

Twenty years of ANZTLA

Reflections from Three Presidents

Popular memory attributes the lead for the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association coming from the South Australians, and there is no question that the South Australians were well-organised early and endeavoured to involve libraries in the other states in forming an association. However, recent historical work by Val Canty, herself a South Australian original, reveals that visions and groundwork for an association were happening in various parts of Australia through the late seventies and early eighties. An active correspondence between potential participants was being conducted, showing a keen awareness of other theological libraries with common needs and goals. The need was there, the interest was growing, it was simply a matter of people communicating further, and making contact, in order to make it happen. It is a mistake to think now that we look back at some golden age. In reality it was as it always is: the problems were different, the challenges were different.

One happily abiding feature of ANZTLA is its ecumenical harmony. It is genuinely irenic in nature and welcomes involvement across denominations and religions. The common interests and needs that draw us together have been instrumental in the foundation of the Association, they are the factors we keep coming back to. The daily challenges are the stuff of our work together, whatever aspect of librarianship we may be handling at the time.

If there is one ideal or quality that we work with in order to maintain the standards, it is

collegiality. Every kind of theological library is represented in ANZTLA, and every size of library. Sensitivity to the needs of all our members has strengthened as the years pass, to the degree that it is a main characteristic of the Association. Out of such collegiality there has sprung camaraderie and friendship. Even sharing the differences has helped us grow in our understanding of our own work. Perhaps the size of the Association has helped with this close-knit sense of belonging, we being fortunate enough to get know nearly everyone in the Association if we put our minds to it.

The chapter organisation of ANZTLA is another blessing, where there is close on-going awareness and discussion of local needs as well as the larger issues in our field. Each chapter has developed its own special character, not surprisingly a reflection of the personalities and histories of the different regions. This chapter system has been a particular strength when it comes to organising the annual conferences. Everyone gets a turn to work for the common interest. The chapter conference committees are the main form of corporate involvement that we experience and enjoy on an annual basis.

Here now are three views of ANZTLA from three of the elected Presidents, given on this twentieth anniversary.

The Spirit of ANZTLA

Tony McCumstie works at the Mannix Library in Melbourne and is the current President of ANZTLA

In writing this reflection to mark the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association, I would like to focus on the spirit that underpins the Association and sustains it rather than events and achievements (which, hopefully, will have been considered by other contributors).

Everything the Association has done and continues to do is possible only because of the generosity, willing participation and co-operation of its members. From the very beginning, it was the dedication and commitment of a few like-minded people who paved the way for the formation of what has become ANZTLA. Needs were identified, possibilities were explored and the necessary work done to produce the goods.

Having been established, ANZTLA provides an environment in which more needs and possibilities can be identified.

Regional chapters serve to both facilitate communication, support and co-operation at a local level and also act as a conduit for individuals to connect to the larger theological library scene across Australia and New Zealand. The rotation of the annual conference from chapter to chapter escalates this dynamic to the international level. It also provides an opportunity for individuals, regardless of the size of their library or their professional circumstances, to contribute to the overall endeavours of the Association through participation in conference organizing committees.

Each year the Association's conference brings together delegates from libraries all around the region. This coming together of librarians from such a wide variety of circumstances and backgrounds offers an unparalleled opportunity

for people to meet, confer, support and inspire one another. While the conference only lasts a few days, the relationships (both professional and personal) that are established there persist through the year and result in either the achievement of some common task or personal development that assists individuals in their own library workplace or career.

It is well worth noting that two speakers giving a presentation on mentoring at the 2004 conference remarked that ANZTLA is already well advanced in this area. They identified what we may take for granted, viz. regional chapters and the annual conference, as key means by which peer-mentoring relationships can be established and develop.

The generosity of ANZTLA members - be it in performing some task or participation in some project or just in being available to one another - is the basis of our Association. I would hope that each member may read the Association's "Mission Statement" on the website (<http://www.anztl.org/Pages/about.html>) and consider ways in which they may be able to contribute the work of the Association at one level or another.

Something that struck me when I attended my first ANZTLA conference in 1994 and continues to impress me year after year is the genuine personal warmth that exists at such gatherings and the welcome that is extended to newcomers. There is a communal spirit evident within the Association that sustains it and enables it to be what it is and do what it does. It is a spirit of generosity, of co-operation and concern one for another. This spirit was instilled in ANZTLA by those who founded the Association and has been fostered by those who have been a part of the Association over the past twenty years. This spirit is still evident today and it is our responsibility to ensure that it continues into the future.

Wendy Davis works in the Adelaide Theological Library and was President of ANZTLA from 1996-1997

My term as president was an interim one. I was elected at the Perth conference in October 1996 following the death of Trevor Zweck, who had been our founding President. The grief we shared at that time was heart-felt, particularly for the South Australian chapter members, who had worked closely with Trevor for many years. I had been close friends with Trevor since we studied together in library school in 1980.

Trevor's death was quite sudden, following a fairly short period of illness. He suffered many health problems over the years and one of his most memorable qualities was the courage and fortitude with which he faced these difficulties. His deteriorating eyesight could have given him reason enough to retire, especially considering the importance of eyesight to a librarian who spends most of their working day reading something! But no, Trevor doggedly continued

on, such was his dedication to theological librarianship and ANZTLA. His last overseas study trip was cut short by his final illness.

Trevor's death marked a major turning point in the life of ANZTLA. As he was one of the founders and leading lights of ANZTLA it was difficult to think of ANZTLA without Trevor and I think it took us all a while to recover and to start thinking about ANZTLA in a "post-Trevor" light. It required the members of ANZTLA to reevaluate their roles. It gave us an opportunity to tap the wealth of talented and dedicated librarians who have led ANZTLA forward.

The highlight I remember was that during my term the 3rd edition of AULOTS (the first edited by Tony McCumstie) was published--I got to write the preface and sign it as President!

The Trevor Zweck Award

At the Annual General Meeting of ANZTLA in 1994, held at Ormond College in Melbourne, Coralie Jenkin proposed from the floor that an Award be instituted "to a person who has contributed to theological libraries in Australia or New Zealand." Significant amongst the terms were that "the recipient be a person who, in the opinion of the Executive Committee [the forerunner of the present Board], has made a significant contribution to the development of theological libraries in Australia or New Zealand in any way during the previous twelve months"; that "recipients will not necessarily be librarians"; and that "no person receive the Award on more than one occasion." To honour Trevor Zweck's contribution to ANZTLA this Award is known as the Trevor Zweck Award

In fact, the Trevor Zweck Award is the highest accolade that ANZTLA can award. It is awarded to an individual (not an institution) in recognition of an outstanding contribution which has furthered the course of theological librarianship. It can be awarded annually but, since its inception in 1996, has only ever been awarded once before. Members of the Association nominate a person to receive the award and this must then be approved by the Board. It has only been awarded twice, to Tony McCumstie for his work in producing AULOTS 3 and to Ruth Millard for her work in organizing the Consortium Task Group.

Judith Bright works in the Kinder Library at St John's Theological College, Auckland and was President of ANZTLA from 2001-2003

The 20th anniversary of the founding of ANZTLA encourages a look back to where we have come from, to the significant achievements of this Association, and of theological librarians themselves. Prior to the inaugural 1986 ANZTLA conference, there had been a library consultation 'tacked' on to some ANZATS conferences, at which many librarians were represented by a faculty person from their institution. The coming of age of the theological librarian as a professional and able to speak in their own right was in its infancy. So it was with a good deal of excitement that that first conference took place.

As one who was at that first Canberra conference, and was later elected as President (2001-2003), it is interesting to reflect on the past. Each President has had new and different challenges. During a dinner address at the 2002 conference, I quoted our first President Trevor Zweck when he looked back at our achievements. Trevor wrote

- we have provided a forum for interaction,
- we have fostered the development and improvement of theological libraries,
- we have developed and implemented standards for theological librarianship,

- we have fostered inter-library co-operation,
- we have published and distributed literature on theological librarianship,
- and we have fostered contact with other library associations and groups.

My term as President was the first appointment of a New Zealander to the position, and the first time that I remember that those nominated were asked to speak in support of their nomination, prior to the election. The distance between members of the executive (later Board), and the impossibility of face to face meetings ushered in an era of conducting Board business by email when necessary.

Considerable work led to ANZTLA becoming ANZTLA Ltd, the annual general meeting having resolved to incorporate the Association according to Australian law, and having passed a constitution to enable this to happen. We also completed a process of evaluation of suitable software for our indexing project, the Australasian Religion Index.

The opportunity to stand for President is one that all members should consider seriously as part of their professional development, and in order to assist our Association to continue to move forward. It is a challenge, but one that I offer to all members of ANZTLA.