

*40 Years an Academic Librarian*

*John Mark Tucker, Christian College Librarians, Gordon College, 30 May 2013*

I want to thank Myron for hosting CCL; this involves quite a bit of hard work. He and I have been friends since 1995 when he was a student at Illinois. As a Lipscomb student, Myron studied under Charles McVey, Professor of German and Russian. I had known Charlie since high school, and he asked me to talk to Myron about the library profession; so I drove from Lafayette to Urbana to meet him. Eighteen years after the fact, in 2013, these are “Things I Wish I Had Said to Myron.” Incidentally, Myron has not needed my help. He understands academic libraries, technology, teaching and learning, and higher education management.

But I also sorted these things out with Carisse Berryhill. At ACU, she conducted an oral history interview, and then sent me an outline of our conversation. So my comments are also labeled “What Carisse Said.” Obviously, these are surrogate titles for things I really want to say.

By way of introduction, I worked in academic libraries continuously (from September 1968 through October 2011) except for 15 months as Graduate Assistant at Peabody College, now a part of Vanderbilt. I practiced librarianship for 3 years (FHC), 1 year (Volunteer State Community College), 6 years (Wabash College), 24 years (Purdue University), 8 years (ACU). I have a B.A. in English, also an M.L.S., Ed.S. and Ph.D. in library and information science. For continuing education: workshops

conducted by the Human Resources Office at Purdue, the Advanced Library Management Seminar at Miami University, and the New Director Mentor Program sponsored by the College Library Section (ALA).

I did not have the “complete” mentor who showed me step-by-step what to do and who introduced me to people. It was especially difficult at Wabash College. The director was 31 years my senior and his priorities were not library-related. He and I were great personal friends, but he could not help me professionally. I did, however, encounter amazing people who gave me thoughtful, spirit-filled advice.

There were six of them, some involving only 3-4 conversations over several years: Ed Gleaves directed the library at Lipscomb, the library school at Peabody, and the Tennessee State Library & Archives; I was Ed’s student at Lipscomb and graduate assistant in library school; Jessie Carney Smith directs the library at Fisk University and holds an endowed chair funded by comedian Bill Cosby; Smith was one of my Peabody professors; Ed Holley directed departmental libraries at Illinois, the library system at the University of Houston, and the library school at North Carolina—his educational trajectory was the same as mine—Lipscomb, Peabody, Illinois—so we knew many of the same people; Don Davis taught in the ISchool at the University of Texas; he and I were co-authors; Emily Mobley directed the library system at Purdue; D.W. Krummel directed departments at the Library of Congress and the Newberry Library, and he directed my dissertation at Illinois.<sup>1</sup> These people embodied scholarship and service, and stretched my thinking and my imagination. The

question was, whether or not I mature enough to listen, and to use the advice they gave me.

These folks call to mind the counsel of Paul the apostle. He said that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (*Romans* 15: 4). These individuals gave advice that I needed, because God wants His people to live in hope.

Despite personal comments, I do not want to be autobiographical. In his book, *The Social Animal*, David Brooks writes that two-thirds of the words spoken by males are about themselves.<sup>2</sup> But this talk is not about me. My story is my framework; but I am not talking about my story *per se*. Think of this as a report from the field—a scout surveys the terrain and reports to a commanding officer. This is what I have observed—these things require our attention.

*First.* We need to think above and beyond the library. We need to talk about university topics using university language. Outside the building, we need to limit library jargon. Terms such as “Authority Control,” “Bibliographic Utility,” even “Reference” or “Cataloging” mean very little to professors or administrators. And those who use these terms attach different meanings or different values to them.

When we speak our own language, we talk among ourselves but we limit our credibility for larger conversation. We are, above all, academics. We have things to

say about curriculum, instruction, faculty governance, administration, development, admissions, retention, scholarly communication, institutional repositories, distance learning, and graduate education. We are just as well equipped for these topics as professors of Biology, History, or Art.

Except for people in Higher Education Management, scholars in these other fields have no more authority than we do. In fact, they may take a more narrow point-of-view. We in the library tend to take a “whole-campus” point-of-view.

We should be the first citizens of the university. Our best and highest interest should be the common good, the best interests of everyone in the community. Our goals are intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth for every student and, indeed, every person on our campus. To these ends, we practice our craft.

We do not know which Accounting courses belong in a Business major, how much Molecular Biology is required for a major in Biology, or how much 18<sup>th</sup> Century History is needed for a History major. These are disciplinary matters.

But we should know the vocabulary, the trends in research, how the disciplines relate each to the other, how they impact core curricula, and how they impact teaching and learning and research and institutional values.

As a profession, we over-focus on process and we neglect purpose and value and meaning. Greg Smith of Liberty University writes that “Christian librarians focus research on practical topics rather than on theory that underlies them,” reflecting a general trend in the literature. We “are more likely to write about how to implement technology in [our] libraries than to expound on the values that characterize [our] work.”<sup>3</sup> James Thompson, formerly of the University of Reading in the U.K., writes that “A library school must teach the power of libraries in society, education, and culture, and prepare recruits to the profession to exploit this power for the good of the community.”<sup>4</sup> I wonder if library educators do this. I also wonder about continuing education: for example, the recent ACRL conference in Indianapolis offered many programs on instruction and services with minimal offerings for collections. But collections—the intellectual contents of our resources—are the very topics of most interest to students and faculty.

At ACU, one of the librarians showed me her list of duties. She said, “I do these ten things and they are all important.” After further conversation, it was clear to both of us that 3-4 things were of high importance and at least 3 things could be omitted altogether. This is a biblical idea. Paul told early Christians about priorities. Certain things were of “first importance” (*I Corinthians 15: 3*).

**Second.** Our first and last word should be collaboration. Academic silos are a threat to innovation; the library can offer a better model. This is what I have in mind. Team teaching has a long tradition. Openness to team teaching is essential to information

literacy. At ACU, professors from History, Art, and English taught a course on the Gilded Age & Progressive Era (1870 - 1920). Soon the library was involved—the course was research intensive—one of our librarians collaborated with these professors, assisting this class even when it moved to Oxford for Study Abroad. At Purdue, a librarian co-planned, co-taught, and co-graded the History of Photography course. Here at Gordon College, Myron has brought together the Library, the History Department, and the Salem Museum, working with others in very creative ways.

Information literacy is definitional for libraries. But remember that only a small corps of professors will work with us, so we work with that very small corps—and we must work in collaborative ways.

At ACU we established partnerships for the Learning Commons (LC): Art & Interior Design; the Café Service, Marketing Class (College of Business Administration); House Keeping; Faculty Development (Center for Teaching and Learning); Physical Resources; Speaking Center (Communication Department); Technology Support; and the Writing Center (English Department). We had worked together to add value.

But we had something else equally important, the opportunity to re-direct and re-frame ideas about the library. This would not have been possible for the library alone. A leading authority in this area is Scott Bennett, formerly library director at Johns Hopkins and Yale.<sup>5</sup> His most important work is a collection of essays, *Library*

*as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*, available full text, free [pdf] on the CLIR website.

The biblical principle for collaboration is that one person sharpens another, as iron sharpens iron (*Proverbs 27: 17*). Put differently, two people (or a cross-functional team) can create something more effective than one person working alone. Steve Jobs talked about designing the iPod, the iPhone, and other products, Apple employees talked “incessantly about what they call ‘deep collaboration’ or ‘cross-pollination’ or ‘concurrent engineering.’ . . . Products are worked on parallel . . . in endless rounds of interdisciplinary design reviews. Managers elsewhere boast about what little time they spend in meetings. Apple is big on them and proud of it. . . . You have to develop a product in a . . . collaborative, integrated way.”<sup>6</sup>

The negative argument is that, if we do not seek partners, we become irrelevant. As college librarians, we stand at the margins of power. Power in the academy is vested in professors who design curricula, offer courses, assign grades. Degrees, grades, and credentials are the “coin of the realm.” The library operates at the side of this work [explaining why thousands of colleges offer programs but do not fund libraries]. As librarians, we need partners to expand our influence, to give us the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students. I suggest a little-known book by James Thompson, *Library Power*, to underscore the importance of what we do. When I get discouraged or depressed, I read the Psalms of David, and then I read *Library Power*.<sup>7</sup>

***Third.*** Pursue beauty in the context of student experience. What happens to the senses? What can we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch? Our students seek an experience. People like a certain atmosphere, something that appeals to the whole human being. Starbucks has re-defined public space. That company makes it possible for people to be alone and, at the same time, to be with others. This happens in ways that are welcoming, in ways that hint at a sense of community. In Christian higher education, we can create real community. It may require an Architect, Interior Designer, Ergonomic Specialist, or Psychologist. We should never under value beauty. “From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth” (*Psalms* 50: 2). “The Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (*Psalms* 96: 6b – 7a). Beauty is something we should seek and cultivate. We must, however, ensure that we worship the Creator and not the things He has created.

As librarians, we cannot build attractive, hospitable space on our own. Our forte is service, efficiency, and early adoption. We need help from experts. We want students to inhabit inviting space because we want them to feel welcome, but also because we want them to learn. Research shows that most learning takes place outside the class room. The library ought to be that place.

We have another reason to create hospitable space—a college needs students, and students often choose a college on the basis of facilities. So our libraries can be



vitaly important in recruiting, admissions, and retention. The library can be a big reason a student chooses our college. The Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers conducted a survey. They found that buildings related to academics were “extremely important” or “very important” to students choosing a college. Students looked, first of all, for high quality facilities in their prospective major. The next most important facilities were, in order: libraries, sophisticated technology, classrooms, residence halls, exercise facilities, bookstores, open spaces, recreation facilities, science and engineering facilities, dining halls, performing arts centers, the student union, visual arts centers, intramural sports, and varsity athletic facilities.<sup>8</sup> In thinking about sixteen types of facilities, students identified the library second as a factor of interest. I regret that, in order to attract students, a campus needs to look like a country club. But that great philosopher Barbara Tucker’s Uncle Dewey B. Wilson said, “It is what it is.” The library must to be attractive and hospitable, more so than most public space.

***Fourth.*** Our staff members deserve a transformational experience. Never underestimate the value of recruiting and developing good people. Most of the work on the ACU Learning Studio occurred while I was away. Mark McCallon co-chaired a planning committee assisted by a consultant. This person created a survey for our staff and he interviewed every librarian privately, giving Mark and Carisse and me general feed-back while protecting confidentiality. People connected with this process were pleased to talk about technology and learning and the large issues of the library.

The lesson I learned has to do with the importance of sound advice from an outside observer who has a breadth and depth of experience. Our consultant spent enough time with our staff that they knew I did not have all the answers. I needed help. They knew all along—that I needed help, but I let them know—that I knew—that they knew.

There is great variation in institutional culture. At Purdue, we never used a consultant. We had to do things the Purdue way—so we engaged in circular thinking; we compounded our mistakes. ACU was not afraid to ask for outside help. Our staff members were given wide exposure to new ideas, and they engaged their work in a fresh way. With our consultant, we had new opportunity to show our staff that we respected their opinion.

***Fifth.*** We need a biblical approach to the human labor that goes into making a good library. Libraries are labor intensive; often two-thirds of a budget is allocated for salaries. People are made in God's image; they are our most important asset. Everyone has something important to contribute. Popular notions of work are not biblical. Many people regard work as punishment for sin. Ancient Greek citizens preferred not to work at all, slaves did it for them. People view work as necessary to meet financial and family obligations. But people also use derogatory terms to describe work.

But work was created by God, and He saw that it was good. He places equal value on physical and intellectual labor. In the Garden of Eden, before the fall, Adam did physical labor—caring for and cultivating the Garden, and intellectual labor, naming the animals. God envisioned and created and sanctioned both kinds of activity. Mark Twain said that, “things that are fun in life are illegal, immoral, or fattening.” God’s view is that He made every task for our good because He is a good God. Unless a task is illegal, unethical, or immoral, it is good and we honor God by doing it. The apostle Paul said, “Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your master; you serve the Lord Christ” (*Colossians 3: 23 – 24*).

At Purdue, I met a man sweeping the stairs in a parking garage. I asked about his work. He said, “I clean 167 stairwells.” (Some were 3 stories, some were 12 stories). I said, “What do you do when you finish all 167?” He said, “Then I start over. That way I keep them all clean.” I said the only thing I could think to say, “God bless you. Thank you for doing this.” God values the sweeper of stairs as much as the president or the professor. This is God’s way. In his memoir, Jack P. Lewis talks about a church in Berkeley, California which had two elders. One was a renowned scholar of Greek and Latin, the other a member of the University of California maintenance staff—the two worked in harmony, side-by-side serving God and his kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

Academe is a hierarchy. It rewards some more than others. Society as a whole is this way. But in the economy of God, all of us are called to be faithful to the task we put our hand to—physical labor, intellectual labor, artistic labor, or social labor

regardless of where that task fits into the social or economic order. All of it is God's work; all of us are His stewards regardless of our place in the world.

Pollster George Gallup surveyed 1.7 million workers. He found that 71% are emotionally detached from their work. Respondents were “not engaged” in—or were “actively disengaged” from their work. “They are emotionally disconnected from their workplaces . . . . That leaves [less than] a third of American workers who are ‘engaged,’ or involved in and enthusiastic about their work and contributing to their organizations in a positive manner.”<sup>10</sup>

What is going on here? People do not use the gifts, talents, and passion that God gave them. They do not enrich their work places with the things that interest them most. Employers wrongly assume that people can be trained to do pretty much anything. Companies waste billions of dollars teaching people to do particular things, often without a sense of what people are especially good at doing. All staff, librarians, library faculty members, and support staff must have the opportunity to do what we do best. This improves our quality of life; it helps us have fun at work. King Solomon wrote that, “It is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil” (*Ecclesiastes* 3: 13).

Professional growth occurs when it coincides with existing interests and passions. This is a biblical concept. “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (*Romans* 12: 6a). “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit; and there

are varieties of services, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates them all in everyone” (*I Corinthians 12: 4 – 6*). God made us to be different, and His dream for us is that we become who He made us to be.

The things we need to do will change—so when we hire, we do not fill a particular position but we seek people who want to learn and grow and adjust at the same time that they identify and use the gifts God gave them.

**So we have these five lessons:**

- To think above and beyond the library.
- To make our first and last words “collaboration”.
- To pursue beauty in the context of student experience.
- To provide our staff a transformative experience.
- To offer a biblical approach to the human labor.

Finally, we work in settings driven by outcomes; we have written goal statements and learning outcomes but, at either the micro or macro level, we must not ignore biblical values. We plant, we water, but only God makes it grow. “Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (*I Corinthians 3: 7*). We are not owners or landlords, we are stewards. And it is required of stewards that we be found faithful (*I Corinthians 4: 2*). Let us use the

**heart and the mind God has given us to model the life of service and to take joy in the task God has given us to do.**

Notes

1. Steve Cohen, "Interview with Dr. Edwin S. Gleaves," *Tennessee Libraries* 59:2 (2009); Christa Hardy, "Piecing a Quilt: Jessie Carney Smith and the Making of African American Women's History," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois, 2010); Lelia G. Rhodes, "A Critical Analysis of the Career Backgrounds of Selected Black Female Librarians," (Ph.D. Diss., Florida State University, 1975); Jessie Carney Smith, "The Four Cultures: Twenty Years Later," in *The Black Librarian in America Revisited*, edited by E.J. Josey, 143 – 51 (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1994); Delmus E. Williams, et al, *For the Good of the Order: Essays in Honor of Edward G. Holley* (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1994); Cheryl Knott Malone, Hermina G.B. Anghelescu, and John Mark Tucker, eds., *Libraries & Culture: Historical Essays Honoring the Legacy of Donald G. Davis, Jr.* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Center for the Book, 2006); David Hunter, ed., *Music Publishing & Collecting: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Krummel* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1994); Linnea Martin, "Pin the Tail on the DonKay: The Life of Libraries by Don Kay as Told to Linnea Martin." *Library Trends* 47:3 (Winter 1999), 375 – 94; Katherine Markee, "Interview with Emily Mobley, 2007, Nov. 21." Purdue University Oral History Program Collection.
2. David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2012), 14.

3. Gregory A. Smith, "A Philosophy of Christian Librarianship," in *Christian Librarianship: Essays on the Integration of Faith and Profession*, edited by Gregory A. Smith, 70 (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002).
4. James Thompson, *Library Power: A New Philosophy of Librarianship* (Hamden, Connecticut: Linnet Books, 1974), 20. See also James Thompson, *A History of the Principles of Librarianship* (Hamden, Connecticut: Linnet Books, 1977). Both books were co-published in London by Clive Bingley.
5. Scott Bennett, *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space* (Washington, DC: CLIR, 2005. [www.clir.org?PUBS/reports/129/contents.html](http://www.clir.org?PUBS/reports/129/contents.html)); and John Mark Tucker, "An Emerging Model for the Undergraduate Library." *Library Issues* 27:5 (May 2007), 1 - 4.
6. Quoted in Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*, Updated and Expanded Ed. (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2006), 440.
7. James Thompson, *Library Power* (1974). Studies of library theory and philosophy include Pierce Butler, *An Introduction to Library Science*, with an Introduction by Lester E. Asheim (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1967), originally published in 1933; Jesse Hauk Shera, *Sociological Foundations of Librarianship* (New York: Asia House, 1970); Barbara McCrimmon, ed., *American Library Philosophy: An Anthology* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1975); Andre Cossette, *Humanism and Libraries: An Essay on the Philosophy of Librarianship*, translated and



- edited by Rory Litwin (Duluth, Minnesota: Library Juice Press, 2009), originally published in 1976; A. Robert Rogers and Kathryn McChesney, *The Library in Society* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1984); Michael F. Winter, *The Culture and Control of Expertise: Toward a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship* (New York: Greenwood, 1988); and John M. Budd, *Knowledge and Knowing in Library and Information Science: A Philosophical Framework* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow, 2001).
8. Audrey Williams June, "Facilities Play a Key Role in Students' Enrollment Decisions," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52:40 (9 June 2006), A27; and Jonathan Zimmerman, "Colleges as Country Clubs," *Los Angeles Times* (21 April 2013).
  9. Jack P. Lewis, *As I Remember It: An Autobiography* (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate, 2012), 225.
  10. Nikki Blacksmith and Jim Harter, "Majority of American Workers Not Engaged in their Jobs," *gallup.com* (28 October 2011). Accessed 22 April 2013.