

# LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

## ANZTLA Links

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At the 1993 ANZTLA conference, held in Napier, New Zealand, the Annual General Meeting voted to allocate funds to two organisations: the Programme for Theology & Cultures in Asia (PTCA), and the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS). The donations were to be used at the discretion of the organisations to assist in the development of librarianship in the two regions.

What are these organisations? What are their aims, and what is the role of the regional libraries and librarians within the goals and objectives of these organisations?

## THE PROGRAMME FOR THEOLOGY & CULTURES IN ASIA

### I. Aims of the Programme

The overall purpose of the programme is to strengthen, through concentrated joint efforts, the formation of living theology and to facilitate the growth of a creative theological community in Asia.

- a. To equip younger theologians and leaders - women and men, lay and clergy - with Asian resources for their ministries.
- b. To recover *our own cultural and spiritual resources* in Asian countries.
- c. To promote creative indigenous theological writing within Asian struggles and the heritages of the Asian region.
- d. To facilitate theological interaction within Asia, and between Asia and other parts of the world.

## **II. Activities of the Programme**

**1. Theology Seminar-Workshops** are conducted each year for 50 younger staff members of theological faculties, Bible schools and Study Centres, Asia-wide, (including doctoral candidates). From February to May, participants work in their home locality, researching and writing on the course theme for the year. In June or July these participants assemble (in a different country each year) for a residential workshop. Since 1983 over 300 colleagues have participated in these workshops.

### **2. Publications**

2.1: An annual volume of selected papers from the Seminar-Workshops is published with ATESEA, as Occasional Papers. This year the tenth volume will appear along with an anniversary collection of materials selected from ten years' of the Programme's activities.

2.2: The PTCA Bulletin is published 2 or 3 times per year for the exchange of information on Asian Christian theologies, the development of Asian library resources and the work of PTCA.

### **3. Research Groups**

Formed in 1990, three Research Groups have studied further the major areas of Creation Theologies, Women's Stories, and Church History as Peoples' Movements. A volume of papers prepared by the groups is now being prepared for publication.

### **4. Library Development**

4.1: Since 1985 selected libraries have been assisted to give priority to Asian resources in their collections, and a PTCA collection has been initiated. From 1995 this has been located on behalf of PTCA and the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology at the Mosher Library, St. Andrews Theological Seminary.

4.2: In 1991 a workshop for theological librarians was held at Payap

University. A special issue of the PTCA Bulletin (November 1991) published the findings of this gathering.

4.3: A Core-Group has worked with SEAGST in establishing an M. Theol programme for theological librarians (located in Manila) and has initiated the Forum for Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) as a means of exchange and support for librarians in all countries of the region. The Forum is preparing both a directory of theological libraries in the region and a manual for their use, especially for the development of Asian resource collections.

4.4: National workshops for theological librarians, including emphasis on the development of Asian resources, have been held in India (October 1992) and the Philippines (November 1992).

#### **5. National Theological Seminar-Workshops**

Alumni and their colleagues have applied the Programme's aims and methods in locally organised workshops and these have so far been held in Japan, India and Vietnam. More of these are being planned in various countries of the region.

In November 1993 representatives of associated alumni, and of partner and supporting agencies met together for a major convocation, entitled: *Living Theology in Asia: Birth and Rebirth*. This assembly evaluated ten years' work of the Programme, and engaged in forward planning for future activities throughout the Asia Pacific region.

### **THE FORUM OF ASIAN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIANS**

This association is the outcome of the Consultation of Asian Theological Librarians, held in May 1991 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which was sponsored by the PTCA. Fourteen members from eight countries participated in the Consultation. A core-group of members met in Singapore, in October 1991, to formulate the aims of the Forum. These aims are:

1. To facilitate the development and exchange of resources for theology in

the Asian context.

2. To encourage and support the formation of:
  - a. National Theological Library Associations,
  - b. National Depositories of Christian Literature,
  - c. Union listings, Directory of Asian Theological Libraries, Guidelines, Indexes, Bibliographies, for publication.
3. To promote cooperation among, and training of, theological librarians.
4. To arrange short-term courses and workshops.
5. To develop an Asia-wide network of theological libraries.

From this meeting plans were formulated for:

- \* a Master's Degree course in Library Science,
- \* a network of the librarians in Asia,
- \* a Directory of Asian Theological Libraries,
- \* the preparation of Guidelines for Asian Theological Librarians.

Membership of the Forum is open to: those attending PTCA Theological Library Workshops; any practising librarian (by application); any person committed to the development of Asian theological studies (on application).

Recent contributions of the Programme to the work of libraries in the region include:

1. the sending of book parcels of Asian writings to some libraries in order to help in their building of Asian resource materials. Some libraries have difficulty in obtaining (or paying for) books from other Asian countries.
2. the arrangement of short-term scholarships for librarians to add to their experience and training in specific areas. For example: a Sri Lankan librarian was enabled to learn about conservation methods from an archival Centre in Thailand; and a Thai librarian, before moving into a new library building, visited other libraries to observe their organisation. She had no previous experience of other libraries.

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## SOUTH PACIFIC ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is affectionately known as SPATS. In reality no image could be further removed from the truth. Any SPATS gathering will reveal a miscellany of black, brown, caramel and white feet either unshod or in thongs, at the most in sandals but never with spats. However, the informality of the footwear does not detract from the seriousness of the task SPATS has undertaken.

SPATS was founded in 1969 to strengthen theological education in the Pacific Islands. Its seventeen member schools are scattered across some 90,000 square kilometres; most of it water which both unites and divides. The members come from eleven countries and embrace many different cultures and denominational traditions. This very diversity and geographical spread make the existence of SPATS significant, as it provides channels of communication and cooperation for those who would otherwise be very isolated in their endeavours to provide adequate theological and ministerial training in their own contexts.

One of SPATS achievements has been to provide standards that are both academically acceptable and contextually relevant, and to assist schools to use those standards to evaluate their own performance and identify areas that hinder them from achieving their own goals. The regular publication of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* is another achievement, as it encourages islanders to reflect theologically and share their insights with others. It has been an important contribution to the growing awareness that the Pacific does have a perspective that is worth recording and passing on to those both within and outside the region. There has been a particular emphasis on opening theological education to women, as many feel that the reluctance to do this has prevented the Pacific churches from being all that they could be.

Meetings, workshops and consultations provide opportunities for people involved in the practice of theological education to discuss subjects of mutual concern. There have been two workshops in the last six years for the people who work in the libraries of the theological schools. These have

been crucial in raising the profile of the libraries within their institutions and in providing some training for the majority who had no library education or experience whatever, and usually no one to offer advice except faculty members who had used libraries elsewhere.

SPATS has produced two library manuals based on these workshops to be an ongoing aid to untrained people as they try to acquire and organize libraries under extremely difficult conditions. If you can imagine what it would be like to have no regular budget, few tools, no book shops that stock the kind of books you want to buy and no way to keep up with what is being published you begin to get the picture. Add in the problems of cyclones, bookworm, and for most, unreliable electricity.

The effect of the workshops has been augmented by SPATS offering to pay the course fees for anyone working in a member library who is accepted to do library courses externally through the University of the South Pacific. Several people have taken advantage of this and one has completed his Certificate in Librarianship. SPATS has also helped some schools get library tools such as Sears Subject Headings, or Dewey Decimal Classification or the concise AACR2. There has been some limited funding of visits to schools by a trained librarian to help schools get on the right track with their libraries and address any particular needs, often weeding the collection of half a century's discards from ministers' personal collections.

The money donated by ANZTLA will help SPATS expand these forms of assistance. There are always more requests for help than SPATS can meet and this problem will remain while there are untrained people trying to run underfunded libraries. By specifically supporting the work of the libraries and those who work in them, SPATS has encouraged schools to see libraries as a significant aspect of the educational process and to make better provision for them.

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