

## LE CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES ASSOCIATIONS DE BIBLIOTHEQUES DE THEOLOGIE

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The first international meeting of representatives of Catholic theological libraries of Europe took place in Frankfurt in September 1957. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholisch-theologischer Bibliotheken (AKThB) was celebrating the tenth anniversary of its foundation on the very site of its initiation, the Hochschule Sankt Georgen. Several foreign librarians had been invited as guests: P. Luchsius Smits (VSKB, Netherlands), P. Francis Courney (ABTAPL, England), P. Paul Mech (France).

This meeting gave rise to the idea of forming an organisation which would allow for periodic gatherings of delegates of associations, in order to promote common action for the benefit of association members and theological libraries as a whole. The idea progressed and was finalised at a first meeting of delegates of the three associations (AKThB, VSKB and ABSR) in Frankfurt on 18th October 1961.

The new organisation was named: Comité international de Coordination des Associations de Bibliothèques de théologie catholique (CIC). Guidelines were established and a charter drawn up: -

The AKThB (Germany), VSKB (Holland), ABSR (France)

- affirming that most ecclesiastical libraries of religious sciences of the countries that they represent (and of other countries) are far from fulfilling their anticipated function within the church, not only concerning the extent and composition of their funds, the cataloguing of materials, financial resources, ... but also, in many cases, the competence, professional standing and experience of the librarians;

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- regretting that, on the whole, ecclesiastical libraries find themselves somewhat inferior to other libraries, both public and private;
- considering that the problems and difficulties faced by religious libraries are more or less the same everywhere, that, consequently international cooperation in studying these problems must be considered possible, and even useful;
- convinced that, generally, the undertaking of responsibilities on behalf of libraries of each association, will be made more efficient by an organized, mutual cooperation;
- desiring, by broadening their perspectives, to render serviceable the mutual cooperation above-mentioned to ecclesiastical libraries of a religious nature of other countries;

convene and determine:

1. to transform contacts, which until now were only occasional, into a regular interaction;
2. to promote a general standard among libraries in the associations, and as much as is possible, among ecclesiastical libraries of a religious nature, of other countries, particularly those which, situated in distant under-developed countries, find themselves very isolated, providing that these libraries express this desire;
3. to convoke, in view of the above-described collaboration at least once annually, a meeting in which will participate two delegates from each association, ... for the discussion of problems which will be submitted by the offices of the various associations ...

Meetings would be held alternately in each of the participating countries: Germany, France, Holland, and would be presided over by a member of the host association. No precise plans were made. We would work towards coordinating the services already crated by the national associations, developing their international usefulness, and eventually, seeing the introduction of new services which would cater for the overall needs of librarians.

In 1965 a newsletter circulated a list of the services offered by the CIC under the respective responsibility of the associations that had initiated them. It was addressed by the Bestelcentrale VKSB to all the theological libraries whose addresses could be obtained.

The CIC proposes, among other methods of achieving the goal which it has assigned itself, to put at the disposal of the catholic theological libraries of the world a list of services which address their principal needs. The direction of each of these services belongs to the national service which initiated it, and which takes responsibility for it. The role of the CIC is to supervise these initiatives, to coordinate the efforts, and eventually to give rise to new services. The services actually functioning (1965) were: -

**1. Information :**

a. *Scripta recentior edita* (VKSB, 1959). This bulletin is published ten times annually and lists all new publications throughout the world which may be of interest to philosophical and theological libraries.

b. *Bibliographia ad usum seminariorum* (VSKB 1959). This bibliography enumerates, justifying its choices for each discipline, the fundamental working instruments. The works are chosen for their scientific value, regardless of original language. Translations are indicated. The volume concerned with liturgy appeared in three editions (German, French, English); the volume on missiology in German and English; that on ecumenism in English only.

**2. Bookshop:**

Bestelcentrale (VKSB 1950). This bookshop is able to supply all foreign works to any theological library which has subscribed to *Scripta recentior edita*, sought recognition and been accepted. Conditions: clearly marked price of the country of origin, at the official exchange rate, excluding freight costs.

**3. Research of desiderata and sale of duplicates:**

TEOL (Theologici Exquisiti Oblatque Libri) (ABSR/ABEF, 1961). To publicise to other libraries the works researched, and to duplicate available for sale, the lists dispersed to TEOL allowing direct relations between libraries.

We thought of other services: microfilm and microfiche, reprinting of classic theological works, an international library borrowing service, a centre of periodicals, facilitating the acquisition of missing journals, and the sale of discontinued copies ... In fact only those services existing in 1965 continued to function.

From 1961 to 1971, the CIC held ten meetings, seven in Frankfurt, two in Nimegue, and one in Paris. Continuity of delegates to these meetings facilitated acquaintance with problems peculiar to other countries, problems related to recent religious history of catholicism in each country, to the method of training clergy both lay and regular, to relations between church and state, etc.

The principal subjects treated at these meetings were: the convening of an international congress of librarians of catholic theology; aid to librarians of Eastern Europe, under the direction of Father Bakker; the editing of a *Clavis Periodicorum*; the editing of a bibliography of publications in the field of theological sciences; the forging of national annual contact with the Congregation de l'Enseignement Catholique and the Federation Internationale des Universites Catholiques (FIUC).

None of these projects materialised. The group lacked structure, and therefore continuity. Moreover, from 1965 on, a tendency developed for meetings to become less frequent.

However in 1970, at the ninth meeting, held at Frankfurt, in fulfilment of the aim of the inaugural meeting in 1961, the *Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie* was instituted. To the three inaugurating associations was added, in 1967, the Vereniging van Religieus-wetenschappelijke Bibliothecarissen (VRB) of Belgium, more recently formed than the others, but motivated by the same desire for international collaboration.

The new organisation was based at Nimegue where the secretary lived. Statutes were discussed and approved, and registered in 1900 under Dutch legislation. They have continued to the present, with some modification of detail. Since the acceptance of the constitution in 1971, the *Conseil*, composed of two delegates of member associations and a representative of extraordinary members has convened regularly each year.

The *Conseil* does not wish to be a closed circle. It is always seeking to increase its membership. In recent years more associations have been accepted as ordinary members: the Association des Bibliothèques de Théologie de la Pologne (1980), the Associazione dei Bibliotecari

Ecclesiastici Italiani (ABEI) (1981), the Verband kirchlich-wissenschaftlicher Bibliotheken (VkwB) in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Archive und Bibliotheken in der evangelischen Kirche (AABevK) (1983), the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) (1984) and the Association des Bibliothèques de Théologie et d'Information Religieuse (ABTIR, Belgium) (1987). As well the following organisations were admitted as extraordinary members: the Centre de Recherche et de documentation des Institutions Chrétiennes of Strasbourg (CERDIC) (from 1973 to 1986), the Centre Informatique et Bible at Maredsous (CIB) (1986), and the Bibliothèque du Conseil Oecuménique des Églises at Geneva (1988).

Over the years contacts have been made with theological library associations in Austria, Switzerland, Spain, USA, Australia and New Zealand. But until now these casual relations have not yet extended to affiliation.

From 1971 to 1986 the Conseil was a member of the Federation Internationale des Associations de Bibliothécaires (FIAB/IFLA), being the only representative therein of theological libraries. But, regretfully, it was decided to withdraw, as the subscription was too costly and the real advantages minimal.

What are the results of these combined efforts, pursued with perseverance ... over three decades? The same questions remain on the agenda of the general meetings, year after year - an indication that solutions are not yet found.

The Conseil promotes above all relations between associations: by the sharing of each other's problems, delegates being able to transfer information to the other members of their associations, at their own national gatherings; by encouraging attendance of sister-associations at national meetings; by exchange of newsletters between associations.

Subjects considered important have not yet materialised: the editing of a model constitution for a library in a theological institution; the establishment of good relations with the higher authorities, those responsible in the theological institutions. In particular there is the project of a *Clavis Periodicorum*, which would give a detailed description, with bibliographic and historical data of reviews, at scientific

level, in the field of theology and religious sciences. Conceived in France as early as 1959, the *Clavis* has been taken up again by the Conseil as an international project. Partial realisation is in the process of discussion, somewhat advanced, but more so in France than in Germany or Benelux.

Many of the services which were functioning in 1965 have ceased to exist, especially those which encouraged the Bestelcentrale (VKSB). Under the name *World Library Service* it had to cease publication of the facsimiles of *Bibliographia ad usum Seminariorum* after the third edition (1959-1965), then that of *Scripta recentiora edita* (1959-1973), ...; finally the World Library Service ceased its activities in 1980.

If one compares the original ambitions with the results, one may be tempted to be discouraged, so much effort, so many journeys, meetings, reviews, so many advances ... Nevertheless the delegates participating in general meetings have always thought that the organisation should continue. There are seemingly many obstacles - diversity of languages, brevity of general meetings, the tyranny of distance and consequent lack of meetings of executive between annual meetings ... Much of the burden is borne by the President and Secretary.

This is but a brief history of the collaboration between theological library associations. We have a twofold inspiration to move on: the conviction that libraries must work together to achieve their objectives; and the certainty that the development of theological libraries is a service indispensable to the church.

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