

Theology on the web

John Briggs outlines an exciting project to make theological material available more widely

NEW TECHNOLOGIES create opportunities for exciting new pathways of Christian service. One man who saw the possibilities opened up by the worldwide web is Rob Bradshaw, a former Tearfund missionary to Nepal, who has been engaged for more than 10 years in making available theological resources on computer screens worldwide.

Two years ago this was given a new focus under the title 'Theology on the Web'. There are subsidiary sites for biblical studies, theological studies, biblical archaeology, different periods of church history, and missiology (under construction).

Its purpose is 'to make high quality theological material available throughout the world, thus providing Bible teachers and pastors with the resources they need to spread the gospel in their own countries'.

Anyone studying in the UK can obtain virtually any theological book or article that has ever been printed. In stark contrast, Christians in many countries of the world not only have no books or journals, but for some, the very act of trying to obtain them could put them and their families in danger.

At the same time it is in these countries, especially those in the Global South, that both the church and the use of the internet are growing most quickly. It is for this reason that this work, which began by simply offering bibliographic listings, thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of authors and publishers, has grown into a gateway for transferring some of our theological riches to where they are most needed.

Rob posts online:

- Detailed bibliographies for seminary level students and ministers
- A large number of leading periodicals
- Reprints of rare and out-of-print theology books and articles
- With the help of volunteers, translations of theological articles in a number of languages
- Other aids for biblical and theological studies

Cross-linking of subjects means, for example, that a student studying baptism would be able to move from the baptism of Jesus, to baptism in the early church, the medieval church and then to how it is understood by a range of modern theologians.

Rob Bradshaw tells the story of a Baptist minister

involved in translation work who had been wrestling with a long-standing difficulty in the translation of Matthew 28:1. Through Theology on the Web he came across an article in the *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* – a journal that is otherwise unavailable in the UK – which provided the solution he was looking for (http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/cjet/08_057.pdf). It is exciting to think that placing this article online could make such a positive contribution to Bible translation.

While all this is useful enough to a student, pastor or lecturer in this country, imagine how helpful it can be to those who have no, or only distant, access to academic or public libraries. The seemingly necessary but unavailable tools of theological enquiry can be brought into their own homes.

My own first contact with this work was when Rob Bradshaw sought permission from the Keston Institute, of which I am a trustee, to make available on site our periodical *Religion in Communist Lands*. Reading and advising students writing theses from Eastern Europe quickly reveals how much they value the scholarly analysis found in such a periodical.

My mind then went to the *Baptist Quarterly* and its predecessor the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, which is not available in many even quite prestigious libraries. He readily agreed to digitalise these and now the *Transactions* and the *Quarterly* are available and searchable on line. Already we have had grateful responses from Australia, Germany and from Eastern Europe. In this way we are delighted that Rob Bradshaw has made the work of the Baptist Historical Society accessible globally in a new and exciting way.

This valuable work however needs support. While the site has over a million visitors a year, only three people support the work financially on a regular basis. Rob does not want to charge for access to the material, because this would impede the sites' primary target audience, those in the Global South, from using it. Instead he has to rely on advertising to pay for basic expenses like site hosting, photocopying and postage.

www.theologyontheweb.org.uk

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