

TECHNOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Address delivered to the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association Second Conference held at Ridley College, University of Melbourne, Monday 24 August, 1987, by Frances H. Awcock, Director, Technical Services, State Library of Victoria

Introduction

In thinking about what I might say to you today, representing as you do the world not only of librarianship but also of theological learning and scholarship, I thought I should begin at the beginning. And, so I shall, and in language you will recognize, which, despite the simplicity with which it conveys its meaning, is nevertheless the medium for the expression of some powerful imagery ...

"In the beginning was the Word ..."

"I am Alpha & Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

Without disrespect to any for whom those words are rich in Christian symbolism and for whom those same words convey an eternal truth, they seem to me to act as a reminder that language as spoken or as written will continue to be the basis of our profession as librarians and as information specialists. Without written language, even from its beginnings as pictogram and hieroglyph, the notion of books and libraries and librarians would not exist. Can you imagine a world where there was no record of mankind's origins and of his past? From the primitive drawings in the caves at Lascaux or on rocks in the Kakadu National Park to the microchip that has revolutionised the information industry, mankind's innate drive to record and to communicate is living testimony to the power of the word. It was so from man's early beginnings and will surely continue so until the end. Whatever of today is rendered obsolete in the future, human beings will continue to express themselves through language in all its forms and others will seek to learn from such expression.

I feel immensely proud to be part of a profession on which it has been said, all others depend. Will that (dependence) continue to be the case? Let me present you with a series of perspectives which you will I hope regard as relevant in answering that question.

Firstly let me draw on some aspects of life in the State Library of Victoria and compare them with your own current situations as librarians of theological institutions.

Profile of the State Library of Victoria compared with the average theological library in Australia and New Zealand (as reported by Trevor Zweck).

The State Library (hereafter SLV) has: nearly 1.3 million volumes and about 3 times that number of individual manuscripts, pictorial materials, pamphlets, exhibition catalogues and items of ephemera. Your typical library in 1985 had 25,000 volumes.

The SLV in 1986/7 spent nearly 1 million dollars on acquisitions and received in monetary terms about the equivalent in donations. Your average budget is \$12,000.

The SLV in 1986/7 had 228 staff each with a detailed highly specific job description. Your libraries averaged 1.5 staff and most of them do most things that need doing in your libraries.

The SLV, through the provision of inter-library loans, lent fourteen and a half thousand [14,424] items including 1,000 photocopies and bulk loans in 1986/7. Your average library will have lent 52 items to other libraries.

In addition, several thousands of people used the SLV's collections or services in the last financial year. How many used your library? More importantly, how many of those users obtained what they wanted or got the types of service they needed? In my library, the number of persons who do not find what they want is far too high and one of the performance objectives is to reduce that number.

What about the use of technology? The SLV joined CAVAL and its computerised cataloguing system in 1980; it then joined the Australian Bibliographic Network in 1983 and is one of the biggest contributors of data to it. I believe only one or two of you belong to ABN or to NZBN. Do you know that it is quite easy now to register as a dial-up user and to contribute your holdings to ABN? Such a contribution will become increasingly important if we are to participate in schemes of cooperative collection development. Despite its participation in ABN, like most of you, the SLV does not yet have a computerised collection management system although it is around the corner at long last. It has been sorely needed for at least 10 years.

However, the facts I have just quoted and the contrasts I have drawn are merely to demonstrate to you that my perspective on librarianship and its practice might well be different from yours. Your perspectives however are as valid as mine. What then, given

our different libraries and library experiences, might we have in common, and will our futures in librarianship whether they are built on common ground or on diversity or on both, lead us all in similar or different directions? What will be the practice of librarianship in the year 2000 and beyond? I believe that intimations of that future may be gleaned from a close look at the present. Let me begin in the pursuit of the commonality theme looking at the significant religion collection of the SLV and you can make your own connections with it, since we both have significant theological collections.

I shall quote to you from our published Selection Policy, not as "plug" for the policy but as an account of our current strategy for the development of those parts of the collection dealing with the broad subject "RELIGION".

A. Collections - State Library of Victoria : Religion (200-299)

The library aims to develop a balanced collection representing all the major religions and their sacred books. Authoritative material which introduces and explains the basic concepts and practices of the various religions and beliefs is also included. The library avoids including material of a strictly proselytising nature. In addition to material pertaining to the beliefs of individual religions, the collection includes basic authoritative studies in the areas of history of religion, theology, comparative religion and mythology. It encompasses studies on new trends, ideas and movements taking place in religion today.

In areas where religion overlaps with other subjects collected at a high level, such material is collected at the higher level. Examples include the histories of individual churches in Victoria or individual denominations in other Australian states; Australian missions; religious works which are acquired for their importance in the history of printing; works which overlap with philosophy, such as religious ethics; and literary works of a religious nature.

The SLV currently holds 26,516 titles in the broad class "religion", predominantly the Christian religion, distributed thus:-

1. Monographs

There were approximately 25,860 monograph titles with DDC 200's. The predominant part of the collection within the Range DDC 200-289 (covering natural religion, the Bible, Christian theology) is for works published between 1900 and 1949. Forty nine per cent of the total collection falls within this period. Yet the period 1950-83 is best represented not by works on Christian theology but by 3,742 titles specifically on non-Christian religion. This is a result of our stated policy to develop such holdings which now include much on Zen and other aspects of Buddhism and a fair amount of recent material on Hinduism. There are also, of course, old editions of sacred books in Judaism and other faiths, nineteenth century European works on Indian religions and a fair amount of material in the La Trobe Library on Australian aboriginal religions.

In writing this paper and after reading the current newspaper accounts of political turmoil and unrest in the Middle East, I am asking why the SLV has no significant reported holdings of works relating to modern Islam. Without such availability in a major public collection, how can we as professionals or any other citizen even begin to understand the differences between the Shia and the Sanni Muslims and their various sects? Do we understand the political storms in Sri Lanka involving Buddhist Monks and Tamil Tigers and extreme Sinhalese groups committed through their religious and political fervour to particular courses of action? Have your own collections begun to reflect the realities of the modern world? If they have not, how will the new generation of theologians (whose intellectual training and stimulation is dependent on your active collection and exploitation for use of published works) meet the challenge of declining numbers of Christians and burgeoning Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and other communities? I recall a stimulating series of lectures on comparative religion given in St. Paul's Cathedral Melbourne in the 1960's by the English Anglican Bishop Stephen Neill. He made a cogent case then for the serious study of other world religions, the better to understand our own perhaps, but in recognition of their cultural and historic and political importance. His comments are no doubt as apt today as they were then. I assume others have built on his work and that you, charged with the development of the theological collections, are much more aware of the available literature than I am, and that you are rigorous in ensuring your own students and academic staff are kept up to date and made aware of major new publications in their fields of specialisation. Are we able to enter informed debate on the role of women in the modern church or at least to ensure our theologians can because our libraries provide them with appropriate information sources, including newspaper reports and articles? However, to return to my description of the relevant materials in the SLV, in order that you should not only be mindful of them but encourage their use, as well as understand where they might stand in relation to your own collections and those who use them. I turn now to the ...

2. Rare Book Collection of the State Library of Victoria

Of the 17,000 volumes in our Rare Book Collection, a significant number are of importance to the study of Christianity and Judaism. For example, the collection includes a significant number of works on protestant theology covering the period from the 16th to the 18th century; it includes important works by and about Martin Luther; it includes 25 medieval manuscripts and 90 incunabula; (printed items before 1500); it also includes a collection of early Hebrew printed books and manuscripts; it includes examples of early missionary printing, especially in Southern Asia and the Pacific; one of its most famous items is a leaf from the earliest printed book, the 42-line Bible printed by Johann Gutenberg in Mainz in about 1455. Its current market value is more than a quarter of a million dollars (remembers it's just one leaf!)

I have said a lot about published and printed sources of material in the SLV. There are other information resources which are important to religious scholarship and many of them are located in the Manuscripts Collection.

3. Manuscripts

The most important primary source materials in this collection have been included in a published work -

Register of Church archives : a select guide to resource material in Australia. 2nd ed. Church Archivists' Society, 1985, edited by Leo J. Ansell.

Of particular note are the papers of the Congregational Union of Victoria (both the central body and many of its constituent churches); the records of 4 inner suburban Melbourne Anglican Churches -

- Christ Church, South Yarra;
- St. Stephen's, Richmond;
- St. Jude's, Carlton;
- St. Mark's, Fitzroy.

These Collections were acquired by donation prior to the establishment of the Diocesan archives so that it would be improper to attempt any further collection development in this area, except by consultation and agreement.

Also of importance in the Manuscript Collection are papers of the Melbourne Meeting of the Society of Friends (The Quakers) and of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies.

In addition to the papers of churches and congregations, there are many fascinating collections from eminent clergy and laity - Sir Irving Benson and Sir Edmund Herring for example, and papers of the noted 20th century church architect Louis Williams.

Many of your own collections will hold important source materials, particularly archives relating to the establishment of your host institution or of the beginnings of the Christian Church from Colonial Settlement. Such documents are to be cherished and preserved. They need to be subject to the same sort of vigorous bibliographic control as befits published documents so that access to them is not jeopardised, particularly for those studying church history or the sociology of religion, for example.

4. Periodicals

Of the 653 journal titles, many include long unbroken runs from the nineteenth century of key periodicals such as *Crockford's Clerical Dictionary*, 1877- ; *Faith and Thought*, vol. 1, 1867- ; *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, 1888/9- ; *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 1, 1881- ; *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 1, 1899-cancelled 1987.

The journal titles also include many newsletters of church groups and societies which have been lodged according to the Legal Deposit provisions of the Library Council of Victoria Act.

The feature of our holdings is however, RELIGIOUS HISTORY, often in support of our emphasis on Australian and British National and local history. Many of our serial holdings are we believe unique in Australia and others are unique in Victoria. For example, we have the only known (or reported) holdings of - *The Covenanter* (Belfast), 1857-69; *The Christian Esoteric* (California), 1937-43; *Textus* - the only complete and continuing set of a chiefly linguistic annual on the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint (The National Library holds a partial set); *The Sikh Courier*. Our unique holdings are *Faith and Thought (on religion and science)*; *The Jewish Quarterly*; *Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*.

How is uniqueness of holdings determined? Union lists of periodicals continue to feature as an important tool in the practice of librarianship. For example, the SLV's holdings of individual journal titles have been checked against SALSSAH (Serials in Australian Libraries, Social Sciences and Humanities) and NUCOS (Nation Union Catalogue of Serials).

There is also the *Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections*, edited and completed by Hans Arns and Marianne Daly. Leichhardt, NSW, National Catholic

Catholic Research Council, 1983; and O'Rourke, John W. *Union list of periodicals in theological libraries in Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand*. Rostrevor, S.A.: St. Francis Xavier Seminary, 1976.

How meticulous are you about reporting holdings for the continuing accuracy of union lists? Why do I regard such reporting as important? There is no doubt that within librarianship, "collections are still the core of cooperative enterprise"¹. In a time of continuing and worsening economic (and therefore resource) constraint, it is important that library collections are developed not in competition with each other but in cooperation. There will inevitably and rightly be many examples of expensive serials and monographs that each of your institutions will need to collect as part of your core collection and as essential study and research tools. There will be many others that you might well share at least regionally. How generous are your inter library loan policies as practised among yourselves? For every one journal title you share, it may well be possible to subscribe to another (new) one so that the benefit of modern scholarship is spread amongst you rather than being denied through financial stringencies precluding new subscriptions. Do you consult with each other before you cancel a subscription or before you place a new one or before you purchase an expensive series?

Recent developments within the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) whereby libraries can enter holdings to any one of the 5 or 6 million bibliographic records on the data base, provide an effective means of resource cooperation yet less than a handful of your theological libraries are registered even as dial-up users of ABN or of NZBN. Only one or two of you actually contribute bibliographic data to our national network.

I shall move on now to a discussion of networks which, in addition to the cooperative development of library collections, is the other key area of today's librarianship which I believe speaks to us of a technological future which we must embrace if our library services are to be seen as relevant to the communities to whom they are offered. I will include an outline of the bibliographic network I know best and which will remain in the forefront as a resource sharing mechanism for the foreseeable future. The same is true of the New Zealand Bibliographic Network.

B. Networks and Networking - Australian Bibliographic Network

The rapid growth of the Network since its establishment in 1980 to the end of June 1987 is evidenced by the many hundreds of libraries (over 700) now participating either as contributors or as users (or as both) of its bibliographic, authority and location data. These libraries are from all Australian states and territories; they include most of the

large state and academic libraries, the National Library and CSIRO; special libraries from both the government and private sectors and a growing number of public libraries. School libraries are notably absent although they have their own network ASCIS (the Australian Schools Catalogue Information System).

The early significance of ABN was that it provided a means whereby Australian libraries could, for the first time, obtain online access to bibliographic records (in the MARC format) to which their holdings could then be added. The data was subsequently extracted, via computer processing, for output on magnetic tape or as computer output microform, vis a vis the prevalent COM catalogues we see in many of our libraries today (instead of card catalogues). What was remarkable about this?

Experience soon proved that libraries were obtaining records for up to 80-85% of all current acquisitions. The impact of this had to be a reduction in cataloguing effort with consequent savings to libraries which could thence re-direct resources to improved service delivery. In the twenty per cent of cases where no bibliographic record was deemed to be present in the rapidly growing ABN data base, cataloguing staff could perform the cataloguing online thereby adding the newly created record to the data base and thence precluding any subsequent need to catalogue the work.

As increasing numbers of libraries have moved towards conversion of their entire card catalogues to machine readable formats, the "hit rate" for most libraries remains high. Furthermore, as more special libraries with highly focussed collections join the network, libraries with similar collections will also achieve high hit rates at the same time as they add records for much of the specialist and report literature which characterises many fields of human endeavour and which typifies many special library collections.

The more bibliographic and location/holdings data there is on the data base, the greater is its potential for library cooperation and for the rationalisation of collections. In the 1980's it no longer makes sense for libraries to develop their collections without regard to the known holdings or planned acquisitions of others. It is entirely feasible NOW to indicate via the Australian Bibliographic Network not only your holdings but whether your library has a particular item on order or whether you intend cancelling a journal subscription on completion of a particular volume.

I referred earlier to supposedly unique serial holdings in the SLV. Are they unique or do they only appear to be because your library has not identified its holdings via any one of the major union lists? Your own participation in the practice of librarianship and information science, is of the profession's very nature, participation in the wider network of libraries. While many libraries now participate in formal networks, usually linked by

a common computer system, the trend will be towards greater network involvement, with computer to computer links between entirely different networks. The Linked Systems Project in the United States is pioneering this development - growing as it did out of the need to minimise the duplication of bibliographic, authority and holdings data that had arisen with the growth of the major bibliographic utilities in the United States (BALLOTS, OCLC, WLN, and RLIN, each with LC MARC records as the primary database.) If you wish to follow this up, I draw your attention to an article by Henriette D. Avram².

C. Impact of Technology

While such developments might seem remote from your present realities, particularly to those of you who feel isolated from the wider library and information community, it is most unlikely that you will move into the 21st century without the new technologies having significant impact on your work as librarians. Already, the role of the librarian as an information consultant or knowledge broker has begun to weaken dependence on the physical facility of the library. This earlier dependence on a given collection and its housing often meant that (and still means) librarians are regarded as keepers or custodians rather than as key players in the design and delivery of modern information systems or in the prescription of informational materials. How often do you venture outside your library to meet with the academic staff, to involve yourself in formal course design teams as the expert on information sources or to talk with your students to better understand their need for library and other materials? If you are inclined to wait for people to come to you, you might well be by-passed. Already, the invisible college with its informal links between scholars and researchers often means the library is not as relevant as we might hope - not only because it may lack the most up to date information resources, but also, because of our somewhat hidebound traditions, it does not occur to practising professionals that the librarian might well make a useful contribution to research in progress by short-circuiting tedious manual searches for relevant information and research findings or at least by ensuring the scholar is kept up to date on new publications in his/her field.

The huge growth of online data bases, including full-text data bases, means information is at one's finger tips quite literally as the modern world acquires personal computers not only for use at work but at home. You can now dial-up ABN or AUSINET or even DIALOG from your home or desk-top computer. Thirty thousand Australians are now registered users of Telecom's communication system VIATEL which currently provides information ranging from today's stockmarket prices, to agricultural notes for farmers, to airline timetables and hotel prices for accommodation and availability details to

what's on in the SLV! In France which leads the world in its use of videotex technology, even the telephone directories are online. In fact I am told there are no longer any printed telephone directories since the French equivalent of Telecom provides householders with very cheap terminals through which you can book your theatre tickets, order airline tickets, buy stocks and shares - or do just about anything else. That same trend is gathering apace here. In Victoria, the SLV has established, through VIATEL, a more efficient means of delivering its inter library loan services. All regional public library headquarters (60 of them) currently use VIATEL for this and other purposes. Two factors make this possible - the communications infrastructures now in place and the widespread use of personal computers.

Within three years the SLV hopes, as part of the developing Victorian Library Network, that individuals and other libraries will be able to dial into the SLV's catalogue, which will in early 1988 go online to the public. If you visit us next year the Online Public Access Catalogue will have 250,000 records for you to access by computer terminal. By the end of 1990 we hope to have the entire monograph and periodical holdings of the SLV in machine readable form and accessible online, as well as a significant number of pictorial items, sheet music, sound recordings and other "non-book" bibliographic records.

All of this means speedier and more efficient access to library resources. The microfiche catalogues which resulted from the initial days of library automation are now giving way to online catalogues - which is just as well since a recent study has shown that paper copy is three times more likely to be read than microfiche. That is why library users appear to consult the card catalogue before the microfiche one, even although most libraries display explanatory signs to indicate the fiche catalogue contains the most recent acquisitions and - usually - a growing number of records for older works.

What other technological developments will impact on our delivery of library services? Some of you may well have a compact disc player at home. None of you (I venture) will have a related piece of equipment, a CD ROM player although you all will have heard of the developing optical storage technologies of which CD ROM (compact disc, read only memory) is one type.

It has such fantastic storage capacity that all of the bibliographic records of the Library of Congress can be stored on 3 discs. That data is readily available in a product now selling widely as BIBLIOFILE. The University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library has it out on show for anybody to use and it is especially useful for bibliographic verification. CD ROM's impact is now being felt as the increasing telecommunications cost of accessing large data bases online, means that data base vendors have had to utilise this

new technology in order to remain competitive in the market place. Significant "chunks" of individual data bases are stored on compact disc with new information available online or on supplementary discs issued in much the same way as one might subscribe to a new serial.

A local Victorian Company has just pioneered the use of this technology in a product called Supermap which contains the 1981 Australian Census data, with plans to record the 1986 Census in a similar way. The number of data bases on CD ROM is growing rapidly and access to this technology will increasingly come within reach even of the smallest library. In fact none of us will be able to do without it, the more so as CD ROM products become commonplace in the home and the office. F.W. Lancaster goes so far as to say he sees little long term future for the library - although he believes the librarian "could long outlive the library" as "the pursuit and procession of information ... becomes increasingly important," provided librarians maintain and develop their skills as information providers. This will necessarily entail the analysis and subsequent selection of appropriate information to be given to the user, rather than merely the provision of bibliographic and descriptive data which librarians have traditionally provided. The librarian's key role will be as a facilitator of access to recorded knowledge - in other words his/her role will be one which facilitates communication. What can be more important in a world being torn asunder through lack of communication.

If CD ROM is now being exploited by the information industry, so videodisc also offers a bright future, with 55,000 pages of text capable of being stored on each disc and with random or sequential access to each frame. This technology will help us preserve valuable collections of pictures, drawings and manuscripts. It facilitates access to rare and fragile materials which in their original format can only be used sparingly and often with severe restrictions. Special collections of rare books, original pictorial items, of early maps or of manuscripts are often restricted to bona fide scholars and researchers. The emerging optical storage technologies will enable much wider access to primary source materials.

There are many other examples of emerging technologies which will transform the provision of information through libraries and librarians as we know them. I have mentioned sparingly networks, computer to computer links, telecommunications, CD ROM and videodisc. I have commented on them because they are developing as the keys to unlocking our information futures and if we are serious about wanting to remain in the forefront of information provision, we must not only be fully aware of their power but harness their energies in the interests of an informed and therefore of an empowered society.

And what kind of society will that be? As part of a complex corporate planning exercise at the SLV, a group of senior staff has identified a series of "high impact events" that our library will need to respond to and to take account of in its planning. They cover economic, social, political, business, demographic, educational, and technological aspects of society. Many would seem to me to be as relevant for your theological libraries as they are for the SLV -

On the economic front - Static levels of funding in the public sector; Adoption of the 'user pays' principle in public sector financing - that is, public sector institutions are likely to have to derive more of their revenue from charges; Greater competition for resources in the public sector, as a result of static funding.

Social - More leisure time, brought about by different work patterns and shorter working hours; More emphasis on other cultures and languages.

Political - Likelihood of a change of government in Victoria; Recognition by government of the importance of information and the information sector of the economy.

Business Management - Desire for increase in industrial democracy and worker participation; Need for priorities to be set in a situation of static finance.

Democracy - Ageing of the population, increase in proportion with disabilities; Increase in the proportion of part-time workers.

Education - Trend to individually-tailored learning programs; Increase in formal learning; that is, learning for personal development and satisfaction rather than vocational training; Trend towards lifelong learning; that is, fairly continuous re-training or upgrading of qualifications and skills through education; Increased use of information technology in the education process.

Technology - Major impact will be changes in communications technology; Impact of mass information storage technologies, such as laser and optical disc storage; Changes in patterns of publication, with an increase in electronic forms of publishing; Increasing importance of copyright issues arising from the above; Polarisation of society between the information-rich and the information-poor.

How prepared are we to meet those challenges? I have tried to suggest that in a future where resources are constrained but where technology is unrestrained in presenting us with new opportunities to share those scarce resources, we as professionals owe it to the world of learning and of scholarship, to facilitate the transmission of ideas in all their forms of expression. There is no doubt that the power of the word to transform the individual from illiteracy to literacy, from innumeracy to numeracy, from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge, is a power vested in us as information specialists. Can our colleagues from other professions continue to depend on us to disseminate, to promulgate, to elucidate that word? The answer to that is up to you and to me.

1. David Farrell, 'The North American Collections Inventory Project Option for Coordinated Collection Management' in *Library Resources & Technical Services*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1986), p.49.
2. 'The Linked Systems Project', its implications for resource sharing', in *Library resources and technical services*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1986), p. 34-36.