

Co-Operation among Caribbean Theological Libraries: A Case Study

GLENROY TAITT

Main Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago,
West Indies

This study set out to determine whether co-operation exists among the libraries of six theological colleges in the Caribbean and to identify potential areas for further co-operation. The objectives of this study were: to ascertain whether co-operation exists among the selected theological libraries; to identify the areas in which there may be co-operation; to ascertain the opinions of librarians and administrators of the selected theological colleges towards co-operation; to identify the existing factors in the libraries under study which are liable to promote or hinder co-operation; and to make recommendations on possible areas of (further) co-operation.

The study found that co-operation exists at a national level but not at the regional level. The factors which foster co-operation are: geography, strong links between parent institutions, the use of CDS-ISIS software as a common platform and a vibrant national information system. The barriers to co-operation appear to be geography, finance, the small number of research students in the colleges comprising CATS, the use of incompatible software, denominationalism, the absence of librarians from CATS meetings and a focus on preparing students to become ministers rather than on theological education more broadly-speaking.

Introduction

This study examined co-operation among six theological libraries in the English-speaking Caribbean. In the context of the study, co-operation was defined as “any arrangement entered into by two or more libraries for the benefit of one or more of them. Such arrangements may be formal as well as informal, simple or technologically complex, for the mutual benefit of all the libraries or even for the stated advantage of one party” (Taitt 2003, 3). The reasons for co-operation among libraries are well known and do not need repeating here. However, referring specifically to theological libraries, Cornish suggests that:

theological and religious libraries are no more capable of meeting all the needs of their users than any other library and it will become more and more necessary to rely on others and also be relied upon by others (Cornish 1993, 31).

Objectives

The objectives of this study were five-fold:

1. to ascertain whether co-operation exists among the selected theological libraries;
2. to identify the areas in which there may be co-operation;
3. to ascertain the opinions of librarians and administrators of the selected theological colleges towards co-operation;
4. to identify the existing factors in the libraries under study which are liable to promote or hinder co-operation;
5. to make recommendations on possible areas for (further) co-operation.

Methodology

This study used the qualitative method and took the form of a case study. Use of the qualitative

Glenroy Taitt is Special Collections Librarian, Main Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. E-mail: gtaitt@library.uwi.tt

method is rather unusual since library research has tended to involve statistical analysis.

Population

Seven tertiary-level theological institutions incorporating six major theological libraries participated in this study: Codrington College, Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs, United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), St. Michael's Theological Centre, Institute for Theological and Leadership Development (ITLD), Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST). The Zenas Gerig Library jointly serves JTS and CGST, which share the same compound. ITLD, UTCWI, St. Michael's and Zenas Gerig are all located in Jamaica while Codrington and St. John Vianney are to be found in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago respectively. The apparent bias towards Jamaica in the study was due to the fact that the researcher was based in Jamaica for several months, during which time the enquiry was conceptualised and much of the research was conducted.

The selected libraries represent diverse denominations: three are mainline Protestant (Codrington College, UTCWI and ITLD); two are Catholic (St. Michael's and St. John Vianney); and one is Evangelical (Zenas Gerig). The mother-churches for the Protestant and Catholic libraries all belong to the ecumenical movement in the Caribbean.

Several of the parent institutions have close links with each other. UTCWI, Codrington College, St. Michael's and St. John Vianney, being affiliated to The University of the West Indies (UWI), have formed the Caribbean Association of Theological Schools (CATS). UTCWI and ITLD share a very strong relationship. The United Church, ITLD's parent, is a partner in UTCWI, contributing financial resources, faculty and students. St. Michael's and UTCWI are located adjacent to each other and enjoy a very close working relationship.

Three of the Jamaican libraries use the same database management software. ITLD, UTCWI and St. Michael's each have a computerized catalogue based on the CDS-ISIS software supplied by the National Library of Jamaica.

Zenas Gerig serves as the node library for the national theological sub-system within Jamaica's College Libraries Information Network (Colinet).

Colinet, which began in 1985, comprises the libraries of all the teachers, community and theological colleges in Jamaica.

Data collection

Data was collected in three ways: via documentary study, a short questionnaire and interviews. The documents and the questionnaire were a rich source of background information on the libraries and their parent-bodies. The interview was the key data collection instrument. Separate, unstructured interviews were held with library administrators and heads of the respective theological colleges. The interviews began by focusing on the nature of co-operation with other theological libraries and institutions, the attitudes of the respondents towards co-operation as well as the likely barriers to co-operation.

Literature survey

Although "Theology and religion cannot claim to suffer from poor bibliographic control" (Cornish 1993, 24), finding material specifically on theological libraries was truly a challenge. Eventually, the American Theological Library Association's (ATLA) Religion Database and the National Library of Australia's Australian Library and Information Science Abstracts (ALISA) Database yielded valuable references.

Geuns and Wolf-Dahm (1998) identify three factors that encouraged co-operation among theological libraries in Europe: the need to rebuild after the Second World War which forced theological libraries to seek mutual support; the thrust towards ecumenism after the Second Vatican Council which made it possible for Catholic theological libraries to collaborate with other Christian libraries; and the replacement of clergy-librarians by qualified lay persons. Hamilton (1995) also identifies ecumenism along with financial stringency as the motivation for the formation in 1981 of the Joint Theological Library in Melbourne, Australia, a partnership between the Uniting Church of Australia (combining Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists) and the Society of Jesus in Australia. Zweck (1997) cites the growth in student numbers, particularly of laypersons, as having placed great pressure on the parlous resources of over-taxed theological

libraries and forced librarians in Australia to look at ways of working together to maximize the use of scarce resources.

The literature covers several examples of co-operation among theological libraries. Zweck (1997, 7) highlights the production of a co-operative collection development policy for the Sydney College of Divinity in Australia which he described as "the first such co-ordinated approach ever undertaken by theological libraries in this part of the world". This was a joint collection development policy of the nine libraries of the Sydney College of Divinity. Harris (1997) examines the formation of a Joint Library Committee in Bangalore, India, which has increased contact among that area's theological libraries. Activities have included the publication of a Handbook which functions as both a directory and union list of serials, reciprocal borrowing and joint training. More recently, attention has shifted to the possibility of electronic networking.

Union catalogues have been a common manifestation of co-operation among secular libraries. However, Cornish (1993) notes that union catalogues specifically for theological libraries are the exception rather than the rule. Zweck (1992) even doubts whether online union catalogues are indeed feasible for small theological libraries. He therefore recommends a simpler and cheaper alternative: involvement in a national bibliographic network such as the Australian Bibliographic Network or the New Zealand Bibliographic Network. Costs would be far less than if theological libraries had to create their own network. Also, national bibliographic networks tap into a much wider circle of libraries and, consequently, provide access to many more theological resources than are held by the aggregate of theological libraries.

There are a number of barriers to co-operation among theological libraries. Twiest and Badke (1992), in their study of a library consortium among three evangelical libraries in Canada note that a possible loss of denominational identity and a fear of compromise in beliefs were the main barriers to co-operation. Denominationalism was also identified by Cornish (1993) and Harris (1997). Zweck (1997) identifies chronic under-funding and under-staffing as well as a lack of adequate facilities and equipment as the main problems in Australia. This lack of finance has explained why the vast majority of theological libraries in Australia have still not introduced automation (Zweck

1992). Harris (1997) indicates that the absence of automated catalogues in Bangalore has similarly retarded moves towards electronic networking among theological libraries there. Reflecting on thirty years of co-operation among theological libraries in Chicago, one researcher has concluded that:

a program of effective resource sharing among the Chicago area theological libraries has yet to succeed because of the inability to provide easy bibliographic access to the holdings of the libraries (Smith 1996, 171).

The Caribbean

The Caribbean's theological libraries rarely appear in the literature. Hivale (1991) highlights a joint training exercise for theological libraries – a mini-seminar in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1991 sponsored by the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association, and with participants from Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti and Jamaica. McKoy's (1994) study on theological libraries in Jamaica, which barely touched co-operation, found that co-operation was generally limited to reciprocal use of library facilities by students. This mutual access was done more "in the spirit of friendly co-operation than through formal agreement" (McKoy 1994, 72). She also noted that automation was rare among the island's theological libraries.

Results and discussion

Current status of co-operation

Co-operation exists at a national level, namely among the four libraries in Jamaica. These libraries engage in co-operation largely on a one-to-one basis in four areas: shared access to library resources, rationalisation of journal subscriptions, exchange of databases and of library materials. This co-operation is both formal and informal.

Some of the libraries allow mutual access to their information resources. In some cases, students and faculty even have borrowing privileges at other libraries. Rationalisation of journal subscriptions is the second area of co-operation, though this only involves two libraries, UTCWI and St. Michael's. Exchange of databases is the third area of co-operation. UTCWI and St. Michael's have an informal agreement to exchange their automated library catalogues. The fourth area of co-operation

is in the exchange (albeit it one-way so far) of library material. The UTCWI librarian has occasionally sent over to St. Michael's material more suited to the latter's curriculum, especially material on Catholicism.

On a regional level, co-operation does not exist. The Jamaican libraries do not co-operate with either of the two libraries in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. The latter do not co-operate with each other.

Perceptions of co-operation

In general, administrators and librarians alike were in favour of co-operation. However, in the few instances where reservations were expressed, these reservations came from administrators rather than librarians. At St. John Vianney, the Dean of Studies stated that co-operation "isn't a felt need" (Johnston 2003). The limited evidence therefore suggests that librarians are more attuned to the need for and possibilities for co-operation than administrators.

Amalgamation of libraries can be considered an extreme form of co-operation. UTCWI was itself the product of a merger of three distinct theological colleges each with their own library in 1966. Asked whether they would consider the idea of a joint library to serve both St. Michael's and UTCWI, given the very close relationship between the two respective colleges and their location adjacent to each other, the administrators of both colleges rejected the notion. There were fears that such a merger would place an intolerable financial burden on St. Michael's. Moreover, it was pointed out that uniting the two libraries would require the seal of approval of all the mother-churches.

Factors promoting co-operation

Geography, strong links between parent institutions, the use of CDS-ISIS as a common platform and a vibrant national information system have fostered close co-operation. Geography has facilitated co-operation since, of the six Caribbean libraries, the most co-operating libraries are located on the same island, Jamaica. In other words, co-operation exists at a national level. Furthermore, the deepest co-operation exists between the libraries at St. Michael's and UTCWI, which are located adjacent to each other.

Strong administrative links between the colleges have fostered co-operation in some instances. For example, integration between St. Michael's and UTCWI – common courses, common exams, sharing of lecturers – has obviously spawned the close relationship between their respective libraries. The third factor promoting co-operation is the use of CDS-ISIS as a common platform, which has enabled the exchange of databases between UTCWI and St. Michael's.

A vibrant national information system is the fourth factor that facilitates co-operation. Jamaica's national information system has inspired an open system of co-operation among that island's theological libraries. As illustrated above, the promotion of CDS-ISIS by the National Library fosters the sharing of databases. In addition, the existence of a national theological sub-system within Colinet is a potentially useful pillar for supporting further co-operation. However, this sub-system though existing on paper is not yet functional.

Barriers to co-operation

Geography, finance, the use of incompatible software, the small number of research students in the colleges comprising CATS, a focus on preparing students to become ministers rather than theological education more broadly-speaking, the absence of librarians on the CATS steering committee and denominationalism appear to be barriers to co-operation. Geography, or more specifically distance, has apparently impeded co-operation at the regional level – the Caribbean Sea perniciously divides. Co-operation is absent between the Jamaican libraries and their regional counterparts in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Similarly, the two libraries in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago do not co-operate with each other.

Finance, which the literature suggests is a potent factor bringing libraries together, is an all-too-effective deterrent to co-operation. As Jenkin (1992, 67) observes, "It is easier to co-operate when there is less pressure on the budget, because in straitened financial times our first responsibility is to our own immediate users". St. John Vianney acknowledged that finance was a barrier to co-operation, especially with St. Michael's.

St. Michael's, in turn, cited lack of finance as the major obstacle impeding the merger of its library with neighbouring UTCWI. Pondering the

suggestion of a merger, the Dean of Studies explained, "It would mean expenditure of money which St. Michael's cannot afford" (Milner 2003).

Apart from finance, those libraries catering exclusively to undergraduate students felt less need to co-operate. The Deans at St. John Vianney and St. Michael's both expressed this view (Johnston 2003; Milner 2003). They felt that their libraries amply supported the academic programmes. They acknowledged that were their institutions to focus on graduate programmes, especially research programmes, their libraries would need more (access to) resources generally: more Catholic resources along with more ecumenical resources.

Incompatibility in software is clearly a barrier to co-operation. This is especially the case in Jamaica where the National Library promotes the use of CDS-ISIS as a common platform. Thus Zenas Gerig library, which uses alternative software, is unable to exchange bibliographic data with the other three theological libraries.

It is always a point of interest whether the presence of a librarian increases the likelihood of co-operation. One of the six libraries, St. Michael's, is without the services of a full-time librarian or even access to professional expertise on a regular basis. However, this research has unearthed no evidence that there has been less co-operation because of the absence of a librarian.

Commenting on his own library's lack of links with the other CATS libraries, the Dean at St. John Vianney commented that the need for sharing information resources "has not hit us in quite the same way it has hit other people" (Johnston 2003). He explained further that the very *raison d'être* of the colleges was the main culprit impeding co-operation. The colleges were basically institutions for preparing students to become ministers rather than for theological education. Furthermore, ministers are formed for denominations; hence the library and its resources are slanted that way and have a "strong denominational bias". But, he conceded, the need for co-operation would be stronger if the theological colleges were faculties or schools of theology rather than centres for ministerial formation.

The absence of librarians on the CATS steering committee has undoubtedly stymied co-operation among the association's libraries. The administrators from St. John Vianney, St. Michael's, Codrington and UTCWI respectively, all confirmed that

CATS was not a forum for discussion of library matters (Johnston 2003; Milner 2003; Titus 2003; Williams 2003). Instead, the caucus dealt with curriculum and examinations matters; those who attended meetings were generally deans and/or principals. Insofar as administrators seem to be less aware of the possibilities of co-operation, the unfortunate absence of librarians is no doubt a factor why CATS has not promoted co-operation among its member libraries.

Denominationalism has often been cited in the literature as an obstacle to co-operation. In this study, denominationalism seems to be a potential barrier to co-operation but the evidence is not overwhelming. Responses were mixed as to the possibility of co-operation between a library that was part of the ecumenical movement and one which was not.

Conclusion

This case study has revealed an absence of co-operation at the regional level; but co-operation, both formal and informal, exists at the national level, among the four libraries in Jamaica: ITLD, UTCWI, Zenas Gerig and St. Michael's. Moreover, the four are apparently complimentary libraries. For these Jamaican libraries, co-operation is mainly in the area of shared access to library resources. Two of these libraries, UTCWI and St. Michael's, have informally rationalised their journal subscriptions, exchanged databases and can boast of an incipient exchange programme; but the later two ventures have been one-way transactions to date. On the other hand, Codrington College in Barbados and St. John Vianney in Trinidad and Tobago do not co-operate with each other or with any of the other four libraries. Furthermore, with the exception of the two in Jamaica, the CATS libraries do not co-operate with each other.

In general, those interviewed were in favour of co-operation. However, in the few instances where reservations were expressed, these reservations came from administrators rather than librarians. One administrator questioned the need for co-operation while two others were cautious about co-operation and the potential impact of doctrinal differences.

The factors promoting co-operation are: geography, strong links between parent institutions, the use of CDS-ISIS as a common platform and

a vibrant national information system. The four co-operating libraries are all in the same island. Because St. Michael's and UTCWI operate almost like sister-colleges, their respective libraries have been collaborating very closely. The use of CDS-ISIS as a common platform has enabled the exchange of databases between St. Michael's and UTCWI. Jamaica's national information system has also fostered an open spirit of co-operation.

Seven barriers to co-operation have been identified. These are: geography or more specifically distance; finance; the use of incompatible software; the small number of research students in the colleges comprising CATS; the absence of librarians on the CATS steering committee; denominationalism; and a focus on preparing students to become ministers rather than on theological education more broadly-speaking.

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