

## PROPOSAL FOR AN ANZTLA GUIDE TO REFERENCE LITERATURE

### Abstract

A project is proposed for a research guide service for the literature of theology which would provide both detailed annotations for key reference tools and introductory essays on the various forms/genres of theological reference works. Such a service would be updated regularly and would serve as a fundamental resource for programmes of bibliographic instruction.

### Background

The ability to conduct research is basic to the study of theology and to the practice of ministry. Effective preaching, teaching, counselling, administration and community involvement all presuppose the ability to undertake independent research. Librarians and their academic colleagues in theological colleges recognise this, but at present little is done to inculcate basic research skills as part of pastoral training, and in Australia there is an undeniable paucity of indigenous resources for instruction in theological research and bibliography.

Bibliographies and research guides are basic to instructional programmes, whether as central texts or supplementary resources. The preparation of such tools on an individual basis is difficult work which places heavy demands on both time and bibliographic and evaluative skills. Furthermore, the number of indifferent guides currently in print indicates that few academics, librarians or bibliographers are genuinely competent in preparing such works; and they continue to appear, duplicating work already done and never taking into account specifically Australian needs in terms of content. The results continue to be mediocre and ephemeral, rarely attaining a quality acceptable in a range of theological colleges.

### The Project

The focus of the proposed guide is reference works which are essential to the professional training and ongoing development of clergy and church workers. Unlike traditionally printed research guides this project will be in constant revision and expansion. It will be a service rather than a one-off publication which quickly becomes dated. The provision for regular updating will commend the service as a current awareness tool. A series of preliminary essays will be developed, covering (1) the basic structure of theological literature, (2) the main genres of theological reference works, (3) research strategies for theological work. These essays may well be based on John Trotti's "Introduction to the Study and Use of Theological Literature" in Gorman and Gorman, *Theological and Religious Reference Materials: General Resources and Biblical Studies* (Greenwood Press, 1984). Alternative models might be Aldrich and Camp's *Using Theological Books and Libraries* (Prentice-Hall, 1963) or Kennedy's *Library Research Guide to Religion and Theology* (Pierian Press, 1974). However, the proposed essays must not merely replicate such overseas work but must take into account the study and teaching of theology as practised in Australia.

Following these relatively static essays, which may be issued as a separate fascicle, will be the bibliographic reference guide. Few annotations in available guides convey an adequate sense of experience in theological literature and research. Therefore, the annotations in this project will:

1. survey the salient features and unique features of each work,
2. evaluate its specific strengths and weaknesses,
3. compare and contrast it with similar publications,
4. suggest how it can be used in combination with other works to provide more complete coverage of significant literature on a topic,
5. clearly indicate any denominational bias or theological viewpoint.

Citations will be standardised to ensure adequate bibliographic detail needed for locating the work in a library, for online data base searching or ordering. Unit numbers will be assigned to facilitate cross-referencing. Indexes will provide access to the works by author, title and subject. Key words in context (from titles) will also be considered. The subject index will be developed in a way that will provide access to such features as reviews, abstracts, bibliographies, biblical text indices, etc. even where these are not predominant features of a given work.

Subscription to the project will include authorisation for the subscriber to revise the profiles according to local needs. Thus a librarian presenting an introduction to tools for research in Victorian church history could create with relative ease a tailored, annotated bibliography simply by "mining" the project profiles and adapting the annotations as required.

After an initial core of approximately 40-50 items has been developed (annotated and indexed) this could be released as the first instalment. Thereafter supplementary pages would be released on a regular basis (perhaps quarterly) in a looseleaf format. An editor will direct ongoing input into the project, and an editorial board will be established to represent the various disciplines and traditions within ANZTLA. This board will develop with the editor both detailed criteria for the project and required procedures. Each member will have responsibility for a specific subject area and will co-ordinate a group of annotators in that area. The board as a whole will review each annotation in order to ensure the fullest, most objective analysis of each title. Editors and annotators with demonstrated subject expertise and research skills will be recruited from librarians and scholars from across Australia and New Zealand. The editorial process must allow drafts of annotations to be submitted, reviewed, edited, printed and circulated with considerable despatch. A format adequate for frequent updating will be sought. A notebook or looseleaf format is one such possibility, as this would allow individual pages to be added or replaced as required.

The success of such a project depends on both capable leadership and a secure operational base. There are at least two basic approaches.

1. Association sponsorship. Such a project is a natural undertaking for ANZTLA.
2. Independent product. The project could become a publication venture of simply a group of people and/or libraries who act as a broker for the service or contract with a publisher. Local presses would need to be contacted in order to determine their interest in such an undertaking. In either case third party funding would need to be sought for the initial stages of the project. Ongoing operational costs would be recovered through subscription or through a contractual arrangement with a publisher.

Comments and criticisms of this proposal from ANZTLA members will be most welcome prior to the Canberra consultation in August. This will enable us to gauge the amount of support for the project and to determine whether there are enough individuals willing to provide input to the proposal to make it viable.

G.E. Gorman  
School of Information Studies  
Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education  
P.O. Box 588  
WAGGA WAGGA. N.S.W. 2650