
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

From June 19 to 22, 2024, the 78th annual meeting of Atla convened in Long Beach, California, where Atla members, staff, friends, and colleagues met for professional development and for fellowship. We learned about each other's ongoing work and planned for the future. We created and renewed friendships, and we gamed. Yes, we gamed! (Shout-out to *Wanderhome!*)

This volume is the product of that gathering. The *Summary of Proceedings* chronicles the activities at Atla Annual, documents the association's ongoing activities and interests, and makes available the research, best practices, and professional wisdom shared at that meeting. The *Summary of Proceedings* also serves as a barometer of sorts: A glance at any volume can reveal what dominated our association's attention in any given year. With this in mind, we can look at this year's papers to discern the topics, trends or technologies that dominated Atla's attention. While a couple of common themes do stand out—which we'll consider momentarily—the range of topics addressed by Atla Annual can defy easy collation. This year's papers range in topic from license negotiation to information literacy to gender diversity to *creatio divina*. Atla's professional interests, like its members, are diverse.

In addition, this year's volume offers readers a unique opportunity to engage with Atla Annual's plenary speakers. Dr. Amir Hussain (our opening plenary speaker) and Dr. Lynn Silipigni Connaway (our closing plenary speaker) generously gave Atla time for interviews that allow us to better explore their professional insights and perspectives.

Nonetheless, two themes surface that invite attention. The first addresses curating, maintaining, and downsizing physical collections. This is a perennial concern as libraries everywhere must contend with the challenge of evaluating and maintaining collections while people, programs, and resources vie for space. Papers from Beth Kumar, David Kiger, and Oliver Schulz share lessons learned from their institutions' respective discard and curation projects. This does not suggest that physical books have lost value for our collections,

however: Karl Stutzman reminds us that print collections continue to have significance, and Brandon Wason discusses the importance of physical books as cultural and historical artifacts. Hannie Riley further teaches that library discards can still have life and meaning for Majority World libraries.

Certainly, one theme clearly stood out as having captured Atla's attention, and it is no surprise: artificial intelligence (AI) was the dominant topic of conversation, as five papers (and a total of nine presenters) wrestled with the concerns raised by AI for librarians and for higher education. Michael Hanegan offered theological librarians an invitation to serve as leaders in responding meaningfully to the challenges and potential of AI in education. A panel conversation with Brady Alan Beard, Allison Graham, Emily Peterson, and David Edward Schmersal examined the nature of AI in contemporary teaching and scholarship and counseled a path of thoughtful engagement with AI in order to best serve our communities. Dyan Barbeau and Kathy Harty described their library's commitment to working with theological faculty to better understand AI and develop relevant pedagogical strategies for it. Finally, we get into the weeds of using AI: Steve Jung introduced strategies for crafting AI prompts, while Nathan Ericson related his exploration of using AI for developing a digital edition of an early sixteenth-century astrological treatise. (*Sic itur ad astra!*) This constellation of papers serves as a fascinating and instructive introduction to AI in academic librarianship, and provides a valuable opportunity to learn more about AI in theological education.

This year's *Summary of Proceedings* is ultimately like many previous years' volumes: the contents are both timely and timeless, both addressing perennial questions and responding to new urgencies. I invite you to browse the contents and learn about the work of your colleagues; these papers might provide new insights for problems you already face, raise concerns you had not considered—or even inspire you to think in areas that you feel demand more research and discussion.

I'd like to close this editorial introduction with a few words of gratitude for the many people who made this volume possible: to the presenters and authors whose words grace these pages, and whose patience, professionalism, and collegiality made it possible to bring

their work to a broader audience; and to our plenary speakers, for their time before, during, and after Atla Annual. Finally, no small amount of gratitude is due to Barnaby Hughes at Atla. His work was instrumental in refining and sharpening these papers. (Never edit alone!)

And thank you, readers, for bringing your attention to Atla's work and the *Summary of Proceedings*.

Take, and read!

James A. Estes
Editor-in-Chief