

INTERRING THE REMAINS, OR RESURRECTION: DEALING WITH DYING THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

Margaret Macpherson

An after-dinner discussion at the 10th Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Libraries Association, Canberra, 21-24 September, 1995.

Your Committee has very kindly asked me to speak this evening on dealing with dying theological libraries under the challenging title of *Interring the remains, or resurrection*. This by way of leading to a lively after dinner discussion!!

Why should this be when I am by no means a theological librarian? A passing interest in one very small theological library and a general experience in libraries may suffice to open up this topic, especially if you will allow me the indulgence of some reminiscing. Each of my library positions has contributed to the views I now take, including a less precious approach to discarding material. May I skim through these experiences, mentioning some topics which we can return to in discussion?

Early indications of my future path include being a helper in public and school libraries, with no intention of being a librarian. Towards the end of my undergraduate studies I joined the library staff of CSR Research Laboratories, a chemical research establishment which was just beginning to automate its information retrieval operation - revolutionary in 1963. It gave me a taste for special libraries and an understanding that the collections in them are very important in the national scene.

I went on to the State Library of NSW, then known as the Public Library of NSW, as a trainee cataloguer. It was both a privilege and challenge to work in such a library, caring not only for the current collection but an extensive and significant historical collection. I was fortunate to have an outstanding mentor in Miss Jean Arnot and to experience dealing with catalogues in various shapes that had been built over more than a century. In those pre-automation days, we had to grapple with questions of closure versus migration of catalogues, which are among the things we might discuss tonight.

It was a library for all-comers and consequently had a very wide clientele, something which is a lesser challenge when one is working in a special library. It had a largely closed collection which had to be understood by users and staff alike.

My next experience was at Wagga Wagga Teachers' College where the library had only 3 1/2 staff serving 450 students who all lived on campus. It was a library with very clear purpose, to support the courses being offered by the institution. We worked with considerable space constraints, so that although this was an era when discarding was decidedly unfashionable, we had in fact to discard or at least consign material to a stack. While the College had primary clients, it was in a country town and we responded to a great need by serving a secondary clientele. Theological libraries will usually have a secondary clientele or indeed secondary clienteles but we should form collections for our primary group.

Community links were important because it was the only academic library in the region at the time and because our students went out into schools for both practical and demonstration classes and the library was intimately involved in those activities. We made a valuable contribution to the cultural life of the town.

After my time at Wagga Teachers' College I moved to Western Australia, as the Head Cataloguer at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University. It was a sizeable organisation, having some 125 staff in the Library alone. While the focus of the library to serve the courses of the institution remained the same, other aspects were very different from my experience at Wagga. Administration and technical services were centralised. We were merging libraries by incorporating an old technical college library and several other specialist libraries, and we were also working in a multicampus situation, having town and suburban campuses, and having specialist colleges for occupational and physiotherapy, as well as an agricultural college an hour's drive from Perth and the School of Mines in Kalgoorlie which was a whole

day's drive away.

This presented some interesting technical problems. We had very generous resources and were able to buy a lot of material but it was important that it be processed quickly. We used quite atypical procedures. We were experimenting with automation but created all our records from scratch and used the Universal Decimal Classification creating a co-ordinated index to go with it instead of subject headings. They were interesting but expensive experiments as they proved to be wrong and were altered some years later. Any library that considers that it will use technical processes which vary from the established norms must consider the consequences.

After 4 years at WAIT I moved to Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst. This was an expanding institution having a library staff in 1974 of 14 which very quickly rose to 26. We had considerable growth in the mid 70's because of Commonwealth tied grants to the CAE's for collection development. We collected in multiple formats having a major audiovisual collection, mainly to support teacher education courses but by no means confined to that area. The library was different from many in that it supported distance education students wherever they were, and this has meant that the library has developed quite a sophisticated service to them, first by mail, moving to facsimile, then to online catalogues and lately to remote access online services.

We have been fortunate to be part of a very significant co-operative activity run for and by the Colleges in NSW. CLANN was initially set up as a shared cataloguing service. It moved on to provide not only integrated systems for its member libraries but many other advantages from co-operation such as joint purchasing and is now very active in leading us into the online environment - that is, the online information environment. We've had online library systems for many years. CLANN is now known as UNILINC and one of the features of its co-operative effort has been a very strong, free, reciprocal borrowing scheme.

Mitchell College of Advanced Education merged with Riverina Institute of Higher Education in 1989 to become one of the new universities under the name of Charles Sturt University. It has three main sites - at Bathurst, Wagga and Albury - and a number of affiliated sites such as the Police Staff College in Manly, the Ambulance Education Centre in Rozelle, the Orana University Tafe Centre in Dubbo and an outlying centre in Broken Hill and close links with the NSW Police Academy at Goulburn. Some of these have Schools of the University on them, others merely have very close affiliation with joint courses. The University also has a number of overseas students, usually established as cohorts in a particular area. A recent, interesting example is that we have been contracted by the Northumbrian Ambulance Service in Britain to teach the paramedical course that was established for the NSW Ambulance Service. It is being offered in the distance education mode. The library could provide little service to these students were it not for the developments offered by new technologies and the first databases we had online were in fact medical databases. We are now able to offer students of the university access to quite a large range of materials via Internet and I expect this to grow in the near future.

CSU library could not have so easily undertaken the merging that was necessary were it not for our membership of UNILINC, which has enabled the library system to be truly integrated across three campuses. We have in fact been able to be much ahead of our academic and administrative partners in this activity. It has been interesting to see that even though the component libraries were of very much the same tradition, there are attitudes and procedures on each campus which are distinct and it's one of the challenges in bringing this multicampus institution together to ensure that the library works as a whole rather than as separate parts.

When I was first asked to speak to you, I had no reason to think that Charles Sturt University was moving into theology but some of you will know that there are talks underway which would give St Mark's College, which you are visiting as part of this conference, another role as the School of Theology of CSU. That's likely to happen next year and, if not, in 1997. I am very pleased that we will be working with Judy James to provide library services to students arising from that affiliation.

My scant knowledge of theological libraries comes from the fact that from 1982 until recently I had charge of the very small library owned by the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst. It has been accumulated over a considerable period of time, starting soon after the formation of the Diocese in 1870. Material dates from the

18th to the 20th century, mostly being from the period from about 1890 till the 1950's.

It started as a library for clergy and was in fact supported from Britain by donations from Dr Bray's Lending Library for the Colonies, beautiful leather bound books with rules for reporting annually to London on the use of the collection. It was revived on several occasions, in the 1930's and the 1950's with a homemade classification which grouped the books in general categories such as CH = Church History, DOC = Doctrine, NT = New Testament and so on. The books were listed in a hand-written book catalogue.

In the 1980's, the then Dean of All Saints' Cathedral, Richard Appleby, thought that it was important to encourage the clergy to read and sought to promote inservice education by re-establishing the Diocesan Library. He made a room in the Cathedral available and acquired some handsome book cases. I was asked to undertake the task and with the help of two other librarians who happened to have some free time, we sorted a collection of around six thousand titles, into material that was worth keeping, material to be thrown out and material which could be given away. Just prior to this time there had been significant fires which had ravaged the Adelaide Hills and had burnt Crafers and its library. We planned to send unwanted but still useful material to Crafers. However, because the theological colleges in South Australia had agreed that basic theological training was going to be done through Flinders University, the material that was not wanted by Bathurst was donated to Flinders University Library.

But to return to Bathurst. We had knowledge of the Petty classification but elected to arrange the collection in Dewey classified order, to create an author and title card catalogue and a shelflist, hoping that the shelflist would act as a type of subject approach. I did intend to go back and give subject headings at some later date but that has not happened. As I have said there was a rigorous sorting and discard of material and the collection now stands at some 3,000 books.

It was probably a mistake to re-establish this library. It has not been made widely known within the Diocese. Several clergy have tried to promote its use because they were concerned at the lack of current reading by both clergy and laity. However, very few people have taken advantage of the collection. I can identify several failings. The purpose of the collection was not firmly established, funding was non-existent except by kind donation, and access arrangements were variable. In theory the library was open whenever the Cathedral was open but because of vandalism the Cathedral was more often locked and it was sometimes necessary to seek an appointment to use the collection. Last year because the space it occupied was needed for an office, the library was moved to a position where it is unavailable other than by appointment and it is my judgement that few people know about it and it is too difficult to try to use it.

Within the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst there was another collection belonging to the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd and located in Dubbo. It was probably at its strongest during the pre-war years but had become dated and duplicated much that was in the Diocesan Library. I am very pleased to hear, that although at one stage the Bishop thought that the collection might be relocated somewhere within the geographical bounds of the Diocese, it has been given to St Mark's in Canberra. I want to emphasise the importance of transferring such collections to a staffed library.

A topic very dear to my heart, which you will be discussing at length during this meeting, is access. Underpinning the Distributed National Collection is the notion that the nation's bibliographic collection can be dispersed if locations are able to be determined. It is very important that special libraries such as theological libraries place their holdings on ABN or otherwise make them locatable through Union catalogues. In this way, material can be found and unnecessary duplication can be eliminated with some ease. That's a negative reason for wanting location details but still a helpful one.

It is also important for special libraries to be involved in formal agreements within the Distributed National Collection, perhaps even more so than for the big generalist collections. Opportunities must exist within the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library group to determine that particular libraries will maintain the specialist collection in specific aspects of religion. If that were to occur, reciprocity will remain important. It's fashionable to suggest that co-operation is too expensive to proceed with, is altruistic and is to be abandoned in these days of political correctness and economic rationalism. I would strongly urge you to continue any reciprocal activities you have and indeed to strengthen them. I don't think these agreements

need to involve payment which seems to be the only way in which some of my colleagues will consider working together these days. We still have considerable scope for co-operation and for freely allowing our patrons to use each other's libraries. Where that involves expensive interlibrary loans, there are times when charges are reasonable, but otherwise we should maintain whatever reciprocal operations we have.

To draw out some issues that we might discuss further, it is important to be confident of the purpose of any collection and to be sure that it has long term support. For the same reason that the State Archives do not place regional collections in any institution that does not have an ongoing life of its own, I think it's dubious for libraries to exist in institutions that do not plan a continuing life for the library or which themselves have precarious management.

Another topic which ought to be considered is the retention and discard of material. Theological libraries are very likely to receive donations, usually on the death of a member of the clergy or theological scholar. It must always be made clear by the receiving institution that they have the right of discard as well as retention unless the collection is superlative and needs to be kept together as a collection in its own right. It would be my judgement that that is the case much less often than is considered to be so by the families of the donor.

Retention implies that there is value. We have to add the costs of processing and storage into any discussion of retaining donated material. There should be a clear agreement as to the basis on which the donation is accepted. We should push for right of disposal and should generally integrate the donation into the main collection of our library. It is expensive to keep collections separate and it tends to make the material less accessible to the general user of the library.

To inter or resurrect? The heart suggests revival, the decision may be to bury or at least transplant.

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MAJOR REFERENCE RESOURCES - 1995

Lawrence D. McIntosh

The purpose of this listing is to draw attention to the availability of recently published reference resources in the fields of religion, theology and related disciplines. The annotations are designed to assist with selection decisions. Included are 1994 titles, which were not here in time for last year's list, along with 1995 imprints sighted prior to the end of September of this year.

RELIGIONS

Religions in Australia

1. Humphreys, Robert and Roland Ward. *Religious bodies in Australia: a comprehensive guide*. 3rd edn. 358 Mountain Highway, Wantirna, Vic. 3152: New Melbourne Press, 3152. 0-646-24552 X. \$27.95.

Updates the earlier editions of 1986 and 1988 and adds a number of new features.

Following a general introduction, this guide to the diversity of belief in Australia describes over 300 religious groups which are classified under family headings: Trinitarian Christians; non-Trinitarian; other world monotheistic religions; mental, psychic and other religions; nature and traditional religions and, finally, Buddhism. Bibliographic sources and contact addresses are given. Appendixes provide tables of religion by language spoken and birthplace and there is an index to religious groups and subjects.

The authors confess that their own convictions 'are in line with conservative Reformation theology' (p. 3), but they have consulted widely and appear to have presented their assiduously collected data dispassionately.