

CONSPECTUS IN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Margaret Henty

Thank you for inviting me here today to talk to you about conspectus and its application in theological libraries. I must confess that I have had little experience with theological libraries, so before we look at conspectus, I thought it might be appropriate to look at some of the discoveries I made with theological libraries while preparing this talk, and what they might tell us about the context in which you operate.

I started with some statistical information. The most recent to hand are statistics for 1988, published in *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*¹ Figures provided here for 55 libraries in Australia and five in New Zealand inform us that in 1988, they had median holdings of less than 20,000 volumes, that the median number of staff was one and that median annual expenditure was \$15,000. Clearly these libraries are small and rely on a small band of library staff, less than half of whom are professionally qualified. However, the totality of the collections is sizeable, over 1.3 million items, which must together make a substantial contribution to our cultural and intellectual life.

A recent ACLIS survey, *Library Networks in Australia*,² tells us something more. This survey, which covered all types of Australian libraries, includes responses from 18 libraries described as 'religious'. Four of these 18 libraries (22%) reported that they contribute information about holdings to the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN), while only one of the libraries agreed that it contributes information about all holdings and that this information is kept up to date. Reasons for non-

¹ Jenkins, Coralie: *Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Statistics*. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* 21 [1990] No.4, 233-245.

² Peter Judge and Associates: *Library Networks in Australia: a Survey for ACLIS Final Report April 1992*. Canberra: Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services, 1992.

contribution of bibliographic information to ABN included lack of funds/staff, lack of computerisation and, in one instance, the comment 'we are a private library'. A further three libraries (17%) agreed that they intend to contribute bibliographic data, including retrospective conversion, to ABN in the future. Eight libraries (44%), however, contribute information about all of their holdings to another network (ANZTLA, ASCIS and AULOTS). Nine libraries (50%) provide enhanced access to their collections within a network, through the waiving or reduction of interlibrary loan charges, reciprocal physical access or reciprocal borrowing. Five libraries (28%) are participating in some form of collection rationalisation with another library or libraries, and two (11%) are part of a cooperative preservation plan. See Table 1 following page.

If these figures are representative of theological libraries as a whole, then it is reasonable to assume that most are working in isolation, not contributing bibliographic records to a network and unable to locate the holdings of other libraries with the ease of electronic access.

A second recent ACLIS survey provides an indication of approaches to collection development policies,³ among theological libraries. Twenty-nine theological libraries responded to the survey (there is no indication of how many were approached). When asked if the library has a collection development policy, only eight (27.6%) said that they do. Of the 21 who have no such policy, nine responded that they plan to have a policy by the end of 1992. The questionnaire also asked about the format of the policy, and responses to this question showed that only twelve of the collection development policies, either already in existence or forthcoming, follow the ACLIS guidelines. These guidelines suggest that collection development policies should be set out in terms of the standard collection level definitions used in the Australian conspectus.

³ Peter Judge and Associates: *ACLIS Survey on Collection Development Policies*, (rev. version, December 1991) Canberra: Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services, 1991.

Table 1: Responses from religious libraries to the survey Library Networks in Australia.

Question	number	%
Q1: Is your library/information service contributing information about its holdings to the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN).	4	22
Q2.1.2 (if YES to Q1) We contribute information about all holdings and keep that information up to date.	1	6
Q2.1.3 (if YES to Q1) We contribute information about some holdings and keep that information up to date.	1	6
Q2.1.4 (if YES to Q1) We contribute information about some holdings and plan further retrospective conversion.	2	11
Q2.2 (if NO to Q1) Does your library intend to contribute bibliographic data, including retrospective conversion to ABN, in the future?	3	17
Q4. Is your library contributing holdings to a network other than ABN, in Australia?	10	56
Q7. If you are contributing information to ABN and/or other network(s) in Australia, are you providing other network members with enhanced access to your collections?	9	50
Q12. Is your library/information service participating in any form of collection rationalisation with another library or libraries?	5	28
Q13. Is your library/information service part of any cooperative serials collection development or cancellation scheme?	6	33
Q14. Is your library/information service part of a cooperative preservation plan?	2	11

So at last we have arrived at the word conspectus. And we have plenty of information now at hand about Australian theological libraries in which to introduce the other terms which usually go alongside it, terms such as

distributed national collection, collection assessment and resource sharing, not to mention the organisation, ACLIS.

ACLIS, or the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services, was established in 1988, and is the national organisation established to offer advice to governments and other authorities responsible for libraries, to facilitate cooperation and coordination of library services in the national interest and speak for libraries and information services on matters of common concern. ACLIS carries on much of the work done by its predecessors, AACOBS (the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographic Services) and ALIC (the Australian Libraries and Information Council).

One of the major tasks for which ACLIS has responsibility is the development of the concept of the distributed national collection, a responsibility which was passed to it at the Australian Libraries Summit in 1988. The development of this idea comes as a response to the growing need for cooperation between libraries, for which there are several reasons:

- the increase in the amount of material being published each year, in an increasing range of formats, so that no library can expect to be self-sufficient
- the continuing increase in the cost of library materials, especially of journals
- increased demand on library services as a result of changing educational patterns in the community together with a greater emphasis on resource-based learning
- increased demand for access to library materials due to improved bibliographic access, due mainly to the use of information technology
- recognition that the condition of Australian library collections is deteriorating, primarily due to the use of acid-based papers and other non-permanent materials.

At the same time, libraries have experienced real declines in funding since the mid-1970s which, together with the factors outlined above, are necessitating fundamental changes to the ways in which libraries operate.

The Distributed National Collection Resolution AAI of the 1988 Australian Libraries Summit formalised the concept of the Distributed National Collection in stating the now generally accepted notion

- that the following principles of a national collection be accepted:
 - a. aggregation of all library collections in Australia whether in the public or private sector
 - b. comprehensive in relation to Australia
 - c. selective in relation to the rest of the world as present and future needs require
 - d. adequately recorded and readily accessible.

The idea of a distributed national collection is not new. What is new is the idea that there might be strategies put into place to develop and organise this collection so that libraries maximise their ability to meet the information needs of all Australians.

There are five aspects of the distributed national collection which need to be considered if it is to be developed more formally:

- *Collections:* while there is considerable scope for collaborative collection development, this can only occur if existing strengths and collecting intentions are known. The key to such knowledge is seen as being the development of a national conspectus database which will indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the national collection, at which point it may be possible to develop further the notion of national collecting responsibilities to be undertaken by appropriate libraries. Even without the assignment of collecting responsibilities, a knowledge of what other libraries are doing

should, in itself, lead to less duplication of collecting and a maximising of individual titles available in the country.

- *Bibliographical control:* the linking of libraries through the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) has enabled the development of a national bibliographic database (NBD) of holdings of individual titles, to which libraries can refer when seeking to borrow materials for users. At present there is a tendency to think of ABN as the single source of such data, but it is conceivable that we may not be thinking of one database, but perhaps a system of linked local or regional databases. The national collection would be strengthened if items of national or regional significance were recorded as soon as possible after ordering.
- *Preservation:* there is a need for a nationally coordinated approach to the preservation of the Australian documentary record and to those non-Australian materials to which future access should be assured. The conspectus database will, to some extent, indicate intent to retain collections, and this should lead to less duplication of retention and preservation effort.
- *Access:* the key to the Distributed National Collection is access. Library lending policies need therefore to be known, and to be as liberal as local needs will permit. Delivery systems of both original items and copies need to be prompt and efficient.
- *National Coordination:* it is desirable that some libraries undertake to develop parts of their collections in the national interest, and not simply in response to the needs of the primary clientele. There is no immediately apparent mechanism for the coordination of such a program, to take responsibility for such issues as funding, document delivery, retention and preservation. At present, ACLIS has responsibility for coordination, but there is no reason why this should not change.

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Conspectus: Central to the development of an effectively coordinated and functioning Distributed National Collection is the idea that each library must know what other libraries hold, at an item level and at a subject level. The tool chosen to assess and describe library collections at the subject level is conspectus. This technique was developed by members of the Research Libraries Group in the USA for the purpose of sharing information about collections with a view to collaborating in collection development, and it is now in use in a number of countries throughout the world.

The development of a national conspectus database is already well under way in Australia, as is the training of library staff in techniques of collection assessment. A conspectus officer was appointed to the staff of National Library in August 1990, a position funded jointly by ACLIS and the National Library. Training has been provided for over 350 library staff from over 100 libraries from all sectors. The conspectus database is in place and receiving entries, and documentation has been provided for conspectus implementation. The *Australian Conspectus Manual* is available from the National Library of Australia, and is essential for those who want to know about the tool in detail.

So far you would be forgiven for thinking that conspectus is an exercise designed to keep librarians busy for the sake of the nation, with there being little in it of immediate benefit for their own libraries. However, there is an immediate benefit to participating libraries, and that is in relation to its own collection assessment and management. The word conspectus refers to a general view of a topic or a scene, or a tabulation of details regarding a specific subject. In the library sense, the word refers to a means whereby we can gain an overview of library collections, enabling them to be described in a standardised way which can therefore be readily understood by others. Conspectus is simply one form of collection assessment, but by providing us with a standardised terminology, there are a number of benefits:

- a standardised description of the collection which is clear and concise and is consequently a meaningful communication tool to use with administrators, other librarians and users,

- a tool for collection management, so that collections can be adapted in accordance with changes in the library's mission, to patterns of use and to programs supported,
- a tool which can assist the library to be accountable to its administrators, by providing a basis for the setting of priorities, for selection, for weeding and for relegation,
- a basis for the production of a collection development policy,
- a means of helping the library respond to changes in budget,
- a tool for communicating what your library is doing, and what it is planning to do, to other libraries, in order to optimise resource sharing and to provide a framework for collaborative responsibility for collection development.

Collections are assessed by subject. Worksheets are provided in 24 different subject areas: chemistry, performing arts, psychology, sociology and so on. Philosophy and religion have been combined into one division. These divisions are not based on any particular classification scheme, but are intended to represent an up-to-date breakdown of human knowledge. Each division is divided up into categories - about 600 altogether in the Australian version - and these are further broken down into more precisely defined subject areas - some 4,000 in all. The division of Philosophy and Religion has 17 categories and over 180 subjects. All categories and subjects are named, but because libraries use different classification schemes, worksheets are provided in different versions, for the Dewey and Library of Congress classification schemes.

Collection levels are assigned using a range from 0 to 5. The levels used are those defined in the *Australian Conspectus Manual*⁴. These definitions are expressed differently from, but are compatible with, those of the Research Libraries Group definitions.

⁴ Margaret Henty is Conspectus Officer, National Library of Australia.

Level 0 Out of scope

The library does not collect in this area.

Level 1 Minimal

A collection for which few selections are made beyond introductory/very basic materials.

Level 2 Basic Information

A collection of up-to-date materials which serves to introduce and define a subject and to indicate the varieties of information available elsewhere. It may include dictionaries, encyclopedias, access to appropriate bibliographic databases, standard and significant works, handbooks, manuals, films, sound recordings and a few popular or major serials. A basic information collection can support general enquiries, school and some undergraduate instruction, and information at a popular level, but is not sufficiently intensive to support advanced undergraduate courses.

Level 3 Intermediate

A collection containing a broad range of resources adequate to support undergraduate and most graduate instruction, sustained independent study, work based interests or specialised inquiries; that is, adequate to impart and maintain a knowledge of a subject in a systematic way at less than research intensity. It includes a wide range of basic works in appropriate formats, the fundamental reference sources and bibliographical works, a significant number of classic retrospective materials, complete collections of the works of more important authors, selections from the works of secondary writers, a selection of representative journals and access to appropriate databases.

Level 4 Research

A collection containing both current and retrospective resources, with historical material retained. Such a collection supports postgraduate and independent research and includes the major published source materials required. It includes all important reference works, a wide selection of specialised monographs, a very extensive collection of journals and immediate access to bibliographies, abstracting and

indexing services in the field, materials containing research findings and non-bibliographic databases. The collection will provide materials in all appropriate formats and languages, including original materials and ephemera.

Level 5 Comprehensive

A collection which includes, as far as is reasonably possible, all significant works of recorded knowledge (publications, manuscripts, other forms) in all applicable languages, for a necessarily defined and limited field. This level of collecting intensity is one that maintains a special collection; the aim, if not the achievement, is exhaustiveness.

For the Australian conspectus, levels 1, 2 and 3 have been subdivided into 1a and 1b, 2a and 2b and 3a and 3b. This was done in order to make participation possible for libraries where collections are not large, but which still require a useful range of collection descriptors to work with.

Libraries completing worksheets are asked to look at three different aspects to their collection:

- the Existing Collection Strength (ECS) describes the collection in its entirety,
- the Current Collecting Intensity (CCI) describes the rate at which materials are being collected at the moment.
- the Desired Collecting Intensity (DCI) describes the level at which the library should be collecting in order to properly support the activities of its users.

There is provision also for language codes to be incorporated and for comments to be included for additional detail. When worksheets are completed, these can be entered into a national conspectus database held at the National Library of Australia. This database then produces reports of your holdings as well as reports which compare the holdings of your library with those of other libraries.

So far we have not actually discussed the question of how you actually go about the process of assessment, and I do not propose to do that as it is the subject of our second speaker today. What I have tried to do is to

introduce you to the concept of conspectus in the context of the activities of Australian and New Zealand theological libraries and what you may hope to get out of it, both for your library and for the national collection. Theological libraries are small for the most part and have much to gain from resource sharing and cooperative approaches to collection development. Conspectus is a useful tool to assist with this process.

Margaret Henty is Conspectus Officer, National Library of Australia.

Copy of a letter received from ACLIS

Dear Colleague

The Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) has been active in promoting the concept of the Distributed National Collection (DNC) among Australian libraries. Over the past year, ACLIS conducted two major surveys of libraries' attitudes to collection development policies and to participation in networking arrangements. In addition, Derek Whitehead led an ACLIS research project on serials practices in Australian libraries.

Over 1400 libraries were invited to participate in these surveys, and an excellent response rate ensured that a great deal of useful information was gathered. That information is being used by the ACLIS National Council to help plan further action on the DNC.

I am writing to you now to let you know that ACLIS is appreciative of the time taken by those libraries which participated in these surveys. Reports on the results of the surveys have been published in *ACLIS News* (April 92 and June 92), and a short news item is also being published in *inCite*. In line with standard ACLIS practice, a gratis copy of the major reports has been sent to all ACLIS members. A copy of the report *Serials in the Distributed National Collection* was posted with the June 1992 issue of *ACLIS News*, and a copy of the report *Library Networks in Australia* was posted to all ACLIS members on 11 August