

How GOOD is our LIBRARY?

by Lester De Koster, Director of the Calvin Library

YOUR GUIDE on a tour of the Calvin Campus has a favorite quip which he makes just as he pauses with you in the lobby of the Library. "I must ask you to be very quiet," he says, "so you won't disturb the students who are asleep here."

You chuckle and follow him into the building.

At any time of day or evening you will find life aplenty inside. If it is mid-morning, you will see no seat in the building which is not occupied. And no one — as you knew all along — is asleep. Nor are the books. For good books are, as Milton said, "the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Alive they are, the many long shelves of volumes, their verdant fruitfulness nourishing those youthful minds who use them here under the guidance of teachers who have long since learned to reap their treasurers.

"How good is our library?" you ask the guide when the tour of reading room, reference and periodical rooms, stacks and study carrels, processing and fine arts rooms is over.

That is a significant question: how good is our library?

The "our library" is significant because a library requires support, the support of your dollars not only but also that of your interest and your prayers for its usefulness. Every good library is an "our library," for a library is a work of art created by many loving hands and hearts. So it is well that you ask after "our library."

The "how good" is also significant. Mentioned in one breath when the worth of an educational institution is under discussion are the faculty, the library, and the administrative leadership. Deficiencies in any one of these place intolerable burdens upon the rest.

HOW GOOD, then, is the Calvin Library?

To a blunt question, a blunt answer: The Calvin Library is a good library, one in which you may take pardonable pride. I may say this because, as I have pointed out, a library is the work of many hands, and so I flatter no one. It is simply true that those colleges and seminaries of our size which possess better libraries than ours have generally been much longer in the building of them, or began under more affluent circumstances than did we. And we are now setting a pace which in a generation will rank us with the best of our class, college and seminary alike.

How can such strength be measured, you wonder?

Well, like the judgment of other works of art, the judgment of a library can hardly be set out with mathematical precision. But there are some standards which can be applied. Let me list them, and then apply some to our Library.



Statuette of John Calvin
Recently acquired by Calvin College

One standard is that of quantity: how many books, magazines, pamphlets, pictures, and such are in the collection? Or, again, how much money is provided annually for materials and services? Or, once more, how large is the staff, the building, and how extensive the facilities?

Quantity is important. A library can hardly be too large, or offer too many services, or have too substantial a budget.

A second measure of strength is that usually employed by accrediting agencies since they gave up their exclusive stress on quantitative factors. It is this:

College and Seminary

SYDNEY T. YOUNGSMAN, Editor

how adequately does the library serve the demands of the programs of study offered on the campus? And, how well does it serve the special requirements of the faculties?

Adequate resources and service are, of course, indispensable. The judgment of the library begins with these.

A third measure of library strength is, shall I say, *temporal*. A good library is not made in a day, nor in a year, nor in a decade or two. Even funds unlimited cannot create at once a rich and balanced library collection. Less than one out of four of the books on our shelves is probably in print and immediately available, and many of them cannot be duplicated at any price except in photostatic form. The accretion of materials which has made the library good today must continue at a steady, if not growing, pace if the library is to meet the demands of tomorrow. Because tomorrow will be too late to obtain what is missed today. Not only do the disciplines continue their progress so that, for example, the libraries which yesterday treasured their mighty *Migne Patrologi*, a collection of the original writings of the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, must today be subscribing to the vastly improved editions appearing in the *Corpus Christianorum*, or their scholars of tomorrow will have inadequate tools; I say, not only is this progress true in all fields of scholarship, but the expansion of curriculum and of faculty tomorrow will depend upon wise library expansion today.

Thus, the test of strength measured by growth, studied growth, is significant.

A fourth test of library strength is that of quality. It is the hardest test to apply, and the most important to attempt. Bacon distinguished between the books to be "tasted" and those to be "digested." A library must provide books of both kinds.

Let's begin next time with the fourth test: the quality of the Library collection. Though many challenges remain, and though sustained and developed pedagogy in the years ahead will demand sustained and developed library growth as the days go by; yet you will be pleased, I think, to learn how the patient accumulation of many years has given us a collection generally strong, and in many ways excellent.

How is the Calvin Library?

Come and see.