

Christian Libraries and Learning

“Si quem sancta tenet meditandi in lege voluntas Hic poterit residens sacris intendere libris.”

[“Here he whose thoughts are on the laws of God May sit and ponder over holy books.”]

~Paulinus of Nola

“Cunctum vite tempus in ejusdem Monasterii habitacione peragens omnem meditandis Scripturis operam dedi; atque inter observantiam disciplinæ regularis et quotidianam cantandi in ecclesia curam, semper aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere dulce habui.”

[All my life I spent in that same Monastery, giving my whole attention to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and in the intervals between the hours of regular discipline and the duties of singing in the church, I took pleasure in learning, or teaching, or writing something."]

~Bede Historia ecclesiastica v. 24

“O quam dulcis vita fuit dum sedebamus in quieti ... inter librorum copias.”

[“Oh how sweet life was when we sat quietly ... midst all these books.”]

~Alcuin Ep. Xxii

“Amor litterarum ab ipso fere initio pueritiæ mihi est innatus, nec earum, ut nunc a plerisque uocantur, superstitiosa uel [superuacua] otia fastidui; et nisi intercessisset inopia præceptorum et longo situ collapsa priorum studia pene interissent, largiente deo meæ auiditati satisfacere forsitan potuissem; siquidem uestra memoria per famosissimum imperatorem K[arolum], cui litteræ eo usque deferre debent ut æternam ei parent memoriam, coepta reuocari, aliquantum quidem extulere caput satisque constitit ueritate subnixum præclarum Cic[eronis] dictum: honos alit artes et accenduntur omnes ad studia gloria. Nunc oneri sunt qui aliquid discere affectant; et uelut in editio sitos loco studiosos quosque imperiti uulgo aspectantes, si quid in eis culpæ deprehenderunt, id non humano uitio, sed qualitati disciplinarum assignant. Ita, dum alii dignam sapientiæ palmam non capiunt, alii famam uerentur indignam, a tam præclaro opere destiterunt. Mihi satis apparent propter se ipsam appetenda sapientiæ (Lupus Servati Lupi epistolæ [SLE] 1).”

[“A love of learning arose in me almost from earliest childhood, and I did not despise what many people today speak of as a horrible waste of time. And if there had not been a lack of teachers, and if the study of the ancient writers had not passed almost into oblivion through long neglect, perhaps, with the help of God, I could have satisfied my craving, for within your memory there has been a revival of learning, thanks to the efforts of the illustrious emperor Charles to whom letters owe an everlasting debt of gratitude. Learning has indeed lifted up its head to some extent, and support has been given to the truth of Cicero's well known dictum, "Honor nourishes the arts, and all men are aroused to the pursuits of learning by the hope of glory." In these days those who pursue an education are considered a burden to society, and the uneducated who commonly look up to men of learning as if seated on a high mound impute any fault which they may find in them to the quality of their training, not to human frailty. Men have consequently shrunk from this noble endeavor, some because they do not receive a suitable reward for their knowledge, others because they fear an unworthy reputation. It is quite apparent to me that knowledge should be sought for its own sake.”]

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Libraries are as the shrines where all the reliques of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved, and reposed

~Francis Bacon, 1605

Jewish Quotes about Books, Reading & Libraries

“Cover your bookcases with rugs and linens of fine quality; preserve them from dampness and mice and injury; for it is your books that are your true treasure.”

~Ibn Tibbon c. 1120-1190, Provençal Jewish scholar

“Never refuse to lend books to anyone who cannot afford to purchase them, but lend books only to those who can be trusted to return them.”

~Ibn Tibbon c. 1120-1190

“Make books your companions; let your bookshelves be your gardens: bask in their beauty, gather their fruit, pluck their roses, take their spices and myrrh. And when your soul be weary, change from garden to garden, and from prospect to prospect.”

~Ibn Tibbon, c. 1120-1190

“Books should be placed in stately array near the dead, so that the souls of the righteous may in death study as they did on earth.”

~Judah of Regensburg, 13th century, Sefer Hasidim (work on ethics)

“If you have one child who does not like to lend books, and another child who does, leave your library to the second, even if that child is younger.”

~Judah of Regensburg, 13th century, Sefer Hasidim (work on ethics)

“If you drop gold and books, pick up the books first, then the gold.”

~Anonymous

“My pen is my harp and my lyre; my library is my garden and my orchard.”

~Judah Ha-Levi, Spanish poet, physician

“Three possessions should you prize: a field, a friend, and a book.”

~Hai Gaon, Head of Bet Din in 998; wrote commentaries on Torah and Talmud until his death at age 99.

“None is poor save him that lacks knowledge.”

~The Talmud

“Books lead us into the society of those great men with whom we could not otherwise come into personal contact. They bring us near to the geniuses of the remotest lands and times. A good library is a place, a palace, where the lofty spirits of all nations and generations meet.”

~Samuel Niger, *Gathered Works*, 1928

“However when the wise man lies down in death with his fathers, he leaves behind him a treasured and organized blessing: books that enlighten like the brilliance of the firmament (Daniel 12:3) and that extend peace like a river (Isa. 66:12).”

~Rabbi Shimon Ben Zemach Duran, *Zohar ha-raki'a*, Hakadma

“I have always imagined Paradise as a big labyrinthine Palace library in the 7 heavens.”

~Louis Borges

“Libraries are more than inert storehouses of written tradition; they are volatile spaces that actively shaped the meanings and uses of books, reading, and consciousness that evolves. They are spaces where conceptions of knowledge are created and grow. They are the crucibles in which knowledge is shaped.”

~Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library*