

## REFERENCE WORK: SOME RECENT LITERATURE ON COLLECTIONS AND SERVICES AND ON THE SELECTION OF REFERENCE RESOURCES

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*Dr. Lawrence McIntosh, of The Joint Theological Library in Melbourne, presented these bibliographies in the course of an address on 'Reference tools and their assessment', given at the Fourth Annual Conference of ANZTLA at Auckland in July, 1989.*

Library literature is strong on the factors which impact on reference services. For example, it has dealt extensively and intensively with the 55% rule which refers to a correct answer 'hit rate' in academic and public libraries. Direct reasons for the success or failure of reference librarians have been well analysed. These include the nature and degree of their professional assistance, bibliographic instruction and the use of appropriate search strategies. The indirect factor, however, that is the reference collection itself, has not received anything like the same attention. In the spate of material on collection development and even in the numerous published collection development policies, the reference collection is treated as something of a Cinderella among the general relations. Comparatively little has been written on its role, on measures of adequacy, on its ordered development or on the peculiar presuppositions which inform the selection of reference resources.

All this is surprising when one realizes that, in most libraries, the reference collection occupies the prime real estate on the block and also the high credibility area where users expect to find the whole truth. Further, the evaluation of reference material and the publication of prestigious guides, with their updating mechanisms, reflect advanced librarianship. And, finally, the average cost per reference title is likely to be considerably higher than the monograph rate. So, with status symbols such as these, one could argue that there is a 'unique qualitative distinction' about the

reference collection. It could be an elitist Cinderella; a Cinderella after the ball. Certainly I would argue that the performance and reputation of a theological library depends, to a great extent, on the strength of its reference collection and the ability of its librarians to exploit these resources.

Bibliography I lists some recent items on reference services and, particularly, on the discrete importance of the reference collection.

Bibliography II lists some of the major tools for the selection of reference resources, with special attention being paid to resources for theological libraries.

### I. Reference collections and services

Biggs, Mary and Biggs, Victor. "Reference collection development in academic libraries: report of a survey". *RQ* 27:67-79 (Fall 1987).

(An analysis of questionnaires; a valuable survey of issues).

Bunge, Charles A. "Reviewing of adult reference materials for general libraries". In *Reference services in the 1980s*. Edited by Bill Katz. New York: Haworth Press, 1982, pp.21-29. (Also published as *The Reference librarian*, nos. 1 & 2, (Fall/Winter 1981).

(An overview of the current status of reviewing of reference resources).

Grover, Robert, and Hale, Martha L. "The role of the librarian in faculty research". *College & research libraries* 49:9-15 (Jan. 1988).

(Passive and assertive roles are analysed; underlines that the librarian should be a key participant in the research process.)

Hacken, Richard D. "Tomorrow's research library: vigor or rigor mortis?" *College and research libraries* 49:485-493 (Nov. 1988).

(A realistic appraisal of the gamut of futuristic visions which have appeared in library literature, e.g. 'no books, no collections, no librarians'.)

Hernon, Peter, and McClure, Charles R. *Unobtrusive testing and library reference services*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987.

(In part, explores the 55% correct answer success rate.)

Katz, Bill, and Kinder, Robin, eds. *The Publishing and review of reference sources*. New York: Haworth Press, 1987.

(Also published as *The Reference librarian*, no. 15, (Fall 1986).

(Recent essays on these themes by librarians, reviewers and

publishers).

Kerr, Hugh T. "Trademarks of theology". *Theology today* 43:467-471 (1986-1987).

(On the informational excess and 'analysis paralysis' which infect theological scholarship.)

Kroll, Rebecca. "The place of the reference collection in the organizational structure of the library". *RQ* 25:96-100 (Fall 1985).

(Analyses reference collection development as it relates to the general collection and to other library operations.)

Rutledge, John, and Swindler, Luke. "The selection decision: defining criteria and establishing priorities". *College & research libraries* 48:123-131 (Jan. 1987).

(Reviews literature on selection criteria and develops a model for decision making.)

Stevens, Rolland E., and Smith, Linda C. *Reference work in the university library*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1986.

(Useful coverage of all aspects of academic reference work.)

Worley, Joan H. "Collection development in a small college library: can less be more?" *Choice* 25:1512-1517 (June 1988).

(Considers selection as an interactive process; weighs the roles of faculty and librarians.)

## II. Reference resources and their assessment: some major selection tools

### A. Retrospective: General.

*American reference books annual*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1970 - Annual.

(Lengthy, critical, signed reviews).

Sheehy, Eugene P. and others, eds. *Guide to reference books*. 10th ed. Chicago: American Library Assoc., 1986.

Walford, A.J., ed. *Walford's guide to reference material*. Vol. 2: *Social and historical sciences, philosophy and religion*. 4th ed. London: Library Assoc., 1982.

### Religious and theological

Gorman, G.E., and Gorman, Lyn. *Theological and religious reference materials*. 4 vols. Westport, CT: 1984 - .

(Interprets 'reference' broadly; annotations are most useful.)

Kepple, Robert J. *Reference works for theological research: an annotated selective bibliographical guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981.

(Arranged by type and subject; critical annotations. Restrictive on Catholic resources because of McCabe (see below).

Kepple, Robert J., and Muether, John R. *Reference works for theological research: supplement of additions and changes*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1986.

(Cumulates the supplements to the 1981 edition and adds new entries.)

McCabe, James Patrick. *Critical guide to Catholic reference books*. 2nd ed. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1980.

(Critical introduction to over 1,100 items, in English and foreign languages, which relate to Catholicism).

Wilson, John F., and Slavens, Thomas P. *Research guide to religious studies*. Chicago: American Library Assoc., 1982.

(A helpful section on reference works with critical annotations.)

#### B. Current: General

*Choice: current reviews for college libraries*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1964 - . Monthly (except bi-monthly, July-Aug.)

(Formerly subtitled, *Books for college libraries*. Major critical reviewing medium: reviews now signed. Good selection of religious titles.)

*The Times*, newspaper: *Literary supplement*. 1902 - .

(Generous sprinkling of reviews of titles on religion and theology, including reference works.)

#### Religious and theological

*ADRS newsletter: newsletter of the Association for the Development of Religious Information Systems*. Bronx, NY: Department of Theology at Fordham University, 1971 - . Quarterly.

(Important source of descriptive and gently critical reviews. Prompt in announcing new publications. Additional features include recent noteworthy periodical articles.)

*Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical*

*Libraries*. 1956 - . 3/year.

(Reviews sections show some concentration on reference works.)

*Critical review of books in religion*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988 - .

(Expands and enhances the review sections of *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and *Journal of biblical literature*.)

*Religious studies review*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Council on the Study of Religion, 1975 - . 3/year.

(In addition to reviews of monographs, includes essay length reviews of major reference sources, eg. *Encyclopedia of bioethics*, *Encyclopedia of religion*.)

### C. Selected professional serials which feature prompt reviews

*Booklist*. Chicago: American Library Assoc., 1905 - . 22/year.

(Incorporates *Reference books bulletin* with reviews prepared by the ALA Reference and Subscription Books Review Committee).

*British book news*. London: The British Council, 1940 - . Monthly.

(Short descriptive annotations only; good coverage of 'philosophy and religion'; an awareness tool.)

*Library journal*. New York: Bowker, 1876 -. Semi-monthly: Sept-June; monthly: July-Aug.

(Candid reviews by librarians for librarians).

*R Q (Reference Quarterly)*. Chicago: American Library Assoc., 1960 - .

(Major source of articles on all aspects of reference work; includes extensive reviews.)

*Wilson library bulletin*. New York: Wilson Co., 1914 - . Monthly.

(Well respected resource with authoritative reviews).

### D. Major indexes to book reviews: General

*Book review digest*. New York: Wilson, 1905 - . Monthly.

*Book review index*. Detroit: Gale, 1965 - . Bi-monthly.

*British humanities index*. London: Library Assoc., 1962 - .

*Humanities index*. New York: Wilson, 1974 - . Quarterly.

*Social sciences index*. New York: Wilson, 1974 - . Quarterly.

### Religious and theological, comprehensive coverage.

*Australasian religion index*. Wagga Wagga, NSW: Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Assoc., and Centre for Information

Studies, Charles Sturt University, 1989 - .  
*Catholic periodical and literature index*. Haverford, PA: Catholic Library  
Assoc., 1967 - . Bi-monthly. Continues *Catholic periodical index*. 13  
vols. 1930-1966.

*Index to book reviews in religion*. Chicago: American Theological Library  
Assoc., 1986 - . Bi-monthly with annual cumulation.  
(Supersedes book review section which appeared in *Religion index*  
*one* through volume 17, 1985.)

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## ANZTLA AFFAIRS

I hope that all who attended the fantastic 1989 conference, as well as those who have read and/or listened to the meaty presentations are enjoying the challenges of reference work and are providing an improved reference service in their local libraries. Time now to set our thoughts on sunny Queensland for the first week in July, 1990! What better place to be in the heart of winter! The local committee has its planning well advanced and this augers well for another superb conference. With Australian domestic airfares set to crash with deregulation of the airline industry in 1990, we should be out in full force at Banyo (near the Brisbane airport) in July!

Official endorsement of the ANZTLA Standards is taking an inordinately long time, due mainly to the desire of the Australian Library and Information Association to make a joint response with the New Zealand Library Association, which has been going through a great deal of turmoil in recent months. Meanwhile, the ALIA has had some turmoil of its own, due to the relocation of its head office from Sydney to Canberra, as a result of which I have already had contact with three different Industrial Officers over the standards. I have now requested Tom McKeon (the permanent replacement for Louise Lansley) to press for a unilateral endorsement by the ALIA if the NZLA cannot get its act together. I am actually hoping to hear from him any day now.