

# **TOWARDS A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR A PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP**

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## **Abstract**

Within the discipline of library science, there are two themes that speak to both the philosophy of librarianship and its intersection with biblical teaching. These are “documentality” and “information literacy.” Both themes within the librarianship context emerge from and speak to the metanarratives of contemporary culture, particularly as they pertain to higher education. Documentality embraces the social values and practices underpinning the reification and commodification of human communication, from the mind of the author to publication, distribution, and access. Information literacy, in turn, engages the social values and practices of the individual reader who interacts with these authored products. Though framing the discussion with the terminology of documentality and information literacy may be contemporary, I suggest that the themes proper are ageless, and have been addressed in Scripture. Further, I suggest that the contribution to these themes from Scripture shapes a biblically informed philosophy of librarianship.

**Keywords:** Documentality, Information Literacy, Philosophy of Librarianship, 2 Peter

## Introduction

Within the discipline of library science, there are two themes that speak to both the philosophy of librarianship and its intersection with biblical teaching. These are “documentality” and “information literacy.” Both themes within the librarianship context emerge from and speak to the metanarratives of contemporary culture, particularly as they pertain to higher education. Documentality embraces the social values and practices underpinning the reification and commodification of human communication, from the mind of the author to publication, distribution, and access by readers. Information literacy, in turn, engages the social values and practices of the individual reader interacting with these authored products. Though framing the discussion with the terminology of documentality and information literacy may be contemporary, I suggest that the themes proper are ageless, and have been addressed in Scripture. Further, I suggest that the contribution to these themes from Scripture shapes a biblically informed philosophy of librarianship, a necessary step in the integration of faith and practice within the profession.

Three contemporary metanarratives provide discussion points that link the two themes to the philosophy of librarianship. “Postmodernism” speaks to questions of authority and power. “Consumerism” addresses the problem of abundance and the quest for more, whether things or knowledge. And “technological solutionism” emerges from a mindset that technology provides the answer to all questions and the solution to all problems. I suggest that tacit values from these three metanarratives profoundly shape each individual’s totality of knowledge, skills, and values that define the individual. One is a tendency towards, though not necessarily, a “hyper-individualism” in which all value is determined in relation to oneself. Scripture provides a countercultural check on these tendencies and sufficient guidance for disciples to thrive spiritually in this environment and, in spite of it all, to grow in knowledge. A short and pithy work found in Scripture that addresses these enduring issues is 2 Peter.

The implications for librarians as they serve in libraries at Adventist institutions of learning are many. This essay focuses on only two. One is understanding that the pursuit of truth, of growing in knowledge, of partaking in the divine nature takes place within the learning community. Thus, the library becomes a communication hub that connects individual learners with the shared knowledge of many voices in the community. Librarians speak of holdings and resources, of collections and catalogs. Another implication is that libraries are in the business of knowledge creation. In the university, librarians empower and mentor learners in information seeking, the foundational step in creating knowledge. All this may be a norm within the collective understanding of the academic library; however, ideally the biblically informed expression of this norm should be motivated with a clearer vision of neighborly love delivered with excellence.

## Part I: Documentality

Librarians classify documents. They organize books on the shelf and provide tools so that interested searchers can easily find the book for which they are looking. This includes three phases. The first is to describe the work using rules consistent across the collection. The second is to assign subject headings using controlled language that group the works by topic. The third is to assign a call number so that the item fits on the shelf in a precise location in relation to other works. The call number is intended to group similar works together. All this is attempted to help potential readers find the books they need.

“Documentality” carries the discussion to another level by asking what defines a document. What can librarians classify as documents? From within the library profession, Briet (1951)<sup>1</sup> offered an influential examination of this question in 1951. The term “documentality” is a transliteration of the French term for the theme she developed, “documentalité.” She concluded her argument by suggesting that any object could be a document if it was in any way acted upon by one person to communicate something to another person. Her famous example is the antelope. While the antelope is roaming free in the African plains, it is not a document. But should it be captured and placed in a zoo, it becomes a document. It has been acted upon by a person, the zookeeper, for the intention of communicating with another person, the visitor, a physical experience of the antelope. The cycle continues as the antelope dies, is stuffed and placed in a museum, as zoological reports and studies of the specimen are published, and so forth. Thus, a “document” is the reified and commodified product of human communication.<sup>2</sup>

A second use of the term “documentality,” coined by the Italian philosopher, Maurizio Ferraris (2013, 2014) and transliterated from the Italian “documentalità,” takes issue with the claim of social constructionism that all knowledge is socially constructed or derived. His basic argument is that ontology must precede epistemology. So, the object must be classified first, and he identifies three classes: physical objects, ideal objects, and social objects. His argument is as follows: mountains exist whether or not there are people to see them. Nothing humans do can alter the existence of the mountain. Physical objects exist in and of themselves, not merely according to the imagination of a human. The second category, ideal objects, include abstractions like triangles. It may take a human to conceive of a triangle, but the triangle as a concept would exist whether or not specific humans thought about it. However, the third category of objects is socially constructed. They derive their meaning from social interactions. He categorizes these objects as documents. As a physical object, a piece of paper with multicolored ink artfully engraved on it, has no intrinsic value as a physical object. What makes the difference is the social construction of the value of that piece of paper as a document

representing the ideal object of money. However, even then it only means something if two people share the same interpretation of the document. Thus, a document is a “social construction,” as an object, it only has meaning when there are two different persons making use of it to communicate with one another.<sup>3</sup>

It is impossible to capture all the nuances and distinctions of these rich abstractions in a few sentences. But the generalized and distilled concept of interest to this argument is to think of the document as a reified and commodified social object that connects two human minds. This concept, in turn, invites reflection on the place of documents in knowledge creation.

The first reflection focuses on documents as a source of knowledge exchange. Conventional epistemology suggests that a person comes to know something through perception, memory or inference. The problem with using only these as sources of knowledge is that one could not know anything outside her immediate experience. In addition, various arguments have been put forth that question the absolute reliability of each of these sources. One additional source of knowledge that has been argued is “testimony,” the word of another person. From the testimony of someone else, she, in a sense, vicariously perceives, remembers, and infers, and thus comes to know. In reality, most of what one claims to “know” was acquired from the word of others (Gelfert, 2014, pp. 55-76; Shieber, 2015, pp. 14-20).

Documentality expands the concept of testimony further. Most examples of testimony used in epistemological debates on testimony are first-person oral reports, such as in the courtroom or face to face conversations. Yet, through documents access is provided to the perceptions, memories, and inferences of authors from other places and other times (Buckland, 2017, pp. 60-61). Thinking about this class of interpersonal communication as a source for learning opens the possibilities exponentially. In higher education, documentary sources for learning are taken for granted, so much so that any knowledge gleaned from personal perception, memory, and inference is critiqued and devalued if “research” suggests otherwise.

A second reflection on documents involves their role in social memory. As Ferraris (2014) notes,

“Society is not based on communication, but on recording. This thesis turns on the fact that we can imagine a society without language, but not a society without memory. This corresponds to the fundamental nature of thought and action, which are strictly dependent on the ability to remember.” (p. 200).

This recording results in the creation of documents. Ferraris (2014) further argues that “human beings are primarily passive receptors of rules manifested through documents. We are not intentional producers of values.” (p. 200). This claim serves as one explanation of the role of Scripture in the social memory and value transmission within the community of faith.

The last function of documents to be discussed is their role in personal identity. Passports, driver's licenses, birth certificates, and the like are taken for granted until they are lost. Without them, it is difficult to get around, to prove one's identity, to communicate, to get employment, *ad infinitum*. Without sufficient and appropriate documentation, it becomes impossible to prove who one claims to be. (Buckland, 2014).

Scripture provides examples of these roles of documentality.

"After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: 'Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you.'" Deut. 31:24-26, NIV.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Tim 3:16-17, NIV.

"Nothing impure will ever enter it [New Jerusalem] ..., but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Rev 21:27, NIV.

Within Scripture, documents are a mechanism for memory, instruction, and identity. Libraries are also a means for memory, instruction, and identity through their collections, repositories, and archives.<sup>4</sup>

## **Part II: Information Literacy**

In its simplest iteration, information literacy is the ability to identify, find, evaluate and use information. To apply this definition to pedagogy in higher education, the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) adopted standards that guided library instruction. While practical and easy to measure, these standards did not suffice. So in 2016, the Association of College and Research Libraries adopted a much more complex understanding that embraces the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication.

"Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." (ACRL, 2016)

Thus, the historical trajectory of library instruction has gone from “which is the best book” to “how to use the computer” to “how to think about information.” I suggest this development is a response to three conditions that have emerged in the last sixty years, especially in reference to libraries in higher education.<sup>5</sup>

The paradigm “condition” is that of postmodernism, particularly as described by Lyotard (1984). He begins his essay by rejecting the metanarratives that had been normative for centuries, the enlightenment project, capitalism, Marxism, even scientism. These had only resulted in world wars and human suffering. In its place, he suggests that the new normative metanarrative was “performativity.” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 47). The goodness of an idea or an organization or even a product is grounded not on the reputation or status of the source, but whether or not it performs according to its claims. “By their fruit you will recognize them.” Matt 7:20, NIV. Yet, how is a person to be able to make an adequate judgment about the goodness of a product, idea, or organization? Lyotard’s answer is that it could happen using technologically enhanced and enriched access to information. Access to sufficient information empowers each individual to judge the performativity of a product, idea, or organization for themselves. (Lyotard, 1984, p. 67). Thus, information literacy has drawn inspiration from the postmodern condition by having as a pedagogical outcome the ability to find and evaluate information using digital technologies.

The other side of the equation is that there must be information to evaluate. The assessment culture of academia is one example of how this has emerged. Institutional goals and values must be verified and validated. Evidence of performance must be documented. Tenure is based on publishing. Only if the professor is a published author in acceptable peer-reviewed venues will all the other attributes that make them effective teachers be considered.

Simultaneously, the “condition” of consumerism emerged. In the simplest construction, this is the gospel of more. Within the library experience, this condition speaks to the commodification of information by authors, publishers, and vendors into a product that must be purchased or licensed in order to access it. It also speaks to the dissemination of information for commercial interests. The outcome is that quantity becomes more important than quality. From the perspective of information literacy, the information literate person is able to navigate the abundance of resources and achieve a desired outcome.

A metaphor that illustrates this condition is the large supermarket. As a consumer, I need just enough food to prepare one meal. I walk into the supermarket and find enough food in one place to feed thousands of my neighbors. I must navigate a large building to find the two or three ingredients I need and often must choose from a variety of options for each one. I must read the labels and make sense of them. In the end, I must make intentional decisions about every ingredient. I can then create the meal. Contrast this with a culture of scarcity in which there are no

consumer choices. I must work with whatever ingredients might be at hand, whether or not they are sufficient or even part of the recipe.<sup>6</sup>

Tara Brabazon (2013) passionately expounds on the problem of the abundance of information in the context of higher education. Her work is titled: *Digital Dieting: From Information Obesity to Intellectual Fitness*. Her plea is to avoid the over-consumption of easy-to-find comfort reading; instead, the student ought to be grappling in depth with complex and serious issues, and that this is what drives intellectual performativity. To continue the metaphor of preparing a meal, Brabazon's argument challenges the practice of submitting food choices to marketing interests and factory kitchens. She would support the attitude that it is much more effective to prepare healthy meals from original ingredients.

Hinson-Hasty (2017) has elaborated on this condition in the context of economic affluence labeling it hyperindividualism.

“Many US Americans are prone to think that hyperindividualism, competition, and keeping self-interest and our own national interests at the center of economic activities will lead to the ‘blessing of our nation,’ alleviate poverty, and increase community. This is a false promise and hope.” (p. 216).

Informational affluence is no different. In the previous quote, by substituting “publishing” for “economic,” and “ignorance” for “poverty,” the claim is equally valid.

The third "condition" driving conceptions of information literacy is technological solutionism. This is the belief that technology is the answer to all questions, the solution to all problems. A cogent discussion of this condition was authored by Evgeny Morozov (2013). The title captures the essence of the argument: *To Save Everything Click Here*. In the library world and higher education, technology provides access to the works of literature of all times, of all places, and of all disciplines. The internet connects knowledge and information sources globally. The solution to any need for information is at the tip of the fingers. Lyotard's vision of the common person having access to information has been fulfilled beyond any expectation he might have had. The problem he did not foresee is the incredible productivity of technologically enhanced communication resulting in information overload, spin, and information silos. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010).

A Scriptural correlation to these three conditions is illustrated in the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness at the outset of his ministry.

1. Postmodernism: the elevation of self as the ultimate authority.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

2. Consumerism: more is better, now, immediate gratification.

The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

3. Technological Solutionism: do the impossible, make technology extend human capacity

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matt 4:3-10, NIV)

I suggest that in his response, Jesus practiced information literacy at its most useful level. It illustrates that he was able to recognize disinformation for what it was, and ground a response in reality as evidenced by valid testimony. It is worthy of note that the response to each temptation was, “It is written ...” Jesus grounded his response on a documented, reliable, and time-tested information source.

The standards and frameworks associated with information literacy may have emerged from cultural forces often perceived as inimical to Christian faith; nonetheless, they are essential to learning. When properly applied with discernment derived from faith as exemplified by Jesus, they provide a path that leads to growing in knowledge.



### **Part III: 2 Peter: A First Century Treatise on Documentality and Information Literacy**

A Biblical source that discusses growing in knowledge and the discernment of veridical information and disinformation is found in 2 Peter. From a pedagogical perspective, the learning outcomes are delineated. The documentary resources are identified. The consequences of both success and failure are spelled out.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Simon Peter's letter opens with the learning objective and affirmation that the learning objective can be achieved.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Pet 1:3-4 (NIV).

The learning outcome is participation in the divine nature, *θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*. Κοινωνος is a term used for a joint relationship, such as a business partner. Πηρσις refers to what is normal, natural, un-constructed, as coined earlier in the sentence, a godly life. So, the idea is that when the promises of God are embraced, a relationship is entered into with God in which it is natural to be like God. The inference is that the opposite state, corruption, has a definite ending point, but that the natural state of those who participate in the divine nature, as uncorrupted, is perpetual with no end point.

The next paragraph in this letter lists the virtues that describe what is the “normal” when participating in this relationship with God.<sup>7</sup> Note the ordered trajectory of the list from an internal belief to a relational performativity.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” 2 Pet 1:5-7, (NIV)

One metaphor to illustrate this progression might be the cable, in which any number of strands are woven together, each additional strand increasing the tensile strength of the cable. So, when all of these virtues are woven together collectively into the character of the disciple, the outcome is a durable strength. Likewise, this

fits with the anticipated performativity of a learning experience that weaves together strands of information from multiple sources into a coherent whole.

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Pet 1:8-11, (NIV).

Note that intentionality, making every effort, is a value at the core of achieving the goal. Evidence of success is described as never stumbling, and eventually being welcomed into the eternal kingdom.

### Documentality

Next Simon Peter inserts his reason for writing the letter, in order to “make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.” 2 Pet 1:15, (NIV). The intention is reiterated in 3:1. Referring to his letters, he asserts, “I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.”

One function of documents is to preserve the thinking and memory of the author and communicate these to a reader. It is providential that this letter was reproduced and passed down through the ages when countless other similar documents have not survived. Simon Peter’s work continues to stimulate readers to wholesome thinking.

A second aspect of documentality evident in this letter involves the social relationships between author and reader. The original work had a specific audience in mind, one with whom the author appears to have had a personal relationship. The readers trusted the author and valued what he wrote because he was not a stranger to them. His testimony was accepted as trustworthy because their experience with the author gave evidence to his trustworthiness. A relationship/connection was bridged with his reader. (Shepherd, 2013).

### Reliability of Information Resources

Simon Peter argues that learning truth requires trustworthy testimony and reliable processes for vetting sources, including verification and validation. Concerning the story of Jesus, Simon Peter claims authority as an eyewitness, a first-person source. He also affirms that the prophetic word was confirmed.

“For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . . We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it. . . . Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Pet 1:16, 19-21, (NIV).

In evaluating any document, it is essential to take into account the claims of the author. In this case, Simon Peter claims to be an eyewitness, experiencing the story first hand. His claim concerning the reliability of the prophetic word is warranted on performativity, and validated by the Holy Spirit. Again, the first readers trusted the author, and accepted his testimony as trustworthy based on the evidence of his dealings with them.

As contemporary readers of an ancient text, can we accept the claims of this author at the same level of confidence as we accept the teachings of a trusted professor or pastor? Epistemologists offer three general definitions of truth that have some utility. The first asks if the proposition corresponds with reality. Does the Word of God as documented through the experiences of the prophets and apostles speak to human realities? The second asks if the proposition is coherent with what is already known to be true. Are the teachings of the Scriptures coherent within the Scriptures, and with human experience? The third asks if the proposition works or functions as it claims. Does the Gospel transform lives? Based on these three questions, there are many who confidently embrace the Scriptures as a trustworthy authority. Their testimony to that effect is well documented throughout the history of the community of faith.

### Disinformation, Fake News, and what Awaits the Perpetrators

A recent teaching moment in information literacy pedagogy emerged with the focus on “fake news.” (Jolley, 2018; Sullivan, 2018). Key skills in recognizing fake news include understanding the political or social biases associated with the source; verifying and validating the facts; assessing the tone and intent of the piece; and noting whether or not the piece acknowledges differing opinions and treats them with respect. “Fake news” is not simply content we may not like; rather, it is an attempt to spin a story for the purpose of social manipulation. Even though elements of the story may be accurate, there is an embedded purpose that obscures reality. Simon Peter acknowledges that this type of spinning existed in his world. Commenting on the writings of Paul, he states, “His letters contain some things that are hard to

understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” 2 Pet 3:16, (NIV). A prime example of information literacy performativity discerns the difference between works that accurately reflect Paul’s teaching and the distorted versions proposed by some.

Following his presentation of reliable sources, Simon Peter warns his readers against false teachers (2 Pet 2). The list of their evil intentions is long: they teach destructive heresies; they exploit listeners through deceptive words; they are presumptuous, self-willed, and speak evil of things they do not understand; they carouse in all their own deceptions; they have eyes full of adultery; they cannot cease from sin; they entice unstable souls; and their heart is trained in covetous practices. Their performativity measures are the opposites of the values listed in 2 Pet 1:5-8. Even so, it may seem these false teachers achieve success according to a set of values generally acceptable within contemporary culture. If material success, political power, and the ability to manipulate people serve as the standard, then their performativity might be rated high.

Embedded in Simon Peter’s argument are two significant points. The first is that disinformation and falsehood will eventually be destroyed. Reality and truth will triumph. This is a life and death matter.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.” 2 Pet 3:10-13, (NIV)

Confronting those who cause others to lose their eternal life warrants the blistering rhetoric Simon Peter engages to describe their falsehood.

The second significant point is that it is not the duty of the disciple to execute judgment on false teachers. God will deal with them in due time. Rather, the duty of the faithful is to “be not be deceived.” Every disciple has all the essential and sufficient resources needed in order to grow in knowledge, and avoid this deception. The assurance is that God knows how to keep them safe (2 Pet 2:9).

### Final Word

“Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” 2 Pet 3:17-18, (NIV)

In the educational context, growing in knowledge can be understood as learning. One uncritical, but popular, notion of learning assumes a metaphor of acquisition in which knowledge acquired is viewed as commodified objects. Thus, more learning parallels having more stuff. Because it is assumed that the objects have value in and of themselves, this becomes objective learning.

The way of thinking about learning highlighted by Simon Peter is not objective in this sense of the collection of cognitive objects. This “growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior” entails a relationship between two independent and thinking individuals, in other words, the content that is learned is a social object. Like paper money, or a passport, the paper with ink splashed on it as a physical object is not what defines the meaning or function of the object. Rather it is the social contract between two people in relation to the documents that define meaning. Likewise, the “great and precious promises” recorded in a “book” are not a string of code, but assume a meaning and function in the context of two persons communicating.

The metaphor of growing in connection with grace and knowledge is also instructive in that it implies a process. Achievement is measured relative to yesterday, never in absolute terms. Any claim to total or complete knowledge about anything is by definition false. This metaphor of growing is able to confront any unavoidable ignorance because of grace. Grace is the experience of God’s goodness when we do not know what we do not know. And the more we come to know, the more we become aware of what we do not know. Thus, if grace is needed to fill the void of ignorance, the more we grow in knowledge the more we grow in grace, and the greater our perceptions of something more and something beyond.

#### **Part IV: Application to an Adventist Philosophy of Librarianship**

##### **Documentality and Information Literacy in a Philosophy of Librarianship**

To a greater or lesser degree, every experience and every relationship contributes to a person’s learning. Libraries, through the documents they curate, extend learning at first hand from perception, memory, and inference to learning at second hand from testimony. This includes the testimony of those who are not physically present, but who have recorded their thoughts and experiences in an accessible format and technology.

First and foremost, Scripture fills the role of providing testimony for the purpose of growing in a knowledge of God. These documentary works are a commodified and reified communication that provide access to an authentic knowledge of God as experienced by ancient authors. The works were created for an audience, subsequently this same appreciative audience published and preserved the works. The spiritual impact of the works cannot be simply attributed to the creative genius of the authors. Countless unknown works have not made it to a second edition because the readers were not motivated to preserve the works. However, generation after generation in the community of faith has read and valued Scripture and been transformed by the reading. This enduring engagement with Scripture has been attributed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the evidence of its authority is rooted in the testimony of unnumbered faithful disciples. But like any other document, whether a dollar bill or a passport, the social impact of Scripture flows from a community of faith that is both informed and transformed by the message contained in the documents. Christianity is inconceivable without the written Scripture accepted as the authoritative word of God.

The story of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is also rooted in documentality. A group of like-minded individuals, separated by miles of difficult travel, were still able to discuss, debate, explore, and apply the meaning of Scripture with each other through the technology of printing. The half decade before 1844 saw the transformation of the printing process from hand presses to steam presses. During the same period, production of paper was transformed from a labor-intensive process that formed one page at a time to the high-speed machine production of paper using wood pulp. And the early Adventist pioneers aggressively engaged the new technologies to communicate with one another and to share their message. And as the ministry of Ellen White emerged and grew, the publishing of her writings formed a documented foundation for global engagement.

In the early twenty-first century, documentality in the Adventist church continues to flourish. While the economic challenges of competing in a media rich culture may stress some long held traditional formats, nonetheless, innovative and alternative media outlets are continuing to make an impact. Librarians are actively engaged in developing new avenues to access these documents. One example is the Adventist Digital Library (2016), a rich resource for historical primary sources. Another example is the institutional repositories found on several Adventist university campuses that make academic works globally available. (Digital Commons @ Andrews University, 2015; "Millionth download from Digital Commons at Andrews: Milestone achieved in just over three years," August 29, 2018)

Learning takes place in community. Without undervaluing the impact of personal relationships such as parents, friends, and teachers, the engagement with media is also influential. Thus, having access to Adventist content and intentionally learning from it is formative. This is where information literacy makes a difference.

Having the skills to evaluate the media messages and “test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil” (1 Thess 5:21-22, NIV) becomes essential. As the newer/younger members of the learning community begin growing in knowledge, the learning community is in a position to nurture them, mentoring them in discerning the difference between the good and “every kind of evil.”

### Documentality and Information Literacy Pedagogy

Much of the conversation around information literacy focuses on the impact of information seeking in learning. In the documentality model of communication between author and reader, weak information literacy skills can be analogous to noise that obscures the successful transmission of knowledge, as on a telephone line. It may require intentional effort by the reader to accurately understand the text. This challenge is exacerbated by time, distance, and language. It requires much more effort to read and understand a text written in the first century from Asia Minor in Greek than a work written in the twenty-first century by my neighbor in my first language. Beyond that obvious point, there are a number of other limitations with documentary communication.

- Language is linear. One word must follow another. One idea must follow another. Accurate interpretation includes plotting the ideas on a map. The tacit preferred path of the reader may not correspond to the author’s. The reader may perceive gaps and detours in the author’s line of thinking. The author may assume the reader already shares a knowledge base that the reader does not have.
- Space is limited. An author must select a finite number of knowledge units in constructing an argument. It is never possible to give expression to everything an expert knows on a subject in a single media instance. No single document completely includes all relevant data. No movie can simultaneously play all the relevant scenes.
- Perceived audience defines a number of facets, including vocabulary, illustration, metaphor, and so forth. These may or may not be obvious to someone from a different time, place, or culture.

All of these limitations generate noise between the author and the reader. On top of that is the realization that when someone reads a text, it is read using the cognitive structures of the reader, not the writer. This suggests that a reader will find in the text what they expect to find, and will interpret the content in light of their own expectations. The resulting interpretation may or may not be compatible with the intentions of the author. (Jolley, 2018). In response, information literacy

skills bring to the reading a grounded, intentional, and savvy mindset that critically engages the text to control for these types of tacit influences.

The savvy reader also appreciates that any given textual artifact cannot fully capture reality. Just as a map may be accurate and useful, it is not a substitute for the physical terrain that is represented on the map. The map is two dimensional and symbolic, not three dimensional and real. The map is frozen in time, representing the moment when it was created, and does not take into account any changes in the terrain since then. Nonetheless, having the map as a guide is better than having no map and getting lost. Knowing the historical context of the map helps in interpreting it correctly. That is the joy of reading, of discovery, of growing in knowledge, gratefully acknowledging the expertise of the map maker in pointing the way (Stackhouse, 2014, pp. 140-145).

Librarians with an Adventist perspective have the opportunity to guide novice learners using these maps, to provide evidence to seeking minds, through their vocation. In humility, those who are called to connect authors and readers are not omniscient, but they can be confident that their work will guide the reader further along in their quest for a knowledge of God.

The common image of the writer is that of a solitary individual grappling with great ideas. Yet, this essay on documentality teases out another dimension. Writing might be a solitary act, but it lives in hope of a reader. Without a reader, it might as well have never been attempted. So, writers not only strive to put ink on paper, but to engage their readers, to speak their language, to map the course from where they are to where they need to be—to be a bridge from the darkness of unknowing to the light of knowing. And it is the delight of the librarian to provide the timely connection between the author and a much larger group of readers.

## **Conclusion**

As a discipline, librarianship has explored and experimented with any number of methods to fulfill the mission of the library and engage its communities. That which should distinguish Adventist librarianship is the biblical social imaginary<sup>8</sup> that envelops library practice, summarized by Simon Peter's list of virtues.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Pet 1:5-8, (NIV)



Hinson-Hasty (2017) sums up what love entails. Contrasted with a condition dominated by hyperindividualism, a culture of neighborly love has a different focus. “Our relationships, communities, nation, and world would look much differently if we consistently embodied love through the values of reciprocity, cooperation/collaboration, interdependence, accountability to the commons, sustainability, and the inclusion of diverse peoples and experiences.” (p. 214). Libraries and librarians model this culture of neighborly love every day. The biblical social imaginary inspires the pursuit of “these qualities in increasing measure,” achieving excellence in effectiveness and productivity.

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<sup>1</sup> For commentary and discussion on Briet’s contributions, see (Day, 2014, pp. 7-10; Frohmann, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> By describing documents as reified and commodified, I am highlighting the fixed form of the document and the potential for exchanging it between people.

<sup>3</sup> An application of this use of the document apart from the content of text to the field of theology is discussed by Muers and Grant (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Libraries serving as institutions of memory and instruction seems intuitive. I also suggest that collections reflect identity. The Seminary collection at James White Library is the most extensive religion collection of any Adventist university, and this reflects on the identity and place of the Seminary in Adventist higher education. Other examples of how libraries engage the identity of the university include: special collections on Seventh-day Adventism; institutional archives; and institutional repositories.

<sup>5</sup> These “conditions” emerged out of different contexts, and some of the core concepts and observations overlap. The intent here is to take a manageable key focus from each, and illustrate how these influence philosophical presuppositions in concert.

<sup>6</sup> This culture of abundance in access to information and its social and intellectual impact has been discussed at length by Floridi (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Köstenberger (2011) applies 2 Pet 1:3-8 to academic scholarship, and thus illustrates how the Scriptures can inform and transform learning, using excellence as the defining quality.

<sup>8</sup> A helpful definition of social imaginary is provided by Nerlich (2015). “Social imaginaries ‘are ways of understanding the social that become social entities themselves, mediating collective life’ and shaping the way we live now and into the future.” Thus, a biblical social imaginary is guiding the “ways of understanding the social” gleaned from Scriptures that inform the practice of librarianship.

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