

IMPROVING REFERENCE SERVICE IN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES: THE PROPOSED AUSTRALASIAN RELIGION INDEX¹

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The Library as an Information Service

The opening premise in this proposal is that theological libraries are not indispensable sources of information. The discrepancy between the size of the potential and actual user groups bears this out, as do figures on frequency of use by the various categories of users. Every librarian can cite examples of academics - reasonably good ones at that - who rarely go near the library but are still well read and stimulating teachers. One can also recall many examples of the other sort - who never visit libraries and have not changed their lectures in twenty years. In terms of quantity students on the whole are better library users, but why do they use the library? Surveys indicate that they use our buildings for reasons other than their primary purpose, and most use them as a place to read their own books or to write essays rather than to seek information. Many students use the library only as essay deadlines approach, and they are not encouraged to regard the library as an essential and ongoing resource. Finally, parish priests as a professional group have the reputation of being less well read and less up to date than any other professional group. On the one hand they complain vigorously about the exorbitant price of books and the fact that they cannot afford even the sale prices. Therefore, they ought to be prime users of our libraries. On the other hand they rarely use them either in person or by post. Highly unscientific sampling of clergy in three Anglican dioceses (Ballarat, The Riverina, and Canberra - Goulburn) indicate that no more than fifteen per cent of clergy ever use a library as part of their professional support system. But if they did not use them as students and were not taught to, why should we expect them to as busy pastors?

On the whole those in the nonscientific professions seem to put a depressingly low priority on the library as a source of information. Is there any reason why theological library users should respond differently? There is no concrete evidence to convince one that they are out of the ordinary. The simple fact of the matter is that people do not use libraries effectively, and they certainly are not using the reference collections to advantage either. While there are no survey data of theological libraries to support these comments, there is a great deal of information from academic libraries generally and from public libraries which point to one glaring reason for this state of affairs. Librarians on average are able to satisfy their users with the correct and adequately detailed information only 50 to 60 per cent of the time. In their recent study of academic and public library reference services Hernon and McClure reach one incontrovertible conclusion: "participants in the study answered 62 per cent of the questions correctly and 38 per cent of the questions incorrectly".² In a slightly earlier

study of public libraries Gers and Seward focus on somewhat different variables, but their results show a remarkable similarity to Herson and McClure: the correct answers (but not always the correct source) are provided in 54.9 per cent of cases.³ On the one hand all librarians agree that effective reference service centres on providing the right information to the right user in the shortest possible time. This simple proposition, on the other hand, fails to become reality in nearly half the cases studied in a range of academic and public libraries. Why is this so? There are at least four reasons for this, and they all have to do with qualitative and quantitative constraints in reference service.

Budget. First of all, library budgets are chronically inadequate, and this is especially telling in the reference area, where titles cost most. What librarian will not proceed cautiously when selecting a \$400 encyclopedia, when the same money will purchase eight or ten monographs that appear on subject reading lists? Will the library commit itself to the recurrent expense of an indexing or abstracting service when it subscribes to only a handful of the serials indexed or abstracted? In most cases the replies to such questions indicate that the reference collection has a low priority when the book vote is distributed. This in turn means that reference collections suffer by becoming dated and outmoded at a faster rate than the circulating collections. To compound the problem, as budgets become increasingly incapable of upgrading reference collections, the volume of reference literature continues to reach new heights. In America alone we have identified more than 2000 new theological reference titles published in the past two and a half years.

Time. The second factor is linked to the first. A basic principle of collection building is that if the library does not acquire a title now, when it is published, it probably will never acquire it at all. Time marches on, and simply keeping up with the latest releases means that yesterday's attractive title, unless in constant demand, simply becomes forgotten - to the possible detriment of the collection. But there is another dimension to time, one related to budget. If money is in short supply, the library is bound to be understaffed. If the library is understaffed, there is inadequate time to deal fully and competently with information requests, especially the detailed ones so popular with theological students. How many theological libraries are able to provide SDI or current awareness services? How many are able to compile bibliographies or conduct detailed searches of the major religion indexes? How many offer reader education courses? And how much of the negative response to these questions is due to inadequate staffing?

Quality of Staff. Of course, time or its lack is a convenient explanation for a multitude of sins, but here is one case where "*Absolvo te*" is simply not on. At the risk of being offensive, the third reason why librarians answer queries so poorly is because we are unable to. On the whole librarians are pretty bad at finding information, at teaching users how to find information and at articulating either the information or the process. This is so for many reasons, including the personality traits of bookish people and inadequate teaching in library schools. Furthermore, librarians seem unwilling to engage in critical dialogue with their reference collections. Selecting a title is one thing, and that happens normally on the basis of second hand knowledge. But getting to know

it intimately as a working tool is something else. No book should be placed in the reference collection until the librarian, the craftsman using the tool, has a sound working knowledge of its content, arrangement, level and value as an information source. Quite simply, the less familiar one is with something, the less one uses it. Yet how often does the librarian bother to become genuinely familiar with the latest additions to the reference collection? It somehow always seems easier to rely on the tried and tested old sources when dealing with requests for information.

Quality of Reference Literature. This leads naturally to the fourth reason for our reference inadequacy and to the purpose for the project about to be proposed. The quality of reference literature in theology, like reference literature in other disciplines, is far from acceptable in relation to its quantity. Of the titles being scanned for Volumes 4 and 5 of *Theological and Religious Reference Materials* and its supplement one can estimate that something like 30 per cent are genuinely worthy additions to a collection; the rest are inferior reinventions of the wheel.⁴ We seem incapable of existing without Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Anglican wheels; accordingly, Westminster, Abingdon, Sheed and Ward, Mowbrays and others must put their imprint on dustjackets which so often cover only cosmetic differences. By evaluating as objectively as possible a wide range of new reference tools it is apparent that much of the literature is repetitious, that much of it is inferior. We could well do without this, yet someone must be buying the products. And if libraries are buying second rate or unnecessary reference books and then placing them on shelves without first studying them, this is only compounding the problem of under-utilization of reference collections.

Proposal for an Australasian Religion Index

What can theological librarians do to alleviate this unfortunate situation? In the Australian context there are several possibilities, including the production of genuinely critical analyses of the literature and the development of services tailored to the specific needs of Australian theological collections. First, though, it is important to understand that existing services, whether foreign or indigenous, are inadequate for Australian theological enquiries. *Religion Index One* (produced by the American Theological Library Association) surely the premier anglophone indexing service in this field, covers only a handful of the better known Antipodean theological serials. *APAIS* (*Australian Public Affairs Information Service*) indexes more than twice as many relevant publications, most of them "news and views" titles rather than scholarly journals. Appendix I summarizes the Australian theological coverage in these two services and indicates the possible range of titles that might be indexed. If the numbers of serials treated is depressingly low, so is the quality of service. A recent search for information on the ordination of women issue in the Anglican Church of Australia indicated that *RIO* was still using "Church of England in Australia" as well as the newer title but that all relevant articles were not appearing under either name. Equally frustrating, *APAIS* failed to index the many important newspaper articles (particularly in *The Age*) on this subject. In short, neither of these potentially useful services covers an acceptable

number of Australian theological serials , nor do they provide adequate indexing of the titles ostensibly covered.

We have concluded, then, that there is at present no comprehensive indexing service covering religious serials published in Australia and New Zealand; at the same time a fairly crude analysis of titles listed in the *Australasian Union List of Theological Serials (AULOTS)* suggests that there are some 200 current titles produced in the region. While many of these can be regarded as marginal in terms of information or scholarly content, many others are of acceptable quality and, together with the major metropolitan newspapers, deserve indexing in a single, comprehensive source. Accordingly, the focus of the proposed service is religious serials of all types produced in Australia and New Zealand by and for various traditions. Publications of individual denominations and orders, of scholarly and professional bodies, of local or regional focus are to be included. There is to be no limitation on the subject coverage, and the sole criterion for exclusion should be the quality of a serial's contents. Those with substantial scholarly content are to be included, as are those which discuss issues at a more popular, pastoral or devotional level.

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion are to be established by a proposed editorial board appointed by the co-sponsors, ANZTLA and the Centre for Library Studies.⁵ The board will also be responsible for determining policy with regard to format, frequency, supply of data and related matters. It is expected that editorial staff at the Centre will administer the project in accordance with this policy and under the board's direction. The following additional points are offered for initial guidance during the feasibility study:

coverage of serials will be determined by the board on the basis of clearly articulated criteria;

responsibility for indexing titles will be shared equitably among ANZTLA libraries;

titles will be indexed in a standard form and format to be determined by the board and monitored by the Centre;

the Centre for Library Studies will serve as the initial project base because of its excellent computing, publishing and editorial facilities; the Centre will manage the pilot project on a cost recovery basis;

entries supplied to the Centre on data sheets designed for this purpose (see Appendix 2) will list the following: author, article title, serial title, volume and issue number, date, pages, content note, descriptors

subject descriptors will be selected from *Religion Indexes: Thesaurus*, and the descriptors for each entry will be permuted as necessary.

the alphabetical subject sequence will be supplemented by the following contents in each issue: list of serials and issues indexed, author index; list of book reviews; the fourth and final issue each year will be an annual cumulation.

The libraries which have agreed to participate in the feasibility study include: Lohe Memorial Library (Luther Seminary) in Adelaide, Veech Library (Catholic Theological Institute) in Sydney, Joint Theological Library (at Ormond College) in Melbourne and the libraries of Whitley College and Ridley College in Melbourne. Each of these will index the contents of five different serials, and the resulting data will be used by the Centre to produce two pilot issues. Issues will be sent to all ANZTLA member libraries and other libraries on application. The results will be evaluated at the next ANZTLA Conference (Canberra, August 1988.)

Appendix 1, Australasian Religious Serials in APAIS and RIO

Australasian Religious Serials	in APAIS	In RIO
AASR Newslink		
ACR News		
AWD Newsletter		
Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Magazine		
About Catholic Schools		
Accent		
Accent on Worship		
Across the Currents		
Adelaide Church Guardian	*	
Advance		
Advance Australia		
Advocate		
Alpha		
Alternatives		
Anglican		
Anglican Communications Office Bulletin		
Anglican Encounter		
Anglican Messenger		
Anglican News		
Annals		
Annals of the Propagation of the Faith		

Anthropological Forum	
Antichton	
Australian Catholic Record	*
Australasian Journal of Philosophy	
Australasian Record and Advent World Survey	
Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology	
Australian Baptist	
Australian Biblical Review	*
Australian Catholic Digest	
Australian Chaplain	
Australian Christian	
Australian Church Quarterly	
Australian Church Record	*
Australian Evangelical	
Australian Frontier Newsletter	
Australian/Israel Review	
Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage & Family	
Australian Jewish News	*
Australian JewishTimes	
Australian Presbyterian Life	
Australian Society	
Australian SCM National Newsletter	
Australia's New Day	
BCA: Bulletin of Christian Affairs	
Background	
Bread and Wine	
Bridge	
CIRC Papers	
CMS News	
CPS Bulletin	
Canon Law Society Newsletter	
Carpentarian	
Catalyst	
Catholic Education	
Catholic Education Commission Circular	
Catholic Leader	*
Catholic Missions	*
Catholic School Studies	*
Catholic Theological Review	
Catholic Viewpoint	
Catholic Weekly	*
Celebrate	
Chair Talk	

Checkpoint
 Chomi Das
 Christian Activity
 Christian Brothers Studies
 Christian Echo
 Christian Review
 Church Alive
 Church and Nation *
 Church Chronicle
 Church Gazette
 Church Heritage *
 Church News *
 Church Scene
 Circle
 Clef
 Colloquium * *
 Communicate
 Communication
 Communion
 Compass
 Concern
 Contact
 Curriculum Exchange
 Dedication
 Descent
 Digest
 Dioscene
 Echo
 Ecumenical Liturgical Centre Newsletter
 Evangelical Presbyterian
 Ex Nihilo
 Family
 Far East
 Focus
 Footprints
 Four Rivers
 Friends Quarterly *
 Frontier News
 Gippsland Anglican Church News
 Go Spread the Good News
 Grail Newsletter
 Harvest
 Healing Resource Bulletin

Historical Studies: Aus & NZ		
Home and School		
Humanity		
In Unity		
Institute of Family Studies		
Discussion Papers		
Family Information Bulletin		
Working Papers		
Interaction		
Interchange		
Johannine		
Journal of Christian Education		
Journal of Intercultural Studies		
Journal of Pacific History		
Journal of Religious History	*	
Journal of Studies in the Bhagavadgita		*
Journal of the Aus. Catholic Historical Society	*	
Journal of the C of E Historical Society		
Journal of the ICE		
Journal of the Polynesian Society		
Justice Trends		
Landfall		
Latimer		
Leaping		
Life and Times		
Light		
Liturgy		
Liturgy News		
Lutheran		
Lutheran Theological Journal	*	
Majellan		
Marist Messenger		
Mental Health in Australia		
Migration Action		
Millions		
Minimag		
Ministry		
Ministry in New Zealand		
Mission Probe		
Mission Review		
Missionary News		
Morpeth Review		
NCC News Service		

NCRC Newsletter		
National Outlook		
Network		
New Age		
New Citizen		
New Day		
New Envoy		
New Life		
New Times		
New Zealand Baptist		
New Zealand Christian		
New Zealand Journal of History		
NZ Society for the Study of Religion and Communism Newsletter		
News Weekly		
Norcenzo		
Northern Churchman		
Nungalinya News		
Oceania		
On Being		
On the Move		
Outlook		
Outreach	*	
PSC News		
Pacifica News		
Pastoral Liturgy		
Pax Christi Newsletter		
People at Work		
Pivot		
Praise		
Presence		
Profile		
Queensland Baptist	*	
Real Australian		
Reaper		
Reformation in Australia		
Reformed Theological Review		
Religious Educator	*	
Religious Traditions		*
Renewing		
St. Mark's Review	*	*
St. Thomas More Society Journal	*	
See		

Historical Studies: Aus & NZ
 Home and School
 Humanity
 In Unity
 Institute of Family Studies
 Discussion Papers
 Family Information Bulletin
 Working Papers
 Interaction
 Interchange
 Johannine
 Journal of Christian Education
 Journal of Intercultural Studies
 Journal of Pacific History
 Journal of Religious History *
 Journal of Studies in the Bhagavadgita *
 Journal of the Aus. Catholic Historical Society *
 Journal of the C of E Historical Society
 Journal of the ICE
 Journal of the Polynesian Society
 Justice Trends
 Landfall
 Latimer
 Leaping
 Life and Times
 Light
 Liturgy
 Liturgy News
 Lutheran
 Lutheran Theological Journal *
 Majellan
 Marist Messenger
 Mental Health in Australia
 Migration Action
 Millions
 Minimag
 Ministry
 Ministry in New Zealand
 Mission Probe
 Mission Review
 Missionary News
 Morpeth Review
 NCC News Service

NCRC Newsletter		
National Outlook		
Network		
New Age		
New Citizen		
New Day		
New Envoy		
New Life		
New Times		
New Zealand Baptist		
New Zealand Christian		
New Zealand Journal of History		
NZ Society for the Study of Religion and Communism Newsletter		
News Weekly		
Norcenzo		
Northern Churchman		
Nungalinya News		
Oceania		
On Being		
On the Move		
Outlook		
Outreach	*	
PSC News		
Pacifica News		
Pastoral Liturgy		
Pax Christi Newsletter		
People at Work		
Pivot		
Praise		
Presence		
Profile		
Queensland Baptist	*	
Real Australian		
Reaper		
Reformation in Australia		
Reformed Theological Review		
Religious Educator	*	
Religious Traditions		*
Renewing		
St. Mark's Review	*	*
St. Thomas More Society Journal	*	
See		

Shaker
 Social Survey
 Societas
 Soundings
 Southern Cross
 Summit
 Theosophy in NZ
 There and Here
 Today
 Together
 Trowel and Sword
 Tyndale Papers
 Unison
 Uniting
 Victorian Catholic Education Bulletin
 Vineyard
 Vision
 Vox Reformata *
 War Cry *
 Western Impact
 Willochran
 Witness
 Word of Salvation
 Youth Leader
 Zadok Centre News

Appendix 2. Sample Entries in Australasian Religion Index

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS/INDONESIA

Butagalung, S M The Pancasila in Indonesia L Theol J 21, 2 Aug 87 90-98

Argues that the 5 principles in the Indonesian constitution preamble enshrine doctrines of religious freedom and tolerance and that these should form the basis for Christian engagement with Indonesian political ideology.

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS/INDONESIA

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION/ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH/
LUTHERAN CHURCH/AUSTRALIA

Overduin, DC A response to the Vatican document on IVF and related issues
L Theol J 21, 2 Aug 87 82-89.

Discusses key issues in Instruction on Respect for Human Life (1987)
and indicates common ground with a similar Lutheran statement
(1987) still awaiting formal discussion.

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION/ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH/
LUTHERAN CHURCH/AUSTRALIA

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION/FIELD EDUCATION/
LUTHERAN CHURCH/AUSTRALIA

Koch, J B New directions in seminary education L Theol J 21, 2 Aug 87 68-81
Based on Farley's *Theologia*, argues that changing perceptions of
ministry require new educational responses. Alternative patterns,
types of field education and models are discussed, with emphasis on
field education at Luther Seminary.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION/FIELD EDUCATION/LUTHERAN
CHURCH/AUSTRALIA

THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Huber, D The place of the seminary library in the church L Theol J 21, 2 Aug 87
55-67

Discusses the roles of a theological library, resources for development
and range of challenges, including collection development,
automated storage and retrieval.

THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Notes

1. This paper was presented at the Inaugural Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association at Ridley College, Melbourne, in August 1987. At this conference ANZTLA, in co-operation with the Centre for Library Studies at the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education, agreed to undertake a feasibility study of the time and costs involved in creating and maintaining the Australasian Religion Index.
2. Peter Hernon and Charles R. McClure, "Unobtrusive Reference Testing: The 55 Percent Rule," *Library Journal* (15 April 1986): 40.

3. Ralph Gers and Lillie J. Seward, "Improving Reference Performances: Results of a Statewide Study," *Library Journal* (1 November 1985): 32-35.
4. The three volumes published to date are to be continued by volumes on Judaism and Islam and on the Eastern religions. There will also be, *Deo volente*, a final supplementary volume to cover important omissions and publications of the decade or so that has elapsed since the project began.
5. Centre for Library Studies, School of Information Studies, Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education, P.O. Box 588, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650. Telephone: (069) 232460.

This address was delivered to the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association Second Conference, at Ridley College, Melbourne, on Sunday 23rd August, 1987.

Father Gary Gorman is presently a lecturer in librarianship in the School of Information Studies at the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education.

ERRATUM

Our apologies to Ms Frances Awcock for the error which the editor failed to correct in her article in Newsletter No. 3 (see page 4, second paragraph). The relevant sentence should read :

'... mankind's innate drive to record and to communicate is living testimony to the power of the word ...'

We beg forgiveness for so reducing the impact of Frances' message.

RELIGION IN DEMAND?

Studies of the use of materials across the various subject categories in two major Australian libraries reveal that religious literature is not in very heavy demand. At both the National Library and the State Library of NSW, the Dewey 200 category reflected the second lowest of all the Dewey categories: 2.6% of all materials used at SLNSW and 1.48% at NLA. Does this reflect a lack of interest in theology - or superior service being provided by the theological libraries?