space for collecting—one which possessed qualities embodied in both a theological library and a museum space. Without Turner's enterprising ideals, creative impulses, collaborative undertakings, and enduring curiosity, we would not be having the conversations we have today, nor would I be speaking of ontologies or considering Bridwell as a library-museum space. Some may question even the museum designation, because nowhere in our charter or official description is there the description of museum. But as we entrust our materials of great quality and value into the hands of specialists, feature ever more extensive professional exhibits, and support a full-time staff of curators, digital designers, conservators, and exhibition programmers, the role of exhibition spaces and defined exhibits are intermingled with what characterizes the singing of the muses—the museum space and idea.[3]

For thirty years, Decherd Turner expressed the collecting principles of an eclectic personality through a vision that projected the Bridwell brand as one that was both-and: both a Methodist theologi-

cal library and a special collections repository of great prestige. Yet, in many ways, Turner went far beyond the collecting principles of the originating documents or the notions of Mr. Joseph Sterling Bridwell, the Perkins family, and other major founding donors. Turner was a man of particular interests, who clearly saw the role of special collections and the library itself as expansive, holistic, and even organic. The specificity of Methodistica and Wesleyana certainly had their place, but so too did the manuscripts, incunabula, and so-called monuments of early printing, which are among Bridwell's cherished prizes. Yet these, too, merely scratch the surface of what Turner procured. The archival collections themselves are exponents of fields of knowledge and inquiry that burst beyond the predictable limits of a premiere theological collection, and the multitude of fine art, antique furniture, historic sculptures, occult archives, and a plethora of cultural artifacts are both breathtaking and stunningly disparate.

Nearly three quarters of a century on, a re-assessment is in order. In many ways, the often unarticulated and under-the-radar collecting habits of the first Bridwell director make sense when we consider the conditions and circumstances of the mid-twentieth century world and a time when the legacies of old-world museums were still very much on the minds of directors, curators, and conservators. The particularity of Turner's visions, along with some of the collections he inherited from SMU's original antiquarian collections (e.g., the A. V. Lane Egyptological Collection) were in so many ways the manifestation of what is commonly referred to as the *Wunderkammer* legacy—the "cabinet of wonders" that stands as the origin of the modern museum. The relationships between the "cabinet's owner" and the establishment of museums echoes the matrix of relationships among donors, curators, directors, and administrators. For Turner, his strengths were in these very matrices of power and persuasion, whereby he was able to turn chance encounters or introductions into major acquisitions of collections or works of art—some of which today are of significant value.

Many tales of Turner's methods still circulate among us. Two years ago, I wrote an article for one of our newsletters about a modernist painting a colleague had found in storage at Bridwell. I liked it so much that I had it installed in my office. Some months after, I received a lovely letter from the artist, who was unknown to me but had somehow come across the article online. The remarkable part of this story is that the painter was ninety-five-year-old Marlinde von Ruhs—an internationally acclaimed artist who was still active paint-

ing and who had, for many years, been living in Guadalajara, Mexico. When I called her in Mexico a few weeks after receiving her letter, she told me that Turner was quite persuasive in his wishes to acquire the painting for Bridwell—even though she was not in the market to sell. His impression of the work was that it fit well within the collections of the theological library, broadly defined as they were.

Stories like this demonstrate a number of points to consider, but not least is the consideration of modern and contemporary art as contributing to theological reflection, inquiry, and research. What we should consider, though, is that Turner's own seemingly haphazard collecting was not all that erratic. Instead, it foretold the need to preserve in areas that might easily be discarded and forgotten—like the parapsychology, occult, and astrology materials. It also encapsulated a vision of theological and religious studies where there were very few boundaries or limits: cultural artifacts of Qing era statuary, Meiji period Shinto shrines, and Tibetan Buddhist manuscripts, along with paintings from European modernists, convey the broader richness of an institutional repository and museum-space, while also recognizing that these materials both instruct and inspire those who enter this place. Theology, thus, cannot be simply a rigid and inflexible enterprise of letters between itinerant preachers or Protestant hymnologists; it must be an expansive, holistic, organic, and living presence of the spoken, written, sung, and artistic human experience. This is the legacy of Turner and Bridwell broadly speaking, and one which inspires us to move forward with fortitude, grace, and a commitment to an awe-inspiring future.

Part III: The Future of Bridwell and Special Collections

Contexts, Communities, and Commodities: or, How to Plan the Future Through Differing Means

As I noted in Part I, the successes of Bridwell are derived from a long historical complex of donations, investments, creativity, vision, and the constant commitment of an expansive community of stakeholders who, since the beginning, have wanted to see the library thrive. I cannot emphasize this more strongly because, in many ways, I now

believe that the greatest inhibitors to the successful growth of both an institution and its library are the unwillingness to take risk on innovations and the undervaluing of the library itself as something decreasing in value rather than increasing in value. Institutions may have the greatest collections, the greatest spaces, the greatest staff, but, if their self-image does not match their potential, this will immediately stanch the potential for growth and transformation into something greater.

A major problem for many theological libraries is not simply a balanced budget or even underfunding. Rather, it is the overall environment of fiscal competition within the institution itself. If the library is seen as merely "a department" that requires subsidizing, that not only perpetuates the general self-image of a dependent subsidiary that plods along, it also does not encourage faith that a fundamental administrative unit within a theological institution can re-establish itself as something more extraordinary, visionary, and central to the overall success of that school.

Among the ingredients required, then, are a) the willingness of library admin and staff to innovate around the unique qualities of the library; b) the actual cultural, social, and bibliographic artifacts with which to engage (e.g., special collections and archives); c) the administrative trust, openness, and vision of the institution to afford open conversations among departments, especially development and fundraising, finance, recruitment, alumni relations, and the library; and d) a frank discussion about how to raise monies, fund new endowments, and attract a more diverse base of the public in the theological institutional space.

Theological schools, seminaries, and their libraries often focus narrowly on their labors—the "that's all we can do" model. Instead, the approach should be more than engaging with the routine patron, but with consumers of information, spaces, aesthetics, and comfort. This does not mean that all theological libraries will become the Met or the Louvre. What it does mean, though, is that all theological libraries have the potential to establish and grow into spaces of intellectual, theological, and even commercial exchange that will foster and enhance the greater institution itself. This can begin by eliciting monies to establish funds supporting theological artwork, youth-oriented projects, or even highly stylized internships. Developing from the ground up the cross-campus relationships, the clear channels of communication, and the overall willingness to enact new ideas into something concrete will yield new opportunities.

This evocation is not a recipe for how to start or build a museum or, as I have now stated, a library-museum. Instead, my suggestion considers the components and roadblocks to what could potentially be outstanding curatorial components of almost any theological library. Beyond the proclamations of the ICOM and how they have defined "museum" in the last two decades, we also face the general connotations of the word in public and among theologically minded colleagues. The term "museum" itself has, for many, a fairly unattractive reputation—that of being boring, old-fashioned, and a waste of time. Yet in recent years we know—both from the most recent ICOM statement and from contemporary and recently updated museums themselves—that these institutions have worked vigorously to remake their identity as anything but boring.

The takeaway then, for most theological libraries, might best be found in the following prescription: Institutions should collaborate internally to understand their archival past, while engaging with the immediate present and preparing for the impending future. In so doing, they must not limit their engagement to a discrete group of incoming students, for example, but engage the expansiveness of the public, which is interested in a wider palette of offerings—in the arts, in music, in social justice, in community affairs, in collaborative discussions, in lecture series, and much more. Expanding beyond a traditional understanding of a library will yield greater returns in not just monetary gains or donations but the cultural and social capital that actual money cannot buy.

I do not propose that all theological schools or theological libraries aim to build or establish their own "museums" here. Instead, the purpose of my considerations are to offer new ways to think about our libraries and institutions broadly speaking. Perhaps most important to the way that I think about our institutions is to remember that the more organic and holistic of an approach one takes, the greater the rate of success there will be in that institution. Indeed, even for our own libraries and theological schools, the words of Abraham Lincoln continue to ring true: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

From Gloom to Social Work?

Among the vast literature on museums and cultural institutions, two very different yet fascinating approaches may be touched on when considering the potential scenarios for the library-museum of the fu-

ture, which overlaps well with Bridwell and its own vision. First, in a century-old essay by John Cotton Dana, titled "The Gloom of the Museum" (1917), the author explores the historical backgrounds to the rise of museums in relation to the formation of nations and empires in Europe.[4] The glorious beauty of objects that were acquired would eventually have complicated relationships with those very empires, especially as cultural artifacts and artworks often came from places where they should have remained. As materials in museums came to reflect expansions of the state, the role of custodian of artifacts would become increasingly important. In recent times, the critical self-assessment and appraisal of not just artifacts or cultural objects but the very historiographies and provenances of cultural heritage are in constant need of reevaluation. The "gloom," though, of Dana's title is in part the recognition that the contents of a museum (or, for us, a library-museum) have multiple layers of history, meaning, and interpretation—many of which had not been discussed in the public square. But this then allows us to transition to an approach that has to do with not simply our holdings but how we show and interpret them, as well as how this can serve the public good. This second consideration comes from a fascinating book by Lois H. Silverman, titled *The Social Work of Museums* (2010). Silverman's assertion is that the museum serves a particular set of purposes that have evolved over time and are required to be more purposeful, interactive, and central to the work of society and its transformation toward the good. As Silverman writes:

> Fundamentally, museums offer interactive social experiences of communication in which relationships are activated and people make meaning of objects. This communication yields beneficial consequences: people may meet fundamental human needs like the need for self-esteem and self-actualization; achieve change in essential areas such as knowledge, skills, values, and behavior; build and strengthen social connections and relationships, including social capital; address social problems; and promote social justice and equality. (21)

Taken perhaps a step further, Chet Orloff explores in his article, "Should Museums Change our Mission and Become Agencies of Social Justice?" (2017), whether museums should take on the role of arbiters of social justice and change as prescribed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Orloff's concerns elevate the conversation toward the particular issues of social change, and specifically justice

around immigration, and how that plays out in smaller, local, money-strapped institutions. But we may apply the central tenet of his critiques here to how museums or library-museums should consider not simply practices of collecting but of curating, exhibiting, and engaging in critical scholarship around relevant and pressing topics facing our global society. There are ways that both the financially secure and the smaller, budget-strapped institutions can contribute to giving voice and support to social struggles, justice, and work. Institutions are often inventive places or, more precisely, they have creative staff who are able to find ways to improve the environment and cultivate a socially evolving and supporting space. This is, in fact, how we as a library, a theological library, and a museum space can transition from Dana's gloom to Silverman's and Orloff's social work. The library-museum of the future will demand those changes, because the people who use the library will require it long before that.

Accessibility

With these positions in mind, we can consider how changes to the vision of a library like Bridwell may coincide with adapting to cultural changes. Among the most central considerations, then, would have to be accessibility. Accessibility may be understood in a host of ways, but essentially it concerns the idea of a broad public gaining entry and access to materials with fewer restrictions and roadblocks. Part of the democratization of information and knowledge requires us to offer not simply more opportunities for access but more information about materials we already hold. Most special collections have backlogs and unprocessed items. These areas would be included in an accessibility plan, where increased or reconfigured staffing might evaluate such backlogs and develop specific plans to make materials known and available. The other part of the accessibility framework will be to engage more thoroughly with the digital humanities and web access for patrons. With this in mind, Bridwell itself continues to work diligently in this area and will further opportunities in the future.

Printing, Presses, and the Legacy of Typography

Bridwell Library has a rich legacy in the area of printing, typography, and traditional presses. The centerpiece of this triad is the Ashendene Press and collection, founded by Charles St. John Hornby. For decades, the themes of printing and typography played significant roles in the historical contexts of Bridwell's pedagogy, research, conservation, and curation. In the last couple years, there has been renewed interest in exploring these areas more deeply and constructively, and recent acquisitions in typography, lettering, and font design have contributed to this area of Bridwell's history. Though these themes may seem more antique and less contemporary, there are burgeoning fields of digital font and letter design, especially as we evolve in virtual and online spaces. Bridwell is in a unique position to bring its historical works and holdings into contact with digital innovators of typography, such that we may provide internships, events, lectures, and research fellowships around these topics, and perhaps even establish a program or institute for the future of print design. The world of typographic experimentation continues to be an expanding and illuminative field that is driven by digital programming, market branding, and innovative visual associations. By tapping into this future of psychology and design, Bridwell will be poised to engage in a highly productive and strategically important endeavor. Additionally, there are various avenues to take in both traditional paper publishing and digitally born publishing, where new publications will carry the Bridwell Library imprint.

Calligraphy, Art Production, and New Book Arts

In the year prior to COVID-19, I had the opportunity to meet members of several calligraphic guilds in the North Texas region. Many of these talented individuals had a long history and expansive reach within the national and international networks of professional calligraphers. Bridwell is ready to engage in creative projects and possible commissions with calligraphers, who may design and create a series of hand-drawn works that are specific to Bridwell's areas of theological and biblical studies. A move toward a more concerted approach around arts production will benefit not simply the artists involved, but the broader community of global researchers. And the

hope is that we will afford opportunities to artists from traditionally underrepresented communities to explore themes relevant to contemporary society and theological reflection. Furthermore, when an institution of any size promotes and supports commissions of calligraphy, art, and artist books, from modest compensations to major remuneration, the library effectively acquires a unique item that will never be found in any other institution. As a result, this specificity will build the library's credentials and attract donors, researchers, and patrons for years to come. And pedagogically, these works will serve as additional entry points into theological discourse. Among other ideas that we have considered are increased engagements with younger demographics, high school groups, and children, especially from communities without easy access to or knowledge of the work of a theological library and special collections. Such circumstances may afford opportunities for students to experience a place like Bridwell in a way that may help them form new and positive ideas about libraries, archives, collections, and museums—perhaps even giving them inspiration for future careers. These same groups eventually may be encouraged through volunteer opportunities or even competitions to create their own hand-made books and other works of calligraphic art. One day, such undertakings and community-focused engagement may be seen as useful by future researchers seeking to understand the imaginations and visions of our children in a complex, evolving, and transitional era of American life.

The Library-Museum as Performative Space with Special Collections

Since coming to Bridwell in 2018, I have had the pleasure of working with a number of insightful and intellectually thoughtful individuals. Some have provided useful and, at times, provocative ideas about how the space of a library may serve not simply to host musical performances, but how the articulation of such performance may be incorporated into a conversation among the extant holdings, future acquisitions, and planned commissions.[5] It should also be recognized that Bridwell is physically situated exactly between Perkins School of Theology and the Meadows School of Music. This reality—along with the interests of faculty with shared appointments in both schools—affords Bridwell a unique position to articulate a future with more than simply unused space in mind. Spaces, like walls, are themselves meant to provide both utility and imagination for the work we set

out to do. Therefore, the future vision of such spaces shall be more than thoroughfares for patrons to access the collected works of Wesley or the most recent biblical commentaries from Europe. The aim will be to create a space that enhances the patron's experience there, drawing them in and helping them see how the building itself is a dynamic structure containing art, artifacts, sculptures, rare books, archives, and an occasional musical event or theatrical rendition. Performance, after all, is not simply in the moment when an instrument or voice is sounded, but in the total experience of those involved in the process. Bridwell, then, should consider itself in a constant and perpetual state of performance, a waltz or tango of the library-museum with its extensive community of patrons.

Part IV: Conclusion—Bridwell in 2520 CE?

What will there be in this place in five hundred years? Perhaps we must look back in order to look forward. When we consider our collections in one way but our spaces and library buildings in another, we are not getting the entire picture of what we should be imagining. It is easy to rely upon our projections of books, manuscripts, and other cultural items in our mindscape because the work that we do demands that. We are, after all, in a theological space—a school of theology—where we discuss and debate and consider the refinements of what it means to be in relationships with the divine, with each other, with the world. And these are generally mediated through the cultural objects and images found via books and artifacts. Yet, we must also consider the spaces where we learn—now more than ever, since we have been subjected to a disembodying pandemic that makes us certainly more aware of ourselves and our physicality in a way that we were not so keen to observe or recognize before. The whole concept of presence today is something that has far more meaning and value than it may have had a year ago.

So, what does this mean, then—that we must recognize and consider the physical space, the environment, and the fluid articulation of nature in the broader scheme of theological education, libraries, our collections, and the museum territory that enumerates and defines a place like Bridwell? The campus and space of SMU, along with Perkins School of Theology and Bridwell itself, have been dissimilar throughout time. The years between 1920 and 1970 are the same duration of time as those between 1970 and 2020, yet they are vastly

different in how they were experienced and even how the buildings, land, and space related to one another. The Bridwell building did not even exist in 1920, and the campus had not been "fully" transformed into the lush landscape of subtle rotating gardens, aged live oaks, and perfectly cut sod squares. The earth appeared dry, the land had not been completely cultivated or torn open and covered over with macadam. There were likely no cars on campus a century ago, and certainly no parking lots (though Ford had already opened a plant in the area in 1915).

The cultivation of the campus over a hundred years also reflects the harnessing of nature and the environment of water and earth. The budget of the university's groundskeeping in 2020, and especially its monumental grass plantings, is likely to have exceeded the budget for the entire university of 1920. In 1870, the land was an aggregation of dry ranches, and in 1820 or 1770 it was a scrub-covered dry earth that had been possessed under various treaties by the French and, prior to that, the Viceroyalty of the Kingdom of Spain. In 1670 or 1570 or even 1470, we can easily establish the histories and prosopography of books and manuscripts in the Bridwell's collection, but all that we can say of the land was that it was inhabited and utilized by the Caddo tribes and that there was likely a small dry-bed river or stream that ran under the space that is now Bridwell Library. Is it then even worth predicting what might come in fifty, a hundred, or five hundred years, especially when the differences of the last five hundred could never have been imagined at the time?

Theological schools of 1820 were institutions that are virtually unknown today. The demographics, curricula, and expectations of two centuries ago were quite different than what they are today. So too were their libraries and research needs. Education, information, resources, libraries, museums, nature, and the environment are all things that change; they are also things that are very much connected. As Bridwell and other institutions and libraries take their steps into the future, we must recognize this greater holistic enterprise.

At the start of this chapter, I asked the question: How do we continue to work within a profession where our human presence has been central to our mission and livelihood, yet by its own virtue during a pandemic, we are forced to abandon that physical human presence and adapt to an increasingly virtual environment? The short answer is adaptability. The longer answer involves our participation in a more studied, self-reflective position that requires greater openness, more expansive thinking, increased inclusion of diverse

stakeholders, and a willingness to take risks. As the libraries and library-museums of the future will be more hybrid, they will find the best elements of the physical and the virtual and emerge as the most effective institutions possible. While I have also written these considerations with Bridwell specifically in mind and the privilege that comes with having specific means and endowments to support many such programs, I also recognize, having worked in several smaller institutions with extremely tight budgets, that there can be opportunities to do many of the same things, such as commissions, community art projects, and eliciting donated works of art. But this will certainly involve more legwork, coordination, creativity, crowdsourcing, and fundraising to accomplish those goals. It is not impossible. And I still firmly believe that our greatest resources are our staffs and their collective creativity—the seeds of innovation.

I have written this essay in the hopes that we can have the thoughtfulness, consideration, and courage to look deeply into the future, not necessarily to predict what might happen, but to provide a guiding spirit of our present. For we know—or at least hope to know—those things which are around us. We recognize what is in our world, and we can facilitate small actions into incremental change. We will never know what will come so far into that crystal ball of the next half-millennium, but it is not about our knowing—it is about our preparing. And, like the president of that Dallas religious organization, whom I mentioned at the outset, our responsibilities are in how willing and able we are to commit to our responsibilities as stewards and custodians of the present cultures around us and to do the best in making the world better for those who come after.

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Endnotes

1. There are many people to recognize and thank for all the work done in our libraries and communities. It is often a risk to list names, because invariably you miss someone. I will say that the current staff of Bridwell continues to impress me with their creativity, focus, and hard work, and I want to mention that their approaches to their many labors are much appreciated. Everything they do facilitates our greater goals of re-imagining the library and what can be accomplished with its resources and collections. Special thanks are in order to Jane Lenz Elder, Ellen Frost, Jon Speck, Kimberly Hunter, R. Arvid Nelsen, Leslie Fuller, Rebecca Howdeshell, Timothy Binkley, Frances Long, Robert Tifft, Michelle Ried, Lara Corazalla, Jesse Hunt, Seth Miskimins, Mehret Negash, Robert Edwards, and to the countless others in SMU Libraries and Perkins School of Theology. Additional thanks to Deans Craig Hill and Holly Jeffcoat for their tireless support and leadership.
2. There are too many to thank for their great and enduring contributions, though, most recently, my two predecessors—Dr. Valerie Hotchkiss and Roberta Schaafsma—had tenures of more than a decade each and provided multiple contributions to our special collections. Notably, Dr. Hotchkiss significantly expanded our incunabula collection and developed a variety of engagement programs with the public and international researchers, including fellowships and annual lecture series.
3. One consideration of the "museum" designation may be to evaluate the ratio of cultural materials, artifacts, and rare books, for example, in relation to staffing costs. For example, if an institution holds at least x-number of items (determined by the institution), which in value exceed the annual salary of any given staff member, then that is the benchmark that determines museum status. Certainly, there will be critics, but some modest framework should be in place to articulate these determinations.
4. First published in 1917, the essay has been reprinted and discussed in museum circles for more than a century.
5. Drs. Christopher Anderson and Marcell Steuernagel have been tremendously helpful as interlocutors of tonal philosophies, acoustics, and general performance theory, which continues to be much appreciated and helpful in the strategic thinking around musical spaces.