

# Conference Summary

by Philip Harvey



*The President's Summary of the Twenty-Fourth ANZTLA Conference, held at the Sundown Motel Resort and Conference Centre, Narrabundah, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory from Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.*

This year's pre-conference cataloguing session tackled the cataloguing of electronic resources. Delegates were reminded by cataloguing staff at Charles Sturt University Library (Irene Evans, Jennie Arrow and, in absentia, Maryanne Johnston) that cataloguing is a skill not belonging to any other profession, so we should be putting a high value on it. The new basic concepts were rehearsed. (1) With an electronic resource, is it direct or remote, i.e. the physical carrier vs. the input-output device connected to a computer system. (2) Granularity, i.e. levels of image presentation, do we catalogue the whole thing, or all the things in the whole thing? (3) Content vs. carrier, i.e. the primary content (language, sound &c.) vs. carrier (pdf file, paper &c.). (4) Multiple versions, which raises the question for us, is the resource published as finite or continuing? (5) There are three identifiable bibliographical categories now: monographs and serials and integrating resources. An integrating resource is a resource that is changed by updates. The only time we need to create a new integrating record is when the original exists and the resource continues. I was reassured at this point to



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learn from the presenter that whatever choice of description I take, “it won’t be wrong.” It was also a relief to be directed not to try to catalogue everything on the world wide web.

Wearing his professorial cap rather than his mitre, on Thursday evening Tom Frame (Director, St. Mark’s College, Canberra) gave the keynote address. Tom said we need to be knowledgeable in what has been written, while leaving space for our own imaginations. Our reading affects how we do things and how we write. Tom is his own best example. His latest book, on Charles Darwin, addresses the core literature on Darwin’s changing religious beliefs and Australian reactions to his ideas. Tom raised new questions in turn, like why theologians continue to sideline or ignore evolutionary theory, while creationists place it in the centre. Tom’s life of Prime Minister Harold Holt prompted one friend to react, “What! 300 plus pages to prove that he drowned!” Of course, as I noted in my thanks later, the book demonstrates Tom’s desire to ask questions, to address unanswered questions. Holt’s death had a big effect on Australians, some of it related to unlikely theories about being kidnapped by a Chinese submarine, Holt was a counter-spy, and so on. Like any good historian, Tom wants conclusiveness, but knows he must remain open. His expressed concerns about students not reading is a common one, but obviously of direct concern to someone whose example of broad reading influences and improves not just his work and knowledge, but augments and inspires our own. I was struck by his closing words, that many theological librarians choose the work as a vocation, both in the secular and religious senses. This is something rarely mentioned at ANZTLA conferences, but a living reality for many.

Google is increasing activity on Libraries Australia now that the database has been exposed to Google, but for Reference at the National Library of Australia what to do with say the enquiry from Texas that has nothing to do with Australia? Aileen Weir (NLA) asked this question next morning on the fourth floor of that building. Meanwhile the NLA has created its own Google, the SBDS prototype that offers one-stop access to all the Library’s main on-line features. Noticeable at this year’s conference were the number of people ‘making Googles’ of their own in their libraries.

Meg Poore (Australian National University, Canberra) asked, what are people doing online? We are in a non-linear, interactive, abundant environment. We expect instant information. We can all do it, we don’t need the hard-coding. We expect trust, openness, and access. Things move so quickly there is no time for an instruction manual. This is where we are at: Web 2.0. For young users, the Web is there for convenience and control, but not for learning; Meg stated that this is found to be true across the literature. So how do they learn at home? The message was clear: wherever and whoever, we ourselves need to improve our own information and communication technologies (ICT) skills. We can join the play! Meg became



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counter-intuitive when remarking, the quickest way to motivate a student is by assessment. Some things never change.

In many places libraries are not called libraries anymore, but ‘resource centres’ or ‘learning commons’, we were told by Shirley Oakley (Executive Director of Library Services, Charles Sturt University). Scholars visit online. Libraries need power-points more than computers. Libraries have cafes. Electronic libraries don’t own anything, they just give access. All of this is due to changes in tertiary education. Universities are concerned with the intangible factor known as satisfactory student experience, satisfactory for the student, that is. This factor now heavily influences building design, service design, and service delivery.

Deirdre Kiorgaard (Australian Committee on Cataloguing representative on the RDA Joint Steering Committee) updated us on Resource Description and Access. The Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR) are an outdated ‘class’ system devised for card catalogues. RDA addresses the new environment of tags, links, full text, formats &c. In data terms, we now deal with websites, databases, digitisation projects, and institutional repositories. There is increased sharing of data. RDA is a cataloguing tool, it is interactive and on-line. RDA will be available in digital form for people to use. It will be released as an online tool near the end of 2009, and available online in the New Year. RDA has its own training in-built, but cataloguers will need to do the course next year.

Annette McGuinness (Library Manager, Australian Catholic University, Canberra) couldn’t stand still talking about ebooks in theology. An ebook is a hand-held electronic device on which book text can be read, or PC-based text. The preferred pathway to ebooks is via the catalogue. ACU has a vast percentage of ebooks in its collection. How are we all using ebooks though, once available? There is software to search ebook sites across the collection: ACU uses Metalib. Of the 60,000 ebooks at ACU, judgements will vary as to their uniform ‘excellence’, but the advantages are good in a distributed environment: 24/7 access via the internet, better availability for those with disabilities, it is easy to make copies, and no physical storage is needed.

A name with strong associations for those with memories of the print Australasian Religion Index (ARI), Stuart Ferguson (Information Studies, University of Canberra) talked about becoming a librarian. Well, they ought to be people who have done a course, therefore leading to professional recognition. They can be a person who works in a library, but love of books won’t be a useful sign, they may be trained managers or IT experts, distant from literature. Stuart was nervous at the thought he was preaching to a group of theological librarians, but he needn’t have worried, the delegates were already converted.

The enthusiastic Jane Hardy (ALIA) opened awareness of what we do, in fact raised our consciousness of our own consciousness. We



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have the pleasure of providing information and connecting people to what they want. But we have challenges, like how to make our organisations and our decision-makers cognisant of the critical necessity of what they call their library. We can deliver a four-fold return on our asset. We work with the dynamic environment of Web 2.0, Web 3.0, Web 4.0. We also work with the dynamic environment of administrative change, funding, the changing workplace, and its workforce. Then Jane asked us to ask, are we committed to the ideals of our profession? What are we as individuals to do about the issues we care about? The West Islanders later found out how things are done on the North and South Islands, thanks to Mark Hangartner (Subject Librarian, University of Auckland Library).

Saturday morning was crisp but sunny in Canberra. Our international visitors - Judy Powles (Spurgeon’s College, London, also former Chairman, yes Chairman, Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries), Cindy Vanuaroro (Talua College Library, Vanuatu), and Lucy Tasra (Bishop Patteson Library, Solomon Islands) – brought their worlds into ours with informative presentations. It was revealing how much we share in common in our libraries, whether we are in London, Santo or Honiara, both in the daily round of things as well as for future planning.

Followed, a session on practical issues for managing our libraries. Tony McCumstie (Mannix Library, Catholic Theological College, East Melbourne) gave us a wake-up call to the reality of politics in our workplace. We need to know what authority we hold in the library in order to make decisions. But we are also talking about the exercise of power. Remember that the library is ancillary. We have to make our authorities aware. In politics, our personalities are a determining factor. When we know where we fit, how can we influence those in authority? Know the network of the institution, speak to the people who will make things work for you. One closing maxim seemed appropriate in the context of the national capital: in one way or another we are all lobbying one another.

Wendy Davis (Adelaide Theological Library) talked on collection development, its necessity, its decision challenges, its on-going re-evaluation. Communication with authorities was, again, essential. We were given weeding criteria: item-by-item deletion, report-based redundancy, layers of dust on immobile books, silverfish damage, wear-and-tear, dog ears. Another issue was how to make the budget stretch. Answers included making the most of access journals; using document delivery for items otherwise too expensive; sharing expensive books, reference works and subscriptions co-operatively; and, joining consortia.

Donations and backlogs were dealt with by Philip Harvey (Carmelite Library, Middle Park, Victoria). Make sure you have a Donations Policy, and make it clear to potential donors that once received the donation is the responsibility of the library. Accept as



“Ebooks, ejournals,  
epresence,  
enewsletters.  
E-nough! Are we  
losing sight of  
books altogether?  
Is a library without  
books a library?”

a fact that backlogs are always with us. Backlogs are known causes of friction between management and cataloguing, as management keeps being told its their problem, while cataloguers know that ultimately they have to do all the work. Like nearly all the papers at the conference, this one will appear in the forthcoming *ANZTLA Ejournal*.

Immediately before lunch at St Mark's College, we heard the new Manager of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Margaret Roberts, give a sprightly introduction to the Centre and its many activities. Then we were allowed to be entranced by John Harris, Bible translator and famed author of the seminal book *One Blood*, as he explained to us some of the many Bibles of the Bible Society in Australia, gifted to the College. An Authorised 1611 Bible printed in 1611. The Breeches Bible, with reading of the relevant verse from Genesis. Vanuatu and Solomon Islands translations, quite familiar to our Pacific guests. Something that is either William Shakespeare's Bible or one of Mr Ireland's forgeries: either would fetch huge figures. The Bible of the first Governor-General of Australia, Lord Hopetoun, recovered by an Australian tourist when visiting Edinburgh one time &c.

Four quotes, recalled in tranquillity, from the convivial and at times uproarious conference dinner. Mark Hangartner, in ceiling-high gnome hat, in the New Zealand Chapter's performance of Snow White: "Due to budget cuts I am the seven dwarves." Anonymous poet from the 'Naughty but Nice' table: "Charles Darwin is the person who tortoise." Nancy Clarke, by this time Countess Clarke, in Edwardian pink hat (stately): "And now here is the Prize for the Category of Most Irrelevant Poem to the Set Subject!" Susan Phillips who, having dispensed with the 'dull' *ANZTLA Guidelines for Conference Management*, chose to follow the directions for conduct set out in *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861): "Given everything we have seen so far we could not call Nancy parsimonious, could we? Or, a sluggard!"

Come Sunday morning, Julie Olston (Moore College Library, Newtown, NSW) looked at digital repositories. Julie predicts the phasing out of paper periodicals. Our job will be to guide users to find what is out there in digital form. Repositories may be moving away from institutional to geographic and thematic repositories, big news to those delegates who had not even heard of digital repositories before Julie started her presentation. Marilyn Gane (Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW) asked, do we have a repository, or not? Certainly the first question from any librarian. Repositories can contain almost anything: articles, conference papers, theses, ejournals, images, library updates. Do we build it, or buy it? Who owns the copyright of the material? How is content decided?

Ebooks, ejournals, epresence, enewsletters. E-nough! Are we losing sight of books altogether? Is a library without books a library? One coinage we saw for the digital service business, Ebrary, attempts



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to describe a place that was a library, but with E as the core letter of the name. Maybe this is something to look at in more detail when we travel to Perth in 2010 for the silver anniversary conference.

Scott Cowdell (Associate Professor of Theology, Charles Sturt University) wondered about this too. After a year in the cool space of St Mark’s Rare Books Room, Scott of the Antarctic emerged to talk to us about his reflections, and his experience of some of our own libraries. It was refreshing and inspiring to hear his powerful recollections of places where he has studied: the studious hum at St Francis Theological College Library in Brisbane, the perfect retreat of the Library of the Sisters of Mercy in that city, the restful surrounds of the old St Barnabas’ College Library in Adelaide, and the harmonious calm of the Joint Theological Library (as Scott called it), Melbourne. It was good to hear him talking about a place where the line between reading and praying can be crossed. Scott talked incisively about the anxieties of users in the new library environment, especially its ongoing digital revolution. I liked his conclusion that there is something ‘theological’ about theological libraries.

This is the first ANZTLA Conference Committee consisting essentially of two people: Susan Phillips (St. Mark’s College Library, Canberra) and Nancy Clarke (retired Librarian of ACU Signadou). This nerve-making committee size proved nerve-making only for members of the Board, it would seem. Nancy Clarke, when asked by Susan if she could help, just said, “It’ll be a hoot!” It was. The dynamic duo came up with a full program, a plethora of outings and entertainments, and a venue some miles from draughty boys schools or traditional university colleges. The positive and at times even flamboyant mood of the 2009 conference has to be attributed in large part to the skilful and imaginative work of Susan and Nancy over the last twelve to eighteen months. Both gave special thanks for the support of Wendy Davis. Assisted in the late stages of planning by their Sydney ‘slaves’, though ‘guardian angels’ would be more appropriate, ably led by Meredith Tsai, Susan and Nancy have bitten the bullet, shown the way, called the shots, raised the bar and delivered the goods with their impeccable and no-fuss planning of every minute of the 24<sup>th</sup> ANZTLA Conference. They are to be thanked and congratulated. *Bravissima!*