

REFERENCE FROM A USER'S POINT OF VIEW

Harold Pidwell

I am delighted that this conference is being held in New Zealand as the NZ Association of Theological Colleges (a chapter of ANZATS) has tried for some years to get such a group together. Perhaps it says something about the relationship and priorities of teaching staff and Librarians that it has taken so long for it to come about. But more about that later.

It is an opportune time for us. Developments in theological education in New Zealand are happening very quickly now, and here in Auckland we (or at least I) feel we have a tiger by the tail and we are having to work very very hard to keep up. Three years ago our co-operation was a glimmer on the horizon and worked mainly through faculty relationships. Yet last Friday representatives of the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Methodist Churches sat down together in this building and approved 97 pages of course prescriptions for 1990. Just 10 days earlier we held the first meeting of the Auckland University Joint Board of Studies for the Bachelor of Theology degree which we begin teaching in 1990. Respect and co-operation are increasing almost daily, yet each institution is finding perhaps more freedom than ever before to express its own emphases and thus enrich us all. In this the relationship between theological libraries will become increasingly important. Hopefully out of models of good co-operation in Australia and Dunedin we will learn a great deal this week and receive a good impetus to take some further steps which will enhance the witness of the whole Church.

But to the task in hand.

I am a user of libraries. I have been as long as I can remember. When I was a child my father, who worked on Saturdays, sent me off each week to the Public Library in Wanganui to borrow four books for him. No fiction or war stories. Just biography, history, and travel, together with two magazines, usually Life and one other. The librarians got to know the Pidwell kids who came weekly to the adult section of the Library, and we came to know them as friendly helpful people. Sometimes they would say "I think your father's read this one" or "I've put this aside for your father

this week". So I was never fearful of the library atmosphere - at least in the adult section. Strangely enough I never found my way around the children's section quite as well. Did the staff not think I needed the same assistance as a child borrowing books for his insatiable father?

My next experience of a library was as a theological student. The library was not large - just a big room full of books. But it was a mystery to me. I can well remember the first time I went to find a book, borrow it and take it back to my room. I was near the end of my third year of studies! Nearly two MCD Diplomas complete and little library expertise. Mind you, the library was dark, the books stacked up nearly 12 feet high, few journals and little real expectation that theological students would do more than reproduce their lecture notes. The system did not encourage me to become a user. Those who used the library were the few "intellectuals" among us. We "real" ministerial students did not need it, either to preach or pass exams.

This state lasted through my BD studies also. However the theological ferment which erupted in the 60's changed all that for me and I knew I had to find some trajectories, some patterns of thinking, start some serious Biblical and theological study or I would not survive. Dunedin and the theological hall at Knox College started me off afresh. The stimulation of lecturers and students there, who became friends, gave fresh impetus to my own journey. But why did I not use the Knox Library? I have no answer to that. Certainly no one suggested it to me, and I never thought of it - to my shame.

It was in Switzerland that I first discovered a user-friendly library. In the Baptist Seminary at Rüslikon I found an environment which made using the library a pleasure. Certainly the design helped. The newspaper and journal reading room was separate from any study area. It was comfortable, accessible, central to the whole complex, and it was the place where one met everyone else. Conversation was not only allowed, it was encouraged. There were no restrictions on eating or drinking. The study and catalogue area was likewise quite separate from the stacks. This was the QUIET place. It was very well lit, had a good view, and was large, airy, with plenty of tables at which to work. The issuing room and the stacks were in a separate area. Here there was a reasonable amount of noise. Trolleys, questions, footsteps, conversations.

It was this separation or delineation of functions which made the Library less intimidating, even welcoming. I wish I could say the same thing for

the staff. The librarian had a problem with those of us who used books. She really preferred that all books be in the correct place on the shelves, not in a student's study, and certainly not having the pages made less than pristine by usage. She took to hiding the new books away so that students couldn't find them! Hundreds of them. Eventually she was fired.

I also like the system there. Unlimited book borrowing - both in number and in length of time. But very good recall facilities so that one never waited more than a day to get access to a book. It was for me a very good experience of a library system. It has linked to it an excellent subject index developed by one of the Professors with assistance from Library staff and students so that research time was not consumed by unnecessary searching for material.

Two other libraries deserve mention

The University of London library I found quite intimidating. I felt oppressed and as if I was an intruder. I was a post-graduate research student and I could not get access to the stacks. One went to the card catalogue, selected the book required, gave a written request to the desk staff who within 45 minutes brought a copy to the desk where one was sitting. It was due back the same day. Sometimes the book was at another location of the same library outside London and it was the following day before the book arrived. I found it a very oppressive system. Here were all these books, all this information, and it was like trying to get a third mortgage from your bank to retrieve it.

The Library at Southwestern Seminary in Texas is I believe the largest theological library in the USA with nearly 300,000 volumes, a new building and a very sophisticated computerized catalogue system. It was friendly enough, and the information was readily available through the computer terminals. It was reasonably quiet, not cathedral like silence as the really QUIET area was again partitioned off and VERY quiet. In the main library soft drink machines, areas for conversation, thought, dozing and newspaper and journal reading were scattered through its floors.

But even so it was difficult to break into the system. I was a new faculty member. No one suggested that new faculty members might need to learn how to use the library. O the computer was easy enough. But how to make use of all this information. Was it all readily accessible? Where did the bound copies of the periodicals live? How could I find something

which the computer couldn't tell me? Why not ask a Librarian you ask? Why not I ask myself? The Head Librarian treated me exceedingly kindly. Among a faculty of 150 full time staff plus at least twice that number of tutors and adjunct faculty, he recognised me, called me by name, walked with me, and talked about New Zealand. Why didn't I tell him I was wasting so much time finding my way around? It was my fault I guess. But new faculty members have needs too. I needed to be treated by him as a consumer, a customer, a client, and not just a colleague. I did need his help. I certainly got the impression that he thought all faculty members could/should find their way around the library system without help. I couldn't.

A library usage survey

So armed with this background I went to the students and teaching staff of ACTE and asked them some questions about their experience of our libraries (St Johns & Baptist). The survey is informal and as useful or as useless as most such surveys are. Much of it I think you could work out yourselves if you sat down together and discussed such things as user education, reference, environment, purpose, library-faculty-administration relationships. But it did help clarify some things for me. So here are the results.

Of our respondent users 84% have had some previous tertiary education. The response from students reflects the numbers in each year group, and comes from about half the combined student body. The response from faculty members is over 90%. The following chart indicates frequency of library use among respondents:

User Group	Every day	2-3x week	1x week	1x month
1st year	47	32	21	
2nd year	60	30	10	
3rd year	50	50		
Faculty	10	60	10	10
Of all respondents		81		

Reasons for use of library

First year students used it overwhelmingly for reading the newspaper, their own personal study, reading recommended books and using books in the stacks. They do not read periodicals. Only 15% did so. Second year students used it 100% for newspaper reading, personal study, reading recommended titles and using books in the stacks. 80% read periodicals in the library. Third year students had a similar usage pattern.

Faculty members and research students did not use the library for newspaper or personal study (no surprise there), nor for recommended reading. They did use the books on the stacks (90%) and they did read the periodicals (90%). Again no surprises.

But the pattern is clear. First year students don't read periodicals. They probably (certainly) have enough to do learning the basis of a subject and they don't have the framework for absorbing the information contained in periodical literature.

But can we break this down further? Yes. And it's probably not surprising.

Very few people - teaching staff or students use periodical index material - such as Old and New Testament Abstracts or Religion Index 1 and 2. 58% of those surveyed said they never read any at all. 33% read it infrequently and only 4% read it often. If one deletes the faculty members who teach in the areas of Old and New Testament - only 1 student and 1 teaching staff person actually reads them at all.

Neither it appears do many people read the ephemeral/pamphlet material. In our survey only 13% said they read such material often, and all were Faculty members. 46% replied Never, and 40% replied only infrequently.

On the other hand 57% said they used encyclopedias and dictionaries often. And to my surprise this included 40% of Faculty members, and higher proportions of 3rd and 2nd year students than first year students. Only 38% of first year students said they read such material often, while 80% of second year and 100% of 3rd year students replied that they did read such material often.

So the usage patterns are not really surprising - only to me that of encyclopedias and dictionaries. I would have guessed that the usage of such material would have declined as students moved through the educational process. But Faculty members and research students still use such material more often than I would have guessed.

How do our students find material?

Obviously the catalogue is the first place to look. 100% in all categories consulted the catalogue. 45% of 1st year students said they also browsed through the shelves but this figure reduced in later years so that no 3rd year students replied that they used this method - even in conjunction with other methods. Only 16% of Faculty members browsed shelves, yet 33% said they would ask the Librarian, as did 50% of 3rd year students, 20% of 2nd year students and only 8% of first year students.

It obviously becomes easier to ask the Librarian the longer one relates to the Library.

We also asked about attitudes to the Library concerning borrowing, finding books, and finding information. What users liked and disliked. There are no percentages here as we tried to get impressions of what was helpful and unhelpful.

Multiple borrowing (how many books); the ease of borrowing; the system of borrowing and staff all rated very highly. As did the system of reserving major text books for class use. One of the interesting features was that to find information many students simply asked fellow students. The environment also came in for praise. Warmth, view, location and layout were all praised. So were staff. Friendly, efficient, helpful were terms used often.

Dislikes included the abuse of the system by fellow students. This was mentioned again and again. Books were unable to be found. The subject index and/or vertical file material was too limited. The short borrowing time was mentioned often by faculty members. A different system of journal classification and display was requested - alphabetising is not good enough, many said. Noise is obviously a great problem. It was the single most mentioned dislike. Yet alongside this was a clearly expressed need to be able to talk/discuss/have sufficient privacy, to hold a conversation.

Teaching staff monopolies of periodical literature was mentioned regularly. And some felt quite clearly that the ordering of books reflected the interests of teaching staff and not a balance of available literature. This came through clearly from those who had studied in other institutions and did not find on the shelves the books they expected.

What makes using the Library difficult?

'The lock on the door', said one. This was echoed again and again. Students and Faculty clearly expect that the library will be open when they need it. Some anger was expressed about Library closing times. Some still felt the Library was difficult to use and was not 'for them'. Both new and long serving Faculty members expressed views which indicated they 'struggle' with the system.

What makes using the Library easy? Accessibility, proximity; staff.

So where does all this leave us?

One issue for me is user-education and the recognition of the different needs of the users. As a child in an adult library I was recognised as someone who needed help and I received it every week. The Wanganui Public Library adult section remains warm in my memory. But as a post-graduate student at London and a new faculty member in Texas, my needs went unrecognised. They were I believe greater. But a combination of expectations, status, and a sense of 'not belonging' crippled me as a library user. We need to work harder on user education. The beginning student, the new-to-campus-student; the academically disadvantaged student, the new faculty member and the part-time teaching staff all have different needs. We dare not place our users in the Library's homogeniser.

The Biblical mandate is to correct oppression. We must protect those who are disadvantaged by the way others abuse the system. This is not just students. Faculty members expressed some anger about the way other Faculty members also abused the system.

There seemed to me a very definite expression of a gulf between some Faculty members and the Library staff. Subject-based liaison would seem a good place to start. And librarians ought not to feel any lack of credibility for their views just because they are alongside faculty members who generally possess a doctorate and are expected to engage in research and publication. Prestige (so-called) and credibility are not

the same thing. Library development ought to be a joint task of all who have the responsibility of theological education - teaching staff and librarians. Given that teaching staff will always outnumber librarians some good planning is essential. So while I rejoice in this meeting here in Auckland, I am also sorry that we are meeting separately from the ANZATS meeting in Perth later this year. Librarians cannot afford to separate themselves from the teaching staff.

Information finding is obviously the key to good theological education. This has to do with library education programmes. Faculty do not normally stress library use. Those of us on a semester system find that there is less time than previously to assimilate information and we seem to be involved in a sprint from day one semester one. So little class time is given to library use skills. Most faculty seem to rely on discussions with colleagues and materials in their own collections for their own use, and on the libraries reserve collections to meet the needs of students. Students obviously replicate this pattern by conferring with fellow students and buying their own books to supplement the reserve materials. So to develop good patterns of library usage some good liaison between classroom and library needs to be planned.

May I say a word about **computerisation and OCR scanners**? I'm glad that the subject is on your agenda in general terms. I look forward to the day when synopses of articles - even complete articles - are scanned into our library computers and through the use of Vertical File searching are made available to students and faculty alike. And when our Libraries are accessible to anyone with a modem who can search the catalogue and get bibliographical and subject information. Surely we must plan for this if our usage is to keep pace with the demand. It will be our fault if one of today's students has such a sorry testimony as mine about library usage in the early days of his or her career.

So don't be put off by arrogant Faculty members, Deans or whatever. The library is more important than any faculty member. I honestly believe that only two things are essential to educational institutions. One is students, the other is a Library. Teaching staff are only guides to the short cuts. So all strength to you. May your conference give you renewed vigor for the task.

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