

# “Sharing the Word” with Hans Arns

by Ethel Morris

The Pacific Regional Seminary of St Peter Chanel, Suva, Fiji is the first library to adopt the Koha software, and is hosted and facilitated by Prosentient Systems in Sydney, Australia.

I had first heard about Hans in 2003, when I had returned from working at the IJALS Library at USP, to begin work again at the PRS library. I was told that a Mr Hans Arns had set up the Athena Library Software System in 2001. This system was very easy to use and our users liked it, but unfortunately Athena was not being updated by the manufacturer and we began to experience problems mainly in the backing-up of records.

In May 2012, we were in the process of trying to select a new library system to take the place of Athena and had eventually narrowed our search down to two systems, Destiny and Liberty. At this time, the SPATS (South Pacific Association of Theological Schools) Consultant was trying to convert us to changing over to Destiny with the idea of all the Theological Libraries in the Pacific using this same system. However, before we could agree, quite out of the blue, an email arrived from Mr Hans Arns with a proposal. He wanted to know if we would be interested in a project which he was setting up.

Hans had seen the many problems faced by Catholic seminary libraries and wanted to do something about this - problems such as isolation, poor resources, a lack of funding, and most importantly, a lack of trained librarians. He set up a project which he called *Sharing the Word*, a very apt name, as he thought of all the libraries and how they could benefit from each other through sharing. He had a list of approximately 200 seminary libraries.

Being an advocate on the use of Open Source software and in particular, Koha, Hans's idea was, in his own words, “*To design a generic seminary configuration of Koha that could be run either as a standalone as well as with both software and data in the Cloud and available online.*” He got together with Martin Teulan of Catholic Mission Australia to discuss the adoption of a common open source library system that could eventually be maintained by a Church agency for the use of seminary libraries, Koha of course being on the top of the list. He knew a service agent in Sydney who was keen to get involved in this project, Edmond Balnaves



Awarding of Trevor Zweck Award to Hans Arns  
by ANZTLA President Kerrie Stevens

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of Prosentient Systems. Prosentient now hosts our Koha *Sharing the Word* website.

After a meeting in Rome with the Society of St Peter the Apostle, Martin Teulan managed to get their backing for, and sponsorship of, the *Sharing the Word* project. Things began to move quickly now, and to start the ball rolling, a seminary was needed to be used as a sort of experiment. As Hans was familiar with the Pacific Regional Seminary and the PRS Library, he immediately thought of asking us if we would be interested. After much careful thought about Hans's proposal, the Rector and all concerned decided that this would be the best way forward for the PRS Library. We downloaded all our data from Athena, saved it on a disk, and sent it over to Australia via courier services. Edmond then managed to convert all the Athena data into the Koha system.


Hans was eager to make a start so, in September 2012, he flew over to Suva, Fiji and spent a few days training me and my assistant. We found him to be a very good teacher and it was easy to learn from him about using the Koha System. He took us through the Circulation, Cataloguing, and the Serials modules. While he was here in Suva he also attended a workshop on Koha sponsored by The University of the South Pacific Library, and was asked to give a talk as well on the Koha system at this same workshop.

On returning to Sydney, Hans kept working on the Koha *Sharing the Word* website, and enhancing it in many different and useful ways. He linked us to some important resources such as Worldcat, and useful links to *Church Documents* and other important online resources, such as the *Global Digital Library on Theology and Ecumenism*.

It is encouraging to note that the SPATS Library Consultant, who had tried to convert us to Destiny, is now really impressed and is promoting Koha to all the theological colleges around the Pacific. This is all due to Hans Arns and how he has presented and promoted Koha mainly through his *Sharing the Word* project. The future looks good for Theological Colleges around the Pacific now and I feel hopeful and confident that the SPATS Consultant will also recommend to SPATS that all theological libraries in the Pacific area should convert to Koha and a special website for SPATS theological libraries, similar to Hans's *Sharing the Word* project for seminary libraries, should be set up.

Hans also organized a newsletter, and set up a special email account on Google especially for all the seminary librarians so that they can keep in contact with each other.

He searched for, and found, Open Source materials suitable for theological/seminary libraries and so far has entered 1100 records into the Electronic Resources section of *Sharing the Word*, for books, Church and other documents, free subscriptions, etc. with records and links in the PRS catalogue.



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So that others could benefit from these, he downloaded them as separate MARC files and offered them to other theological libraries both in New Zealand and Australia via the ANZTLA website. So far 9 libraries have taken up the offer. Besides being a great way of indirect evangelizing, this puts the PRS library on the regional theological map.

Hans has had to travel to a number of seminaries to set up Koha and eventually all these seminary libraries will be linked to *Sharing the Word*. All this cannot be accomplished in a short period of time, but Hans has taken up the challenge. The Myanmar (Yangon) Major Seminary in Burma should be brought online by the end of this year, and Hans is now planning on going to a seminary in East Timor soon for Catholic Mission. The *Sharing the Word* initiative is led by Catholic Mission Australia.

Throughout all this, he has taken the time to be with the family, go on holidays with them, and be there for them in all family happenings. Just recently he sent us a photo of his two grandchildren – the eldest and the youngest. When he speaks about them in his emails you can feel the love he has for his family.

For someone of his age, I think that what Hans has been doing is nothing short of marvellous, and he deserves to be recognised for his special efforts in opening the way up for regional seminary libraries to a host of communications possibilities for social interaction, cooperation and most importantly for information sharing through his *Sharing the Word* project. His work has also made an impact on other theological colleges around the Pacific which I’m sure will have a far-reaching effect on the way that theological libraries will be run in the future. I feel strongly also that Hans has contributed significantly to the development of theological librarianship in the Pacific region.

Therefore, I wish to co-promote Mr Hans Arns to receiving the Trevor Zweck Award.