
Atla Association Update

John F. Kutsko, Atla Executive Director

Each year at the Atla Annual, the executive director provides an update on the Association, the state of Atla's finances as reported in the last fiscal year's audit, the major accomplishments this year by staff and committees, and a look ahead to the next year's goals and initiatives.

Let me begin with several words of thanks. First, the members of Atla, through its delegation to the Board and the search committee it formed in 2022, entrusted to me the role of leading Atla by serving its members, mission, and organizational ends. That mission is to provide resources, collaboration opportunities, and research tools to promote worldwide scholarly communication in religion and theology and to foster theological and religious studies libraries and librarianship. My entire professional life, my vocation, has been in religion and theological studies, and I am grateful to you for this new opportunity. Second, thanks to the Atla board for warmly and graciously welcoming me to Atla and supporting my onboarding. In just six months, I feel like I've known them for years. Third, the Atla staff, in particular its leadership team, has supported and guided me. Thank you Jim Butler, Chad Handshy, Gillian Harrison Cain, and Maria Stanton, as well as Margot Lyon (who stepped away to pursue new interests). Accomplishing that is enough, but they have done so with goodwill and team spirit. Last, but not least, thanks to my predecessor, Brenda Bailey-Hainer, whom I have known for over a decade, who led Atla with vision, and who generously gave her time to support my introduction to Atla. At Brenda's last Annual, she described herself as a Zamboni driver, "sweeping the surface, preparing the rink so that the next generation of Atla leadership has smooth skating ahead." She did much more than that, but her handing off the baton smoothly, like an Olympic relay runner, demonstrated character and commitment, borne of a nonprofit director's deep devotion to an organization's mission.

THE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Because of Brenda's leadership, the last fiscal year, which ended August 31, 2022, was financially positive, and I can report that the

state of the association is strong. The audited fiscal year 2022 financial statements from the independent audit are available online in the 2022 Annual Report (<https://www.atla.com/about/annual-report/>) on pages 33–36.

The audited Statement of Financial Position reported the organization’s total liabilities and net assets at year-end August 31, 2022 as \$18,265,362, down \$136,616 from FY2021. Actual revenue was \$7,520,515 against actual expenses of \$7,574,975. This brings Atla’s total net assets (sometimes called total net worth) to \$11,806,050, down \$54,460 from FY2021.

However, current assets represent cash and investments and other assets that will likely be converted to or provide benefit similar to cash in the next 12 months. The current asset level is a gauge of liquidity and the organization’s ability to meet its near-term obligations. Atla’s current assets increased by \$140,427 from FY21 to FY22 showing that Atla continues to have strong coverage to support its liabilities. And the unaudited FY2023Q2 financials show that current assets total \$9,202,700, an increase of \$157,436 over the previous year. This continues our good cash flow position this year.

Atla’s primary source of revenue (97%) continues to be royalties from the research tools we create. Income generated from Member Programs Department activities (3%) include dues, conference fees, and fees for services such as hosting e-journals for other organizations.

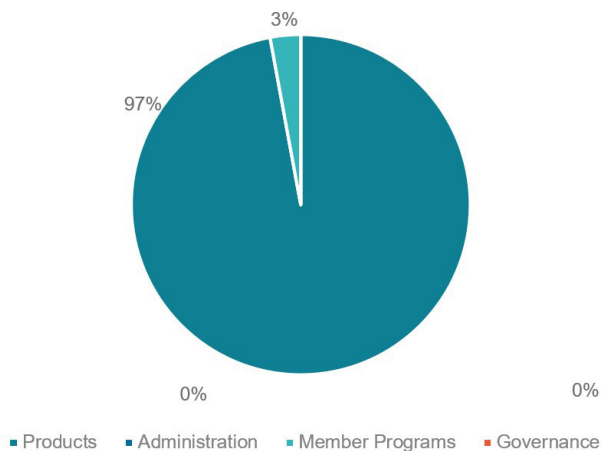


IMAGE 1: Atla Actual Revenue by Category, FY22

On the expense side, the largest portion (61%) was used to produce the Atla research tools we create and provide through EBSCO. However, a significant amount of Atla's expenses—more than six times the revenue—is focused on fulfilling the mission of the association. Last year this was 18%. That includes funding committee work, open-access publishing, Member Programs staff, and professional development opportunities for our members, such as Atla Annual and webinar series. Board and governance work as well as much of the administration costs are also really the work of the organization's ends.

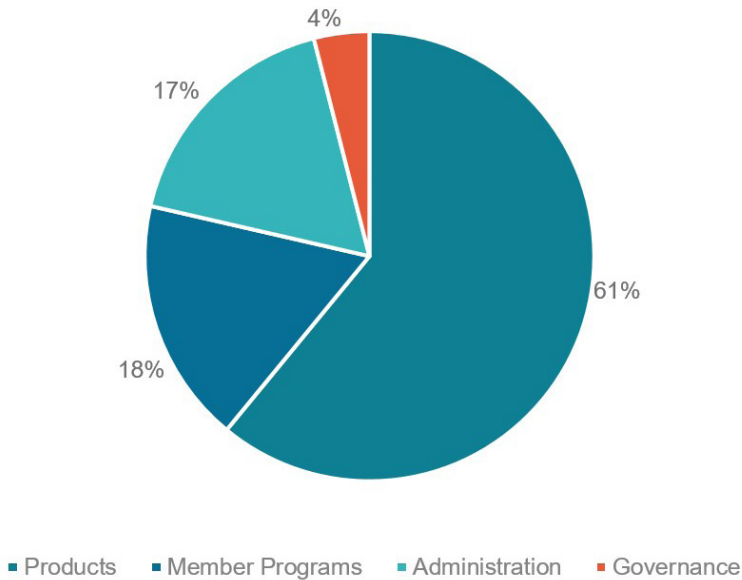


IMAGE 2: Atla Actual Expense by Category, FY22

As of May 2023, Atla has 782 members in 28 different countries. While the membership has remained relatively flat for some categories and up in others over the time trended in this slide, all categories of membership from FY22 to FY23 to date are down, which is typical since often members renew near conference (June) or the beginning of the consortium year (July). A highlight of membership, however, is that both institutional and individual memberships outside North America have steadily grown.

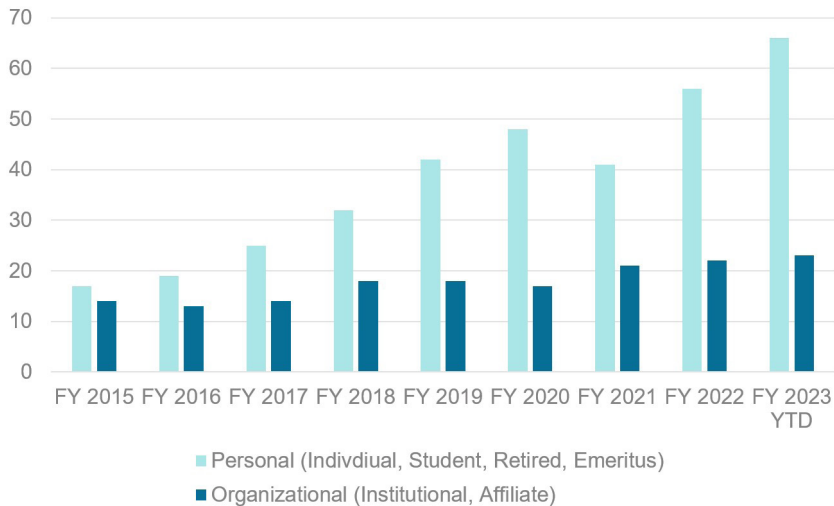


IMAGE 3: Atla Members Outside North America

We have welcomed a number of new institutional members this fiscal year including Ukrainian Catholic University, Wagner College, Belmont University, Dominican University New York, and Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary.

In the new fiscal year, current membership dues will remain the same, but we will introduce membership bundling. Due to Atla's hybrid model of membership, with both institutional and individual members, many people who work at a member institution do not join Atla as individual members since they are able to receive so many benefits simply by virtue of being staff at an institutional member. This reduces the number of individuals eligible to serve as members of committees, editorial boards, and the board. Also, this does not give Atla a clear line of communication to library staff who are not the official representative for a member institution. By introducing membership bundling for the 2023–2024 membership year, we hope to increase the number of individuals receiving regular communications from Atla and engaging with Atla through grant and professional development programs for individual members.

THE IMPACT OF THE ASSOCIATION

A review of the organization's accomplishments by committees and staff are too numerous to cover in detail. And while I will highlight several, I wanted to make two general observations as an executive director new to the position.

I came to Atla as a long-time user of its research tools, not its association services. It has been only since being here that I have the full scope of what Atla does for its members, for their professional development, and for their libraries and institutions. Long-time members all know this, but I didn't. It is a remarkable range of services that few larger associations can boast: volunteer leadership groups; resources to inform and connect library staff; a suite of open access resources; collection cooperation and development services; grant opportunities; and collective information and insights.

On the products side of Atla, this association, its members, and its staff have produced the premier research tools for over 75 years. What began with the Religion Index One and Two are now manifold and recognized for their excellence and indispensability. We have new partnerships, as with Boston College and the Catholic Biblical Association. The research databases have grown in content, breadth, and diversity, expanding coverage of languages, religious traditions, and areas of interest, that includes open access and small-press journals. We help make important scholarship discoverable. And it is not just diverse and global content. In February, we published parts three and four of our continuing blog series highlighting Atla's efforts to make our subject headings more inclusive. Part three highlighted some of the specific topics and categories of subject headings that were changed in our research tools, and part four discussed Atla's participation in the Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms Project.

I quickly reviewed what you already know to make a point. This is what this association does for libraries, librarians, and for the scholars and students they serve that study religion and theology around the world. Seeing all this—now being a part of all this—I feel like a kid in a candy store as your executive director. And I hope you feel that way as a member.

Each year we add to the products and services to help the association expand, thrive, and deepen its impact. The following includes brief highlights from this year.

ATLA & CRRA: THE NEW PATH FORWARD

A word of thanks is due to the work of Brenda Bailey-Hainer, who began conversations with Catholic Research Resources Alliance's (CRRA's) leadership in 2022. Brenda and members of Atla's Board (Kerrie Burn, Jérémie LeBlanc, Armin Siedlecki) worked with the CRRA leadership to explore a way for Atla to incorporate and maintain CRRA's identity, programs, and resources (especially the Catholic News Archive and the Catholic Portal). Special thanks to Atla's Director of Member Programs, Gillian Harrison Cain, and CRRA's Executive Director, Xan Arch, for making straight the path. On May 15, 2023, CRRA held a members' town hall after which members began voting on a resolution for CRRA to dissolve and to become a program within Atla. The resolution passed with 81.6% approval of voting members. Atla is committed to maintaining the CRRA identify; continuing to offer Catholic-focused programming and networking for libraries, archives, and other institutions; and ensuring that the suite of scholarly resources developed by CRRA continues to be openly available.

DAY1 AND THE LILLY ENDOWMENT FUNDED PROJECT FOR PREACHING ARCHIVES

The Lilly Endowment awarded a \$1 million grant to The Alliance for Christian Media, on behalf of its media ministry, Day1, to help improve access and discoverability of the past 75 years of Protestant Hour/Day1 sermon archives for preachers and teachers of preaching. Atla collaborated with Day1 on the grant proposal, and Brenda Bailey-Hainer, again, was instrumental in Atla's role. We have hired an archivist to curate, organize, and enrich the archival materials with robust metadata. The sermons, which will be available on the Day1 website, will be a resource for preachers and seminary students.

EXPANDING THE ATLA RECIPROCAL BORROWING PROGRAM

After interest in participating in the Atla Reciprocal Borrowing program was expressed by several members or potential members outside North America or without the ability to receive patrons, an expansion to the program was announced in the first half of the fiscal year. The expansion offers a more inclusive option while also allowing each individual library to decide their level of participation.

DIGITIZATION AND OER GRANTS AND NEW PARTICIPANTS IN THE ATLA DIGITAL LIBRARY

In the area of digital projects, the Atla Digital Library welcomed collections from Moore Theological College, Western Michigan University Libraries, Carey Baptist College, and Ayson Clifford Library. After the webinar *Harvesting, Hosting, and Highlighting Digital Collections in Religion and Theology* that was featured as part of Theological Libraries Month, and based on feedback from the member survey on digitization, an institutional repository solution for members will begin development in the second half of the fiscal year. Digitization grants were awarded to Saint Paul University and Ukrainian Catholic University. Ashland Theological Seminary was awarded an OER grant in late 2022 with expected publication of the resource in late 2023.

NEW EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PROGRAMMING

The two new educational programs launched in late September, Skilltype and Library Juice Academy, are proving to be a valuable resource for members and a great way to engage not only individual members but staff at institutional members. Members continue to take advantage of webinars offered by our colleagues in the Professional Development Alliance as well as Atla offerings such as the webinar *Shaping the Future with Cooperative Cataloging! Joining Atla's Funnel Projects: An Information Session for Catalogers and Library Directors* and a session focused on incorporating DEI initiatives in an academic setting entitled *In the Beginning Was DEI: Infusion into a Small Stand-Alone Theological Seminary*.

A PRODUCTIVE YEAR FOR ATLA OPEN PRESS

Atla Open Press continues to be productive, with *Theological Librarianship* publishing its April issue including an article discussing the challenges librarians face when tasked with supporting disciplines in which they don't have subject expertise, and an October issue with a forum focused on multimodal scholarship and is seeking contributions to its special forum on the ethical imperative of open. In the April issue of *TCB: Technical Services in Religion and Theology* articles featured Harvard's CopyrightX and transitioning to OpenAthens, the October issue featured a story about textbook affordability at U of

North Alabama, and the January issue featured critical cataloging practices. The *Atla Summary of Proceedings* and *Atla Annual Yearbook* were published on schedule in December, and the full run of the *Summary of Proceedings* has been made available online and open access.

CONNECTING WITH MEMBERS THROUGH MEETINGS AND VISITS

A concerted focus and effort to engage with members in person through member visits and attendance at regional group meetings, as well as in person committee meetings for the first time in two years. With campuses, and individuals more open to receiving visitors and having face-to-face conversations, member programs staff took to the road to hear about what is going on in member libraries and share the wide range of programs, offerings, and opportunities available to members.

TUTORIALS IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES TO HELP RESEARCHERS

In June 2022, we released three new tutorial videos to complement the previously released Three Methods to Search for Biblical Scripture Citations. All tutorials were released simultaneously in English, French, German, Italian, Korean, and Spanish.

- Filtering and Refining
- Using Boolean AND Connectors, Truncating Search Terms and Other Advanced Search Topics
- Organizing Your Search

NEW, DIVERSE TITLES INDEXED IN ATLA RELIGION DATABASE® (ATLA RDB®)

During FY22, 89 new titles were added to the Atla RDB index. These titles illustrate Atla's continued commitment to expand RDB's quality, currency, and scope. We focus on adding titles that meet the research community's current needs and represent research from underrepresented communities, regions, and perspectives. The subject matter of the new titles includes Black women (*Black Women and Religious Cultures*), Buddhism (several including *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, Ethiopian and Eritrean studies (*Aethiopica*), Islam (several including the *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies*), Jewish studies (several including *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Wom-*

en's Studies & Gender Issues), Latter-day Saints (*Latter-day Saints Historical Studies*), Myanmar Biblical studies (*Journal of Myanmar Biblical Studies*), and several interdisciplinary titles.

A CONTINUED FOCUS ON DIVERSITY WITH ADDITIONAL CONTENT IN ATLAS AND ATLAS PLUS

During FY22, 63 new full-text titles were released for Atlas and Atlas PLUS. These titles reflect our same commitment to diversity for our full text offerings. The titles include our first title from Samoa and our first title from Serbia. Other recently licensed titles are from Canada, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Philippines, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, and Spain. Just a few specific titles that highlight continued diversification of the content include the Black Catholic Theological Symposium; Black Theology Papers Project; Dunwoodie Review; Women-Church (a ceased journal from Australia on feminist theology) and a journal on Indian diaspora that covers Hinduism and Indian Studies.

THE FUTURE OF THE ASSOCIATION

The staff leadership team is in the middle of the annual budgeting process for the next fiscal year. We are all aware of the pressures on our field, both in religion departments in college classrooms and in seminaries, divinity schools, and schools of theology. Library budgets continue to be cut. SBL and AAR's reports on the faculty job market show a steady decline for over a decade, and because of tenure, new faculty positions are a lagging indicator of student interest in the humanities. ATS reports decline, mergers, and closures of theological schools every year, and the only ones that don't run an annual deficit budget are those with endowments.

But the study of religion and theology is thriving, just not always in its traditional places and curricula. It is in healthcare, law and public policy, international relations, and peace and justice studies, too. The study of religion and theology are in the highways and byways. What an opportunity.

Hence our priorities. The first priority will be to budget for an annual contribution to a new Product Development Fund, a war chest as it were, to develop new tools for new ways religion and theology

are integrated into higher ed and how their study is changing in the theological education around the world.

The second priority is to continue to build the Endowment Fund. We've implemented the board approved investment policy and moved the investments to long-term growth allocations. And we will begin budgeting an annual contribution to the Endowment. By the way, please also support that the Endowment Fund any way you can. A small contribution, and if able name Atla in your estate planning. The study of religion and theology, and the librarians who deliver that knowledge need support not just this year but the next 100 years.

In terms of staff and reporting structures, we are building collaborations between the research products and the association services, so that we multiply our communications, marketing, and new product development efforts, like iron sharpening iron.

Our focus next year will be to engage in closer collaboration between Board and staff on member linkage activities, gather input from other stakeholders, begin new strategic planning between staff and board aligned with the Organization Ends, and to develop staff's Key Performance Indicators that demonstrate impact toward those Ends.

Priorities next year will include launching the Institutional Repository platform, building a public-facing hub with the critical mass of our open access resources, and developing new marketing efforts and classroom tools to integrate and promote the index and databases.

This is all while expanding existing resources, such as the Atla Digital Library, Atla Open Press publications, the current Atla research tools, and support services for libraries and overburdened librarians.

CONCLUSION

Observing Atla's history, reviewing this year's work, reflecting on my first six months, and thinking about what lies ahead, I am optimistic and excited. To be sure, we face challenges. I heard someone recently describe the challenges at seminaries and divinity schools as being Groundhog Day in reverse. You know the movie: a cynical weatherman wakes up every morning to the same day. Groundhog Day in reverse is like waking each day to same day, but nothing is the same. Everything has changed. That is the world we live in. But Atla is a unicorn organization of products and services for librarians, students, and scholars, with passionate members, a dedicated board, and creative staff. Atla is ready for that challenge.