

## PROCRUSTEAN PROBLEMS

Philip Harvey

Every cataloguer has favourite *bêtes noires*, headings, subdivisions and practices that are of particular and recurrent frustration. The following list analyses twenty such problems in theological subject headings. They have been recognized from experience and seem to be common.

This is not intended as an attack or even a criticism of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, but is more a "thinking aloud" about some of the niceties and not-so-niceties of the system. Whatever advice is given here should be read as advice only and not some kind of imperative.

1. 'Early works to 1800.' This subdivision was invented to represent works on modern concepts and fields of study. When used to deal with church doctrines, however, it is meaningless and useless as we are cataloguing works written since the beginning of the Common Era at least. The scope note suggests "other dates may be arbitrarily selected if they provide a satisfactory division of the literature in the field in question", which begs the question, where do we divide then? 'Early works to 800'? In this case I believe the cataloguer should either create a subject heading for the doctrine without 'Early works to 1800' or, if it is a critical and historical work, use the far preferable 'History of doctrines'.

2. 'Religious aspects.' This subdivision is an abbreviation of the older 'Moral and religious aspects' and has been adopted with a surprising lack of caution in LC. It raises a number of dilemmas for the cataloguer, mainly because it is never spelt out what "religious aspects" of a subject could be and it raises the question, does this subject have to be treated as though religion were but one aspect of it. In the heading 'Evolution - Religious aspects', is this meant to denote the religious disputes over the theory of evolution, or evolution and its relation to religion, or what?

The subdivision invites indiscriminate use. It forms no boundaries, gives no indication of where you can reasonably go. Much CIP only illustrates

how far you can go with the subdivision, to the point where it becomes meaningless or is of no conceivable use. 'Peace - Religious aspects' is a common example of the subdivision trying to be more specific where in fact it becomes so general as to mean less than nothing. One is tempted to use the simple heading with no subdivision. The subdivision also appears to be used sometimes simply because the person who wrote the piece is regarded or has the reputation for being religious.

Ultimately the question is asked in special libraries, where are we stating the obvious? In theological libraries the main subject heading can often be enough, the addition of 'Religious aspects' being a given that sheds no new light for the user.

Why, for instance, does LC have no subdivision 'Scientific aspects'? If it did, would indexers of *Index medicus* be tempted to add it to things like AIDS or appendectomies?

3. 'Church history' Works on the history of Christianity in particular places and among ethnic groups receive this subdivision as a matter of course. However, too often it is used simply to cover any work that deals with religious history (including non-Christian religions), when that history is really being treated from a sociological, anthropological, missiological or other perspective. The distinctions have become blurred. There are appropriate headings and subdivisions for these varying treatments and more use should be made of them rather than falling back on Old Reliable.

4. Overrefinements. Sometimes the headings just do go on for too long, and there seems to be a crying need to cut down the length. This is true of many headings, especially those found in the CIP, which are inordinately lengthy and say the same thing well in half their length. E.g. 'Body, Human - Religious aspects - Christianity - History of doctrines - Early church - Congresses.' These headings have as many segments as an elongated centipede. Just as you should be careful not to be so earnestly brief as to be parsimonious and misleading, you should also be careful not to create headings of such length that they tell you no more than you could gather anyway.

5. Cross-disciplinary problems. 'Sociology and religion', 'Psychology and religion', etc. These headings are sometimes used to kill two birds with one stone when all they do is put all their eggs in one basket. It is good to be wary with these. You will find that (i) they can be used to cover such a diverse amount of material that the entries are many and the cohesion is poor, the use of them is too easily applied and the meaning increasingly becomes meanings, and blurred meanings at that; (ii) there is probably a more specific heading lingering around waiting to be thought of. Certainly these headings serve a purpose, but I believe it is one of representing broad ranging works that cover both fields named in general rather than specific ways.

6. New terms. What do you do with very new terms that have developed beyond the buzz word stage and that the user will be looking for? E.g. liberation theology and inculturation. Part of the problem with standard lists is that they lag behind the language. Encountering a subject with no real alternative headings and which gained common currency long before its final inclusion in LC, do we go ahead and use the heading, anticipating its final inclusion? Or do we wait and not give it a heading, while our users search in vain for books on the subject? In these cases the letter and the spirit of the law are tested.

7. Parish histories. The name of the parish church is used as a subject heading. I have always made one for the precise place where the parish is centred also. 'St. Michael and All Angels, Bennettswood' is given an extra heading under 'Bennettswood, Vic. St. Michael and All Angels.'

8. Christology. One heading that is long overdue for inclusion in LC is the discipline of 'Christology'. This needs to be used to distinguish it from the only alternative at present, 'Jesus Christ' used with special subdivisions like 'History of doctrines'. The amount of material coming out on the science and art of christology as distinct from actual doctrine, is now so diverse and specialised that present subdivisions under 'Jesus Christ' will not suffice.

9. Festschriften. When the person honoured has work of his or her own in the publication then it is required to include an author card. When bibliographies, biographies and other material also appear then a subject card has to be created. When there is virtually nothing about or

by the person honoured, or when their name only shows on the title page, there is fair reason for not giving them either author or subject entry.

10. Period subdivisions. Time spans are made available to help the user find a work under a more specific period. One problem cataloguers get into is taking these subdivisions very literally, so that when a work covers more than one period they list each one in turn in order to cover the full span. The resulting multiplication of headings is often unnecessary and can go to the ludicrous lengths of three or four headings each with an adjoining time span. Be rational. If the work covers a great period of time it is easier to keep the main heading and even dispense altogether with the period subdivisions. They are tripling your workload and are not making things any clearer for your users. I am not advocating rejection of these useful subdivisions, only a wariness about the possible extents to which they can be employed.

11. Home usages. Where usages of one denomination are ignored or overruled in favour of another, do we remain faithful to one at the expense of the other? The best example I can think of is 'Lord's Supper' versus 'Mass'. Until recently LC did not have 'Mass', leaving Catholic cataloguers with the unhappy choice of 'Lord's Supper' (which does not mean much) or nothing at all. Does one create See refs. from the most favoured term back to the acceptable LC term or drop the LC term altogether in favour of what, for Catholics, is the immediately understandable and acceptable term? Knowledge of the users will hold sway in these circumstances; where, for example, the user will be known to go only to 'Mass' there has to be a card there to explain how the catalogue represents this subject, whatever the decision of the cataloguer.

12. Double meanings. Constant vigilance has to be kept for terms that contain large or subtle variations of meaning, depending on the use. Here are two examples.

'Modernism - Catholic Church' represents works on the movement to revise theological thinking in the light of modern knowledge. 'Modernism' is a heading with qualifying bracket subheadings, that

represents the whole range of modern artistic and philosophical developments that could be called such and which has now had its day. Clear identifications are possible with this example and it should be easy to differentiate.

'Secularism', 'Secularization' and 'Secularization (Theology)' are three headings that some cataloguers appear to use interchangeably; each has special meanings and attendant nuances. One way of gauging the differing definitions of such terms is to analyse the Broader, Related and Narrower Terms that come with each heading; a scope note should automatically clear up any doubts. With these three headings a quick glance at the notes and terms reveals the differences.

13. Unspecific Generalities. 'Christian life' and similar cover-all headings, so general as to have lost all meaning or pungency are regularly brought out virtually as an escape from looking more deeply at the contents themselves. Such headings should be used sparingly, only when no other will do, and only when completely appropriate.

Other examples of this overuse include 'Catholic Church - Doctrines', 'Lutheran Church - Doctrines', etc., and the subdivision 'Biography'. This last one seems now to be used for any biography at all. The biography of an oncologist receives 'Oncologists - Biography' regardless of the amount of material actually on the subject. And so on. I believe it is justified only when the work is collected biography of people of a definable group. Imagine the ranks of cards if each life of a saint was given 'Saints - Biography'.

14. Heresy. Certain heresies are listed in LC, others are not. A book on Docetism will not be able to get an individual heading. In such a specific case does the cataloguer make do with the available headings, invent a heading for the more specific one ('Docetism'), or ignore all possibilities because they are either unrepresentative of the contents or outside the rules? Where the collection specializes in the history of heretical controversy the option of creating specific headings for individual heresies becomes a serious temptation.

15. Name changes. What happens when churches change their names: When the Church of England in Australia becomes the Anglican Church of Australia, do we continue treating all works published before the name alteration under the old name, and everything after under the new name? And what of churches uniting or, even more confusingly, splitting up?

For works issued by the church in the period it had its old name, certainly there is no question that the original name is used. For histories of the church covering that period it is certainly necessary to use the old name.

Otherwise the following steps are taken. First of all, use the official name or the most commonly accepted and recognized name of a church. Second, wherever sensible and possible, keep to the present name of the church and stick to it. Third, a history card needs to be inserted into the catalogue explaining the changes of name of a church, duplicated cards under each variant name.

16. Qualified headings, i.e. headings in brackets. What do you do with 'Woman (Theology)' and then 'Woman (Christian theology)'? If you were in a large library collecting works on the different religious positions then this would be helpful to distinguish between religions. However, where most if not all the material in your collection is Christian, it's a given, it does seem redundant to have (Christian theology); to have to change from the practice of putting (Theology) is tiresome and confusing for the user. Where established practice has (Theology) throughout the catalogue I would even recommend keeping with that, and ignore the (Christian theology) qualifier entirely.

17. 'Liturgy'. This subdivision replaces the old 'Liturgy and ritual', and should only be used for works about the forms of worship and their history. Liturgical texts are generally not given any subject headings and should certainly not be given 'Catholic Church - Liturgy', 'Lord's Supper - Liturgy', etc. This practice shows up in some CIP and is to be avoided.

18. Australian, New Zealand and Pacific terms. A recurrent problem facing all cataloguers is what to do when LC uses a term that is quite different (and/or unrecognizable) in the local context. The ideal

example of this is 'Forest fires'. No allowance is made for the common Australian term 'Bushfires', the one that all users would go to. The problem is compounded by the fact that a forest fire has a distinct and separate meaning from a bushfire in the Australian context.

Three authorities are worth consulting in this dilemma, *Australian Bibliographic Network authority file*, *A list of Australian subject headings*, (or LASH, compiled by John McKinlay), and the *Australian national bibliography*, plus New Zealand equivalents. If you choose to create headings outside LC in this way, once you have selected the relevant heading for your catalogue, 'See Refs' will have to be made from the other headings, and notes made in the authority file.

19. 'Meditations'. Where does one type of literature begin and the other end? When does a work stop being theology and start being a meditation? When does it stop being a meditation and become a devotional work? There actually isn't an answer to this, as in each area of Creation we are always employing practices from the other areas. However, there is more than enough misuse of these terms to warrant drawing attention to the fact. The direction in LC for the subdivision 'Meditations' reads "for works containing descriptions of thoughts or reflections on the spiritual significance of these topics." Something that could as well be said of works requiring 'Theology' or even 'Prayerbooks and devotions' as its subdivision. Be cautious in the application of these, only using them definitely when they are recognizably of one type and no other.

20. 'Addresses, essays, lectures'. If the subject heading already covers the contents, is it necessary to remind the user that the work is a collection of items? I find that this subdivision is used decreasingly, being reserved for works where there is a need to emphasize that they are a collection of items.

*Philip Harvey is the Technical Services Librarian at the Joint Theological Library, Ormond College, University of Melbourne.*