

## Theological Libraries and the Hermeneutics of Digital Textuality Panel Discussion

### Part One—In Pursuit of Seminary Historiography: The Case of Digital Textuality, Preservation, and the Margins Theological Librarianship

by

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#### Introduction

The expression “digital textuality” may be a bit of a funny term, because it presents a sense of “academese” that might not readily translate into the theological library world. But today, I’d like to suggest some possible discernment of this topic by offering some examples of “digital textuality” and how it may fit into an interesting narrative about our seminaries, especially our seminary histories.

The title of my short paper is “In Pursuit of Seminary Historiography . . .” which I will explain. You see, I am at a library that serves two institutions. But the fact is that these two institutions, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and McCormick Theological Seminary, are not just autocephalous seminaries *ex nihilo*—they are seminaries with predecessor bodies and libraries, other seminaries that grew into their spaces and culture, or theological schools that consolidated into a central Lutheran or Presbyterian institution. All of this is part of what “Seminary Historiography” is: effectively, “how we write about the history of our seminaries.” And since I am amid a fleet of seminaries—older seminaries, newer seminaries, obsolescent seminaries, dead seminaries, and even para-online seminaries—there is a lot of seminary history to be aware of, excavate, understand, preserve, and write about, if it so moves you.

What I’d like to present to you today is a brief discussion on understanding these seminary historiographies through the digital preservation of certain library materials—both circulating books and archival materials, which I like to call *library marginalia*—and how using very basic free online tools (e.g., the Google platform) can promote and develop a broader and more developed educational and scholarly product for your institutions, denominational bodies, and the larger academic communities. I will go through a few products of early Web 2.0 (which are common and many of you know about), as well as some newer, later Web 2.0/3.0 technologies, such as Google Wave. I will focus most on the Lutheran portions of the collections, as they are the aspects I’ve dealt with most intimately. But let me begin with a brief discussion of “digital textuality” itself.

#### 1) *Digital Textuality: A Question*

The word “textuality,” like “disciplinarity,” “selfhood,” and “meritocracy,” is a fairly modern term that connotes a variety of interpretive meanings. Structurally, when we speak of texts, the traditional rendition of a text was something “physical,” like a book or magazine, conveying the sense of “a poem” or “a story,” “a novel,” “a monograph.” But “text” and its value-laden academic-step-sister “textuality” have now become metaphors for interpersonal communication,

messaging, narrative, dialectics, discourse, and the human condition itself. “Textuality” is the “*How do we tell the story?*” aspect of our careers, vocations, and lives that presages any potential understanding of “texts.” Just look at the use of the term “text” in scholarship and popular usage in the past 40 years (“body as text;” “sexuality as text”—Foucault; “film as text;” “happiness as text;” “suicide as text”—C. Forth). On the one hand, to answer “What is textuality?” is easy: it is the expression of a text in various media, modes, and sets; but complex, because the more encompassing definition is “the transcendence of the physical and the electronic, becoming the embodiment of discourse itself.” In short, “textuality” is many things, many of which are non-verbal and hard to define. As a result, how do we come to understand a “*digital textuality?*” Does this mean that we are now confronted with objectified texts in electronic format, whose architectures are formatted and constructed through some binary-coded universe? Or, is it something else, something broader and more complex? I would argue that “*digital textuality?*” is to some extent the narrative of discourses provided through the digitized image, as a method of fostering communal involvement. It is something that promotes access, promotes community, and promotes a preservation of cultural heritages.

## **2) Background to this Paper/Panel**

This panel was first considered, if my memory serves me correctly, last year in St. Louis, over a plate of eggs and bacon with one of my colleagues at this table, John Weaver. But it did not come together for a while, and surely it had a life of its own, changing and modifying under various circumstances and experiences. Whatever my intentions were six months or a year ago, those intentions were quickly overcome by subsequent activities taking place at my library in Chicago. Because of many factors—the financial downturn being one of them—our library is undertaking a massive weeding project: likely some 100,000 volumes by the time it is done. As one student commented to me one day, “It’s like you’re weeding with guns to your heads!” Well, standing among the stacks, weeding one day, I started coming upon some old books that had been selected for de-accession, many of which were old and fragile, and had not been checked out in decades, if not longer. Many of them were old language grammars—Hebrew, Greek, and so forth. Inside these covers, I discovered various notes, many with stylized book-plates, signatures of ownership, and even comments on provenance. At this point, I started to think about something that neither seemed relevant prior to this experience, nor part of our policy, and that was, “What ethical role do we have in preserving these margins of library history, which ultimately are part of the larger seminary histories? And how do we go about this (or *their*) preservation?”

Well, there were several problems: we needed to weed, and weed furiously. There was no time to tarry around preserving old low-circulation books with scribbles in them. And besides, there was no money to be had for such a project, which presumably was seen as luxurious. Remember, archival-related work is always the first thing to go in many a budget. But this is when I started to have some clarity, because it was of some work I’d done in the archives earlier that gave me another idea.

Now, the next few years are significantly important to the Lutheran Seminary heritage in Chicago because of some big anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of the founding of Augustana Seminary and College, which, though now in Rock Island, Illinois, was originally founded in Chicago in 1860. And in 2012, LSTC will be celebrating the 50th anniversary

of its founding. As a result, there have been various discussions about planning, and I've had various conversations and adventures into our archives, looking for items about the seminaries' histories, retired or long-gone faculty, and alumni from the early days of the schools' histories. And while I was sitting up in the stacks weeding this one day, I realized that there were a number of narratives that still needed to be told among the archives—but so, too, in these books, these margins of the library, especially when I'd come across books once owned by past presidents or scholars of the seminary. So I decided to do what I'd done two years ago, when I first started doing more archival work: create a website (specifically, a blog), which would detail the stories, images, and artifacts of the library and seminary histories, in order to preserve the potentially lost artifacts and share the information on a wide access scale.

### 3) *Vocatio divina et bibliotheca*

Some years ago, a friend received a phone call from a local government office. The person on the other end of the line stated that they were moving buildings and that the municipality had “cleaned out the attic of junk” and put it in garbage bags in a dumpster on the street. If my friend wanted to look in the massive dumpsters for any of the “old papers,” she would have to come by and take them immediately. My friend is an historian. So she went to see what was tossed. By day's end, she'd discovered bags full of ledgers, account books, bound newspapers, and receipts in the trash . . . all dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries! Full economic and social histories of early American transportation, commerce, and society, nearly lost to the ignorance of bureaucrats. This was probably ten years ago. Back in the early 1960s, a similar event occurred, which was recounted to me by Martin Marty. His Th.M. adviser, Robert Fischer, an historian at the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary (a predecessor of LSTC), received a call, as the story goes. Someone was cleaning out their attic or garage, and had “boxes of junk.” The good professor went and retrieved the boxes—some dozen or so. Their contents: the papers of the first professor of theology of the first continuously operated (long-term) Lutheran Seminary (CLTS) in Chicago—as Augustana moved already in the 1860s from Chicago. The papers of Henry Warren Roth, former president of Thiel College and protégé of the famed William Passavant, were saved from extinction by a call, and now rested in the care of Dr. Fischer, who held them for several decades until his death in the early 2000s. The boxes contained manuscripts and other materials dating back to the 1820s all the way up to Roth's death in 1918, including eulogies given in tribute to him. Dr. Fischer had labeled some of these items, with interest mostly focused on Roth's mentor, William Passavant; hence, the boxes of Roth's papers went virtually unexamined and un-itemized for nearly a century, until I began work on them in 2008.

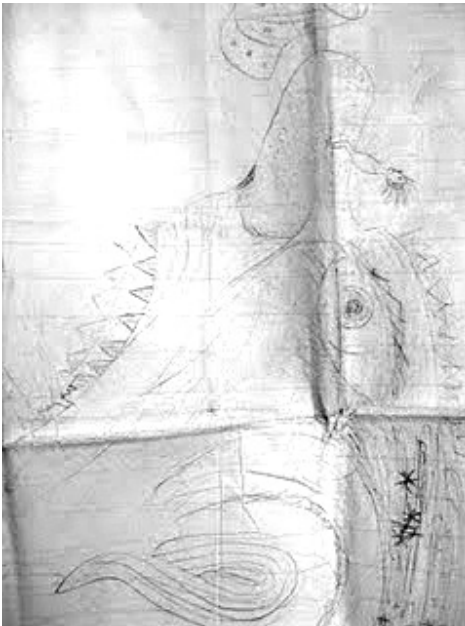
The library at that point still had an archives budget, but within months budget cuts across the board eliminated that line, and the collection was left to uncertainty. But at some point, I had decided to create a blog for the materials. And I began scanning, photographing, and digitizing various artifacts, which I could no longer catalog physically. This all came to fruition, due in part to the scarcity of preservation materials and the discontinuing of archival responsibility by the library, stemming from the effects of the financial crisis. As a result, I felt obligated to do something, and from that point on, I began volunteering after (and *outside of*) work and on weekends to bring part of this collection to life. And this is where the blog comes in . . . .

#### 4) *The Technologies and Digital Textuality*

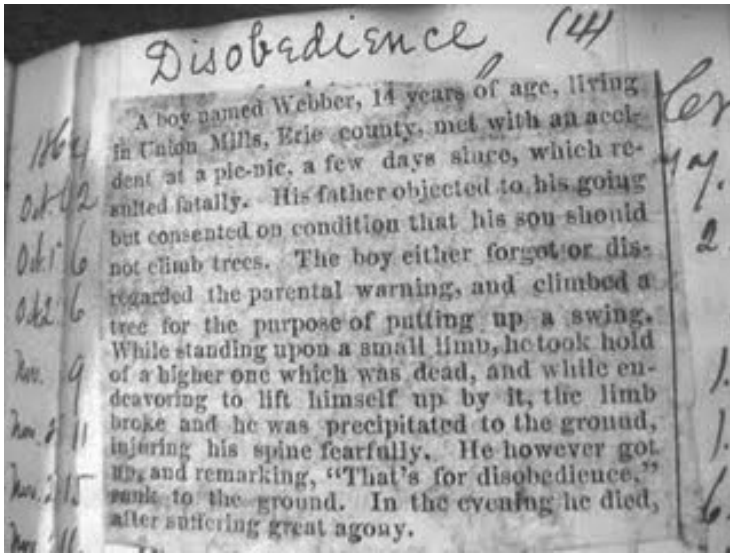
The blogs were the answer to providing some sort of *preservational* model for these materials, lost to generations because of hiddenness, low or no funding, and general apathy toward promotion of special collections. With the coming of these anniversary years, these unique items are finding a special place for some of those interested in writing the seminaries' histories, or simply understanding what was happening in those days. Design of both blogs—first, the “Henry Warren Roth Archive” at <http://henrywarrenrotharchive.blogspot.com> and second, the blog “Seminary Historiography” at <http://seminaryhistoriography.blogspot.com>—has helped me situate some sense of potential loss. [NB: Both are presently password protected, until more complete, and may be accessed by contacting the author].

The latter blog, especially, has become somewhat of a discernment of lost stories and cultural church history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—both are relevant to who we are as seminaries and libraries. The additional piece of technology I wanted to share comes with the need to collaborate on such anniversary celebrations: the use of online meeting softwares to coordinate events synchronously or develop plans for ceremonies or other events. And for this there is Google Wave. You can use Google Sites and Groups to do interactive work with disparate populations on planning, as well.

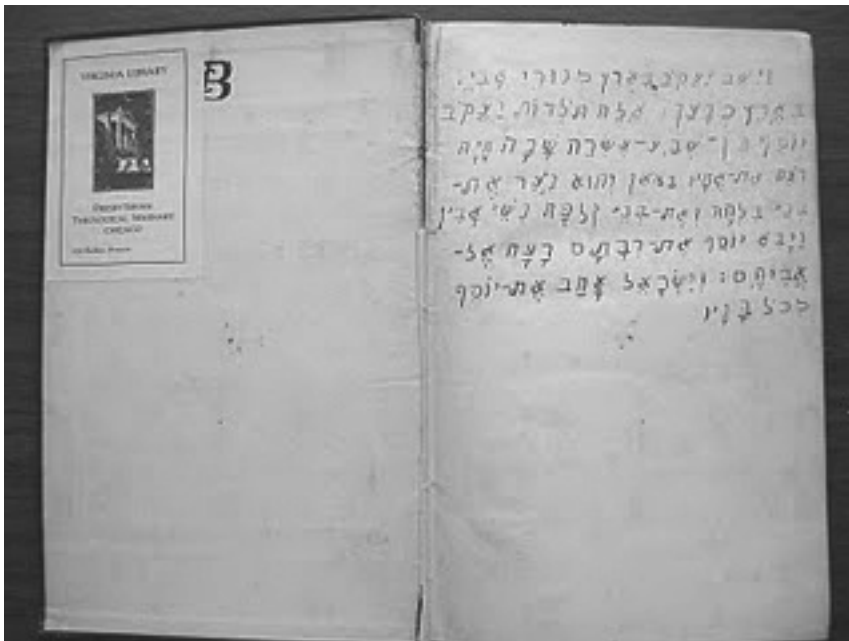
Ultimately, we can identify and understand our pasts with the fleeting remnants of our worlds, whether archival material or books with 100-year-old scribbles; but in this modern or post-modern age, it is the utilization of digital technologies that will hopefully allow us to embrace the old with the new and promote these (almost) lost items for future generations.



*figure 1. Cholera Monster*



*figure 2. Disobedience*



*figure 3. Hebrew Inscriptions*

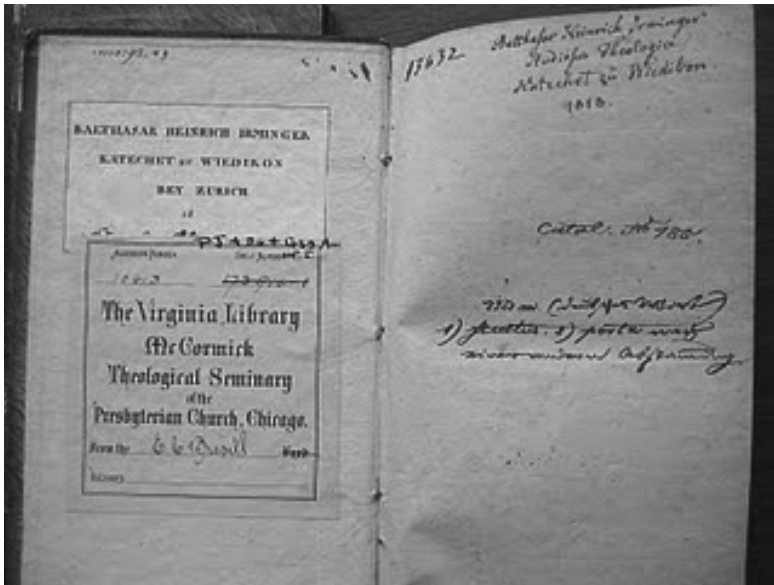


figure 4. Irmingen Marginalia

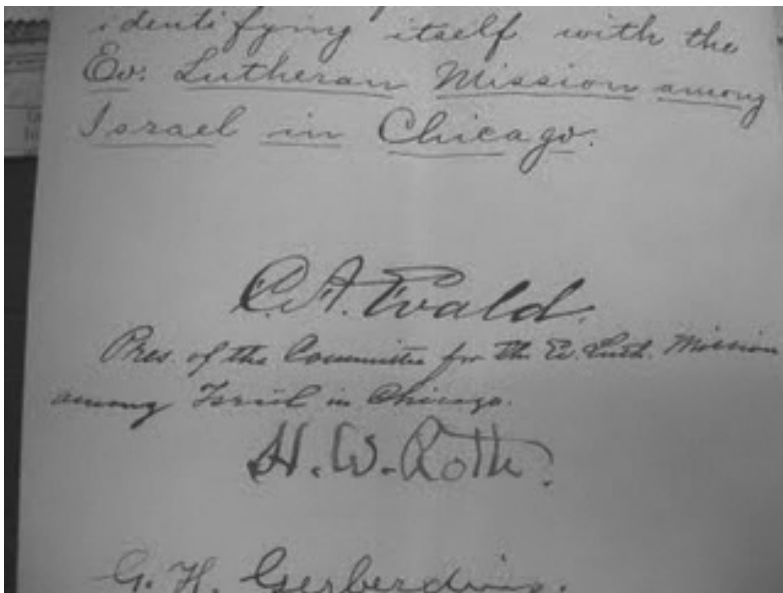


figure 5. Missions—Roth

**LECTURE!**

**Rev. H. W. ROTH, of Pittsburgh,**  
Will deliver a Lecture in St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
below and near Spring Dale, for the benefit of the Congregation, on

**MONDAY EVENING, APRIL 26.**

SUBJECT:  
**"Protestantism a Failure!"**

The community is respectfully invited to assist the Congregation in  
liquidating its indebtedness by attending this Lecture.

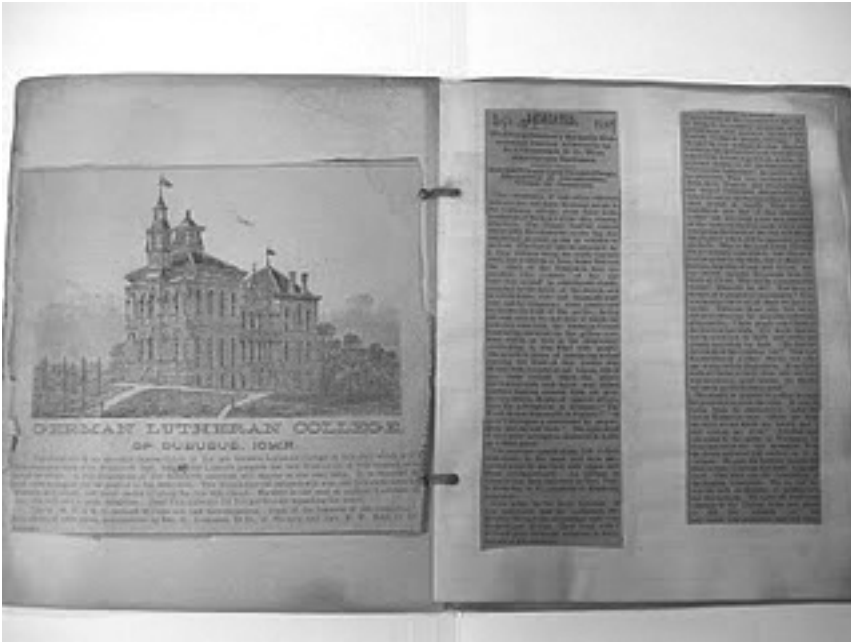
Tickets, 50 Cents. Family Tickets, \$2. Lecture begins at 7-1/2 o'clock.

*figure 6. Protestantism Failure*

A reward to  
H. W. Roth  
for his good care  
of the school

Wm. H. Bobb  
Feb

*figure 7. Roth Notes*



*figure 8. Roth Wartburg Note-book*

## **Part Two—BibleWorks Software in Reading and Teaching: The Difference a Digital Text Makes**

by  
**John B. Weaver**

This presentation addresses two interrelated questions. First, what are the similarities and differences between the reading/interpretation and teaching/preaching of 1) printed Bibles, and 2) the digital texts in BibleWorks software? And, second, what are the implications of these similarities and differences for theological education?

To help address these questions, an online survey with ten questions was posted to a user discussion board on the BibleWorks website, and to “the wall” of the BibleWorks page on the Facebook social-networking website. There were sixty-seven responses during two weeks in June, 2010.

### ***1. On average, how many hours per week do you spend reading and studying the Bible?***

Response: 31.8% spend more than 20 hours; 34.8% spend more than 10 hours; 16.7% spend 5-10 hours; 16.7% spend 1-5 hours.; 0% spend less than 1 hour.