CHAPTER 5

The Sub-Library of Theology of the University Library of Würzburg: Difficulties and Challenges in the Past and Future

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1 Historical Stages

Since the second founding of the University of Würzburg by Prince-Bishop Julius Echter in 1582, there has been a Faculty of Theology, which was responsible for the academic training of the next generation of priests in the Diocese of Würzburg until 2020. The university library has been collecting literature for the teaching and research activities of the university since 1619, significantly interrupted by the turmoil of the Thirty Years’ War and by its destruction during the Second World War. It was since the 19th century that a library of the Faculty of Theology began to be decoupled from the university library, which until then had uniformly collected literature for all theological and also for other lectures of the University.1 In 1861 the Homiletic Seminar was founded with its own library, in 1884 the Church History Seminar, in 1885 the Patristic Seminar, in 1896/97 the Exegetical Seminar, in 1901 the Apologetical Seminar, in 1906 the Dogmatic Seminar and in 1918 the Moral Theological Seminar. The library had been housed in two rooms since the Faculty of Theology moved to the New University building in 1897. It was destroyed in the bombing of Würzburg on March 16, 1945. Still in 1945, the Faculty of Theology resumed its operations in rooms of the Mariannhill Missionaries until it could return to the restored building of the New University in 1950. The seminar libraries, which by then had been largely rebuilt through gifts of books, moved in with a collection of some 4,000 volumes. At this time, the faculty consisted of the professorships of Old Testament, New Testament Exegesis, Church History, Patrology, Dogmatics, Apologetics, Moral Theology, Canon Law, as well as an extraordinary professorship for the study of the Christian East. Now there began a differentiation of the range of subjects and associated with it a strong expansion, which also meant an increase of further seminar libraries. In 1953

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the chair of Pastoral Theology was added, in 1959 a professorship of Missiology, in 1964 Biblical Criticism, in 1965 Franconian Church History, in 1966 Liturgical Studies, in 1967 a second chair of Dogmatics, in 1968 Christian Social Sciences, so that by the end of the 1960s there were 17 seminar libraries.

The chairs purchased the books independently and inventoried them separately from 1970 onwards, since individual chairs were also housed outside the main building of the university, so that formally there were no more than several individual libraries. For their function as professors’ libraries, this procedure was completely sufficient, but it also made heavy demands on their secretariats and other staff at times: for literature from abroad, the appropriate suppliers had to be found, with a varying amount of correspondence and order control depending on the reliability. Multiple acquisitions were not uncommon due to an inadequate record-keeping: cataloguing was done with varying quality on two index cards: one for the local card catalogue and one for the ‘complete card index’, which, however, had no claim to a common alphabetical card catalogue, which had been built up since 1971 under the name ‘Complete Catalogue of the Theological Institutes and Seminars’ and was officially kept since 1973. Since 1982, a librarian expert performed the cataloguing according to the German ‘Rules for Alphabetical Cataloguing’. In 1990, cataloguing began with a local computer program until 1994, when the Bavarian Online Union Catalogue could be used for this purpose. The Bavarian Union Catalogue has been run based on Aleph since 2004. From 1995, the newly catalogued records were available in the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Of a total holding of approximately 170,000 volumes in all departmental libraries, less than one fifth was computer-catalogued around the year 2000. The decisive leap was achieved in the years after 2010, until in 2014 the complete computer cataloguing of all departmental libraries could be completed with the help of staff financed by grants from the Bavarian government. In these developments toward a high level of library cataloguing, the libraries at the Faculty of Catholic Theology have lagged far behind the standard of other libraries for a long time, because the staff of a chair could not professionally manage a library.

The academic assistants of the chairs were mostly responsible for signing the books, which they did with varying quality. Occasionally, a signing system was abruptly broken off and completely restarted, for example in the library of the chair of Fundamental Theology. This brought the library into a desolate condition. At first, however, the resistance of the chairs had to be overcome to uniformly arrange the books according to the ‘Regensburger Verbundklassifikation’ (RVK) and to abandon older arrangement systems. In 2001, the library of the chair of Liturgical Studies was started, followed by the library of the chair of New Testament Exegesis in 2003. It was not until around 2010 that the
resistance of the other chairs broke in here, when they first actively applied for the conversion of their holdings to the RVK. Nevertheless, the conversion of all previous chair libraries to RVK has not been achieved, nor does it make sense, because two thirds of the holdings are now in closed stacks. Here, the books remain arranged according to their old signing systems, which, however, are not continued either, because the new acquisitions are uniformly set up according to RVK.

The processing of the purchase of books and journals finally went back into the hands of the university library in 2005, which employs professionally trained staff for this purpose. The acquisition of literature, which had been handled by the chairs for decades, was unable to eliminate a deficit, especially in acquisition coordination, budget planning, vendor selection, and order management. Finally, it was noted that the secretariats had often not requested the library discount of 5% on their orders. In individual cases, there had even been overpriced orders placed with suppliers beforehand. Nevertheless, there were also quite a few resistances to overcome here, which on the one hand revealed an underlying distrust towards the university library. On the other hand, the attitude of the chairs was characterised by the concern that they would no longer be able to provide the staff of the chairs with sufficient meaningful tasks.

The university library then incorporated the acquisition process into its existing electronic acquisition system, which is based on the OCLC Sunrise local system to record the book data required for acquisition and lending for the entire university, thus adding another core competency to the day-to-day business of book processing in addition to cataloguing. Thus, worldwide title reference via the Online Public Access Catalogue became possible now of ordering. Reminders can be generated and sent automatically. Precise budget control is provided via the recording of order prices.

From 1976 onwards, there were 21 individual libraries. At last count, the presumed total stock was around 170,000 volumes. During this time, the newly founded universities in Regensburg and Augsburg, also with Catholic theological faculties, had already set the course for a unified library system, both spatially and organisationally, setting a trend in Bavaria that, for example, brought together the libraries of the two theological faculties of the University of Munich, along with the holdings for philosophy, into one large, specialised library in 2004. In 1997, it was the Bavarian Supreme Audit Office that startled the landscape of Catholic theological faculties in Bavaria by stating that they were overstaffed and recommending a reduction to three or four faculties, which would prove to be an important motivation for the future profiling of the existing locations. After initial considerations for a spatial consolidation of the Catholic Theological Faculty in Würzburg had become bogged down
with the plans for a third construction phase at the Hubland Campus in the 1980s, plans were formulated in 2001 by the Catholic Theological Faculty to consolidate the Institute of Practical Theology together with its libraries in the old building of the Clinic of Ophthalmology on Röntgenring, which ultimately resulted in a positive vote by the Governmental Commission in 2003, but did not come to fruition. This would have made it possible to abandon a makeshift building that had been used since the 1970s for the libraries of Moral Theology, history of the Eastern Church, and parts of Church History, and that was hardly thermally insulated, climatically unsuitable for storing books, and polluted with harmful substances. It was not until 2008 that the offices and libraries of the institute of Practical Theology and the chair of Moral Theology were able to move into rented rooms near the cathedral. After that, the possibility of an overarching solution for the entire faculty flickered once again for the site of the former Studienkolleg St. Benedikt, which had been abandoned by the Benedictine monks of Münsterschwarzach, but then fizzled out.

2 Consolidation in 2019

In July 2015, the Faculty of Catholic Theology informed the university library of plans to consolidate all chairs and affiliated facilities in a 1960s building at Domerschulstraße 15/Bibrastraße 14, which had not been used for a longer time and was within sight of the Old University. The new section library was to be housed on three floors, which were connected by a newly constructed staircase. However, the lowest floor could not be included in public use. Changes in favour of library concerns were only possible in details. The explosive nature of such questions as the capacity to accommodate all the old libraries, the necessary load-bearing capacity of the building’s ceilings, which had last been calculated in 1962, and the provision of workplaces therefore characterised the subsequent phase, in which the university library had to plan the consolidation of 16 individual libraries of eight spatial units at the new location.

The fundamental disadvantage of this project was that the university was thus entering into a new rental relationship – the owner is the Diocese of Würzburg – while the State of Bavaria, as the donor, also has unused land and building property in Würzburg. Here, however, the preliminary decision made by the president of the university and the bishop of Würzburg took precedence over more sustainable alternatives.

The university library had been excluded from the plans for too long. Because the universities require a considerable number of rooms and space for the constantly increasing demand for personnel and material capacities
during third-party funding and various project initiatives, decentralised libraries are increasingly becoming the focus of university building and space management and are thus becoming competitors, which are at least forced to deal with the space available to them in a demand-oriented, economic manner. In this case, however, space planning for the library degenerated into paternalistic management of leftovers, while other needed space was allocated to the faculty.

Another stumbling block was to be the fact that in the organisationally fractured university there is no unified planning staff for projects of this kind since it was also a matter of moving and merging the entire Faculty of Catholic Theology and not just the partial libraries of theology. The university’s space management department has no experience with structural design and bidding for a major move. The Dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology has no insight into the space requirements and professional planning for the library’s facility and operations. Finally, the library had not yet been involved in the tendering process for an on-site installed mobile shelving, because in Bavaria this is the responsibility of the building offices for state buildings, which are organised in a separate office structure.

The developer’s plans for equipping the library section allowed for a maximum stock of 140,000 volumes, which could only be achieved if a compact shelving system was installed in the basement, which was not accessible to the public. In fact, the theological departmental libraries had a significantly higher stock of (rounded) 170,000 volumes of monographs and periodicals. Therefore, it was necessary to agree with the 17 professors involved on the reduction to counteract the unusually dysfunctional condition of occupying less space with one library than was previously available in the aggregate of all individual libraries. To this end, the subject librarian presented a concept to the faculty in December 2017 to accomplish this and make room for future new acquisitions. It initially included a proposal to weed out the 18,000 duplicates identified. Selected back journal volumes of subscriptions that were no longer kept current were to be moved to an alternate stack at the university library. Furthermore, it was decided not to keep literature that was foreseeably no longer in use, such as social science literature from the 1970s and 1980s.

While the university library had already submitted the key figures for the load assumptions for library shelving in accordance with the relevant DIN technical report to the developer in October 2015 so that the building would

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be repaired in this way, other figures continued to circulate that made the complete accommodation of the planned holdings for the ground floor and the first floor appear questionable due to an excessively high bearing load. In 2017, an expert report on the structural design of the library floors determined the necessary spacing of the shelves and forced an unusual step: anchoring the shelves in permanently mounted base frames to ensure even load distribution and prevent future expansion. In addition, each shelf may only be fitted with a maximum of six compartments. As a result, the capacity for free-standing shelving turned out to be much smaller than initially assumed, so that now around 42,000 monographs and the continued periodicals with the last 20 volumes are placed on 550 square meters. The remaining 90,000 volumes are housed in the compact stacks in the basement.

As early as 1987, the Students' Representative Council of the University of Würzburg had complained to the management of the university library about the poor situation for students of Catholic theology, which was essentially caused by the occupation of library rooms by lectures of the faculty and the poor usability of the libraries due to disparate and often minimal opening hours. Students therefore often had to hope to cover their literature needs in the central library of the university library, which collected theological literature in parallel, or to gain access to the seminar libraries. Because of their spatial fragmentation, however, they could not count on being able to use the entire spectrum of theological subjects in one place. This had improved only gradually with the consolidation of the libraries for Religious Education, Liturgical Studies, Canon Law and Missiology at Paradeplatz right behind the cathedral in 2008. In addition, there has been a trend in recent years to use libraries more intensively as places of learning beyond the direct need for posted literature. However, the fact that students require workstations for individual, concentrated learning, for learning in groups, and for communicating to a greatly increasing extent has played no discernible role for the faculty. The planning submitted to the university library for the new branch library therefore left very little room for workstations. The DIN standard recommends that a workstation be provided in the library for at least 12% of the department's students. This means that 48 workstations would be needed for 400 students. Initially, only 27 workstations could be provided in the ground floor area.


on the window side facing the inner courtyard. Later in the planning, a room with 26 square meters of space was added on the first floor, equipped with up to ten workplaces. However, this initially had to overcome resistance from the faculty, which had initially claimed this room for lectures. The reaction of the student council to the presentation of the new Sub-Library in May 2019 was almost exuberant, despite the small number of workstations, because fixed spaces were announced that could not be occupied by any of the faculty’s lectures, unlike what had previously been the practice in the departmental libraries.

Because of the lengthy procedure for the tender for the mobile shelving in the basement, the schedule for the move was so tightly timed that only a single weekend buffer remained before the start on August 19, 2019. However, delivery difficulties on the part of one of the shelf builder’s suppliers still led to turbulence during the relocation phase, without the schedule being blown in the end – but only because of the dedicated efforts of the university library’s staff involved. Among the other difficulties of the move, it is worth mentioning the fact that the target building was still largely in the state of a construction site, so that both the access routes were temporarily impassable, and the elevator did not work for days. The moving company remained calm and subsequently charged the university for the resulting time loss. In the happy end, the new unified Sub-Library was able to open on time for the scheduled date of October 14, 2019, after a nine-week relocation period.

The visually striking area of the building is the new steel and glass staircase in the inner courtyard, which connects the open access areas of the library with around 42,000 volumes located on two floors, as well as providing access from the outside.4 By far the largest part of the collection, some 90,000 volumes, had to be housed in the basement, which is not accessible to the public and can only be used as a storage area. Nevertheless, the climatic conditions for storing books are satisfactory here.

The freely accessible area of the Sub-Library of Theology is arranged according to the RVK. The old departmental libraries, which had retained their previous shelf mark system until the move, have been placed in the basement stacks along with the back volumes of periodicals. Orders on these holdings are serviced at least once a day. Uniform and reliable opening hours contribute greatly to the positive image of the new sub-library among its users.

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3 Challenges and Opportunities

The planning for the building had already made important specifications for the area of the new Sub-Library of Theology, which limit the operation of a professional library to the extent required. Moreover, in the library system of a university with faculties of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, the limitation of library units to individual departments is economically difficult to justify if the utilisation rate is too low. Nevertheless, the long period of spatial dispersion and correspondingly difficult use of the libraries at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Würzburg has come to an end, and this is an important milestone for theology in Würzburg.

The criteria for a future-oriented structure of decentralised libraries at a university have turned out to be their proximity to the subject, their design as places of learning and social exchange for students, their function as a direct link to subject representatives and as a competent service point on campus. Meeting current user needs is indispensable for a library. Direct connection to the professional community is well possible in the context of a sub-library. Information Literacy has been trained for the students of the Faculty of
Catholic Theology for 18 years by the university library. Here, greater proximity to the students’ lecture offerings could be achieved through on-site training in the Sub-Library.

In the university’s Open Access publishing strategy, the proximity of the library to the subject is also particularly important. This can be supported in a sustainable manner via efficient sub-libraries. In this context, it would have been an important desideratum to expand the decentralised library into an attractive location for research as well, for example by creating a generously sized work infrastructure. Unfortunately, this was not considered in the planning by the faculty.

The next step will be to network the Sub-Library of Theology with the other sub-libraries and with the central library in Würzburg more closely than before, to increase the efficiency of the library system of the university. So far, the structure results from the fact that the central library has had the function of the lending library using an electronic booking system, while the sub-libraries could not use electronic booking systems until now and were therefore de facto only reference libraries. Since the equipping of the central library and the largest sub-libraries of the University of Würzburg with RFID has begun in 2021, the inclusion of further, also smaller sub-libraries will be able to create a uniform bracket for the usability of the university library system, so that the stock of the sub-libraries as well as the central library can be borrowed electronically with self-service. Before the Sub-Library of Theology will be equipped with RFID technology in 2022, it must also be considered that, due to the structural conditions there, two thirds of the holdings are in a stack that is not accessible to the public, so that even with RFID they will not have a greater user reach. Every order here will have to be fetched by library staff in the future as well.

Networking also includes the expansion of digitisation services in the library system. The Sub-Library of Theology does not have the appropriate hardware for this. Here, it will be necessary to examine whether the three physically adjacent Sub-Libraries of Law, Music and Theology can be combined into a service network to be able to handle digitisation requests quickly on site. A scanning station is already available for this purpose in the Sub-Library of Law. Orders that go beyond this, such as the digitisation of older books or books in a critical state of preservation, will continue to be handled by the university library’s digitisation centre in the future because of the better technical and staffing resources available.

It remains to be seen whether the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Würzburg will have a future in the medium term after the outsourcing of priestly training in 2020 and, beyond that, drastically declining student numbers. Important functions of a sub-library remain valuable even in an innovative, digitally influenced environment: librarians offer on-site service, and a room close to the subject provides good opportunities for learning, research, and communication, for the subject culture, and for the consolidation of the faculty identity. Library staff, with their expertise and resource knowledge, have played a vital role to date. These skills, valued by scholars and students alike, as well as the increasing need for spaces to learn and communicate, could have been brought to bear through wise planning. However, whether the media mediation skills of library staff will continue to play the same role in the future has already been questioned with good reason, given the decreasing effort required to mediate between user and digital document due to increasingly intuitive access. It is therefore possible that one of the few possibilities for the Sub-Library of Theology to still have significance or to exist in the medium term is to make its holdings more prominent. However, this depends decisively on its financial resources.

The financing of literature for the subject of theology at the University of Würzburg has so far been based on the Bavarian budget model for literature supply. Central to this distribution model is the determination of the subject-specific funding requirements for monographs and journals in print. In this process, a key figure for the respective degree of expansion of a subject based on the number of staff positions is multiplied by the subject-specific funding requirement (literature in volumes times average price). However, due to the small number of students of theology enrolled in Würzburg, the inclusion of the factor of the funding requirement for student literature supply leads to a strong reduction of the budget for the subject Catholic theology in Würzburg. In addition, the application of the budget model in recent years has made it clear that in the future it will no longer be possible to derive and determine the academic literature requirements solely from the analysis of subject-specific literature production and corresponding genre-dependent average prices, especially since strict genre boundaries are beginning to dissolve more and more in the digital age. Instead, the determination of demand will increasingly have to be developed from local conditions, individual user behaviour and scientific publication behaviour, to meet the growing need for location-specific and subject-specific individualisation. In this context, it will be important to

enrich components of conventional needs assessment with modules such as Open Access publication funds or usage quotas for user-controlled acquisition processes to achieve an adaptation and individualisation of conventional budget models.\footnote{Ortwin Guhling, “Entwicklung von Etatbedarfsmodellen für Hochschulbibliothekssysteme,” in \textit{Handbuch Hochschulbibliothekssysteme: Leistungsfähige Informationsinfrastrukturen für Wissenschaft und Studium}, ed. Konstanze Söllner and Wilfried Sühl-Strohmenger (Berlin and Boston: W. De Gruyter, 2014), 489–502.}

The chairs still have the acquisition initiative for the Sub-Library of Theology. They have a literature budget derived from the Bavarian budget model and provided by the university library. For a balanced and future-oriented acquisition policy of the Sub-Library to free itself from the stranglehold of the participating chairs, which are fixated on their temporary research project and still largely on German-language publications, the initiative of the chairs would have to be shared with a neutral moderator, the theologically trained subject librarian. Only in this way would it be possible to give the new acquisitions, and thus the Sub-Library, a profile that not only responds in large parts with delay to a need guided by the individual case, but increasingly takes on the format of a research library that is representative of and accurately reflects the scholarly publication market. Finally, the increased purchase of e-books during the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that only a centrally managed acquisition budget can respond adequately to the demand for electronic media in view of the complicated supply structure.

In the past decades, the central library of the University Library of Würzburg has tried to compensate for the poor usability of the theological departmental libraries by acquiring theological study literature in parallel to a large extent. It also draws its funds from the budget distribution model for academic literature, which is divided between the central library and the Sub-Library of Theology. The acquisition initiative here is taken by the subject librarian, who is also the head of the Sub-Library of Theology. Basic reference works are available here as well as textbooks accompanying lectures, which are kept in the broad subject spectrum of the textbook collection of the central library. In addition, the central library has developed a closeness to the users through an uncomplicated electronic offer for acquisition suggestions, which together with the very good opening hours – at least during normal times – meanwhile make students of theology an attractive offer for printed and electronic literature. However, the fact that the central library is located on the Hubland campus, while all theological lectures are held in the city centre, three kilometres away, has always been an aggravating factor. Recently, there has been a greater
emphasis on e-books by the university library as part of the shift to digital teaching offerings. In concert with the central library, which has largely purchased theological literature in parallel with the needs of the former department libraries, the significantly improved usability of the Sub-Library of Theology has now made it possible to focus the resources for theological literature in one location as close as possible to the professional community.

Bibliography


