

REVIEW / CRITIQUE

The enduring library: technology, tradition, and the quest for balance. Michael Gorman. Chicago: American Library Association, 2003.

Michael Gorman is not afraid to say *exactly* what's on his mind. As American Library Association (ALA) president-elect, Gorman is both activist and politician at a time when we need both. If his latest book, *The enduring library: technology, tradition, and the quest for balance*, is any indication, he will continue to speak out on what matters most to librarians.

Take last summer, for example. Gorman delivered the keynote address at the 2004 Canadian Library Association (CLA) Conference in Victoria, B.C. He outlined some of librarianship's main achievements over the past 100 years and spoke eloquently about the key values of our profession. As a skilled polemicist, he warned of dangers if librarians become complacent about values: right-wing governments eroding our free speech; libraries' autonomy and intellectual freedom under siege (the US Patriot Act); even how computers threaten to overwhelm us (making us stressed and stupid). Full of one-liners and political jabs, it was exactly what you want from a keynote speaker.

But candour without diplomacy can be a dangerous thing. After his *Library Journal* editorial was published in early 2005, Gorman found himself at the centre of controversy months before his ALA presidency starts. This time aiming at bloggers, Gorman said that "many of the Blog People are [not] in the habit of sustained reading of complex texts. It is entirely possible that their intellectual needs are met by an accumulation of random facts and paragraphs." Librarians — often among the first to adopt new technologies (like blogs) — found his comments insulting. Not what you'd expect from an ALA president.

Was it *Gormangate*, as some suggested? Were his comments out of touch with librarians on the frontlines? To what

extent does the ALA president have a responsibility to "speak for all librarians"?

As the issues were debated, Gorman was unrepentant. Lighten up, don't take yourselves so seriously, he seemed to be saying in a follow-up editorial. While the debate continued, Gorman had achieved his goal — to have a discussion and to incite debate about new technologies.

And so it is with *The enduring library*. In this slim volume, Gorman covers territory familiar to those who have read him or to those who have heard him speak at conferences.

Gorman is one of the few among us to look critically (some would say negatively) at technology's impact on our lives, our profession, and on services. Even if you don't agree with his views, it doesn't matter; he helps you to sort out your position on important issues, to find some balance at a time when it is badly needed.

This is a must-read for all librarians. Health librarians may find the chapters on the future of research libraries and overcoming techno-stress particularly relevant. health care system, but its practical use is limited at best.

Dean Giustini

University of British Columbia
Biomedical Branch Library
Vancouver General Hospital
700 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1L5, Canada
E-mail: dean.giustini@ubc.ca