

THE INTERNET AND USERS IN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Judith James

The Internet has spread its presence into all aspects of society, theological education included, with frightening speed, and we are swamped by information on the Internet. The ANZTLA newsletter has presented some excellent articles on various aspects of the Internet - from Trevis Lawton, Lynette Champion and others. My aim here is to gather my random thoughts and observations from a practical perspective which will, I hope, stimulate thinking about processes we engage in our respective libraries: the Internet and library users in the reference process, the implications of Internet access which librarians need to be aware of, and the issue of equity of access. 'User' here is taken to mean any library client, whether student, staff or member of the public.

The Internet is a dynamic research instrument which connects users to a global learning community, but it is also confusing for the new user, who can wander about in the maze, click and go to all sorts of places, which are often untested, have no structure, and in are a state of continual change. SURFING or searching by NET SEARCH or keyword is time-consuming. Our users, accustomed as they are to a well-ordered arrangement of information, such as they find on our library shelves, may expect similar order in an electronic world. On our shelves resources are carefully selected to meet selection criteria, even hand-picked in these tough fiscal times, - but it's not like that in an electronic world. It's anarchy out there when it comes to standards and evaluation of information.

The technologically smart librarian can assist here by assuming a role as a 'filter and a finder' (Colin Steele's phrase)¹: evaluating sites, checking their currency, bookmarking them, downloading them onto disc and passing on to staff or research students, setting up THEOLOGICAL HOT SPOTS to make the search process user-friendly to the new user.

Our role is no longer a GATEKEEPER of resources but a FINDER and FILTER.

More than ever there is a need for librarians to train users in information literacy skills such as locating resources, evaluating resources and recognising bias, so they will not be disadvantaged - or lost - in the maze of information on the Internet. At the point of need is the most effective method, but classes or training sessions are useful.

The reference process takes on a whole new meaning when we include the Internet - remember the key questions information studies textbooks teach to assist the user to clarify his/her enquiry? Well, these five questions, who? what? where? when? why? are spot on in shaping the Internet search strategy. The user's question can sometimes be answered quickly and simply by traditional means - by looking up a reference book. But younger students and users often think the secrets of the universe are found "on the Internet", and it is the librarian's role to discern the appropriate place to begin searching, often the Internet is the final place to look. Our role is to give the users the answer they need while engaging in some subtle user education, increasing their understanding of the range of available resources.

The user has access via the Internet to the most current information - for example: if a student or user is looking for the information on the latest on the intersection of science and religion, the ABC has a web site with news of programs on radio and television and links for further information. An aside here - have a look at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/> for a great new packaging of the ABC religious programs - it is much more attractive than its print forerunner.

In 1996 we have seen the growth of excellent online sites for reference material - the net is becoming a 'one stop shop' especially for sociological material. MacquarieNet at <http://www.macnet.mq.edu.au> gives access to a superb range of Australian material for the cost of several reference books - with a

¹ ANU Librarian

free three month trial. Another site is Finding God in Cyberspace², written up in an ANZTLA newsletter in 1995 by Lynette Champion. This is a dependable, well-organised site and a great starting point for showing staff the treasures of the Internet.

Librarians have to decide if the scarce dollar will be spent on print or electronic resources, such as the above. While print media will continue to be a focus for research, expenditure will be increasingly diverted from information in print format to on-line services. - and the equipment to make those services available to more users.

The Internet indirectly provides advantages to the user when traditional library management tasks such as acquisitions and cataloguing can be done on-line. The user will have quicker access to new titles when libraries use on-line ordering. More suppliers are providing this service, along with previews of new titles: these include Blackwells, Blackwells North America, Uni-Coop, Ebsco, Scholar's Press. Some have a fee for the service - talk to the agency to negotiate a discount or waiving of the fee - theological libraries are renowned for their lack of cash. Cataloguers can consult the on-line catalogues of university libraries anywhere in the world for information for copy cataloguing.

One problem has surfaced which libraries who provide Internet access for students will have to resolve: with the availability of so much information on the net it is easy for users to copy, Alt+tab, paste, the information straight onto a word-processing document, which becomes the substance of the assignment or essay. Some students from school and university can be heard to comment: "there's nothing to writing assignments - it's so easy" without a thought of ownership of intellectual content. Lecturers and librarians need to be aware that this is likely to happen wherever there is Internet access. Plagiarism using the Internet is easier than photocopying. To prevent it requires careful planning when setting assignments so it is not "so easy", and also a continual program of user education by library staff, one-to-one, on the standards and guidelines for using the Internet in assignments.

We can make available an up-to-date set of rules for citing Internet sources to users, staff and students, but keep in mind that these guidelines are still evolving.

A reliable guide for religion and theology, although it does not yet have the McIntosh customisation, is A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources found at <<http://hnet.msu.edu/~africa/citation.html>>. It is derived from Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations. With on-line information not only Internet "addresses" or URL's have to be referenced, but any electronic-mail correspondence or information from listservs or bulletin boards must also be cited correctly.

Access to the Internet and computer networks has generated a fresh wave of cooperation, as Al Hurd notes³. Our limited experience supports this - students, including theology students, receive useful responses from experts when they ask questions related to research on e-lists, listservs, or bulletin boards, for example, as found in Gresham's site, or on TELA for the Scholar's Press⁴. Do academics and experts answer letters from unknown undergraduates? Probably not, but they generously share their knowledge and resources in an electronic environment. The net is a democratic tool which gives all users, students and academics equal access to knowledge.

Therefore, our students and users are disadvantaged if they do not have access to the Internet. Theological libraries without access to host computers connecting them to the Internet are as disadvantaged as residents who live outside the main cities when it comes to Internet access. Finances - or their lack - are the problem for STD charges, computers and phone line charges. However, an Internet connection for theological libraries is a high priority. If there are no funds, seek out sponsorships - Telstra have funds for selected projects for telecommunications in education - lobby them to consider theological institutions. Seek out your nearest university and arrange Internet access,

² It is found at <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mikef/durham/gresham.html>> until August 1996.

³ Hurd, Al. ANZTLA Newsletter No 28, May 1996. Pp5-6

⁴ <<http://scholar.cc.emory.edu>>

in return for a reciprocal service acceptable to them; information technology students sometimes need to develop home pages for course practical work, so giving your institution a presence on the Internet.

The Internet collates, collects and disseminates information in a totally new way. Information which was previously obtained by visits, phone calls, or by asking librarians is now available 'up-front' to the user. Here I mean access via the Internet to library catalogues, university handbooks, course outlines and directories. A great democratisation of access to the resources of the National Library has taken place, as Averil Edwards at the Canberra ANZTLA Conference outlined to us. The resources of the National Library of Australia are now electronically available to the residents of Australia - not just those who live in the ACT. Visit the National Library Web Site⁵ for a fantastic example of electronic resources, including the university and state library catalogues of Australia. Imagine finding out the location of works in reading lists, and whether they are available on the shelf without leaving home!

All of these information services give the user control and ownership of the research process. Processes which previously took time, or had to be done by others are now directly in the control of the user, with the added benefit of motivating the user by the interface with information.

However, in each of these processes the librarian is the essential link in connecting the Internet to the user, at least for some of our users, and for those without access at home. Obtaining information from the chaos of the Internet becomes possible because sites are collated and available by bookmarks, instruction is available for searching the maze of the Internet and information literacy is taught as needed. There are many more issues which new technologies will force librarians to consider in the future, but the above are some which may come your way in 1996.

Yarra Theological Union Library.

Margaret Lamb

ANZTLA members will be saddened by the news of the demise of the Library of the Yarra Theological Union, one of the inaugural member libraries of the Victorian Chapter. The Library only, let me hasten to add, the Y.T.U. itself continues to flourish.

When the various Catholic religious orders came together in 1971 to form the Yarra Theological Union, each order had its own library to assist in the training and formation of their seminarians; some small, some larger. The YTU set up its lecture rooms and offices on the Franciscan property at Box Hill using St Paschal's library as its primary library resource centre. In 1982 the executive of the YTU decided to start a library collection of their own as a starting point should the Union move to another location.

Gwen Wilson was appointed Librarian and she remained in that position for thirteen years until her retirement at the end of 1994, when she was succeeded by Judi Long who continued until her relocation to Sydney in 1995. Judi retains her connection to ANZTLA by continuing her M.Theol (begun at BCV) with Moore College.

Gwen was guided in the early stages by the Rev. Bill Goldsworthy and among her early helpers have been Janet Secomb and Coralie Jenkin. The Library grew into a "small but significant" (as Gwen referred to it) collection of books and journals numbering approximately 1200 monographs and 1500 journal volumes concentrating on material for the courses given at YTU. Because of its proximity and larger collection of around 50,000 books, the main resource centre for the YTU courses and students remained St Paschal's Library. When Judi resigned last year the YTU executive requested the Paschal Province to have St Paschal's administer the YTU Library and to integrate its books and journals with St Paschal's holdings; the YTU would retain ownership and finance their collection. A similar integration was arranged some years ago with the Missiology section of the Divine Word Missionaries' library, in order to make it more readily available to YTU students. This arrangement has proved quite satisfactory to all concerned, with the books involved now numbering in the vicinity of 900.

⁵ < <http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov> >