

From: Patrick Joseph Stevens pjs3@cornell.edu  
Subject: RE: Letter from Cornell University Library: Religious Studies
Date: November 2, 2020 at 1:53 PM
To: pcashman21@verizon.net

PS

Ithaca, 02 November 2020

Dear Mr. Cashman,

I regret the unreasonable delay in my reply to your letter of 12 September. The semester has proved a busy one in spite of, or perhaps because of, the pandemic, as the library has worked assiduously to meet requests (such as electronic books) from researchers and to open up, albeit with caution, more of the functions (including on-site research by appointment) that had shut down in the spring.

Nonetheless, I did remember you had several questions, and I wanted to answer them.

I'm curious how the University Libraries are operating during this time. I presume there is a skeleton staff in each of the libraries to do things like get books from the stacks and replace them there, but what else needs to be physically done on premises? Are library hours cut back? Have any of the libraries physically closed, or are they operating on reduced hours? Are libraries open only for curbside service, as it were? I presume the number of carrels for occupation has been reduced to enable social distancing. Do any students have jobs in the library, as they used to have in the pre-COVID past?

You are correct in virtually all your suggestions. The library system has been operating with a skeleton crew for most of the months of the pandemic. Initially, the only on-site work was in connection with facilities maintenance--walkthroughs to make certain systems were functioning as anticipated. Even for staff (myself included) who came in for these purposes, time on campus was held to a minimum.

Libraries for months closed completely to the Cornell community and of course to the general public in our region. Then our access services teams developed, often in conjunction with bibliographic utilities (HathiTrust) and publishers, ways to make electronic monographs more available. Curbside service, what we also call contactless pickup, followed for a number of our books, which of course means we brought in staff to fulfill these requests. A great emphasis continued on using electronic resources.

Now we have researchers in parts of the library by appointment only. The protocols continue to mandate strict social distancing and low density, so the libraries remain virtually deserted except for reduced complements of staff, although the number of staff being allowed back for various functions is rising incrementally as plans for their return are carefully vetted. The few students now working seem to be concentrated in access services to monitor the arrival of researchers by appointment.

You use the term "ameliorating"; what does that mean in this context? Closing gaps in collections? I assume "sustaining" means to keep a collection current with new published works, as appears to be the purpose to which this year's allotment from our book fund was put.

Both terms are of course flexible and overlap in some measure. One could say that we sustain by ameliorating. In the basic sense, we would like to sustain growth by continuing, for example, subscriptions to journals that are essential across a vast field of religious studies; or adding new monographs from established series. At the same time, new fields and schools of interpretation

emerge, with new publications, so acquiring at least a solid representation of this innovative literature can constitute amelioration, made more necessary when faculty place requests for it. New gaps can suddenly appear with new (sub)disciplines.

Amelioration can also involve adapting to new formats, principally electronic journals and databases. The former are often more convenient for downloading and reading papers. The latter, like the former, can be expensive. One has to determine which resources most nearly address present and anticipated future needs for research and teaching. Faculty feedback, or even a sense of what individual faculty (and graduate students) have requested over time, can be valuable for arriving at decisions.

There are frequently surprises, not only new requests, but older stones unturned. This morning I learned of a series in Religious Studies that I do not recall having encountered. The *Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300-1500*, with several volumes dedicated to *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity*, escaped until now my attention, but a researcher requested we purchase one of the volumes in electronic format. I agreed with that request, and appreciated that I was able to rely on the Class of 1973 Book Fund to make this purchase. The individual volumes in the series are expensive; nonetheless, I shall order them across time to fill what I perceive to be a genuine lacuna in our information base on Eastern Christianity that will be accessible to multiple scholarly levels.

Ithaca awoke this morning to a light cover of snow, more of a dusting, and accompanying strong winds. Cycling in to campus was interesting, though not a real challenge. I am certain you remember the dynamic beauty of our region and how winter arrives to exert its awesome presence for half the year. In that setting, glazed over by this pernicious pandemic, the campus continues to function, even though the students actually on site seem fewer and farther between and in fact have been remarkably cooperative with the university in our effort to minimize the risk to the community.

With all best wishes for you and yours,



Patrick

From: Paul Cashman <pcashman21@verizon.net>
Sent: Saturday, 12 September, 2020 11:52
To: Patrick Joseph Stevens <pjs3@cornell.edu>
Subject: Fwd: Letter from Cornell University Library

Hi Patrick —

I always look forward to your email in the fall. As I believe I've said before, the selection of titles always make me appreciate the incredible depth and breadth of scholarship at Cornell.

I'm curious how the University Libraries are operating during this time. I presume there is a skeleton staff in each of the libraries to do things like get books from the stacks and replace them there, but what else needs to be physically done on premises? Are library hours cut back? Have any of the libraries physically closed or are they operating on reduced hours?

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You use the term “ameliorating”; what does that mean in this context? Closing gaps in collections? I assume “sustaining” means to keep a collection current with new published works, as appears to be the purpose to which this year’s allotment from our book fund was put.

I will publish your letter in my winter 2021 class newsletter.

I hope you and your family and friends are well and stay well in this crazy time.

best regards —
Paul

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Jennifer D. Sawyer" <jds367@cornell.edu>
Subject: Letter from Cornell University Library
Date: September 9, 2020 at 1:05:43 PM EDT
To: "pcashman21@gmail.com" <pcashman21@gmail.com>

Dear Mr. Cashman,

I trust this message finds you and yours safe and well.

Cornell University has now, in the most unusual of circumstances, welcomed back its community of scholars for a new fall term. True to its tradition, Cornell has responded with resolve to our current challenges, prioritizing the safety of its students. The work of the university library continues as an indispensable component of the university’s mission, even though most of our staff are still working online from remote locations.

We bibliographers in the library have a profound privilege sustaining and ameliorating outstanding library collections at Cornell—an endeavor that would be inconceivable were it not for the generosity so many of our donors have long manifested. The Class of 1973 Book Fund has long had a significant role strengthening the library’s collection in Religious Studies, which include religion in a generic sense, and significantly the history of religion and biography of religious personalities, as well as the study of Christianity. I am pleased to share with personal appreciation a selection of several titles the Class of 1973 Book Fund has recently enabled the library to acquire, which I hope you will share with your class:

- *Aus dem Leben der Familie Bonhoeffer: Die Aufzeichnungen von Dietrich Bonhoeffers Jüngster Schwester Susanne Dress*, edited by Jutta Koslowski (2018)

- *Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*, translated with introduction and brief annotations by Ronald E. Heine (2018)
- *Die Genesis Jesu Christi aber war so...: Die Herkunft Jesu Christi nach dem Matthäischen Prolog (Mt 1,1-4,16)*, by Matthias Berghorn (2019)
- *Die Königsmacher: Wie die synoptischen Evangelien Herrschaftslegitimierung betreiben*, by Christian Schramm (2019)
- *Les manuscrits arabes des Lettres de Paul: État de la question et étude de cas (1 Corinthiens dans le Vat. Ar. 13)*, by Sara Schulthess (2019)
- *Über die narrative Kohärenz zwischen Apostelgeschichte und Paulusbriefen*, by Nathanael Lüke (2019)
- *Zeit und Ethik im Johannesevangelium: Theoretische, methodische und exegetische Annäherungen an die Gunst der Stunde*, by Olivia L. Rahmsdorf (2019)

This selection suggests with good reason a large share of contributions by scholars writing in German. In fact, considerable research into the history and textual origins of the Christian tradition emanates from German theological seminaries and universities, making these works an important albeit by no means unique source for this vast field.

Please know of my profound gratitude for the ongoing partnership of the Class of 1973 Book Fund with the Cornell University Library in generous support of Religious Studies. I hope you will have an opportunity, at your convenience, to share this message of appreciation with members of the Class of 1973. If any questions about the Class of 1973 Book Fund should arise, please feel free to contact Jennifer Sawyer, Director of Library Alumni Affairs and Development, at jds367@cornell.edu or 607-255-9568.

With all good wishes,



Patrick J. Stevens, bibliographer for Religious Studies