
Before ANZTLA - what happened?

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Preamble

In 1975 I was offered part-time work in the library of Parkin-Wesley College, Adelaide and the next year became the librarian. The only training I had was 'on the job'. In 1978 I was sponsored by the college to attend the first consultation of theological librarians ever held in Australia and New Zealand. It was the first time I had met other librarians. It would be fair to say I was overwhelmed by the experience. Ever since I have valued each meeting with other librarians with like problems, as a learning experience and part of my 'on the job' training.

As years went by, I came to realise that I was among the few left still working in theological libraries who were at that first historic gathering. Many are retired, some are now "of blessed memory". In their place are others who know nothing about the beginnings of our association.

In talking with various people, it became important to me to write down what some choose to call our "pre-history"—that is what happened before ANZTLA came into being? So my focus is quite specific—the years 1975-1983. It has actually been quite difficult to gather information and no doubt there is still more which could be written—particularly history of the various chapters which were formed after ANZTLA came into being. There is work here for others to do!

The Beginning

In March 1977 an invitation was sent by Hans Ams, Librarian at St Patrick's College, Manly, to the librarians of thirteen theological colleges/institutions to "a luncheon followed by a meeting to discuss common problems and possibilities of future cooperation."¹ The majority of invitees were from the Sydney region, with St Mark's in Canberra, Avondale in Cooranbong and St John's in Morpeth also invited. The gathering was obviously

successful because they met again at the end of April. On that occasion the matter of a union catalogue of periodicals was discussed and a working group was set up to gather data regarding possible

- availability and problems of updating such a union catalogue
- ways of making known holdings more accessible
- conditions under which rationalization of subscriptions could take place
- formation of a metropolitan/regional/national association.²

The summary of the questionnaire makes interesting reading; most notably the consensus was for a regional association (i.e. NSW, plus St Mark's), which should not exclude the possibility of further development. A national association was seen as "too vast". On the subject of name of the proposed association comments included: the name 'Association of Religious Studies Libraries' (ARSL) might include some Bible colleges; on the other hand it could include some university collections. One reply expressed an objection to ARSL on euphonic grounds!³

The group met again on 1st July 1977 when an Association of Theological and Religious Studies Libraries (ATRSL) was formed with eighteen member libraries. The stated aims were:

- to encourage contact and co-operation between members,
- to discuss subjects of common concern to them and
- to support the scholarly study of religion by promoting library sources and librarianship in the areas of theology and religious studies.⁴

Edmund Perrin (Librarian at Camden Library from 1975-1988) recalls that soon after he began

negotiations were commenced to establish the Sydney College of

Divinity. There was a spirit of unity and cooperation amongst the Sydney theological institutions. The librarians were encouraged to meet to share information and methods. One of the interests that drew some of us together was the use of the Union Theological Seminary Classification.⁵

Early issues which came to light in the fledgling association included classification problems – for those libraries which did not use Dewey, should they change from Union Classification (Petee) to Library of Congress (LC)? Such considerations are interesting to contemplate in hindsight, as Philip Harvey expresses:

There was a strong move at the time to adopt LC before the imminent arrival of automation. By the 1980's that wave had become tidal, with huge conversions in the U.S. Australian Pettee people missed the flood, with the happy result that they now have the best theology classification system in the world, with updates. Australia escaped the ideological sweep that destroyed Pettee in America.⁶

St Mark's connection

On 28th June 1977 Dr Robert Withycombe, Warden of St Mark's Collegiate Library in Canberra, wrote to Hans Ams with several proposals, including

- possibility of inviting overseas theological librarians to a national conference of the Australian Library Association late in 1978, which was planned to be held in Canberra. Such librarians "might well agree to travel in Australia before or afterwards to inform, encourage, advise, or promote the cause of religious and theological libraries in Australia."
- a desire to establish links (between St Mark's) with other libraries on the Pettee classification system to mutual benefit.
- a union list of reference works for religious and theological studies
- membership of the (ATRSL) association should be determined by commitment to a goal and not by a personal professional qualification in librarian-

ship.⁷

Robert Withycombe also raised awareness of the Library Assistance Scheme, which was set up by the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS), and a proposal for a conference on a nation-wide basis for theological librarians in Canberra late in 1978.⁸

ANZATS' Library Assistance Scheme

For a small fee members of the scheme received on a monthly (later quarterly) basis an alphabetical list of recent accessions, giving cataloging information and either Dewey or Pettee classification numbers. The lists were based on cards supplied by two libraries, Ormond College and St Paschal's (both in Melbourne), and were provided to assist in cataloging acquisitions for those libraries who had either limited or untrained staff. It was reported at the 1977 meeting of ANZATS held in Auckland that seventeen libraries had joined the scheme.⁹ St Mark's took over the operation of the scheme from the end of 1977.¹⁰

Promotion of ATRSL and a national librarians conference

Meanwhile, back in Sydney, moves were made to promote the new association by forwarding their newsletter, named *Syndesmos*, to the National Library of Australia and approaching the Library Association of Australia (LAA). Several interstate libraries also joined the association or subscribed to *Syndesmos*.

ATRSL agreed at its meeting on 10th February 1978 "to write to ANZATS suggesting that provision be made at next conference for a meeting of librarians."¹¹ This proposal must have been acceptable to the planners of the 1978 ANZATS conference as Robert Withycombe circulated all members of ANZATS informing them of a day workshop to be held in Melbourne in August.¹²

Although the proposal included twelve possible areas for discussion, the agenda for the day focused on:

- inter-library loans/photocopying/etc
- classification schemes,

- a national co-operative network; ANZATS library assistance scheme,
- cataloging and reader services¹³

In his contribution to the McIntosh festschrift, Trevor Zweck gives a summary of what was achieved that day (18th August)¹⁴, including the possibility of *Syndesmos* becoming a national journal, and the formation of state groups.

Second consultation

The ATRSL proceeded to plan a further consultation, with Edmund Perrin having been appointed National Convener by the Melbourne meeting. The consultation was held at Wesley College, Sydney, in conjunction with ANZATS, in August 1979 and was attended by eight Sydney librarians and one each from Victoria and South Australia.¹⁵

Discussions regarding a national organisation were attempted but because of lack of representation from other States, reluctance to proceed was strongly expressed. The possibility was floated of a national group being an independent body or becoming a special interest group of the LAA; the convener of the Consultation was asked to approach LAA regarding the advantages of affiliation. On learning of the costs involved in such a move, ATRSL decided not to proceed.¹⁶

Further consultations

As Zweck has documented¹⁷, the consultation in Brisbane in September 1983, was the turning point in galvanizing librarians into action and highlighting the needs for library standards. It was also agreed that a further consultation be held the following year in Sydney, the details of which are covered in Zweck's major paper.¹⁸

ANZTLA came into being following the fifth consultation held at Luther Seminary in August 1985, with the inaugural meeting being held in Canberra the following year.

The beginnings of AULOTS

At the 1983 Brisbane consultation, Hans Arms presented a copy of the *Australasian union list of serials in theological collections* of which he was editor.¹⁹ It contained the periodical holdings of 85

theological libraries.²⁰

Fr. John W. O'Rourke, Librarian of St Francis Xavier Seminary, South Australia, had originally compiled a *Union list of periodicals in theological libraries in South Australia* in 1972.²¹ Listed were the holdings of six theological libraries in Adelaide including St Michael's House at Crafers, which was completely destroyed by the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983.

O'Rourke issued a *Union list of periodicals in theological libraries in Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand* in 1976 which listed the holdings of 55 theological libraries.²² It was this list which was taken up by ANZTLA and evolved into AULOTS.

Formation of state groups

Even though little progress was made following the 1979 consultation, the Sydney group continued to meet, with a project being the updating and planned expansion of the O'Rourke *Union list of periodicals* to include data from 100 ANZATS libraries and other centres, including New Zealand and Oceania.²³ The group fell into a lull from 1981-83 but, with the commencement of the Sydney College of Divinity in 1983, regained enthusiasm.

The South Australian story, which began in September 1978, has been told elsewhere.²⁴

There was a preliminary meeting of librarians in Melbourne following the La Trobe workshop. It was reported at the second consultation (Sydney, 1979) that recent contact had been made with various librarians in Melbourne indicating that two meetings had been held but no formal organization was being planned even though some interest had been expressed.²⁵

Eventually the Victorian group was constituted in 1987.²⁶ Philip Harvey quite clearly remembers Trevor Zweck, at the 2nd ANZTLA conference in 1987 held at Ridley College, telling the Victorian people to "go sit in the corner and talk to each other".²⁷

Other state groups were formed as: New

Zealand 1989, Queensland 1989-90? and Western Australia 1990.

Leadership

Initial moves for cooperative association between theological and religious studies libraries quite clearly lie with Dr Robert Withycombe in Canberra and Hans Arns, along with the members of ATRSL, in Sydney. When Rev Trevor Zweck came on the scene in 1981, the movement increased markedly. Dr Lawrence McIntosh's appointment to the Joint Theological Library in 1982 brought even greater strides. The professionalism and dedication shown by these people in bringing ANZTLA to birth is amazing.

There are many others who have served in differing, but no less significant, ways. Together they are part of our history and we are profoundly grateful.

Acknowledgments

Jocelyn Morris originally suggested something be written about all the above. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Hans Arns who lent me a bundle of minutes, papers and letters. Kim Robinson kindly gave me a very long term loan on the issues of *Syndesmos* in Moore College Library and provided critical information when needed. Edmund Perrin shared his memories (even though, as he said, some were a little rusty!) Dr Robert Withycombe, now retired, put up with my persistent emails and responded with his reflections (which follow). Philip Harvey, as always, was encouraging and supportive, offering helpful comments and reflections on what had been written. To all I say: thank you very much.

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List of ANZATS library consultations

August 18, 1978 Chisholm College, La Trobe University, Melbourne.
August 24, 1979 Wesley College, University of Sydney.
September 3, 1983 St Francis College, Brisbane.
August 27-28, 1984 Baptist Theological College, Sydney.

August 25-26, 1985 Luther Seminary, North Adelaide.

References

- 1 Letter 10/3/77 from H. Arns
- 2 Circular 22/4/77, with attached questionnaire [?from H. Arns]
- 3 Circular 6/6/77, with attached responses to questionnaire, from H. Arns and B. Sharpe
- 4 *Syndesmos*, 1, 1977, p 2
- 5 Email message, 7/8/03, E. Perrin to V. Canty
- 6 Email message, 28/4/04, P. Harvey to V. Canty
- 7 Letter 28/6/77, R. Withycombe to H. Arns
- 8 Letter 26/9/77, R. Withycombe to H. Arns
- 9 *Syndesmos*, 2, 1978, 4
- 10 Letter 26/9/77, R. Withycombe to H. Arns
- 11 Minutes ATRSL, 10/2/78
- 12 Circular, undated, from R. Withycombe
- 13 Agenda for Consultation, 18/8/78
- 14 Zweck, T J "A decade of working together: the establishment and early history of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association" in 'So great a cloud of witnesses': *Libraries & theologies. Festschrift in honour of Lawrence D. McIntosh*. P. Harvey and L. Pryor eds. Melbourne: Uniting Church Theological Hall and the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association, 1995. p 8 (This paper was subsequently published [abridged form] in *ANZTLA Newsletter* No. 46 2002)
- 15 Report of consultation 24/8/79
- 16 Minutes ATRSL, 8/11/80
- 17 Zweck, p 9-10
- 18 *ibid*
- 19 Report of consultation, 3/9/83
- 20 Published by National Catholic Research Council, 1983.
- 21 Published by St Francis Xavier Seminary, 1972.
- 22 Published by St Francis Xavier Seminary, 1976.
- 23 Minutes ATRSL, 30/7/82
- 24 *ANZTLA Newsletter* 51, p 27-30
- 25 Report of Consultation, 24/8/79
- 26 *ANZTLA Newsletter* 3, 1987
- 27 Email message, 29/7/03, P Harvey to V. Canty