

Cataloging in Swaziland

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## Cataloging in Swaziland

### Introduction

Over the past year I have had the privilege of volunteering on a project to copy catalog books for the library of the Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU). The project director was Dr. Sharon I. Bull, Dean of Academic Services & Library Director of Northwest Nazarene University, in Nampa, ID. Sharon graciously allowed me to interview her via email, and I will begin this paper with that interview and an outline of the Swaziland cataloging project. I will then review some of the literature concerning theological library needs and projects around the world.

### The Swaziland cataloging project

Becky: How did this project come about, and how did you get involved?

Sharon: A couple of projects came together for this project to come into being. I had helped with a theological library in Haiti in 1987 and in 1991 I spent a month at what is now the Faculty of Theology library there in Swaziland. Because of that involvement and people I worked with, I became part of EDUF [Education Development United Foundation, a Nazarene organization involved with education in Africa] and proposed that for my sabbatical from NNU in 2006, I would visit the small Nazarene libraries in Africa, write assessment reports and conduct a workshop for the staff. I became a known entity to the Nazarene educators and sometimes was asked for suggestions.

The second project began in about 2012, when the International Board of Education for the Nazarene denomination began working on a digital library project and the librarians in the USA, Canada and Britain were invited to help launch this digital library. The project manager, Tammy Condon, saw how the librarians worked together and knew we had established a strong, positive group.

In 2014, I think it was, I got a plea for help from the Faculty of Theology library as the system they had been using, Librarians Helper, had crashed and was no longer

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supported. About the same time, Tammy had also received an inquiry about a library system and we got our heads together to see what we could do.

Becky: You took a group to Africa... what was accomplished on that trip? And what was left to do when you came home?

Sharon: In the spring of 2015, Tammy asked me if I would consider going to Swaziland to get them started with OPALS. By this time all 3 libraries of Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU) had the infrastructure in place. There were going to be just a couple of librarians, but in the fall Tammy felt we should take a larger team. Tammy dreams big dreams and she wanted this project to be successful and to give the staff in Swaziland a shot in the arm. We then ended up with 6 librarians (5 from the USA and 1 from the UK), a computer person who was actually there to work on another project but was certainly part of our team, Tammy and her 12 year old son, and my sister who had planned to go with me when it was just going to be a couple of people.

Tammy's wisdom in deciding we needed a larger group became evident very quickly. I was the team coordinator and the other 5 librarians each took on a specialty so to speak. One had great experience with Circulation, another helped with the webpage, another with cataloging etc. As well, because there were 5 libraries involved, each of them teamed up with a library.

SANU has existed as a university only since 2010. Before that there were 3 separate colleges. The College of Nursing and the Teacher Training College are located just a few yards apart in Manzini. They have been in existence in one form or another since the late 1920s/early 1930s. The Bible College is located in Siteki, about an hour away and it dates back even earlier. The three institutions became SANU and at this point have maintained their individual libraries and campuses.

We were there for about 2 and 1/2 weeks and in that time we were able to get all 3 libraries off to a solid start. Together we catalogued almost 1600 items, barcoded 8000 items, set up circulation loan rules etc. Now, 14 months later, there are about 10,000 items in the 3 systems!

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In addition to the 3 SANU libraries, we had staff from Nazarene Theological College in Malawi and also NTC in South Africa. All together there were 9 individuals we trained. All but one had some type of library training and experience. All spoke English so that really helped in terms of communication. At least one of the SANU librarians has been helping the librarians at another institution in Kenya as they get started with OPALS.

Because of the distance and travel time to get to the Theology library, we were not able to get as much done there. I also knew that the shelf list cards there were in very good shape and while we couldn't find all the disks, we could take photos of the shelf list cards and so that is what we did. What remained at the other 2 sites was not overwhelming and they would be able to get it done.

Besides the cataloging from the shelf list cards, the other thing we have done is some question answering but those are few and far between.

Becky: How many libraries are involved in this project? Where are they located? What kinds of schools are they (purpose, students, etc)?

Sharon: The Church of the Nazarene has a very comprehensive system of education around the world. There are many Bible institutes which would offer certificates or diplomas, then colleges and seminaries offering degrees. There are about 30 - 35 institutions outside of North America - in Central America, South America, Asia, Europe, Australia, etc. Some are probably not at all ready for a cloud-based system, but others are. Since the trip to Swaziland, a seminary in the Philippines and a Theological College in England have gone live.

Becky: How many books?

One of the next things I will be working on is a survey for all of these libraries so we can learn more about size, system used, training of staff, infrastructure etc.

The libraries in Swaziland might have about 12000 items total. The largest is Faculty of Theology. The librarians all took advantage of this opportunity to do some weeding.

Becky: How many volunteers worked on the cataloging?

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There were a total of 20 individuals who participated in the cataloging after we returned. A few more signed up but then were not able to do any. I am really pleased at the response I got and the commitment the volunteers had for the project.

Becky: Where did the money come from?

There were some funds available through the International Board of Education and then we solicited support as we could. It was so wonderful to see how it all came together.

Becky: What problems have you encountered, and how were they overcome?

Because we made such a quick decision to go with more people and then for Swaziland January was the best time (we had been thinking March) we were barely ready to go! None of us had used OPALS except to look at it and see it demoed. When I look back and realize how smoothly the whole project went, I think the ease of OPALS really was a significant factor. The biggest problem we had was losing Wi-Fi connections from time to time.

Becky: How was the decision made to use OPALS [OPen-source Automated Library System]?

In 2014, I put out a question on the ACL Discussion list for recommendations for a strong, easy to use, not expensive library system. I had several responses. The more I learned about OPALS the better it sounded. I did not want the decision to be made solely by librarians here in the USA. A librarian visited in the summer of 2014 to help get the wireless infrastructure in place, and he sat down with the librarians, showed OPALS to them and got their feedback. They liked what they saw and that helped us feel positive about moving ahead.

Becky: What are some advantages and disadvantages of the OPALS system?

Sharon: OPALS is extremely user friendly and very straight forward. The records are MARC records so could easily be exported if necessary. There are good reports although there could always be more! Support from OPALS is excellent. They have done multiple webinars and respond very promptly.

Becky: What has been the response of the users to the new system?

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Sharon: Faculty and students at SANU are excited about the system. The librarian in the UK is delighted with how OPALS works. SANU showed the system to the University of Swaziland librarians and they were very impressed.

Becky: What advice would you give to someone wanting to tackle a similar project? What do you wish you had known before you started?

Sharon: You can never be too organized! Because of the short time we were there, it was really great to have 6 librarians. I have said that I really didn't do much and don't know the system nearly as well as the others as they were working in it and I was busy planning for the next day! We managed to stay about a day ahead of what we wanted to be doing. Swaziland was a great place to start because the staff were trained so we didn't have to start from scratch. There may be libraries in the future where we will have to spend a week just teaching basic library things. It was also great because it is English speaking and the collections are almost entirely in English. That will not be the same in other locations.

Becky: How can volunteers help at this point?

There is nothing more to do with the Swaziland project now. I am so thankful for everyone of the volunteers! We are contemplating where we will go next so there may be more volunteer work in the future.

Becky: Is there anything specific you would like to say to theological librarians?

Sharon: Theological librarians are often in small settings and often 'solo librarians'. Find ways to connect with the larger community if you can. Don't think because your library is small that you can't automate. OPALS is an extremely reasonably priced system. (Bull, 2017)

When Sharon's team went to Swaziland in January of 2016, 30 of the 52 higher education systems in the Church of the Nazarene had little or no computerized system for their libraries (Stocker, 2015). The OPALS system that was implemented allows for additional global libraries for the Church of the Nazarene to join whenever the infrastructure can be put in place. Since that time Mozambique, Portugal, the Philippines, Kenya, Manilla, the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (with students

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from PNG, Samoa, Australia, Philippines, Korea, Mongolia and Indonesia) and others have all begun the process of being linked to the network, with the ability to use the OPALS system and share cataloging resources.

In February 2016 Sharon and her team started testing the instructions they had prepared for volunteer catalogers. They developed a website for signing up, uploaded the files of catalog cards and instructions, and on March 21, 2016, Sharon Bull sent out a call for volunteers on the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL) listserv to help with the entry of data into the Faculty of Theology Library system. I saw that message and responded. I am not Nazarene, but as a Christian library student interested in cataloging it was a great opportunity to learn and do something of value. One year and 20 volunteers later, that work was finished. Almost 6000 items have been entered into the SANU system. You can view the new library website at <http://sanu.gnec.kari.opalsinfo.net/bin/home>

The librarians in Africa have been very appreciative of the resources they have been given access to. Below is a response from the NTCCA Librarian (Bull, n.d.-a)

To: Dr T. Condon  
From: Moses Zigwewa.  
Date: 31/06/2016.

### RE-WORD OF APPRECIATION

I am very much grateful to God for the training that have received in OPALS and very appreciative to the Visiting Team for the time and energy spent in empowering us to be effective Library stewards, they have done an excellent job and am really thankful to each of them.

Before this training I had no idea as to how a digital library works. The Swaziland training has equipped me with advanced and greater skills in bar-coding, cataloguing, circulation and getting into relevant websites and creating web links for students to access information easily. Honestly this is indeed a gigantic step in a right direction. As a

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librarian at NTCCA I have really been empowered, am no longer the same and NTCCA library will no longer be the same.

I believe that when the system is fully implemented at NTCCA it will expand the radius of education and research as it is going to afford us access to E-Resources thereby simplifying teaching activities at NTCCA and Nazarene Theological College of Central Africa School of Extension (NTCCASE).

Yours Faithfully,

Moses.

And in a Facebook post on August 12, 2016, Sharon shared:

Today I'm sharing excerpts from a message I received from Lungile Virtue Duze at SANU. "Things are fine here at SANU and I am so happy for Noreen. We organized a mini workshop for faculty and staff where we were orienting them on OPALS. You will be surprised that it turned out to be a big thing... a launch for the system. We roped in some of the publishers such Emerald who did not only talk about their electronic databases but also motivated staff on the importance of academic research. After the presentations, everyone was excited about the system and inspired to read and publish.

I am saying this event turned out to be a big one as the VC's representative made a key note address overlaying the Story of OPALS (how the system came about). The event was on a Wednesday 13 July, but was aired on national radio and TV up to Sunday 17 July. I had invited some of our colleagues from the other universities and they were aghast and congratulated SANU for having such an on point system.

### **Literature Review**

My own small part in this cataloging project has inspired me to look for other ways to help theological librarians around the world, and to investigate other needs and what projects might be possible. My research led me to several articles of interest.

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Sandy Ayer of Ambrose Seminary made a presentation to the World Christianity Interest Group of the ATLA in 2014 (Ayer & McMahon, 2014). There he discussed the needs of francophone African theological education. He reported that there is a shortage of French-language theological materials, in both print and e-book formats. Once more the Nazarenes have filled a need by digitizing about 90 French-language theological books from the public domain and their own denomination, but they do not seek out non-Nazarene publishers. There are also the problems of poor internet service, numerous difficulties in shipping available resources to this area, and the ever present prohibitive factor of insufficient monetary resources.

One project Ayer mentioned that could be pursued is the use of seminary curricula in a form that can be loaded into and read on a cell phone, such as course packages that have been developed in Spanish. Most Africans own cell phones, and cell service is reliable in the larger centers. Several years ago I heard a missionary from the ministry OneHundredFold, and it occurs to me that they might be able to help with this kind of need. They make Biblical teaching tools available for cell phone use (“OneHundredFold —,” n.d.).

Ayers continued his presentation with an account of a trip to the Philippines, where he conducted a library seminar on the future of libraries. He moderated a discussion held by the 26 participants in which a plan for collaboration between local libraries was a huge success. A presentation on free internet resources was also very valuable to the participants.

Another presentation at that same ATLA session was made by Melody McMahon. She had toured Catholic libraries in the Philippines, Vietnam, and China. She listed the following six challenges that most of those libraries are facing:

1. Home-grown computer, not online, catalogs
2. No e-resources, no remote access

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3. Many staff are not trained as librarians, nor do they have theology degrees, and only one I met has both.
4. Very small budget for resources and a lack of collection development policy
5. No collaborative arrangements
6. Facilities are different in each location; some are sufficient with space for more material, others have very little space for resources and their use. There is no attention to preservation from humidity, extreme heat, etc.

She reflects that, “The single most important thing that could benefit the libraries I visited is to collaborate through networking and consortia.” This appears to be a common thread running throughout the literature.

Alvaro Perez has a list similar to McMahon’s, from a Latino environment:

1. Fewer bibliographical resources, some of them obsolete.
2. Understaffed departments.
3. Limited technology information access, not to mention upgrades.
4. Only occasional equipment renovation.
5. Inadequate infrastructure.
6. Inadequate information services.
7. etc.—essentially, no library development.

He also closes with a call for collaboration, not only among Latino libraries, but also for international collaboration (Pérez, 2011).

Concerning collaboration in a very different context, Penelope Hall writes about The International Council of Theological Library Associations, with suggestions for how ATLA can collaborate with that European library association, including a complete, systematically ordered, multilingual thesaurus of vocabularies, and the technical system to make it usable, in order to index theological resources across many languages (Hall, 1997).

## Conclusion

This project has been very rewarding not just for SANU, but for me personally. From my interactions with Sharon I surmise that she would say the same thing about her own part in the project.

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International collaboration benefits all parties involved; those who are assisting and teaching are learning, growing, and being blessed just as much as those who are being assisted and trained.

Collaboration, the sharing of resources and knowledge both at home and abroad, is a key ingredient. We can do this through our organizations such as ATLA and ACL, through our schools, and through our denominations.

The story behind the Swaziland project, and the research into other stories, has inspired me to seek out ways to help librarians and ministries around the world. Not long ago I was visiting with a friend who is a missionary in South Africa with East Mountain, where she is involved with discipleship and training. They have a small library there (probably about the size of a good pastor's library), and she mentioned in passing that maybe I could come organize their books. Ideas of how to make that passing-thought dream a let's-do-this reality have dominated my own thoughts ever since. I look forward to seeing how God uses us, and our profession, in the future!

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