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The Biblical Basis of Selection

Jeffery S. Gates
Cedarville University, jeffgates@cedarville.edu

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Selection is not only the first step in librarianship, it is also the first application of the philosophy of librarianship. Before anything can be searched and accessed in a library, it must be selected by that library. But the process of selection requires a selection policy--whether or not it is written. A written selection policy would help insure consistency in the selection process, but whether it is written or not, one who selects resources for a library must follow some policy. And this policy is shaped by the selector's philosophy of librarianship.

Jeffrey Gates is Head Librarian at Faith Baptist College & Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA

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JEFF GATES

CHRISTIAN SELECTION

Library school hopefully prepares a librarian to be a good selector. While practical check-lists such as accuracy, physical condition, and relevance are given, it is expected that by graduation library students would have wrestled with issues such as the quality of the collection versus the number in the collection and use of the collection verses the pride and beauty of a big collection. But a Christian librarian needs to concern himself or herself with more than these issues.

Moral standards of selection. As important as quality and use are in selection of resources, the Christian librarian must first deal with the moral issues as they apply to selection. For a Christian librarian morality is summed up in the question, Is it God's will to select one resource and not to select another? While some standards of selection may be amoral, morality influences nearly every selection decision. When first confronted by this thought, it may seem narrow and impractical as a basis for a selection policy. As to narrowness, it is doubtful whether very many decisions that a Christian makes about anything are amoral. Most apparent amoral decisions are found to be moral upon closer examination. Morality is really very broad and all encompassing, and this is certainly true of selection as well. Concerning impracticability -

while there will always be resources that are hard to determine whether they are right or wrong, this does not mean using the standards of morality should be abandoned. It simply challenges selectors to think through the implications of their philosophy of librarianship when making selections. Those few selection decisions which are amoral can be based upon other selection criteria.

If the primary basis of selection is God's will, how can we arrive at standards of selection that agree with His will? For the Christian librarian, this answer is the application of the clear and implied standards found in the Bible. A Christian's primary responsibility is to love God as the Great Commandment tells us (Mark 12:28-31). And this love involves every part of his being, including the mind. Philippians 4:8 is especially applicable for selection because it deals with the mind. The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (W.E. Vine, Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984) provides the following shades of meaning for the words in Philippians 4:8:

True (alethes) - unconcealed, manifest, actual, true to fact

Honest (semnos) - august, venerable, honorable, reverent, nobly serious, grave

Just (dikaios) - righteous, a state of
being right, right conduct

Pure (hagnos) - pure from defilement, not contaminated
Lovely (prophiles) - pleasing, agreeable, lovely

Good report (euphemos) - uttering words or sounds of good omen, avoiding ill-omened words, fair-sounding

Virtue (arete) - intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue, impression made on others, i.e. renown, excellence or praise, moral excellence
Praise (epainos) - approbation, commendation, praise, praiseworthy

Quality as a standard for selection.
The book of Proverbs has much wisdom that can be useful in selection. Much of this wisdom can be summed up in Proverbs 1:5 i.e., "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." How do selectors know which resources have quality and which do not? While he or she may have some areas of expertise, the selector is limited in knowledge of many areas. This underscores the importance of relying upon the "wise counsel" of others.

Faculty are a good place to find quality resources. They have expertise in their field and are usually knowledgeable of what is current. Their experience tends to make them knowledgeable about the best resources that are available. Some faculty will be more helpful than others. Some may seek to promote their own "pet" teachings or narrow interests. Proverbs 11:14 gives helpful guidelines here, i.e. "in the multitude of counselors there is safety." Getting help from several of the faculty will help offset these narrow areas of interest and insure a balanced collection.

"Many counselors" does not limit a selector to the faculty at his or her school. This may include faculty from other schools, as well as pastors, teachers, and scholars who do not teach or attend schools. Written and oral review from such people can be very useful in selecting quality resources. Associations and organizations produce standard lists, indices, and periodicals that offer helpful guidance in selection.

The selection standard of use. While "use" should not be the only criteria for selection, it is helpful and necessary when guided by morality and quality. We do not want resources in our libraries that have never been, are never, and will never be used. The service nature of the library, and especially for Christians, prohibits this. The Second Great Commandment (Mark 12:31) encourages us to love others which translates into serving them. What should motivate every Christian librarian is the opportunity to love and serve God by loving and serving other. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus gives what has been called the Golden Rule. While this is a subjective standard, when it is used along with morality and quality it can be helpful and useful. After a selector has applied the objective moral standards of the Bible and sought the wisdom and expertise of the "multitude of counselors," he or she may then seek to apply the Second Great Commandment and the Golden Rule to the selection process. After a selector has determined that a resource is morally in line with the Bible and of good quality, he or she can then try to find and meet the needs of users by putting himself or herself in their shoes. In selection this would involve finding the needs of users through reading current news sources, books, and literature and through formal surveys and informal interviews of users.

In using the standard of "use" for selection, a selector must be careful not to limit this to short-term or measurable use. Just because a resource is not used immediately, does not mean it will not be used in the future. The school which your library serves may be looking at adding programs and classes. Furthermore, just because a resource is not in high demand by many users, does not mean it is not used extensively by a few. A resource that has had a profound effect upon one user may be more valuable than a resource that gets used by many users with little impact upon them.

CURRENT SELECTION POLICIES
The rise of post modernism (the view that there is no right or wrong and that all views should be accepted) has affected every area of society, including the library profession. There is a conflict, however, with these new ideas and the library profession. Many librarians have succumbed to these influences at least in theory. The American Library Association, the only association that gives recognized accreditation to library schools, has spread its influence through the library schools and those who graduate from them. While there is discussion of the standards of quality and use in selection, the issue of morality is dismissed as "elitism" and arrogance. But this attitude has only reduced the need for professional librarians in the selection process. When the morality is stricken from the criteria of selection, quality is also removed. Post modernism demands this! Using this philosophy, does the selector have the right to determine which resources have quality and which do not? "Use" is then made the primary standard. In a classic article by Nora Rawlinson entitled "Give 'em What They Want" (Library Journal, November 15, 1981, pp. 2188-2190), the author describes the unusual selection policy at the Baltimore County Public Library. They had almost totally espoused the criteria of "use" in selection. In another article entitled, "We Don't Need a Philosophy of Library and Information Science-We're Confused Enough Already" (Jim Zwadlo, Library Quarterly, vol. 67, no. 2, pp. 103-121), the author contends that there is no need for a philosophy to guide library policy. He

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states that “use” should be the only basis of library work. What he fails to recognize is that this is in itself the application of the philosophy of pragmatism. Both Rawlinson and Zwadlo are in line with the philosophy of postmodernism. Many do not agree with either author, affirming that quality is a valid criterion for selection and that librarians should use their professional judgment to determine quality. But those who support the criteria of quality are not in agreement with the relative values promoted by ALA and others. In fact most librarians do not rely strictly on “use,” and they do use their professional judgment in the selection process because they believe there is an objective basis for morality and quality.

At one time censorship was a good thing—even in ALA. Librarians were responsible for letting good resources into the library and keeping out bad resources (Jose Ortega Y Gasset, The Antiqthic Review, Summer, 1961, Vol. 3 No 1, pp. 1-22. At one time the professional librarian selected resources for the library based upon morality, quality, and use. Today the words “good” and “bad” have been replaced with “appropriate” and “inappropriate.” And this appropriateness is based primarily on use. If any other criteria are used for selection, it is because the selector is not consistent with postmodernism. He or she has either outright rejected this philosophy or has borrowed from another philosophy that says there is an objective standard for quality other than just “use.”

WHAT TO DO WITH FALSE RESOURCES

Basing a selection policy on quality and use is quite common; they elicit little disagreement. The most controversial standard for selection is what Christians would consider the most important, i.e. morality. This is controversial, especially to those who hold to postmodernism, because it says that there is such a thing as right and wrong. Many would agree that there must be at least general standards for right and wrong. Without these standards, there is no basis for selection other than use, as was pointed out earlier. But while solving one problem, we now must deal with another. Those who hold to the selection policy of the ALA and other liberal organizations haven’t nearly the problem with controversial resources that those who support the use of morality as a basis of selection. Those who espouse the postmodern view can claim intellectual freedom as a basis for selecting and keeping a controversial resource. Although applying the standard of

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morality to selection can be difficult, it can be done. The real problem isn’t the resources that would be selected; it is rather the resources that would be excluded. Using morality as a basis of selection might leave out some resources that would be helpful for comparison. Can one truly study cults or worldly philosophies without examining the works that advocate those positions? But how could such selections be justified using morality as a basis of selection? It must be remembered that the basis of this standard for selection is from the Bible. Although the Bible does not give concrete guidelines for the application of this criteria to every case, it does provide some principles and examines that can be helpful.

Knowledge is not bad in and of itself. As a matter of fact the Bible encourages us to seek knowledge (Prov. 2:3-5). The issue seems to be the ability of humans to have knowledge and still remain moral. According to King Solomon, “he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Eccl. 1:18). Another danger of knowledge is pride (1 Cor. 8:1). The motivation behind Satan’s temptation of Eve in the garden was to get this crowning jewel of creation to have knowledge without God. He knew that for the human race to have knowledge apart from God would destroy this race. A casual reading of the third chapter of Genesis demonstrates this (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Genesis-Numbers, pp. 45,51). It is reaffirmed in the description of mankind’s moral digression in Romans chapter one. As a result of this Fall, all of Adam and Eve’s ancestors have the propensity to abuse knowledge because they are independent of God (Job 21:14; Isa. 59:8; Rom. 3:10-23; Eph. 2:1-3). This problem is partly corrected when a person is reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At that point the believer is given the mind of Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-16). This Holy Spirit gives the Christian not only the ability to discern between good and bad, but also the desire to follow the good and turn from the bad (Rom. 7:22). This does not, however, completely negate the effects of the Fall. When a person receives the Holy Spirit, he or she does not lose the propensity to abuse knowledge (Rom. 7:15-23; 1 John 1:8). It is greatly subdued, but not canceled out. If Eve was tempted to gain wisdom apart from God, how much more will we who possess the propensity to sin.

Were this propensity to gain and use knowledge apart from God removed at regeneration, there would be no need to limit Christian’s use of knowledge. The person would naturally rely on God’s ability to discern between good and bad. As it is, even a Christian does not have the discernment to know the difference and must consciously seek and grow in God’s discernment (Heb. 5:13,14).

Since there is a danger of doctrinal contamination if a library selects resources that are false and worldly, why take such a risk? Only including resources that are doctrin
nally true would be safer, but would also result in excluding many helpful resources from the library. Furthermore, it would be in violation of another very important biblical principle.

While there are several admonitions for God’s people to separate from false teachers and teachings, there are also commands for them to reach out to those who espouse them (Acts 1:8). Yes, there is a risk that the false teaching would influence the believer in a negative way, but it is possible to minimize the risks.

The Issacharites are an example of the importance of having "worldly" wisdom (I Chron. 12:32). The time was chaotic. Saul, Israel’s king, had been slain, and his son had assumed the throne. This despite the common knowledge that David had been anointed by Samuel to be Israel’s next king. The men of Issachar wisely chose to support David. They "knew what Israel should do" because of their "understood the times." Their knowledge was not limited to the Law, but included knowledge of political affairs. They no doubt weighed the current events with the revealed word of God and made a wise decision.

The New Testament not only allows examination of false teaching, it also commands it by implication. All believers are commanded to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21) and to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (I John 4:1). Spiritual leaders are further commanded to teach and warn their followers about false teachings (Tit 1:9-16). When Paul was in Athens he quoted from pagan sources to convince the residents truths about God (Acts 17:28). All of these examples imply some knowledge of the false teaching. The knowledge is limited to be sure. Too intimate a knowledge of false teaching might negatively influence the student, especially if that person is not grounded in the truth. Those who study false teachings should be humble enough to recognize their own susceptibility to them (Gal 6:1). It would also be advised that the student spend more time studying true teachings than false ones. Each time the false ideas are considered, the person should pray for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom to discern the good from the bad (John 16:13).

As we examine the basis of a Christian selection policy for a library, i.e. the Bible, we discover that there is justification for including certain untrue items in a library. The purpose for having such resources is not to promote them, but rather to provide resources that accurately describe false views so that they can be compared with the Bible and soundly refuted (I Cor. 2:13; Eph. 5:10,11).

CONCLUSION
Selection is especially important to Christian librarians because it is one of the first areas in their field in which their philosophy is manifest. How important than is it for Christian librarians to have a clearly developed philosophy of selection that is based upon the clear and implied principles of the Bible. Applying the Bible to library selection can be difficult at times, but this should not keep them from trying to do so. The Bible does not speak directly to every detail of selection, but offers many principles that can and should be applied.

Upon examining the Bible, we find that it does give many guidelines and principles for a selection policy. From it we derive three basic criteria for selection, i.e. morality, quality, and use. The first criteria, i.e. morality, are essential for a Christian selection policy because it acts as a guide for the other two and prevents "use" from dominating. The only exception to the morality criteria is the inclusion of resources that accurately represent false views so that they may be studied and refuted.

**PROPOSED SELECTION CRITERIA**

**I. Morality**
- a. Are the author(s) and publisher reputable?
- b. Are the author(s) and publisher orthodox in theology and fundamental in persuasion?
- c. Is it true?
  - 1. Does it agree with the Bible?
  - 2. How thorough, reliable, and complete are the facts?
  - 3. Is it up-to-date?
  - 4. If it represents a false view, does it document the view accurately?
  - 5. Will it balance the collection when considering the subject?
- d. Does it inspire respect and dignity?
- e. Does it present good morals?
- f. Does it promote purity?
- g. Does it motivate to love and good works?
- h. Does it emphasize what is good and wholesome?

**II. Quality**
- a. Has it been given favorable reviews by fundamental Christian pastors, teachers, and/or scholars?
- b. Does it have an attractive package and/or cover?
- c. Are the paper, binding, and/or tape of good quality?
- d. Are the typeface, sound, and/or visuals of good quality?
- e. Is there another item available that better covers the same material?

**III. Use**
- a. Is it relevant and useful?
- b. How easy is it to read, listen to, and/or view?
- c. Will it hold interest?
- d. How frequently will it be used?
- e. Is it too expensive for individuals to buy?
- f. Is it worth the cost compared to its expected use?
- g. Are other items more urgently needed than this item?
- h. Does the level of use justify multiple copies?