

# *Hungarian Theological Libraries in a New Role*

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**U**niversities and research institutes in Hungary rely heavily on the research-oriented services provided by theological libraries. These services play a crucial role throughout the entire research process, from planning to publication, as well as in the preservation and dissemination of research results. The libraries of ecclesiastical higher education institutions also increasingly support knowledge creation.

There are sixty-five church-run libraries in Hungary, of which thirty-four are academic theological libraries (OSZK MNMKK 2024).<sup>1</sup> Eleven of these libraries support research. Research support and research activities include the following library services:

- data transmission to the Hungarian Science Bibliography (MTMT)
- compilation of subject bibliographies

- research, carried out in an organised framework
- publishing activities
- DOI-registration service
- library training and user education

These library services represent the four pillars of publication: scholarly publishing, identification, preservation, and visibility (Bilicsi and Holl 2024).

In this paper, we discuss the following research support services that small church libraries in Hungary offer their users:

- MTMT data input
- supporting editorial work, and
- virtual library services

### *Data Management of Institutional and Authors' Publications in the Hungarian Science Bibliography*

Many countries have their own national scientific bibliographic databases. Examples include the French Hyper Articles en Ligne (HAL) and the Polish Scientific Bibliography (POL-on). The Hungarian Science Bibliography (Magyar Tudományos Művek Tára, or MTMT) is the Hungarian unified system which aims to register and make visible the publications and citations produced by the Hungarian scientific community as well as to measure and present the scientific performance of individual researchers and research institutions (Hungarian Science Bibliography 2025). In addition to publications, MTMT also registers other intellectual products, including patents and products that are important for scientific performance and career development (Makara and Seres 2013).

The MTMT provides a useful opportunity for domestic theologians and researchers in the field of religious studies. Their work is typically published in Hungarian, sometimes in journals with no academic recognition. The journals in which they publish are often not listed in large international scientific databases, such as Scopus

or Web of Science, so their scientific output cannot be measured, even though this is crucial for their career progression. In MTMT, authors can input and manage their own publications and citations, and rely on the assistance of librarians skilled in continuous and accurate data management, knowledge of theological bibliographies and scientometrics, and experience in using various databases.

In 2023, librarians from twenty-two ecclesiastical libraries contributed nearly eighty thousand records (articles and citations) to MTMT. Notably, it was discovered that the Tittel Pál Library of Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger has been managing the faculty publications of the Eger College of Theology and has plans to extend this service to authors from additional professional fields, including doctors, engineers, priests, and lawyers located in Eger and the surrounding area. In doing so, the Tittel Pál Library is facilitating inclusion and discovery of these professionals' publications in MTMT (Gál 2023). By providing this service, these librarians ensure the visibility of theological research, enhance the work of their institutions by assisting in data reporting obligations, and support researchers' career development by providing bibliometric data.

### *Editorial Support: Institutional Journals*

For institutions and researchers, in addition to their recognition in domestic scientific circles, international visibility, inclusion in relevant databases, and high numbers of citations are important. Journals published by ecclesiastical academic institutions also offer such opportunities, provided they are accessible worldwide and adhere to scientific conventions. Universities and research institutes are increasingly issuing electronic journals in which their researchers and academics can publish research results. Institutions are increasingly favouring open access, some even making it compulsory for their institutional journals.

Of the sixty-five Hungarian church-run libraries, the following were engaged in publishing activities and three of the libraries have released open-access publications:

- Cathedral Library of Esztergom
- Cathedral Library of Kalocsa

- Great Library, Scientific Collections, Sárospatak Reformed College (open access)
- John Wesley Theological College's Library (open access)
- Library and Archives of the Calvinist Church in Kecskemét (open access)
- The Theological and College Library of the Transilvanian Reformed Church District and the Reformed College of Debrecen

A concrete example from the John Wesley Theological College in Budapest demonstrates a library's editorial support in the publication of an institutional journal.

The college is a church-maintained higher education institution in Hungary, offering courses in humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship, a Methodist church, sponsors it. A full-time librarian and a team of volunteers operate the library. In 2023, the college launched its academic journal, *Opuscula Theologica et Scientifica*. Open access was a priority in the preparation of the journal; thus, the Open Journal System (OJS), a worldwide open-source editorial system, was chosen for practical reasons such as usability and visibility, and because it is free of charge. OJS ensures the publication of high-quality scientific journals from submission to publication. Data can be easily exchanged with other databases, thereby increasing the journal's visibility and reach.

The college is the publisher, and the editorial board comprises members of the college's Academic Council. The librarian helped create the foundational conditions for establishing the journal by ensuring the correct format and by requesting an ISSN number and the DOI (prefix).

Publishing a journal involves several tasks that require librarians' competencies:

- bibliographic expertise
- knowledge of various document identifiers
- knowledge of the structure and data of a journal issue
- knowledge of classification

- information technology skills

As the college is in a difficult financial and personnel situation, more tasks were eventually handled by the librarian, including the following:

- linguistic and formal proofreading of submitted manuscripts
- formatting the list of references, and finding and assigning identifiers, such as DOIs for the references
- uploading final manuscripts to OJS<sup>2</sup>
- assigning and recording volume and article data (page number, DOI, etc.), and requesting activation from the DOI office
- defining and entering metadata for articles
- creating a journal issue
- publishing and dissemination<sup>3</sup>

These measures ensure the journal's international visibility and long-term preservation.

### *Virtual Library Services, or "Library on the Desktop"*

A virtual library essentially mirrors everything that traditionally takes place within library walls, including catalogues, information services, links, circulation, subscriptions, renewals, interactive communication (such as a chat box), and, of course, full-text electronic document delivery or exhibition in the online space.

This service is much more widespread in Hungarian church libraries than are the services mentioned so far. Based on 2023 statistics, virtual offerings may include the following services:

- dedicated church library website
- Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC)
- communication (chat box)<sup>4</sup>
- remote services (subscription, payment, renewal)

- distance learning
- electronic document delivery (built or accessible databases, e-books)
- institutional repository

Smaller libraries—the focus of this chapter—also do not limit themselves to traditional library services hiding within their walls. They do not confine services to institutional members but include the outside world. Their tools are the website and the OPAC, where people, even without registration, can access literature, information, and services outside opening hours, from the comfort of their homes. In the following, we discuss how these libraries support teaching, research, and learning, enhance access to literature for those in remote locations, reflect the ethos of their institutions, and connect with users.

## *Library Websites*

In 2023, forty-eight of the sixty-five church-maintained libraries had their own websites or appeared on the websites of their parent institutions. Information ranges from home pages with simple structures and static data to more complex structures with portal-like services, where data and information are updated daily. None of the latter types are found in small libraries. Libraries that do not have a website of their own are all small (e.g., school) libraries run by churches.

The static pages include a description of the library, opening hours, contact details, regularly updated news, information on library use, a searchable catalogue, bibliographies, as well as links to access them. An example is the independent website of the Library of the Baptist Theological Seminary (BTA könyvtár 2025), which can be accessed from the institution's website. In addition to its own services, the Useful Resources menu offers Baptist link collections, valuable resources for Bible studies, and national and international digital collections for research, study, and orientation.

## *Dharma Gate Buddhist College Library Website*

The Dharma Gate Buddhist College library is more complex and multilingual, with basic information available in English, German, Spanish, Tibetan, Russian, and French, in addition to Hungarian (Tan Kapuja Buddhista Szakkönyvtár 2025). Accessibility tools are available upon request. The link to the library on the college's website is prominent, and so is the search box; these are the first things one sees on the library's website. The basic information is presented on the home page, followed by menus that provide access to more in-depth content.

Remote access to subscribed full-text resources (book and journal databases) with quick links is provided after identification. Help files, illustrated with screenshots, support use. The compulsory and recommended literature for bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and Buddhist Lifestyle Counselling Assistant courses is listed in the syllabi, along with direct links to the relevant items in the catalogue. The range of digital course materials, with library notes, is published on the college's website, complemented by recordings of lectures and roundtable discussions that reinforce the acquisition of knowledge through modern channels.

## *Online Catalogues*

Most libraries have hybrid collections with catalogues that reflect the library's own collection, but also the contents of paid or open-access external databases (e.g., Atla, JSTOR). Digitized versions of holdings on the library's shelves can be accessed through the catalogue, allowing readers freedom to work in different formats. The library of the Sapientia College of Theology of Religious Orders, for example, does not lend books. However, its students and teachers can access documents available in other formats through the catalogue. It is useful to catalogue digitised texts uploaded to Google Drive, to which access (lending) can be flexibly controlled while respecting copyright. Some libraries also catalogue book chapters. If an institution does not have a repository, it can place works by its authors into external repositories (or a national library database) with a link (URL, DOI) from the

catalogue, making the content accessible. The catalogue, therefore, dually serves preservation and visibility functions.

## *Supporting Lifelong Learning of the Clergy*

Besides supporting students during their studies, the library of the Lutheran Theological University also provides useful help and spiritual support (Mészáros 2020) for congregational, religious educational, and diaconal services. Two successful services resulted from the library's cooperation with the university and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary: (1) The Sermon Preparation Library (Igehirdetési Előkészítők Tára, or IHLET) and (2) the Lutheran Integrated Catalog.

## *Sermon Preparation Library Database*

The Sermon Preparation Library (IHLET) database (Evangélikus Hittudományi Egyetem 2020) was created during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist pastors and theological students of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary in preparing sermons (Mészáros 2024). IHLET literally means “inspiration” in English. It turned out that more and more people were using the database, and it proved beneficial even after the pandemic, so it was further developed, cost-effectively and collaboratively. The interface was developed by the library using international sites (e.g., *textweek.com*, *workingpreacher.org*). Sources include Hungarian journals and licensed theological databases, including the Atla Religion Database. Volunteer students assist with processing content by performing the work of collecting and uploading materials. The library cooperates with the staff of the University's Institute of Practice in developing the appearance and structure of the site. The background is the university's WordPress-based website, and the searchable interface is available from the library's website.

## *Lutheran Integrated Catalogue*

The academic activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary are conducted in two areas: the Lutheran Theological University and the Lutheran Central Collection (Hubert 2022). The Library of the Lutheran Theological University manages the union catalogue of Protestant libraries (Evangélikus Hittudományi Egyetem Könyvtára 2025). In addition to its own printed and electronic holdings, the catalogue makes searchable and accessible holdings of the Lutheran Central Collection and the Ráth Mátyás Evangelical Collection, as well as the material of the Hungarian Evangelical Bibliography and the Hungarian Evangelical Digital Repository.

## *Service-Oriented Library*

In his chapter titled “Size Doesn’t Matter” in Volume 4 of *The Theological Librarian’s Handbook*, Stutzman (2024) argues that even without significant human and financial resources, we can identify the good practices, tools, and methods needed in a particular field. The principles of best library practice, compiled by a team of international librarians (Penner 2021), are also relevant for theological libraries serving doctoral programs, as well as for research support as a service. For the services discussed here, principle two (prioritising individual needs) and principle eleven (emphasising proactivity) are particularly relevant. Librarians are well-positioned, Penner writes, to think creatively, propose solutions, and contribute to the research culture.

Through the library services described in this study, we contribute to the scholarly dialogue between our institution, the church that maintains it, and other ecclesiastical or secular actors worldwide. We support the institution’s teaching and learning efforts. Besides providing bibliographic information that transcends geographical limitations, we offer a channel for our staff to access the literature that our libraries do not possess.

The level of digital literacy and the needs of theological library users differ significantly. Many are still wary of the possibilities available on the Internet, yet more and more are turning to online resources. In turn, librarians are learning to use emerging

technologies to enhance services by tailoring them to patron needs, cultural backgrounds, and information-seeking habits and competencies.

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## Notes

- 1 The Hungarian library statistics cited in this chapter are from the Library Institute of the OSZK MNMKK and are current through 2023.
- 2 As the editing process is coordinated also using tools outside the platform, manuscripts are sometimes sent to the editorial office and not uploaded by the authors directly to the platform.
- 3 Dissemination includes exporting or importing journal issues and articles to databases, liaising between different platforms, databases, catalogues, and editorial staff (MTMT, DOAJ, REAL projects [MTA Library Repository]).
- 4 There is no data on chat boxes in the statistics, but there is no doubt that sooner or later this will become an important segment of library services.

