
THE VEEP'S VIEW

Philip Harvey

- *Prioritise your backlog!*
- *The goal of theology is wisdom!*
- *Decide what goes in and what stays out!*
- *The budget is a fiction!*
- *Theology is exciting and different—but also very expensive!*
- *What is relevant and irrelevant?*
- *Serendipity*
- *Creative randomness*
- *Intuitiveness*

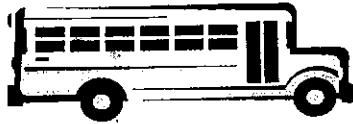
On a rainy Thursday afternoon the cataloguer at the Joint Theological Library in Melbourne conducted yet another pre-conference cataloguing session. Water seeped under the door as we heard about name authorities and the Princess Diana Problem. The Library of Congress can supply her birth date (1961) but not her death date (1997), due to a combination of understaffing, strict in-house rules, and technological inertia. To update Diana's details we must gather the information from LC's very same authority record.

The catalogue is central to our libraries, we were told. Despite huge increases in information available, the increasingly poor quality of that information makes the cataloguer more indispensable than ever. We heard about time management and such classic problems as the email addict, the backlog, and the backlog of backlogs. Don't feel guilty about the backlog, prioritise it!

Veronica Brady BVM, in line with previous keynote speakers, set a subject and then proceeded to talk about something else. The loneliness of the librarian involves the same passion for discovery as a scientist's: the passion for knowing, the passion for being unfashionable. Computers are wonderful if you are after information. Information, however, is hijacking most things in our profession. The ends we serve are what are important, not the means. The goal of theology is not mere information, or mere knowledge, but wisdom. Wisdom is dwelling in what is ultimately the case, to understand the Anglo-Saxon etymology.

When we are taught to read we are set free. It enables us to get outside the circle. Any kind of reading can be transformative, especially in theology. As Sr Veronica stated, you cannot get information about God. We have a teaching role, to keep people alive through reading, through memory, through tradition. Tradition she defined as 'running errands for the dead'. A book is taking on another life for size. She encouraged us to keep the memory alive, especially of the losers. 'The forgotten dead have a meaning yet unrealised,' as Johannes Baptist Metz says. The only way we can change things is by new ways of thinking, and that we find in theology and in books.

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'Your Enjoyment Is Our Satisfaction'

was the edifying banner above the driver as we screeched and bumped toward New Norcia next morning.

Lawrence McIntosh was moved to poetic rapture by the trip, exclaiming later "There was little fuss / on the geriatric bus."

Abbot Placid Spearritt quoted a Jesuit librarian: I have observed that there has been a sad decline in manners and morals, said Adam to Eve. This by way of a cue to his topic, that librarians are inevitably censors. We are not stiflers, gaggers, cutters or repressors. We are censors in the sense of editors, expanders, improvers.

Placid advocated a certain form of censorship for librarians. Deciding what goes in and what stays out makes us like the Fathers of the Church who determined canon, acting to include and exclude. We are very conscious of our own pseudopigrapha.

He warned us in the friendliest way possible of the dangers of fundamentalist censorship, while confessing publicly to keeping a file in his office entitled 'Lunatic Fringes'. He is on his own library committee and confided that he felt justified in throwing his weight around if he knew what he was talking about; Placid was Librarian at Ampleforth Abbey for thirty years.

Should we give the public what it wants or what it needs? The Abbot did not reach a Socratic conclusion. Only that librarians are inevitably censors, that they need to be aware that they are censors, that their censor role has to be used to keep the relevant questions under discussion.

Dom Michael Tunney later spoke on refectory reading, after which he took us on a privileged journey through the monastery, including the very same refectory and both the libraries. The archives were on the trail too, excellently laid out and cosy, though some were

struck by one notice on a large archive box: 'Organised Mess'.

Saturday brought something different. It's what you are doing with what you've already got that is your protection, it's not money that is your protection, said Grant Stone (Scholarly Resources, Murdoch University) paraphrasing the grumpy author of Ecclesiastes. "What is going on with money?" we ask. Every budget is of its time, it will change.

We are in the business of spiritual formation in the building of our collections. If we know what we desire for our collection, we know what to do with the budget; therefore we have to rank our desires. We need a series of allies, never losing friends, and all for the greater good of the organisation.

The budget is a fiction, Grant proposed, so know the narrative. The narrative we create will affect the outcome. To vary the idea, he said the budget is a game, so know the rules of the game. We don't need to thrash over the outcome this year because next year will be another year, another game, an improved replay.

He also emphasised the importance of knowing the trade, which led nicely to the next speaker, Audra Kuncinias of John Garratt Publishing. Why are theological books so expensive? Audra asked. Answers: rising costs on small print-runs, reduced demand, the lack of a big book-buying public. Why do publishers continue selling theology? Spirituality, church, liturgy and other general religious markets subsidise specialist theology. Capitalists don't invest in theology, but in a world without meaning, to publish in theology is different and exciting.

At Practicalities, Christine Brunton (St Francis Theological College Library, Queensland) conducted an open discussion on e-journals and database subscriptions. It is a dose of realism to hear librarians putting together the shifting world of license agreements, access definitions, and changing URLs.

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Meanwhile, Sue Johnson (New Norcia Monastery, WA) led a group looking at the one person library. Two troubling messages were directed at ANZTLA itself:

1. What is/are ARI, AULOTS, Servatrixs? There are members of ANZTLA who don't know. The need to enunciate in full these abbreviated names comes loudly. People need to be reminded for the first time.
2. There are members who don't know how to become part of the ANZTLA-Forum. See elsewhere in this Newsletter for the directions.

The group touched on the question of mentoring, which was felt to be a great form of assistance, especially for isolated librarians.

- Is that the right book to order?
- How do I catalogue this one?
- Where do I go to get that request?
- Am I in the right job?

A mentor can be there to answer or at least help with any question. Others in ANZTLA are there with the information. It's a case of finding someone to talk to about your problems, in an on-going fashion.

Steven McVey (Liaison Librarian, University of Notre Dame, WA) said that in cyberspace the question is, how do we get people to judge what is relevant and irrelevant? Locating, evaluating, and using the information effectively is what we are after, he remarked, pointing to the overheads with a broom handle, like one of the characters he utilised from the tarot pack: The Guide, perhaps.

In information literacy, emphasis is placed on what we do before and after the search. It teaches generic skills that can be applied universally. Understand what you look for, match your information, critically evaluate it and manage the information carefully.

Especially important from a cataloguer's viewpoint was the centrality of learning how information is structured. If we understand the structure, be it the

catalogue or the internet even, it will be easier to work with.

Digitisation's effect on reference services has been immense, Paul Genoni (Information Studies, Curtin University) reminded us on Sunday morning. New means of communication via email and remote chat have changed our practices. Portals are available to direct reference enquiries anywhere on the Web.

He came up with the astounding statistic that in 36 hours Google receives more enquiries than all the reference questions in all the libraries in the United States per year. Reference librarians develop their art to utilise the science of technology, and to work with the shortcomings of the science.

Minimising time and effort has always been a by-word of reference. An ounce of nous can be worth more than a ton of science, Paul uttered. He encouraged serendipity, creative randomness and intuitiveness, which can serve us well whether online or at the shelves.

The Association gained great insights into individual libraries from Cindy Vanuaroro (Talua Library, Vanuatu), Rosemary Watts (Trinity Theological College Library, WA), and Val Canty with her picture history of the South Australian Chapter, the origin of ANZTLA itself.

Perth became increasingly sunny as the Conference proceeded, which was very thoughtful of the weather. The expressions of the Conference Committee were increasingly sunny also, as it became clear the Conference was turning out to be a genuine success.

We thanked our sponsors. And we thanked especially the members of the Committee (Sue Johnson, Rosemary Watts, Bridget Barry, Kerriann Lock, Sue Martin, Robin Dunn, Vicki Tkacz, Mick Stringer – and especially Elisa Marino, conference organiser) for their magnificent work throughout, and also in light of the Western Australian member implosion in the new year.

Philip Harvey
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