

THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Trevor Zweck

*Keynote address delivered to the Third Annual Conference of the
Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association, Canberra,
8th September, 1988.*

When one considers that some theological libraries are among the oldest of all libraries in Australia and New Zealand, and when one surveys the present condition of our libraries, one can only be amazed that so little has been achieved in so long a time. Measured by any acceptable library standards, the present condition of our theological libraries (with but few exceptions) is simply inadequate to meet the demands of modern, research-oriented theological education. The librarians themselves, by and large, have shown a desire to provide the kind of library service required, but are hampered by a poverty of skills and resources, both personal and material. Radical and urgent action is required to bring our libraries face to face with the realities and challenges of the twentieth century before it passes into the twenty-first.

In this paper, attention is focused primarily on the 60 libraries in Australia and New Zealand which are associated with the ANZATS schools. We should note in passing, however, that there are another 120 libraries in our two countries which may be categorized as theological. Among them are about forty libraries serving a variety of ecclesiastical institutions: resource centres for teachers, diocesan libraries, and the libraries of various church organisations and ministries. They provide support services in the area of theological education and include some significant research collections. Unfortunately, no statistical data about them is available.

Among them also are about 80 libraries of Bible colleges and similar institutions providing theological courses for various lay ministries. Most of these are of very recent origin, more than 20 having been established in each of the past two decades. Not many of these appear (as yet) to have become seriously involved in the development of significant theological resource centres; only the two oldest, Sydney Missionary and Bible College (established in 1916) and the Bible College of Victoria (1920) having collections exceeding 20,000 volumes; most being limited to less than 5,000 volumes.

The Past

The oldest theological library is that of St Patrick's College, Manly, NSW, (established in 1833). Others established early in the nineteenth century are those of St. John's College, Auckland, NZ (1843), Christ College, Sandy Bay, Tasmania (1846) and Moore Theological College, Newtown, NSW (1856). Others which trace their origins to the nineteenth century are Knox College, Dunedin, NZ (1876), St Barnabas College, Belair, SA (1880), Whitley College, Parkville, Victoria (1891), Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW (1897), and Presbyterian Theological Hall, St Lucia, Queensland (1897).¹ The only major period of expansion in the twentieth century has been the 60s and 70s, which saw the establishment of more than a dozen new libraries, largely as a result of increasing ecumenical consciousness leading to amalgamations of institutions.²

Although many of the libraries are of considerable antiquity, theological librarianship as a movement is still in its infancy. The first attempt to bring theological librarians together was the ANZATS Library Consultation held in Melbourne in 1978. This meeting led to the formation of a regional group of theological librarians in Adelaide and was preceded by a similar group in Sydney, where a newsletter, *Syndesmos*, was published for a couple of years. Further consultations were held in Sydney (1979), Brisbane (1983), Sydney (1984), and Adelaide (1985). It was at this last consultation that the decision to form the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association was made. ANZTLA Conferences have been held annually since then: in Canberra (1986), Melbourne (1987), and Canberra (1988).³ Already this Association has shown that it will be an important factor in the future development of theological libraries and librarianship in Australia and New Zealand.

¹ Dates are taken mainly from the *Training for Service Guide, On Being*, August, 1988 (supplement).

² Some of the libraries formed by more recent amalgamations will also contain the surviving collections of libraries first established in the nineteenth century.

³ Unofficial reports of the ANZATS Library Consultations are published in *Syndesmos* 3-4 (1 Aug. 1978), p.5-6; *Lutheran Theological Journal* 17:3 (Dec. 1983), p.135; *Colloquium* 17:2 (May, 1985), p.67; *Colloquium* 18:1 (Oct. 1985), p.71; and the ANZTLA Conferences in the ANZTLA *Newsletter* 1 (Mar. 1987), p.3-7; *ANZTLA Newsletter* 3 (Dec. 1987), p.2-3.

The Present

Statistics which have been gathered under the auspices of ANZTLA since 1984 reveal a rather depressing picture of the present condition of ANZATS libraries: collections are at best modest in size; staffing levels vary from minimal to almost non-existent; funding levels range from parsimonious to totally inadequate; and these libraries have hardly been touched by the revolution which has taken place in information technology in the past decade.⁴

The average number of staff is 1.5, but only twenty of the libraries benefit from the services of a professional librarian, only ten of these being full-time. The paucity of professional expertise shows itself most obviously in the area of subject cataloguing; while one-third of the libraries use *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (increasingly being augmented by the *Religion Indexes : Thesaurus*,) another one-third use a variety of unsatisfactory systems, and another third provide no subject headings at all! The question which defies an answer is how students can operate with methods of individual enquiry and research oriented education when they have no subject access to the materials in their library collections! To deny students the opportunity to do their own research is to reduce them to the status of intellectual parasites, feeding off the minds of their lecturers! That may have been considered good enough in a bygone era, but it is not good enough for today. Fortunately, the statistics do not reveal the full depth of the inadequacy of our libraries in the areas of reference services, user education, and current awareness services.

Average holdings of bibliographic resources are 25,000 monographs and 110 current periodical subscriptions; however, the average is boosted greatly by the two with holdings of 100,000 volumes (Moore Theological College, Sydney and Joint Theological Library, Parkville, Vic.) and many fall into the range of 10,000 to 15,000. Microfilm and microfiche have long been recognised, not only as excellent space-savers, but as an ideal way of coping with the collection of retrospective materials, especially periodicals; but only a handful of our libraries have significant holdings of microforms and one-half do not even possess a microfiche reader!

⁴ Statistical information is drawn from "Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Statistics 1984" *Colloquium* 18:2 (Oct. 1985), p.36-45; "Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Statistics 1985" *ANZTLA Newsletter* 2 (Aug. 1987), p.8-15; and the unpublished first draft of the 1986 statistics.

Theological librarians endeavour to provide normal library services despite the limitations of staffing and finance; however one-half of staff time is taken up with cataloguing and technical processing, a situation not improved by the lack of automated systems, though the means exists for copy-cataloguing which is simple to establish and cheap to operate. Libraries are open for an average of 65 hours a week during term time (well above the Australian average), but unfortunately they are not always staffed for all these hours. Circulation figures average 200 loans a week. Interlibrary loan figures present an altruistic picture, the number of items outweighing the number of items borrowed by a ratio of 2:1, average figures being 60:30; however, 75% of the total burden is borne by four libraries (Moore and Joint Theological in Australia and Knox and St John's in New Zealand).

Only one theological library (St Mark's, Canberra, ACT) is a full participant in the Australian Bibliographic Network and only one (St John's, Auckland) in the New Zealand Bibliographic Network. Another, Avondale, Cooranbong, is a member of CLANN. Only a couple of others are dial-up customers of ABN. A few libraries are in the throes of establishing automated library systems, (notably Trinity Theological College, St Lucia, Queensland) and a few have access to online databases. That is about the extent of automation in theological libraries. One of the more serious consequences of the lack of automated systems is exclusion from participation in the national union catalogues, where the only means of input is now by computer.

The financial plight is illustrated by average annual expenditures of \$10,000 on monographs and \$3,500 on periodical subscriptions; but many libraries operate at a level far below the average. Expenditure on salaries and wages is a topic too embarrassing to mention publicly, even if data were available for public consumption.

While this picture of theological libraries is particularly depressing, efforts which have been made in the area of library co-operation afford a more optimistic picture. The improved ecumenical spirit of the 70s and 80s leading to the establishment of colleges of divinity which now encompass all the major cities of mainland Australia as well as New Zealand, has led also to a closer spirit of co-operation among the libraries involved. It was the desire to improve the lowly condition of the theological libraries that led to the formation of ANZTLA. It is this concern that has led to the production of the ANZTLA Standards for Theological Libraries and to specific action on the local level (through the meetings of ANZTLA chapters), and on the national level (through the annual ANZTLA Conference).

Chapters of ANZTLA have been established in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne. The first three of these have all devised schemes for reciprocal borrowing, for the rationalism of periodical subscriptions, and for some kind of union catalogue. There has also been promotion of the idea of cooperation in collection development, and the NSW chapter is currently working on a collective collection development policy.

The lack of adequate access to theological holdings of other libraries through the national union catalogues led some years ago to the compilation of the *Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections*⁵ (compiled by Hans Arns and Marianne Dacy), the successor to an earlier list compiled by Fr John O'Rourke. It is currently being updated. It records the holdings of 3,000 periodical titles in 80 library collections, much of which information is not available elsewhere.

A concern for the lack of adequate reference materials on theological topics relating to Australia and New Zealand has led to a pilot project to produce an Australasian Religion Index.⁶ If approved, it will cover many local periodicals which are not currently being indexed in existing indexes and abstracts. ANZTLA is also looking at the problem of providing more concentrated professional development opportunities for theological librarians.

This survey of the current condition of theological libraries and librarianship indicates a willingness on the part of librarians to work together for a better library service to theological education in Australia and New Zealand; it also highlights the importance of ANZTLA in providing opportunities for working and planning together; but it also indicates a great poverty of resources, both personal and material. Moreover, the inadequacies are of such major proportions that they are greatly hampering the efforts of librarians to develop more efficient and effective library services.

The Future

As we look forward from this historic year (for one of our countries), it would be idle to speculate on what the future of theological libraries

⁵ Hans Arns, Marianne Dacy, *Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections* (Sydney : National Catholic Research Council, 1983).

⁶ G.E. Gorman, "Improving Reference Services in Theological Libraries; The Proposed Australasian Religion Index", *ANZTLA Newsletter* 4 (Apr. 1988), p.3-13.

actually will be; but that should not deter us from projecting a vision of what that future ought to be. Indeed, if our reflection on the past and our celebration of our history really mean anything to us, we will surely be motivated to work for the kind of future we want for our libraries, as well as for other aspects of theological education. I believe that no single factor is more important for the future of theological education than the development of adequate libraries. I suggest that the best thing that we can do for our libraries is to undertake a searching examination of the educational philosophy and learning methodologies of our schools; for our libraries will either reflect or else determine the kind of teaching and learning that actually take place in our schools - whether we like it or not!

It is idle to even speculate on, let alone expound, the virtues of student-centred learning and methods of individual enquiry, research-oriented education, and the like, if we do not have the library resources to back up such worthy ideals; and the facts reveal how sadly deficient we are in that respect. Claude Welch, Dean of Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, in a paper presented to the annual conference of the American Theological Library Association in 1987, suggests that we have to think of our libraries not as the servants of the faculty, but as partners in the enterprise of theological education.⁷ He might well be speaking of our situation when he says: 'What is called for is a radical reconception of the role of the theological library in the life of the theological school'.⁸

Virtually all of our schools are now involved in some program offering postgraduate degrees at the masters level and beyond - in many cases entirely by research. The amazing thing is that many of these programs have evidently been approved without the need to demonstrate the availability of adequate research collections! This being so, however, it is incumbent on us to do all within our power to ensure that the maximum library resources, offering the greatest possible depth and comprehensiveness, are available to researchers; availability including also the means of access. If we want theological students to undertake postgraduate study in our part of the world, we will have to see to it that they have adequate resources for doing such research.

What is really needed is nothing less than a National Collection Plan for theological libraries. We do not have the advantage of the major research collections (the Princetons, the Yales, the Harvards) which our

⁷Claude Welch, "The Theological Library - Servant or Partner?" *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings*, 1987, p.156-169.

⁸*ibid.*, p.159.

North American neighbours have to back up their own resources. In our situation, we cannot look to the universities to do the job for us; if we don't do it ourselves, it won't be done at all. Our only chance of ensuring that the required resources are available somewhere in Australia and New Zealand is to plan together, to pool our efforts and to divide up the task in a rational and equitable manner. It will be necessary for every library to assume the role of a university type theological research centre rather than a school type learning resource centre; each will have to develop some special collection over and above its basic undergraduate teaching collection. The national effort will have to be planned in such a way that the total collection embraces the broadest possible coverage at the greatest possible depth.⁹

The inevitable corollary of adequate collections is access to them. Libraries will have to work together to ensure that materials acquired are actually available; that is to say, that it is possible to locate them and to borrow them. In modern library terms, this means networking - and, in present-day networking computers are not luxuries, but essential tools - if not for the individual library catalogue, then certainly for the national union or network catalogues. In the Australian Bibliographic Network and the New Zealand Bibliographic Network, we possess the most efficient, most exact, and most highly centralised library networks in the world; it would be folly, and poor stewardship of finance, not to utilise them for copy-cataloguing, as well as for the sharing of holdings for interlibrary loan purposes - especially since they are so cost-efficient.

Such plans are predicated on the availability of capable and cooperative librarians - and sufficient of them. The piece-meal approach to library staffing which many theological schools have adopted in the past is simply not adequate for theological education today - if it ever was! Employing bodies need to be convinced that librarianship today is not just a matter of getting the books catalogued, basic though that activity still remains, but of providing an information service to users; it calls for people with expertise in present-day principles of librarianship and the time and facilities with which to implement them. Continuing professional development - even retraining in some cases - must be a high priority.

The needs which our theological libraries face today are really very basic - adequate staff and adequate collections. Very little can be done about either of these needs, however, without adequate finance. The

⁹For similar ideas, see Donald Huber "The Place of the Seminary Library in the Church", *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 21:2 (Aug. 1987), p.55-67, especially p.56,63,65.

challenges facing our libraries today cannot be met without massive increases in funding; finding such funds is obviously the biggest challenge of all. Theological libraries have no access to public money and have no real likelihood of getting it; they are almost totally dependent on freewill offerings, whether through church budgets or by direct donation. It will require all the managerial and entrepreneurial skills that we as librarians and school administrators can muster to convince those who hold the purse-strings of the central importance of adequate resource-based, service-oriented libraries to the enterprise of theological education.

Not only theological faculties and principals, but also the leaders of our churches need to 'own' their libraries, as Don Huber suggests,¹⁰ not merely in the juridical sense, but also in a personal sense. If we are concerned about the future of theological education in this part of the world, we must be doubly concerned about developing adequate library services; for nothing is more basic to the development of informed and critical theological students than the availability of adequate resources and services for the support of theological research. Let us make the next decade the decade of development for theological libraries!

NEWS

PATRISTIC CATALOGUING PROJECT AT LUTHER

With a major input from Rev C. Priebbenow, Lecturer in Patristics at Luther Seminary, the Luther Seminary Library has embarked on the project of the analytical cataloguing of all patristic materials held in the library. All multi-author works are being analysed, and every primary work (even if only one page) in any language is being separately catalogued. Uniform titles are being used to bring together different versions and editions of the same work. So far, all church fathers in alphabetical order from A to E have been covered and nearly three thousand cards added to the catalogue. When the project is completed, it will be possible to tell from one simple search of the catalogue whether the library has any work of any church father in any language.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.60.