
Beyond Mere Denominationalism in Atla

Exploring Ways to Enhance Professional Development and Resource Sharing in Theological Librarianship

T. Patrick Milas, Director of the Gardner A. Sage Library and Assistant Professor of Theological Research & Bibliography, New Brunswick Theological Seminary

David Kriegh, Head of Collection Management, Saint Mary's College of California

Robin McCall, Seminary Librarian, Union Presbyterian Seminary

Alison Poage, Harrison Library Director, Seminary of the Southwest

Karl Stutzman, Director of Library Services, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

ABSTRACT: It's not every professional association whose structure includes denominations. Why does Atla? What are these denominations, and how do they connect with Atla's member institutions and organizational aims? In this panel paper, T. Patrick Milas surveys the history of Atla's theological and faith-based aspects, with a focus on denominational groups and related conference worship/devotions. This is followed by a question-and-answer session with panelists representing the Anglican/Episcopal, Anabaptist/Mennonite, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian/Reformed denominational groups. Each representative discusses different aspects of their involvement and activities within denominational groups along with their perspectives on the activities, needs, and strengths of these groups, to discern and inspire their group's denominational identities and role within Atla.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS IN ATLA

T. Patrick Milas

When I first joined Atla in 2006 I noticed there were various events on the conference program that sounded like spiritual edification of

some kind, such as “Worship in the Anglican Tradition,” and some groups that had religious-sounding affiliations, such as the Anabaptist and Mennonite denominational group. Over the years I’ve attended many morning worship events sponsored by denominational groups other than my own. But I haven’t attended others’ meetings, nor have I scoured their minutes, which may or may not be a good reflection of what they actually do. Out of curiosity, I invited some of our colleagues who serve on various denominational groups to discuss what we are and what we do, and what we might be able to do if we knew more about each other.

But first, some background is in order. After searching the *Summary of Proceedings* from 1948 to 2017 for any references to the terms *denominations*, *denominational*, *denominational group*, *denominational meeting*, *denominational report*, *worship*, *devotions*, *meditation*, and *invocation*, I was able to identify some milestones, some trends, and a plethora of collaborative spirit.

In 1947, 51 librarians met in Louisville, Kentucky, to establish the American Theological Library Association (ATLA). Participants hailed from stand-alone seminaries, divinity schools at major universities, and a variety of Protestant denominations. In 1948 they assembled as the Second Annual Conference of ATLA, at which there was a “devotional period” but no denominational group meetings (ATLA 1948, 1). But as early as 1949, the ATLA *Summary of Proceedings* demonstrates that members were thinking and publishing about the “Values of Denominational Bibliography,” and continuing to offer spiritual devotion as part of the regular conference program (ATLA 1949, 21). Edward Starr, Librarian at Crozer Theological Seminary, wrote,

The fact that we have denominations, and are likely to have them for some time to come, can give us ground on which to stand. Denominational schools, and denominational foundations are stabilizing factors. . . . A carefully constructed denominational bibliography can tell us where we came from; how we lived, thought, and felt. It can indicate what we hope for, and perhaps even what we may achieve. . . . In all our pursuits may we seek, in the words of John Cotton Dana, “to hold the eel of wisdom by the tail.... May these bibliographical endeavors help to that purpose.” (Starr 1949, 21–27)

Our panel presentation hopes that by exploring these denominationally informed endeavors we may further help discern and inspire our bibliographical identities.

As in 1949, there was one instance of morning “devotions” in 1950 (ATLA 1950, 1). And between 1951 and 1953, there were two instances per conference. By 1955, “devotions” were referred to as “worship,” and offered every day of the conference (ATLA 1955, 1, 24, 69). In 1956 we have the first *Index to Proceedings*, but to that date, “denomination” does not appear in the *Index to Proceedings* (Chicago Area Theological Librarians 1956, 86–92). Nor have “denominational meetings” appeared on any agendas. In 1957, a single morning service was called simply “meditations” (ATLA 1957, 1). In 1958, worship was foregone (or undocumented) and a Lutheran bibliography was presented (Schmidt 1958, 8–24).

In 1959, there were “invocations” each day of the conference. The invocations were provided by representatives of Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal seminaries, respectively (ATLA 1959, v). So 1959 was a milestone for ATLA. The 1959 Annual Conference also featured a paper, “A Preliminary Survey of Some of the Existing Patterns of Intra-denominational Library Cooperation in the United States” by Roscoe Pierson, Librarian at the College of the Bible. (Pierson 1959, 139–146). (College of the Bible would later become known as Lexington Theological Seminary.) By 1960, ATLA seems to have set its standard for using a variety of terms for faith-related events such as “devotions” and “invocations.”

Also in 1960, a Committee on Denominational Resources was formed, formalizing two years of informal work by the Chair Niels Sonne of General Seminary. The Committee prepared and distributed a survey to all ATLA institutional members and church historical societies. It asked about denominational collecting policies and intra-denominational cooperation on denominational resources. The primary purpose was to inform a guide for all denominational resources. The secondary purpose was to provide material for Pierson’s paper on denominational collections for the theological libraries issue of *Library Trends* (Sonne et al. 1960, 16–17). These are major milestones in the history of not just ATLA, but collaboration in theological librarianship.

The Committee on Denominational Resources continued to appear in the conference program in 1961, but by 1962 it was not fruitful. In 1963, it was disbanded. The Chair Niels Sonne respectfully submitted that, “in view of the fact that this project has been in being since 1957, and that it has been impossible to produce any useful results, it is recommended that the Executive Committee dismiss the Committee on Denominational Resources” (Sonne 1963, 12).

Ironically, at the very same conference that year, ATLA’s denominational groups make their first appearance! Indeed, on the first day of the conference, after the first session, ATLA members split into denominational and area groups at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 18, 1963 (ATLA 1963, ix). I think we can earnestly point to that date and time as the first documented meetings of our ATLA denominational groups.

Denominational groups convened again in 1964 alongside interest groups (which seemed to replace “area groups” in programming). Specific denominations were not identified in the program (ATLA 1964, ix). The 1965 Annual Conference brought two new types of events to ATLA: a memorial and the reading of a telegram. The President read a telegram from the Catholic Library Association: “Greetings from the Catholic Library Association” (ATLA 1965, 3). It’s relevant to note that several Roman Catholic institutions were already attending the ATLA conferences at this time.

And yet in 1966, when ATLA’s denominational groups were documented for the first time with specific denominational names, and “conveners” appearing in the conference program, there were no Roman Catholic denominational groups. The denominational groups consisted of the following:

- Baptist (Calvin C. Turpin, Convener)
- Disciples (David McWhirter, Convener)
- Episcopalian (Thomas Edward Camp, Convener)
- Lutheran (John Heussman, Convener)
- Methodist (Elizabeth Royer, Convener)
- Presbyterian and Reformed (Ernest White, Convener)
- and “Other groups by arrangement” (ATLA 1966, xi)

It must have served some use to have these meetings, because they were given some precedence; after a Presidential welcome, assembling into denominational groups was the first order of business at the Twentieth Annual Conference, to be followed by presentations of papers, budget meetings etc.

From 1967 to 1969, the “Original Six” (or “OS” as I refer to them) appeared consistently in the conference agenda, alternating who was the convener (and how the word *convenor* was spelled). In *Essays in Celebration of the First Fifty Years*, there is a note that Roman Catholic institutions were not participating until the late 1960s: “Since Roman Catholic participation in ATLA began in the late 1960s, the first twenty-five years of the Association history is predominantly Protestant” (Hurd 1996, 22). My review of the *Summary of Proceedings 1966–1969* confirms that during those initial years, the denominational groups’ infrastructure did not include Roman Catholic institutions.

But in 1970, ATLA finally welcomed the Catholic denominational group to the Association, with Fr. John Shellem as the first Convenor. That year, in President Harold B. Prince’s Address, we read:

Today as we begin our twenty-fourth year of living we are facing the question of whether ATLA can move forward more rapidly and more efficiently by altering its structure. . . I hope we will make changes in our operation. . . [including] broader participation in the conferences and in the life of the association. . . But as we get at these things, I hope we will not lose, or even diminish, the friendliness and camaraderie that is so much a part of our association’s life. I have heard our conferences denigrated as “mere fellowship.” If it is true that in this day of tension, of strained relationships, of talking at rather than talking with, we have a *koinonia* here—and I believe it is true—then it is indeed a pearl richer than all our tribe. I hope we will not let ourselves cast it away. (Prince 1970, 86).

In 1970, they wondered about their identity as a professional association and about “mere fellowship” as a problem. In 2024, let us interrogate whether or how we might best transcend our inherited structure of denominational groups and go beyond mere denominationalism.

But first, we have a few more decades of history. In 1972, the United Church of Christ group appears for the first time (ATLA 1972, 4). In 1973, denominational groups themselves got short shrift in the *Summary of Proceedings*, but there was a Love Feast, and the new *Index to the Summary of Proceedings 1947–1972* took great care

to delineate denominational resources (Jeschke 1973, 171–189). In 1974 and 1975, denominational group names appear in the agenda, without conveners' names or reports, and worship was absent from the program both years.

But in 1976, one of my own mentors, Norman Kansfield (one of the few ATLA members who had a PhD in Information Science), led worship every morning of the conference, and the denominational groups were back on the agenda (ATLA 1976, 1–3). In 1977 there were denominational meetings but no worship. In 1978 there was chapel every morning, and ambiguous “denominational meetings,” undifferentiated by denomination or convener (ATLA 1976, 2).

By 1980, contact information for the denominational group conveners appears for the first time. What were they thinking? Perhaps that ATLA members could wish to be in touch with conveners of relevant groups, perhaps even outside of their own denomination. Who knows if maybe even the public would be interested? Alas, only the Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterian-Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups provided contact information. The year 1980 was also a substantial milestone for documenting the goings-on at the various denominational cabals: their reports appear for the first time in the *Summary of Proceedings* (ATLA 1980, 109–115).

The history of the denominational groups is at times three steps forward and two steps back, since in 1981 denominational meetings are present in the agenda, but no convener information is provided, and there are no reports. (How can you request a report from someone you don't know how to contact? I don't know.) In other big news that year, the first student members participated. Maybe the powers that be didn't want to scare off the new library school students with all the denominational bravado! But what the *Summary of Proceedings* showed through 1982 was vague references to denominational meetings and no reports.

Come 1983, denominational groups appear by name in the *Summary of Proceedings* table of contents (ATLA 1983, iv) and contact information is included in the *Summary of Proceedings* reports section (93–95). Campbell-Stone appears first in 1983. And there are references to tangential groups, such as the Methodist Librarians Fellowship and the Presbyterian/Reformed Library Association. From 1984 to 1989, the denominational groups appear consistently in the

Summary of Proceedings and in the conference program; and they sponsored a variety of worship at annual conferences. What's more, the level of participation and extent of the reports from denominational groups usually exceeded those of other committees, including problem groups, task forces, area groups and interest groups. The denominational groups were an active and productive phenomenon, but were they useful? Well, they continued into the 1990s.

The 1991 program included a great variety of spiritual opportunities, with Matins and Compline bookending the first day of the conference, a memorial service the second day, and liturgy of word and eucharist with string quartet the third day (ATLA 1991, 18–23). In 1993 the Orthodox Librarians denominational group first appears (ATLA 1993, 102). The ATLA choir was active throughout the 1990s, with denominational groups content continuing to outpace the content from interest groups, even Technical Services and Automation up to 1993.

In 1994, interest groups' contributions to the work of the Association ballooned, far exceeding the reports of the denominational groups in the *Summary of Proceedings* (ATLA 1994, 93–116). The 1995 conference offered the first worship in the African Methodist Episcopal Tradition, with Renita Weems of Vanderbilt preaching (ATLA 1995, 3).

In the late 1990s, the names of the groups varied. Sometimes there was an Anglican group, sometimes Anglican and Episcopal. In 1997, there is the first meeting of the Anabaptist/Mennonite group (ATLA 1997, 5), held at a different time than the other groups (as Karl Stutzman elaborates upon in the question-and-answer portion below). The conference in 1999 offered the most worship, with four full services (ATLA 1999, 329–340). And with the addition of a “Non-Denominational denominational group,” the denominational groups once again outnumber the interest groups of ATLA in number (ATLA 1999, 4) and reporting productivity (ATLA 1999, 117–123, 319–328).

In 2000, the denominational groups are given an hour and fifteen minutes to meet, and meetings started at 7 p.m. New member breakfasts were scheduled right before morning worship (ATLA 2000, 2–3). In 2001, the denominational groups are given an hour and half to meet and meetings started at 3:30 p.m. (ATLA 2001, 3–4). In 2002 and 2003, denominational groups reporting overtakes

interest group reporting in terms of quantity of content (ATLA 2002, 65–71, 269–276; ATLA 2003, 4–45, 229–235); Quaker worship appears (237–239); and “Prayer at ATLA Banquet” (by John Trotti) officially appears in the program (Atla 2003, 249)! In 2004, the denominational meetings were scheduled at the same time as the International Collaboration Committee Meeting (ATLA 2004, 4). Why did the International Collaboration Committee meeting have to compete with denominational meetings? What if someone wished to participate in both, or multiple?

By 2005, there was more going on in the interest groups than the denominational groups, and sadly, the number of memorials outnumbered both types of groups’ coverage in the 59th Annual Conference’s *Summary of Proceedings*. It was a year of generational change in ATLA, as many Lifetime Members had passed on (ATLA 2005, vi). The 2007 Annual Conference doesn’t stand out particularly in terms of faith-related events or denominational groups trajectories, but it happened to be the first conference for me personally. I will confess I did not attend any of the worship services, but I did attend the Presbyterian denominational group.

The year 2008 was the low point for denominational groups submitting reports to the *Summary of Proceedings*, with only the Baptists, Lutherans, and UCC folks doing so (ATLA 2008, 367–368). In 2009, the Pentecostal Worship service conflicted with the Diversity Committee Breakfast (ATLA 2009, 3).

The year 2012 stands out as a year when Anglicans, Episcopalians, Orthodox, and Methodists either did not attend the conference, or did not meet as denominational groups, or met but did not report on their meetings. With such a liturgical desert, something interesting happened called a “Spiritual Discipline of Meditation” and a “Spiritual Discipline of Service” (ATLA 2012, 302–309).

The year 2013 appears to be the last time the Atla Hymn was sung (ATLA 2013, 7). It was also the only year when there was a joint Presbyterian and Evangelical worship service (ATLA 2013, 4). In 2015, the worship services were concurrent! You could either go Buddhist, Catholic, or Disciples of Christ, but nothing in between (ATLA 2015, 5).

The 2016 Annual Conference marked the first worship in the Jewish tradition (ATLA 2016, 1). And in 2017, with just two interest groups reporting (World Religions and Technical Services) and five denominational groups reporting (Baptist, Campbell-Stone, Lutheran, Methodist, and Catholic), the interest groups' reports and denominational groups' reports were extracted from the *Summary of Proceedings*, and moved to an online-only publication called the *Atla Annual Yearbook*. From 2018 to the present, the events and minutes of the groups have grown in number, complexity, and content, yet continue to appear only in the *Atla Annual Yearbook*.

For many years—and now in 2024—worship has been scheduled only first thing in the morning, before member breakfasts (at 7 a.m.), without hybrid setup or support. Even in 2022, denominational groups met in person when they could, but those are now only online. So the denominational groups have a long, storied history, but some of the age-old questions about our groups functioning for “mere fellowship” or as mere siloes abide to this day. But I have every faith that our distinguished panelists will help us to better understand our story, current context, and future possibilities.

PANEL DISCUSSION

- The program then moved to the panel portion:
- T. Patrick Milas—moderator
- Alison Poage—Anglican & Episcopal
- Karl Stutzman—Anabaptist & Mennonite
- David Kriegh—Roman Catholic
- Robin McCall—Presbyterian & Reformed

QUESTION 1. DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE DENOMINATIONAL GROUP TO WHICH YOU BELONG PERSONALLY? OR DO YOU REPRESENT YOUR INSTITUTION AT ITS DENOMINATIONAL GROUP MEETINGS? OR BOTH?

Alison Poage

Hi, everyone. Thank you, Patrick, for a great introduction to that history of the denominational group. Yes, I do belong to the denominational group to which I belong personally, because I think my calling to come to an Episcopal seminary was also a calling to become an Episcopalian. I didn't realize that at the time, but I was Roman Catholic

and was received by the Episcopal Church shortly after starting at Seminary of the Southwest. However, that didn't mean that I knew everything that I needed to know to work in the Anglican/Episcopal setting! Attending the denominational meetings was very helpful to me at the time, and as you'll learn, it continues to be.

Robin McCall

Hi, I really enjoyed that introduction—I learned a lot from that. Thank you, Patrick. I am different: I work for an institution affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA, but my own background is Baptist. I inherited the chair position of the Presbyterian/Reformed group from my predecessor, Christopher Richardson, who was the seminary librarian before me here, but he wasn't Presbyterian either—he was Quaker. So we have a long history, I guess—at least two people—of not being Presbyterian/Reformed, but heading up this denominational group.

Karl Stutzman

Thanks, Patrick, for the intro. Our denominational group (Anabaptist-Mennonite) already met on Zoom, and in the meeting, Eileen Saner, who is my predecessor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, remembered starting the Anabaptist-Mennonite group in 1997. So having this history handy to share with her was really cool. I do participate in the denominational group that I belong to personally, and personally work for, etc. That's not totally common for our group, as I'll get into later, but that's where I'm at.

David Kriegh

First off, thank you, Patrick, for the introduction. It's really humbling to hear the history of denominationalism all the way up to now, and I sort of think of the Catholic group as in the second half of the book on the story, and then my parts like somewhere in the index way at the end, so it's like I'm standing on the shoulders of giants. I'm kind of a combination of my colleagues here: I am personally Episcopalian, and look at me now—I'm convening the Catholic group. I did not swim the Tiber, whereas Alison swam the Thames or the Potomac, whatever they want to call that. But that is the number one question I get, too: what do you choose to do as far as what

group you want to be a part of? And the easy answer for me is that I love my fellow Catholics in employment. I was in a situation in my seminary where I was one of only two non-Catholics working there. But it was still a welcoming space, and I found a welcoming space here as well, and I found this particular group is really where my energy was at. That's why I chose to gravitate to that group. No disrespect to the Anglicans!

QUESTION 2. DOES YOUR DENOMINATIONAL GROUP SUPPORT OR INSPIRE YOU PERSONALLY?

David Kriegh

It's kind of nice when the first question just leads into the second question, organically. The denominational group definitely inspires me a lot here. The number one reason to the question people ask, why do I keep coming to this conference: I've since left the seminary that I was working at, a lot of changes happened, and I'm technically adjacent to the realm of theological librarianship now. I also want to credit Carisse [Berryhill] for getting me to come in the first place. It's my tenth time here, I owe a lot to her for that. But I was considering the Catholic group the main attraction when I came here. I love when we get together in person. I'm still mourning the loss of going to an event for our business, plus going out to dinner, making the reservations, everything like that. I feel that what inspires me is within a small-enough group for me. I'm the kind of person that likes to work within a small group. Not to say we're a tiny group, either, but we're a subset of Atla, and that helps with the ideas percolating the conversation. I always look forward to seeing everyone. I'm always overjoyed when I see Stephen [Sweeney], or Connie [Song], and the others there. That really keeps me coming back. It really does inspire me personally. Yes, it does.

QUESTION 3. DOES YOUR DENOMINATIONAL GROUP STEWARD DENOMINATION-SPECIFIC RESOURCES OR PROGRAMS? IF SO, HOW?

Alison Poage

A subset within the Anglican denominational group has started a conversation about our holdings of diocesan journals in the Episcopal

Church. We got underway earlier this year. It was Dr. Romulus Stefanut from the School of Theology at Sewanee and Dr. Mitzi Budde from Virginia Theological Seminary, and her colleague Jim Fitch, and my colleague, Duane Carter. We started talking about which diocesan journals and newsletters we are currently holding, where do we have overlap, and where might we consider—we're still in the early stages of this, we're just talking—having an institutional commitment to retaining certain diocesan journals; and might we share any journals that we have here that maybe fills in a run of journals that another institution is missing. So that was work that is not necessarily new to everybody. I think it's something that's been done in the history of our denominational group. But we're rekindling this kind of conversation right now, and on a small level. We received a donation here of what we call "The Red Book" in the Episcopal Church (the *Episcopal Church Annual*), and I just sent a box of those over to Sewanee because they could use an extra copy of certain years. I'm excited to see this kind of cooperation in the Anglican denominational group getting going at this time.

Robin McCall

This question was a really great opportunity for me to do some networking with people who have chaired the Presbyterian/Reformed group in the past. So I spoke with Virginia Dearborn, who's here today and also with Jim Pakala, who was the chair for some time, and several other folks along the way. We don't officially steward anything specific in terms of denominational resources currently. But there have been times in the past when members of the denominational group have worked together to create finding aids for the very sort of thing that Alison's talking about—denomination-specific resources that maybe different libraries hold—so that we know where to find certain things, or who has an institutional repository for certain items. And that's something that would be really valuable to do again.

QUESTION 4. IN WHAT WAYS DOES YOUR DENOMINATIONAL GROUP COMMUNICATE?

Alison Poage

Well, we communicate really well because Patrick Milas organizes us. He's our chair right now and will help schedule our meeting that's

going to take place as part of this conference. We also have the listserv that Atla runs for us, which has been a useful tool. It was used recently to help plan the service that took place at the conference in Long Beach, and it's how we heard, for example, that Dr. Mitzi Budde is retiring this year after 33 years of working at Virginia Theological Seminary. So, just because I was helping to present this panel, I was noting how the listserv is a communication tool to communicate big news. I know I also feel inspired, as Robin was saying. As I've been reflecting on preparing for this panel, I can think of more ways that I would use the listserv in the future. You may see some more posts from me, those of you that are on that listserv.

QUESTION 5. WHAT CONCERNS ARE YOUR DENOMINATIONAL GROUP CURRENTLY FACING?

Robin McCall

In this one, I looked back through the group minutes in the *Yearbook*, and I found this—this was from last year, which was the year that I became the chair—and we wrote, “one challenge is that many people working at Presbyterian or Reformed schools are not themselves members of those denominational groups” (Dearborn 2023, 50). So that was something we already talked about—that several people in our group find themselves in that position. This has led to very low participation numbers in the denominational group, and a relative lack of interest in the group, as time has gone by. There are just fewer and fewer people working in Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries who are themselves Reformed/Presbyterian, which is interesting. I think I saw in the record that Patrick was putting together, that we haven't had a Presbyterian or Reformed Worship service at Atla since 2001, which is surprising. I feel it would be helpful to have some procedures in place for passing on group leadership. You know, succession planning for the denominational group, have a vice chair who will step into the leadership position after two years, or something like that so you don't have someone who's inheriting a chair position for a denominational group that they've never participated in before. If they are just new in the field, they won't have access to experience or knowledge about the group's purpose or history. So that is one of the questions: how do we get people involved in this group? Or do we encourage them to

go participate in the denominational group for the denomination of which they're a part, and figure out other ways to get people involved in the Presbyterian/Reformed group? Do we do both? I don't know. That's all the issues that we're currently facing.

Patrick Milas

Thanks so much, Robin. And I'd just like to add, there were some documents circulating among panelists to prepare for today—and I will own this—I might have indicated there hadn't been worship in explicitly the Reformed tradition, and I was thinking of the (Dutch) Reformed tradition, that my own seminary (New Brunswick Seminary) represents. I can affirm there have certainly been Presbyterian worship services offered much more recently than 2001.

QUESTION 6. CAN YOU SHARE ANY EXPERIENCES OF MENTORSHIP, COLLABORATION, OR LEADERSHIP YOU'VE HAD WITHIN YOUR DENOMINATION GROUP?

Alison Poage

Yes, I can. 2015 was the first Atla conference that I attended, in Denver, and at the time I was making a transition from working in the public library setting to an academic library setting and a theological setting. So, as you can imagine, it was a time when a lot of learning had to happen in a very short amount of time. I remember going to the Anglican denominational group and walking into the room and feeling a sense of welcome and relaxed camaraderie and collegiality going on. In preparation for this panel, I decided to see what the *Summary of Proceedings* in 2015 said, since Patrick did this great overview of it. I went to the *Summary of Proceedings* of that year for the Anglican denominational group, and it said that there were three seminaries represented: Sewanee and Virginia Theological Seminary and Seminary of the Southwest. And the members shared personal news with one another and “welcomed new member Alison Poage to the group” (Poage 2015, 338). So then I realized I actually wrote that, because—talk about standing on the shoulders of giants, as David said!—I could see that I was in the room with these folks that had a great deal of experience. I think I volunteered to take the minutes out of a desire to be helpful in

some way! I took the minutes, and that was that day in 2015. But that face-to-face meeting Jim Dunkly, and Mitzi Budde—the value of that could never really be expressed.

And I shared earlier that we're working on this shared resource project with diocesan journals. It is because of that meeting that day and because of connecting with those people. I couldn't go in-person to the conferences immediately after that. But those relationships had formed. And then, later on, when we transitioned to Zoom during COVID, I actually was able to rekindle those relationships—it felt to me we were seeing each other more often, it was easier for me to attend those online denominational meetings. So I'm very grateful for the denominational group. There are a lot of different arms of Atla. The interest groups are also great, and these smaller groups maybe can be a way to welcome people into the Atla work, and for me that was certainly what the Anglican denominational group did for me. So I'm grateful.

David Kriegh

Mentorship, collaboration, leadership. Well, right from the beginning to when I went to my first conference, they paired me off with someone to introduce me to the conference—that was Stephen Sweeney—so that was a really nice introduction. And I feel like the collaboration we talk about—what we're going to do at our meetings—and I remember one year [2017], we're all sitting in on different sessions and stuff, but no one in the room in our denominational meeting was up front. So I kind of made my exhortation: I said, "In 2018, in Indianapolis, let's present more." I think we had like five Catholic focus presentations from that. So that was really powerful, to have that happen. And really reflecting on how we were able to share out rather than compartmentalize Catholic formation in the context of Atla, that was a really powerful thing. We also talked in our meetings about ongoing things we've had. One of the other questions kind of touched on is the programs that we've kind of shepherded through to Atla: currently, CRRA is the big one right now (the Catholic Research Resources Alliance) being absorbed into Atla, but also earlier on, when I first started, it was CPLI [Catholic Periodical & Literature Index], going from being a separate product into being absorbed by Atla. And there was a lot of consternation over that. A lot of private meetings on the side, shall we say, outside

of the denominational meeting, were held to ensure worried people about what might happen from that.

We even had the experience of the CLA (Catholic Library Association) becoming very, very unsteady, and it seemed like their future was in doubt. There was some consideration of whether our group could absorb some of that, and ultimately, we said no. We needed CLA to be its own entity, and I've noticed since then they are reinventing themselves a lot. It's also important to know when we can't do something. But there's a lot of can-do attitude in our meetings. I'm grateful for all of that.

QUESTION 7. WHAT ROLE DOES OR MIGHT YOUR DENOMINATIONAL GROUP SERVE IN SUPPORT OF ATLA'S BROADER MISSION?

Robin McCall

Okay, I've brainstormed a few ideas here. For one thing, it is very important to preserve the opportunity to record memorials—things that are happening that are important in our area of librarianship, of religious study, scholarship just in general. For example, this week we lost Sam Valentine, who was the Professor Emeritus of Old Testament here at Union Presbyterian Seminary, and a wonderful Hebrew Bible scholar and a mentor to me, and a parent to me. And that's important for our school, it's important for our library, because he was a big supporter of our library. It's also important for people in Atla to know when we're losing scholars or when we're seeing changes in scholarship happening where we're losing a previous generation. Being able to share these beyond the denominational groups is really valuable, and encouraging people to read the *Yearbook*, and keeping the minutes in the *Yearbook* available to people. Creating finding aids and bibliographies of denominational records and their locations is a great idea, and perhaps sharing resources. Another thing that's going on at our library, for example, is that we are the institutional repository for PCUSA for the south of the country, and as such we have a lot of microfilm records of church minutes and histories and that sort of thing, and we found that a number of our records this year are experiencing vinegar syndrome, and we are going to lose some of those. Now, we've been really lucky that we have duplicates of those affected records, but we're the only library that has them, and yikes! That's a lot of really important information. It would be really

cool if there was a way that we could share those resources in some ways. Maybe microfilm is hard to share, but if there are ways that we could do that—which leads me to another idea that I had, which is possibly digitizing denominational records in some way, either at the library level, or making donations that contribute to allowing a larger library (such as UPSEM or the Presbyterian Historical Society) to do that kind of digitization because online hosting space is mad expensive. But being able to make those denominational resources accessible to others in an online format would be really great.

Karl Stutzman

As one of the younger denominational groups, one of the roles that we might play is kind of modeling the idea that groups can expand, inform, and grow anew. We don't necessarily have to have kind of a fixity of "these are the Christian subsets that meet together." There could be other religious affiliations, new kinds of birds of a feather. Just to kind of go back into the history a little bit to show what happened, it was over table fellowship that Eileen, my predecessor, discovered that there were a number of other birds of a feather of Anabaptist/Mennonites hanging around at Atla, working at other denominations' libraries, but they wanted to hang out together and get that fellowship of the group that they felt that affinity with. So that's why the Anabaptist-Mennonite group always met at a different time: it was for practical reasons. But there's also a kind of religious backdrop to that, which is that we have at least in some wings of the Anabaptist Mennonite movement, a real enacting of the whole meal as indicative of what the disciples did with Jesus. That table fellowship kind of theme continued, and when I joined the Anabaptist/Mennonite group in 2009, it was always a lunch at a different time from when all the other denominational groups met. There's flexibility and free form enough in Atla to allow for what we on the Board (I'm a member of the Board of Directors) articulated in our organizational ends, as expressing life stances. This is a broader term that indicates not just particularity of religious beliefs but all these stances that make up who we are. I think the Anabaptist life stance maybe provides a model that Atla can use for the future going forward.

Patrick Milas

Thanks so much, Karl. I like how you characterize your denominational group as essentially an affinity group as well, and you think about affinity, and other types of affinity groups.

QUESTION 8. HOW MIGHT ATLA BETTER SUPPORT EXISTING DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS?

David Kriegh

Thank you, Patrick. I have thoughts. One thing, as we saw from Patrick's history of denominational groups, is that consistency is always a good thing and yet we seem to be always changing and some of it's because some denominations that weren't represented came into existence in Atla and that structure had to correct that. I think that we had seen some things lately: the *Yearbook*, even though it kind of ripped out the denominational stuff out of the *Summary of Proceedings* (which has its own issues), also imposed standards we've never seen before on those—and I kind of like having guidelines to work from. When I get the minutes from Kathy [Harty], who's the minute taker for life and the minute dictator for life of the group, there's some consistency to that, and also we're creating a record as well. Atla made some good steps, and making that consistent, so that we can look through the history of these things and more clearly see that, and it'll be less archaeological than some of the experiences Patrick was discovering through years and years of the *Summary of Proceedings*. I would suggest that we look more at the conveners and the way conveners came about. My personal story is that it happened here in Long Beach eight years ago when Stephen Sweeney was elected to the Board of Directors. He said it was going to be hard for him to keep being the convener of the Catholic group (although I don't believe there's any bylaw saying you can't do both) so I volunteered to take over. It was super informal, there were no elections, disputes, or anything like that; it just kind of happened, and it's never changed since, and I'm still in this role. I might suggest that Atla look, though, at the arrangements and how the groups are selecting their conveners. Notice, too, when someone steps into being convener, that they're demonstrating some leadership and seeing succession planning in Atla; notice that action, what's happening there. There's a lot of energy coming out of denominational groups. As

we see in the history of Atla, sometimes trying to impose a top-down order on the denominations wasn't working out so much so they threw the whole thing out at one point. But now we're seeing more of a bottom-up approach, things coming out of the denominational groups. So really look at that, see how they're functioning, and see what best practices can be brought across the groups. Even though I'm not advocating that we all become the same, far from it, there are some consistent best practices that we can all learn from each other and follow, and that's really in the interest of the association.

QUESTION 9. HOW DOES THE TRADITION OF ATLA DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS ENGAGE WITH FAITHS BEYOND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION, IF AT ALL?

Karl Stutzman

I alluded to this a little bit earlier. And really, the denominational groups introduced into Atla a spirit of interfaith understanding. Through planning these worship sessions through this engagement, across denominational groups, this kind of experience of worship—I've heard this from other folks in Atla as well—of learning and engagement and curiosity for each other, and our different expressions of faith, is a unique feature of Atla that is rooted in the history of these denominational groups that we learn today. As we continue to engage in interfaith understanding, this is a model that we already have developed for that engagement. I hope that we can continue to engage respectfully on the basis of our shared work as theological religious librarians. And I really think that the kinds of rituals that we develop at Atla, rooted in this past that we have of denominational groups, serves us well for our future in an increasingly more interfaith Americas, since that's where we're kind of based, but also around the world that we're engaging more and more locally. We're just going to have to keep getting more diverse. And that's a good thing. But we have this DNA, that is a great launch pad.

QUESTION 10. WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR GROUP?

Alison Poage

I'd like to share that it is a small group, and so far in my experience, it's been small participation. If anyone out there is curious about it or craving that kind of connection where you get to talk a little bit more in a smaller group, I would really recommend coming to the denominational meeting. The conversations that we've had today, listening about how some people are working in a denomination that's different from their own, makes me wonder if we could get more people coming and sharing different perspectives. The other thing I would like to share is just how meaningful it's been to hear about the generations. In the chat we were just hearing about someone who's done the work before. I learned from Mitzi about Newland Smith, an Episcopal seminary librarian. I had not known that name, but it was someone who was active in Atla and someone who was a mentor to Mitzi. I looked into who the person is, and now am familiar with another Episcopal librarian who's contributed to the field, even though we've never met. That's really neat; and in light of what Robin was saying about the importance of memorials, I think it's really nice to know of each other and know of each other's work, and to be able to carry on that legacy. And now that you shared, Patrick, that the first convener of the Episcopal denominational group was Thomas Edward Camp, of course, now I have a curiosity about Thomas Edward Camp. I value that about our group and the opportunity it can be for us to get to know each other and be mindful of each other's work.

Patrick Milas

I can add that, in the pandemic and the isolation of the pandemic, one of the things that the Anglican and Episcopal denominational group did was, instead of merely hosting worship at the Annual Conference, we also met midyear. During Advent we met online for prayer services as a way to continue to connect throughout the year, even though we weren't able to go to an in-person conference at all in 2020.

QUESTION 11. HOW DOES THE ABILITY TO GATHER AROUND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ATLA?

Karl Stutzman

This is a really fantastic question for us to work on together. Actually, that dual identity that we hold as theological and librarians—we're *Atla*, lowercase now. But I think we still carry with us that identity as theological librarians largely: that's the name of our journal [*Theological Librarianship*]. I really believe that the two facets of that vocational identity are important to honor at the same time, they make sense together, in this context. I can go to a general church conference and that's not the same as this. I can go to a general library conference, and that's not the same as this. But there's something about this kind of shared passion that we have, as different as we all are from each other, that makes for a very special place of connection. And I experience coming to *Atla*, where we have our strongly held religious identities and vocations, along with our strongly held librarianship values, as a homecoming. John talked about it as a kind of family reunion, right? It's a tribe. That isn't just that we came from the same ancestor. We welcome new people into the tribe all the time. But it makes it a very special place where I do feel I found my people. That's the value of it for me.

Alison Poage

I would add to Karl's comment that I find it to be kind of a—I think he used the word *family*—I'll say stabilizing, comforting piece of our organization that's experienced a great deal of change. Those two things can be both in an organization: you could change and grow and become more diverse, and then you could have these traditional groups that share—our birds of a feather. And even as we're finding new birds of a feather, we have these traditional ones that we've heard about today and have been around since the 19...—I forget exactly what year it was—but it's been a little while. I find denominational groups to be beneficial to our organization in this time.

Patrick Milas

Thank you, Alison. I'd like to open it up to our audience now as well. Would any of you like to address the question of how does the ability

to gather around religious identity enhance your experience of the Atla conference or the experiences of people you know?

We had the comment from Carisse Berryhill, talking about the Campbell-Stone denominational group, and she shared that “Really it may be better to think of it as a tradition, such that our related libraries really collect from throughout the movement and support each other.” Thank you.

QUESTION 12. WHAT HAVE YOU MOST APPRECIATED ABOUT EVENTS OR WORSHIP PLANNED BY OTHER DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS?

Patrick Milas

We have a comment from Michelle Spomer, regarding the Presbyterian and Reformed denominational group and their recent digitization efforts and interest in greater collaboration.

Virginia Dearborn

Hello, everyone! It’s been a minute since I was Atla in-person, but a very early memory from my first Atla was just getting the opportunity to participate in the Atla Choir. I remember that when I heard that there was a choir I was like, “Wait a minute, talk about finding your people! We get to do librarianship and theology and choir?!” It also gave me an opportunity to participate in a worshipful way, which is very important to me, with singing, but in traditions and with music that are not from my own tradition, which is just really special.

Patrick Milas

Thank you. And we have a comment from Kate Wimer, about opportunities for participating in other denominational groups, “work events and worship have helped to bridge the gap between the many denominations that are represented in our seminaries and serve them better.”

Carisse Berryhill

Local host committees have been instrumental in planning our worship services, drawing upon local resources to sponsor worship, and the local host committees, as well as denominational groups, who contribute to that worship, and historically, sometimes in a big plenary setting and elsewhere, and the smaller settings.

Patrick Milas

We have a comment from an online attendee, thoughtfully remembering Melody McMahan and her work with the Roman Catholic denominational group's resources. Thank you.

Karl Stutzman

I have one memory of being involved in worship planning for Atla and that was in Indianapolis, right before the pandemic, and this was the beginning of worship happening in a little room off to the side. It was really meaningful, and we did that partly because of our faith identity, but partly because we were local-ish. (We're in Northern Indiana at my school, about three hours away from Indianapolis—but local-ish, just as some of the local hosts here are local-ish.) That was a really meaningful experience to come together, and we planned a hymn singing, which is something we do as Mennonites, and something that connected really well with our Atla colleagues, who also love to sing. That was a nice bridge point that we were able to build as both local and denominational in that involvement. There is something to be said, too, for a more intimate setting for worship. It's the faithful who really turn up at 7 a.m. in a small room off to the side at the conference, and you have a sense of that passion there.

Patrick Milas

Thank you, Karl—the faithful, perhaps the curious, perhaps the sleep-deprived.

Christina Torbert

There's really something unique about even having worship offerings at the Atla conference.

Patrick Milas

We have a comment from an online participant, in loving memory of Seth Kasten for his wonderful leadership of the Atla choir.

Michelle Spomer

The different worship services are really educational opportunities for folks from other associations, groups and traditions.

Patrick Milas

We're also interested to know about interfaith understanding, but we don't have time to address our final question, "does your denominational group currently build interfaith understanding? If so, how?"

Thank you for the kind remarks from our online participants; and thank you all for contributing to this panel and audience conversation. We'll look forward to continuing the conversation.

Thank you.

Special thanks go to Shraeyah Rajeshwaran, Library Assistant, Gardner A. Sage Library, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, for transcribing the panelists' question and answer portion of the program. Some responses have been shortened or edited for clarity.

REFERENCES

American Theological Library Association [ATLA]. 1948–2018. *Summary of Proceedings: Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/archive>.

Chicago Area Theological Librarians. 1956. "Index to Proceedings Nos. I-X, 1947–1956." *Summary of Proceedings: Tenth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 86–92. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/321/266>.

Dearborn, Virginia. 2023. "Presbyterian and Reformed Denominational Group Report." *Atla Annual Yearbook 2022–2023*: 47–50. <https://serials.atla.com/yearbook/issue/view/332/302>.

- Hurd, Albert. 1996. "Preface." In *Essays in Celebration of the First Fifty Years*, edited by Valerie Hotchkiss, M. Patrick Graham and Kenneth Rowe. Evanston, IL: American Theological Library Association.
- Jeschke, Channing R. 1973. "Index to Proceedings, 1947-1972." *Summary of Proceedings: Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 171–189. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/304/249>.
- Pierson, Roscoe M. 1959. "A Preliminary Survey of Some of the Existing Patterns of Intra-denominational Library Cooperation in the United States." *Summary of Proceedings: Thirteenth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 139–146. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/318/263>.
- Poage, Alison. 2015. "Anglican Denominational Meeting Report." *Summary of Proceedings: Sixty-ninth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 338–339. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/41/21>.
- Prince, Harold B. 1970. "President's Address." *Summary of Proceedings: Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 85–86. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/307/252>.
- Schmidt, Herbert H. 1958. "The Literature of the Lutherans in America" *Summary of Proceedings: Twelfth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 8–24. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/319/264>.
- Sonne, Niels H., Edgar Krentz, and Roscoe Pierson. 1960. "Report of the Committee on Denominational Resources." *Summary of Proceedings: Fourteenth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 16–17. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/317/262>.
- Sonne, Niels H. 1963. "Committee on Denominational Resources" in American Theological Library Association [ATLA]. *Summary of Proceedings: Seventeenth Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 12. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/314/259>.

Starr, Edward C. 1949. "Some Values in Denomination Bibliography." *Summary of Proceedings: Third Annual Conference of the American Theological Library Association*: 21–27. <https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/328/273>.