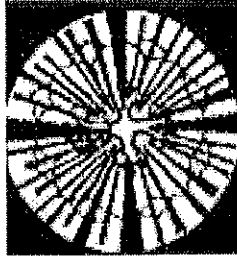

Theological Librarianship in the Asian Context

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Introduction

I was privileged to participate in the Forum of the Asian Theological Libraries Association (ForATL) Consultation held at the Student Christian Centre in Bangkok, Thailand on 15-23 February 2003. I represented ANZTLA at this Consultation and was impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the group of theological librarians who met together. Participants came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and myself from Australia.

The programme involved two days of discussions, mainly about problems, followed by a fascinating visit to the Siam Society and Chulalongkorn University. Then we spent two days in small group work and sessions with two special visitors, Dr Wati Long-char, from World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia and Dr Sientje Merentek-Abram, Executive Director of ATSSEA who attended for the two days. Rita and John England, retired from the Programme for Theology and Culture in Asia,



also provided some initial input.

The consultation was conducted in English, with oral and written fluency being major factors for participants. A number of the group hold Masters degrees in both theology and librarianship, and three are ordained as pastors. Daily worship services added a special dimension to the programme.

Issues in common with Australian setting

- Training in both theology and librarianship is a concern for many in Asian theological libraries.
- Poor staffing is a problem, with people placed in libraries for wrong reasons! eg. faculty member suspended from teaching, faculty spouse.
- Purchasing power of acquisitions budgets is eroded by poor economic situations.

Major concerns for theological education in Asia (Dr Long-char)

- "The brain drain" of theological students from Asia to "the west"

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List of participants

Back row (L-R): Karmito (Indonesia) Convener, Beth Pulanco (Philippines) Secretary, Hilda Putong (Indonesia) Website developer, Christabel Wong (Malaysia) Newsletter Editor, Rita England (New Zealand), Dr Sientje Merentek-Abram (Executive Director, Association of Theological Schools of South East Asia), Nurdiana Sari Wijaya (Indonesia), Jocelyn Morris (Australia).

Front row (L-R): Rev Dr Guillermo Juan (Philippines), Tang Sui-Tung (Hong Kong), Jitra Samsa (Thailand), Dr Cahyana Purnama (Indonesia), Dr Wati Long-char (World Council of Churches and Christian Conference of Asia), John England (New Zealand), Joseph Shi-Yang Lin (Taiwan)

- Proliferation of theological institutions financed by single individuals
- Financial – study in “the west” costs more than *in Asia*
- Lack of awareness of contemporary issues in theology, eg. feminist theology, ecological concerns, social justice
- Lack of net working and resource-sharing among theological schools
- Inadequate theological libraries among theological schools

Issues for Theological Libraries in Asia

- Collection of material published locally in various regions of Asia is difficult but critical for doing theology in Asian contexts
- Oral traditions in various Asian regions poses challenges
- Corruption – government authorities, postal system, other bureaucratic agencies
- Government restrictions and oppression of Christians, eg. in Malaysia
 - confiscation of publications before library takes delivery of parcels
 - raids on libraries to confiscate sensitive material, eg. publications about Islam

Electronic progress

Since the consultation, an electronic list-serv for sharing and communication has been set up at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/foratl> and anyone interested can join this list-serv.

A new website has been launched with the URL: <http://www.geocities.com/foratl>

Outcomes

- Christabel Wong, from Seremban, Malaysia will produce a ForATL Newsletter June & December each year.
- Theological library associations will be established in those Asian countries where they do not exist at this time, eg. Indonesia and Thailand.

- ForATL is keen to develop closer links and receive support from ANZTLA, American Theological Library Association (ATLA), Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL), Bibliothèques Europeennes de Théologie (BETH) (*formerly Conseil International des Associations des Bibliothèques de Théologie*), International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and other library associations.
- A new 3rd edition of the Directory of Asian Theological Libraries has been published in 2003. Contact me for details about obtaining this.
- ForATL is seeking financial support from sponsoring organisations for support of theological librarianship course provided by Lutheran Theological Seminary Hong Kong for
 - visiting lecturers to provide some parts of the course in Hong Kong
 - subsidy for tuition fees and living expenses for students from Myanmar, Vietnam etc.
- Provision of courses in Archives management for librarians required to deal with church archives
- Development of short courses/workshops/intensive training to be delivered in regional settings on specific topics eg. descriptive cataloguing, collection development in Asian contexts.

ANZTLA CONNECTIONS

What can we do to assist this work in Asia?

- Theological librarians in Asian settings need standard library tools. Currently I have a request from Cambodia for assistance in obtaining Library of Congress tools. Others have asked for copies of the Dewey 200 Schedule. This is a practical way in which ANZTLA could assist in developing theological libraries in Asia.
- ANZTLA could provide support for the

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong for example -

- Provision of the subsidy for tuition fees and living expenses for students from Myanmar, Vietnam and other developing countries while under-taking their studies
- Financial support for the provision of this course, handouts, module development
- Sponsor the Convenor, Karmito, to attend the ANZTLA Conference in Perth in July 2003.

Find out more by taking a look at the ForATL website; join the ForATL list-serv.

Final reflection

Asian theological librarians are looking for encouragement and support from Australian and New Zealand theological libraries. They regard us as partners and the ForATL Constitution includes Australia and New Zealand as one region of Asia.

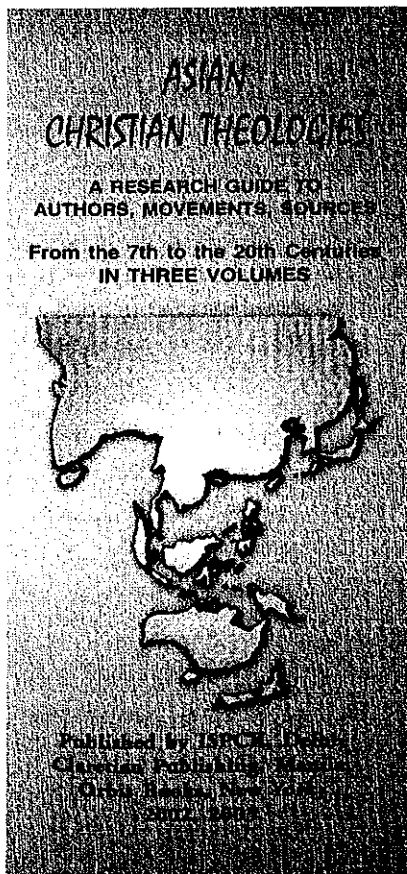
They actively seek our co-operation.

I would like to see ANZTLA chapters develop connections with libraries in one part of Asia. There may be a denominational or mission link with an institution within the chapter. Personal connections help, but long-term development work is achieved by building relationships between institutions and organisations. These people do a tremendous job in incredibly difficult situations with very limited resources and tough restrictions. We can help them if we choose to do so. The choice is up to the members of ANZTLA.

Please consider carefully how ANZTLA can contribute to the development of theological libraries in Asia. This is important work and the time for action is NOW.

I am happy to provide further information, including details of the Hong Kong course.

Jocelyn Morris



ASIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES

This new publication is a must-have source-book for all theological libraries. It is an ambitious project to document and publish a resource book about Christianity in Asia from the 7th-20th centuries. Country by country, each region is documented with extensive details of key people, movements and publications, prepared by theologians from the various countries with first-hand knowledge of the publications and people.

An integral feature of each volume is the bibliographic listings for each section which provide a starting point for further detailed research on each topic. For the value of these alone, this publication deserves a place on library Reference shelves.

The three-volume set is available through various agencies (eg. ISPCK Delhi, and Orbis, NY) and Australia and New Zealand are included in Volume 1. Cost is scheduled as approximately US\$50 per volume.