

FIRST PRINCIPLE: As with all other havings, you are to possess it--not the reverse. AIM: Optimal degree of fineness. Too refined, takes too long to operate; too rough, takes too long to find what you want. What you'll evolve, under this principle and aim, will be a conflate system that fits you. This is bad news in that it'd be easier to adopt some system already articulated to the approximate degree of fineness appropriate to a clergyperson who operates alone [without secretarial help on filing]; but it's good news in that (1) you can adapt my suggestions to where you already are in your filing history and (2) you can modulate this next stage into an even better fitting system beyond that.

ALPHABETIC OR NUMERIC? An alphabetic system is (1) simple, (2) infinitely expandable, (3) unable to transcend media differences [books, large loose papers, small loose papers, audio-visuals, artifacts]. A numeric system is (1) able to transcend media differences, (2) more time-consuming [as you must key each item to a number], (3) more difficult, harder in that you must program your brain to the conversion system, (4) may or may not correlate with other libraries you use [e.g., mine--the DD (Dewey Decimal)--correlates with the public library where I live, but not with the private library where I work, NYTS, which has the LC (Library of Congress) system, which is gradually squeezing out DD all over America].

CAN I HAVE THE ADVANTAGES OF BOTH SYSTEMS? That's my system, the heart of which is the 3x5 subject/number card, which is the middle of the three cards at the lower right of this thinksheet [three actual cards, grasped at random out of my files]. You see the three cards exactly as they stand in the file but in reverse order because, being of three heights, in the proper order you'd see only what is here the back card, viz. "All-Am," which is one of the 80-cut main divisions. [You can begin with the ordinary 25-cut, or 40- or 60- or almost any number up to 3000-cut! For my hundreds of thousands of cards, I have found the 80-cut adequate, since the middle card [yellow] makes many hundreds of subdivisions, and the "3x5s" [the ordinary white, ruled or unruled (I use unruled, because I type most cards) cards] provide opportunity for thousands of subsubdivisions--though the one shown has only the subject on the card it's lower than and stands behind, it might be qualified as "Rel., Am.--Colonial" or might be crossreferenced once by a subject in the upper right or once again by a subject between the filing subject and the subsubject....But there's a catch: you can't buy any cards that are 5" in the horizontal and more than 3" in the vertical. Here's how you get the heights shown. Machine-cut them out of yellow [or whatever else you prefer as long as it's not white or whatever your 80-cut index card color is (mine's gray)] 5x8s, which gives you two per card plus a bit of scrap you'll probably find other use for. Heightening the 80-cut cards is trickier. Make a jig by pasting a piece of card stock on a sheet of paper so that the exact height you want is from the edge of the paste-on to the paper's edge. Set the 80-cut's tab flush with the paper, and rubber-cement an ordinary 3x5 [it's lower edge flush with the paste-on] to the front or back of the 80-cut. [Instead of pasting, you may prefer fine wire staples (Bates), which positively prevent slipping.]

Throughout my system, "277.3" means "AMERICA, RELIGION IN AND RELIG. HIST. OF." Not just the 3x5 files, but the shelved books, the letter-size files, the flat files.

Alternative to a number system: Before shelving your books alphabetically by author, make out as many subject cards as there are subjects under which you think you might want to retrieve the book. On the cards, refer to the book only by author [L, put under the first letter of the last name, to signal the shelf place of the book] and, from the title, a key word or phrase. [More, OVER.]

OVER

If you are into one genre--say, stories--, color-code that genre in your A-Z 3x5 file by using a distinctive color of card stock.

ALL-AM	
AMERICA, RELIGION IN AND RELIG. HIST. OF	277.3
AM., REL.	
<p>Since the American civil religion is not the worship of the Amer. nation but an understanding of the Amer. experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality, the world civil religion could be accepted as a fulfillment and not a denial of Amer. civil religion. Indeed, such an outcome has been the eschatological hope of Amer civil religion from the beginning.</p> <p>"Civil Religion in America" by Robert N. Bellah DALDALUS issue on RELIGION IN AMERICA, Winter '67 p. 18</p>	

NON-NUMERICAL BOOK-SHELVING? On spine and/or cover and/or title. put double qts. [""] under the first letter of the word you'd be most apt to think of for retrieval--last name of author or your key word in title; then A-Z shelves. Include the double qts. when referring to the book on 3x5s (book subject file; middle and research cards). The double qts. on 3x5s will tell you (1) that the book is on your A-Z [25-cut, or more] shelves and (2) the location. [More, OVER.]

TOPICS? Best is to develop your own, as you go. But you're welcome to borrow a copy of my list, which I had typed off in 1961....or my version of the very extensive Baker "Topical Index" from Baker's Textual and Topical Filing System [Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 6].

AUTHORITY? Get acquainted with some master stationer who'll eagerly show you his/her stock, and catalogs on nonstock. Describe accurately your need and ask "What's best, old or new?" Don't assume you know what you want! Compliment his/her expertise by presenting your need, not your want.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO NUMERIZE, BUT WOULD HATE TO DO IT YOURSELF? Two ways to go:

1. In CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, CHURCH MANAGEMENT, or other clergy periodical, note ads for clergy filing systems. Some include ready-associated main divisions and enumeration, either DD or LC [or even UTS, an adapted system]. Write for information.

2. Determine your main divisions and subdivisions and employ your local librarian to put on your "middle" cards, upper right, the numbers.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO IT YOURSELF IF IT WOULDN'T TAKE TOO LONG? Ask your librarian, of a DD or LC library [whichever you prefer], to show you how to use the big, fat classification guides--at NYTS, the LC or UTS system. No fair xeroxing, but take down the main sections and as much of subsections as you think you'll need to begin with. Alternative: Write LC or DD for the "Religion" section in micro [in the case of LC] or in toto [in the case of DD].

NB:

The beauty of the "middle" cards is that they constitute your own personal, adapted, flexible classification guide. Say, you get in a first-rate Bicentennial article you'd like to put in your letter-size file but can't remember "277.3": look up the "America, Rel..." middle card and you've got your number. But suppose the article is general, not specifically on religion in America: look up the "America" middle card and you'll find "AMERICA (v. also U.S.)--973," on which you prove out to have a letter-size folder, whereas you have none for 277.3. [If you look up "United States," you'll find two middle cards: "UNITED STATES...973," and below the latter, "v. also "DEMOCRACY" and "AMERICA"; the other middle card reading simply, "UNITED STATES: RELIGION IN--277.3."]

ATTENTION! BONUS!

What I'm describing is a mechanical storage/retrieval system for clergy. You already have an electronic one, viz. your brain. Before century's end, you should live so long, you'll be able to use, for private purposes, the mechanical-electronic system called the computer, that brain-superior biped [though of course not "mind"-superior]. The bonus? If you numerize your system rather than just alphabetizing, you'll be automatically programming your brain to increased efficiency and riches. Doing this for more than 1/3rd century is the main way I've become an intellectual overachiever. (Of course if you sniff at what I've become, use the alphabetic system.)

WHAT ABOUT AUTHOR- AND SUBJECT-CARDS FOR THE BOOKS? Skip it. I did it for the first few thousand books, then stopped and hardly miss it. Intermediate would be a simple, 25-cut A-Z 3x5 file for authors--a card per author, the card containing, in addition to the author's name, only the book[s] call-number[s]. [Cutter numbers? Skip them. The second line of a book reference should be only the author's initial + the accession number. If you have a Bultmann on a book number and it's the first "B" of that number, that book is "B1"; next you get a Buber, and it's "B2."]

CASSETTES? Stick 'em right in your 3x5 subject file, or keep 'em separate and note their existence by accession number on the particular subject card[s]....Tiny pieces of paper? Glue 'em to 3x5s and file as 3x5s....LABELS? Type-roll for 3-cut letter-size folders; and self-sticks of various sizes. Think about color-coding either or both....CHURCH RECORDS? Another whole subject....SPECIAL CATEGORIES of 3x5 files? Go easy, but some may be justified: states [for travel names/addresses], addresses [personal and business], biblical books, sermons [cumulative, or (mine) locative].