

Taking stock : what's in a name

Don Keast

Introduction

The occasion in December, 2000 of the first annual Löhe Memorial Library stocktake in 17 years, seemed to be largely occasioned by the popular misconception that a very small percentage of the users had, on occasion, been taking the stock. However, it did not take the stocktake team long to discern that there were other factors at work, and that these perhaps emanated from the very nature of the books themselves.

Early on in proceedings I perused a shelf of books. One volume stood out from its fellows : it had no spine label. I examined it more closely, and the reason for the lack of a label became clear : the title was : "*Is Christianity bankrupt?*".

Mislabelled Works

Labels indeed, proved to be very revealing. The following, all labelled incorrectly, speak for themselves :

The great controversy; Library of controversy; Non-conformity; and The lie.

Perhaps, however, the saddest mislabelling of all belonged to the plaintive *Man, I need help.*

Items not on shelf

Of course, the main task of a stocktake is to establish what is missing from the collection. When one looks at the list of "not on shelf" items, it is hard to escape the conclusion that certain titles were predestined to vanish :

Angels : God's secret agents; The forgotten father; The forgotten trinity; The invisible father; Secret wisdom : the occult universe explained; and Unknown soldier.

These titles were all found to be either invisible, forgotten, unknown or secret. As for both copies of : *Destined to perish*, it was found that they had. There was no second copy of *The one and only God* – indeed it would have been heresy to have found it !

Some authors seemed to be more helpful than others. The following "not on shelf" items at least proposed a viable theory for their non-presence : *Evolution : fact or fiction?; A hole in my ceiling; Unformed and unfilled : the gap theory? and Your god is too small.*

In other cases, the rationale was perhaps more obscure :

Nothing but the truth [we had the nothing, what was the truth?]

Render unto Caesar : or what is truth? [it had been so rendered perhaps?]

See no evil [See no book also]

A sense of place [It knew where it was, we didn't]

To be fair to our talented stocktake team, it has to be admitted that some of the "not-on-shelf" items were actually later found with some lateral thinking and extra effort. Of course, the essential essence of such works was that they were predestined to require extra effort :

e.g. *Answers to tough questions; In search of contemporary man; Profound mystery; The unreal god of modern theology.* My favourite title in this genre was covered in dust, wedged behind some shelving and only found when the whole shelf was re-housed : *Anglican cobwebs.*

Cutter Numbers

Cutter-Sanborn numbers seem to be popular in Adelaide, although one suspects that their

main purpose is to ensure the continued propagation of the "cataloguer" species. Nonetheless, they have an inexorable logic about them and their assignments often enhance the nature of a work.

As a random sample, let us look at Cutter numbers ending in "666". As any reader of Revelation 13.18 knows, the mystical "666" is "the number of the beast, for it is man's number". We were therefore, quite unsurprised to find the triplet "666" attached to the equally powerful triplet "*Holy, holy, holy*", while a similar logic saw it appear on "*A man praying*". Perhaps more subtle occult processes also applied "666" to *Exploring English character* and *Roman Catholic claims*.

Conclusion

The pragmatic ones amongst our readers have probably concluded that the only process at work in our quirky list is coincidence. Let them then draw what conclusions they may from our last three examples :

- All titles containing the word "infallibility" were present and correct.
- The shelf containing "Presbyterianism" repeatedly fell over.
- Completely unlisted on any of our records, and in a totally surprising place in the classification, was a lone volume with a one-word title that may explain much of the foregoing : "LUCIFER"

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ARI Index : a message to ANZTLA members

Dear Colleague,

This is to inform you that significant changes have happened since last Spring to the production arrangements for the Australasian Religion Index.

The Centre for Information Studies at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga gave notice that it had decided to withdraw from the enterprise with the completion of Volume 12. This volume is still in production and will appear during 2001. Subsequently the Executive decided to pay out the Centre by buying its share of the property. A price was agreed and the sale is now in the hands of lawyers.

The question of the best way forward is now being actively explored by the ARI Review Committee. The Executive wants to ensure that ARI continues to be published after Volume 12 has been released, with as little interruption as possible. At present, it seems the Association might be able to continue to publish ARI on its own and put the new systems in place to achieve this, this year. The Review Committee has been exploring the idea of ARI continuing electronically as an internet database with, possibly, a CD-ROM spinoff. The Committee is about to test a suite of programmes that could in due course provide the basis for the new ARI. More news should be available before long.

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