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CATALOGING ARTICLE REVIEW

On a Recent Article on Fr. Oliver L. Kapsner, O.S.B., and the *Catholic Subject Headings*

The memory of Fr. Oliver L. Kapsner, O.S.B., for whom our bulletin is named, and attention to the *Catholic Subject Headings* that he brought to life have recently been revived on the pages of the *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, for, in the final issue of the 2024 volume of that periodical, Deirdre Sullivan, a student of library and information science at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University, published a study entitled ““Our Precious Heritage”: *Catholic Subject Headings* and the Assertion of Worldview through Cataloging”.¹ It is my intention here to offer a brief review of this article to readers of the *Oliver Leonard Kapsner, O.S.B. Cataloging Bulletin*.

Sullivan’s article is premised on the idea that knowledge organization systems (KOSs) like subject headings and classifications typically reflect the perspectives or worldviews of the persons who create them: in other words, that all KOSs exhibit bias of some sort.² Many major KOSs used daily in our libraries, such as, say, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), or the Library of Congress Classification (LCC), present themselves as representing general and fairly neutral viewpoints, and yet, they are, in virtue of their historical and cultural situatedness, not immune to bias, as has often been pointed out by critical observers of these systems.³ Although general KOSs typically seek – at least in theory – to minimize bias, there is another strategy possible for dealing with it in a subject heading system or a classification and that is fully to embrace bias as feature, not a bug, of such a system. This strategy of building bias into a KOS is especially apposite for subject indexing systems or classifications designed for the

use of members of a community that shares a particular worldview. Sullivan considers Fr. Kapsner's *Catholic Subject Headings* (hereafter, the *CHS*) to be a parade example of a subject heading system that was designed explicitly to reflect a specific perspective – namely, that of Roman Catholicism – in its index terms and so to be especially appropriate for use by institutions belonging to the community holding that perspective – namely, Catholic libraries.

Sullivan begins by setting Kapsner's creation of the *CHS* into a broader historical frame, briefly reviewing both the long history of tensions between Roman Catholics and Protestants in the United States and the concomitant development of a distinct Catholic educational system, with its attendant organizations like the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). Readers are reminded that the Catholic Library Association (CLA) emerged from this specific denominational-educational matrix, originally arising from the library section of the NCEA in 1931. As Sullivan documents, early members of the CLA sought to keep their organization distinct from the larger American Library Association (ALA), partially out of fear of being absorbed by the larger organization and partially out of a desire to maintain a distinctive Catholic identity. It was within the framework of the emergence of a distinctively Catholic library organization in the 1930s that initial attempts began to be made to create subject heading and classification systems that would reflect Catholic theology and worldview more faithfully than general systems like the *LCSH* did. Fr. Kapsner's creation of the *CSH*, which were first published in 1942, marked the culmination of these efforts.

In tracing the origins of the CLA, the article offers a brief précis of Fr. Kapsner's life and reviews his motivations for choosing to create a distinct set of subject headings for terms relating to Roman Catholicism. Fr. Kapsner firmly believed that it was important to use specifically Catholic terminology to refer to Catholic concepts not only for the sake of semantic accuracy but also to blunt the potential influence that use of Protestant-inflected terms from *LCSH* – e.g., **Lord's Supper** instead of **Eucharist** – might have on Catholic library users. He also sought to fill in what he saw as gaps in the coverage of theological ideas in standard subject heading systems: thus, concepts of interest to Catholic theologians and church historians, such as the different flavors of heresy, received far more detailed coverage in the *CSH* than was the case in contemporary editions of *LCSH*. In Sullivan's view, the resultant subject heading system was one that strongly reinforced Catholic thought and identity:

Inasmuch as the subject heading contained in *CSH* affirm Catholic judgments about materials by projecting Catholic values onto them, the formation of *CSH* in of itself

serves as a legitimizer for Catholic beliefs. By creating a subject heading system fully grounded in Catholic belief, Kapsner and the CLA provided a concrete objective representation of Catholic concepts and, hence, Catholic thought. Additionally, the creation of *CSH* allowed for a greater representation of Catholic thought inside library spaces and in the field of library sciences more broadly ... Catholic reference and cataloging tools maintain a standard of library service that is specifically Catholic and legitimize a Catholic way of service through the formation of official tools.⁴

Interestingly, as Sullivan shows, when the first edition of *CSH* appeared, not all Catholic librarians were enamored with the new subject heading system. Some feared that the *CSH*'s inclusion of specialized theological terms or highly specific subdivisions might be unhelpful to lay readers. Others thought it would be of greater utility to Catholic libraries to use a standard system like LCSH and modify them *ad hoc* for their own specific needs rather than to adopt the *CSH*. In his responses to such critiques, Fr. Kapsner highlighted both the need for semantic precision and the desirability of maintaining Catholic identity in the description of books, arguing that "L.C. terminology in theology is on the whole distinctly Protestant"⁵ and reiterating the principle that one should use Catholic terms to designate Catholic concepts. To his mind, then, a Catholic perspective – or, if you will, a Catholic bias – was an integral feature of the *CSH* and, indeed, its very *raison d'être*.

As we have seen, Sullivan's article frames the *CSH* as a case study of how community perspectives, or biases, can be integrated into KOSs to create subject access tools that support the interests of particular user communities. The idea of incorporating specific communities' worldviews into KOSs designed for those communities has become increasingly common among library and information science professionals over the last two decades or so, and so, in this respect, Fr. Oliver Kapsner's vision for the *CSH*, developed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, can be seen as having been ahead of its time. Sullivan's insights can perhaps be applied to other Catholic KOSs as well. In a recent issue of the *Catholic Library World*, Bro. Andrew Kosmowski, librarian at the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio, and current president of the CLA, has described a classification created specifically to reflect the concerns of the Marianist Family, the *Marianist Library Classification (MLC)*.⁶ Just as the *CSH* can be said to be designed to reflect a distinctly Catholic perspective, so does the *MLC* reflect a distinctively Marianist perspective within Catholicism: both KOSs are expressions of a particular worldview that align the organization of a library, be it intellectually or physically, with that worldview.

To conclude, Sullivan’s carefully researched and well-written study of Fr. Oliver Kapsner and the *CSH* should be of interest to all readers of the *Oliver Leonard Kapsner, O.S.B. Bulletin* not only because of its interesting treatment of the origins and early history of the *CSH* but also because it interprets the *CSH* in a way that sets it into a new and illuminating theoretical framework. For this reason, I am happy to commend this excellent article to the attention of all readers of the *Bulletin*.

1. See Dierdre Sullivan, “Our Precious Heritage”: Catholic Subject Headings and the Assertion of Worldview through Cataloging”, *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 62(6-8), 2024: 603-629. Published version available [here](#) with subscription. Prereview preprint available [here](#) gratis.
2. The word “bias” often has a negative connotation in popular parlance, much like its near-synonym “prejudice”. However, if one keeps in mind that its original meaning was something like “an oblique line”, hence “inclination” (see C.T. Onions, G.W.S. Friedrichsen, R.W. Burchfield, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, 93a), then one can understand it with a more neutral meaning, akin to that of “viewpoint” or “perspective”. It is in this second sense that I use the term here.
3. Classical studies of bias in KOSs include, e.g., Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*. Jefferson, North Carolina/London: McFarland & Company, 1993 [originally published, 1971]; Hope A. Olson, *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.
4. Sullivan, ““Our Precious Heritage””, pp. 617-618.
5. Oliver L. Kapsner, “Catholic Subject Headings: A Friendly Reply,” *Catholic Library World*, 14 (1943), p. 175, cited in Sullivan, ““Our Precious Heritage””, p. 621.
6. Andrew J. Kosmowski, “Marianist Library Classification: A Case Study”, *Catholic Library World*, 94(2): 90-95.

-- Thomas M. Dousa, Editor

DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGING NEWS

Personal Name Access Points

Father **Stephen M. Koeth**, C.S.C., was born and raised in Staten Island, New York, where he attended Catholic schools, graduating from St. Joseph by-the-Sea High

School in 1995. He chose to attend college at the University of Notre Dame, where he earned an undergraduate degree in history in 1999. After graduation, Stephen worked briefly for the Office of Campus Ministry at Notre Dame and soon entered the Master of Theology program at the same university, while entering a novitiate in the Congregation of the Holy Cross. After two years of theological training, he spent a year serving as a seminary intern at a parish in Portland, Oregon, before returning to finish his theological studies at Notre Dame. In 2006, Stephen graduated with a masters of divinity degree and returned to Portland to serve as a transitional deacon; he also took his final vows as member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. A year later, in 2007, he was ordained into the priesthood in South Bend, Indiana. For the next few years, Fr. Koeth served as a parish priest in Portland, before returning to school to pursue a Master's degree in history at the Catholic University of America, which he earned in 2012. He then undertook further studies in modern American history at Columbia University in New York, from which he received his doctorate in 2020. Afterwards, Fr. Koeth returned to the University of Notre Dame as a postdoctoral fellow at the Cushwa Center for the study of American Catholicism. Currently, he is an assistant professor in the Department of History there and also serves as priest-in-residence at one of the university's dormitories. Fr. Koeth has published a number of historical studies in such scholarly journals as *U.S. Catholic Historian*, *The Journal of Church and State*, and *American Catholic Studies*. He is also the author of a book that will be published by the University of Chicago Press in the late summer of 2025, *Crabgrass Catholicism: How Suburbanization Transformed Faith and Politics in Postwar America*, which, as its subtitle indicates, examines how suburbanization changed the social and cultural space of American Catholicism in the second half of the 20th century. The correct access point for works by or about Fr. Stephen Koeth, C.S.C., is:

Koeth, Stephen M.

Fr. **Dominik Pecka** was born on August 8, 1895, in the southern Moravian village of Čejkovice. He came from a relatively humble social background: his father was a peasant farmer and cabinetmaker. After finishing elementary school, Dominik was sent to high school first in the town of Kyjov and then to the minor seminary in the city of Brno, which he attended from 1907 until 1912. After finishing his high school studies at the Classical High School in Brno in 1914, he entered the major seminary in the same city, where he completed his studies and was ordained a priest in 1918. Fr. Pecka spent the first years of his ministry serving as a parish priest in different villages in the south Moravian countryside. After eight years serving in a pastoral role, he was asked by his superiors to take up a ministry in education. Thus, in 1926, after receiving the requisite pedagogical qualifications, he became a

teacher of religion in the Catholic high school in the city of Jihlava, located in the Vysočina region of the Czech lands. As a teacher, Fr. Pecka was heavily involved in leading religious youth groups, organizing summer camps and academic retreats for the Catholic youth under his care. He remained in Jihlava until 1941, when the high school there was shut down; he was then transferred to a high school in the Králové Pole district of Brno, where he taught for the next five years. After a brief return to Jihlava at the end of World War II, Fr. Pecka was assigned to a high school in the Husovice district of Brno, where he taught religion, philosophy, and modern languages from 1946 until 1953; in addition to this, he served as a lecturer in sociology at the Theological Institute of Brno in 1949 and 1950. In 1954, at the height of communist persecution of Czechoslovak clergy, Fr. Pecka was arrested because of his religious educational activities and imprisoned, first at the notorious Pankrác prison in Prague and then in a high-security prison in Mírov. He was released after a year of captivity and returned to Brno, where he became a confessor for a congregation of nuns. In 1958, however, Fr. Pecka was arrested again on the pretext of “frustrating the oversight of the state” over his activities, and imprisoned again in Mírov, spending fourteen months there until his release in 1960. After his return from prison, he took refuge in the Capuchin Monastery in Brno. State authorities revoked his authorization to carry out priestly ministry in public and so, during the early 1960s, he was reduced to offering clandestine seminary training and spiritual counseling to prospective priests. Fr. Pecka was partially rehabilitated by the government in 1969 and his sacerdotal faculties were restored to a limited degree: in the same year, he received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ostrava. Old age and continuing restrictions, though, would limit his public ministry in the 1970s. He continued to reside in Brno until a year before his death, when he moved to a retirement home for priests in the town of Moravec: there, he died on June 1, 1980. Throughout his career, Fr. Pecka was known not only as a skilled educator and spiritual formator of Catholic youth but also for his manifold literary activities. From the first years of his priesthood, he was a frequent contributor to Catholic periodicals and came, in time, to edit several of them. He wrote a number of volumes on spiritual life, introductory books on philosophical themes, works on Christian education, and essays on the Catholic response to problems of modern civilization, as well as novels (often spiritually didactic in tone), collections of aphorisms and meditations, and memoirs, including an account of his time in prison. Fr. Pecka devoted many of his works to questions of philosophical anthropology, formulating, in time, an integrated and systematic account of what it is to be a human being; he is considered by many commentators to be the father of that subdiscipline of philosophy in the Czech lands. The correct access point for works by or about Fr. Dominik Pecka, is:

Pecka, Dominik

SUBJECT CATALOGING NEWS

Selected LC subject heading additions & changes from the [Library of Congress Subject Headings \(LCSH\) Approved Lists](#) 07 (Sept 20, 2024) – 09 (Sept 20, 2024)

KEY UF = Used for
 BT = Broader term
 RT = Related term
 SA = See also

N.B. You may wish to confirm the current state of the authority record by consulting [LC's authority file](#) or the OCLC authority file—editor.

150 Archery—Religious aspects [sp2024001337]

150 Artificial intelligence—Religious aspects [sp2024001274]

150 Bible stories, Kinyarwanda [May Subd Geog] [sp2024000878]

450 UF Kinyarwanda Bible stories

150 Catechisms, Kinyarwanda [sp2024000876]

450 UF Kinyarwanda catechisms

150 Catechisms, Tswana [sp2024000903]

450 UF Tswana catechisms

150 Christmas wreaths [May Subd Geog] [sp2024000869]

450 UF Advent wreaths

550 BT Christmas decorations

550 BT Wreaths

150 COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020—Religious aspects—Christianity CHANGE HEADING

150 COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020-2023—Religious aspects—Christianity [sp2022005510]

150 Diligence—Religious aspects [sp2024000712]

550 BT Perfection—Religious aspects

150 Guia, Nuestra Señora de [May Subd Geog] [sp2024000944]

053 BT660.G87

450 UF Guia, Virgen de

450 UF Our Lady of Guidance

500 BT Mary, Blessed Virgin, Saint—Apparitions and miracles—Philippines

500 BT Mary, Blessed Virgin, Saint—Devotion to—Philippines

150 Immunization—Religious aspects [sp2024000699]

150 Lay church workers [May Subd Geog] [sp2024000888]
450 UF Church lay workers
550 UF Lay workers (Religion)
550 BT Laity
550 RT Church employees
550 RT Volunteer workers in church work

150 Lay ministry [May Subd Geog] [sp 85075383]
450 UF Volunteer workers in church work DELETE FIELD
550 RT Lay church workers ADD FIELD
550 RT Volunteer workers in church work ADD FIELD

150 Volunteer workers in church work [May Subd Geog] [sp2024002776]
550 BT Church work
550 RT Lay church workers

Genre Terms

155 Sacred dances [gp2023026127]
455 UF Liturgical dances
455 UF Religious dances
455 UF Worship dances
555 BT Dance
555 RT Ceremonial dances
680 Dance compositions expressing personal or communal religious or spiritual beliefs, for use in devotional settings and/or general performance.

Selected additions & changes to LC classification from the [Library of Congress Classification \(LCC\) Approved Lists 07 \(Sept 20, 2024\) – 09 \(Sept 20, 2024\)](#)

“Numbers that appear in square brackets are not displayed in Classification Web browse screens or in the printed editions of the classification schedules. They are shown ... only to indicate the location of the corresponding caption or reference within the classification.”

Christianity | Collected works | Early Christian literature to ca. 600. Fathers of the Church, etc. | Individual authors | Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430 | Separate works. By title | De Genesi ad litteram TABLE BR3 **BR65.A6585-.A65852**

Christianity | Collected works | Early Christian literature to ca. 600. Fathers of the Church, etc. | Individual authors | Narsai, approximately 413-503 **BR65.N377-.N3776**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | Asian languages, A-Z | Helong TABLE BS5 **BS315.H352**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Chiga TABLE BS5 See BS325.N93 **[BS325.C52]**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Lomwe (Mozambique) TABLE BS5 **BS325.L65**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Nyankore-Kiga. Chiga TABLE BS5 **BS325.N93**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Ronga TABLE BS5 **BS325.R66**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Sheetswa See BS325.T79 **[BS325.S495]**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Tsonga TABLE BS5 **BS325.T77**

The Bible | General | Texts and versions | Modern texts and versions | Non-European languages | African languages, A-Z | Tswa TABLE BS5 **BS325.T79**

The Bible | New Testament | Special parts of the New Testament | Epistles | Epistles of Paul | Topics (not otherwise provided for | Soul **BS2655.S616**

Doctrinal theology | Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ. Mariology | Miracles. Apparitions. Shrines, sanctuaries, images, processions, etc. | Special | Other, A-Z | Guia, Nuestra Señora de **BT660.G7**

Practical theology | Worship (public and private) | Prayer | Prayers | Other special prayers, A-Z | Mentally ill, Prayers for the **BV283.M47**

Practical theology | Practical religion. The Christian life | Christian life in relation to special topics | Interpersonal relations | Special topics, A-Z | Reconciliation **BV4597.53.R43**

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Please consider submitting a contribution to the *Oliver Leonard Kapsner, O.S.B. Cataloging Bulletin*. This could be a theoretical essay relating to cataloging, a practical piece discussing specific cataloging challenges and how they are being met within your library, or even questions posed to which our readers would be invited to respond. Send letters, questions, or possible contributions to the editor, Thomas M. Dousa. Contact information is found below.

Oliver Leonard Kapsner, O.S.B. Cataloging Bulletin: e-newsletter of the [Catholic Library Association](#) is a quarterly online publication accessible from the CLA website.

The editor welcomes inquiries about cataloging from CLA catalogers. Readers can contact the editor at:

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