

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

Religion (Classes BL through BX)

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I. Scope

Materials covered by this statement comprise the collections in class BL-BX. As the de facto national library of the United States, the Library of Congress acquires for its permanent collections works of research value in the philosophy of religion; the history and principles of religion; comparative religion; systems of theology and doctrine; law, liturgy, and rituals; religion and society: its historical, social, and cultural role; and trends and developments of current or historic importance. Emphasis is placed on publications of scholarly and research interest at national or international levels. This document excludes religious law (KB-KBX), which is covered by the [Law Collections Policy Statement](#).

II. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement

As the nation's de facto national library, the Library of Congress strives to build an expansive, yet selective, collection that records the creativity of the United States and is reflective of the nation's diversity and complexity. The Library's mandate is to have collections that are inclusive and representative of a diversity of creators and ideas. A priority includes acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library's collections to ensure diverse authorship, points of view, cultural identities, and other historical or cultural factors. The Library also seeks to build a research collection that comprises a globally representative sample of international materials that are diverse in voice and perspective, relative to their places of origin, further supporting the Library's mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress and future generations.

Diverse collecting is mentioned within many of the Library's Collections Policy Statements. In addition, the Library has adopted several specific collection policies in an effort to ensure it is building an inclusive and representative collection. For more information, see the Library's Collections Policy Statements on [Ethnic Materials](#), [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#), [Women's and Gender Studies](#), [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#), and [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#).

III. Research Strengths

The Library of Congress's holdings in the area of religion reflect the tremendous depth and breadth of the Library's collections at large. These materials cover nearly all of the world's religious traditions, in all

manner of formats, dating from before the Common Era down to the present day. The Library has extensive holdings of the foundational texts and other basic writings of all major and many minor religions worldwide. These include all significant editions and translations of the Bible, Talmud, Qur'an, Tripitaka, Vedas, and others, as well as large numbers of interpretive or reference works about them. In addition to the General Collections, the African and Middle Eastern Division, the Asian Division, and the Rare Book and Special Collections Division house significant collections of manuscript and print editions of these sacred texts in their original vernacular languages.

Materials in the subject area of Christianity are found in all of the Library's collecting divisions. These include works on liturgy and ritual across the Eastern and Western traditions as well as primary and secondary sources on Christian history, thought and tradition. The Library collects significant writings by and about religious leaders and thinkers. Examples of particular strengths include documents, history and discussion of the church councils, of various movements in the church such as those in the Renaissance and Reformation periods, the history of monasticism through the ages, and historical missions.

Patristic works are exceptionally well represented in the collection by original texts, translations, and commentaries. The Library also has useful resources on the Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, and Ethiopian churches as well as other ancient groups. Many of these have sizable portions in western languages or are part of a western series and thus are found in the General Collections. Materials in the vernacular for Armenian, Coptic, and Syriac are accessed through the African and Middle Eastern Division.

The Library of Congress has exemplary collections in Orthodox Eastern Church materials, especially from Russia. The Library of Congress has one of the largest collections published by the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia. All major scholarly works are represented, complemented by a significant collection of liturgical texts and service books. The Library also has a rich collection of materials from the Orthodox Church in America. Extensive vernacular materials for various Eastern Churches are kept in the African and Middle Eastern Division. These include translations from the Greek and Latin Church fathers, commentaries on them, and original compositions from each church's patristic period to the present.

The General Collections are particularly strong in United States religious history. The holdings in this area are exceptionally broad and abundantly document the American religious experience from the colonial period to the present day. All the major religious groups in the country are covered along with works by American religious leaders. Sectarian groups are well represented by histories, annual reports, and serials. Distinctly American religious expressions and movements such as Christian Science, Seventh-day Adventism, the Church of Latter-day Saints, New Thought, and Scientology are well-covered. Because of copyright deposits, the General Collections have a representative amount of religious materials on African American churches, clergy, and religion in the 20th century.

Judaism is well represented in 20th-century publications. Because of copyright deposit, the General Collections contain most 20th-century English-language publications by Jewish presses in the United States and United States presses with titles on Jews and Judaism. The collections of the Hebraic Section of the African and Middle Eastern Division are especially strong in the areas of the Bible, rabbinics, liturgy, and responsa. The Hebraic Section has a unique collection of rare children's books in Hebrew and Yiddish, particularly from the formative years of its development in early 20th century Russia and Eastern Europe.

Between the Library's General Collections and the collections of the African and Middle Eastern Division, Islam is broadly represented. Materials relating to the study of Islam in the General Collections are especially rich since the 1950s, providing abundant resources for research. The Library possesses a vast collection of Qur'ans and works on all areas of Qur'anic studies. These include: *tafsir* (or commentary),

interpretation, ritual and practice, teachings, and recitation available in books and articles in various languages. The Qur'an itself is available in many formats, including manuscripts, printed works, and sound recordings. Aside from the numerous editions of the Qur'an in the original Arabic, the Library also possesses translations of the Quran in many other languages. The collection further includes all major compilations of Hadith--the traditions and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad--both in Arabic and in translation.

The Library's Islamic collections also include works on Islamic law and jurisprudence, Islamic mysticism, Islamic philosophy, Islamic science, works on the various sects of Islam and their traditions, political Islamic doctrine--both historical and modern--and the groups associated with them, in addition to many other areas. All major schools of thought are represented with modern and classical interpretations. These include the Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali schools for Sunnis, Ja'fari and Zaydi schools for Shiites, as well as the Ibadi, Ismaili, Ahmadi, and Zahiri schools. All canonical works for these groups are available in the original Arabic and in translation (where available). Studies and works by and about related sects and religions such as the Alawis, Druze, and Baha'is can be found both in the General Collections and the African and Middle Eastern Division. All sources in the vernacular on these topics are available in collections in the Near East Section, both in book and manuscript format. These languages include Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Kurdish, Pashto, and various Central Asian languages, among others. This combination of materials in the General Collections and Near East Section in all formats render the collections for the study of Islam at the Library superb. It should be noted that excellent sources on Islam in South and Southeast Asia can be found in the Asian Division in Urdu, Bangla, Malay and various Indonesian languages.

The Library of Congress has a wide variety of materials pertaining to all religious traditions of South Asia. Between the Library's General Collections and the Asian Division, there is an expansive collection of reprints, critical editions, and translations of the sacred works of Hinduism (e.g., Vedas, Upanishads), Jainism (e.g., Kalpasutra), and Sikhism (e.g., Guru Granth Sahib). There are also numerous works on South Asian Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, including primary sources produced by South Asian communities and secondary works analyzing these religious traditions from scholarly perspectives. A notable strength is the collection of materials on South Asian religious traditions in approximately 100 vernacular languages, including some publications, contemporary and retrospective, that are only available in North America through the Library of Congress. Contemporary publications are particularly strong after the establishment of the overseas offices in India (1962) and Pakistan (1965).

The Library's collection of materials related to Buddhism possess great depth and breadth. All traditions of Buddhism are well represented in Western languages, comprising more than 15,000 monograph and serial titles that range from early translations of canonical Buddhist texts to contemporary scholarly studies. Holdings in vernacular languages are exceptionally rich; in fact, Buddhism is significantly represented in each of the Asian Division's seven collections. These holdings encompass sacred texts and commentaries in classical forms of Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan, as well as scholarly works in modern vernaculars from across South, Southeast, and East Asia.

The Asian Division has especially strong holdings of Tibetan canonical literature, the Kanjur and Tanjur, in both original 18th-century xylographs and reprint editions, as well as extensive commentarial texts. These are complemented by strong holdings of canonical texts of Bon, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, including three rare editions of the Bonpo Katen. The Mongolian Buddhist tradition is well represented in both rare and modern editions, including the Mongolian Kanjur and Tanjur, bilingual Tibetan-Mongolian texts, modern commentaries, and works on Mongolian shamanism.

The Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections—each the largest of their kind outside of Asia —together hold more than 20,000 monograph and serial titles on Buddhism, including hundreds of rare books and different editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon. These three collections also contain substantial holdings of works on other major religious traditions in East Asia, namely, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto, which are well represented both among rare books and contemporary publications. The Southeast Asian collection likewise holds thousands of works related to the study of Buddhism, with particular strengths in Burmese- and Thai-language materials. Across the Asian Division, the vernacular collections possess extensive holdings of works produced by, or written about, a wide variety of regional, folk, and syncretic religious traditions.

Beyond the holdings of the General and International Collections noted above, many custodial divisions hold exemplary collections. A few of these include the Canon and Islamic Law collections in the Law Library, the Bible and Reformation collections in Rare Book and Special Collections Division and the papers of Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry Ward Beecher, Dwight Lyman Moody, and the Russian Alaskan Church Archives in the Manuscripts Division. The American Folklife Center has extensive audiovisual documentation of religious practices from various locations in the U.S. and other parts of the world; included are recordings documenting the spiritual beliefs and traditions of many indigenous communities.

Digitized collections of particular note include the [Manuscripts from the Monasteries of Mt. Athos](#) , the [Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai](#) , and the [Manuscripts in the Libraries of the Greek and Armenian Patriarchates in Jerusalem](#)

More detailed descriptions of the strengths of the Library of Congress religion collections can be found in [Religion Collections in Libraries and Archives: A Guide to Resources in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia](#) (1998)

IV. Collecting Policy

The Library of Congress collects at Level 4 for most areas within the BL-BX classification with some areas at Level 3 in an effort to maintain a strong research collection across languages. Materials collected include current reference books, monographs, serials, microforms, and electronic resources, such as databases, e-books, e-journals, and archived web sites (e.g., Papal Transition Web Archive). Electronic resources are collected consistent with criteria used for other formats (e.g. *ATLA Religion Database*, *Index Islamicus*, *Bibliography of Asian Studies*).

Manuscripts, facsimiles of manuscripts, recordings, motion pictures, and other special format materials are acquired on their individual merits, in keeping with the appropriate Collections Policy Statements. Hymnology and liturgical music are acquired in conformity to the [Collections Policy Statement on Music](#).

Collection Policy - Guidelines for specific areas

- **Religions. Mythology. Rationalism**

The Library of Congress acquires for its permanent collections current works of research value in the following subjects:

- Philosophy of religion
- History and principles of religion
- Comparative religion
- Systems of theology and doctrine
- Law, liturgy, and rituals
- Religion and society; its historical, social, and cultural role
- Trends and developments of current or historic importance

The Library collects at Level 4 national and international publications on world religions of interest to scholars. Minor and popular works in all languages will be collected at Level 3. Those publications dealing with local religious groups, practices, beliefs and controversies will be acquired:

- If they relate to matters that have national or international significance or have attracted wide attention, or
- If they have substantial value for cultural, historical, political, anthropological, sociological, or economic research

The collections of other U.S. libraries will be taken into account, but the Library of Congress may, when desirable, duplicate individual titles in the holdings of denominational archives, theological libraries, and local repositories.

- **Sacred writings and related works**

The Library will acquire all significant editions and translations of the Bible, Qur'an, Talmud, Tripitaka, Vedas, and other major sacred writings.

The following are not acquired, unless they include important commentaries or have other bibliographical significance such as fine illustrations:

- Variant editions and reprints of translations already in the Library's collections
- Individual editions of the Bible, abridged editions and selections from sacred writings

Materials from the above category are considered for acquisition for their linguistic value when they represent virtually the only available work in a given language. The [Collections Policy Statement for Translations](#) may also shed light on the acquisition of sacred texts.

All major reference works about the Bible and other sacred writings (dictionaries, concordances, glossaries, etc.) and scholarly commentaries are acquired. Other publications about the Bible and other sacred writings intended for adults and juveniles are acquired on a selective basis.

- **Denominational or sectarian publications - United States**

The Library of Congress acquires the following publications of U.S. religious denominations at the national level:

- Yearbooks, annual reports, directories
- National periodicals of general circulation

- Liturgies, rituals, codes, protocols, disciplines, books of order, canon law, and other legal materials
- Any major monographs

The Library acquires histories of local churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other congregations as they reflect the regional or national history of the United States or of the religious group, and often contain substantial genealogical information.

Instructional materials (for adults and juveniles) should be gathered for the collections at Level 3, focusing on items published at a national level.

Publications at the regional, diocesan, or local level are acquired only in exceptional cases, for example:

- Publications relating to local activities or circumstances of national interest
- Important publications of denominations, congregations, etc., which lack a national organization

Because of copyright deposit and the Cataloging in Publication Program, the Library has a representative amount of U.S. devotional publications. More in-depth collecting is considered to be the responsibility of local and denominational libraries. The Library of Congress will seek out the following on a selective basis for their ability to support historical, cultural, and literary research:

- Devotional publications
- Tracts and pamphlets
- **Denominational or Sectarian Publications – Non-U.S. and International**

Publications of religious denominations, sects, or other organizations necessarily vary according to the country of origin. Emphasis is placed on publications at the national level, or those having national or international significance.

As a general principle, acquisitions are not limited to the predominant sect or sects within a given country, but include all those which may have significant religious, political, or social impact, including clandestine groups. Similarly, for countries where particular religions, groups or sects are officially discouraged or limited, the Library attempts to acquire those publications which provide information on the status and influence of significant religious groups or trends within the country.

Yearbooks, annual reports, and directories of major international religious groups are acquired in English and in the vernacular when desirable.

Published reports of missionaries, containing significant observations on social, economic, and political conditions in the areas in which they worked, are considered for addition to the collections.

Instructional materials for non-Western religious traditions (for adults and juveniles) are gathered for the collections at an Instructional Level (3), focusing on items published at a national level.

For countries whose publications are not widely distributed internationally, the provisions of the [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges Collections Policy Statement](#) are followed.

V. Acquisition Sources

Whenever possible the Library attempts to acquire materials through non-purchase means, such as copyright, exchange or gift. The Library of Congress collections are heavily dependent upon materials received through the copyright deposit provisions of U.S. copyright law ([17 USC section 407](#) & [17 USC section 408](#)). For copyright demand, the U.S. regulations allow for the Library to receive analog and some digital materials. When items are offered in both formats the Library's default is normally the Best Edition print version, unless the publisher has arranged a special relief agreement with the Copyright Office. For materials not available to the Library through copyright deposit, or other non-purchase means, the Library acquires materials through purchase. Purchase is used predominately for non-U.S. publications that are not widely available within the United States. The Library utilizes an array of traditional methods of library acquisition (firm orders, subscriptions, and approval plans) with vendors located in different areas of the world. In addition, the Library uses its six Overseas Operations Offices to broaden its acquisitions opportunities. Copyright deposit plays an important role for the collecting of work by and about new religious movements in the United States. These movements are broadly collected, even those not enumerated in this document. See Collecting Levels Chart for more information.

VI. Best Edition and Preferred Formats

For guidance regarding best editions for material acquired via the Copyright Office, see: <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ07b.pdf>.

For guidance regarding recommended formats for material acquired via all other means; e.g., purchase, exchange, gift and transfer, see: <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs>.

For information regarding electronic resources and web archiving, see the following Supplementary Guidelines: <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/electronicresources.pdf>, <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/opencontent.pdf>, and <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/datasets.pdf>.

VII. Collecting Levels

Meeting the Library's Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement (see Section II) and the collecting levels outlined below requires continual evaluation of the publishing landscape, sources of expression, current events, and socio-cultural trends to thus maintain effective collecting policies and acquisitions methods. Changes in publishing or in the creation of materials covered by this policy statement may necessitate collecting efforts not explicitly referenced here. Such efforts will be handled on a case-by-case basis while the Library evaluates the need for policy statement updates.

The following list, arranged according to the major Religion sub-classes of Class B of the Library of Congress Classification, indicates the collection intensity levels (0 through 5) to be followed in acquiring materials on religion. For explanation of the Collecting Levels used by the Library, see <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html>

While most major religious groups are noted below, the list is not exhaustive. A level 4 is assumed if a classification is not specifically noted.

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BL1-BL980	Religion (general) /mythology	4	4
BL1100-BL1295	Hinduism	4	4
BL1300-BL1380	Jainism	4	4
BL1500-BL1590	Zoroastrianism, Parseeism	4	4
BL1600-BL1695	Semitic Religions	4	4
BL1830-BL1883	Confucianism	4	4
BL1899- BL1942.85	Taoism	4	4
BL2017-BL2018.7	Sikhism	4	4
BL2216-BL2227.8	Shinto	4	4
BL2390-BL2490	African Religions	4	4
BL2500-BL2592	American	5	4
BL2700-BL2790	Rationalism, Atheism	4	4
BM1-BM65	Judaism Periodicals, yearbooks, societies, etc.	4	4
BM70-BM127	Study and teaching, religious education	3	4
BM150-BM199	History (general)	4	4
BM201-BM449	History by country, region	4	4
BM480-BM509	Pre-Talmudic and Talmudic Jewish literature	4	4
BM510-BM518	Midrash (texts and critical works)	4	4
BM525	Cabala	4	4
BM600-BM645	Dogmatic Judaism	4	4

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BM650-BM747	Practical Judaism, including liturgy and ritual	4	4
BP1-BP253	Islam	4	4
BP300-BP395	Baha'i Faith	4	4
BP500-BP610	Theosophy. Anthroposophy. Other beliefs and Movements	3	3
BQ1-BQ9999	Buddhism	4	4
BR1-BR136	Christianity Devotional works and tracts	4 2	4 2
BR140-BR1500	Church history	5	4
BR1690-BR1725	Biography	4	4
BS1-BS399	Bible Texts and versions Variant editions New translations	5 2 5	4 2 4
BS410-BS2970	Works about the Bible	4	4

Doctrinal Theology

Note: The Library attempts to acquire all of the important current periodicals, reference books, and scholarly works on the major topics in doctrinal theology. However, the Library acquires only selected works on topics of narrow doctrinal interest or on controversial topics. Tracts, sermons, and pamphlets are not acquired unless the topic or theologian's work is of historical or theological importance.

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BT19-BT33	Doctrine and dogma	4	4
BT40-BT60	Philosophical theology	3	3
BT65-BT83	Doctrinal, dogmatic, and systematic theology	4	4
BT88-BT92	Authority	3	3

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BT95-BT97	Divine law. Moral government	3	3
BT98-BT180	God	3	3
BT198-BT590	Christology	3	3
BT595-BT693	Mariology	3	3
BT695-BT748	Creation	3	3
BT750-BT810	Salvation. Soteriology	3	3
BT819-BT891	Eschatology. Last Things	3	3
BT899-BT940	Future state. Future life	3	3
BT960-BT985	Invisible world	3	3
BT990-BT1010	Creeds, confessions, covenants,	4	4
BT1029-BT1039	Catechism	3	3
BT1095-BT1255	Apologetics. Evidences of Christianity	3	3
BT1313-BT1480	History of specific doctrines and movements	4	4

Practical Theology

NOTE: The Library collects only the major works in most of the categories of practical theology. However, it attempts to develop a research-level collection in the categories of hymnology, ecclesiastical and church theology, church law, the ministry and the clergy, and missions.

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BV1-BV4	Practical theology (general)	3	3
BV5-BV168	Worship	3	3
BV170-BV199	Liturgy and ritual	4	4

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BV301-BV525	Hymnology	4	4
BV590-BV650	Ecclesiastical theology	4	4
BV597-BV628	Church theology	4	4
BV659-BV680	Ministry and clergy	3	3
BV759-BV765	Church law	4	4
BV800-BV873	Sacraments	3	3
BV900-BV1450	Religious societies	3	3
BV1460-BV1612	Religious education	3	3
BV2000-BV3705	Missions	4	4
BV3750-BV3799	Evangelism	4	4
BV4000-BV4470	Pastoral theology	3	3
BV4485-BV5095	Practical religion. Christian life	3	3
BV5015-BV5095	Asceticism and mysticism	3	3
BX1-BX9	Ecumenical movement	4	4
BX100-BX750	Eastern and Oriental Avoid repetitive material in liturgy and ritual	4	4
BX800-BX4795	Roman Catholic Church Avoid repetitive material in liturgy and ritual	4	4
BX2315-BX2333	Relics, shrines, saints	3	3
BX2400-BX4556	Monasticism	4	4
BX4717-BX4795	Dissenting sects	3	3
BX4800-BX9999	Protestantism	4	4

LC Classification	Subject	U.S. Levels	Non-U.S. Levels
BX4872-BX4924	Individual sects (Pre-Reformation)	3	3

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