Theological librarians and the Internet. Implications for practice
(A monograph published simultaneously as the Journal of Religious & Theological Information, Vol.3 Nos.3/4)
Edited By Mark Stover
ISBN 0 7890 1341 X (hbk); 0 7890 1342 8 (pbk)
Cost: US$59.95 (hbk), US$24.95 (pbk)

The Editor and the contributors to this enlightening collection of essays on the Internet and Theological librarians must be warmly congratulated on a job well done. This review is offered from the perspective of a Professor in the Faculty of Theology and Religion Studies - not a librarian or the son of a librarian!

The thirteen essays cover a multitude of aspects which every modern librarian and theological lecturer need to be aware of in order to utilise the Internet as a modern means of finding resources, publishing academic articles and communicating with students and peers.

The reader is made aware of the dictum’s relevancy in Mark Stover’s tone-setting essay: Internet shock: Change, continuity, and the theological librarian, (pp.1-12), that the more things change, the more they remain the same. This is especially true when it is applied to ‘the timeless principles and values of librarianship’. Teachers of theology can say “amen” to the dictum. The content of theology also needs to be taught as timeless principles while recognising the values of practising theology.

Faculty members of Theological institutions are always in search of the best academic data in the minimum amount of time. Another common trait among teachers of theology is the high cost of journal subscriptions. Mark Dubis (Chapter I. Religious and theological journals online: The ATLA Serials Collection Project) has provided good news to the theological fraternity with the news that the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) created on January 1, 1999, the Center for Electronic Resources in Theology and Religion (CERTR). Thus periodical literature in religion and theology can be accessed, quickly and conveniently, ‘and at a reasonable cost’.

Surfing websites for specific information can easily waste precious time. A user-friendly body of catalogues made available on the Internet will prove to be a boon in the preparation of lectures and the writing of articles for publication. This will in turn engender further access to information, encourage and enable research, acquire and preserve collections and deliver resources to web clientele according to John Dickason (Chapter 2. The function of web catalogs in theological libraries), who also provided extremely useful websites in his copious notes.

Marshall Eidson’s article on Electronic Journals in Religious Studies... (Chapter 3) highlights some reasons for the relatively low volume of scholarly religious studies journals on the Internet. Of special interest was his discussion on the work of the Association of Peer-Reviewed Electronic Journals in Religion. This may well provide a healthy injection of academic credibility and greater acceptance of web published material in Religious studies. Of paramount usefulness are his appendices of journals participating in the ATLA CERTR and Institutions involved as ATLA member libraries working towards filming journals for the ATLAS project. His selected yet extensive ‘Webliography’ of religious studies journals is worth the cost of this book under review.

The extensive and growing Accredited Theological Schools membership and its theological electronic resources needs are topics dealt with by Dave Harmeyer (Chapter 4). One of the major problems faced by distance students is the availability of resource material via the traditional and electronic means. The author lists some useful free databases. He also provides an update on the progress of the Atlas full text project under the auspices of ATLA. A comprehensive update of fee-orientated databases is provided and useful comments are provided on each.

Charles K Bellinger (Chapter 5) provides a useful “how to” article, basing his insights and advice on the available data and useful links of the Wabash Center Internet Guide.

Other applicatory friendly articles include Robert R Howard’s Homiletics and Liturgics (Chapter 6) on the Internet with a most useful number of websites on the two disciplines. He warns though that discernment is necessary as ‘...scholarly efforts in these fields are random, with little interaction’.

Other fascinating ‘how to’ articles include Elizabeth Davis Deahl’s Accessing Digital Images: Sources for Christian Art on the Internet (Chapter 7) and Andrew J Keck’s Opening the Front Door: Designing a Usable Library Web Site (Chapter 8).

Theological teachers will find Rebecca Moore’s Using the Web in Religious Studies Courses (Chapter 9) an answer to their prayers for a personal testimony of using Web-based resources in a teaching situation.

Novice researchers of Christian history will find Michael Strickland’s selection of Internet Resources (Chapter 10) helpful in their exploration on the Internet.

The penultimate chapter also belongs to Mark Stover. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations for Web Site Design in Religious and Theological Academic Libraries (Chapter 11), provides closely reasoned motivations for religious and theological academic libraries. Many of the principles enunciated will also apply to other academic institutions. The article provides an authoritative ‘hands on’ guide to the basic content of a good website in non-technical English.
Of interest to ‘novice-to-intermediate Web users’ interested in Jewish issues is the final chapter on *Virtually Jewish: the Creation of a Jewish Internet Tutorial* by Terren Ilana Wein and Juna Z Snow. This is a dual purpose website: to help teach a Jewish audience on a ‘how to’ use the Web, and a ‘web-based’ audience who wish to obtain information about matters Jewish on the Web.

**Conclusion**

A most useful book for the teacher of theology, especially if web-based resources are important to the teacher and the students. This volume contains background information to the current development of web-based academic resources, and chapters on how to use the Internet in furthering religious and theological education. To this reviewer, the most valuable information is found in the many excellent listings of websites and the names of the North American institutions participating in various web related theological and religious education.

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**The practical library manager.**

Bruce E Massis


ISBN 0 7890 1765 2 (hb); ISBN 0 7890 1766 0 (sb)

Cost: US$34.95 (hb); US$24.95 (sb)

There is a need for guidance for those faced with the challenge of day-to-day administration and running of small to medium-size libraries of all kinds. The education of library and information science workers at the professional level is usually pitched at a general level, seeking to equip new entrants to the career with sufficient knowledge of principles so that they can make informed decisions as needs change. Some knowledge of practice is acquired through fieldwork but it is during the period of introduction to a new job, subsequent mentoring and practice that most detailed practical knowledge is acquired. Little wonder, then, that there is a market for a guide of this kind.

This book does not attempt to address the needs of the market in Southern Africa or, indeed, anywhere outside the United States of America; however, it is a useful guide to the issues such a guide should cover and its practical approach, with clear guidelines and the use of copious “bullet-point” lists is a model of good presentation.

Massis writes in a direct, personal, style about American public service that may challenge many of our conceptions of culture “across the pond”:

“For the decades leading up to the new millennium, the phrase ‘public service’ clearly appeared to be misapplied to the American workforce. It frequently appeared that those in general public service positions provided a poor quality of service matched only by a general abhorrence of the public they were ‘sworn’ to serve. One did not have to attempt anything more exotic than a visit to the local Department of Motor Vehicles to recognise that the only thing many public service employees despised more than the service was the public” (page 1).

Thus it is that planning, implementing and evaluating a training programme for library staff is seen by Massis as being the greatest challenge facing library managers. In terms of our South African culture it must also be the point of challenge - but not because of an antipathy to the concept of public service. As a recent immigrant from the United Kingdom, I have, with few exceptions, been impressed by the standard of service, general courtesy and care expressed in shops and other public service points in South Africa. The challenge is to design staff training that takes people beyond the boundaries that are still part of the collective mindset of this culture.

The influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is also seen as a transforming element that must be managed and accommodated in training. Here the reviewer takes issue with Massis: “transformation” is a teleological concept, meaning that we are sure of the beginning and the end points of the process. The adoption and development of ICT’s seems, by contrast, to be an agent of change, the impact of which we have no clear view. The World Wide Web is barely ten years old, at least in its public manifestation: few of its effects were perceived when it was first launched. Thus we have the challenge of designing and re-designing our staffing structures and staff training to accommodate and to shape new facilities and services that we can create.

Many of the ideas in this book will be useful once suitable parallels in Southern Africa have been identified. Will someone please write a training manual to satisfy our needs?

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SA Jnl Libs & Info Sci 2003, 69(2)