

Theological Libraries in Australia '88

by Trevor Zweck

Although the first theological libraries established in Australia are among the oldest Australian libraries, theological libraries are largely underdeveloped. And despite their commendable spirit of co-operation and initiative, a lack of resources (both personal and material) sees them struggling to meet the demands of modern, research-oriented theological education.

The 160 libraries in this category are best described as 'special academic' libraries. They are special in that they, for the most part, serve programs of post-secondary education in theology and religious studies. Sixty libraries are attached to theological colleges and seminaries involved in training men, and in many cases, women for ordination. Most of these libraries are used by a rapidly increasing number of people studying theology. Moreover the theological libraries support specific educational programs, broader theological research and continuing education for parish clergy.

In nearly all cases, the parent institutions are members of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) and the libraries themselves are members of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Libraries Association (ANZTLA). These two links make them a close-knit and cohesive group. Since ANZTLA has been gathering statistics on these libraries since 1984, it is possible to describe them in greater detail. This is not the case with other categories of theological libraries.

Another 70 libraries belong to the Bible colleges and similar institutions involved in training men and women for various lay ministries, as well as providing general theological education. These libraries are generally both extremely small, supporting specific teaching programs, both internal and external. Ten are linked with the South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges, but most are isolated and independent, unless affiliated with ANZATS and ANZTLA.

Another 30 libraries serve a variety of ecclesiastical institutions: resource centres serving church schoolteachers; and libraries serving dioceses, church organisations and ministries. They provide support services for ordained and lay ministries and include significant research collections.

Not included in this survey are church

archives or parish libraries, libraries of non-Christian religions.

History

St Patrick's College Manly, NSW, is the oldest theological library in Australia. It was established in 1833, followed by the Christ College, Sandy Bay, Tasmania (1846) and Moore Theological College, Newtown, NSW (1856). Other libraries had their origins traced back to the late 19th century: St Barnabas College, Belair, SA (1880); Whitley College, Parkville, Victoria (1891); Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW (1897) and Presbyterian Theological Hall, St Lucia, Queensland (1897). The only major period of expansion in the 20th century has been the 60s and 70s, which saw the establishment of more than a dozen new libraries as a result of increasing ecumenical consciousness and consequent amalgamations.

The history of the Bible college libraries is much more recent: the oldest being Sydney Missionary and Bible College (1916) and the Bible College of Victoria (1920). In the 70s and 80s, more than 20 new libraries were set up per decade.

Although many of these libraries are established, theological librarianship as a movement is still in its infancy. The first attempt to bring theological librarians together was the ANZATS Library Consultation, held in Melbourne in 1978. Further consultations were held in Sydney (1979, 1984), Brisbane (1983) and Adelaide (1985). It was at this last meeting that the decision to form ANZTLA was taken. The association has held annual conferences in Canberra (1986), Melbourne (1987) and again in Canberra (1988).

Size and scope

The data gathered on the ANZATS libraries provide a picture which is not particularly optimistic or encouraging. Collections are at best modest in size. Staffing levels vary from minimal to almost non-existent and funding levels range from sparse to inadequate. These libraries have hardly been touched by the information technology revolution.

The average number of staff is 1.5, but only one-third of libraries benefit from the services of a professional librarian. The lack of professional expertise is most obvious in the area of subject cataloguing. While one-third of the theological libraries use the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (increasingly being augmented by the Religion Indexes Thesaurus), another third use a variety of unsatisfactory systems, and the rest provide no subject headings at all.

Average holdings of bibliographic resources are 25,000 monographs and 110 periodical subscriptions. However, the average is greatly boosted by two libraries (Moore Theological College and Joint Theological College, Parkville, Victoria) which have holdings of 100,000 volumes. Many fall in the 10,000 to 15,000 range. Only a handful have significant holdings on microforms and half do not even possess a microfiche reader.

Theological librarians try their best to provide normal library services despite limitations of staffing and finance. Still half of staff time is taken up with technical processing. And the lack of automated systems has not improved the situation. Libraries are open for an average of 65 hours during term time and unfortunately are not always staffed. Circulation figures average 200 loans a week. Interlibrary loans figures present an altruistic picture; the number of items lent outweighing the number of items borrowed by a ratio of 2:1. The average ratio is 60:30 but 80 percent of the total burden is carried by the two major theological libraries mentioned above.

Only one theological library, St Mark's, Canberra, is a full participant in the ABN, and only a couple of others are dial-up customers. A few libraries are in the throes of establishing integrated library systems, and a few have access to online databases. That is about the extent of automation in theological libraries.

Financially, the plight is illustrated by average annual expenditures of \$10,000 on monographs and \$3,500 on periodical subscriptions; but many libraries operate at a level far below the average.

Finally, while the vast majority of theological libraries are consistent with the majority of the Australian libraries in using the Dewey Decimal Classification, a significant minority, 12, uses

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the Pettee (Union Theological Seminary) Classification. This is a classification which is specifically oriented to the subject of theology.

Co-operation

Theological libraries have generally been willing to co-operate with other libraries, but have not always been able to do so. For example, while outward interlibrary loan traffic heavily outweighs the inward, not many libraries have the staff to operate a very efficient interlibrary loan service. For the same reason, not many have contributed to the National Union Catalogues; recent decisions restricting input to the National Bibliographic Database to automated systems now exclude theological libraries almost totally.

The improved ecumenical spirit of the 70s and 80s, leading to the establishment of colleges of divinity which now embrace all the major cities of mainland Australia, has led also to closer co-operation among librarians involved. It was the desire to improve the lowly condition of theological libraries that led to the formation of ANZTLA. It is this concern that has led to the production of the *ANZTLA Standards for Theological Libraries* and to specific action on the local level, through meetings of ANZTLA chapters, and on the national level through the annual ANZTLA conference.

Chapters of ANZTLA have been established in Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. They have devised schemes for reciprocal borrowing and rationalisation of periodical subscriptions, as well as setting some kind of union catalogue in three city areas. They have also promoted the idea of co-operative collection development, having adopted the RLG Conspectus categories as early as 1985. The NSW chapter is currently working on a collective collection development policy.

The lack of adequate access to theological holdings in other libraries through the national union catalogues led some years ago to the compilation, by Hans Arns and Marianne Dacy, of the *Australian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections*. It records the holdings of 3,000 periodicals in 80 collections, much of which is not included in *National Union Catalogue of serials (NUCOS)* or *Serials in Australian Libraries: social sciences and humanities (SALSSAH)*.

A concern for the lack of adequate reference materials on theological topics relating specifically to Australia and New Zealand has led to a pilot project to develop an *Australian Religion Index*. It will cover 50 to 60 periodicals, most of which are not currently being indexed. ANZTLA is also looking at the problem of providing more professional development opportunities for theological librarians.

Challenges

The challenge facing theological libraries in the immediate future is to confront realistically their inadequacies and deficiencies and to develop the resources, both personal and material, to enable them to provide the services required by their users. The needs are actually very basic. The first step has been the adoption of a set of standards; the challenge now is to implement them at the level of individual libraries.

Improved library services must begin with adequate staffing: sufficient in number and possessing all the skills required for a modern information service. Employer bodies must see that librarianship is not just a matter of getting the books catalogued, but of providing a service to users. It will require people who understand present-day principles of librarianship and have the time and the ability to implement them.

Theological librarians will need to be more

aggressive in building adequate collections, both with current material and with important retrospective material. They will also need to co-operate in building special collections, so that the national collection — if not the individual library — will be capable of supplying the needs of future researchers. Theology is one area in Australia — probably the only one — where reliance on the university libraries to establish the major research collections is impossible. If it is not done by the seminaries and theological colleges it will not be done at all.

The corollary of adequate national holdings is access to them. In the modern library world, this makes the possession of computers not optional but essential. Theological libraries have much to gain from participating in ABN, not only for the interlibrary loans networking but also for copy-cataloguing. Then valuable staff time can be redeployed for more productive activities.

None of these challenges can be met, however, without massive increases in funding; finding such funds is obviously the biggest challenge of all. Theological libraries enjoy no ready access to public money; they are almost dependant on offerings through the church budget or through direct donations. Theological libraries will need all the managerial and entrepreneurial skills they can muster to convince those who provide and those who control the funds, of the central importance of libraries in the enterprise of theological education.

The Reverend Trevor Zweck, Graduate Theology, B. Ed., Graduate Diploma Library St., ALAA, is the Librarian for Luther Seminary, North Adelaide. He is the first President of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association. Following seven years of parish ministry and eight years of secondary school chaplaincy, he has been librarian of the Luther Seminary since 1980.

Exchange position wanted

Anitra J. Lahey, a reference librarian with the Seminole City Library System in Oviedo, Florida, USA, would like to exchange places with an Australian librarian in 1989 or 1990.

She may be contacted at Apartment A-10, 551 E. Semoran Boulevard, Fern Park, Florida 32730, USA.

Correction

- Robert Sharman Retires

Publications staff produced a library time warp in the front page article 'Robert Sharman Retires' (*InCite* no 15, 9 September 1988) and managed to move two buildings from Queensland to Tasmania! The second paragraph in this article should have read:

'Bob began his library career in 1948 as a library assistant at the University of Tasmania library. In 1949 he moved to the State Library of Tasmania and as the State's first archives officer established the Tasmanian State Archives. Ten years later he took up the foundation position of Archivist for the Library Board of Queensland, where he was responsible for establishing an archives system and planning both the State Archives and the Intermediate Records Repository buildings.'

These years are especially important as during this time Bob was President of the LAA's Queensland Branch, represented Queensland on General Council on several occasions and was elected time and time again to the Board of Examiners.

Publications staff apologise for the confusion and feel that getting together an edition during the conference it would have been preferable to produce a real time warp rather than just one on paper.

CSIRO Library and Information Services

A number of LAA members have expressed concern about the state-of-play regarding CSIRO library and information services. At present there appears to be a high level of uncertainty about changes and proposals, and how they will affect the place of the library and information services as a very major part of the national network. The Association is monitoring the situation, with the support of Branches. As soon as possible a factual report will be published with an indication of the LAA response.

Alan Bundy

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