

Donation of Books by North American Theology Libraries to Africa:

Reflections on the Challenges and Benefits

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ABSTRACT With the development of Christianity in the third world increasing, the need for theological training and teaching increases. Unfortunately, many third world countries lack the fiscal resources to provide some of the critical components to a sound theological education, one of those resources being books. Subsequently, many institutions striving to provide theological education advocate for print resources to truly fulfill their mission. This article provides some of the challenges and benefits for North American theological libraries in donating to Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries represent a nation's wealth of knowledge. They are like manuals that precisely teach how to do almost everything in this world. Libraries are like fountains from which waters are drawn for the maintenance and sustenance of life. Libraries are like oceans from which all kinds of fish are drawn. Good libraries have books whose contents are as diverse as the nations and languages of the world. Without this diversity, libraries become ineffective and do not serve the purpose for which they are instituted. A good library fulfills the research and learning needs of its users. Countries often look to libraries as a resource that can supply all the knowledge needed for economic growth and development. Subsequently, libraries play a critical role in nation building.

ARGUMENT FOR AND AGAINST BOOK DONATION TO AFRICA

There are arguments for and against the donation of books to Africa.¹ Among other reasons, those who are against it insist that donating books to Africa does not help the receiving institutions and is a disadvantage to the local publishing industry and to those who sell books in Africa. The second group are those who insist that because of the widespread poverty in Africa, the donation of books to libraries in Africa should not stop. As much as I appreciate the concerns of those against donating books to Africa, it is a fact that most of the important books needed in Africa for theological reflection and economic growth are printed abroad and as such are not on sale in bookshops in Africa. Even when books are imported and brought by retailers to the bookstores, they are often so expensive that the ordinary student in Africa is not able to purchase them. While it is true that some theological works are produced in Africa, someone specializing in a particular area must be able to read from local as well as foreign scholars in that area. Subsequently, it becomes very difficult to call that person a specialist in his or her area of study when lacking familiarity with works produced outside of Africa. It is a well-known fact that most African scholars are trained abroad. Therefore, they write their thesis and dissertations abroad, and in most cases, publish abroad. For me, therefore, continuation of the donation of books to Africa is still relevant and crucial.

This article aims at giving the challenges African libraries face as a result of inadequate stock of books and journals, and the benefits of donating books to Africa. It will conclude by suggesting ways by which the challenges could be assuaged.

¹ See Journal of SCOLMA, no. 127, November 2016: 3–137 for a detailed discussion on the debate.

CHALLENGES

Inadequacy of Library Books in Africa

Almost all African tertiary institutions and schools, including theological institutions, have libraries. But it is sad to say that the volume of books of most libraries in Africa are nothing to write home about. These libraries are normally under-resourced. Very few institutions in Africa, primarily those in Egypt and South Africa, can boast of libraries that somehow meet the needs of the researcher. As a result of the fact that most African countries' stock of library books is woefully inadequate, most students in Africa rely solely on the lecture notes of the lecturers. Project works leading to the fulfilment of the requirements for most courses are very difficult to finish because of the unavailability of the required books. Where there are books, they are primarily older works with very few newer titles, if any at all. This challenge opens the door for students to plagiarize most of their work from resources generated through search engines like Google. Furthermore, where there are one or two of the required books, students either hide them in shelves in the library where no one will be able to have access to them until they are able to finish their work, or the required pages in the books, are ripped out and taken away, never to be returned.

Security Detecting Instruments

Because there are no security measures in place to detect unchecked at the entrance of the buildings, books are easily stolen from the libraries. This makes research very difficult for most students in African tertiary institutions, including theological institutions.

Plagiarism

The lack of books and journals needed to sufficiently embark on a research work in libraries also leads some students to resort to plagiarism. From my point of view, more difficult content requiring extra books for research further motivates students to compensate by stealing ideas from the limited books that they could consult. The search engines also become another source of plagiarism. The lack of books and journals for research and learning, therefore, increases the chances of plagiarism.

Photocopying and Breaking of Copyright Rules

Again, where there are two or three books, students resort to photocopying sections of the books, and at times the whole book. Thus breaking copyright laws. According to a publication by the American Library Association,

Libraries serve the economic purpose of copyright through billions of dollars spent on copyrighted materials from libraries (such as books, journals, motion pictures, art, and music). Libraries serve the 'use and access' purpose of copyright by circulating billions of copyrighted items annually. Libraries are thus economic engines of both copyright law and knowledge distribution.²

If that is the case, then copyright laws must be protected all over the world.

Over-photocopying also wears out the books and subsequently depreciates the lifespan of books very quickly. Moreover, where tertiary institutions and students obey copyright laws, the resultant challenge is that most African students find it difficult to get the funds needed to do the photocopies they need for research.

² "Professional Ethics", American Library Association, May 19, 2017. <http://www.ala.org/tools/ethics> (Accessed June 4, 2019). Document ID: 39f580a8-833d-5ad4-f900-53ecfe67eb1f

Poverty in Africa

Because of widespread poverty, students in Africa are not able to purchase the required books from bookstores or from the internet. This is not to cover the misdeeds of African students or researchers, but at times, poverty pushes students to cheat in their academic work. In addition, because of limited resources, most African libraries are not able to purchase the required books in the various topics of study, or to subscribe to the paid journals in the academic world. As a result, most Africans read out-of-date books in their subject area because they do not have access to newer publications. Where there are journals, they are primarily older journals. Consequently, students often lack access to current thought in their areas of research and therefore their research findings fall short of the academic contribution to the subject areas worldwide. Lack of procurement of new books means lack of students' access to current research in a particular subject area. That weakness makes the work of students and faculty duplicative of research already covered by other scholars in the world of knowledge.

These challenges are only some of the impediments which students face in African tertiary institutions, including theological institutions.

MITIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES

The challenges noted above make it imperative for books to be donated to Africa. These donations empower third-world libraries to solve some of the challenges above. Permit me to make the following suggestions to mitigate against the challenges.

Use of Internet Resources

It is a known fact that most African countries have very bad internet connectivity. But the fact still remains that slow as the connectivity may be, most African countries have working internet connections, especially in cities where millions of Africans flock from the rural areas to get higher education. Theological institutions in North America must support open access resources. By so doing, they empower partner institutions in Africa to utilize internet resources in their research and learning programs. Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Ghana, for example, is in collaboration with Princeton Theological Seminary. By the work that Princeton Theological Seminary has done regarding open access content, Princeton has given online library access to the faculty and students of Trinity. In addition, there are exchanges of students and faculty between the two institutions. These exchange programs help solve some of the research needs of researchers and lecturers from Africa. Further collaboration is strongly encouraged.

Old and New Books

We have had occasions when donations comprising primarily old books were sent to African libraries. If a donation of books to Africa is going to have any merit, it is worth sending a blend of new and old good books and journals. When that happens, it makes learning and research in third-world countries easier by enabling researchers to find enough books to work for their inquiry. A donation like this also helps African researchers to be current in their subject areas.

Plagiarism and Stealing of Books

A stock pile of books makes stealing them less attractive. For example, Trinity Theological Seminary (TTS), Legon-Ghana has an exchange program with the Candler School of Theology (CST), Emory University in Atlanta. From August 2017 to August 2018, I spent my sabbatical at the Emory University as a Visiting Scholar with a small living allowance. During the sabbatical, they gave me an office and access to their library with faculty member privileges. As a result, I was able to work on two books (both about three-quarters finished)

and during the period I was able to contribute two chapters (“The Ethics of Kwasi Wiredu & Kwame Gyekye”, and “The Ethics of Paulin Hountondji”) that have been accepted for publication in the book entitled *Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, edited by Nimi Wariboko and Toyin Falola, to be published in 2020.³ I was also able to contribute an article. Furthermore, when I was about to go back to Ghana, I appealed to the CST through the Associate Dean of Faculty & Academic Affairs, Jonathan Strom, for them to donate books to the TTS where I teach. The dean accepted to facilitate the donation of the books and immediately spoke to the Director of Pitts Library, Dr Richard Manly Adams, Jr., about the possibility of Pitts donating books to TTS, and also appealed to the lecturers of the Candler School of Theology to make some donation of books from their libraries. In the end, I shipped about one hundred small boxes of very good books to TTS. That, together with those donated by the World Book Trust, have given students and lecturers the opportunity to read books which were not available to them prior to this exchange. This, to a large extent, lowers plagiarism and stealing of books. We are most grateful to Emory University.

Shipment of Donated Books

It is important to add that when exporting books to third-world countries, the donating institution should also try to take care of the cost of shipment for the receiving institution. This is because most libraries in Africa cannot afford to pay for shipment from the donating countries, and that could be a stumbling block to some institutions in Africa.

Books Needed by the Receiving Institution

It is pertinent for donating institutions to write to the receiving institutions to obtain a list of books needed by that institution before selection of books are made by the donating institution. If that is done, lecturers in the receiving institutions will be able to put together the required books of the programs being offered by the receiving institutions so that books sent to them will be more useful. This is not to say that theological books of all kinds are not welcomed by the receiving institutions.

Security Detecting Devices

It is imperative that while large stocks of books are donated to African libraries, security devices must also be provided so that stealing of books is completely eliminated.

Training of Library Personnel

I will also suggest that North American libraries should also consider ways by which they can help train librarians in Africa to effectively mark and code books in the shelves.

CONCLUSION

I, therefore, appeal to North American higher education institutions to donate generously to help needy institutions in the third world to facilitate their research and learning. If knowledge is indeed power, then donating very good books to Africa will ultimately give Africans access to good theology which in the end will help African theological institutions to develop very good theology, for the development and growth of the churches in Africa. Most of the challenges above may be minimized or exterminated altogether if efforts are made by prominent theological libraries in North America to donate books to African institutions.

³ This article has been submitted to the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Cambridge University Press for review and possible publication.