

THE PETTEE AND DEWEY CLASSIFICATIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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For most librarians, the comparative discussion of library classification schemes is likely to be a matter of mainly academic interest; they have no choice about the system they have to work with, and the more important thing for them is to gain a sound understanding of the scheme, whichever one it is, so that they can work effectively with it. The two classification schemes compared in this paper are the two which are used almost exclusively in Australian and New Zealand theological libraries¹ such a comparison may contribute to a better understanding of each and may provide some assistance in the event of a library having to make a choice between the two.

As the Pettee (Union Theological Seminary) classification scheme was organized for use in a theological library, the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages in comparison with Dewey will be mainly limited to the 200 (Religion) section and its suitability for use in a theological library.

The Pettee classification is based on the scheme formerly in use at Union Theological Seminary Library, New York. It is a scheme which '... covers in outline all departments of knowledge, and in so far as it does, it is a general scheme; but the arrangement of the classes is from the point of view of theology, and as far as logic permits, designs to keep in convenient proximity groups used together.'² An example of this is the subject "Church History" which is not segregated from "Secular History" but grouped with it, under country units. Whenever a Christian topic touches a field of interest a spot is made for it within that field. As Slavens states,

¹ Trevor J. Zweck, 'Australia and New Zealand theological libraries and librarianship', Summary, 1986, p.41.

² Julia Pettee, *Classification of the library of Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York*. Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1939, rev.1967, p.111.

'This scheme treats Christianity as central, and every subject is seen within this perspective.'³ Non-Christian religions are also assigned their appropriate place within the scheme.

History of the Pettee Classification

Julia Pettee followed the above theory when constructing her scheme for the Union Theological Seminary, New York. This work began in 1907 when she commenced the re-organization of the Library of Rochester Theological Seminary. Pettee worked with an extensive classed catalogue prepared by Dr Charles Ripley Gillett. In 1909 Pettee was invited to re-classify the library of Union Theological Seminary, New York and spent fifteen years in perfecting the tentative form of the scheme. The scheme was applied to more than half of the departments of the library, and along with an index, one hundred copies were issued in mimeograph form from 1913 to 1925. This edition is now out of print.

Several factors contributed to the soundness and practical usefulness of this classification. 'It was devised by a person of intellectual and professional stature, and applied by that same person to the strongest theological library in the United States.'⁴ It is in fact, the largest theological library in the world. When Pettee retired in 1939, only a few form classes, such as sermons, devotional books and polygraphy, remained to be classed. All the main subject work had been completed.

The schedule was revised in 1939, and a supplement published in 1945 listing additions and amendments. In 1967 a further revised edition of the 1939 schedules was published.

Since 1977 Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, has held the copyright of the scheme, the Union Theological Seminary in New York having abandoned it in favour of the Library of Congress Classification

³ Thomas P. Slavens, 'Classification schemes for the arrangement of the literature of protestant denominations', *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 1965, 4, p.441.

⁴ Ruth C. Eisenhart, 'The classification of theological books', *Library Trends*, 9, 1961, p266.

when it entered into a computerised network. The Richmond Librarian, Dr John Trotti, renamed the classification "Pettee" after its founder Julia Pettee. A users' group was formed and the newsletter *Pettee Matters* commenced under the editorship of Trotti. The newsletter is used to discuss problems relating to the scheme and to update the schedules. The present aim is to completely revise the classification by the year 2000. The group also has a meeting at the annual conference of the American Theological Library Association.

In Australia fourteen out of a total of sixty theological libraries use the Pettee classification⁵. Until recently only a few of those fourteen libraries subscribed to *Pettee Matters*, but since the formation in 1985 of The Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association, and the efforts of its President, Trevor Zweck, the numbers receiving the newsletter has increased to include all libraries using the scheme.

The Pettee Classification

The Pettee Classification is published in one volume, with the tables listed first, followed by the general directions, synopsis, classification and the index.

The notation bears some resemblance to the Library of Congress Classification, consisting for the most part of two letters followed by one or two digits. It is an alpha-numeric classification from AA-ZY, with subdivisions from 1-99.

All aspects of one subject are classed together. For example, Australian Aborigines (MW64) - under this subject all aspects are grouped in close proximity, such as ethnology, religion, social conditions, history, missions, etc.

Comparison of Pettee and Dewey

To compare Pettee with the Dewey Classification and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the one over the other, we need to bear in mind what classification is and what it aims to do and try to decide if the criteria are being met by each classification and how well. We are

⁵ Zweck, 1986, p917

reminded by Sayers '... we keep clearly in mind this one end : to be useful to our readers with the smallest complication of search or other effort for them or for ourselves.'⁶ and again, 'Classification, then, is not only the general grouping of things; it is also their arrangement in some sort of logical order, so that the relationships of the things may be ascertained.'⁷

Disadvantages of Dewey

One of the basic differences between the two classifications is that Melvil Dewey organized the Religion section according to his own understanding of religion. He held the typically nineteenth century view that Christianity is the true religion and all others are false. For him "Religion" meant "Christianity" and other so-called religions were included at the end of the section (290-299). Thus the number in the index for "Religion" is 200 and the number for "Christianity" is 200 also! He made no provision for Religion as a total entity embracing all religions. This fact highlights how inadequate the Dewey scheme is for a special theological library. This, perhaps harsh, judgement on Dewey has been made: '... it is obvious that his classification reflects some of his psycho-religious mentality.'⁸

Referring to Dewey, Uhrich makes this comment: 'It is limited in its basic conception of the nature and scope of theology and is therefore not too satisfactory for a theological library.'⁹

The lack of suitable subdivisions has resulted in almost all libraries using it having to expand the scheme. Commenting on the Australian situation, Trevor Zweck states: 'That Dewey is not entirely satisfactory, however, is indicated by the fact that thirteen of the libraries using Dewey are

⁶ W.C. Berwick Sayers *A manual of classification for librarians and bibliographers*. Deutsch, London, 1962, p1.

⁷ Sayers, 5.

⁸ Makis Dunni-Ib, *Comparison of Pettee classification scheme and Dewey Decimal classification scheme and their effectiveness and appropriateness in theological libraries*. Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, 1985, p6.

⁹ Helen Bordner Uhrich, 'Classification and cataloguing theological libraries', *Special Libraries*, Feb. 1949, p56.

operating with some expansion of it, eight of these being of local origin.¹⁰ Added to this is the disadvantage of the great amount of staff time needed to classify the items and to manipulate the long numbers with the use of tables, because of the lack of subdivisions in the schedules. There is also the burden of shelving with long numbers and the trouble for the users in locating the desired item.

Advantages of Dewey

Despite the above weaknesses, there are some points in favour of Dewey.

- Being expressed in Arabic numerals, it is understood worldwide and, being widely used internationally, co-operation between libraries using it is facilitated.

- Several important bibliographies and reference books provide DDC notations: for example, the British National Bibliography and the Australian National Bibliography.

- As there are many translations of Dewey, it is likely to be available in the local language of a seminary or theological college anywhere in the world. In all fairness, Broadus reminds us, 'It must be remembered that the original purpose of the scheme was to serve not large specialized collections, but one college library.'¹¹

Disadvantages of Pettee

Pettee's bias for theology limits co-operation and networking opportunities with a variety of libraries. National bibliographies and reference works, and computer databases do not usually provide Pettee notations. This applies, for example, to bibliographic databases such as the Australian Bibliographic Network.

Use of the Roman alphabet prevents the scheme being used or understood worldwide.

Advantages of Pettee

Pettee has a very specific classification, and a very quick method of classification due to its very precise index, which takes you directly to the

¹⁰ Zweck, 93.

¹¹ Robert N. Broadus 'Dewey and Religion'. *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 14, 1970, p57.

class number. This makes Pettee an economical scheme to use with regard to staff time. Subdivisions are generally included in the schedule and with the comprehensive 676 x 100 divisions provided by the alpha-numeric numbering scheme, only a few tables are necessary. Being alpha-numeric, Pettee can be precise without the use of long numbers, as in Dewey, and this also reduces confusion in the shelving arrangements and the retrieval of items. Smaller notations are easier to remember by the users and give a lot less clutter on the spine.

The Pettee classification provides for convenient shelf arrangement by grouping all aspects of the one subject together. As Johns claims, '... specialised subjects required intensive organization of the literature related to them.'¹² Browsing is made easier by this grouping and users find it easy to familiarise themselves with the arrangement. As a new user recently observed after thirty minutes in a library using Pettee, 'The books are right where you would expect them to be!'

Pettee provides for continuous revisions, which are made available to the users of the scheme through publication of supplements and accession lists (including classification numbers) and the regular publication of the newsletter *Pettee Matters*. Users worldwide also contribute to the revision process.

Conclusion

Ruth Eisenhart (1961, p259) claims that '... none of the general classifications has developed its religious section in sufficient detail or with much awareness of the established order of theological thought.'¹³ I feel this judgement must be applied to the Dewey Classification. I contend that Dewey does not serve a theological library as well as Pettee for the stated reasons, and, although automation is luring many libraries to convert to the general schemes, for which classification numbers are provided on bibliographic databases, I believe there is still some point in

¹² Ada Winifred Johns, *Special libraries : development of the concept, their organizations, and their services*. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, 1968, p11.

¹³ Eisenhart, 259

Julia Pettee's 1939 (p.111) statement: 'Classifiers of special libraries tend less and less to adopt all-embracing schemes such as Dewey's, or that of the Library of Congress, for they find these too detailed on peripheral topics and meagre on essentials.'¹⁴ In today's financial climate, economics play a very large part in the staffing and organization of any library, and here Pettee is at an advantage with its precise classification.

The importance of the users should never be overlooked. As Hagler asserts, 'The ultimate function of any book classification, however, is the logical systematic arrangement of materials in accordance with the needs of their users.'¹⁵ In this regard I feel Pettee meets the user's needs more effectively, grouping all relevant material together with the use of simple notations. With the staff and users' needs met more efficiently by Pettee, I consider the Pettee Classification to be the one of choice over the Dewey Decimal Classification for a theological library.

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NEWS

Advance notice for 1991 ANZTLA Conference!

The Sydney chapter has already booked the Robert Menzies College at Macquarie University for July 5-8, 1991. Set these dates aside now and plan to be there!

¹⁴ Pettee, 1939, 111.

¹⁵ Ronald A. Hagler, 'Some applications of a theory of classification', *Catholic Library World*, Nov. 1956, p.71.