

THE QUEEN OF SCIENCES: INDEXING THEOLOGY AND DISCIPLINES RELATED TO RELIGION

Thomas Aquinas called theology the “queen of sciences,” using science in its medieval sense of a pursuit of knowledge or a knowledge-base. In his day most people assumed that all intellectual action came down to questions about God, and in practice that was pretty much the case. Climb into your time machine and take a ramble through the Bodleian Library in Oxford any time before about 1550, unchain and open any of the small collection of books it contained, and you’d almost certainly be reading about a religious topic.

After that, of course, things began to change. Now most people regard theology as a rather obscure topic. Indeed, Stephen Hawking, in *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1998), felt emboldened enough to state that physics has usurped theology’s crown, taking over as the discipline that answers the ultimate questions about who we are and why we are here. Whether or not one agrees with him that we have a new queen of sciences, there’s no doubt that many people are uninterested in, and even uncomfortable with, the kinds of religious questions that once excited the world. Even in Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, which tend to be more directly oriented to spiritual issues than are our secular Western societies, it’s hard to imagine a city in which the chief talk in the taverns and on the street corners is of the edicts of the Council of Chalcedon and the divine nature of Christ, as was the case in Byzantine Constantinople.

Nevertheless, society continues to crave spiritual writings, even if it’s the platitudes of *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* or the ersatz mysticism of *The Da Vinci Code*. If they were in the running, the Bible and the Quran would always be on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are not known as “people of the book” for nothing. Theology and spirituality remain living academic disciplines, with new schools of thought (feminist philosophy of religion, liberation theology) in constant development. Non-western theological works now appeal to worldwide audiences. Religious topics already make up a hefty portion of the bookselling market and are the fastest growing segment of the publishing industry (*Publisher’s Weekly*, 8/2/2004).

The vast majority of these works need indexes, and indexers to write them. Yet because of perceptions of difficulty, yawn-inducing tendencies, and simple disinterest in religious subject matter, many indexers are reluctant to tackle theological works. I’ve often had lucrative and interesting projects referred to me by indexers who are just afraid to handle writings about God. This article is an attempt to help indexers take a second look at theology and other religious disciplines. The field has economic potential, as well as the intellectual stimulation indexers crave.

What Is Theology?

First, however, it might be useful to define terms. What is theology? There’s both a specific and a loose use of this word. Etymologically, “theology” is derived from the Greek *theos logos*, or study of God. Most frequently the term is used to describe the study of religious practice, belief, and experience as an academic discipline, particularly when approached in a systematic way. (Thus, “theology” can also be used to indicate a specific belief system.) Academic theology is particularly associated with analyses of the nature

of God and God's relationship to the world. Not surprisingly, theology is closely associated with theistic conceptions of religious belief, in which God is framed as having some sort of personal identity.

"Theology" can also be defined in a much, much looser sense, to cover any religious topic at any level, theistic or nontheistic. Used in this way, it's sometimes described as "talk about God," encompassing everything from the writings of Deepak Chopra to the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia. From this perspective it would not be unusual to refer to Advaita Vedanta as "Sanskrit theology," even though it has no concept of God in a personal sense. (See Paul J. Griffiths, "Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine," *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright, NY: OUP, 2005, pp.59-79.) In this article, when I use the term "theology," I will generally be using it in this looser sense. If I use it in a more specific sense, I will generally refer to it as "academic theology."

One problem that some people have with theology as a discipline is that it usually, although not always, takes place within a framework of belief. Indeed, an old Catholic definition of theology is "faith seeking understanding." This is not unique to theology; many scholars in other disciplines base their work on a foundation of accepted knowledge, whether it's Darwinian evolutionary theory or deconstructionism. But much, though not all, "talk about God" grows out of a corpus of revelatory wisdom subject to limited questioning. The degree of dependence on revelation varies enormously, but it remains a factor central to the understanding of any theological text.

Cultural Milieu and Personal Belief

Indexers are well aware of the challenges inherent in indexing both familiar and unfamiliar disciplines. When we are closely attuned to subject matter, we may miss or ignore common-sense or every-day language in favor of jargon that we don't even recognize as such. I'm using jargon here in its non-pejorative sense, to mean the specialized vocabulary common to a specific discipline. Jargon makes talking about a subject easier. My 75-year-old mother recently got her first computer, and explaining even simple operations was at first problematic; she didn't know what a diskette is, for instance. I had to think through the specialized language about computers I now take for granted in order to get ideas across to her. We can communicate about computers much more easily now that she has begun to pick up the language.

The other danger of growing comfortable with a particular topic is that it becomes fatally easy to structure the index using the classical ideologies of that discipline. As someone both brought up Roman Catholic and trained as a medievalist and a Roman Catholic theologian, I inevitably think about sacraments, for instance, in a certain way and even in a certain order. But that may not correspond at all to the way the reader thinks about them, and the way I structure the index may not, therefore, be helpful. Alternatively, the author might be proposing a radical approach to the topic, on which I might be tempted to impose a structure that is traditional to the discipline, but that just doesn't work for this particular study of it.

Indexers seldom are a perfect intellectual match for the books they are hired to do, so it's perhaps more common for us to find ourselves working on an alien topic or on an aspect or perspective of a discipline with which we are not familiar. This lack of

sophistication may serve a purpose if the product in question is aimed at a beginning audience, but becomes more of a problem when it is composed at an advanced level. We all know the pitfalls here, and every indexer has worked out ways of dealing with them. We don't know the jargon; sometimes we don't even recognize that the jargon *is* jargon (I once knew an indexer who got halfway through a book on pension benefit plans before discovering that "defined benefit plans" meant a specific type of retirement arrangement); the book's argumentative structure may appear wholly foreign; and we may have to struggle to avoid applying a more familiar intellectual approach to a strange topic.

These problems occur in every field within which indexers work, but they are especially at issue in theology. Assumptions about religious belief, practice, and spirituality form part of the deep structure of all cultures, which makes it hard to be aware of them in the conscious manner required of the diligent indexer. This may be especially true of our secular society, where God and talk about God doesn't live on the surface of the world. Certainly I have found it easier to explain the notion of theism to people from Asian religious traditions than to get across nontheistic concepts of God to Westerners.

Moreover, because theology is so often practiced from a standpoint of belief, it tends to carry a lot of baggage with it, even in supposedly uncomplicated texts. Like a poor-performing airline carrier, indexers may find themselves losing track of all those suitcases full of background information rolling down the intellectual conveyor belt, and important topics may find themselves wandering disconsolately around the airport terminal of the index, permanently separated from their related concepts. For instance, in a devotional book about the rosary, I found that the indexer had made an entry for the glorious mysteries, but none for the joyful or sorrowful mysteries. There were, however, entries for the scourging of Christ, and for the crucifixion, which are part of the sorrowful mysteries, and entries for the Assumption were not doubled-posted or cross-referenced under the glorious mysteries. If you have no idea what I am talking about, well – I suspect you have something in common with the indexer who worked on this book. It is intended to be a simple piece of writing for a general audience, but to someone outside its cultural milieu it must seem like indexing Chinese.

The prospective indexer of religious products may face any one of five situations in which the cultural milieu or personal beliefs of the book and the indexer raise difficulties in proceeding with the production of the index.

"I was brought up without any religious tradition whatsoever. How do I index theology?" I majored in medieval studies in college. One of my fellow students in this small cross-disciplinary program was the child of psychologists determined to raise their children free of the neuroses induced by religion. I was never certain of how they felt about their eldest child's four-year commitment to studying a world intimately related to belief processes. But I do know that my friend's biggest difficulty in pursuing her studies was her lack of familiarity with the kinds of assumptions and motivations of a world imbued with religious inculturation. Imagine trying to comprehend something like chantry endowments without any experience or sense of how the church can act upon human existence. This is not a matter of belief per se, but of cultural instantiation. I have been confidentially informed by Chinese colleagues that their students in China who study English literature spend their first semesters on the Bible; it's the only way they can get their minds around Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It's not simply a matter of having to

master a foreign belief system, but of people raised in a secularized communist system handling the idea of any belief system. These same colleagues find that students with any sort of religious background tend to catch on more quickly to the underlying themes of classical Western literature.

Westerners without religious inculturation usually do not have the same problems reading *Paradise Lost*, of course. Its themes resonate throughout even our secular cultural life. However, tackling an index to a nonfiction text dealing with theology without any religious background may make one feel like the hapless Chinese students reading Milton: adrift without a paddle. However, indexers do have the materials to make a paddle out of their own cultural and social backgrounds. Theological issues are informed by the world in which they develop, the same world we live in, and recognizing that can help one understand more fully what the theologian is trying to do. The Dominican theologian Brian Davies once told me that the point of philosophy is a simple human goal: “How should we live?” How do we make moral decisions? How do we choose which path to take? At its heart theology is asking the kinds of questions that we all ask about how to best live a decent life, in a systematic way and from a perspective of faith.

“I was raised in Reform Judaism and I’m trying to index a book on Orthodox Jewish thought” – interdenominational indexing. Indexing a book on a topic within one’s own religious tradition but outside of one’s specific denomination creates its own problems. On the one hand, one assumes a certain level of familiarity with the basic dogmatics and principles of faith and practice. On the other hand, it’s a bit like that old saw about England and the United States being two countries separated by a common language. Denominations may have different meanings for the same term, or know a similar concept under a different term altogether, or have quite divergent systems for organizing thought or classifying spiritual activity. Many of these potential pitfalls can be checked with a simple awareness of potential conflict. It’s also worthwhile to have access to resources – dictionaries, encyclopaedias, websites – that specifically deal with the theology of the denomination you’re working on. You’ll get a very different discussion of predestination, for instance, depending on whether you look it up in a Protestant versus a Catholic source.

“I’m a Wesleyan Methodist and I’m working on a Muslimtext – inter-Abrahamic indexing. The so-called Abrahamic faiths – Jewish, Christian, Muslim – are very different, but they share a surprising number of assumptions about the nature of God. For instance, all three are theistic religions – God has a certain personal, present, humanized character, humans are viewed as created in God’s image, and God works directly in our world. While Jews and Christians are pretty well aware of the inter-relationships between their religious doctrines, people are often surprised at how much theory and even story that Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, the wise indexer approaches a sister faith with caution. Jews and Muslims don’t always understand the full theological ramifications of the Christian doctrine of the trinity, for instance, assuming that Christians are polytheists rather than monotheists. Christians often miss the relationship between praxis and theology as it functions in Judaism.

“I’m a Muslim trying to index a book on Buddhism” – indexing across belief systems. If the Abrahamic faiths must exercise caution in indexing across belief systems, East-West cross-indexing can be even more confusing. The most basic assumptions of Western religious systems can be quite foreign to Eastern faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, etc. Indeed, the very concept of theology as the study of the nature of God is somewhat alien in Eastern faiths, in which God is not necessarily a personalized being. Westerners also tend to assume that a religion like Hinduism, with its many manifestations of divinity, is a form of polytheism, whereas Hinduism holds that God is one (insofar as Hinduism conceives of God as a being of any sort).

Eastern religions have since the 1960s enjoyed a certain popularity in Western culture, and in some cases books apparently dealing with, say, Buddhist belief are in fact Westernized interpretations. Indexers need to understand the purpose and background of the author in order to approach the book from the proper perspective.

“I’m working on a topic within my own religious tradition, but it seems totally alien!” Despite claims of eternal verity and timelessness made by many if not most organized religions, belief and practice in fact vary infinitely and change constantly. Thus indexers may be surprised by texts that supposedly lie within a familiar tradition, but which upon closer examination contain all sorts of new and strange elements. Some of these result from entirely new strains of thought within theology, while others are the fruit of interdisciplinary academe. Recent examples include:

- A spiritual guide to the stations of the cross that includes Buddhist meditative techniques;
- An introduction to Kabbalah referencing modern psychosocial theory;
- A history of Islam utilizing concepts drawn from current ideas about the experience of ethnicity;
- A book about Hindu deities comparing them to Christian cults of saints.

Indeed, whole shelves-worth of theological schools arise, evolve, and fade every decade. Indexers who want to work on theology regularly do well to keep up with the latest trends and influences, in order not to be thrown by the use of the latest buzz words and pet theories in even the most traditional texts. Theological journals offer a good source of new ideas, but just reading the newspapers in the right frame of mind will keep the alert indexer attuned to evolving trends (such as the current celebrity mania for Kabbalah) that may turn up in theological projects.

Academic theology remains divisible into two major schools: analytic (or Anglo-American) theology, and Continental theology (a division paralleling analytic and Continental philosophy; see Carol Roberts’ article in this volume). Analytic philosophy emphasizes logical analysis of concepts and ideas, and is the dominant strain of theological thought in the United States and the United Kingdom. Continental philosophy presents more of a grab-bag than a united school of thought, signifying the methods and styles of a whole range of theologies practiced in Continental Europe, including phenomenology, existentialism, and deconstructionism. Continental philosophy could perhaps be said to study logical processes as much as it uses them. Awareness of these two major theological strains can help indexers get a better grip on new types of religious

thought; it helps, for instance, to know that feminist theology charges analytic theory with fundamental criticisms and borrows heavily from Continental philosophy.

While Eastern philosophies and religions have exercised a tremendous pull on Western thought in the last 40 years, it is only recently that any sort of sophisticated approach to non-Western belief systems has evolved in Western literature (and African and Native American religious beliefs remain obscure in most academic theological surveys). Nevertheless, indexers need to be aware of their potential influence on texts, either from a pop culture standpoint or from an academic approach. Most modern encyclopedias of theology now address Eastern religious thought. Even though these texts often try to frame Eastern philosophies in European knowledge systems, they can provide a useful guide to how Western thinkers (the authors of most of the texts indexers will be working on) use non-Western beliefs and practices.

Language and Religion

Do you like languages? Are you interested in things like etymology and the origins of language? Then you might do well at indexing theology. Theology is heavily involved with language. Both analytical and Continental philosophy delve into language theory and the study of religious language. Analytical philosophy was rejuvenated in the early 20th century by writers intent on teasing out the meaning and function of talk about God. Wittgenstein, one of the giants of Continental philosophy, closely related the language function to the human need for relationships, with each other and with God; his deconstruction of St. Augustine's description of learning to talk as a child has exercised enormous influence over both Anglo-American and European theologians. Advaita Vedanta, a school of Sanskrit religious thought, treats the actual vocalized syllables of the Veda texts as sacred objects.

Besides language theory, the indexer of theological works will need certain language skills. No, you don't actually have to be fluent in Hittite or Chaldean, or even Greek or Latin, to index most theological texts (although it might help in some cases). For one thing, there are just too many languages; detailed Biblical commentaries might reference texts in seventeen or more languages and dialects. Publishers have decided that most modern readers don't want to struggle with vast chunks of untranslated dead languages, and they're probably right, so they insist that even authors who write academic tomes for specialists translate quoted passages and transliterate texts in, say, Arabic or Greek into the Latin alphabet. However, indexers do have to be comfortable with handling unfamiliar speech: recognizing significant terms, identifying and joining together different grammatical forms of the same word, and reproducing them accurately in the index. Indexers who wish to work on high-end academic projects, especially commentaries on religious works and historical texts, will find this much easier if they have at least some knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. I have produced indexes for both Buddhist Chinese and Hindu theological works, and did not experience any hindrance from my total lack of knowledge of Chinese and my minimal familiarity with Sanskrit and Urdu; these works were created for a Western audience whose own linguistic skills were assumed to be minimal. I do, however, have a certain facility for recognizing how languages are put together, developed from exposure to a wide range of

languages and from studying and indexing linguistics texts, an undoubtedly useful background for any indexer.

Even if terms are translated and transliterated, however, the indexer may have to deal with diacriticals (an accent mark associated with an orthographic figure to indicate a phonetic value, for instance, the ç in François or the é in fiancé). One can add certain diacriticals using the insert symbol function in most word processing and indexing softwares, but this can be clumsy and time-consuming if there are a lot of them, and I've never yet met a software package which covers all the diacriticals required in a complex theological text. Indexers may need to work out a diacriticals "cheat sheet," with unique codes for each accent and letter, that the project's production editor can then convert. It's good to warn the editor or author about this at the start of the project. Sometimes the editor will have already worked out such a set of codes; if not, the indexer can easily create one. Just remember that the code has to be a unique set of characters so you can do a global conversion without risk of false positives. If I have a lot of diacriticals I like to be systematic about it. I'll do all vowels with long accent lines over them as the appropriate vowel between pipes; for instance ā would be represented as |a|, ē as |e|, etc. You would turn in the diacritical code list along with the final index.

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Bias, Polemic, and Apologetics

I mentioned earlier that the wise indexer keeps in mind that most theology is written from a perspective of faith. The author often is working not just with but from within a belief system. Theologians are not divorced from the concept of intellectual balance in their work, but they do start out inside a certain framework which inevitably colors their conclusions. In this way theology shares a certain commonality with political science and economics, fields in which academic writers often start from a specific point of view and with certain assumed values. Two recognized types of theological writing, polemic and apologetics, concern defending or attacking a particular set of beliefs. Apologetics is a systematic argument defending a specific doctrine (especially associated with early Christian writing); polemic is a systematic attack on a specific doctrine (such as Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's refutation of Christian Biblical exegesis, or Walter of St.-Victor's *Contra quatuor labyrinthos Franciae*). This means that the theological indexer may have to deal with the problem of bias, sometimes crude, sometimes quite sophisticated.

In such situations it behooves indexers to remember their job – helping readers find information in the text. If the information is one-sided or poorly presented or even just offensive, well – that, fortunately, is not our problem. This may mean using more generally-accepted terms that readers will more likely use rather than the text's specific terminology (albeit with appropriate cross-references). And tempting as it may be to imitate the indexer of a famous obstetrics/gynecology text who included the entry, "birds, for the, 1-495," when indexing some of the more virulent papal encyclicals, one should resist. One is not paid to give one's own opinion when indexing. Sensitive souls can

always opt to refuse a project due to its subject matter (not that one need tell the editor or author that).

It is with good reason that English gentlemen were admonished not to bring up the topics of sex, politics, or religion at the dinner table; they tend to get everyone's ire up, and indexers are no exception. Indexers may find their own prejudices the hardest to deal with, rather than their authors', when indexing theology. Being the queen of sciences, theology deals with a wide range of potentially inflammatory subjects. Be it birth control, abortion, homosexuality, feminism, charity, or child abuse, theological texts stand a good chance of pushing all your buttons. But swallowing hard and representing the text fairly is one thing; bias can be a far more subtle issue than that. For instance, as a Catholic, I was raised with a of sainthood that is quite oppositional to Protestant ideas of the saints. When I index a non-Catholic text, I have to remain aware of the assumptions I bring to the table, and not use them to force ideas in the text into "Kate"-shaped boxes.

Types of Religious Text

The queen of sciences is a wide-ranging discipline, and the potential indexer of theological works will encounter many different sorts of texts to work on, of varying degrees of difficulty and aimed at all sorts of readerships. The simpler works are not necessarily the easiest to work on as far as indexing goes. Academic theology can be mind-bending to read, but well-organized enough that its indexing is not a struggle. Spiritual works, however, whilst aimed at a far more general audience, are often loosely organized and highly allusive as to subject matter. They pose problems even to those familiar with such works and comfortable with their language and themes. Dictionaries and encyclopedias, although their length and range of subject matter make them formidable, probably constitute the easiest types of theological project for a "newbie" to handle. It's clear what the topic of each article is, terms are identified and defined, and the entire product aims to help people unfamiliar with the field. Those new to indexing, unless already comfortable with religious thought, should probably stay away from theology. Combining an untried skill with an unfamiliar subject area sounds like a bad idea because it is. For intrepid souls who want to give it a try, I've summarized some of the main types of theological texts below.

Academic theology. This is probably what most people think of when they imagine a theological work: a scholarly monograph systematically dealing with a religious concept, particularly one dealing with the nature of God. William Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) is a classic example. It focuses on the traditional attributes of God shared by all of the Abrahamic faiths – omniscience, omnipotence, and divine goodness – and the logical problems these pose (such as, how does an all-powerful, all-seeing, and unlimitedly good God allow evil to exist in the world?). Indexers who specialize in scholarly texts, particularly those who happily index philosophy, should enjoy indexing academic theology.

Philosophy of religion. Most academic theology could also be classified as philosophy of religion – philosophical works aimed at God and at religious belief. For earlier writers such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and John Locke, philosophy was pretty much

inseparable from talk about God. Modern philosophical writers interested in religion tend to write more exclusively, and philosophy of religion tends to be a separate specialty (although relatively modern philosophers, such as Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, wrote extensively about religious belief in their more general philosophical works). The classic topic for religious philosophers is the existence of God, from Anselm of Canterbury to Immanuel Kant, but all sorts of theological topics appeal to philosophers. While an academic theologian might approach a topic such as miracles from a historical framework, or in terms of how belief in miracles interacts with a particular doctrine, a philosopher of religion would tend to be more interested in, say, questions of logical probability. The journal *Faith and Philosophy* and the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (ed. William J. Wainwright, NY: OUP, 2005) provide useful guidance in this field.

The Bible. The Bible provides a branch of publishing all in itself. (Much of what I say about the Bible should apply to Quranic studies and to works on the canonical materials of other belief systems such as the Veda, albeit on a less extensive scale, but my own experience is mostly with Jewish and Christian Biblical theology, so I will restrict myself to discussing what I know best.) Most Bibles include a rudimentary index, but most of them don't begin to provide real access to the Biblical texts – see for instance the 15-page index in the standard edition of the *Jerusalem Bible* (first published in 1966), to a text which is 451 pages long. Technically it should be possible to produce a detailed, pinpoint Biblical index, using the standard chapters and verses as locators, which could be applied to any edition. However, the Bible (1) is very long; (2) its text is dense with information; (3) the text varies more than you might think between versions, and over time; and, perhaps most significantly, (4) the topics “read into” the Biblical text, which need to be indexed as much as the text itself, vary between religious traditions and over time, and are in any case implicit rather than explicit. Take, for instance, the Book of Daniel. Different parts of it are canonical (accepted as the inspired word of God) for different religions and denominations. The various translations (and I'm only dealing with English versions here) break the text up a little differently into the chapters and verses we tend to think of as fixed. And while, for a Christian, no index entry on foretellings of Christ would be complete without multiple references to Daniel, this book of the Bible has a whole different significance for Jews and Muslims.

Annotated Bibles – with scholarly notes providing information, historical context, definitions, and comments on the significance and interpretation of various passages – encompass a whole other level of information that requires indexing. I recently indexed a relatively straightforward annotated Bible aimed at Jews who were just beginning the process of Biblical study (*Jewish Study Bible*, Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation, ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, OUP, 2003). Only the commentary material was indexed, but I still had a hard time keeping the index under the required 50 pages. Nevertheless, it was an exhilarating experience. I've talked with William Meisheid, indexer and online help guru, about producing a universal Bible index, something we're both interested in pursuing. (If any readers are interested in talking further about developing such a project, please contact me at kmertes@hotmail.com.)

Biblical commentaries present detailed studies of a Biblical text, usually single books and in some cases only parts of a book, or perhaps even a few crucial verses. Commentaries present many challenges for the indexer. They assume knowledge of many abstruse theological concepts, reference sources, and influences in multiple languages, and require tables of such things as Biblical quotations, ancient sources, and modern scholarly authors as well as a subject index. The contents of the commentary proper are often densely written and heavily footnoted. A good example, Jacob Milgrom's *Leviticus 23-27* (NY: Doubleday, 2000, part of the Anchor Bible Press series), consists of verse-by-verse commentary, plus essays on specific topics such as Leviticus' documentation of the transformation of the Israelite sacrificial system, the development of purification ritual, the concept of holiness in ancient Israel, and the idea of the "resident alien" as laid out in Levitical law. Commentaries can be exhausting to index, but provide a real sense of accomplishment on completion. Some commentaries are in fact commentaries upon commentaries, such as J. W. Bowker's *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (CUP 1969). Targums, Aramaic translations or paraphrases of, and commentaries on, texts from the Hebrew Bible, were derived from oral readings that were part of early synagogue practice, and preserved in written form. Both Jewish and Christian scholars rely on targum literature.

Spiritual works. Although spiritual writings prove perhaps the most accessible type of religious text for many readers, in my opinion they are amongst the toughest works to index. Spirituality might be defined as any work which treats of the individual's response to the call of faith. Such texts range from essentially practical guides to religious practice, such as a book of meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through popular inspirational works like Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* (NY: Harcourt, 1998), about a young man's entry into a Trappist Monastery, to intellectually challenging works including Elaine Pagel's *Beyond Belief* (NY: Random House, 2003), chronicling the international scholar's work on the Gospel of Thomas as it interplays with the ordeal of her infant son's critical illness. By their very nature, spiritual works seldom follow a straightforward, logical argument, and they are highly allusive, playing (often indirectly) on multiple cultural and religious leitmotifs – a bit like rap music, one finds oneself chasing the samplings and sometimes missing the central themes.

Ritual works. Missals, prayerbooks, psalmodies – almost all religions have ritual practices, many of which require written guidebooks to help worshippers through the readings, public prayers, and activities, and quite a few of these guidebooks need indexes. Ritual guides are fun and often quite easy to index – if you understand the religious practices they are meant to serve. If possible, attend the appropriate service with a veteran member of the congregation to grasp the function of a ritual work.

History and archaeology. One of my favorite books of all time is Bernhard W. Anderson's *The Living World of the Old Testament* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2000). First published in 1958, it has gone through many printings and at least four editions. Anderson relates the Biblical text to the geography, history, and archaeology of the Middle East, using the latest research and scholarship. If you are a history or archaeology buff, you will enjoy this expansive wing of theological indexing.

Some of the published material has a highly polemical flavor, especially the work of some Biblical scholars supported by religious groups bound and determined to use archaeology to prove theological points; but most works are essentially secular scholarly studies. Some travel literature is related to this category, such as Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's *The Holy Land* (OUP, 1998), another classic work now in its fourth edition (originally published in 1980). While many of these texts are not theologically oriented, they nevertheless do require some knowledge of theological concepts. Shimon Gibson's *The Cave of John the Baptist* (NY: Doubleday, 2004), a study of the excavation of a cave used for ritual bathing as far back as the Iron Age and possibly associated with the baptismal practices of John the Baptist, necessarily discusses early Israelite purification rituals, first century *miqwot*, and Jewish, pagan, and early Christian notions of baptism. Other historical works are much more bound up with theological concepts: John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (3 vols, NY: Anchor Bible, 1991-2001) attempts to place Jesus in his proper first century context with an extensive study of the religious and political world in which early Christianity incubated.

Pre-modern works. Most religions rely heavily on tradition and the historical past, so pre-modern texts play a huge role in theological scholarship. Aside from canonical texts such as the Bible, the Quran, and the Veda, works such as the writings of Rabbi Moses Maimonides (a twelfth century Jewish commentator) and Thomas Aquinas (whose masterwork, the *Summa Theologia*, was written in the thirteenth century) still provided the framework for much modern theological writing. Such texts are objects of religious scholarship themselves and regularly produced in revised editions and new translations, both with and without additional commentary. The indexer has to work through multiple prisms, faithfully representing the concepts of the original authors and the culture and assumptions of the world in which they lived; the ideas of the modern editor; and the concerns of the current readership. I am currently working on a modern edition of Hugo Grotius' *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* (*The Laws of War and Peace*) [Liberty Fund, 2005], originally written in Latin in the 17th century (not strictly a theological text, but like many early modern works alight with talk about God). In the 18th century English translation, by John Morrice, itself based on an earlier French translation by Jean Barbeyrac, I have to somehow render in the index the different uses of the term "liberty:" Grotius' original conception of *libertas*, closer to our idea of free will; Barbeyrac's and Morrice's notes on *liberté* and "liberty," still not quite paralleling ours; the modern editor's comments on the developing concept of freedom, sometimes but not always related to the use of "liberty;" and finally, the modern readers' expectations. In addition, the particular mission of the text's publisher is to "foster thought and encourage discourse on enduring issues pertaining to liberty," which includes "the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals." Readers of Liberty Fund books tend to be especially interested in concepts of liberty and freedom and will look for them in the index. That's a great deal to hang on three little syllables. But that's the challenge and the job of working with historical materials.

Language texts. Earlier I discussed the indexer's need for certain linguistic skills when working on any theological text. Some religious writings are in fact language texts. Serious Jewish and Christian scholars study Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Aramaic, plus

many more obscure languages such as Hittite, Chaldean, and Syriac. Muslim scholars and devotees read the Quran in Arabic; Western converts to Buddhism often desire to master a number of the languages of that religion's important texts. Language textbooks are often written precisely for theological students and stress the vocabulary they require; instead of "la plume de ma tante," it's "l'argument d'ontologique de mon oncle" in these books! Depending on the level of expertise the book assumes on the part of the reader, the indexer may need anything from minimal to extensive knowledge of the language in question.

Still other texts could be classified as linguistic studies based largely or entirely on religious works. Many studies of the linguistic roots and lingering remnants of Aramaic are based on surviving Biblical fragments, for instance. Finally, philosophical studies of religious language – "the use of language in connection with the practice of religion," that is, to quote William P. Alston ("Religious Language" in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright, NY: OUP, 2005, p. 220), both talk *about* God and talk *to* God – form a whole sub-section on the library shelves of divinity schools. These works may concern themselves with logical analysis of religious statements, or predicates; or they may stress the understanding and expression of religious concepts. Such texts require indexers to be comfortable with linguistic theory, philosophical musings, and theological topics.

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Dictionaries and encyclopedias. Theological dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other types of reference work are a great place to start for indexers new to religious subject matter. They provide a ready-made source for information, and of course are aimed at readers who want to find out more about a concept. They also divide into discrete, readily-recognizable topics. However, they tend to be quite long, and size is daunting when one is tackling a new knowledge-base. Also, even introductory guides may make assumptions which can disturb the indexer. I recently talked with an indexer-friend from a Jewish background who was working on an encyclopedia of Christian theology; she had real problems distinguishing what the authors meant when they referred to, for instance, "Hebrews." To a person from a Christian background it was clear even out of context that they were talking about The Epistle to the Hebrews, part of the Christian New Testament. Nevertheless, dictionaries and encyclopedias are a great place to start, either as a first religious indexing project or as a way to explore the subject matter. The Catholic Encyclopedia provides a great, free online source (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>) with detailed entries for persons, places, doctrines, etc. A word of caution, however: many religious groups use the same term in widely varied ways. The Catholic Encyclopedia, for instance, will give you a somewhat different slant on the concept of "sacrifice" than would a Protestant or Jewish or Muslim source. When relying on dictionaries and encyclopedias to aid your indexing of a text, make sure to match your project's belief system to the resource you are consulting, or try to consult multiple sources.

Children's works. Children's books on religion make up an enormous market, but like children's books in other areas their simplicity is deceptive. Scholastic requirements and political sensitivities plant a minefield of difficulties for the novice. Indexers with experience in children's works probably make the best indexers of children's religious texts.

Biography/hagiography. All religions have their "rock star" figures, and people have always thronged to hear their stories. The Gospels are at their root the story of Jesus' life, and the books of the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament) contain many biographies and biographical elements. Starting with Sakyamuni himself, narratives of saintly life have long been a staple of Buddhist literature. Hindu, Confucian, Muslim, and Shinto traditions all rely on hagiography, writings about holy people. While westerners tend to think of lives of medieval saints or of martyrologies when the topic arises, the tradition remains as strong today. Biographies of Billy Graham and Mother Theresa have been best-sellers; "the Little Flower," St. Thérèse of Lisieux, died in 1897 yet multiple versions of her autobiography still sell briskly on Amazon.com. Biography is big business, and religious biography occupies a big corner of the market.

Biographies and hagiographies range from popular to scholarly, blandly admiring to cuttingly controversial. Saintly lives remain a staple of children's religious literature. Indexers of religious biography face the same issues dealt with in secular biographies. However, they also need to be aware of traditional structural elements in religious biography that readers will expect to find in the index. Conversion experiences, mystical awareness of the presence of God, and in Catholic and Buddhist biographies potentially miraculous occurrences, need to find their way into the index. Indexers should consult indexes to several biographies in the same tradition as their project. Hazel Bell's *Indexing Biographies and Other Stories of Human Lives* (Sheffield, England: Society of Indexers (UK), 2004) is a good general guide to indexing biographies; see also Martin White's excellent article on indexing biographies in this volume.

Feminist theology and liberation theology developed in the last forty years. Feminist theology grew out of the women's movement and is heavily influenced by feminist schools of literary criticism and philosophy. Liberation theology is closely associated with Latin American religious and political thought; Marxist and socialist schools of historical and literary criticism also contributed ideas to this contemporary theological movement which emphasizes Christian commitment to the poor. Within Roman Catholicism, its chief home, The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*) criticized many aspects of liberation theology in two influential documents published in the 1980s; church disapproval, as well as the decline of Marxist-based intellectual theory after the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, has greatly diminished the role of liberation theology. Recent surveys of theological trends barely acknowledge its existence. *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (ed. Adrian Hastings et al., OUP, 2000) does not even contain an index listing for it. Nevertheless liberation theology remains a significant influence in Latin America, and both gay and black strains of liberation theology exist. Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Orbis Books, 1988) remains the classic text.

Feminist theological philosophy, on the other hand, remains a strong force in modern theological thought. Highly critical of the analytic school, feminist theology has helped to popularize interest in Continental philosophy amongst American and British scholars. It has also influenced many other theologies of the disaffected, including gay and black theories of religion, and liberation theology itself. Sarah Coakley's "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion" in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright, NY: OUP, 2005, pp.494-525, provides an interesting introduction to the tension between feminism and analytic philosophy and theology. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (ed. Susan Frank Parsons, CUP 2002) guides readers through the multifarious strands of feminist theology and its influences.

Legal texts. The Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all rely heavily on legal concepts and continue to produce many legal texts. The Muslim *Shari'a* is now a feature in our daily newspapers; the Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law affects the lives of millions of people around the world, especially as regards marriage. As for Judaism, many people will aver that Jewish belief and ritual practice *is* the practice of law. Indexers with a legal background often take to indexing theology with gusto. The various codes that govern Christian, Jewish, and Muslim society spawn the same sorts of periodically revised and updated regulatory addenda, case law, and commentary that secular law creates, and many of these texts need indexing. See my chapter on legal indexing in ASI's forthcoming book, *Indexing Specialties: Scholarly Indexing* (Medford, NJ: Information Today Inc.) for an overview of indexing legal materials. Interested indexers may also want to look at The Canon Law Society of America's *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (NY: Paulist Press, 2000) for an example of a legal theology project.

Comparative religion. The field of comparative religion, the study of multiple religions and their common themes, had its inception with the discovery of the Americas. The priests who followed the conquistadors into Central and South America may have been repulsed by some of the religious practices they observed, but they were also fascinated, and some of them were able to see beyond their own religious traditions to shared commonalities. Concepts of natural law and human rights arose out of these early studies of non-Christian belief systems. Today comparative religion is an adjunct discipline of theology, philosophy, and anthropology. Indexers who enjoy working in those areas will also enjoy projects involving comparative religion. Huston Smith's *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) is a classic of the genre. The works of both Mircea Eliade and Claude Levi-Strauss have greatly influenced the language used to talk about ideas across theologies, and indexers of comparative religion should find their writings helpful in choosing appropriate vocabulary.

Non-Western religions. While works on non-Western religions may fall into any of the text types described in this article, the indexer may need to think about another sort of categorization entirely: texts directly out of the non-Western tradition, those written by Westerners, and those which attempt to amalgamate East-West concepts or apply non-Western religious ideas to our society and culture. Indexers need to be aware of these distinctions because they affect the way information is categorized. Different societies

impose order upon thought in different ways. I once attended a university seminar on “Africa in the Middle Ages.” The lecturer had to keep reminding us that the whole concept of the Medieval Period didn’t really make sense applied to Africa. While, obviously, stuff was going on in Africa at the same time as stuff was going on in eleventh century Italy, it wasn’t the same sort of stuff, and Euro-centric conceptualizations like “the rise of humanism” and “feudalism” just didn’t apply. Western attempts to include non-Western cultures when writing generally about a topic can backfire, because the whole intellectual framework is the wrong shape.

Indexers can get caught between authorial intents and reader expectations. Readers of a translation of Hindu mystical writings, for instance, might expect to find the same sort of concepts in the index as they would in a European spiritual text, but those ideas just might not fit around the work in question. A Westerner writing about, say, Shamanism in Mongolia will have to adapt to concepts that the book’s audience will understand while still reflecting the world written about, and the indexer must reflect both. A popular work on yoga might apply Chinese concepts of internal health and balance to thoroughly Western notions of stress. Simple awareness of the potential for cross-cultural messiness assists the indexer in producing coherent access to textual information. General guides to non-Western cultural concepts, such as *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, by Damien Keown (OUP, 2000) also supply examples of content frameworks and key concepts that might otherwise get lost.

Dealing With Diversity

While I have attempted to be inclusive in my discussion of indexing theology, readers will certainly note a definite bias toward examples from Christian and Jewish works. This is hardly surprising, given my personal and academic background, but it does point up the issue of dealing with diversity when working with religious texts. We live in a world where a multicultural perspective is expected, but it can backfire on us. Authors with the best of intentions sometimes end up shoehorning traditions with which they are not entirely familiar into a framework that just doesn’t fit, and indexers can fall into the same trap. Religion is so deeply embedded in our cultural processes that trying to work across traditions is fraught with difficulty. But none of us index because it’s an easy job. Indexers love challenges, and theology certainly provides them. In that sense, it remains the queen of sciences.