

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENT'S REPORT, 1992

The year under review has been one of consolidation rather than of expansion of the Association's activities; however, since this year marks the completion of a decade of continuous cooperative activity among theological librarians in Australia and New Zealand, this is an appropriate time to reflect a little on what has been achieved in ten years of working together and to look forward to the challenges which lie ahead.

The one innovative project affecting the theological library community in the past year has not been strictly an ANZTLA activity, but a private venture; however one for which the whole library community has great reason to be thankful. I refer to the publication by Auslib Press of Coralie Jenkin's *Collections of Religion and Theology in Australia and New Zealand*. Coming as it does some twenty years after Paul Drakeford's *Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Directory*, it reflects the tremendous growth and expansion of theological and religious libraries that has taken place since then and provides us with a vital tool for communication between such libraries. Meanwhile, work has begun on the style manual commissioned by the last ANZTLA conference and intended as a joint production of ANZTLA and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS).

Turning to a review of the past decade of working together (encompassing three ANZATS library consultations and seven ANZTLA conferences), it is possible to point to some quite significant achievements.

1. We can point to ten consecutive annual meetings of theological librarians (with attendances ranging from 22 to 52) at which professional development and improvement of library services have been the dominant emphases.

2. We have maintained the regular publication of the *ANZTLA Newsletter* through seventeen issues containing educational and informative articles on a wide spectrum of library activities and services.
3. We have produced a set of standards (*ANZTLA Standards for Theological libraries*) which has been endorsed by both the Australian Library and Information Association and the New Zealand Library Association. Though not prescriptive in specific details, it nevertheless provides guidelines on the basis of which informed and responsible decisions can be made.
4. Originally conceived by Gary Gorman, the *Australasian Religion Index* (now in its fourth year of publication) is a singularly remarkable venture, harnessing the efforts of 25 volunteer indexers, spread across the length and breadth of Australia and New Zealand to produce a highly professional and extremely useful index to 68 local theological and religious journals. Subscription lists demonstrate that it is meeting a very real need, not only in Australasia, but all around the world.
5. Under the editorship of Hans Arns, and with the cooperation of 90 librarians, a second edition of the *Australasian union list of serials in Theological Collections* has been produced to facilitate the interlibrary lending of journal literature.
6. As mentioned above, we now have a directory which provides up-to-date information on all theological and religious libraries and other important collections in the area.
7. Work has begun on the production of a style manual for the writing of term papers and research assignments.

Apart from such tangible results of ANZTLA activity, who can measure the extent of the Association's influence in the growth and development of individual librarians and the improvement of the services they offer? While such achievements cannot be quantified, it can surely be said that ANZTLA (with more than 120 members) has established itself as a

body which is capable of focusing the concerns and aspirations of the theological library community, giving it a sense of purpose and a level of cohesion which certainly did not exist a decade ago.

But what then has it failed to do? And what remains to be done? If a wistful glance back into the past affords some degree of satisfaction, a furtive look into the future permits no level of complacency.

1. The fundamental problems facing theological libraries in Australia and New Zealand today are the same problems that faced them a decade ago - chronic understaffing and underfunding, and, in many cases, a lack of suitable facilities. So whatever we may have achieved, we have generally failed to persuade the bodies which govern our institutions to commit to our libraries the levels of personal and financial resources we believe are necessary for an adequate library service. It may be good that we have adopted a set of standards, but perhaps there is also a big disadvantage in the fact that the standards have been set by the librarians rather than the bodies that govern them; it means that we have the librarians saying, 'This is the way it ought to be', rather than the institutions saying, 'This is the way it has to be'. Is it simply coincidence that precisely the opposite is the case in North America, where the libraries are generally very much better than ours? Whatever the case, it is obvious that we will need to develop our public relations and hone our lobbying skills if the situation is to improve in the years ahead.
2. Over the years, ANZTLA has set a very professional agenda and we have talked a lot about such lofty and laudable concepts as cooperative collection development, conspectus, and the distributed national collection; but how much progress has been made in such areas? Certainly, one can point to some worthwhile projects and I would not want to belittle them; but for many of us, these ideals have done little more than to trouble our consciences. And again, the reasons appear to be not difficult to find, for they are the very same reasons of lack of labour and finance. Or is it really that we have been too timid and too hesitant in promoting such causes and pressing for the resources we need to get them done?

3. It is surely time for us to come to grips with the opportunities and challenges afforded by modern information technology. We have been slower than most in introducing computers into our libraries - for reasons which need not be mentioned yet again. But computerised tools and techniques are bringing about such radical changes to the very nature of research that we cannot deny our faculties and students their use without consigning them (together with ourselves) to some kind of pedagogical Dark Age.
4. Over the years we have become more generally aware of theological libraries and librarianship in other parts of the world; indeed, we have had some tentative interactions with our colleagues in Asia and the Pacific Islands - and even in Europe and North America; but we have so far only made a small beginning. Theological librarianship is as broad as theological literature - and that is world-wide. Surely, now is the time to come to grips with the international aspect of our profession and to commit ourselves to some specific projects to strengthen our international relationships and to provide assistance where it is required beyond our own shores.

As significant therefore as the achievements of the past decade may be, they pale considerably by comparison with the challenges which lie ahead. What they do however demonstrate is that we are serious about our intention of building up more adequate libraries with more professional library services. Theological librarians tend to be timid and self-conscious people; but what our achievements of the past decade should do is to give us confidence in ourselves and credibility in the eyes of our colleagues. I would like to think that what we have done to date will prove to be but the foundation on which we will build the better libraries and library services of the future, the necessary preparation for the bigger challenges that lie ahead.

(Rev.) Trevor Zweck,
President.
June, 1992.