



atla **Summary of Proceedings**

Seventy-ninth
Annual Conference
of Atla

Katie Thorman
EDITOR



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The 79th annual meeting of Atla convened from June 18 to 21, 2025, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Atla members, colleagues, and staff dedicated to librarianship and information access gathered for collaboration, professional development, and community. Conference attendees shared work, life, and other updates with faces both new and familiar. In addition to scholarly conversation, attendees also held space for worship, shared meals, explored Pittsburgh's sights, and remembered colleagues who passed during the year.

Like the previous three iterations of Atla Annual, the conference was presented in a hybrid format, offering flexibility and allowing those interested to attend either in person or remotely. Sessions were recorded, regardless of modality, and made available to attendees after the event.

In this volume of the *Summary of Proceedings*—the final volume—you will find a range of research, inquiry, advice, and best practices shared at Atla Annual 2025. The *Summary of Proceedings* serves as a record of the four-day event, from business meeting summaries and the annual association update to papers, presentations, and collaborative sessions.

The conference was bookended by two engaging and highly relevant plenary addresses. The opening plenary was given by Dr. Frank Yamada, the Executive Director of The Association of Theological Schools. It focused on the tectonic shifts taking place in theological librarianship and considered the many roles librarians play in the age of accelerating digital technologies. The closing plenary by Keith Webster, the Helen and Henry Posner, Jr. Dean of the University Libraries at Carnegie Mellon, delved into scenario planning, the rise of artificial intelligence, and the future of theological librarianship.

The papers and presentations shared throughout the conference likewise touched on a variety of significant and pressing topics in theological librarianship. For example, three contributions to the *Summary of Proceedings* touch on the importance of engaging the profession worldwide, three are focused on technology and artificial intelligence, and four center on strategies for building resources on

cultural study and diversity. Other timely topics include librarian neutrality, leadership development, collection building, and creative programming for engagement.

I invite you to review the contents and enjoy the range of material at your own pace. However, if you are wondering where to start, I have some suggestions. The panel presentation from Ezra Choe, Gerrit van Dyk, Robin McCall, Dee Roberts, and David Schmearsal explores the nuances of neutrality and the concept of hospitality in a library setting, taking into consideration current events and varying work environments. Christine Love-Rodgers's analysis of university librarians in the United Kingdom presents results of survey data collected and includes recommendations for library associations based on the findings. A panel presentation from Marlon Patterson, David Schmearsal, and Vincent Williams shifts focus to student workers in the library, exploring how these students can be an asset for the library while they are introduced to the profession.

Thank you to the presenters, conference attendees, and Atla staff for once again curating an important and necessary space for the sharing of knowledge in religion, theology, and librarianship. Our community is made stronger by your contributions and engagement.

I hope you will join us in celebrating eighty years of Atla at Atla Annual 2026 in Denver, Colorado.

Katie Thorman
Editor-in-Chief

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BUSINESS REPORTS

Minutes of the Atla Business Meeting

Thursday, June 19 at 12:15 – 2:30 pm in the William Penn Ballroom

Beth Kumar, Graduate Theological Union, Atla Board Secretary

Atla Annual included the annual business meeting, led by 2024-2025 Board President Susan Ebertz, and the association update, provided by Executive Director John Kutsko. All conference attendees were invited to participate.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

- Atla staff received the certified election results via email from ElectionBuddy and verified 271 (or 40.5%) of the 667 eligible members cast valid ballots and quorum for each voting class was met. The membership elected Cindy Aalders, Evan Kuehn, Romulus Stefanut, and Kate Wimer to the Board class of 2025-2028.
- President Ebertz welcomed the new Board members.

BOARD TRANSITIONS:

- Ebertz thanked outgoing Board members and presented plaques to Carisse Berryhill, Dan

Flores, and Jérémie LeBlanc.

- Ebertz announced Karl Stutzman's resignation from the Board and thanked him for his service and presented a plaque. Ebertz announced Yasmine Abou-El-Kheir will serve the remainder of Stutzman's term.
- Ebertz thanked the 2024-2025 Board officers:
 - Susan Ebertz, President
 - Karl Stutzman, Vice-President
 - Beth Kumar, Secretary
 - Kris Veldheer, Treasurer
- Ebertz announced the Board officers for 2025-2026:
 - Leslie Engelson, President
 - Beth Kumar, Vice President
 - Vance Thomas, Secretary
 - Bo Adams, Treasurer
- Ebertz offered a word of thanks and reflected on her time as president. She passed the gavel to Leslie Engelson. Engelson thanked Ebertz for her service as president and for her time on the board, presented her with a plaque, and closed the business meeting.

President Engelson closed the meeting at 1:56 pm US Eastern Standard Time.

2025 Association Update

John F. Kutsko, Executive Director

A version of this report was presented to those who attended the conference, in person and online, on June 19 during the Business Meeting. This report expands upon the Association Update presentation (Kutsko 2025c).

A main feature of my report is to present to members the state of Atla's finances at the last fiscal year's audit, that is, the year ending nine months ago, August 31, 2024. I also provide program and product highlights since last June, and we look ahead to next year's initiatives. I say each year that there is no way to adequately convey the business details, the development of the databases, the Open Press publishing, and association programs and services in the few minutes I have during Atla Annual. Neither can I do that in this report. And, honestly, we hear from you in surveys that you can't keep up—you're not aware of all we do. To be sure, we have to better communicate the 24/7 programs and services for you and your institutions in addition to the Annual Reports, blogs, social media, and announcements posted to [Atla.com](https://atla.com)—and we will.

In addition to these typical updates, I want to provide what I believe is a frank look at our challenges ahead, because that may not be evident in an annual snapshot or in a financially positive year, such as this one. It is easy to look past challenges, to mention only vaguely the disruptions happening in higher education and theological education. I want to be blunt and tell you what keeps me up at night.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

FY2025

The last fiscal year that ended August 31, 2024, was financially positive, and the state of the association is strong. The audited fiscal year's financial statements from the independent audit are available online in the 2024 Annual Report on pages 31-50 (Atla n.d.). All our audit reports and Annual Reports are now publicly available on [Atla.com](https://atla.com). The paragraphs below reference those pages.

The audited **Statement of Financial Position** reported the organization’s total liabilities and net assets at year-end, August 31, 2024, as \$21,907,211. This was up \$2,564,348 from FY2023. Actual revenue was \$9,318,901 (excluding foundation restricted funds of \$973,439) against actual expenses of \$7,891,692, as shown on the **Statement of Activities**. This brings Atla’s total net assets (sometimes called total net worth) to \$14,870,395, up \$2,400,648 from FY2023. It was a positive fiscal year from FY2023 to FY2024.

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 \$2,233,919 from FY2023 to FY2024 showing that Atla continues to have strong coverage to support its liabilities.

The unaudited FY2025 Q2 financials (this year) show that current assets total \$11,590,051, which is an increase of \$1,177,228 over the previous year. This continues our good cash flow position this year.

Atla’s primary source of revenue (75%) continues to be royalties from the research tools we create: *RDB*, *Atlas*, and *AtlasPLUS*. Income generated from Member Programs activities (2%) include dues, conference fees, and fees for services such as hosting e-journals for other organizations. Administration is a category that includes unrealized gains and losses from investments, and we’ve had gains this year. In addition, Atla received over \$900,000 related to grants from foundations that represented 9% of overall revenues.

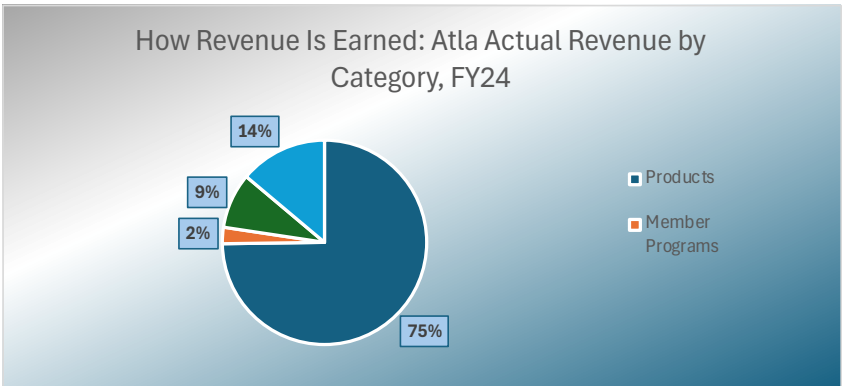


Figure 1: FY 2024 Results, How Revenue is Earned

On the expense side, the largest portion (53%) was used to produce the Atla research databases we create and provide through EBSCO. However, a significant amount of Atla’s expenses—approximately ten times the revenue—is focused on fulfilling the mission of the association. Last year this was 20%, which is also higher than the previous year. This includes funding committee work, open-access publishing, Member Programs staff, and professional development opportunities for our members, such as Atla Annual and our webinar series. Board and governance work, as well as much of the administration costs, are also really the work of Atla’s Organizational Ends.

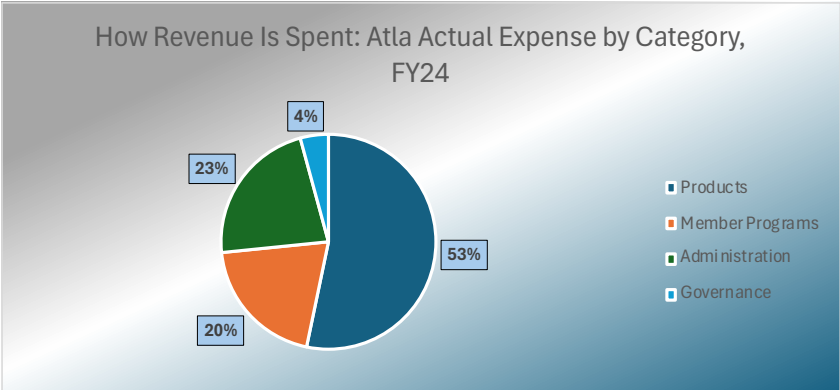


Figure 2: FY 2024 Results, How Revenue is Spent

These two pie charts—how revenue is earned and how revenue is spent—are critical to appreciate. They demonstrate the role Atla databases play in revenue for the association. However, they also reveal how the databases represent Atla’s contribution to information literacy in religion and theology, core to what theological librarianship represents, fosters, and promotes. Please support the use of the databases at your institutions.

Below is a year-to-year comparison of investment. Total investments including the Endowment, Operating Reserve, and other non-endowed funds grew from \$7,854,138 in May 2024 to \$8,511,938 by May 2025, which is over \$657,000 greater. This growth is largely due to increases in market valuation of the holdings and realized investment income. The allocations allowed now by the investment policy have significantly helped over the last two years.

Table 1: Total Investments

	<u>5.29.25</u>	<u>5.31.24</u>	<u>5.29.25 Chg from 5.31.24</u>
16-1233 (Other Non-Endowed Funds)			
Cash Equivalents	1,825,368.98	2,648,656.62	(823,287.64)
Equities	-	-	-
Fixed Income	2,133,829.33	1,060,477.78	1,073,351.55
Alternatives	-	-	-
Total Fund	3,959,198.31	3,709,134.40	250,063.91
16-1233A (Endowed Funds)			
Cash Equivalents	146,166.98	102,072.07	44,094.91
Equities	1,473,178.33	1,356,391.30	116,787.03
Fixed Income	-	-	-
Alternatives	-	-	-
Total Fund	1,619,345.31	1,458,463.37	160,881.94
16-1233B (Operating Reserve)			
Cash Equivalents	138,005.61	51,442.79	86,562.82
Equities	1,755,799.39	1,625,548.07	130,251.32
Fixed Income	1,001,314.76	982,421.66	18,893.10
Alternatives	38,275.02	27,127.80	11,147.22
Total Fund	2,933,394.78	2,686,540.32	246,854.46
ALL FUNDS			
Cash Equivalents	2,109,541.57	2,802,171.48	(692,629.91)
Equities	3,228,977.72	2,981,939.37	247,038.35
Fixed Income	3,135,144.09	2,042,899.44	1,092,244.65
Alternatives	38,275.02	27,127.80	11,147.22
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	8,511,938.40	7,854,138.09	657,800.31

As of May 31, Atla has 774 members in 20 different countries. From May 2024 to May 2025, Membership is up in the individual category and in most other categories. Membership bundling, with the help of our institutional members, has been a success. With more individuals as members, there is a larger number of individuals eligible to participate in the governance of the association, serving on Committees and on the Board. It also allows Atla to have a direct line of communication to those individuals instead of the member representative being responsible for sharing news about programming, professional development, individual grants, and events. Bundling, however, does not significantly increase revenue. That wasn't its goal.

Table 2: Atla Membership Trends

Atla Membership Statistics, FY15-FY24											
	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	As of 5/31/25
Individual	367	377	368	346	330	336	350	367	362	351	415
Lifetime	90	96	97	94							
Retired					22	24	25	18	19	17	16
Emeritus					70	71	20	13	12	5	6
Student	80	45	57	60	66	71	85	82	90	56	32
Institutional	234	239	263	285	294	292	291	301	304	310	298
Affiliate	62	61	47	32	23	22	23	23	13	9	7
International Institutional	10	10									
Total Members	843	828	832	828	830	816	794	814	820	747	774

BUDGETING AND PLANNING FOR FY2026 AND BEYOND

The next two charts provide a longitudinal view of three important association metrics since FY2017.

- Atla’s total net assets, and you can see a healthy rise here.
- The Atla Endowment, and here, too, you see a steady rise.

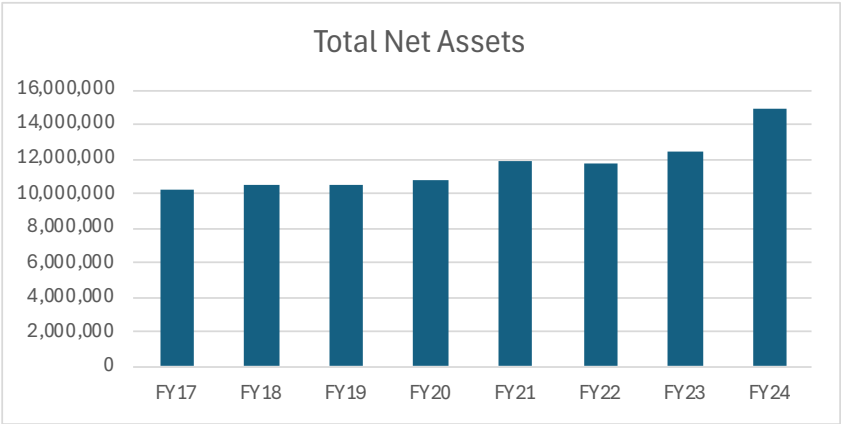


Figure 3: Total Net Assets FY17 - FY24

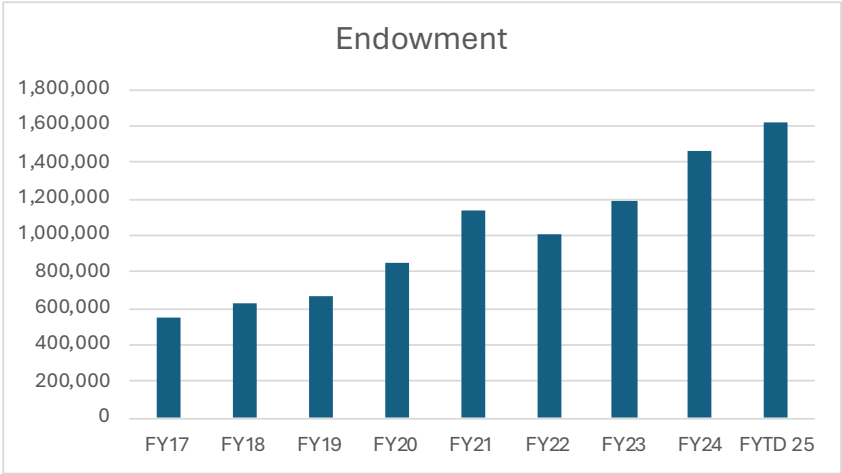


Figure 4: Endowment FY17 - FY24

These trends might suggest all is well, but the trends hide some realities. I know, you’re saying to yourself, here goes Kutsko focusing on the negative. Yes, Atla’s assets have increased more than \$3 million in two years, but the leadership team and I soberly look at cash and subtract out things like unrealized market gains, unexpected bequests, and one-time grants. We are delighted to have raised \$900,000 last year, most of it from the Lilly Endowment to support Project Eureka, and money to support the exploration for a new database for religion and professions (Atla 2024). However, we can’t build long-term expense structures with those funds because they are designated and restricted. Not only is the market this year exceptionally volatile, but what goes up sometimes goes down. Atla also treats its databases as intangible assets, which they are, but I focus on the word intangible, not the word asset. For example, each year we capitalize production costs and amortize them over ten years, with the current year going in at a higher inflationary amount than the decade-old year’s amount going out, which increases Atla’s net assets every year without actually being tangible. So, when the Atla leadership team budgets, we focus on cash assets and adjust out capitalization, one-time grants and bequests, unrealized market gains, and intangible assets. We treat these as unusual and unreliable.

It is important we do that especially for next year. We are facing a year in which we cannot see around the corner. Higher education in the US is rapidly being reinvented and reprioritized. Theological

education, like congregations, has declined over two decades, and we are likely to see that amount of change in just the next two years, not twenty.

Henry Ford famously said, “If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse.” Ford’s faster horse fallacy highlights how people tend to want a better version of the past and base their desire on current limitations and not a new paradigm. But innovations like the iPhone and Uber arose from addressing unmet needs rather than directly responding to customer requests for “a better version” of what exists. AI, for example, **is** a new paradigm, and even its programmers admit to not fully understanding it. Incidentally, this is also why Atla is taking a leadership role with ATS and In Trust to understand the opportunities for its members and their institutions.

Like Ford, when we ask Atla members what they want, we hear something like, “1975.” But it’s 2025, and we can’t go back. We’re going to face very challenging times, including budgeting for next year, caused by enrollment decline, loss of billions of dollars in federal research funding and student aid, sweeping cuts to agencies like the IMLS, leading to institutional austerity, and faculty and library job loss. So, we, too, must seriously consider hard decisions and significant changes. With hard decisions, we will inevitably have sacred cows that won’t make it.

And even when change is positive, it elicits two powerful emotions: nostalgia and fear. And the closest cousins of nostalgia and fear are sadness and anger. These are real organizational emotions. I hope you read Susan Ebertz’s last blog as board president—it was on nostalgia (Ebertz 2025). I’ll write more about that emotion in September, when we begin a new fiscal year.

To adapt and evolve, we may want to consider ways to expand and broaden our mission and increase our organization’s visibility. This will help us to promote theological librarianship, to look for opportunities for new library services, to consider new ways to convene at Atla Annual, to create new products that showcase the breadth of skills theological librarians have, and to serve the wide range of jobs that religion and theology inform.

You've heard me say that religion is everywhere. When other professions, not just other academic disciplines, need to understand religion and theology, you will be the guides. I wrote to you in May that the technology term "interoperability" captures the extraordinary skill set and knowledge base of theological librarianship (Kutsko 2025b). Your value to the seminary and university lies in your unique ability to connect people, disciplines, and resources. In our increasingly utilitarian academic environment, theological librarians serve as interdisciplinary mediators, translators, and facilitators. I wrote to you in March that Atla's past, present, and future is a path toward new associations, connections, and collaborations in widening circles that demonstrate and showcase the critical role of theological librarianship in society (Kutsko 2025a). I believe that. I hope you believe that. I hope, together, we can embrace that.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES UPDATE

Project Eureka

Last year at this time, we announced that Atla received a grant to build a federated search solution to support research, teaching, and ministry (Atla 2024). The first of its kind for theological education, this centralized hub will be an open discovery platform that cross-searches a wide range of materials, including a significant number of open access resources, special archives and collections, and institutional histories. It will be designed to serve and support theological education, interdisciplinary research in religion, preaching, and teaching. It is being designed to reach well beyond institutions and those at them to be accessible to individuals. While religion is everywhere, Atla is the theological library association that connects people and resources so that everyone can better understand religion and theology.

At the start of this year, supported by funding from the Lilly grant, we officially began building the beta version of Project Eureka, which is scheduled for completion by August 2025. This milestone aligns with the project's goals and marks a significant step in fulfilling our grant commitment to Lilly, as the beta site is designed to serve as proof of concept for the project's innovative approach. The beta will provide a collaborative springboard to attract and engage new community content partners, organizations, and archives. We will

also use the beta to gather feedback from the community to guide features, content, and marketing development in support of the full release in Summer 2026.

ATLA RELIGION DATABASE (ATLA RDB)

In the midst of that major product development, the production team has also reached a major milestone with the current databases. As of June, *RDB* now exceeds four million records, with over 2,780 serial titles, of which more than 1,400 are actively indexed. To give this pace of growth some context, it took ten years to grow from two million to three million records and less than five years to grow from three million to four. *RDB* began as a crowd-sourced database in 1950 (the *Religion Index*). It has grown in diversity and breadth, and is without peer.

I am also pleased to share key updates from Atla's editorial team as we expand *RDB* to meet the research community's evolving needs. We continue to broaden our coverage across disciplines—emphasizing the role of religion in society and helping researchers better understand its intersection with social, cultural, and political dynamics worldwide.

Our content strategy enhances the study of Religion and Society, focusing on journals that offer unique voices and geographic perspectives. Recent additions highlight religion's connections with business, politics, ethics, and culture, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and enriching our members' access to diverse, global scholarship. Notably, these new titles are already experiencing high usage, reflecting strong interest and engagement from our research community.

ATLAS AND ATLAS PLUS

Atlas currently offers 415 titles. *Atlas PLUS* includes 750 titles. Eighty-five percent of these titles have coverage starting from volume one, issue one.

These newly added full-text titles reflect our ongoing commitment to advancing the study of religion and society. By including

journals such as the *Journal of Religion and Demography*, *Decisions of the Roman Rota*, and the *International Journal of Sport and Religion*, along with expanded relationships with leading publishers and organizations, we ensure our collection represents a broad spectrum of perspectives and scholarship. This approach supports our mission to provide comprehensive resources that illuminate the diverse ways religion shapes and interacts with communities and cultures worldwide.

MEMBERSHIP

As mentioned earlier, Membership Bundling has increased individual membership and offered new opportunities. In FY2025, staff made a concerted effort to promote and assist institutional members in bundling memberships, which has had the desired effect of increasing the number of individual memberships. As of April 2025, 196 institutions (65% of all institutional members) utilized membership bundling. Of the 301 individual members that were part of a bundle, 140 (46.5%) were new joins.

The majority of institutions using bundling assigned one individual membership, several assigned and paid for one or two additional individual members, and a handful of institutions assigned and paid for three or more memberships, with one institutional member assigning and paying for ten additional memberships. Thank you to the institutional representatives who see the value Atla membership provides their staff and, through them, their institution's faculty and students.

ATLA ANNUAL 2025

Atla Annual 2025 provides opportunities for education and networking with the feel of a family reunion. Registration for this year's Atla Annual was slightly less than the previous year. However, this is the first year since the pandemic that the number of in person to online attendees hasn't been close to 50/50. This year, 72% registered to attend in person. An even higher percentage of first-time attendees, 83%, registered to attend in person.

The number of concurrent sessions this year decreased as well, and fewer proposals were received than in previous years. The number of exhibitors was comparable to previous post-pandemic years, but the number was still significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. The timely programming included sessions focused on AI, leadership, the theological education environment in North America and globally, digitizing and working with primary source materials, reference and information literacy, and more.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

The Membership and Engagement team works across the organization to promote and market Atla programs and resources. Building on the success of last year, this year we have continued to work closely with EBSCO on several marketing campaigns to drive awareness of the Atla databases, increase use, and demonstrate the value of the databases in student learning and outcomes. If you haven't watched the interview with Dr. Samuel Adams (Chair of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary), I encourage you to do so and to share it with your students and faculty (Atla 2025).

We also worked closely with EBSCO to add a link to the "Atla Scripture Search" under the "Research Tools" section of the new EBSCO UI, addressing a concern of many members and clearing the way for them to transition (Cain 2025).

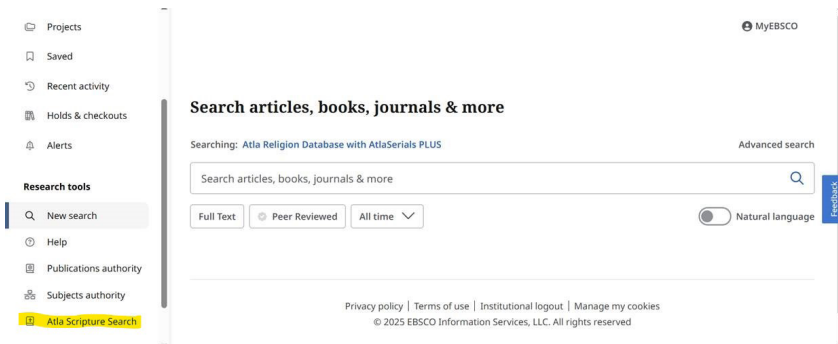


Figure 5: Atla Scripture Search Function on EBSCO

In addition to the regular monthly title updates, we have started focusing on marketing specific content in the databases by title or publisher, or by subject area or focus. These content marketing pieces

are designed to not only create awareness of new and interesting content, but also to help librarians alert their faculty to content in the databases that align with their interest, research areas, or course curriculum. Please share these, too, with your institutional colleagues.

AI LEADERSHIP

In a March 2024 blog post, I promised that “Atla’s leadership in how AI can be used to study our past, serve the present, and protect the future will be critical in a world in which religion is everywhere” (Kutsko, 2024). For the past year, Atla has been collaborating with ATS and In Trust to offer several professional development and education opportunities relating to AI and theological education. Events included several seminars and the creation of a microcredential (short course) that was first offered this spring. Response to the material and this collaboration has been extraordinarily positive and we hope to continue this collaboration next year. We feel it is critically important for Atla to collaborate with others in the ecosystem on this effort. While AI is not limited to the library sphere, this is an area where librarians can take on a leadership role to educate and implement AI within their institutional context.

SURVEYS

The Membership and Engagement team has also spent a major portion of its capacity to develop two types of surveys to better understand what you face and experience and what we face in theological librarianship with our peers worldwide. We launched these surveys last year and are routinizing them this year and next.

One type is an annual membership satisfaction survey, split into three parts this year. It asks you how Atla is doing with its products, services, and advocacy. These surveys, while designed to help measure and report progress toward the Organizational Ends, also provided invaluable insight into the current state of Atla member libraries, and the report being finalized is designed to help those in research, teaching and learning, and administration better understand librarians and their work.

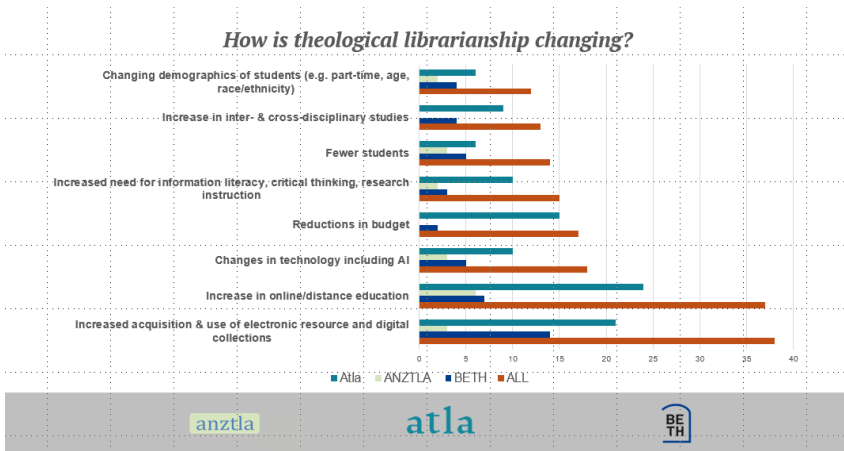


Figure 6: Results From Global Survey Showing How Theological Librarianship is Changing

A second type of survey, which will be distributed every other year, is an International Demographic and Environment Global Study conducted in collaboration with BETH, ANZTLA, and ABTAPL, and distributed in three languages. This study is designed to understand the environment in which theological and religious studies libraries are functioning, and how libraries and librarianship are evolving to meet the changing landscape of theological education. The results of the 2024 study will soon be released to members, peer associations and societies, stakeholders, and decision-makers in theological education to help foster dialogue about the future of theological libraries.

Like you, with your interoperable skills, on the threshold of Atla's 80th anniversary, Atla asks itself, *where can we, where should we, where do we go from here?* Where and what do you want your association to be? We are listening.

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PLENARY

An Interview with Dr. Frank Yamada

Atla Annual 2025 Opening Plenary Speaker

Dr. Frank Yamada, the sixth executive director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), delivered the opening plenary address at Atla Annual 2025. Under his leadership, ATS has fostered and encouraged innovation in member schools while strengthening their diverse missions to address the shifting landscape of communities of faith and the broader public. He has written about and speaks on many topics within theological education.

In preparation for the conference, Atla Product Specialist Todd Aiello and Marketing and Communications Coordinator Katie Thorman interviewed Dr. Yamada about his experiences. The following interview has been edited for clarity and length.¹

Could you tell us about your role as the executive director of The Association of Theological Schools, or ATS?

So, the first thing, as a Christian myself, and a religious person, I tended to view all of my roles in theological education as callings, and this certainly feels like a calling to me. I've experienced it as a calling, but it's been a different kind of calling than when I was a faculty person at McCormick, and before that at Seabury Western, where I think the focus was on intellectual formation of students within the theological school. As a theological educator, it was different from my vocation as a president of one of those schools, McCormick, where I thought the focus was more on aligning the mission of the school with the realities of the church and society, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and in urban centers of Chicago.

ATS is a 281-member organization of schools that span a variety of Christian traditions, and we have one Jewish school. By charter, we are actually a Judeo-Christian organization. The predominance of ATS schools are Christian, but they come from a variety and a vast spectrum of theological positions and different traditions. In fact, many ATS schools were created as a result of an argument within a denomination. We have schools that are historically mainline Protestant, like Presbyterian, United Methodist, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, and American Baptist, but we also have a plurality of schools—Evangelical Protestant schools. About 46% of ATS schools are Evangelical Protestant, which range from Pentecostal to more fundamentalist reformed—and all across the theological spectrum and different kinds of traditions. We also have Roman Catholic and Orthodox schools.

One of the things, I think, that makes this a unique calling is it is the one organization that I know of where these traditions actually come together and do shared work with each other. One of our core values is collaboration, and that's certainly what we live out in ATS. It is the one place that I know of in the world where you will get these different theological traditions, that have really been in conflict with each other over the centuries and millennia, together to work on our common mission, which is quality graduate theological education for the church and broader society. It's been amazing. In fact, I think it's a witness to the church and our current society about how theological differences can come together around a common mission and good work.

In your past professional work, you have served on Society of Biblical Literature committees, such as the Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics Group, the Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible Section, and the Committee for Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession. How has your participation in these groups impacted or shaped your views on the future of theological education?

In the roles before my executive work, I found that my ministry wasn't so much tied to the classroom or to my scholarship, but was tied much more to the overall thriving of the school.

I felt like I should play a role in leadership in some way in the academy, and that leadership was focused on lifting up the voices that weren't the most dominant voices in the discourses. I believe

that context matters deeply in biblical scholarship and in scholarship in general, so my participation and leadership over these committees sought to promote the important perspectives of women and of racial and ethnic communities in biblical interpretation. I think these committees align as they point to the future of theological education in a display of diversity. For decades now, demographers have understood that the US population will not have a racial or ethnic majority sometime before the midpoint of the century.

The diverse perspectives that I saw on scholarship are reflections of that diversity that I think are evident in the broader population, and I think they enrich scholarly conversations as well. It suggests that there are multiple ways through which people come to the text and understand the text, and I think it creates a disposition of the desire to listen to differences and to others that are different from you. I think those are tremendous values needed to be a good global citizen. I think it's also the kind of values that we're going to need as we emerge, eventually, into the second half of the 21st century, when we will have a greater diversity of peoples than this country has ever had.

Your talk at Atla Annual will touch on the reality that theological education is in the midst of a series of tectonic shifts at a time that has been called “the great transition” and will ask what roles librarians provide in this age of acceleration in digital technologies. Can you elaborate on this idea?

Sure, and I'll elaborate on them further at Atla Annual, too, of course. I think of these tectonic shifts you refer to in four categories. There are certainly more issues going on within theological education, but these are the four things that I think are markers of this great transition.

First, there is a shifting organizational financial model among schools. The best example that I can give is that at ATS we see approximately one merger about every three to four months. I don't see this as schools seeking to do the next best thing to closing, but as an attempt for schools to actively think about how they can extend the mission of the school when the idea of going forward as a freestanding institution, or as a non-partnered institution, is just not viable. So there are certainly some shifts happening in the financial and organizational model.

The second tectonic shift is adapting educational models. We have seen a proliferation of the different kinds of educational models for doing theological education. The one that grabs all the headlines, kind of post-COVID, has been online or distance education. We have data to support this. Several years prior to COVID, approximately two thirds of ATS schools were approved for online distance education. We have two forms of that: comprehensive, which means a school can offer a complete degree online, and partial, which means they can offer a course online, for example. During COVID, of course, every school went to distance learning in some way, shape, or form. Some were not so sophisticated, like those hosting conference calls, but others offered very robust online learning platforms. Currently, close to 93% of schools are approved for some form of distance education, and somewhere in the high 80% of schools are actually able to do a complete degree online, which means that they are approved to do comprehensive distance education. So online education is certainly one of the adapting modalities of educational models, but we have others, like competency-based theological education or education in various different kinds of languages—a growing number of ATS schools do their instruction primarily in Mandarin, Korean, or Spanish. All of these adaptations to the educational model signal a significant tectonic shift as well.

Third, schools are serving more diverse student populations now than they ever have. The number of racial, ethnic, and international students continues to grow. Although, we will see what this immigration crackdown will mean for international students—this has required schools to do some significant shifting again to their tectonic shift number two (educational models).

And fourth, we have seen an unprecedented number of leadership transitions. The top two roles in ATS are the chief executive officer or the president, executive deans and the chief academic officers, or the academic deans or associate deans. In those two roles we have seen over 600 transitions since 2017. That is unprecedented, and it is the largest number of transitions we have seen in the top two positions at ATS.

If I could say what role librarians and information services can play in all of these shifts—and this is just again a little foretaste of what I will expound upon at Atla Annual—I think one of the great

things that librarians have done over time is they have been a very adaptable profession. They have gone from this collections model, where they were the great archivist for the institution, to being really more instructors about how to use digital technologies to access information and knowledge. So, librarians now provide more access to different forms of knowledge and information while balancing the rising costs of IT infrastructure, and this will inform the future organizational and financial models of schools. Second, librarians can continue to be guides for faculty and students who are teaching and learning with an increasing use of digital technologies.

So how can information services support and resource these adaptations? I think there can be some good synergy that can help the institution adapt better, as it has partners, librarians, and information service professionals who help them see the benefits of what digital technologies can do for the classroom and help them adapt their own educational models.

Third, diverse students need more diverse resources. Librarians and information services personnel help to build resource bases that are more contextually relevant—and relevant for the diverse students that they serve and the diverse faculties that teach them. Finally, I think that information service professionals and librarians can work with senior leaders and executives at schools to see the possibilities within emerging technologies, like AI. I think librarians have become advocates for the use of technology and we need to ask how do we help faculty and executive or senior leaders really see the potential that lies in something like AI, as AI is changing the landscape of education. I think there's no question about it.

Looking forward to the future, how do you see ATS and Atla contributing to the future of the study of religion and theology?

Atla and ATS are serving schools and communities in a time of big transition and are another way to shape that transition. Though it has an ominous title, Ted Smith's book, *The End of Theological Education*, uses "end" to ask what is the telos of theological education. In the book, he describes a lot about the changing nature of institutions. I'll leave you to read his book to find out what his conclusion is, but I think he's right that what we're seeing is the changing nature of institutions and the current iteration is that institutions are very fragmented. They're really kind of pieced here and there and all over

the place, and are struggling to stay connected to each other. Where we see this in theological schools is that there is a greater disconnect now between, say, the local church and the seminary and the leaders that serve those churches who may be attending the seminary. Then, there are disconnections from that local church to its large adjudicatory or its sponsoring denomination. There's very little that actually holds that together well, or at least as well as it used to. I think what ATS and Atla provide is some of that connective tissue.

NOTES

- 1 This interview was previously published at <https://www.atla.com/blog/interview-with-atla-annual-plenary-speaker-dr-frank-yamada/>.

An Interview with Keith Webster

Atla Annual 2025 Closing Plenary Speaker

Keith Webster delivered the closing plenary address to conclude Atla Annual 2025. Webster, the Helen and Henry Posner, Jr. Dean of the University Libraries at Carnegie Mellon, is a professional futurist, and regularly consults with not-for-profit and professional organization boards. His professional interests include AI and data-informed community engagement, research evaluation, and the future of scholarly communication.

In preparation for the conference, Atla Marketing and Communications Coordinator Katie Thorman interviewed Webster about his experiences. The following interview has been edited for clarity and length.¹

You bring a unique dual perspective as a library dean and a futurist. How do you see these roles informing your vision for the future of libraries?

I think being both a dean and a futurist gives me an exciting vantage point. I get to see firsthand how deeply grounded libraries are in tradition, in scholarship, and in community. I can also use my skills as a futurist to look ahead and imagine what things might be like in years to come. Balancing these roles helps me guide Carnegie Mellon's libraries towards embracing bold innovations—the sort of work we are renowned for in open science and AI—while simultaneously keeping our work deeply rooted in human values and meaningful scholarly practice. It's easy to get excited about the future, but we need to remember why we are here to do the work that we do.

As someone whose background is not specifically in theological librarianship, what value do you think an outside perspective like yours can bring to the community?

I think that being an outsider is quite valuable because it allows me to bring some fresh eyes and some different ideas to the conversation. Also, as you note, I don't have a theological library background. I deeply appreciate the mission driven work that theological librarians perform. Coming from perhaps a more mainstream research

library environment, I can share some of the strategies, successes, and many failures that hopefully will spark new thinking or offer pathways that theological libraries might not have fully explored yet, or maybe are just at the beginning of thinking about again. It's difficult at this stage to talk about libraries today and libraries in the future without thinking about AI, and how that might either disrupt or enrich the work that we do.

Thinking of AI brings us to your plenary talk titled “Reimagining the Sacred Space.” Can you explain a bit more about what sacred space might mean to you in the context of libraries and technology?

Sacred space isn't about religion. It's about creating environments that deeply resonate with people—spaces that foster meaningful connections, opportunities for reflection, and capacity for growth. In the context of libraries and technology, I think that a sacred space is one where tradition and innovation coexist beautifully. It's where scholars can encounter deeply rooted ideas, where students are inspired, and where communities are formed through shared curiosity and discovery.

Technology doesn't diminish this sacredness. I think it expands the possibilities and allows libraries to become dynamic, evolving spaces of scholarship and community building, and libraries are deeply important to students. We are generally viewed as the primary non-classroom academic space in our institution where students come to do serious work—the work that matters. Therefore, I think we can really talk about our mission in that broad context. I see this metaphor of sacred space as describing the work of libraries in a quite profound way.

Why do you think it is so important for theological libraries to think boldly about technology and innovation in this moment?

I think, undoubtedly, we are at a pivotal moment of rapid technological transformation. For theological libraries, embracing technology ensures that they will remain vital and relevant, not just preserving the richness of the scholarly tradition, but actively shaping its future innovations like AI and digital transformation. Open scholarship platforms can dramatically enhance accessibility, amplify scholarly voices, and foster deeper connections within communities of faith and learning.

I think it's important to recognize that libraries, for centuries, have embraced transformation or revolution. In the first industrial revolution in the UK in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, libraries were established at the heart of the communities they served by the owners of mills and mines to provide space for education and recreation for their workers and their families. During the nineteenth century, we also saw libraries embrace the industrialization of science and communication. What they were seeing was due to a multiplicity of factors: the expansion of universities, the industrialization of printing, and the growth of research and libraries, which were established to manage the products of research and scholarship. Then, the digital revolution of the 1960s through the 1980s brought another opportunity for libraries, and we embraced the growth of things like online catalogs and the emergence of digital texts made possible through the internet.

Now, we're on the cusp of another industrial revolution, one that is going to be grounded in autonomy. AI is a great example of that, and I have every confidence that libraries will once again step up and thrive during this period of innovation and transformation. But for theological libraries, I think it will be really focused on connections within their communities.

In your plenary talk, you will be exploring different possible futures for theological libraries. Why do you think scenario planning might be such a powerful tool for navigating this kind of change?

I've worked with and used scenario planning for many years. I think it's tremendously powerful because it expands our thinking beyond immediate challenges and by envisioning multiple possible futures, we can become more proactive rather than reactive. We can use scenario planning to help us identify new opportunities to anticipate risks and to cultivate resilience and adaptability so that we can thrive, no matter how the future unfolds.

There are a number of ways that we can develop scenarios, but a common one—one that I will illustrate briefly in my talk—is using a simple two by two matrix where we identify a couple big drivers of change and map those against each other to create four different worlds. If we've identified the drivers correctly, then we can extrapolate from where we are today to understand that each of these four worlds contains a scenario, let's say ten years from now. To say it's

plausible doesn't mean that it is a definite future world—and the reality is that the future ten years from now is likely to contain bits of each of those four different worlds—but we can recognize that these are plausible, and therefore, they are possible. In turn, we can make decisions today that reflect the implications of that potential long-term state. It allows us to understand the investments that we need to make now, the capacities that we need to double down on, and the blind spots that we need to be aware of so that when the future happens, we've given ourselves the best chance of success.

We need also to recognize that we are not passive bystanders in the future. Once we've identified our scenarios, we might have a sense that there is a particular one that aligns best with our values or our view of the mission of our organization, and we can be agents of change. We can try to tilt the future in our preferred direction while recognizing that other futures may well happen, and we need to be ready to respond to those if they do eventuate.

NOTES

- 1 This interview was previously published at <https://www.atla.com/blog/interview-with-atla-annual-plenary-speaker-keith-webster/>.

PAPERS

Bridging Knowledge and Faith

A Comparative Analysis of Ranganathan's
Library Science Laws and the Church's Mission
of Service, Growth, and Accessibility

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ABSTRACT This presentation draws parallels between S. R. Ranganathan's *Five Laws of Library Science* (1931) and the Church's role as a dynamic, community-serving institution. Ranganathan's laws emphasize accessibility, personalization, efficiency, and continuous growth—principles also central to the Church's mission. For example, "Books Are for Use" aligns with the Church's call to live out faith in action, while "Every Reader His/Her Book" mirrors personalized spiritual care. "Every Book Its Reader" parallels the Church's outreach, ensuring that spiritual resources reach those in need. Likewise, "Save the Time of the Reader" reflects the Church's efforts to offer timely, accessible support, while "The Library is a Growing Organism" resonates with the Church's evolving nature in response to societal changes. By comparing these institutions, this article highlights their shared commitment to serving individual needs through relevance, accessibility, and growth, ultimately showing how both enrich lives and communities as ever-adapting sources of knowledge and spiritual guidance.

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental role of any institution is to serve the needs of the community it represents, be it informational, spiritual, or social. In 1931, Indian librarian and scholar S. R. Ranganathan introduced his *Five Laws of Library Science*, which provided a theoretical foundation for modern library practices. These laws—"Books Are for Use," "Every Reader His/Her Book," "Every Book Its Reader," "Save the Time of the Reader," and "The Library is a Growing Organism"—proposed a user-centered approach that revolutionized how libraries manage and deliver information. At their core, these laws emphasize accessibility, personalization, and the continuous evolution of the library as a service-oriented institution.

While the context of Ranganathan's laws is specific to library science, the underlying principles resonate beyond the library and can be applied to other service institutions, such as the Church. Both the library and the Church are dedicated to serving their communities by providing access to critical resources: libraries offer knowledge and information while the Church offers spiritual guidance and care. By providing a framework that stresses inclusivity, efficiency, and growth, Ranganathan's laws can be seen as offering insights into how the Church operates within its spiritual context, helping individuals navigate their spiritual journeys and fostering communal growth.

The Church, as described in the Bible, operates as a living, breathing organism, constantly growing and adapting to the needs of its members and the wider world. Ephesians 4:15-16 illustrates this point when it speaks of the Church "growing and building itself up in love, as each part does its work." The Church, like the library, is not static. It must evolve in response to cultural, technological, and societal changes while remaining true to its core mission of spiritual nourishment and care.

In her work, Melinda McGarrah Sharp discusses the importance of pastoral care in a postcolonial, interfaith world, emphasizing that the Church must continually adapt to the diverse and complex needs of its members. She states, "Pastoral care that is rooted in Christian theology must be flexible enough to engage with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds" (Sharp 2022, 224). This parallels Ranganathan's vision for libraries, which are required to serve the broad informational needs of diverse users. Both institutions must

be adaptable and inclusive, recognizing the importance of meeting individuals where they are.

This paper argues that Ranganathan's *Five Laws of Library Science* share significant parallels with the Church's mission and approach to community service. Both the library and the Church are committed to making resources—whether informational or spiritual—accessible and relevant, tailored to individual needs, and delivered in a timely manner. Additionally, both institutions are constantly evolving to meet the growing and changing needs of those they serve. By comparing the two, we can gain a deeper understanding of how both libraries and churches function as dynamic, community-oriented institutions, rooted in the principles of service, growth, and inclusivity. This analysis will explore how each of Ranganathan's laws can be applied to the Church, demonstrating the shared ethos that underpins these two seemingly distinct institutions.

BOOKS ARE FOR USE VS. THE CHURCH AS A SOURCE OF PRACTICAL FAITH

S. R. Ranganathan's first law of library science, "Books Are for Use," highlights that the primary value of books lies not in their mere possession or display but in their active engagement and application by readers. In his foundational work, Ranganathan argued, "The books in a library are meant to be used by its readers; their purpose is only fulfilled when they contribute to the knowledge or recreation of individuals" (1931, 32). This principle underscores that books, in their ideal form, are tools for growth, learning, and enjoyment. The parallel between this law and the mission of the Church is striking—just as books are only valuable when actively utilized, the teachings and doctrines of the Church are most meaningful when applied in the daily lives of believers.

The Church exists not merely as an institution for theological preservation but rather as a living, active body that facilitates the practical application of faith in everyday life. Christianity emphasizes the importance of living faith, engaging with the teachings of Scripture, and embodying the principles of love, justice, and service in real-world contexts. The Bible itself is often referred to as "the living word," a dynamic and transformative text meant to be actively

engaged with by its readers. Hebrews 4:12 declares, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Just as a book on a shelf has potential that is only realized through use, so too is the Bible’s value unlocked through active reading, reflection, and application.

This concept is further reinforced in the Epistle of James, which stresses that faith must be coupled with action. James 2:17 asserts, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” This verse encapsulates the notion that faith, like knowledge, is meant to be lived out and applied. It is insufficient to merely possess faith or understand biblical teachings intellectually; the purpose of faith is fully realized when it leads to concrete actions that reflect God’s will in the world. In this sense, both Ranganathan’s first law and the Church’s teaching align on the principle that passive possession—whether of knowledge or belief—is inadequate without practical, real-world application.

In the context of Ranganathan’s law, books are valuable when they contribute to the intellectual and recreational lives of individuals. Similarly, in the Christian context, the Church’s teachings are valuable when they contribute to the moral, spiritual, and social development of believers. The Church, through its worship services, fellowship, and outreach, actively encourages its members to practice their faith in tangible ways. As McGarrah Sharp (2022) discusses in her exploration of Christian pastoral care, the Church must continuously engage with people in ways that are practical and contextually relevant: “Pastoral care rooted in theology must move beyond theoretical constructs and find expression in the lived realities of individuals, meeting them in their specific cultural and personal contexts” (226). Just as libraries evolve to ensure books are accessible and usable, the Church adapts to ensure its teachings are applicable and transformative in the lives of believers.

Moreover, the practical nature of Christian faith is evident in the Church’s emphasis on acts of service, justice, and love for one’s neighbor. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus teaches, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,” emphasizing that faith is most authentically expressed through

acts of compassion and service. This call to action reflects the same ethos as Ranganathan's law, where books find their purpose in usage, and faith finds its purpose in action.

In a nutshell, Ranganathan's first law and the Church's mission both underscore the need for active engagement with their respective resources. Just as books in a library are only valuable when used, the teachings of the Church are only meaningful when applied. Faith, like knowledge, is transformative when it transcends theory and becomes a lived experience, enriching the lives of individuals and the broader community. Both institutions emphasize that their true purpose is realized when their resources, whether spiritual or informational, are actively engaged with, leading to personal and communal transformation.

EVERY READER HIS/HER BOOK VS. THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL

Ranganathan's second law of library science, "Every Reader His/Her Book," underscores the diversity of individual needs and the library's obligation to cater to these varying requirements. In his work, Ranganathan (1931) emphasizes that libraries must provide a wide array of materials to ensure that "for every reader there is some book that will satisfy his needs, though it may not be the same book for every reader" (45). This principle advocates for inclusivity and personalization, recognizing that no two individuals have identical informational or recreational needs. Libraries, therefore, must curate collections that serve the broadest possible spectrum of readers, ensuring that each person finds the resource that resonates with them.

Similarly, the Church operates on the principle that spiritual needs vary significantly from individual to individual, and it is the Church's responsibility to address this diversity through tailored spiritual teachings and services. Though the Church's theology is grounded in universal truths, the way in which these truths are communicated and applied must account for individual differences in experience, personality, and cultural background. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, highlights this diversity within unity: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes

them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.” This passage illustrates the Church’s recognition that while all believers share a common faith, they express and experience that faith in unique ways.

In modern church settings, this principle of diversity is reflected in the wide variety of worship styles, pastoral care approaches, and spiritual education programs offered. Contemporary churches often include traditional and contemporary services, offering multiple modes of worship to engage with different congregants. For some, a liturgical approach with structured prayers and rituals might foster a deep connection with God, while for others, a more spontaneous and charismatic worship style may be more spiritually fulfilling. Just as libraries must provide diverse resources to meet the varied preferences of their patrons, the Church must offer different avenues through which individuals can connect with the divine.

Additionally, churches today are increasingly offering specialized ministries designed to address the specific spiritual, emotional, and social needs of particular groups, such as youth ministries, support groups, or outreach programs for marginalized communities. This mirrors Ranganathan’s vision of the library, where the goal is to connect every reader with the right book, regardless of their background or circumstances. As McGarrah Sharp notes, pastoral care must be flexible and responsive to the unique cultural and personal contexts of individuals: “The practice of pastoral care demands a relational and contextual engagement with the world, recognizing that different individuals require different modes of care, shaped by their own histories and identities” (2022, 230). In this way, both the library and the Church strive to provide personalized experiences that meet the specific needs of those they serve.

The Bible’s teachings further emphasize the importance of recognizing and honoring the individuality of each person in their spiritual journey. In Romans 12:6-8, Paul writes, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach.” This passage highlights the biblical understanding that each individual has unique gifts and callings, and the Church must nurture and develop these gifts in ways that are tailored to each person’s strengths and spiritual needs. Just as

the library must ensure that every reader finds the right book, the Church must provide the appropriate spiritual guidance, care, and opportunities for each individual to grow in their faith.

Moreover, both institutions share a commitment to inclusivity. In the same way that a library cannot serve only a select group of patrons but must cater to a diverse population, the Church's mission is universal. Galatians 3:28 affirms this inclusivity: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse underscores that the Church, like the library, is called to serve all people, regardless of their background or social standing, ensuring that everyone has access to the resources and support they need for spiritual growth.

In summary, both Ranganathan's second law and the Church's mission emphasize the importance of addressing the individual needs of their respective communities. Just as libraries curate diverse collections to ensure that every reader finds the right book, the Church offers a wide array of worship styles, pastoral care, and educational programs to meet the unique spiritual needs of each person. Both institutions recognize that individuals engage with resources—whether informational or spiritual—in different ways, and they are committed to providing personalized experiences that foster personal growth. By ensuring inclusivity and flexibility, the library and the Church remain vital, accessible institutions that are able to serve and enrich diverse populations. This focus on catering to individual needs ensures that both the library and the Church continue to fulfill their roles as dynamic, community-centered institutions that facilitate meaningful engagement and development.

EVERY BOOK ITS READER VS. THE CHURCH'S CALL TO OUTREACH AND EVANGELISM

Ranganathan's third law of library science, "Every Book Its Reader," complements the previous law by emphasizing that every book has a reader who can benefit from its content. This law shifts responsibility onto libraries to ensure that the right reader is connected with the right book. As Ranganathan points out, "There is a reader for every book, but he must be sought and guided towards it" (1931, 52). Libraries, therefore, must engage in active outreach to match

readers with the books that meet their needs, recognizing that not all readers will come forward seeking a particular book on their own. The library becomes an agent of connection, ensuring that knowledge and information are not passively shelved but proactively delivered to the people who need them most.

In the same way, the Church is called to evangelism and outreach, seeking to connect every individual with the spiritual guidance they need. The Church recognizes that every person has a deep need for spiritual fulfillment, even if they are not actively seeking it. This belief is foundational to the Christian concept of evangelism, where the Church is tasked with spreading its message beyond the confines of the congregation. Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 encapsulates this mission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Church's outreach efforts are not passive; they are an active pursuit of individuals who may benefit from the teachings and community the Church offers, just as libraries actively guide readers toward the books that meet their needs.

The act of evangelism in the Christian tradition is not limited to preaching or passive invitation; it involves seeking out individuals who may not be actively looking for spiritual guidance, but who can profoundly benefit from it. This is mirrored in the library's obligation to ensure that every book finds its reader, even those who may not realize that a particular resource could meet their intellectual or personal needs. Just as librarians use tools like reader advisories, recommendations, and personalized services to match books with readers, the Church employs various forms of outreach—like personal witness, missions, and community engagement—to connect people with the Gospel.

Luke 15:4-7 provides a powerful metaphor for this approach in the parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one that is lost. This parable illustrates the Church's commitment to seeking out individuals who are spiritually lost or unaware of their need for connection with God. In a similar fashion, the library ensures that no book remains unread by proactively engaging with readers to introduce them to materials that could enrich their lives.

Modern church outreach has also evolved to meet people where they are. Contemporary churches use digital tools, social media, podcasts, and online worship services to reach individuals who might not step into a physical church building but are searching for answers. Just as the library adapts to new technologies and platforms to increase accessibility, the Church similarly adapts its methods of evangelism to ensure that the message reaches a broader audience. McGarrah Sharp discusses the importance of engaging with diverse populations in her work on pastoral care in a postcolonial, interfaith world, noting that “effective pastoral care and outreach must take into account the diverse needs and contexts of individuals” (2022, 239). Both the Church and the library must be culturally aware and sensitive to the varied contexts in which people live and learn.

The parallel between Ranganathan’s third law and the Church’s outreach mission also emphasizes the shared understanding that information and spiritual guidance have the potential to transform lives. In the same way that a particular book can ignite a reader’s imagination or solve a problem, the Church’s teachings can transform a person’s worldview, values, and sense of purpose. Both institutions recognize their roles as facilitators of connection—between reader and book, or between individual and faith.

Furthermore, evangelism, like connecting books to readers, is not a one-size-fits-all process. Just as each book has a specific audience, the Church’s message must be tailored to reach individuals in their unique circumstances. 1 Corinthians 9:22 articulates this adaptive approach: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” This passage highlights the Church’s responsibility to adjust its methods of outreach, meeting people where they are—whether culturally, emotionally, or intellectually—so that its message can resonate personally and deeply.

Ranganathan’s third law and the Church’s call to evangelism and outreach are both rooted in the belief that resources, whether intellectual or spiritual, must be actively brought to those who can benefit from them. Both institutions take on the responsibility of connecting their offerings with individuals who may not initially seek them out, but whose lives can be enriched through access to these resources. Libraries match books with readers, and the

Church connects individuals with spiritual guidance and community, ensuring that both information and faith fulfill their transformative potential. Through outreach and engagement, both the library and the Church play vital roles in creating meaningful connections that foster personal and communal growth.

SAVE THE TIME OF THE READER VS. MAKING THE CHURCH ACCESSIBLE AND RELEVANT

S. R. Ranganathan's fourth law of library science, "Save the Time of the Reader," emphasizes the importance of efficiency and ease of access within library operations. He argues that a library's effectiveness is judged by how quickly and effortlessly users can access the resources they need (Ranganathan 1931, 60). This principle underscores the necessity of removing barriers and streamlining services so that readers can engage with information without unnecessary difficulty or delay. In the modern world, where time is often a limited resource, this law becomes even more relevant, as libraries must adapt to the fast-paced nature of contemporary life by employing tools like digital catalogs, user-friendly interfaces, and efficient organization systems.

The concept of saving time in the library parallels the Church's efforts to make its teachings and community life accessible and relevant to the daily lives of its congregation. Just as libraries aim to minimize the time spent searching for information, the Church seeks to remove barriers that hinder individuals from engaging with faith, spirituality, and community. In a rapidly changing and often complex world, the Church faces the challenge of ensuring that its message is both timely and applicable to the real-world concerns of its members.

In the contemporary Church, accessibility often involves leveraging modern technologies and addressing issues that are immediately relevant to people's lives. Online worship services, live-streamed sermons, podcasts, and digital devotionals have become essential tools for reaching people who may be unable to attend services in person due to geographical, physical, or time constraints. The rise of digital platforms has allowed churches to provide their teachings in more convenient formats, ensuring that people can access

spiritual guidance whenever and wherever they need it. This mirrors the way libraries have embraced digital tools to ensure their collections are available beyond physical spaces, saving time for users and enhancing accessibility.

The biblical principle of ensuring access to spiritual guidance and support is reflected in Isaiah 55:6, which says, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” This verse encourages people to seek God without delay, but it also implies the responsibility of spiritual institutions, like the Church, to be present and available in ways that allow individuals to connect with faith easily and without unnecessary hindrance. The Church’s responsibility, much like the library’s, is to ensure that the pathways to spiritual growth are clear, direct, and efficient.

In addition to digital innovations, the Church has also focused on addressing contemporary societal issues in its teachings, thereby making its message relevant to modern life. Sermons that tackle topics such as mental health, social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic inequality speak to the real concerns that people face today. By addressing these issues, the Church demonstrates its relevance, offering practical guidance and spiritual insight into the challenges of everyday life. As McGarrah Sharp notes in her discussion of pastoral care in a complex world, “Pastoral care that is grounded in the lived realities of individuals allows the Church to be a space of healing and guidance, offering wisdom that speaks to both personal and societal concerns” (2022, 241). In this way, the Church’s adaptability to contemporary issues mirrors the library’s efforts to remain user-centered by curating resources that are not only timely but also directly applicable to the needs of its community.

Moreover, the Church’s focus on accessibility is deeply rooted in its mission to welcome and serve all individuals, regardless of their background, life circumstances, or spiritual maturity. Romans 15:7 instructs believers to “accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” This call to inclusivity compels the Church to ensure that its teachings, community events, and worship services are designed to meet people where they are—whether they are lifelong believers, newcomers to faith, or those questioning their beliefs. Just as libraries strive to serve a diverse patron base with different needs and backgrounds, the Church must

also be mindful of the diverse spiritual, emotional, and social needs of its congregation, providing accessible entry points for all.

Furthermore, the Church's mission of making faith accessible is not just about physical accessibility but also about creating an environment where individuals feel welcomed, accepted, and understood. This involves removing barriers related to judgment, exclusivity, or outdated traditions that may alienate certain groups. Just as libraries continually evolve to offer services in formats that are more inclusive and accessible to various demographics, such as providing materials in multiple languages or accommodating users with disabilities, the Church must also evolve in its approach to ensure that it remains relevant and welcoming to all. Galatians 3:28 emphasizes this inclusivity: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This scripture reminds the Church that, like the library, it must transcend divisions and barriers to create an inclusive environment where everyone has equal access to spiritual growth.

Ranganathan's fourth law, "Save the Time of the Reader," and the Church's mission to make its message accessible and relevant are both rooted in the shared goal of removing barriers to engagement. Libraries and churches alike must ensure that their resources, whether informational or spiritual, are easily accessible, timely, and meaningful to their communities. By embracing modern technologies, addressing contemporary issues, and fostering inclusivity, both institutions work to ensure that individuals can connect with the resources they need without unnecessary delay or frustration. This commitment to accessibility and relevance enables both the library and the Church to fulfill their roles as vital community institutions that guide, support, and enrich the lives of those they serve.

THE LIBRARY IS A GROWING ORGANISM VS. THE CHURCH AS A GROWING, DYNAMIC BODY

S. R. Ranganathan's fifth law of library science, "The Library is a Growing Organism," highlights the necessity for libraries to continuously expand and evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of their users. He asserts that "a library must constantly grow and adapt, adding new materials and embracing new technologies to remain

relevant” (Ranganathan 1931, 75). This law recognizes that libraries are not static institutions; they are living systems that must adapt to technological advancements, shifts in user expectations, and the increasing complexity of information needs. The vitality of a library is maintained through its ability to innovate, expand its collections, and adopt new methods to serve its users effectively.

This concept of growth and continuous adaptation is equally applicable to the Church. The Church is often referred to as a “living body” in Christian theology, a dynamic organism that evolves to meet the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of its members. Ephesians 4:15-16 encapsulates this idea, describing the Church as “growing and building itself up in love, as each part does its work.” This passage emphasizes that the Church, like the library, must be an ever-growing and evolving entity. Growth within the Church is not merely numerical but also spiritual, intellectual, and communal, as it seeks to respond to the changing realities of the world while remaining true to its foundational beliefs.

Historically, the Church has demonstrated its ability to grow and adapt in response to societal shifts and cultural changes. From the early Church’s expansion across the Roman Empire to the Reformation and the spread of Christianity into diverse cultural contexts, the Church has shown resilience and flexibility in the face of new challenges. Today, churches continue to evolve by incorporating new forms of worship, utilizing digital platforms for outreach and discipleship, and engaging with contemporary issues such as mental health, environmental stewardship, and social justice. These developments reflect the Church’s commitment to being relevant in the lives of its congregants while addressing broader societal concerns, much like a library that continuously expands its resources to remain indispensable to its users.

Matthew 16:18 provides a theological foundation for the Church’s growth, where Jesus declares, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” This promise of the Church’s resilience and ongoing growth echoes Ranganathan’s view of the library as an ever-expanding entity. Both the Church and the library are driven by an inherent need to grow, not only in terms of numbers or physical space but also in the depth of their offerings, their ability

to meet diverse needs, and their capacity to engage with changing social dynamics.

Ranganathan's principle of the library as a growing organism involves a continual process of adapting to new technologies and adding relevant materials. Similarly, the Church must adapt to modern societal and technological trends. Today's churches have integrated digital worship services, online prayer communities, and virtual Bible studies to remain accessible to a broader audience. As society becomes increasingly digitized, the Church has recognized the importance of meeting people in virtual spaces, much as libraries have incorporated digital catalogs, e-books, and online databases. McGarrah Sharp observes that churches must also engage with new forms of communication and societal changes to remain a vital source of pastoral care, stating, "The Church's ability to evolve in the way it offers care and connection is critical to its relevance in a rapidly changing world" (2022, 243). This mirrors Ranganathan's idea that libraries must embrace technological advances to continue serving their communities effectively.

Moreover, just as libraries grow by expanding their collections and improving their services, the Church grows by deepening its engagement with the world through acts of service, mission work, and advocacy. The Church is called to be a transformative agent in society, offering solutions to spiritual, social, and ethical issues. James 1:27 reminds us that "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." This scripture emphasizes that growth in the Church involves not just internal development but also outward-facing acts of compassion and justice. The Church's expansion is thus both a reflection of its internal spiritual maturity and its external impact on the world.

Additionally, both the Church and the library must balance their growth with maintaining their core values. As libraries embrace new technologies and services, they remain fundamentally committed to providing access to knowledge and fostering intellectual growth. Likewise, as the Church adapts to modern challenges, it remains rooted in its foundational mission of proclaiming the Gospel and nurturing spiritual growth. Hebrews 13:8 states, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever," highlighting

that while the Church may evolve in its methods and practices, its core message remains unchanged. The balance between growth and consistency is essential to both institutions: libraries must continually innovate while maintaining their commitment to providing reliable information, and the Church must evolve in its outreach and community engagement while staying true to its foundational theological principles.

Ranganathan's fifth law, "The Library is a Growing Organism," and the Church's description as a growing body are deeply interconnected concepts. Both institutions are dynamic entities that must continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of their communities. Libraries grow by embracing new materials, technologies, and services, while the Church grows by adapting its worship, outreach, and engagement with contemporary societal issues. However, both institutions must also balance this growth with a commitment to their core values, whether it is providing access to knowledge in the case of the library or remaining faithful to spiritual teachings in the case of the Church. By embracing growth and change, both the library and the Church fulfill their roles as vital, responsive institutions that serve and enrich the lives of individuals and communities.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between the Church and Ranganathan's *Five Laws of Library Science* reveals deep parallels in their underlying missions of service, growth, and accessibility. Both institutions, though operating in different domains, serve as crucial conduits for personal and communal development. Just as libraries are tasked with providing access to knowledge, organizing information efficiently, and adapting to the evolving needs of their users, the Church provides spiritual guidance, fosters community, and must remain relevant in an ever-changing world. These institutions share a fundamental commitment to serving diverse populations, offering resources that are tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals while contributing to broader societal well-being.

Ranganathan's laws underscore the importance of accessibility, efficiency, and growth, principles that are equally essential in the Church's mission. The first law, "Books Are for Use," reminds us that

both libraries and churches must make their resources—whether informational or spiritual—readily available for practical use. The second and third laws, “Every Reader His/Her Book” and “Every Book Its Reader,” reflect the need for personalization and outreach, emphasizing that both institutions must actively connect individuals with the specific resources or spiritual guidance that will foster their growth. The fourth law, “Save the Time of the Reader,” aligns with the Church’s responsibility to make faith accessible and relevant in an increasingly complex and fast-paced world. Finally, the fifth law, “The Library is a Growing Organism,” highlights the necessity of continual adaptation and growth, a principle that resonates with the Church’s calling to evolve in response to societal changes while remaining grounded in its core values.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Bible reinforces the Church’s responsibility to serve, grow, and adapt in ways that mirror Ranganathan’s vision for libraries. Ephesians 4:15-16 describes the Church as a body that “grows and builds itself up in love,” underscoring the importance of growth and unity. Similarly, Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission, calls the Church to go out into the world, seeking those who are in need of spiritual guidance, much like a library must connect readers with the right resources. Romans 15:7 further emphasizes the importance of inclusivity, instructing the Church to accept and welcome all individuals, just as libraries aim to cater to diverse populations with varying informational needs.

CALL TO ACTION

This comparison between the Church and libraries offers several practical insights and calls to action for leaders in both institutions. Libraries must continue to innovate, embracing digital tools and personalized services to ensure that their collections and resources remain accessible to all. Similarly, the Church must proactively engage with contemporary societal issues, using modern platforms to reach individuals who might otherwise feel disconnected from spiritual life. Both institutions must commit to inclusivity, ensuring

that no one is excluded from access to knowledge or faith due to barriers of time, technology, or cultural differences.

Church leaders, in particular, are called to ensure that their ministries reflect the dynamic nature of the world around them. This involves incorporating new forms of worship, digital outreach, and addressing relevant social concerns such as mental health, justice, and environmental stewardship. As McGarrah Sharp notes, “The Church’s ability to evolve in its methods of care and outreach is essential to its relevance in a rapidly changing world” (2022, 243). This adaptability must be paired with a renewed commitment to the Church’s core values, ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of doctrinal integrity or community cohesion.

FURTHER STUDY

This exploration of the parallels between Ranganathan’s *Five Laws of Library Science* and the Church’s mission opens up further avenues for study. Future research could investigate how the principles of accessibility, growth, and service are applied within other types of community organizations, such as educational institutions, nonprofits, and cultural centers, comparing their practices to those of libraries and churches. By examining how these diverse institutions fulfill their missions of service and support, researchers can uncover common strategies that foster personal and community development, as well as identify innovative practices that can be shared across sectors to enhance accessibility and societal impact. Another potential area of study could be the impact of digital transformation on both libraries and churches, investigating how technology shapes the accessibility and relevance of spiritual and informational resources.

In addition, there is room for empirical research on how libraries and churches can collaborate to address social challenges such as illiteracy, poverty, and inequality. Both institutions are uniquely positioned to provide resources—whether material, educational, or spiritual—that can foster societal well-being. Such partnerships could amplify their impact, creating spaces where knowledge and faith intersect to promote holistic growth and transformation.

In conclusion, the shared commitment of libraries and the Church to growth, accessibility, and service provides a rich foundation for

mutual learning and collaboration. Both institutions are called to continually evolve in response to the needs of the individuals and communities they serve, offering resources that are not only accessible but also deeply transformative. As society continues to change, the library and the Church must remain steadfast in their missions, ensuring that they remain relevant and impactful agents of personal and collective growth.

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PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Introducing the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries

Christine Love-Rodgers, College Lead (Library Academic Support) CAHSS and Academic Support Librarian for Divinity & Edinburgh Futures Institute

ABSTRACT In this brief survey of ABTAPL's activities, Christine Love-Rodgers, Deputy Chair of ABTAPL introduces herself and her role in ABTAPL, with a reflection on how she ended up in her current position. She outlines the organization and governance of ABTAPL and the current nature of its membership. One of ABTAPL's most important activities is its annual conference, which includes library visits and conference dinners as well as conferences sessions. ABTAPL members benefit from publications including the ABTAPL Bulletin, co-operative services including an interlibrary loan system, and mentoring, training and grant programs. Christine acknowledges the challenges that ABTAPL members face, including diminishing budgets and reducing student numbers, which may lead to library closures of mergers. But there are opportunities also for ABTAPL to develop and to collaborate with Atla, including online training, open access publishing and potentially 'twinning' US and UK libraries to learn from each other.

LIBRARY & ASSOCIATION ROLES

I work at the University of Edinburgh Library, where I have a management role as College Lead for library Academic Support and I

have also been Academic Support Librarian for the School of Divinity for twenty years. During this time, I have worked closely with New College Library, one of the largest theological libraries in the United Kingdom. Currently, I am Deputy Chair of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL). I am also working on the Atla Open Press book project, *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland*.

My library has a long history of involvement with ABTAPL. I was introduced to the association when I arrived at New College Library in 2004, but family responsibilities kept me from being closely involved for a while, although I did attend some conferences. My employer supported me to attend and present at the BETH conference in Cordoba in 2023, where I spent time with Anna James and Marni Thurm from ABTAPL. When Hannie Riley was looking for an editor to join the team for the *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland* book project, Anna James recommended me. Six months later and I was on the committee and elected Deputy Chair. I guess I was approached at the right time, to get involved on the right kind of project for me.

ASSOCIATION ORGANIZATION & GOVERNANCE

ABTAPL is the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries, an organization formed to help those working in libraries containing theological, philosophical and related materials by sharing information and experience.

ABTAPL provides for its members an informal network for consultation, advice and support for both individuals and institutions.

ABTAPL is governed by a committee, which includes a Chair, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, plus other elected members. The committee is limited to a maximum of ten individuals. It meets a minimum of twice per year and conducts business by email. Our Annual General Meeting is held as part of the Spring Conference.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

The association is made up of personal, retired, and institutional members, with a fourth category of complementary memberships. A chart included below from the April 2025 secretary report details the number of members in ABTAPL from 2017 through June 2025. In June 2025, there were five personal-type memberships, 16 retired-type memberships, 77 institutional memberships, and 18 marked as complementary.

Table 1: ABTAPL Membership

ABTAPL membership secretary's report 2025-04-06 – Keith Lang

Here is a table of the membership figures over the eight years held in ABTAPL's membership database.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (at 6-4-25)
(complementary)	0	1	19	19	19	19	19	18	18
personal	5	7	10	11	11	10	12	6	5
retired	11	13	17	18	18	17	14	20	16
institutional	56	62	93	96	95	95	84	80	77
Total (comp.)	72(0)	82(1)	120(19)	125(19)	124(19)	122(19)	110(19)	106(18)	98(18)

The 'complementary' memberships represent institutions to which the ABTAPL bulletin are sent most of which are deposit libraries around the world in order to potentially raise the profile of the association.

ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

ABTAPL hosts an annual residential conference, usually in the spring before Easter. The location moves each year to reflect the membership of ABTAPL across the United Kingdom and Ireland. It is predominantly attended by members, but we do offer non-member rates.

Conference Activities Include:

- Library Visits
- CPD Sessions
- Open Forum / Panel Sessions
- Teach Meet Sessions
- Dinners and Pre-Dinner Drinks
- Conference Lecture

ASSOCIATION BENEFITS & PROGRAMS

Below is a list of ABTAPL benefits and programs with brief descriptions and/or web links to learn more:

- ABTAPL Union List of Periodicals: <https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/>
- Directory of Members: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/resources/directory-of-institutional-members/>
- ABTAPL Guidelines for Theological libraries: Available online to registered members only
- Inter-Library Loans: <https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/request-an-article/>
- CPD e-Book Library: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/learning-and-development/cpd-ebooks/>
- ABCHAT: Monthly online meetings on a topic to share experience and collaborate
- Mentoring, Training, and Grant Programs: Intended to support international partner libraries (e.g. in Ukraine)

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The top three challenges currently facing our membership are stretched budgets, diminishing student numbers, and library closures or mergers with larger libraries (e.g. Dr. Williams' Library and Ushaw College Library).

The top two challenges currently facing the association are decreasing membership and lower attendance at events.

Some of the identified opportunities ABTAPL has noted for possible collaborations with Atla and its members include the following:

- Online training in the form of sharing experience via online communication/meetings
- Open access publishing e.g. *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland* volume due in 2026
- Potential for 'twinning' (or pairing) of libraries to learn from similar and different libraries

To learn more about ABTAPL, visit our association website: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/>.

Introducing the Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association

Nick Gellatly, Head Librarian, St. Paschal Library | President of the Board of Directors, ANZTLA

ABSTRACT This paper is a brief introduction to the Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA). It covers the Association's inception, its administrative structure, and some of the current and future services provided to members. It is intended as a very simple overview for anyone who is unfamiliar with ANZTLA and would like to learn a little more about the Association. Some of the information in this paper was discussed in the panel discussion "Global Theological Library Associations: Engaging of the Profession Worldwide," and there is some additional information about current and future initiatives, including some collaborative projects with Atla.

INTRODUCTION

The Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA) was formed in 1986. The Association's formation was the result of several Library Consultations of the Australian & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) between 1978 and 1985, with the decision being made at the Sydney consultation of 1984 to instigate the formation of a theological library association. At the 1985 consultation at Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, it was decided that an association would be formed (Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association 2025a).

ANZTLA is governed by a Board of Directors, comprising a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Other Directors may also be appointed, including a New Zealand Representative and a Conference Representative who is usually part of that year's Conference Organising Committee, and reports to the Board on conference related matters.

There are several regional chapters within ANZTLA, those being New South Wales (incorporating Australian Capital Territory), New Zealand, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, and Western Australia. These chapters each have a local chairperson and will host events within their region.

SERVICES PROVIDED TO MEMBERS

The Association provides several important services to its members, particularly those involved in theological librarianship across Australia and New Zealand. Through ongoing initiatives and professional support, ANZTLA fosters a dynamic and well-connected community that upholds the values and practices of theological librarianship throughout the region.

1. The ANZTLA Forum

The ANZTLA Forum is an online email discussion list that serves as a means by which members and other interested parties can communicate with one another. The Forum is often used for discussion of important topics in theological librarianship in our region but also serves as a useful way to disperse duplicate journal issues, or even as an informal interlibrary loan service between ANZTLA members.

2. The Pettee Collective

The ANZTLA Pettee Collective is an interest group formed by ANZTLA members whose libraries use the Union Classification System developed by Julia Pettee of New York's Union Theological Seminary in the early twentieth century, as well as those who are interested in the development of the classification system (Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association 2025b).

The Pettee Collective aims to continue the development of the Union Classification System by making additions that reflect the classification scheme's place in modern library classification.

3. Annual ANZTLA Statistics Questionnaire

Each year, a statistical questionnaire is sent out to all ANZTLA members seeking to gather information about theological libraries

in Australia and New Zealand. Kerrie Stevens, ANZTLA's Statistician, collates the responses and presents the collected data as a paper in the ANZTLA *EJournal*. Individual statistical reports are also provided to responding libraries.

4. ANZTLA Conference

The first annual ANZTLA Conference was held in Canberra in 1986 and is hosted each year by one of the six chapters of ANZTLA on a rotating basis. The conference typically runs for around four days and includes presentations, workshops, and lightning talks on a wide variety of topics relating to theological librarianship.

In 2020, the ANZTLA Conference moved to an online modality due to the COVID pandemic and remained online only until 2022. In 2023, the conference moved to a hybrid format, enabling delegates to attend in person or online. The Conference is open to members and non-members, and we encourage interested non-members to submit presentations for consideration. This year's conference will be held in Brisbane, Queensland, from the 26th to the 29th of November.

5. ANZTLA *EJournal*

The *ANZTLA EJournal* is an annual (formerly biannual) publication that brings together “articles and items of interest to theological librarianship (Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association 2025c),” focusing on matters relating to librarianship in Australia, New Zealand, and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The *EJournal* also incorporates papers presented at the annual ANZTLA Conference.

6. ANZTLA Consortia

ANZTLA have negotiated consortial agreements with a number of industry partners, enabling members to access reduced pricing for electronic resource subscriptions.

FUTURE PLANS

ANZTLA's mission is to “foster the study of theology and religion by enhancing the development of theological and religious libraries

and librarians” (Australia and New Zealand Theological Library Association 2025a). To this end, ANZTLZA seeks to further engage with the theological library community in ways that enhance librarianship in our region.

1. ANZTLA Small Grants Program

The ANZTLA Small Grants Program is currently being developed as a way to provide financial support for projects and initiatives that aim to further theological librarianship in Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific region. Grants of up to AU\$2,000 will be provided to approved applicants.

2. ANZTLA Mentorship Program

ANZTLA is currently developing a mentorship scheme that aims to connect potential mentors and mentees. The program is still early in its development, and it is not yet known what form it will take.

3. Redevelopment of the *Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections (AULOTS)*

Earlier this year, ANZTLA ended its agreement with the company that had hosted the Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections (AULOTS) due to changes in the hosting and pricing structure. ANZTLA is currently working on developing a new hosting platform with the assistance of Atla.

CONCLUSION

Collaboration and a sense of community have always been the driving force behind ANZTLA’s mission. The success of the Association comes from its members, who work tirelessly to provide services vital to the theological library community in our region. ANZTLA needs to respond to this commitment by continually working to improve and expand the services offered to our members. Though we continually strive for progress on our own, we achieve our best results through our partnerships with other library associations such as Atla, especially when working towards common goals. Collaboration, both within ANZTLA and across the broader library community, enables us to accomplish far more than we could alone.

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Minions, Secret Weapons, Future Colleagues

Student Workers in Theological Libraries

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David E. Schmursal, Access and Instruction Librarian, Wright Learning and Information Center, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Vincent Williams, User Services Librarian, The Bishop Payne Library, Virginia Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT Colleagues share insights into how we might harness the power and potential of our student workers (for good, naturally). We also consider best practices and cautionary tales related to hiring, scheduling, training, supervising, and retaining student workers. Finally, we commend student employment as a fruitful recruiting ground for potential future colleagues.

INTRODUCTION

Most theological libraries employ student workers in various capacities and for various tasks. Indeed, we could not offer the services or hours of operation we do without them. Far from being minions on whom we can fob off grunt work (like shelving), our student workers not only perform essential tasks (like shelving), but also offer a vital connection with the wider student body and can provide valuable insight into students' perceptions of the curriculum, workload, faculty expectations, and institutional effectiveness. They are our secret weapons. In this session, colleagues will share insights into how we might harness this power (for good, naturally). We will also consider best practices and cautionary tales related to hiring, scheduling, training, and supervising. Finally, we commend student employment as a fruitful recruiting ground for potential future colleagues. After all, many of us began our careers in theological libraries as student workers.

In addition to some practical ideas, we seek to offer a better way of thinking about our student workers, their role in the library, and the work they do, focused less on how many books they shelve (as important as that is) than on the connections they have with the wider student body. This is especially important as theological libraries become more collaborative communal spaces.

Our consideration of this topic is organized around five broad areas, each further elaborated with more specific questions.

ROLES/MISSION/PURPOSE

- 1) *How do you conceptualize the role of student workers?*
- 2) *What roles do your student workers perform?*
- 3) *How do your students further the mission of the theological library?*
- 4) *Ideally, what would you like to empower your student workers to do, or train them to do (beyond what they are already doing)?*

Marlon Patterson (MP): Student workers are a prime resource that enables our library to function and the library, in many respects, could not operate without them. The student workers fulfill the role of essential library functions. They contribute and further the mission of both the theological library and seminary by providing hospitality through assisting faculty, students, and staff with locating resources for class assignments and general research queries.

Currently, assigned tasks vary at each work shift and schedules are once a week due to our library structure. Ideally, offering a more consistent work routine along with additional schedules (i.e. more days per week but with shorter hours) might provide student workers the ability to develop a routine that could aid in work production.

David Schmiersal (DS): Beyond the obvious, day-to-day essential functions that our student workers perform to help keep the library functioning: circulation, shelving, staffing the circulation desk when full-time staff are absent, the most important roles our student workers perform are largely “under the radar.” Like a clerk in a good Renaissance story that might seem to be there simply to take notes or assist a character with a more impressive title, under the

surface and behind the scenes, they are playing a far more critical role: ambassadors and secret agents.

Our student workers are often the first, and sometimes the only members of the library staff that many of our patrons and guests encounter, and thus they largely determine whether our patrons have a positive experience of the library. If our patrons find our libraries places of hospitality and havens for study, reflection, and collaboration, this to a considerable extent is thanks to our student workers.

Moreover, like good secret agents, our student workers comfortably inhabit and transect two worlds: that of the library and that of the classroom. Since many of our student workers are also students at our institutions, they are able to provide insider information regarding assignments, expectations, and challenges facing our students that we can use to assist the entire student body. Since they are obligated to be in the library at certain times, they draw their friends and classmates into the library and can offer a more accessible point of entry into our collections and services. It is often less intimidating to ask a friend for help than to ask a librarian or faculty member. And since they know us better than other students, and know their fellow students better than we do, they provide a bridge between the library and their fellow students. I wonder how many times I have heard one of my students say, “you know, you should ask David about that.”

Vincent Williams (VW): At the Bishop Payne Library, we consider student workers the “face” of the library whenever they are working the circulation desk. They represent the library to patrons, and they are always the first point of contact when patrons have questions or need help using the library. Students all aim to maintain the library’s reputation for hospitality and competent service. They are also, in many ways, “peer coaches” in the sense that they can help their fellow students access and use the library since they know best how everything works. Our students also have a major role in allowing the library to be open as much as we are; they provide necessary desk coverage on evenings and weekends.

Our student workers perform many of the basic or routine circulation functions like checking in and out books, shelving, shifting, scanning materials, and doing shelf-reading. About 75% of their time

is devoted to working the circulation desk and 25% is dedicated to doing projects in the stacks or elsewhere. Some of our students work on more unique projects, depending on their background and skills. In the past, this has involved help with collection development, planning or organizing events, maintaining the library's social media accounts, setting up rotating book displays, or creating libguides.

Ideally, our library would create an environment where our student staffers contribute necessary work to the library while also gaining skills and experiences that are directly beneficial to their future careers. While much of the library-related work they do is transferable to other contexts, it is our goal to make that connection more explicit so that students feel their work is useful in the ways they already aim to grow during their time in seminary. In short, we have a goal of ensuring all of our student workers are part of an intentional and ongoing training program of mutual benefit to them and us.

HIRING AND RECRUITING

- 1) *How many student workers do you have on average?*
- 2) *What qualities do you look for in prospective student workers?*
- 3) *Have you had to dismiss any student workers?*

MP: Our library employment process concerning student workers may be different than many others. Student workers are assigned to work in the library by other administrative offices. Generally, we report how many workers we require for semester operations along with an overview of work expectations to the administrative offices. The personnel in these areas of seminary operations in turn utilize this information to assign workers to the library.

DS: When hiring student workers for the library, the two qualities that I find most desirable are (1) customer service experience, and (2) a demonstrated capacity to exercise independent, responsible judgement. As I tell our candidates, our primary role and purpose in the library is to provide excellent customer service to our patrons. While knowing how to find and use materials in our collection is important, I place greater emphasis on treating our patrons with

courtesy, professionalism, and respect. These are qualities that I strive to model.

When hiring student workers, I ask them to describe a time they have provided excellent customer service. I am especially inclined to favorably consider anyone who has experience working in food services or retail: if you can handle a restaurant or Walmart, you can handle a library.

Often, our students are scheduled to work in the evening and on weekends when I and other full-time staff are not present. Thus, the ability to make independent judgment calls is particularly important, since these students will need to be able to respond to situations in the moment. For example, they may need to decide to close the library if the power goes out or decide to make a reasonable exception to a policy to accommodate a special circumstance. I want our students to feel empowered to make these kinds of judgment calls, but I also want them to let me know they have done so, even if (especially if), in retrospect, their decision proves to be an error. This is why, in addition to asking candidates to relate noteworthy successes, I also ask them to describe a mistake and tell me how they responded and what they learned. In this way, I hope to let them know right from the start that I expect they will make mistakes from time to time and that this is okay, as long as they let me know so we can address any issues arising from such mistakes.

VW: In recent years, we have averaged about five to six student workers per semester. That compares to a permanent staff of nine in the library. In the coming semesters, we aim to replace a portion of our traditional librarian-on-duty rotation (full-time staff working evenings and weekends) with student workers, which will involve hiring additional students.

During the application and hiring process, we look for students who have experience in customer service or who demonstrate aptitude, as well as a willingness to perform some routine tasks or labor. Not everyone is comfortable in service settings; similarly, not everyone is suited for work like shelving or shifting, so determining these aptitudes is critical during our application and interviews. Additionally, we seek students who demonstrate self-reflection, timeliness, and initiative. During the semesters, our position is in relatively high demand. We receive about two or three times as many

applicants as we have positions available. We therefore require an initial application (using LibWizard forms). After reviewing applications, we conduct informal conversational interviews with candidates. For those to whom we wish to offer the job, we also always conduct a brief reference check with a former supervisor. The last step is critical, even though it may seem overkill for a basic student job. Asking a former supervisor, “would you hire this person again?” is an extraordinarily revealing question and helps us determine their likely job performance.

We have never, in recent years, dismissed or fired a student worker. We hire them on a semester-to-semester basis, so we have the opportunity not to allow them to continue. There have been many times when we have questioned our hiring decisions and wished we had hired someone else, but even in those cases, we generally will wait until the end of the semester or school year to make a personnel change. Most performance issues at our library are remedied with consistent communication of expectations and additional training.

TRAINING

- 1) *How much (initial) training do your students receive?*
- 2) *Do you use any programs or materials?*
- 3) *What do your students find most challenging to learn?*

MP: Training for our student workers begins the first day of work. A “building/ incremental” approach is taken towards instruction since student workers typically only work one day per week at our institution. This approach basically means that we “build” their knowledge base of the job by offering instruction/training at each shift until all responsibilities/duties are covered. Remembering everything in one session can be difficult, so the essentials are covered initially to ensure basic assistance can be offered to patrons on their first workday (i.e. check-out/check-in resources, locations in the library, where to locate instructions).

Two primary resources are used for training. First, a Library Worker Training Acknowledgement Form has been developed to assist with staying on task while conducting training. The form also provides student worker accountability. A sample form can be found at the end of this article. Second, instruction documents have been

created using Google docs. These documents provide both pictures and verbiage that is easy to follow. Links to the instructions have been placed on the bookmarks bar so that student workers can easily access them at any time. Should additional questions or difficulties arise, student workers are encouraged to ask for guidance and clarification.

With these resources and approach, challenges in training have been minimized. However, student workers face a different challenge: remembering. Working once a week is not conducive to training retention. Therefore, repetition, repetition, repetition is something that both the supervisor and student worker must get used to.

DS: I confess that as a supervisor, training is definitely an area that leaves room for improvement. I spend at least a couple hours with each student individually when they are first hired, going over the basics from LC classification to emergency response, but this somehow feels both inadequate and overwhelming (and a bit dull) simultaneously. I have created a training document that covers all of this, but I am not sure how often it is used, or how helpful it would be if it were. I think the challenge is twofold: (1) many of the things that I try to teach in the initial round of training are deceptively simple, yet prove confusing (e.g., LC call numbers), and (2) often there is a considerable time-lag between my instruction and the first opportunity to apply the information in a “real world” setting (for example, if a patron returns a lost or damaged book).

Fortunately, we have been able to schedule students when I am also working, and my office is located directly behind them (with an open window between), so it is fairly easy to review procedures when students have forgotten or provide answers to questions that I failed to consider in my initial training. Moreover, as one of our colleagues has said, very few people have died on a library table. When students are uncertain, they simply make the best decision they can and leave me a note letting me know. This allows me to correct any error that may have been made and offers a further opportunity for “in the moment” training that is more immediately obviously relevant. As McGuinness observes, rather than a one-time event, it is helpful to think of student staff training as an ongoing, iterative process “that may have to occur in the middle of whatever

work that I'm doing, requiring me to be flexible and responsive to student staff needs" (McGuinness 2014).

VW: At the beginning of the Fall semester, we aim to do a group-based training for all the new hires. This helps reduce staff workload in training each student individually. We also find that group-based instruction helps motivate and encourage the students to work together to learn and find solutions to their problems. This is conducted, typically, on a weekend for a few hours. Subsequently, our User Services staff will work alongside new students for their first few desk shifts, doing both additional circulation-related training and providing supervision of their first efforts to service patrons. For tasks like re-shelving, we have color-coded flags that students place in the books in the stacks so that library staff can go around and check their re-shelving work. This has been very useful as it both helps ensure that students are fully trained and it reduces the pressure they feel in potentially losing a book when they are attempting to reshelve for the first time. Once they have passed their checks a few times, they will be trusted to reshelve normally.

In terms of documentation, we maintain a circulation guide as a quick reference sheet for basic questions or troubleshooting. Student workers can consult this and read it to refresh their memory on certain procedures. User Services staff have an office directly behind the circulation desk, so they can also hear or see many issues, and they can be easily called upon to help students at the desk who may be unsure of what to do. Over time, we try to slowly add to students' skillset with an ongoing training program, teaching them more "advanced" library skills in the months after they begin work.

While we have circulation policies and a relatively small patron base, we find there are still many gray area cases for which students are often unsure what to do. There are many if-then types of scenarios that our students struggle to learn perfectly. That is the nature of library circulation, so simple and consistent communication is key. The library staff shares responsibility for staffing the circulation desk, so we train students to refer patrons to other library staff when necessary or to enlist the help of User Services staff to address complex patron questions or issues.

SCHEDULING

- 1) *What tools do you use to schedule and manage student workers?*
- 2) *Do you schedule by week, month, semester?*

DS: Scheduling can be a bit of a challenge, as it involves balancing the needs, expectations, desires, and convenience of our students with the need to ensure that the library is adequately staffed while maintaining a sustainable budget, and the fact that I only can and should devote so much of my time to creating and updating the schedule.

I have found it works well, both for me and for our students, to create a schedule on a semester-by-semester basis. This allows our students to have a consistent schedule based on their classes and other commitments. I use a Google calendar that I share with all my student workers and our full-time staff. I assign each student a color so it is fairly easy to tell at a glance who is scheduled and where there are gaps. When students let me know they will be unable to come in for a given shift (either due to a planned absence or last-minute emergency or illness), I change the color to grey to show that the slot is available for someone else to take, and to remind me that I will need to make sure that I or someone else will be available to cover the desk.

This brings up another important point to bear in mind: our students are whole human persons who have lives and commitments outside the library. While it is reasonable to set expectations, I find it is also helpful to be a little flexible where possible. For example, I have never found that chastising someone for being ten minutes late is an effective remedy for tardiness. I have instead found that extending a measure of grace can increase motivation to continue working in the library. If I am going to be out of the office, I will ask my students to make an extra effort to be on time and able to open the library on time.

VW: At the beginning of each semester, we create a master weekly schedule. This will become the base schedule for every subsequent week in the semester, so students always have consistent days and times they come in to work. I use free or low-cost scheduling software popular in food service or retail to build the schedule based

on the availability I collect from the student workers. These almost always need to be adjusted as students register or drop classes at the start of the semester, and the schedule must be updated accordingly. It takes at least two or three attempts before the master weekly schedule works for everyone. We generally have more than enough students to ensure that there is at least one available to work every needed shift.

RETENTION

- 1) *What can we do to encourage and motivate our students to continue working in the library?*
- 2) *How can we help our students see their work in the library as an extension (or application) of their theological education?*

MP: Our student workers are fond of working in the library. While there is great joy, sometimes as they work towards fulfilling their call they may become a sacristan in the seminary chapel. Accepting this position means that they will no longer be able to work in the library. Other students may also get reassigned to other work study positions on campus during their course of matriculation. To provide some sort of retention, the library developed a student worker subs list of former library workers. These students then can still be maintained as a source of contact to fill emergency shifts or other support when they are available.

DS: Creating and maintaining a positive work environment in which students feel valued as people is one vital way to encourage and motivate them to continue working in the library. In addition, as McGinnis asserts, their work in the library “should not be disconnected from other areas of life and study” (2014). For our students, this can mean anything from encouraging them to assist their fellow students with Greek vocabulary while they are working at the circulation desk to recognizing that their more personal conversations with fellow students can offer opportunities to practice the pastoral care skills they have been learning. This can help them see on a broader level that the work of the theological library is not and should not be disconnected from the work of the church or their call to serve in ministry of some kind or in some capacity. All our students (and all of us) are in the process of becoming and it is important for us to

see our students' work in the library as an opportunity for personal growth and maturation.

VW: Retention is a challenge at our library because students often spend a significant amount of time at their field education sites beginning in their second year of seminary. For those students, there is not much that can be done to retain them in the library. For others, we strive to ensure they have unique responsibilities in the library that leverage their background and skill set. In that way, they feel that their contribution to the library is valued. Similarly, we aim to create a positive atmosphere in the library where everyone contributes in various ways. It is truly a team effort, and no task is ever relegated solely to the students. Our regular library staff also do reshelfing and shifting, for example. This sets the tone for students' contributions and helps them feel part of a wider team.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to share insights into the importance of student workers shared by one of our forebears in the profession in the early years of Atla's existence. Henry M. Brimm offered the following remarks as part of an evening address he gave at the ATLA Annual Conference (now Atla Annual) in Chicago on June 16, 1954:

Therefore, blessed is the librarian who must depend upon the services of a numerous staff of student assistants. Irresponsible some of them may be. Unskilled, unobservant, and uninterested most of them are at first—a problem to schedule, a task to train, a chore to supervise. All this. But invested in this group, the librarian's time and effort and patience and affection will yield dividends out of all proportion. Efficient, industrious, dependable workers will be but a part of the return—the smaller part. When he has won, and influenced the members of his student staff, they will become for the librarian an incomparable agency for reaching, and winning, and influencing the student body. And they will serve as his emissaries without prompting. (Henry M. Brimm 1954)

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SAMPLE FORM**Library Worker Training Acknowledgement Form**

The following list of training/instructions concerning employment duties and responsibilities were either offered or provided so that I might know how to efficiently perform job tasks that will be assigned or required of me during my time as a library worker at the Library:

_____ EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

_____ Location of Instructions & Signing in to Google account

_____ Securing the facility

- Open and Closing procedures

_____ Koha library management system use

- Check-in instructions
- Check-out instructions
- Interlibrary Loan Check-out instructions
- Library Card Instructions
- Placing Hold Instructions
- Pulling Hold Instructions
- Renewal/ Set New Due Date Instructions
- TexShare Card Instructions

_____ Paycom & Google Work Calendar

- How to log my hours worked
- How to access the work calendar to verify if I'm on the schedule
- Shift swaps and Filing shifts
- Protocol to follow when the person assigned to work with me does not show

_____ Basic search capabilities to assist library patrons with attempting to locate desired resources.

- Basic search capabilities means that I can:
 - Enter in search terms into Seeker or the Koha Catalog
 - Locate the call number to resources
 - Navigate to digital resources so that they can be read in

the web browser

- Illustrate to patrons how to set limits on their search results

_____ Donation processing

_____ Shelf read and shelve resources

_____ Stamp and sticker print resources that are being added to the collection

_____ Phone

- Answering
- Taking a message
- Transfer
- Dial out

I also acknowledge that the lack of a physical demonstration (i.e. - hands on example) of any of the aforementioned duties and responsibilities does not exempt me from fulfilling my work tasks. Where a physical demonstration was not presented I have been given direction to where written instructions can be accessed for review. If after my training and if after I have also read instructions, I find that I am in need of additional clarity I will:

- Ask my supervisor or other full time library personnel for assistance before performing the task
- Notify and explain what part of the written instructions were unclear and that I had difficulty following

I further acknowledge that as a library worker I am aware that I have the ability to access personal information of library patrons. However, I will not use or divulge library patron's personal information for any purposes other than what is necessary to fulfill job duties as a library worker. I will keep all library patron's information safe and confidential. I will make sure to logout of library worker accounts to maintain this security.

Lastly, I acknowledge that I am aware that policies and procedures for performing specific tasks may be amended or updated. I will make the necessary personal adjustments to continue to fulfill work tasks

assigned to me. I am here to work and keep the library functioning to the best of my ability.

Name of Library worker:

(PRINT) _____ (DATE) _____

(SIGN) _____ (DATE) _____

Librarian Supervisor

(PRINT) _____ (DATE) _____

(SIGN) _____ (DATE) _____

The Atla Code of Conduct

Promoting Shared Values in Atla Spaces

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ABSTRACT Based on their panel discussion at Atla Annual 2025, members of Atla's Code of Conduct committee present the rationale for the Code of Conduct and provide a timeline of key events in the process of its creation. They also detail the responsibilities of the committee, as determined by the prior work of the Board of Directors and Code of Conduct Task Force. They discuss the relationship between their role in the association and the principles of restorative justice. The committee hopes that this introductory work will inform Atla's membership, encourage increased dialogue, and continue to build a culture of respect built on concrete documentation instead of unspoken norms.

WHY DOES ATLA NEED A CODE OF CONDUCT?

The core purpose of Atla is to promote worldwide scholarly communication in religion and theology by advancing the work of libraries and related information providers. This is Atla's why.

Atla achieves this end in three key ways. First, as an association, it fosters a community of professionals who get to know one another and share in the joys and struggles of working with theological and religious library collections. For many, these professional relationships become deeply meaningful, providing an important source of solidarity and support in what can be an isolating field of work.

Secondly, beyond personal relationships, Atla stewards a conversation about how best to collect, preserve, and provide access to religious and theological information. This conversation endures even as individuals and institutions come and go. It helps define the community while serving as a resource for the wider professional community.

Third, Atla is actively engaged in the task of cataloging and providing access to religious and theological information in its databases and other products. This task is an important and shared contribution to the broader scholarly community, and its impact extends beyond the disciplines of religion and theology.

Atla has identified the values of hospitality, inclusion, and diversity as core aspects of a rich community, a vibrant conversation, and a successful repository of information. These values, along with collegiality and collaboration, are all important but can also be difficult. Humans have engaged in religious practice and conversation for thousands of years. Atla members have thought long and seriously not only about historical religious practices but also about their current significance. We have deep and abiding differences and must push back against both historic and recent currents that want to separate and divide.

This has led to recurring side conversations within the membership about who is or is not welcome in Atla. Matt Ostercamp remembers a whispered bus conversation years ago at an annual conference where he was asked if Evangelical Christians (his own religious identity) were welcome at Atla. We have heard stories from fellow members about similar conversations on whether people of color, non-Christians, queer individuals, or atheists are welcome at Atla.

Historically, Atla has maintained its community largely through unspoken norms. Social cues and the leadership of individuals deemed important either by their position or seniority have set the tone for the association. However, this organic process of establishing communal identity has at times proven to be confusing and inconsistent, especially in periods of change and stress. It becomes the subtext of leadership votes that may be completely lost on newer members. Therefore, the need to resort to side conversations noted above, which were often unsatisfyingly opaque, was built into the system.

The Atla Code of Conduct is an attempt to meet the challenge of our global context where intellectually and religiously diverse communities are under pressure to pick a side and participate in polarized and polarizing “us versus them” conversations. It is our hope that we can substantively build upon the tradition of hospitality while also moving from implicit, undocumented norms to a written set of community expectations. We see the advantages of this approach being 1) people inside and outside the group can know who we are and what type of community we are trying to build, and 2) we can update and evolve our expectations through an open and formal process where diverse voices can be respectfully heard.

TIMELINE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Atla’s Code of Conduct is not just a policy; it is an embodiment of Atla’s mission and the values embedded in our organizational ends. In October 2023, the Board reaffirmed that Atla exists so that libraries, librarians, and information providers in theology and religion “connect and grow professionally in an equitable, supportive, diverse, and global community” (Atla, n.d.-a). This is the lens through which we can understand the Code of Conduct—as a framework that ensures our community can thrive safely, collaboratively, and inclusively.

GROUNDWORK: RESOLUTIONS AND ENDS (2020)

The journey formally began in June 2020, with the Board’s Resolution Against Racism and Xenophobia. It acknowledged that systemic racism threatens our shared scholarly mission by marginalizing voices and perspectives, and it committed Atla to education, reflection, and antiracism work. Around the same time, the Board adopted a new organizational end, enumerated 1.5, which states: “Members are equipped to successfully navigate the changing landscape” (Atla, n.d.-a). That landscape includes societal change and shifting expectations around safety, inclusion, and justice. The Code of Conduct emerges from that call to equip members to engage and grow in a rapidly evolving professional context.

Table 1: Key Events in the Development and Implementation of the Code of Conduct

June 2020	Board resolution against racism and xenophobia
June 2021	DEI policy adopted; Code of Conduct Task Force convened
May 2022	Draft Code of Conduct developed
August 2023	Code of Conduct launched
October 2023	Code of Conduct adopted by the Board
December 2023, December 2024, & June 2025	Restorative Justice training sessions for committee members
June 2025	Presentation to membership at Atla Annual
Ongoing	Ongoing implementation and member education.

DEI POLICY AND THE CALL FOR A CODE (2021)

In June 2021, the Board adopted a formal DEI policy, Appendix BP15, which states: “Diversity strengthens us as an organization, broadens our knowledge base, and stimulates innovation” (Atla, n.d.-b). From this emerged the charge to create a Code of Conduct that didn’t merely serve as a procedural safeguard, but as a values-based framework grounded in the core values of hospitality, inclusion, and diversity, supporting organizational ends 1 and 4.1, which address professional development, and global inclusivity of resources and voices, respectively. A member-led task force was convened later that year to carry out this work.

DRAFTING THE CODE (2021–2022)

The task force studied models from related organizations such as the American Library Association, the Society of Biblical Literature, and the Association of Theological Schools, but made a deliberate choice to craft something specific to Atla:

- Centered in our mission to foster the study of theology and religion
- Designed for community, not control
- Rooted in restorative justice rather than punitive enforcement

By mid-2022, a full draft was completed. Implementation was planned for the FY24 membership cycle, timed to coincide with Atla's evolving membership practices and renewed emphasis on building inclusive networks of scholarly communication advocated in organizational end 1.3.

COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION (2022–2023)

Throughout late 2022 and 2023, Atla transparently introduced the new Code to the membership. It was included during renewals and registrations, and its acknowledgement was required for participation in Atla-hosted events and platforms. It was framed as a way to foster respectful engagement across differing traditions, perspectives, and global contexts, reflecting organizational ends 1.4 and 3.1. Importantly, it aligned with organizational end 4.1, which calls for increasing access to inclusive and global content, because inclusion does not only happen in what we read, but also in how we relate. By August 2023, the Code of Conduct officially launched.

OVERSIGHT AND RESTORATIVE APPROACH (2023–2024)

Following the launch, Atla appointed a Conduct Committee, composed of members from different backgrounds and career stages, a representative from the DEI Committee, and an Atla staff liaison. In December 2023, committee members completed training with the Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice. The committee's mandate is to:

- Address concerns with care and confidentiality
- Promote community repair rather than punishment
- Model Atla's values in practice

This committee helps operationalize organizational end 1.2, enhancing the value of members to their institutions, because safe, inclusive professional spaces support thriving, visible leadership.

WHEN DOES THE COMMITTEE NEED TO BE INVOLVED?

The committee's involvement in any complaint is contingent upon three other "question" words: what, who, and where. These criteria establish the parameters for which an investigation may be initiated.

WHAT

This simply establishes that the complaint references some part of the Code of Conduct that was perceived to have been violated. However, the severity of a complaint may also warrant that different channels be employed, such as police or other emergency responders, when there is a substantial risk of immediate physical harm or loss of life. The committee is a deliberative body that does not compromise the fairness or thoroughness of its investigation to meet deadlines.

WHO

For the Code of Conduct to be applicable, both parties must fall under the definition of participants in Atla activities. This applies to the members of the Association and non-members when participating in an Atla-hosted function. Notably, Atla employees are not covered by the Code of Conduct, as their conduct is directed by the terms of their employment.

WHERE

The Code applies in physical and virtual environments where Atla is acknowledged as the sponsor or host. While the annual conference is the clearest example, other Atla spaces include virtual events, committee meetings, and Atla-hosted listservs such as Atlantis.

RELATIONSHIP TO ATLA'S GOVERNANCE

The Committee operates under authority delegated by the Board of Directors and is appointed by the Executive Director. Each member is required to participate in a training activity each year

focused on investigative procedures and restorative justice. The committee functions independently in complaint handling, making decisions based on policy, and reports details to the Board without compromising individual confidentiality.

CONDUCT COMMITTEE'S CORE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Committee promptly receives and logs all Code-related reports. They evaluate these reports for credibility and the scope of the allegations, then determine an appropriate response route and recommend resolutions or outcomes (e.g., mediation, referral, educational action). Throughout the process, they uphold confidentiality, due process, and restorative principles.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE IS NOT

It is important to emphasize that the Committee is not a law enforcement or judicial body. It is not an entity focused on punishment or blame, nor does it serve as forum for theological, academic, or policy debate outside of Code violations.

REPORTING

Any Community member who believes that they have been the victim of a Code of Conduct violation should report the incident immediately to anyone listed below:

- Executive Director
- Director of Membership & Engagement
- Any member of the Conduct Committee

The reporting individual will be treated with respect, and Atla prohibits retaliation of any kind against an individual reporting a perceived violation of the Code of Conduct.

INVESTIGATION

The Committee will promptly investigate each report by delegating a team to investigate. They consider conflicts of interest when appointing these teams. Investigations are fair, impartial, thorough, and timely. Reporting individuals will be informed of the outcome, with details limited to protect privacy.

OUTCOMES AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

As mentioned earlier in this article, the Conduct Committee receives annual training in the use of restorative justice. Restorative justice is defined as “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in an offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations, in order to heal and put things right as possible” (Zehr 2015, 48). The outcomes of the Atla Code of Conduct focus on restorative practices in alignment with Atla values of hospitality, inclusion, diversity, collegiality, and collaboration. Atla is a community and aims to repair and restore relationships should a violation of the Code happen. Relationships are key and this work is invitational. Therefore, if all parties involved are not open to a restorative process, then this outcome is not an option. This work is about our shared responsibility of making Atla spaces free from harassment and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

What began with a resolution in 2020 has grown into a living commitment aligned with Atla’s mission to foster theological study, framed by its organizational ends, and implemented through a collaborative, restorative structure. The Atla Code of Conduct affirms that how we engage with one another is as important as what we contribute. It is about building the conditions in which all members can share, lead, and grow together.

We are living in challenging times. Many of us have lived through the fracturing of families, churches or other communities of faith, and educational institutions. We do not expect that the rich, inclusive community Atla aspires to is going to happen on its own. Instead, we as an association need to think carefully about how to navigate

our current cultural moment. Our hope is to move forward with clarity, kindness, and conversation.

Our invitation to all Atla members is to join us in thinking intentionally about community. Atla has a long history of constructive engagement across a broad spectrum of religious communities, and we want to see that continue and grow. We believe that this work is important not just for the organizational ends of Atla but also as a model and witness to a world where many choose to vilify others instead of listening and engaging respectfully with people from different traditions. We invite you to extend trust and open yourself to the vulnerability that comes from discussing community norms and expectations. We hope that you choose to engage with us in this process and continue the conversation.

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From Rare Books to Real Connections

Rethinking Outreach Through Active Engagement with Primary Resources

Emily Corbin, Reference Archivist, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Dee Roberts, Reference and Outreach Librarian, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Chelsea Williams, Online Learning Project Librarian, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

ABSTRACT Brews & Books is an event series designed to increase engagement with our library's Special Collections through intentional, community-centered programming. Held three times a semester, each event features hand-selected materials curated by our Reference and Instruction team. These events invite students, faculty, and staff to view unique materials in person while enjoying coffee and tea in a relaxed setting. To enhance access for our hybrid and distance learners, we created a LibGuide that includes digitized versions of the materials, supporting resources, and event visuals. By connecting archival materials and rare books to classroom discussions, current events, and student interests, Brews & Books bridges academic content with community life, while demystifying the research process and showcasing the richness of Special Collections. The collaboration between departments not only fostered greater internal knowledge sharing but also helped students become more confident and curious researchers. Through this initiative, we created new opportunities for discovery, both within our Special Collections and across our campus.

THE "WHAT"

Have you ever felt stuck when it comes to creating unique, engaging, and meaningful outreach programming at your library? If so, you are in luck! Staff members from the Reference, Instruction, and Outreach Department and the Special Collections Department at Pitts Theology

Library have collaborated in building a successful outreach model, called Brews & Books, and we are excited to share what we have learned along the way. In short, Brews & Books is an event centered on an item, or items, from our Special Collections Department. Each member of our Reference and Instruction team chose two items for a total of six events over the course of the academic year. The event itself involves having materials from Special Collections available for viewing, under the watchful eye of our colleagues, a monitor to present our information slides, bookmarks created especially for the event, and of course...coffee and tea.

THE “WHY”

Community

Library staff can stand in the gap between students’ interests and the material being discussed in the classroom. As we were planning, we thought about how the event could come alongside students, faculty, and staff and connect to what they are already learning and talking about. We brought in our observations from the classroom, conversations with students, and wider community issues and asked how we could leverage the unique materials in our library to match those interests. As this community is dispersed—a large portion attend as hybrid students—it was important that this event served all members of our community.

For our in-person contingent, we hoped the event would inspire the use of primary resources in research. By displaying physical items from our collection, we hoped to kindle interest in other primary sources. Not only do the events bring us together to build relationships, but they also support our goal of helping students to become more confident researchers. For our distance learners, even though these events would take place on campus, the hope was that these students would be able to see the items digitally. With the creation of a LibGuide, they were able to see the items, engage with related resources, and be connected to other digital offerings from our collection.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

These events showcased the breadth and depth of the materials we hold in Special Collections. Many students are unaware of the materials that we have, and this allowed us to discuss not just the item on display, but others that might pertain to their research.

If something is already digitized, we could use that content. If not, then we have a great in-house digitization process with our colleague Ann McShane who could digitize the materials.

As with many libraries, the archive at Pitts is housed in an area that is a little hidden. The department is several floors up and behind locked doors. This is not an area that a student would just stumble upon, and while that is by design, it is still important for students to know that it exists. The Brews & Books event allows the library to showcase eye-catching materials so that students can discover the Special Collections.

It is necessarily difficult to access materials in Special Collections. Sometimes the process can be a little intimidating, so ensuring that staff from Special Collections are at the Brews & Books events provides a face and a specific email for students to contact to access materials. There are a few extra hoops to jump through, but we want these materials used, so it is beneficial to be able to reassure students of that at these events.

Additionally, it is easy for each department to be very focused on their own work and protocols. The Brews & Books event brought together our main Reference department, which has the most face-to-face interaction with students, and our Special Collections department. This event allowed for the Reference Department to become a little more familiar with what is held in Special Collections, which means they can point more students in our direction when appropriate, and they can explain how to access the Special Collections department.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Planning each Brews & Books event followed the same rough timeline:

- Choose Item(s)

- Research Item(s) and Context
- Create Visuals
- Promote & Execute
- Evaluate

Choosing items always began with what is available in our collection—whether it was part of a larger set of materials (e.g. our Wesleyana) or to highlight a lesser-known resource (e.g. our stereoscope). The first aspect of selecting an item from the archives was to look through the Finding Aids, Digital Collections site, and Library catalog. While doing so, we were also thinking about who would be interested in, and attend, the event. As we have already mentioned, this includes supporting events or conversations already happening on campus (e.g. Douglas choice) or specific classes. Since we wanted this to reach the largest number of people, we knew it should also be available digitally. Sometimes our choices highlighted items that were already fully digitized, but it was exciting when we could use the event as an opportunity to digitize items that had not yet been digitized.

After selecting an item, we would physically pull the item from the archives and go about researching the primary source. Performing research with the physical object included looking through the item, making notes, taking pictures, and noting anything unique or unexpected.

After viewing the primary source, we continued our research with additional sources that could illuminate its context and broaden the conversation about its importance. This research was central to the visuals we created for each event. These were slides that included key information about the item in its context (historical, theological, religious, cultural, etc.), images of the item, ways to connect the item to larger conversations or themes (conceptions of time and its representation in print, for example), and suggestions for further reading. They were displayed on a monitor during the event and then converted to images and included on our LibGuide, which was also accessible via a QR code in the day-of version of the slides. There, they were combined with links to books, articles, and other special collections available from the library. Lastly, we used images of the item to create a unique bookmark for each event, again with a QR code to the LibGuide.

In addition to these visuals, it was equally important to create promotional graphics. Working alongside our Communications student worker, we created a graphic template utilizing Emory branding color schemes. We promoted the event through our weekly newsletter, the Prospectus, on Instagram, and through the student and faculty email listservs. Once the event date arrived, all that was left was to set up all the materials. Because Brews & Books is held just outside the library's front doors, there is some minimal furniture rearrangement required. We set up tables, bring down the brewed coffee and tea, and display the screen and Special Collections materials.

Lastly, it was important to evaluate whether Brews & Books was a good use of staff time and resources. We tracked how many people came to each event, how many LibGuide views we got, and how many appointments in Special Collections were made because of one of these outreach events. During the 2024-2025 school year, we reached over 200 community members, had 140 LibGuide views, and four people made appointments in Special Collections to explore materials in greater depth. Since the Brews & Books events are a relatively light lift for library staff, it has been determined that it is worthwhile to continue this outreach programming again during the 2025-2026 academic year.

We encourage you to consider what kind of similar programming might be possible at your own institution. We hope you will make use of the Brews & Books Annex1 that contains template designs and other detailed information to help with the creative process. Good luck!

NOTES

- 1 See <https://guides.theology.library.emory.edu/brandsandbooks>.

The Impact of Leadership Development for Theological Librarians

Stories from a Mentorship Program

Christa Strickler, Electronic Resources Metadata Librarian, University of Notre Dame

Kelly Campbell, Associate Dean of Information Services and Director of the John Bulow Library, Columbia Theological Seminary

Aileen Mulchrone, Interim Library Director, Catholic Theological Union

David Kiger, Director of Libraries and Theological Librarian, Milligan University

ABSTRACT This panel presentation explored the transformative impact of leadership development in theological librarianship, highlighting the variety of approaches individuals can bring to leadership. Through a narrative-driven style, the presentation aimed to inspire readers to recognize their potential as leaders and pursue opportunities to cultivate their distinct skills. The Leadership Development for Theological Librarians Program, launched in 2023, celebrated the graduation of its second cohort in May 2025. Funded by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and co-led by Kelly Campbell from Columbia Theological Seminary and Myka Kennedy Stephens from Fosgail, the program provides mentoring and executive coaching for theological librarians from varying backgrounds, roles, and institutions. Panelists shared the origin story of the program, discussed their unique leadership journeys, and reflected on how the program has shaped their professional growth.

INTRODUCTION

In a time of great volatility, authentic leadership in theological librarianship is more critical than ever. Not only do we need to foster leadership in formal library director or supervisory positions, but we also need to develop it at every level with all types of people. If

we constrain our understanding of leadership to those with specific titles, a particular personality type, or a traditional background, we risk missing out on the diversity and creative thinking we need to navigate this volatility into the future.

This panel explores one way in which theological librarians are actively cultivating intentional leadership development across a spectrum of librarians in Atla. We share the history and impact of the Leadership Development for Theological Librarians Program, which is co-led by Kelly Campbell from Columbia Theological Seminary and Myka Kennedy Stephens from Fosgail.

We aim to show that leadership in theological librarianship is not just about formal titles; it is about how every one of us, regardless of our roles or personalities, can contribute to shaping our future. The narratives shared here demonstrate the need for, and impact of, intentional leadership development and shared experiences.

We begin by recounting Kelly Campbell's origin story of the program. Following that, we share the experiences of Aileen Mulchrone, David Kiger, and Christa Strickler, who narrate their experiences of leadership development as members of the two cohorts that have completed the program.

KELLY CAMPBELL

When I started as a theological librarian about 20 years ago, Atla had partnered with the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. As a new theological librarian, I applied for their week-long colloquium, which required travel to Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Even though I'd already had my library degree for a while, I applied for the program and made the trip.

During the colloquium, seasoned theological librarians served as individual mentors. It was wonderful to be together with other new theological librarians, learning from each other and from our mentors. I remember one session where a member of the Wabash staff talked about faculty and how to relate to them, explaining the differences between pre-tenure, tenured, and retiring faculty members. That session was invaluable to me in understanding my context in theological education at that point.

The partnership between Atla and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning directly impacted Atla and the librarians who participated in the leadership program. I believe they held around three colloquia over the years. My cohort had about ten participants. Of those, three became Atla board members, one became an executive director at the Association of Theological Schools, and quite a few became library directors. From that one leadership development opportunity, Atla gained several leaders who have continued to grow and mentor throughout the association.

The next time the opportunity came around, I was a new library director. I had a brand-new theological librarian working for me, and I sent him to that colloquium, after which he became the director of two theological libraries and a board member of Atla. That program was invaluable in supporting leadership development for theological librarians, but the partnership eventually ended, though I can't remember why.

Then, Atla created a second program called "Creating Leaders of Tomorrow," bringing in a consultant for leadership development. I presented one of the sessions, but I heard the feedback for the program was mixed. I believe it only happened once, and after that, nothing.

Multiple requests were made to the Atla membership staff asking for leadership development opportunities, but nothing happened. So, these members talked about trying to start some opportunities independently. During COVID, I worked with the education person at Atla to set up a monthly Zoom meeting for directors. We were all facing unknowns and needed to talk with someone else about what was going on in our context. But no further leadership development opportunities came from the Atla staff. It had been several years since our guild had any leadership development.

In 2023, at my current location at Columbia Theological Seminary, a faculty member invited Dr. Lynne Westfield, the Executive Director of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning, and her entire staff to meet with me. Dr. Westfield takes her staff to different locations nationwide for professional development each year, and Atlanta was their choice for that year. This faculty member felt they needed to meet me. So, we met in my office, and in an informal, flowing conversation, Dr. Westfield asked about leadership development for

theological librarians. I was just surprised. Here was someone who was a former faculty member and was now an executive director, and she got theological librarians. She understood what we do. She understood that theological librarians are the glue that keeps things together between faculty and students. I was going into my advocacy mode, which a lot of us do when we're talking to an administrator, but she was already sold. She already understood what we do. So, since she grasped that key point in our conversation, she asked me, "If I gave you a \$30,000 grant, could you develop a leadership program for theological librarians?" And I said, "Yes, I can. I can figure that out." That's how the program started. We've just completed our second cohort this past year.

In 2023, we had our first cohort of four theological librarians. I partnered with Myka Kennedy Stephens, a former theological library director who had achieved her accreditation in coaching and started a consulting firm called Fosgail. We worked together to develop a scaffolded curriculum in which the cohort meets together every other month. Prior to each meeting, they do some professional reading about leadership concepts, which we then discuss. Then we follow up online, unpack that, and have more conversations. During the other months, they meet one-on-one with Myka for a coaching session, where they can talk about a particular context and what is happening in their workplace related to that leadership concept. We start in August and have a three-day retreat in Atlanta, Georgia, in April. From our first cohort, we received tremendous results. Everyone was very appreciative and talked about how much they had grown. It was a delightful experience and we were thrilled, as the results were better than we hoped for.

When I applied for the grant in my second year, I came up with three more specific goals than we had in the first year. First, participants will increase their knowledge and awareness of basic leadership practices. Leadership practices aren't hard or complex. They're simple but so challenging to be aware of and to implement—and we desperately need them in many places in our world today.

The second goal is that participants are introduced to a cohort of fellow theological librarians with whom they can build a professional network and possibly friendships. In our field, many of us work in tiny libraries. We might be the director or the reference person. We

might have two or three people. But if you're the director, it does get lonely at times. That is why we wanted it to be a cohort model, where you start with people in August and end up with them the following May. Having this presentation is exactly what we wanted: the cohorts start talking to each other, and you develop, for lack of a better word, a community of learning where you're building a professional network. You're also building friends who understand what being a theological librarian is like.

The third goal is for participants to deepen their self-awareness and gain perspectives on their context and their unique contributions as leaders. Some may assume they must be a library director to participate in this program. That is not accurate. Everyone can be a leader. It doesn't matter if you're working at the circulation desk, are a part-time employee, or are behind the scenes in technical services; everyone is a leader in their own way. This program tries to help you become self-aware of who you are as a leader. There are all different kinds of leaders. How I lead is going to be different than how someone else leads. The program is designed so you know how you are uniquely created to be a leader in the context you're in, and so that you can build upon that. We've had participants who are directors, who work in technical services, or who come from a variety of other backgrounds.

Intentional leadership development is critical to the development of our industry. Ironically, even though we are in the educational sector, we do not spend time developing each other as leaders in our guild, and we are not intentional about leadership development.

While some might claim that certain people are born leaders (and literature debates this point), true leadership development requires intentional investment in people to help them become leaders. It doesn't happen overnight. Again, the concepts are not complex, but if you are unaware of them or lack self-awareness, that leadership development won't happen. This is especially crucial in theological librarianship.

One of the assessments we use in the program explores how you generally react and respond to conflict. Theological librarians often struggle to engage conflict directly; instead, we tend to avoid it or compromise. This tendency shows up in our advocacy efforts. When I served on the Atla Board of Directors, advocating for ourselves

was a key value, but our profession has always found this difficult. Theological librarians are servants. We want to help and are good at that role, but we also need to advocate for the importance of our work. Recent literature has discussed the concept of vocational awe post-COVID, and I think theological librarians excel at making what we do look easy. Consequently, those in vocational awe of what we do often do not understand or grasp the time and effort our jobs require.

The success of the program has been overwhelming, in my opinion. Comments from the past two cohorts have included feedback like, “This has been the most influential leadership development or professional development that I have done in my career.” Participants talk about how much they’ve grown through the program. After the April retreat, we require participants to submit a personal leadership development plan, which is designed to continue a participant’s growth throughout the year after finishing the program. This plan is a way to hold participants accountable, as leadership growth is continuous. Leadership growth isn’t about figuring everything out and moving on to something else. The plan allows participants to check in with each other and see how things are progressing from year to year.

AILEEN MULCHRONE

My path to librarianship started the way I think a lot of English-major-turned-librarians’ do, with the thought, “I don’t want to be a teacher, what now?” (Little did I know how much teaching my future held.) So, soon after college, I started my MLIS program and began working part-time at a library consortium in Chicago. I worked as a page in the Stacks Management Department, pulling and re-shelving books for requests. After I finished my degree, a job opened up, and I became the supervisor of the department, working under the department head. This was my first supervisory role, and I learned the challenges of managing different personalities while supervising part-time workers. After eight years there, I started working at the Catholic Theological Union four and a half years ago, and I’m currently the Interim Library Director.

I did not aspire to be a leader when I thought about and started my MLIS program. My goal was to work with collections and help people connect with them. Inevitably, as my job titles grew, so did my leadership responsibility. I've now supervised and managed part- and full-time employees for eleven years, the whole of my full-time employment in libraries. In my first full-time role at the Center for Research Libraries, I supervised and trained part-time employees who worked in my previous role as a page. This consisted mostly of answering questions and helping them complete challenging tasks. I was never in charge of hiring, scheduling, disciplining, or potentially ending their employment.

When I started in my role at the Catholic Theological Union, I managed the part-time student workers who worked the evening and Saturday shifts. Although I was now managing fewer employees, two to three instead of eight to ten, my responsibilities covered the full cycle: advertising job openings, interviewing, hiring, training, managing timecards and time off, and ultimately deciding whether or not an employee needed to be let go.

I found managing fewer student workers but with more responsibility far more challenging. I'd never before been in a position where I had to have conversations with employees about perpetual tardiness, or no-call, no-shows for a shift, or even managing schedules and time off. While I was always comfortable training students and answering questions, this was my first supervisory role that required me to address performance issues. Correcting behavior or deciding someone's performance was poor enough to let them go was much more difficult for me. This is something I learned to improve through the Theological Leadership Development Program with the Wabash cohort, where we explored different types of leadership, learned about our own strengths and weaknesses, and received professional coaching.

Throughout the program, we read about and discussed what comprises leadership. We also took a few different assessments that helped us gauge our strengths as people and leaders and identify areas for improvement. These exercises helped me recognize my strengths, rather than focusing solely on what I needed to improve. We also had bimonthly professional coaching. The personality assessments, coupled with the coaching, helped me to turn knowledge

about my strengths and weaknesses into action. I learned it was a positive thing that I had empathy towards the student workers I managed, but I also needed to learn to have hard conversations about continued employment if it was best for the library.

During this time, I had a student worker who was very nice and positive but regularly called off shifts at the last minute. This was hard on me because I needed to scramble to find coverage, and it was bad for the library because if I couldn't find a replacement, I had to close the library unexpectedly early. It was very beneficial to be able to talk this through in professional coaching before I decided to release the employee. Over the course of the cohort, I improved my ability to make hiring and retention choices that were best for the library, even if I had to disappoint a candidate or employee. Additionally, I've become more proactive in handling issues with student workers rather than waiting until there is a glaring problem. Through the Wabash cohort, I learned to put knowledge into action and became a more proactive and effective leader.

For me, the most important takeaway from the program was learning that leadership is intentional. Leadership can look different from person to person, and anyone can learn to harness their strengths to become a leader, or a better one. Learning with and from my cohort members about leadership has been invaluable. As part of the professional development plans we created at the end of the program, my three cohort members and I decided to continue meeting bimonthly to discuss our progress. In the year since our program ended, we've continued to discuss our roles and challenges, and I've continued to reap the rewards of intentional leadership growth and planning with my peers.

This leadership development program, geared specifically toward theological librarians, filled a need for me, and such programs are more important than ever. In the shifting landscape of small seminaries, like the Catholic Theological Union, declining student enrollment often leads to staff reduction. The result is that a librarian may be unexpectedly thrust into a leadership role when a previous leader moves on and is not replaced. Programs like this one address the need for leadership development in theological libraries. My hope is that these programs will trend upward, even as staff sizes and the number of experienced leaders in those spaces trend downward.

DAVID KIGER

I fell into librarianship. It was never a path I imagined would become my career. Throughout my collegiate education I was intent on learning about the bible and theology. I went to Bible college, I then pursued an MDiv at seminary, which led me to work on a PhD in Historical Theology. On a quite personal note, I appreciated how throughout my theological education I was allowed and even encouraged to love God by using my mind. I was allowed to look under the hood and see what truly drove the engine of the faith. Perhaps this is why throughout seminary and into my doctoral work, I worked at the library. This work was at first because of convenience; the library was a great place to study, and I, like most graduate students, needed to study and needed money. While the job began out of convenience, it quickly became a place I loved to work.

These two academic library clerk-level positions introduced me to most of the work of a library. I assisted with ILL, circulation, inventory, archival work, and reference instruction. I'm grateful to my supervisors, who allowed me so many diverse learning opportunities as a graduate student employee. All these experiences came together in my first full-time library position as the Assistant Director of Libraries and Theological Librarian for Emmanuel Christian Seminary at Milligan. This rather verbose title meant that I was to direct the seminary library as part of our larger library system.

In the fall of 2022, our departing Director of Libraries, Gary Daught, encouraged me to apply for the vacancy his retirement would create. I applied and was appointed Director of Libraries and continued as the Theological Librarian.

When I began this dual role in 2023, I realized I had had very little leadership training. I had gone from supervising student employees at the seminary to overseeing the library budget, supervising colleagues, and participating in the university's academic committee. In short, to much more institutional responsibility. During the beginning stages of my time as director, I saw the opportunity to apply for the leadership development cohort.

It became quite clear to me early on that directing and leading an academic library is about fostering partnerships across the university and professional networks. In joining the cohort, I saw

a great opportunity to partner with professional networks. More specifically related to leadership, I saw a great need for personal integration of my personal and professional self. I needed to find ways to experience joy in the work, not feel overwhelmed by my own disorientation to management, and find resources for courage when advocating for the library and myself.

The cohort program was itself a joy to experience. We met on Zoom and noted that we each experienced similar situations. We all were able to bond over similar situations and challenges that we each faced. We worked on finding our strengths and our approach to conflict.

At the start, coaching with Myka was something I looked forward to with some trepidation. I had heard of “coaches” in a variety of non-sports fields and was curious to see how interactions like this went. From the outset, Myka was professional and helpful, empathetic and wise. Our sessions helped me articulate the leadership struggles I was facing, and once articulated, I was able to address them with clarity. Leadership is often about a vision of the future, but it also entails an honest and hopefully accurate view of the self. While I would consider myself modestly self-aware and believe I know myself well, having conversations about my leadership skills and how I fit within my organization benefited me. Sometimes it is hearing something true about yourself but within a different context that makes the situation open up; sometimes it is just getting clarity.

My conversation with Myka about the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument was particularly important. Through that conversation, I was able to feel at peace with how I had been approaching different conflicts at my job. There will always be conflict, and until there is a great amount of institutional trust, full collaboration is elusive. In addition, because conflict is constant, not all conflicts require an urgent response. This conversation helped me determine how best to approach conflicts related to library space, librarian benefits, and how best to advocate for the work of the library.

One of the best parts of my experience was the end-of-year retreat when we all gathered in person. This retreat helped to bond us as a group and helped to solidify the value of the whole program. Spending time together sharing our struggles and aspirations helped form us as a community. We had spent the year knowing each other through

screens but then were able to meet face-to-face. This experience helped remind us all that we are not alone, that our experiences are important, and that the work we do in the library matters.

About a month ago I submitted my leadership plan. Creating this was a bit of a challenge: what to focus on and how best to achieve these goals? As it is, my goals may be too ambitious, but the simple act of taking time to plan how best to approach my own personal leadership growth can only have positive ramifications.

Recently in the Atla Blog, John Kutsko has articulated the interoperability of theological librarians, describing the many diverse layers and roles of a theological librarian (Kutsko 2025). Our work is vast, the challenges are immense, and against the current landscape of theological education, what we do is essential. This means that we need to develop in the area of leadership to cast a clear vision of how our work partners with the work of the university. We need leaders who show, at every level of library work, the value of collecting and connecting. Who we are and what we do matters.

CHRISTA STRICKLER

Years ago, when my college application form asked me to write about my leadership experience, I wrote that the world would not have leaders if it weren't for dedicated followers like myself. As a quiet, introverted person, I believed leadership was only for the outgoing and charismatic, which I would never be.

I'm still quiet and introverted. And yet, I am a leader. This is because of the many people who have encouraged me to develop leadership talents and skills that I couldn't see in myself. Because of others, I am learning to see my quiet thoughtfulness as a leadership strength and am learning to leverage it in ways that align with my values while being mindful of my limitations.

I began my library career as a technical services student worker providing acquisitions and cataloging support at a small Christian liberal arts college. I wasn't leading anything; I simply showed up to work on time and did my job well.

Over time, I moved to a staff-level cataloging position, then to department head, and eventually to a faculty librarian role. Throughout these transitions, I never once thought of myself as a leader, even when I proposed and led a project to reclassify the library's collections from Dewey Decimal to Library of Congress Classification. Later, when I moved to a library faculty cataloging position at Wheaton College, a mid-size Christian liberal arts college, I co-led an even larger reclassification project, still not seeing myself as a leader.

It took the encouragement of others for me to begin seeing myself in a leadership light. I recall a moment when my co-leader for that second reclassification project encouraged me to apply for a library leadership role that had opened. She told me she saw leadership skills in me. Her words stuck with me and started to shift my perspective.

Not long after, I began serving as section editor for Atla's Theology Cataloging Bulletin, and a year later the editor-in-chief role became available. Atla staff invited me to take on the position and informed me that my strong leadership skills would have secured my place in the role the previous time it had been open, had I only applied. I see this now as another pivotal moment in which someone pointed out what I could not see for myself: I was a leader.

This growing self-awareness coincided with several struggles I experienced with my library co-workers in group meetings, which led me to read about group communication and leadership. My self-directed learning highlighted the importance of these skills in the professional world. I began noticing when leaders applied them effectively—and when they did not. Realizing these were skills I could develop, I actively sought out learning opportunities whenever I could. But I could only develop so far on my own.

In early 2023, I received an invitation from Kelly Campbell to participate in a new grant-funded leadership development cohort for theological librarians. I jumped at the chance, my first opportunity for intentional leadership development in a structured setting in community with others.

The program's design, tailored for theological librarians from varying backgrounds and roles, cultivated an individualized journey of leadership development through assessments like the CliftonStrengths

and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, as well as executive coaching and group mentoring sessions. My understanding of leadership gradually deepened through the cumulative effect of these activities.

Reflecting on the assessments helped me define what it meant to lead as me, rather than as someone else or a perfect version of myself. Group discussions revealed leadership challenges common across institutions, from small seminaries to large research universities, helping me realize I wasn't alone. Conversations with Myka as my coach revealed pathways through challenging circumstances in my work context.

These experiences helped me think more holistically about leadership, which allowed me to align my leadership approach with my values while also maintaining awareness of my own limitations. Since starting the program, self-care and balance have become major themes for me. I realized that some of the activities I was doing were draining my energy and affecting my health, as they were driven more by external validation and expediency than by my values and strengths. This recognition led me to step down from them to make space for focusing on my health and finding activities that were a better fit.

The program required us to write a leadership development plan at the end of the year. After some discernment with Myka during the end-of-year retreat, I committed to developing a list of guiding questions to help me decide when to take on a new task or project and when to decline. While a small component of my overall plan, these questions have proven valuable.

I now keep them in mind when new opportunities arise, and I've learned to say no to some even when they sound interesting. It's been hard to give things up, but it's helped me be more flexible as I move through life. I've learned that I need to start fewer things, and I don't need to finish everything I start, because I often set too many goals for myself. Ultimately, the one key takeaway about leadership that I've gained through the program is this: keep my values at the center of everything I do and decide.

This focus on authentic, values-driven leadership has been especially critical given my current professional context. I now lead

electronic resources metadata at the University of Notre Dame as an individual contributor. I no longer supervise anyone, so I'm learning how to lead effectively as someone with little formal authority in a complex organization.

In the past year, the library at Notre Dame has navigated a period of major disruption. We have a new interim dean, a new president, and a new university strategic framework. There's also been an organizational realignment that has put me in a brand-new department with new colleagues and a new boss. And on top of all that, we're moving to FOLIO from Aleph—which we've been using since Bill Clinton was president of the United States. These internal changes are compounded by broader disruptions facing academic librarianship, such as volatile government policies and the rapid increase in AI adoption.

The leadership development program has been especially critical at this time of personal and professional change. It has equipped me to navigate these challenges by enabling me to lead as myself, identify what truly matters to me, and make concrete changes to align my daily work with those values. This helps me to stay grounded even when it feels like my world is being turned upside down every single day.

CONCLUSION

The narratives we have shared in this presentation speak to the need for and impact of intentional leadership across all areas and levels of theological librarianship. While we come from diverse backgrounds and institutions, our collective experiences clearly illustrate this need within theological librarianship, a landscape marked by significant challenges, including declining enrollment, budget cuts, and staff reductions.

Many of us find ourselves stepping into leadership roles to fill institutional needs, often without formal preparation. Many of us find ourselves working in isolation, whether we're overloaded with responsibilities at a small, understaffed institution or struggling to navigate the complexities of getting things done at a large organization. This reality underscores a need not just for intentional development, but for intentional development in community with others.

This period of disruption in our field presents an opportunity. While we need time and space to mourn what we have lost, and are still losing, we have the chance to be creative in our leadership. We have the opportunity to cultivate new kinds of leadership and to discover innovative ways to collaborate that can navigate the realities of reduced funding and staffing.

For us to adapt and find new paths forward, it's essential that we foster an environment where more people can recognize their leadership potential and find ways to contribute, even in small ways.

And fortunately, we're already seeing promising signs of intentional leadership development across Atla. The program described here represents a major effort to that effect. Kelly Campbell and Myka Kennedy Stephens collaborated to fill a need that they saw in our profession. The program they designed created a learning community that allowed us to explore our individual leadership styles in a shared space that enabled us to benefit from the wisdom and support of others, equipping us to lead in our specific contexts. But for theological librarianship to thrive amidst these challenges, we need to see even more of this collective leadership emerging.

So, how do we collectively help individuals in theological librarianship recognize their leadership potential, regardless of their formal role or personality type? A great place to start is by pointing it out when we see it. When we see fresh perspectives and creative thinking, let's not assume that the person offering it knows it. Call it out when you see it.

And if you struggle with seeing yourself as a leader, ask yourselves: what do I see that others don't? How does my unique perspective add something to the conversation? How might I lead as the person that I am, with the talents and limitations that I have?

We hope that our stories have inspired you to think about leadership in your own contexts and how you might intentionally build leadership in yourself and across the profession.

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Neutrality and Theological Libraries

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ABSTRACT The five panelists in this session consider, debate, and discuss important questions concerning neutrality in theological libraries. The goal is to inculcate a greater, if more nuanced, appreciation for the complexities inherent in the professional aspiration toward neutrality and objectivity, and a deeper understanding of the reasons it may at times be necessary and appropriate to set aside this aspiration. Such insights can help guide both reference interviews with students and acquisitions decisions.

INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARY NOTES

Librarians, including theological librarians, are commonly considered to be, and generally aspire to be, neutral. Regardless of personal feelings and beliefs, we will gladly help you find a copy of *Mein Kampf*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, or *Malleus Maleficarum*. Such professional neutrality seems especially precious, and threatened, in our increasingly polarized culture. Yet are there ever times when it may be appropriate to set aspirations to neutrality and objectivity aside, and share our convictions? When, if ever, might it be acceptable to state our opinions or express our beliefs when conducting a reference interview or providing feedback on a student's paper? Is neutrality even possible? How does neutrality relate to equity? This session will provide an opportunity to consider, debate, and discuss these important questions. The goal is to inculcate a greater, if more nuanced, appreciation for the

complexities inherent in the professional aspiration toward neutrality and objectivity, and a deeper understanding of the reasons it may at times be necessary and appropriate to set aside this aspiration. Such insights can help guide both reference interviews with students and acquisitions decisions.

The panelists explored this question by addressing the following five questions:

- 1) What does “neutrality” mean in the context of theological libraries? What does it mean in your particular context (e.g., if you are at a more progressive institution, is it necessary to acquire more books from a conservative point of view to counterweigh this bias? Are we, or have we ever been, neutral?) [ALL]
- 2) Why is neutrality important? What do we gain, what might we lose if we neglect or abandon it?
- 3) How does neutrality relate to questions of equity and justice?
- 4) How might forgoing neutrality affect (positively or negatively) reference interactions?
- 5) How might forgoing neutrality affect (positively or negatively) acquisitions/collection development?

As will be evident in what follows, while there are many points of agreement, not all panelists hold the same views or share the same convictions. Our goal in exploring this important topic is to hold a genuine, forthright discussion rather than reach a consensus or offer a unified argument. Indeed, this ability to share a common space while holding divergent views is one of the many, often underappreciated virtues that our libraries and librarians exemplify in our collections and profession.

QUESTION ONE

What does “neutrality” mean in the context of theological libraries? What does it mean in your particular context (e.g., if you are at a more progressive institution, is it necessary to acquire more books from a conservative point of view to counterweigh this bias? Are we, have we ever been neutral?) [ALL]

David: “Neutrality” means striving toward impartiality in exercising contextually-informed, theologically-grounded judgement calls. Making such contextually-informed, theologically-grounded judgement calls is necessary as I negotiate between my more traditional faith formation and educational background, and my context: a more progressive Presbyterian (PCUSA) seminary in a fairly progressive city (Austin) in a largely conservative state (Texas). In my position as a librarian who engages in both instruction and collection development, I strive to take into account the presuppositions and “leanings” of the institution and decide when and how to counter-balance them, for example, by acquiring books from a Catholic or evangelical perspective, or by suggesting students incorporate sources that argue a position counter to their own.

Dee: The quest for neutrality and objectivity has often come at the cost of ethical and moral considerations. Gone are the days of hiding behind the notion that libraries are “neutral” spaces. While a valiant and important undertaking, the quest for maintaining neutrality and objectivity regarding access to multiple perspectives on various disciplines and subjects has often come at the cost of ethical and moral considerations regarding information access itself. Access to information has never been a topic of neutrality, but rather an issue deeply steeped in ethical considerations and the violations of those same ethics.

In my context at a “progressive” school in a liberal city within a deeply conservative state, it is essential to forgo neutrality when it only serves to further the aims of a harmful status quo. Being confronted with knowledge that is different and new, or which causes some discomfort, is not the same as being forced to engage with information that defamates or destroys the humanity of a person or group. Discomfort is part of the educational experience and to take that away from learners does them a disservice. As a queer theological librarian, it is a foundational ethos of mine to present an authentic and clear understanding of all of the information on a certain subject and not just the parts that people are comfortable with. So, I land on the side that neutrality, more often than not, is co-opted to reify harmful status quos.

Ezra: In a more general sense, neutrality stems from an implicit commitment to values of classical liberalism. Given that we live in

a pluralistic society, neutrality is desired as a value insofar as it aids in social cohesion and maintaining a just society. In effect, neutrality is an intuition that the state has no preference or aim that favors a particular group of people. Political decisions should be value neutral and independent of what the good consists in. Some take this intuition quite seriously and contend that justice requires a strong form of neutrality. For example, John Rawls says, “The principles of justice do not permit subsidising universities and institutes, or opera and the theatre, on the grounds that these institutions are intrinsically valuable, and that those who engage in them are to be supported even at some significant expense to others who do not receive compensating benefits” (Rawls 1999, 291–2).

Some take the opposite view. Perfectionists, broadly based on the Aristotelian tradition, think the state should be invested in the flourishing of its citizens. Thus, the state has the right to advance the common good, which means the state may endorse a particular course of action.

Neutrality in a theological context, I think, functions in a similar capacity. Librarians strive to be impartial, unbiased, and objective in making decisions pertaining to collections, instructions, reference, etc. Neutrality in this context is the general intuition to avoid endorsing a particular view, not censoring materials, and upholding intellectual freedom. But we as librarians are also invested in the flourishing of our academic community members and beyond. I am in broad agreement with Rick Anderson, who wrote: “In some ways neutrality in the library is clearly a very bad idea—and yet in some important ways, it’s absolutely essential” (Anderson 2022).

In my context at Baylor University, I try to exercise both commitments of perfectionism and neutrality prudently. That sounds impossible but one can exercise both simultaneously. I think there is no such thing as being value neutral. On the other hand, neutrality has its perks. I am deeply invested in the well-being of the students that I encounter. But I also know that much of the research and library work that I am involved in may not align with my own personal values. Here, I want to emphasize the need for prudence and to know how I avail myself of these situations. A great symbol for me at Baylor is the Interfaith Meditation and Reflection Faith Space, located in the Moody Library. This space is open to any students who

want to practice their religion or lack thereof. The space is neutral but can become a place that is not neutral.

Robin: My context is Union Presbyterian Seminary: an old, mainline-Protestant, standalone seminary, with a diverse student body. We have two campuses, both in blue areas of purple or red states (Virginia and North Carolina). We value and celebrate diversity. While our faculty and student body lean strongly liberal, our alumni and community patrons—the library is accessible to anyone who wants to use it—are often much more conservative. In our library you’ll find perspectives that range from very liberal to very conservative, but you’ll also see an LGBTQ+ Pride flag hanging in our atrium.

“Neutrality” in the context of librarianship exists to protect freedom of information access. It’s about ensuring that someone is not hindered from accessing information that a library already has because a librarian disagrees with or disapproves of the material or the patron’s research. Neutrality does not mean that a library staff member should never take a position on an issue or openly disagree with a patron. The customer is not always right, and librarians, being about the business of facilitating patrons’ information fluency, can and should point out bias and mis- or disinformation in sources, and flawed arguments that arise as a result of same.

Just as postmodernism and, now, metamodernism, have shown that the goal of “objectivity” in modern scholarship was never really attainable because it failed to interrogate the scholar’s own social location as inherently biased, so too I am not convinced that neutrality in libraries is ever really achievable, if we are truly about the business of facilitating information fluency. We must take ethical positions on things. In my view, neutrality is better re-envisioned as hospitality.

Gerrit: To me, neutrality means not privileging one faith tradition over another. It means seeking and promoting relevant, high-quality scholarship, regardless of whether the source is friendly to any particular faith tradition or not. We should be neutral in this regard.

What does this look like at my institution, Brigham Young University? Close to 35 years ago, one of our university provosts shared his thoughts on the purposes of higher education. “We,” he began—meaning, professors and librarians on campus, “move

[students] from dogmatism through healthy skepticism toward a balanced maturity that can tolerate ambiguity without losing the capacity for deep commitment. [... BYU's] vitality is a continuing witness for the proposition that within the broad gospel framework, robust faith and healthy skepticism are not mutually exclusive" (Hafen 2022, 209). So, neutrality at the BYU library is this delicate balance between robust faith and healthy skepticism. Because we are a private institution, we as librarians are able to be fully open with our students about our personal faith. It's amazing having the freedom to share my religious convictions in the same breath as I teach about Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Hildegard, or Dante.

QUESTION TWO

Why is neutrality important? What do we gain, what might we lose if we neglect or abandon it?

David: Neutrality is important, first, because of the close connection between perceived neutrality and trustworthiness. It is precisely by adhering to neutrality that libraries have gained their reputation as trustworthy institutions. By maintaining impartiality and avoiding bias, libraries foster public confidence, ensure equitable service, and uphold their reputation as reliable sources of information.

There is just one problem with this: theological libraries are not neutral. Neither are theological librarians. Many of us serve in a confessional context in which, for example, writings by Athanasius and writings by Arius do not represent two alternative equally valid options. Athanasius's creed is included in official worship books; Arius is classed with other heterodox authors. For my own part, as someone who professes my faith using the words of the Nicene Creed on a weekly basis, I also am not neutral. At the same time, as a librarian, I would be equally aghast at the idea of removing Arius from the collection as I would with the idea of removing the Creed from the prayer book.

This leads to the second reason neutrality is important. For librarians, neutrality touches on (or represents the diving line between) two fundamental professional values: freedom and truth. As librarians, we believe strongly in defending the freedom of all persons to read whatever strikes their interests and oppose any attempts to

impose censorship. At the same time, we believe in the importance and value of information, specifically information that is accurate and authoritative. When these two values run in tandem, neutrality means that we are able to help our patrons find and use a variety of authoritative sources representing diverse perspectives, allowing our patrons to rely on the merits of the arguments to discern which sources to trust and what positions to adopt. But what happens when these two fundamental values come into conflict? When, if ever, might our obligation to uphold truth require a breach of neutrality that may impinge on freedom? (Kaihoi 2015). When might remaining silent or neutral for the sake of intellectual freedom mean betraying or sacrificing truth, or “choosing the side of the oppressor” (Gerolami 2020, 176)?

In the wider library world, debates between those advocating strict neutrality for the sake of upholding intellectual freedom and those who maintain that the library has an obligation to take stands on controversial social issues to uphold progressive values have been ongoing for some time. One may discern noticeable peaks in the 1930s, when the ALA first adopted the Library Bill of Rights against the looming Nazi threat (Campbell 2014), in the 1960s-1970s amidst social unrest and the Vietnam War, and mid-2010s (Wenzler 2019). These peaks do not seem to be reflected in the theological library literature from these eras, which suggests that perhaps neutrality looks a bit different in the context of a theological library.

Whereas many of our colleagues in the wider library world tend to see neutrality as one side in a two-sided, two-dimensional political struggle for power, theologically, we might instead see neutrality in terms of hospitality—of creating space for the other. This reminds me of Jürgen Moltmann’s discussion of *zimzum*, the kabalistic concept of God’s creating space (or a vacuum) within the fullness of God to allow something that is not God to exist (Moltmann 1985; Moltmann 2003).

What might this hospitality, this creating of space for the other, look like in the context of theological libraries? As Robin discusses in greater depth, as a theological librarian, hospitality means helping our patrons find good sources that offer strong arguments for positions with which I personally disagree. As Gerrit considers further, for a theological library hospitality means acquiring and

holding good sources reflecting a variety of perspectives, even those that are in opposition to positions that I hold personally or that the institution I serve holds confessionally or culturally. As members of Atla, creating space for the other means maintaining the neutrality necessary to include members from a variety of confessional contexts representing a diversity of perspectives, allowing each of us to share our own experiences and convictions in an environment that fosters mutual respect and connection.¹

Of course, by creating space within himself, God also allows the possibility of evil. Thus, hospitality and the freedom it brings also carries with it the call to discern truth and to live in accordance with truth. As Hans Boersma observes in *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross*, true hospitality is not entirely open: a house without walls is not very hospitable, especially on a cold Midwestern winter night (Boersma 2003). It does nonetheless create a space for genuine interpersonal connection.

One aspect of the debate over library neutrality that often seems overlooked is the interpersonal connection between librarians and patrons. Just as the sides of a pyramid draw closer together as one nears the pinnacle, so the space between my personal and professional interactions with students or other patrons narrows as we come to know and trust one another.

Like all persons, theological librarians are not, and cannot be, wholly neutral. We are all standing somewhere and we all bring our own ideas, beliefs, experiences, and convictions to every interaction with a patron. This does not preclude the possibility of, or absolve us of, striving to exercise fair, impartial judgement, insofar as possible. Rather, this gives us the freedom, and responsibility, to exercise discernment on a case-by-case basis. Whereas in my more professionally oriented interactions, I will retain a greater degree of neutrality, I may find it appropriate to forgo neutrality as I have built rapport and established trust. Above all, we must always seek to gain and retain the trust of our patrons (“can they still trust me to help them find good sources on and craft compelling research arguments for positions with which they know I disagree personally?”), grounded in interpersonal connection.

QUESTION THREE

How does neutrality relate to questions of equity and justice?

Dee: Ask people of the Global Majority and they will tell you that the concept of neutrality in library spaces has always been a farce. Many of the characteristics of libraries in Western contexts are born from systems that are inherently racist and exclusive, leading to inherent bias in the systems that many libraries use to organize and recall information. These systems were developed to serve members of the United States government who have historically been white, affluent, Christian men. Therefore, it is not surprising that the mechanisms that make these systems function also tend to be white-centered, cis-male oriented with a Christian and Western worldview (Adler and Harper 2018). Additionally, scholarly academic publishing—as well as publishing outside of academia—has historically been centered around white voices. All of this blended together has created an environment where the resources available on shelves, and the ways people find them, are entrenched in whiteness. This entrenchment requires targeted decolonization—of systems, access to information, and the profession of librarianship itself. Decoloniality exists to listen to Indigenous peoples, dismantle structures that limit Indigenous participation, and confront power relations within educational institutions.

While there are a plethora of social justice issues I could discuss, I have decided to focus on the topic that most library workers, and many professional associations, refuse to engage with—Palestine. Having been to Palestine five times, most recently in March of this year, in addition to having done advocacy work for over a decade, I feel uniquely qualified to speak on this topic.

As collectors and organizers of information, library workers have a two-fold mandate: to allow all voices to have a place, and to allow unrestricted access to these voices. The seventh edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* states that:

[i]ntellectual freedom can exist only where two essential conditions are met: first, that all individuals have the right to hold any belief on any subject and to convey their ideas in any form they deem appropriate, and second, that society makes an equal commitment to the right of unrestricted access to information and ideas regardless of the communication

medium used, the content of work, and the viewpoints of both the author and the receiver of information. (Berman 2006)

Not to get too into the weeds of the medical profession, since I would guess most of us are not experts in this area, I would like to borrow a long-held ethos of medical professionals—do no harm. What happens when our silence (in the face of deep injustice) held under the guise of “neutrality” only upholds a status quo that perpetuates harm on the most disenfranchised in our midst? What do we do when the librarian ethos of neutrality has been weaponized to keep people from being confronted with uncomfortable facts? In journalism, there’s a term called “neutrality bias.” It is defined as “a type of bias in which a journalist or news outlet tries so hard to avoid appearing biased that their coverage actually misinterprets the facts” (Baleria 2021). In the context of Palestine, academic libraries have a long way to go in order to achieve true intellectual freedom within library spaces. The past year and a half has illuminated just how inadequate the idea of neutrality in libraries actually is.

If the library wants to achieve actual neutrality, we must transform our spaces from safe havens where people are not presented with information that might cause them to reevaluate their beliefs and opinions, to spaces where every library user is reflected in the materials held in, and resources available within, the library. Kirkland writes that, “[m]oving from the notion of the school library as a safe space for students who have no other place to seek refuge to a space that makes the full diversity of the student population feel welcome and engaged is not a neutral act. Being an anti-racist educator is not a neutral act. Neutrality cannot be achieved when varying perspectives and cultures continue to be underrepresented or have been historically misrepresented” (Kirkland 2021).

There’s a phrase commonly used in faith-based organizing spaces—“progressive except for Palestine”—that describes individuals and institutions that are forward thinking in their worldview in terms of queer rights, Black lives, Indigenous rights, immigration law, and other human rights causes but remain silent and inactive when the subject of Palestine comes up. Under the current Trump administration, it is abundantly clear that students, staff, and faculty who engage in activism around Palestine are being unjustly and unequally targeted and threatened into silence. Before October 2023, it was possible to have academic discourse about Palestine and, while

fraught, there is evidence that scholars engaged the topic on campus. However, these days any discourse critical of the modern state of Israel is met with aggressive push back. Thus, “[w]hat is crystal clear is that the ‘Palestine exception’ to free speech and academic freedom that has long existed in American higher education and public life is being deeply institutionalized” (Malley and Moses 2025). This institutionalization can be felt in the daily fabric of campus life across the country.

The findings of several international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem, have determined that apartheid, genocide, and illegal occupation are all correct, non-biased, terms to use when describing the realities on the ground. Honest assessment of the recent history of Palestine exposes the reality that the State of Israel is a case of settler colonialism. Therefore, the vocabulary that best fits reality includes words like “oppression,” “domination,” “erasure,” and “apartheid” (Isaac 2025). It is well documented proof that every single university, and every single library, in Gaza has been destroyed. According to a January 2024 report written by Librarians and Archivists with Palestine, no less than six library workers have been killed since October 2023 (Librarians and Archivists with Palestine 2024). In amongst all this destruction and scholasticide, an overwhelming majority of those in academia have chosen the position of silence, or even worse, apathy. In library spaces, this silence is expressed by taking a neutral stance. Unlike the intention of neutrality—which exists to provide unbiased collections, access, and services—neutrality is instead being used to remain silent about one of the most urgent human rights violations of our contemporary time.

In the nearly two years of ongoing assault on Gaza, it has become clear that librarians, trying so hard to maintain a position of neutrality, have created an environment that goes against our collective *Library Bill of Rights*. In the American Library Association (ALA)-sponsored position, *Politics in American Libraries: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, it clearly states that, “[l]ibraries should not ignore or avoid political discourse for fear of causing offense or provoking controversy” (ALA 2017). Writing on this, Bennie Allen argues that “it is our responsibility to provide this, and not one we can fulfill without taking sides” (Allen 2020). Paralyzed by the fear of losing funding, the fear of being called antisemitic, the fear of

losing jobs, and the fear of going against the notion of neutrality, most library workers and library institutions have chosen to remain silent.

Echoing Palestinian theologian Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, genocide is not a matter of opinion, and my opinion about it should not matter (Isaac 2025). Polarizing or not, true neutrality cannot be achieved because it too often “boils down to a slippery both-sidesism that posits the humanity of certain people as up for debate” (Lichtenstein and Sherman 2022). Both-sidesism during an ongoing genocide does nothing other than further the reach of disinformation. If the library profession wants to achieve a stance of neutrality on the subject of Palestine, then those of us in this work must dedicate ourselves to providing accurate, unbiased, information. An accurate understanding of the situation requires library workers to platform the historically silenced voices of Palestinians and those working in solidarity for a Palestine free from occupation—creating safety for all those living in historic Palestine, no matter how uncomfortable that truth might make some of our constituents.

As David mentioned earlier, theological librarians are, by our very nature, not neutral. I would take this a step further to say that we cannot be neutral, particularly when it relates to Palestine. Why? Because Palestine is the fifth gospel. As many Catholic theologians have stated in the past, including the late Pope Francis, Palestine is the living narrative of Jesus’ life and work. The land of the Bible provides a unique, experiential understanding of what we read in scripture. For those of us that are Jesus-followers, we, as theological librarians, have a mandate to provide uninhibited access to all information as well as stand in solidarity with those in our communities (both locally and globally) that are being oppressed. Jesus flipped tables, called out the powerful ruling elite, and built community with those at the fringes of society. Jesus was not neutral, and neither should we be.

QUESTION FOUR

How might forgoing neutrality affect (positively or negatively) reference interactions?

Robin: I came to librarianship after seven years of being a professor of Hebrew Bible at a research university, and my first library position

was that of Reference Librarian at Union Presbyterian Seminary, where I am now the director of the library. When I became a librarian, I discovered that students tended to relate to me as an academic authority, but—because I was not assigning them a grade—they did not see me as intimidating in the same way their professors were. So, there was a wonderful intermediate space where I could help them learn, but students could receive that as a collegial act rather than an authoritative one.

The reference librarian at Princeton Theological Seminary, where I did my Ph.D. work, was Kate Skrebutenas. She always treated her reference interviews as if you and she were about to go on the adventure of a lifetime. It was the student's trip—you were setting the course—but she was traveling with you to hold the lantern and tell you where the landmarks and the shortcuts were. This notion of the reference librarian as a kind of Gandalf figure is one that has colored the way I do reference work ever since.

If the metaphor governing my interaction with someone seeking reference help is “traveling companion,” then “neutrality” is not actually high on the list of qualities that I want to characterize how we interact. I want to establish a relationship and build trust with my traveling companion, so that when things get tough, they already know they can count on me to be on their side. Indeed, “on their side” and “neutral” are ideas that perhaps cannot even comfortably coexist.

To build a working relationship that will open space to build trust, there will likely need to be some transparency—some give-and-take—on both sides. Finding places where you share common ground, or even hold similar views, helps you build connection with someone. I work at a very small school (fewer than 300 students), and the institutional ethos here is one that celebrates diversity and does not tolerate exclusionary or dehumanizing views of others. This institutional ethos gives me some leeway to presume, when I meet a new student or faculty member, that we will probably both be operating under an extensive set of shared values, because if that were not the case, they probably would not have chosen to be at this institution. So, I feel comfortable being tactfully transparent about my perspective on some of the topics my students are

researching—women and queer people in ministry leadership positions, for instance.

Many students who come to me suffer from library anxiety. There are many reasons for this. They may be second-career students who have not been in school for a while, or perhaps they have learning challenges that, in the past, have not been well served. Libraries have not always been safe and welcoming spaces in the lives of some students of color. People who have little experience of large academic libraries can be intimidated by our building. It is my job as a reference librarian to put them at ease and help them feel welcome in this space. That means I need to build connections, and easy conversation that seeks common ground accomplishes that.

By the time students seek out the reference librarian, often they are already at a breaking point. They have done everything they can do without asking for help and now their assignment is due, or they are lost, and their stress levels are high. So, it is also my job to be a calm and reassuring presence, reminding them that they are not on the journey alone. While the nonjudgmental aspect of neutrality is vital here, the sense of detachment that may come with it could be detrimental.

If I do my job well—that is, if I help students find the resources they need and succeed in bringing down their stress or anxiety levels—then I have not only set that student up for success on this assignment; I have also established the library as a safe space, and myself as a safe person, in their mind. So, next time they have to tackle a tough assignment, they may be more likely to seek my help before they are totally stressed out. We have begun to establish a real working relationship. And the stronger our relationship is, the better able it will be to tolerate potential differences in our views.

Some people are great at thinking through difficult things all on their own, but many of us do our best thinking in conversation with others. We process through dialogue. Students can, and do, process their thinking with each other, and with their professors. But a reference librarian inhabits an extremely valuable middle ground, as I noted earlier: we are professional academics, we know things, but the power dynamic is very different with a librarian than with a professor. Thus, librarians make excellent dialogue partners for students who are working through new ideas.

This kind of dialogic processing is strongest when a relationship of trust already exists. There is a balance that must be sought here: a student needs to know they have the freedom to explore ideas without your judgment, but at the same time, they need to know that you will also challenge them on their ideas. If you disagree with their position and ask them to defend it, this can help a student refine an academic argument: identify where their audience may be confused, or where they may need to use more nuance, and hone their argument more finely. Because theological librarians are professional academics who often have subject expertise, we can provide students with academic rigor comparable to their professors', but in the context of a somewhat more horizontal, less vertical power dynamic.

Finally, when reference librarians are transparent about their disagreement with someone seeking their help for academic work, it may help the seeker to recognize a whole area of thought that they did not even realize they needed to consider. After all, students do not know what they do not know. As a librarian with a background in biblical studies, I know more about the state of the field of research than an OT or NT 101 student does. I may therefore disagree with an argument they are making because I have a broader understanding than they have yet learned, and I can disagree in ways that highlight for them topic areas they may need to consider further, or for the first time. Because they did not even know that topic area existed, the student was not able to ask about it before they formed an argument; but through our conversation, they are able to discover it.

The kind of relationship-building I have been talking about is an approach to the issue of neutrality in librarianship that David mentioned earlier: one that differentiates between neutrality and hospitality. Some of the descriptors that come to mind at the word "neutrality" include calm, detachment, acceptance without judgment, and balance. "Hospitality" has a different emotional range. Some of its descriptors include warmth, generosity, kindness and compassion, sincerity, and belonging.

An approach to the reference interaction that privileges neutrality is businesslike. There is freedom of information access, but it may be a freedom detached from relationality. An approach that privileges

hospitality includes freedom of information access but also builds in an element of relationality.

One critical reason that this relationality matters goes back to Dee's question—the way neutrality relates to equity and equality. Library patrons' reference needs are not one-size-fits-all. A librarian needs to respond differently to different patrons in order to help them achieve the goals of finding the research materials they need and applying them to build a strong academic argument. The only way to know what a given patron needs to achieve those goals is to get to know that person. And then you are involved: you are communicating, you are being real people to each other, you are bouncing ideas off each other...and neutrality becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain.

For my part, I find much more value in hospitality in the reference interaction than I do in neutrality—always presuming that hospitality leaves room for dialogue and unfettered information access. Hospitality seeks to build connection, to journey with, to welcome in. Hospitality seeks common ground, strives to talk towards someone else rather than talk ourselves into opposing corners. It may be that the only common ground available is “we are both trying to build a solid, well-defended academic argument with good critical sources behind it.” But those are shared goals, and fields of academic research grow precisely because scholars disagree productively and respectfully about arguments predicated on sound supporting material. In the academy, the most invigorating conversations happen when you have made a strong argument, and someone disagrees with a different strong argument. You both see things in a whole new way that you never would have seen on your own.

Finally, one last reminder to keep reading the room. Just as different people have different needs in order to reach the same goal, so too, different people will have different degrees of comfort with your transparency as a librarian. But again, you can only discern those limits of tolerance if you build connections.

QUESTION FIVE

How might forgoing neutrality affect (positively or negatively) acquisitions/collection development?

Gerrit: Collection development has always been a point of tension in libraries. Part of the ALA Code of Ethics states, “[w]e uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources” (American Library Association n.d.). In the heading of a recent post on the Scholarly Kitchen, the editors acknowledged censorship and book banning from both the political right and the political left—the former primarily through pulling books from libraries which contradict conservative ideologies and the latter through canceling or boycotting an author or book due to its rejection of liberal ideologies (Anderson 2024). In effect, the conservative method is to eliminate contradictory, but already existing material, where the liberal method is to silence or prevent the promulgation of antiliberal ideas. Both examples are infringements upon our freedom of speech. As one librarian noted, “the suppression of any idea can be dangerous to the flow of all ideas” (Swan 1989, 10).

Why do we care so much about banning or canceling certain titles or authors? I think each of us as librarians may have a different response to these questions, but I submit it is essential for all of us to know where we stand. Wenzler reminds us that this question of neutrality is not simple:

[w]hen the overall moral worldview of a librarian is largely in harmony with the worldview of her patrons, propositions A[advocacy] and N[neutrality] usually are compatible with each other. The dilemma comes when librarians encounter patrons whose moral ends are fundamentally at odds with their own. Then, it often seems that the best way for librarians to use their authority to prevent injustice is to use their influence to impose the “patterns of their own thought” on the patron. Thus, the only way to accomplish proposition A is to violate proposition N, or vice versa. (Wenzler 2019, 60)

In libraries, we have created for ourselves a no-win scenario. We either impose our self-righteous views on our less-enlightened patrons through banning, soft censorship (Cooke and Harris 2023), or canceling authors, or we cast our lot with the oppressor by staying silent. But are those the only options, or is it a false dichotomy? Perhaps we have forgotten Aristotle, who cautioned against any extreme, however beneficial, and recommended finding the mean between two extremes. Could we instead find ways to be both advocates and neutral given certain situations? Is neutrality actually the mean to strive for, even if it is ultimately impossible to be perfectly neutral, and advocacy on the extreme left or the extreme right are the Scylla and Charybdis of our times?

For my part, I reject all forms of censorship because I believe in the human right to information. That we should have access to materials which both affirm and challenge our world view. I also believe strongly that the greatest and best way to combat tyranny is a well-educated and well-informed populus. How can we help inform citizens? One way is through our published materials, whether print or electronic, analog or digital.

Censorship takes many forms. At my institution, I have had a few books challenged in my collection, usually because the author has done something reprehensible after publishing a book. This is a tricky situation. Does having a book on the shelf of a known pedophile or murderer give the impression the library endorses those reprehensible behaviors? Would removing that book be a form of censorship/book banning/canceling?

When we collect materials, we also need to acknowledge that as librarians we have our own individual biases as well as our institutional constraints to consider. We must be aware of our own personal feelings on a topic and how that might influence our decision whether to purchase a title or not. Similarly, we may find ourselves at odds with the directives of our library organization and administration. Do we have the academic freedom to purchase materials that might be considered controversial to our library management?

Atla librarians at public institutions should generally purchase materials that support the missions of their institutions, including and especially the research needs of their students and faculty. Naturally, librarians at private institutions may have additional constraints on their collecting responsibilities, but wherever possible we should still practice our professional creed to reject censorship in all its forms. That is neutrality in collection development.

Collecting religious materials has several nuances that more general or secular materials may not have. Today, I wish to focus on one of these nuances: the difference between polemical and academic publications in religious studies. Each religion I am aware of has its share of both popular and scholarly materials about its history, membership, sacred texts, and theology. Because of the nature of religion, and faith in general, some of the more popular materials may be considered polemical, that is, elevating a particular and perhaps extremely biased view of a religious tradition, primarily to

dissuade or support belief in the subject religion, rather than honest inquiry and dialogue about it. These polemics can be both friendly and antagonistic to the tradition. What do we as religious studies librarians do with this material?

What if, at say a private institution, a librarian is asked to purchase polemics which attack another religious faith? Are we obligated to purchase that material even when we know its quality and objectivity are in question? Does the same hold true for polemics which support a librarian's sponsoring religion? If, as a thought experiment, by some miracle we have excess funds at the end of the year, but only polemical material left to purchase (we have bought all academic material on the subject), are we obligated as librarians to buy some of that material? Would not buying it constitute a form of censorship?

I would like to turn to my own experience at a private religious institution, Brigham Young University (BYU). At BYU, it is my job to acquire and manage a collection of books related to the history, theology, and culture of my sponsoring religion, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Polemics are not very problematic when we are acquiring materials for other religious traditions. No one is banging on our door telling us we should not have a certain title about Islam or Catholicism. But that same title might very well become a red flag at an institution sponsored by one of those religions. At BYU, we try to mitigate this by purchasing religious scholarship from academic presses of high quality and reputation. We rarely, if ever, purchase polemical material about another religious tradition.

Those of you who know me know that I hope other religious studies libraries would do the same when collecting Latter-day Saint studies materials. I would hope my Atla colleagues would pass on polemics in favor of academic titles about my faith.

Having said this, I admit I do bend this soft no-polemics rule at BYU in select cases. That is, I do forgo my neutrality in favor of popular materials that have a significant connection to the lives of young adults of my faith on campus. This means I purchase missionary memoirs or conversion narratives from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. I purchase how-to guides for prospective missionaries and those who have returned from their service and now

need tools to help them transition back to so-called “civilian life.” Our students also tend to court and marry while pursuing their degrees, so I buy practical theology books about marriage and raising young children from a Latter-day Saint perspective. I find myself bending this no-polemics rule most often when the author is from an underrepresented group.

When it comes to purchasing scholarship about the Church, my guiding principle is not: is this critical of our faith? But rather, “is this from a reputable publisher? Is the author respected in Latter-day Saint studies circles?” If yes to these questions, I usually just buy the copy.

In conclusion, when in libraries might we not be neutral? I refer us all to Rick Anderson’s post a few years ago (2022). Anderson reminds us that there are issues libraries take a non-neutral stance on, such as literacy, racial diversity, equity of access, and the importance of privacy to name a few. We promote these initiatives and unabashedly combat their opposites.

When we consider neutrality in collections at Atla member institutions, we take into account our individual library’s mission, goals, and population. We should examine our collection development policies to ensure we are acquiring materials which would be considered neutral and non-neutral or partial, to observers. Neutrally, our aim as librarians is to deliver timely, relevant information to everyone. Partially, that is, not neutrally, we actively promote and acquire materials related to information literacy, education, and equity among all human populations, as well as those priorities our individual library administrations have designated. I encourage all of us, when our next collection evaluation and assessment comes up, to examine our print and electronic materials with these considerations in mind.

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NOTES

- 1 Michael Farrell (2022), drawing a parallel with the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, advocated for maintaining Atla's organizational neutrality.

CONVERSATION GROUPS

AI in the Theological Context

Reflections on Information Literacy and the
Students We Serve

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Emily Peterson, Director of Public Services, Columbia Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT As a hub for learning, the theological library facilitates the resourcing and delivery of academic material on campus. Within this setting, library staff serve at the forefront of curating content to support student objectives. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has led libraries to analyze anew the meaning of information literacy as students increasingly turn to this recent technology to research, analyze, and disseminate their knowledge. This conversation group examined how the rise of AI has impacted various seminary settings through the lens of the library, which is often tasked with developing and implementing new AI policy. An initial review focusing on student/faculty needs and AI policy development within the context of Columbia Theological Seminary led to subsequent discussion among the participants about the development of AI guidelines at their respective institutions.

BACKGROUND

An Assigned Project

In fall of 2023, we were tasked with drafting Columbia Theological Seminary's first-ever policy governing student use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic work. We were not and are not AI experts or even aficionados, but our roles leading the Center for Academic Literacy and the library's public services lent themselves to exploring the implications of AI in our particular context. We focused our work on generative AI (GenAI), especially the large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT that were beginning to redefine questions around academic integrity, as they mimic human creative processes such as writing and thinking.

Over the course of months, we reviewed the literature, reviewed the policies of other institutions, solicited input from students at our own institution about their current and expected use of GenAI through the methods of focus groups and anonymous surveys, and invited faculty feedback as the policy was drafted. We ended up identifying three key themes around which to center our policy:

- Students need clarity from faculty about what usage is acceptable.
- Faculty need agency and flexibility.
- Our community needs a balance of broad principles for adaptability and details for applicability.

The resulting policy, therefore, was focused on ethical principles, contextual flexibility, and clear communication.

What Else We Learned

Yet those themes were not all we learned. The process itself taught us some essential lessons about institutional approaches to GenAI. For instance, GenAI's disruptive power had (re)revealed interconnections within the workings of our seminary and its functioning expectations and assumptions that led to cascading ripple effects—with each question it raised, several more were begged. What do we mean by “learning,” and what skills and practices do we expect to be a part of it? What learning practices does GenAI's involvement assist, and what practices does it impede? And if GenAI cannot be

reliably detected (which it cannot, at the time of this writing), how does that change pedagogical and assessment design?

Similarly, we found that the emergent and evolving qualities of AI as a whole can make it difficult to even know what questions to ask about its use and implications, largely because the proliferation of tools makes the definition of “AI use” a constantly moving target. And when we do find or develop answers to the questions we ask, those answers are, by necessity, contextual. Columbia Theological Seminary could not just copy and paste from another institution without giving thought to how GenAI affects our own specific context—its curriculum, its structure, its institutional politics, its student population, its infrastructure—in unique ways. To that end, then, conversation becomes essential to developing the nuance needed for effective response in our contexts. We must understand how people in different areas and functions are impacted, what their AI-related concerns and opportunities are, and how our institution is specifically positioned to respond in order to develop a shared approach that actually works.

It is this last point about conversation, pulling everything else together, that led to this conversation session.

BREAKOUT GROUPS

Reflections

After the brief introduction above, the remaining time was devoted to breakout groups which were tasked with responding to one of the following four prompts:

- How can you **identify attitudes toward GenAI adoption** (e.g., resistance, enthusiasm, indifference) among your students that can help your library shape its information literacy efforts? What considerations are important in your context when gathering this information?
- What specific **student-centered challenges** do you anticipate GenAI presenting in your context? What **constellation of strategies** and practices does your institution need in order to address each of these

potential challenges (e.g., policy/ides, educational best practices, formal initiatives, etc.)?

- How does the introduction of GenAI change what we understand **learning** to be and how we understand it to happen, particularly as it is related to **research, reading, and writing**?
- What is the **scope of your library's responsibility or role** when it comes to providing GenAI tools and literacy instruction to students at your institution, and what would that look like in practice? Are there other institutional **partners** who can support you in your efforts or cover ground outside your scope?

These questions were designed to obtain insights from the participants about the preliminary steps used to inform institutional policies under development or already in place, to determine how AI has affected learning processes, and the role that libraries play in disseminating information about AI tools at their institutions. The groups were provided approximately 20 minutes to reflect with another 20 minutes devoted to debriefing and concluding comments. It should be noted that not all of the groups returned the comments taken during their breakout sessions, resulting in some prompts not being answered.

Comments

In response to the question about specific student-centered challenges with the incorporation of Generative AI and the strategies that institutions used to confront such problems, several participants noted that both faculty and students had issues and expectations with the incorporation of AI at their schools. One group claimed that students at their institution relied on AI when they found themselves in desperate circumstances. Another group mentioned that students should be informed about those skills that are being overlooked when they rely on AI, and that faculty need to be trained in ways to integrate the new technology into their curricula as well as clearly specify on their syllabi whether AI is allowed and how it should be specifically used for their classes.

In terms of how libraries identify contextual factors important for their contexts to shape information literacy, the participants

responded by stating surveys, talks, listening sessions, and observations were useful. They also stressed the need for libraries to seek out student leadership to advise on matters of policy, especially if students were not forthcoming about their use of AI.

Two groups of participants addressed the scope of their libraries' responsibilities when providing generative AI tools and literacy instruction at their seminars. The members stated that the entire school population needed to be included when talking about AI and that the library should assume the primary responsibility for AI training with support being solicited at the very least from the upper administration. Such info sessions should suggest alternative AI policies for faculty to consider when writing syllabi or providing specific information about the various AI tools available. In some situations, the participants stated that libraries needed to ensure that students knew what AI was and that they should share their expertise about AI policy in the event of inadequate guidelines. Concerns surfaced about the need for libraries to continue to contribute to AI policy development and to continually update their skills to keep pace with the rapid changes occurring in AI technology.

Wrap Up

To conclude our discussion, the audience was invited to share their commentary and to reflect on the following questions going forward:

- What do you need to **learn more** about in order to inform your support of students trying to navigate this new technology? What types of resources might help you with that?
- What is one actionable (and attainable) **next step** that you could take to help your library respond constructively to GenAI in the next year?
- Who are your **potential partners** for your GenAI-related information literacy initiatives?

Our aim in holding this session was to provide a forum at Atla Annual 2025 in which participants could ultimately reflect on their institutions' preparation to implement and/or discuss the training that they provide for AI-enhanced technology. Given the information collected, we can provide some limited evidence for the role that

seminary libraries are undertaking to contribute to AI integration among theological institutions. By leaving our audience with the wrap-up questions above, we hope to continue this discussion in the future.

The Atla Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Conversation with Jeannine Hill Fletcher's "The Promising Practice of Antiracist Approaches to Interfaith Studies"

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Elli Cucksey, Head Librarian, Hamma Library, Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University

Stephen Sweeney, Strategic Planner, Operations & Knowledge Management, Library & Info Services Director

ABSTRACT In this conversation session, the Atla Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion guided conversation between Atla members and Jeannine Hill Fletcher's essay, "The Promising Practice of Antiracist Approaches to Interfaith Studies." We examined Atla's history of diversity efforts and initiatives and looked forward to potential futures. The purpose of this conversation session was to better understand the history of Atla within the religious and racial history of the US, reflect on the institutions that make up religious studies and theological education, and identify ways to advance Atla's affirmation of the intrinsic value of all members.

Over the past few months, the DEI committee has spent a considerable amount of time examining the history of Atla in light of the current changes in theological education and the possibilities of our future. We invited the conversation session participants to reflect with us on some of the same questions that we have been contemplating.

As we move forward together in this conversation, it is important that we highlight a few of the spaces that we think are important.

First, we approach this time together as a space for growth. As we heard in Dr. Yamada's opening plenary, theological education is at a time of change and one of those changes is that our student bodies increasingly look different from the way they have over the last 100 years. Our students are older, they are more diverse in their ethnic and racial backgrounds, they are more diverse in their religious beliefs and denominational belonging, and they are more diverse in their career goals. So, as we come to this space to consider the history and possibilities of theological librarianship and Atla going forward, one of the things we want to recognize is that this is a space for growth.

Second, we see this time together as a time for conversation. We recognize that many of us come from different experiences and different types of institutions as well as different expectations of what it means to be a theological educator and what it means to be a librarian. We hope that this space is one that can be thoughtful and experimental. As we move forward in this conversation, we hope to use your conversation and comments to shape the future work of the DEI committee at Atla. While we are not expecting you to necessarily put your name or your institution behind the comments and questions that you might have today, we will use them to help us better understand the needs of our members in the organization and to inform the ways that the DEI committee might better serve Atla's membership.

Finally, as we will see, the folks who are in this room today and participating in this conversation will be, by virtue of being theological librarians, largely whiter and more Protestant or Christian than is probably reflected in many of our institutional demographics. It is important to raise this reality at the beginning of our conversation to name the fact that the dominant perspective in this room is one that has largely benefited from and contributed to the theological histories of majority cultures in the United States. In other words, in so far as theological education, and we might add librarianship, has benefited from the religious and racial landscape of the US, it has also contributed to it in significant ways.

One of the opportunities for reflection that we want to bring into this conversation today is a chance to think through or to anticipate the ways in which theological education may look different 20, 30, or 40 years from now, in the same way that theological education looks different today than it looked 20, 30, or 40 years ago. In other words, we assume, in line with Dr. Yamada's comments, that the future of theological education is *already* less white, less Protestant, and less pulpit-oriented than it has been in the past. In order to remain in theological spaces and theological conversations in the future, Atla will by necessity look different than it did when it was founded. One only needs to consider the collections within *Atla RDB* to see how Atla has developed, expanded, and changed over time. However, we recognize that many of us in this conversation today come to this topic from places within or adjacent to the majority perspective. Additionally, we recognize that DEI includes more than racial and religious diversity, but for the purposes of the conversation today, that is where we will focus most of our energy.

As we embark on the discussion about where Atla might be shifting regarding the future of theological education, we would do well to reflect on the history of Atla as an organization. Thankfully Susan Ebertz has done a good deal of work to help us understand Atla's historical membership and diversity profile. In her work in *Theological Librarianship* examining Atla's membership at 65 years and 75 years, Ebertz brings to light the demographic diversity of Atla. Among the many findings are some that are important to highlight at the top of our conversation today. Ebertz finds that America's population is 60% white and 40% Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). By contrast, ATS populations are even more white than the national average. ATS populations are 81% white and 19% BIPOC. This is across the board at all member schools. Within the individual membership survey, the percentages are even lower among librarians than they are among ATS faculty and students. In other words, one of the key findings of Ebertz's work is that theological librarianship as a field is whiter than our students and faculty, which are themselves whiter, and anecdotally more Protestant, than the national averages.

One of the implications of this that becomes evident is that there's a good deal of work to be done not only to bring theological education in line with the lived experiences of many people in the North

American context but to bring theological librarianship in line with those experiences as well. We must work to ensure that our libraries actually reflect the diversity that makes up our communities. How will these metrics look at Atla's 85th or 95th anniversaries? This question is not one that is new to Atla, as we can go back to the 1990s to see that Atla as an organization has been well aware of the challenges related to diversity within its ranks and that the awareness of those challenges is an important part of the story of Atla's history.

The following data comes from Gillian Harrison Cain's historical review of the Atla diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and initiatives. This history goes back to when the DEI committee of Atla was first imagined. Gillian organizes this history into four waves that I think are useful for thinking about the history of Atla.

First, she recognizes a period of focus on racial diversity from 1999 to 2007. During this period, the Board allocated endowment funds to recruit members from minority communities and added related language to the organizational ends.

The second wave was a time of concentrated effort to develop ethnically and racially diverse leadership among the membership of Atla. That period lasted from 2008 to 2011. It saw the establishment of a special committee on diversity, which compiled reports on diversity initiatives in other associations and received scholarship applications for students from minority communities. During this time, the definition of diversity was also broadened beyond racial diversity to include underrepresented and minority communities (Cain 2020, 3).

The third wave, stretching from 2013 to 2015, can be categorized as a redoubled effort on continued discussion of DEI as well as the development of related programs including sponsored conversation groups on diversity, guided tours of ethnically diverse neighborhoods, and pre-conference sessions on racial equity in theological librarianship (Cain 2020, 5). Such programming complimented the work of other Atla members and groups like the World Religions Interest Group. During this period and the fourth wave, Atla has sponsored interreligious field trips and worship services as well as interreligious programming.

Finally, from 2015 to the present (or perhaps 2020), the charge was again updated to explicitly include within its definitions the diversity of race, culture, age, career stage/experience, sexual orientation, gender expression, religious tradition, and socio-economic difference (Cain 2020, 5). Atla has continued to focus attention on questions of interreligious and interfaith dialogue and research in both the membership and the products, looking for ways to further incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion by increasing programming and scheduled conference sessions (Cain 2020, 5). It is clear that Atla understands diversity, equity, and inclusion to be part of the core values of our organization.

As we turn now to the possibilities of an anti-racist interfaith future for Atla and theological education, it is important to remember that Atla's DEI values have been expressly part of our organization for nearly 30 years. This work has, in many ways, been motivated by more precise understandings of our membership as well as the changing landscape of the students and the institutions that we serve. Again, the theological landscape of 1999 looked different from the landscape of 1946 and, as Frank Yamada pointed out in his plenary address, the future of theological education is one in which the students of tomorrow look radically different from the students of today. Our future largely depends on our ability to meet the needs of those students and researchers. Here is where we enter into what Jeaninne Hill Fletcher calls the promising practice of antiracist approaches to interfaith studies. Her argument is one that the DEI committee found particularly helpful over the last few months and is where we invite you into some conversation around the topic.

In her essay, the "Promising Practice of Antiracist Interfaith Studies," Jeannine Hill Fletcher articulates a history of theological education in the United States that is deeply embedded within a particular type of educational and racial project throughout US history. In short, she argues that theological education was part and parcel of a larger attempt to Christianize the "New World." This approach to education was one that in many ways had the explicit goal of bringing people of many different backgrounds in line with a largely European Christian understanding of God and religious practice. Hill Fletcher, however, is quick to recognize that the dominant narrative of this particular religio-cultural educational system is not one that has gone unchallenged. She articulates that

for as long as this particular vision of education has been around there have been individuals and movements that have resisted the flattening of religious understanding and theological experience to a white Protestant European model of belief.

This dominant refrain, according to Hill Fletcher, meets resistance in the works of individuals like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and many others. The very fact that this resistance exists historically gives us hope that the way things have been in the past is not necessarily the way things have to be in the future. In other words, what feels natural in many cases to some of us is not necessarily inevitable. Models for religious practice and even theological education outside of White Protestant European models are as American as any other. Nevertheless, the dominant one is often assumed to be a white Protestant European one.

In response, Hill Fletcher suggests that interfaith dialogue and interreligious education can actually be a way that theological educators shape the future of religious and racial realities. She says, “Interfaith studies may be one way in which the religio-racial project of theological education can reflect the diversity of the American experience” (Hill Fletcher 2018, 143). In other words, by focusing our attention beyond the experiences and beliefs of white Protestant European Americans, we have an opportunity to complexify our understanding of the world. (As an aside, we do not think we have to look far afield from the work of Atla and its members to be convinced of this claim). Finally, Hill Fletcher suggests that interfaith studies can be one of the tools that theological educators use to form a country that is religiously literate and positively responsive to the diversity reflected in the nation (Hill Fletcher 2018, 145). This work does not just happen but rather requires attention and self-reflection.

And so, here Atla sits. Collecting information and connecting people related to religion and theology. In many ways, Atla is *already* poised at the intersection of what Hill Fletcher describes. We believe that it is possible to leverage this situation by providing information to the world about religious and theological topics while also attending to the diversity that is already in our own midst and which is reflected in our institutions.

As this session was a conversation session, we continued by asking participants to think about ways that we might begin challenging

our role within this shifting theological landscape. We asked them to think about how Atla has, should, and could respond to an increasingly diverse religious landscape in the future. We asked our participants to consider how Atla might respond or might flex to this future. Below are the four questions which we proposed to our in-person and online audience, and which we now propose to you. The questions are ones Hill Fletcher raises for us. We broke up into four groups to address the questions and each group used post-it notes to put their ideas on the wall. We asked our participants (and we ask you) to think about them in relation to Atla and their own institution. Keep in mind that there is a subtle distinction between the second and third questions that has to do with our moral and ethical values as an organization. That is to say, what we think of regarding what Atla, as a member organization, *should* do in the future may very well be different from what it *might* or *could* do in the future. In what ways do you feel Atla has engaged or not engaged with these questions?

QUESTIONS

- 1) What have we learned from our history? Where does Atla fit into the history of the United States as a White Christian Nation? How has structural dispossession and generational inheritance shaped the current religio-racial landscape of Atla?
- 2) Mapping our power structure: Who holds the resources in Atla and in your own institution? What are the religious affiliations within our leadership structure and our committees? Is there diverse religious representation on our Board and on our staff? How is your own religious affiliation related to Atla's resource-holding individuals/structures?
- 3) Gatekeeping: Where do you have power to inform the knowledge production of Atla? Where do you have power in relation to the material resources of Atla? And where do you have power in relation to Atla's political resources?
- 4) Sharing Culture: How can the work of Atla inform the creation of a multiracial, multireligious culture? What sites of resistance to the creation of a multiracial, multireligious culture (theologically, politically, socially, practically) do you see in Atla? What would you like to see Atla do more of?

SUMMARY

The questions presented to participants in the conversation session resulted in as many, if not more, questions than answers. A variety of types of responses can be found throughout the feedback. For some, the questions prompted reflections on the institutions in which members participate. Most often, these institutions can be described as Atla or the educational institution at which the member works. Some questions prompted reflections on the membership and leadership demographics of Atla. Several acknowledged the role that white Protestant Christian men have played in the organization and reflected on ways that Atla might respond to opportunities for diversity in its body. Another common reflection stemmed from the nature of theology libraries. Do they have responsibilities toward Christian belief, history, and praxis, or is there opportunity to expand beyond this focus? This question was especially pertinent toward Atla and its products, like *Atla RDB*. These questions and reflections fit well within Atla's Organizational Ends and require further elucidation by the DEI Committee and related programming.

CONCLUSION

As we reflect on Hill Fletcher's call to reshape interfaith studies in ways that dismantle religio-racial hierarchies and foster a truly multiracial and multireligious society, Atla's Organizational Ends provide both a compass and a charge for how we, as theological librarians, can respond. Organizational End 1.5 says, "Members are equipped to successfully navigate the changing landscape." Hill Fletcher challenges us to confront colonial legacies and systemic inequities—this is the changing landscape we must be prepared for. Atla's commitment to equipping members means we are not alone. We are developing tools, language, and community to do this work with intentionality and resilience. Organizational End 2.1 says, "Members have support to preserve, describe, and share collections." However, preservation is not just about safeguarding books, it is about whose voices we choose to preserve. Descriptive practices are acts of power. Hill Fletcher reminds us that interfaith work must be antiracist. That means interrogating our metadata, expanding our collections, and amplifying silenced narratives. Organizational End 3.1 asserts that, "Members are included as partners in religious and theological

education.” Theological librarians are not just service providers; we are educators and partners. This end affirms our role in shaping curricula and expanding the canon. By supporting interfaith and antiracist scholarship, we help transform classrooms into spaces of critical inquiry and inclusive formation. Finally, Organizational End 4.1 says, “educators and researchers have access to increasing full-text content that is inclusive and global in scope.” Hill Fletcher invites us to dream of a multifaith, multiracial America—and to build it. One way we do this is by ensuring access to content that reflects the full breadth of global religious experience. From Buddhist temple tours to metadata interventions, we help make that vision tangible.

In short, Atla’s Organizational Ends are not abstract goals. They are tools for action. They empower us to live out the work Hill Fletcher envisions—in our libraries, in our partnerships, and in our shared commitments to justice and hospitality.

Throughout this conversation, we explored how Atla has flexed—and how it must continue to flex—to meet the urgent call for anti-racist, multifaith engagement in theological education. We have reflected on our history, examined where power resides, and asked how we as librarians can foster a more inclusive, representative scholarly landscape.

The Organizational Ends we have shared are more than benchmarks—they are invitations. They ask us to be responsive, courageous, and collaborative. Whether we are navigating shifting cultural contexts, rethinking how we describe collections, serving as educational partners, or increasing access to global voices, our work is essential to the thriving of a truly multiracial, multireligious academic community.

As we move forward, let us carry these Ends with us—not just as institutional goals, but as shared commitments that help us answer Hill Fletcher’s challenge: to be leaders in shaping a more just and inclusive future through our scholarship, our collections, and our common vocation.

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LISTEN AND LEARN SESSIONS

Expanding Research Horizons

The Catholic News Archive as a Resource for
Social and Cultural Inquiry

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ABSTRACT The Catholic News Archive (CNA) is an invaluable digital resource, granting researchers access to a wide range of Catholic newspapers that illuminate theological, social, cultural, and political developments. This article demonstrates how scholars, students, and librarians can employ the CNA to investigate historical narratives, public discourse, and community dynamics, particularly in relation to issues such as immigration, civil rights, education, and international relations. The CNA's extensive holdings, including non-English and ecumenical newspapers, offer unique perspectives on immigrant communities and interfaith dialogues, making it a vital tool for interdisciplinary research. Practical guidance is provided for effectively navigating the Archive, integrating its rich primary sources into teaching and research, and fostering critical engagement with historical media that shaped both local and global Catholic experiences.

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic News Archive (CNA) stands today as a vital, innovative resource for scholars, librarians, archivists, and the public interested

in Catholic history, thought, and news in North America. Its creation and growth are a key part of the mission of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA), whose broader mission is to provide enduring global access to Catholic research resources in America. Examining the history of the CNA reveals the challenge of making Catholic news sources widely available, while also illustrating the value of a digital archive. Additionally, this resource surfaces the vast array of benefits these newspapers represent for those studying social and cultural issues viewed through a Catholic lens.

ABOUT THE ARCHIVE

Origins and Motivation

The beginning of the CNA can be traced to an identified need. Catholic newspapers had not been added to the different digital newspaper projects, leaving a gap in access for researchers and other interested users. Recognizing the unique nature and historical significance of Catholic newspapers, CRRA took on the challenge to digitize and make these materials accessible in a single archive. This was not solely a matter of capturing mainstream Catholic perspectives; it was also about preserving regional and local voices, opinions, and historical records critical for a full understanding of Catholic life, culture, perspective and influence in North America.

BUILDING THE ARCHIVE: COLLABORATION

The development of the CNA was the result of collaborative efforts. From its start, the CNA relied on this collaboration to support its technical and operational needs. The work of the CRRA founding institutions contributed significantly, supporting the Archive's technical, administrative, and other needs, and providing ongoing support. The CNA began with major city and selected national newspapers, maximizing the research value by allowing users to compare regional and national Catholic coverage. The CNA was envisioned as a phased project, acknowledging the substantial financial and logistical demands of extensive digitization.

THE VALUE OF THE CATHOLIC NEWS ARCHIVE

The CNA's value is multifaceted. First, it brings together Catholic newspapers, many of which were previously inaccessible. By centralizing these materials on a robust digital platform, the CNA not only preserves them for future generations, but also democratizes access. Researchers no longer face barriers of distance as the resource is available online and open access. Scholars can quickly trace trends in Catholic perspectives on public issues. Even genealogists and local historians can delve into community life as documented in parish and diocesan bulletins.

Beyond practical access, the Archive's scholarly value is immense. The ability to compare local, regional, and national Catholic voices offers critical insight into the role of the Catholic Church in broader social, political, and cultural movements. Scholars of American history, religious studies, sociology, and political science have a unique tool through which to examine how Catholic communities reported on, adjusted to, and influenced the events that were occurring around them. In an era where questions of religious identity and inter-religious relations are deeply relevant, the CNA provides crucial primary sources for informed debate and analysis.

Additionally, the CNA is continuously expanding as new materials are digitized and integrated. Being open access, it ensures that not only academics, but also members of the public can explore the diversity of American Catholic history.

EXPLORING THE ARCHIVE

Scope of CNA Coverage

As mentioned above, content within the CNA comes from parishes, dioceses, and organizations from across North America. As of July 2025, the Archive holds content from twenty-nine sources. These sources represent regions from the Pacific Northwest, to Louisiana, to Boston, MA. Some are national publications, while others are local diocesan papers. Yet each brings to bear a unique voice and unique perspective from each region on social and cultural issues and events. Depending on the title, these newspapers also span the years 1831 to 2024, thus covering many events that have occurred in

American history. Within this collection, a researcher will discover social, cultural, and regional differences as they seek to understand Catholics' and the many Catholic churches' views on these events. Likewise, the Archive provides the opportunity to look across time to understand changing social and cultural perspectives.

CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES

A researcher using the Catholic News Archive gains invaluable access to Catholic perspectives on many local and national topics. The Archive provides firsthand accounts and contemporaneous reporting on Catholic religious traditions and beliefs, enabling rich insight into how faith was practiced and perceived across different eras. Newspaper coverage of local religious celebrations and festivities provides vivid details about community participation, rituals, and evolving customs. Articles and obituaries may highlight prominent Catholic religious historical figures, offering context about their roles and influence within both the Church and society. Exploration of the arts, literature, and sciences through local and national newspapers can reveal how religious thought shaped artistic expression or scientific discourse, capturing debates and innovations as they unfolded.

For those interested in genealogy, newspapers within the CNA are an essential resource, containing birth, marriage, and death notices, as well as stories about everyday community members. By comparing local diocesan newspapers, which offer nuanced, community-specific perspectives, with national newspapers that provide broader context and coverage, researchers can trace the interplay between local practices and national trends, resulting in a well-rounded understanding of their topics.

EXPLORING THE CATHOLIC NEWS ARCHIVE: USER INTERFACE AND RESEARCH APPLICATIONS IN AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY

In this section, we focus on exploring the CNA user interface and demonstrating its applications for research at the intersection of Catholic and North American history. To best do this, we look at two components: first, we do a detailed review of the user interface and its numerous search modifiers; second, we do an examination

of four pivotal topics in the American Catholic historical experience, with particular emphasis on social and cultural dimensions of Catholicism in the United States.

THE CNA USER INTERFACE

The first component we look at is the user interface. To best explore the CNA and to better understand its content, it is advantageous to do a comprehensive exploration of the interface capabilities of the CNA. By exploring the browsing functionality, we can examine how researchers can navigate the CNA by title, date, and tags. To illustrate the platform's search refinement capabilities, the term "great depression" served as a case study, demonstrating how users can modify search results through multiple parameters including specific date ranges, publications, categories, authors, locations, and word counts.

This demonstration clearly illustrated how the CNA serves as a powerful tool for expanding research horizons in American social and cultural history. The interface's sophisticated search capabilities enable researchers to conduct both broad thematic searches and highly targeted investigations, making it particularly valuable for interdisciplinary scholarship.

SERVING SCHOLARLY RESEARCH NEEDS: THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE

The second component bridges theoretical capabilities with practical application. To do this, we examine four significant themes in American Catholic history over the past century. Each topic demonstrated how researchers can leverage the CNA to explore the complex intersections of faith, social justice, and American society.

1. The American Catholic Experience in Times of Economic Crisis and War

The first theme examines Catholic responses to national and international crises, highlighting both institutional and grassroots efforts while tracing evolving perspectives on peace and justice. Two critical historical periods received particular attention. The first, the Great Depression (1930s), revealed extensive newspaper coverage of

Catholic charitable initiatives, including parish relief efforts and St. Vincent de Paul Society activities. The CNA documents robust discussions of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, as frameworks for responding to economic hardship. Editorial content addressing labor rights, union organizing, and the work of prominent figures like Monsignor John A. Ryan demonstrates the Church's direct engagement with economic justice and workers' rights. Researchers can access this material using search terms such as "Catholic Charities," "Great Depression," "Unemployment," "Labor Unions," "Social Justice," "Msgr. Ryan," and "Soup Kitchens."

World War II and its aftermath (1940s-1950s) showcases Catholic press coverage of military chaplains, soldiers, and the broader war effort. The CNA reveals nuanced discussions of just war theory alongside emerging peace movements. Post-war coverage documents the suburbanization phenomenon, the expansion of Catholic parishes and schools, and the transformative impact of the GI Bill on Catholic social mobility. The social justice dimension emerges through examinations of Catholic responses to displacement, refugee assistance, and moral questions raised by warfare. Key search terms include "World War II," "Catholic Chaplains," "Peace," "Just War," "Refugees," "GI Bill," and "Parish Growth."

2. The Church, Civil Rights, and Aggiornamento

The second theme explores the complex and evolving role of Catholics in the struggle for racial equality and broader social transformation during the 1950s-1970s. This section highlighted two interconnected movements. The Civil Rights Movement documentation includes coverage of Catholic institutional desegregation, notably Archbishop Joseph Rummel's efforts in New Orleans. The CNA contain profiles of Catholic activists—clergy, religious, and laity—participating in marches, protests, and advocacy campaigns. Editorial content and letters to the editor reveal the diversity of Catholic opinion on race and civil rights, while official statements from the U.S. Bishops on discrimination provide institutional perspectives. Researchers examining Catholic participation in racial justice movements can utilize search terms including "Civil Rights," "Desegregation," "Interracial Council," "Martin Luther King Jr. Catholic," "Fr. James Groppi," "Sisters

Civil Rights,” and specific diocesan responses. Vatican II (1962-1965) and its American Impact receives extensive coverage in the CNA, documenting both the Council’s decrees and their local implementation. The newspapers trace increased lay involvement, liturgical reforms, and the renewed emphasis on social justice as integral to faith, particularly following *Gaudium et Spes* and its call for engagement with the modern world. Search terms such as “Vatican Council,” “Aggiornamento,” “Lay Apostolate,” “*Gaudium et Spes*,” and “Liturgical Reform Social Justice” provide access to this transformative period.

3. Faith in Action: Catholic Activism and Shifting Social Mores

This third theme highlights prominent Catholic social movements and figures who challenged injustices while navigating evolving societal norms from the 1930s through the 1980s. The Catholic Worker Movement receives substantial coverage, including reporting on Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, houses of hospitality, and their commitment to pacifism, voluntary poverty, and service to the poor. The CNA documents discussion of distributism and anarchist-pacifist ideals within a Catholic framework, representing a radical embodiment of Catholic Social Teaching focused on direct action and solidarity with marginalized communities. Relevant search terms include “Dorothy Day,” “Catholic Worker,” “Peter Maurin,” “Pacifism,” “Houses of Hospitality,” and “Works of Mercy.”

Vietnam War Era and Catholic peace activism reveals diverse Catholic responses ranging from staunch anti-communism and war support to vocal opposition. Coverage includes profiles of the Berrigan brothers (Daniel and Philip) and their civil disobedience actions alongside editorial debates about the morality of war and conscientious objection. This period marks the emergence of a significant Catholic anti-war movement challenging government policy on moral grounds. Researchers can explore this topic using terms such as “Vietnam War,” “Catholic Peace Fellowship,” “Berrigan,” “Draft Resistance,” “Conscientious Objector,” and “Cardinal Spellman Vietnam.”

4. Navigating Modernity: Immigration, Identity, and Ongoing Challenges

The final theme examines the American Catholic Church's enduring connection to immigrant communities and engagement with contemporary social issues from the late twentieth century to the present.

Immigration and refugee advocacy coverage includes documentation of new immigrant waves from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, highlighting the Church's role in resettlement and support services. The CNA captures the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s and ongoing advocacy for immigrant rights, including USCCB statements and initiatives on immigration reform. This demonstrates the Church's consistent advocacy for immigrant and refugee rights, rooted in its own immigrant heritage. Search terms include "Immigration," "Refugees," "Sanctuary Movement," "USCCB Immigration," "Hispanic Ministry," and "Boat People."

Contemporary social justice concerns receive ongoing coverage, including poverty, healthcare access, pro-life activities within a "consistent ethic of life" framework, and environmental justice following *Laudato Si'*. The CNA documents Catholic institutional and individual responses to these challenges, illustrating the breadth of Catholic social concern in the twenty-first century. Relevant search terms include "Poverty Catholic," "Healthcare Reform Catholic," "Pro-Life Social Justice," "Environmental Justice Catholic," and "Laudato Si'."

CATHOLIC NEWS ARCHIVE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR USE AND GROWTH

The value of the CNA grows with every title that is digitized and added to the search platform. A scenario from 2018 serves as an example. The Hesburgh Libraries at the University of Notre Dame participated in a "sprint" with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to add articles from a wide variety of newspapers to the History Unfolded Project, to see what groups in America were learning and reporting about the Holocaust. Volunteers took shifts at microfilm readers to scan as many Catholic newspapers as possible to find articles about Kristallnacht (November 1938) and seek Catholic responses to the events and aftermath. This kind of collaboration is made easier as we strategically add Catholic newspaper titles that fill out coverage of the 20th century and earlier. Discovery in the

CNA is further enhanced by the federated searching of all the titles, keyword search, and full text access.

The CNA is growing steadily, and with the guidance of the Atla CRRA Program Committee and contributions of library and archives providing funds and content, the expansion will serve local and global needs. The advantages for those providing content include preservation of the resources, global accessibility of Catholic newspaper content, and a stake in building a valuable research resource that will persist and hopefully spur others to add to the database.

The bottom line is that more Catholic newspaper content will increase the potential for use by scholars and students at all levels on a global scale. Bibliographies, such as the epic work *Catholic Serials of the Nineteenth Century in the United States: A Descriptive Bibliography and Union List*, may provide a starting point for adding historical titles. Diversity of Catholic viewpoints can be added through the digitization of foreign language titles, mission publications, and small or regional publications. In production, for instance, is the German language Benedictine publication the *St. Joseph's Blatt* from Mt. Angel Abbey and Seminary in Oregon. More diversity of language, viewpoints, international scope, and years covered will enhance the CNA and our collective use of it.

CONCLUSION

Researchers will benefit as they learn more about and explore how the CNA serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the multifaceted relationship between Catholicism and American society over the past century. By combining sophisticated search capabilities with rich primary source material, the CNA enables researchers to explore how Catholic communities have engaged with and responded to major social, political, and cultural developments. The Archive's ability to capture both institutional perspectives and grassroots voices makes it particularly valuable for scholars seeking to understand the lived experience of American Catholicism and its ongoing commitment to social justice.

The CNA embodies the mission and collaborative spirit of the CRRA. From its early conception in the face of significant gaps in digital collections, through painstaking groundwork and strategic

partnerships, to its ongoing role as an indispensable resource, the CNA is a singular achievement in the preservation and dissemination of Catholic news and history. Its continued development promises still greater visibility for Catholic voices, deeper understanding for contemporary scholarship, and enduring access for generations to come. Each researcher can explore the CNA to learn more about the different social and cultural events in history, and about Catholics within the different regions. Additionally, scholars and educators can find new ways to leverage the resources of the CNA as they develop new pedagogies around these local, national, and international events and topics.

Collecting Catholic Open Access Religion Journals

Barnaby Hughes, Metadata Editor, Atla; Production Editor, Atla Open Press

ABSTRACT One way that librarians can do more with less is by adding open access (OA) journals to their library's holdings. But how does one identify and evaluate what is available? In his Atla Annual 2021 Listen and Learn session titled "Open Access Religious Resources for your Students," Jeff Siemon shared his collection of approximately 800 OA religion journals. Siemon inspired me to create my own collection of Catholic OA religion journals, which I presented later that year at the Catholic Library Association's Fall Conference. Nearly four years later, my collection has more than doubled. I describe how I found these journals, highlighting specific journal indexes, including a comparison between the Directory of Open Access Journals and *Atla RDB*. I also present updated analyses of journals by continent and country, by language, and by subject, highlighting remarkable trends.

Librarians are constantly being asked to do more with less, especially when it comes to maintaining library collections on a reduced budget. Considering the current economic and political situation, budgets will probably be shrinking again. One way that librarians can increase their periodical collections without spending more on journal subscriptions is by adding open access (OA) journals to their library's holdings. But how does one identify and evaluate what is available? The simple answer: careful curation. At present, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which is perhaps the most comprehensive such index, includes 21,588 journals. However, most of what it contains is likely outside the scope of your library's collection development policy.¹

COLLECTING THE DATA

In his Atla Annual 2021 Listen and Learn session titled "Open Access Religious Resources for your Students," Jeff Siemon, of Anderson

University in Indiana, shared his collection of approximately 800 OA religion journals. I immediately wrote to him and asked for his spreadsheet, which he kindly shared with me. As a Catholic who primarily indexes Catholic subject matter for *Atla RDB*, I decided to sift through Siemon's collection and single out what is of most interest to me: Catholic OA religion journals.

My criteria for judging which religion journals qualify as Catholic are essentially two: journals published by Catholic universities, Catholic faculties of theology, or Catholic scholarly associations; and journals whose contents are explicitly Catholic. The vast majority of the journals in my collection are Catholic in the first sense. One notable exception is *The Journal of Jesuit Studies*, published by Brill.

What counts as a religion journal? Most of the journals I have selected focus on Catholic theology, canon law, liturgy, church history, Catholic education, moral theology, and religious orders, but some cover religious studies and philosophy of religion more broadly. I have excluded journals published by Catholic faculties of philosophy, since these lack religious content. Perhaps one day I will expand my focus to include these.

I have also excluded journals that are not peer-reviewed, since the focus is on scholarly journals. A notable exception is the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, which is included for its obvious importance. I have also excluded preceding titles, since this could skew and inflate the results. For example, the Polish journal *Biblical Annals* had three earlier iterations, which I have not included. Lastly, I have mostly excluded journals that have ceased publication.

And finally, a word about Open Access (OA). In his influential book *Open Access*, Peter Suber defines OA as "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (Suber 2012, 4). I include both gold and green OA journals in my collection, but not hybrid OA journals. Some do not have a Creative Commons license but are nevertheless freely available online. Moreover, some have embargoes, while others have only been partially digitized.

Once I applied my criteria for rejection or inclusion to Jeff Siemon's data and added a few dozen of my own, I ended up with a total of 146 Catholic OA religion journals. I presented these just a few months later at the Catholic Library Association's Fall 2021 Virtual Conference

and then revised it for publication in *Catholic Library World* (Hughes 2021). Following my presentation, Arthur Quinn, Library Director and Archivist at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach, Florida, sent me a list he had been collecting of OA journals in Spanish. Although most were already on my list or fell under my excluded category of philosophy journals, I was able to add a few. I have continued to add new titles to my collection every year. When I wrote my Atla Annual 2025 conference proposal last year, I had not yet doubled that initial 146. I have now surpassed it with 300 journals, even after removing some.

How do I find Catholic OA religion journals? While preparing this presentation and updating my data, I found many more journals in the DOAJ that I had not seen before. I have found others through the Central and Eastern European Online Library. Some have been found simply by looking at the bibliographies of published articles and others have been found through targeted searches of Catholic university websites.

Unfortunately, I have had to remove four journals from my original list. Two are due to my newly tightened criteria of excluding ceased titles, both of whose websites are gone. These are *New Theology Review* from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and *Scripture Bulletin* from the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain. Fortunately, they are now available full text in *Atlas* and *Atlas PLUS*, respectively. The third title is the *Saint Anselm Journal*, which was acquired by the Catholic University of America Press and is now a subscription journal. Lastly, the *Australian eJournal of Theology*, which is still listed on the DOAJ, seems to have disappeared from the internet and I have not been able to locate a replacement. All four journals, however, can still be found in various web archives, with a little digging.

ANALYZING THE DATA

Having explained how I collected my list of Catholic OA religion journals, I am now going to analyze this data in various ways, sometimes using my first dataset from 2021 for comparison. First, we will look at journals by continent and by country. Second, we will look at journals by language. Third, we will look at journals by

subject. Lastly, we will look at journal inclusion in relevant indexes, such as Atla and the DOAJ.

JOURNALS BY CONTINENT AND COUNTRY

European journals clearly dominate the field at 51%. Why? There are several reasons: wealth, number of well-established Catholic universities, and government support for OA publishing. South America (20%) has the largest Catholic population, large Catholic universities, and strong government support for OA. North America (14%), despite its wealth and abundant Catholic universities, has received government support for OA publishing that is, at best, mediocre. Asia (11%) has a growing number of OA journals, but Christians are few and not well-established, except in a few places, such as the Philippines and India. Africa (2%) is the poorest of all, and despite the growing number of Catholics, publishes few Catholic journals.

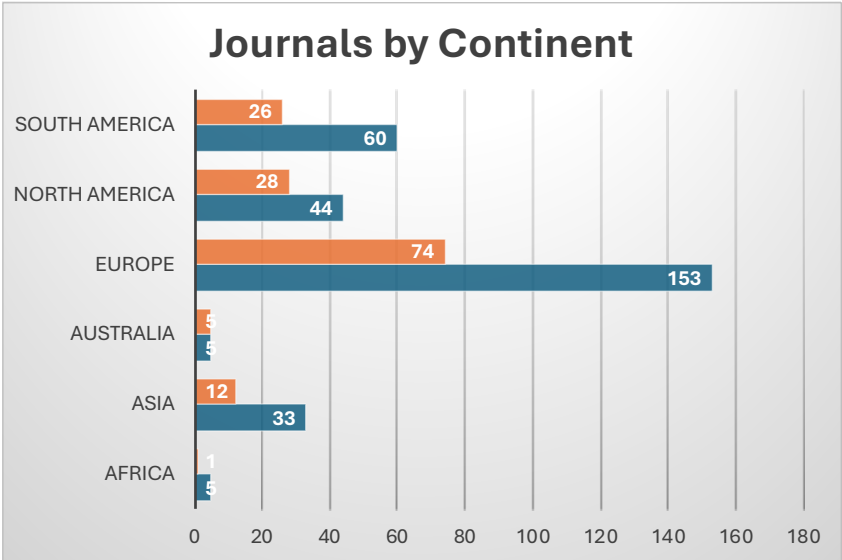


Image 1. Total number of Catholic OA religion journals published on each continent.

Comparing my current data with that from 2021, it remains clear that Europe dominates, doubling the number of journals (from 74 to 153) and maintaining its share at just over half of the total. Australia also remains about the same (5 in 2021 and 5 in 2025). What is most

remarkable are the clear gains in South America (from 26 to 60), Asia (from 12 to 33), and Africa (from 1 to 5). Although North America has gained too (from 28 to 44), its portion of the total has shrunk. This could be simply due to my greater knowledge of North American journals from the beginning, since that is where I am located and what I know best.

For further illustration, one can compare the number of Catholic OA religion journals by continent to the percentage of Catholics by continent (Wikipedia n.d.). This shows that Europe's dominance has shrunk by nearly half, from 51% to 26%. If one combines North and South American journals, the result is about one third, or 35%, of the total, compared to nearly one half, or 49%, of the global Catholic population. The proportions of Catholic journals compared to Catholic population for Asia (11%) and Oceania (1%), however, are about what one would expect. The most glaring imbalance, of course, is Africa, which publishes just 2% of Catholic OA religion journals while boasting 13% of the global Catholic population.

How does this compare to all OA journals by continent? A study of the DOAJ published in 2019, which is getting rather dated now (Pashaei and Morrison 2019), is consistent with my findings above relating to Europe, which publishes half of all OA journals and half of all Catholic OA religion journals. Where my data differs is primarily in relation to Asia (my 11% compared to their 22%) and North America (my 14% compared to their 8%) and this can probably best be explained by the percentage of the Catholic population on those continents.

JOURNALS BY COUNTRY

Instead of updating the 2019 study myself, I have opted to show the ten countries that publish the most OA journals, as indexed in the DOAJ. Indonesia ranks first with 2,481 journals, followed by the UK with 2,200, Brazil with 1,543, the United States with 1,234, Spain with 976, Iran with 971, Poland with 929, Switzerland with 780, Russia with 616, and Türkiye with 575. Of these ten countries, four have significant Catholic populations: Brazil, the United States, Spain, and Poland. As we will see below, these four countries also publish the most Catholic OA religion journals.

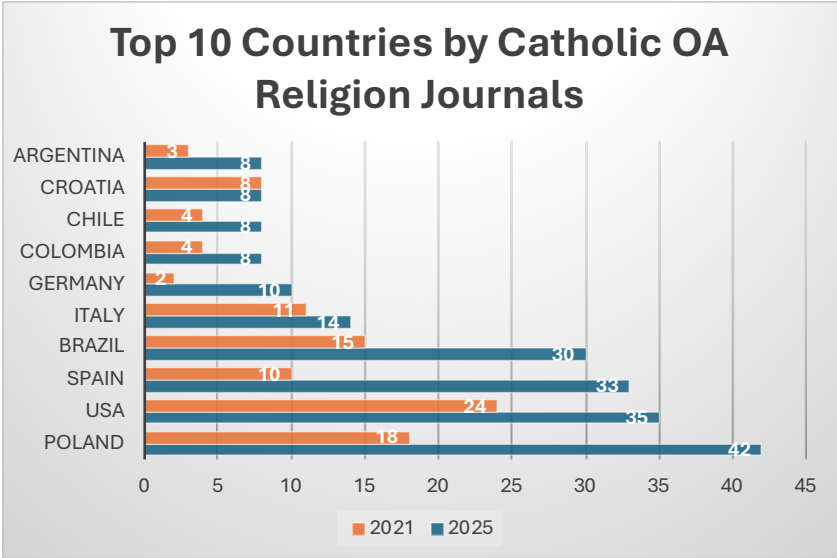


Image 2: The top ten countries by Catholic OA religion journals.

Of the ten countries that publish the most Catholic OA religion journals, Poland (42 journals), the United States of America (35 journals), Spain (33 journals), and Brazil (30 journals) publish the most, as expected, but not in the expected order. The number of journals I have collected from all four countries has grown considerably, especially from Spain, whose numbers have more than tripled (from 10 to 33), and Germany, whose numbers have grown fivefold (from 2 to 10). With 8 journals, Croatia consistently publishes more than its share of journals, considering its diminutive size. Perhaps what is most surprising, however, is that the UK and Indonesia, which dominate OA journal publishing worldwide, each publish just two Catholic OA religion journals. From the UK, I can name several Catholic journals that all require a paid subscription: *British Catholic History*, *Innes Review*, *Downside Review*, *New Blackfriars*, *The Way*, and *Heythrop Journal*. What is holding the United States back? One single American Catholic publisher dominates, publishing nearly twenty journals, but they all require a paid subscription.

It is also illuminating to break down some continents to show journals by country, especially Europe, South America, and Asia. Of Europe’s 44 countries, 22, or half, publish a Catholic OA religion journal. Again, notice the dominance of Poland (42 journals), followed by Spain (33 journals) and Italy (14 journals). Since I only

found two journals from Germany in 2021, I looked very hard to find more—eight more. Romania, Hungary, and Portugal each publish five and Slovakia publishes four. The Netherlands, Slovenia, Austria, France, and Switzerland each publish three. Lastly, the following countries publish only one or two Catholic OA religion journals each: Vatican City, UK, Czech Republic, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Malta.

My findings for South America are also quite comprehensive and well-substantiated: of South America's 12 countries, 8, or two-thirds, are represented in the data. OA Catholic religion journals have at least doubled in every country, not just in previously represented ones like Brazil (15 to 30), Colombia (4 to 8), Chile (4 to 8), and Argentina (3 to 8), but in putting others on the list for the first time: Peru (2), Bolivia (2), Uruguay (1), and Ecuador (1).

The change of findings in Asia is similar. Three countries appear for the first time: Japan (7 journals), China (3 journals), and Taiwan (1). The results for Japan are unusual in that all seven journals share the same publisher: Nanzan University, which is run by the Society of the Divine Word. Similarly, five of India's seven journals share the same publisher: Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram. In the Philippines, my findings have doubled (3 to 6)—and I expect that number to continue increasing. I hope to find journals in Vietnam soon. Of the 48 countries in Asia, 8, or just one-sixth, are represented, however, which makes these findings quite weak.

JOURNALS BY LANGUAGE

Before presenting the data, it is important to note that I have categorized each journal by only one language, even if the journal is published in multiple languages. In such cases, I have designated it by the most used language of the journal or by the language of its editorials or website. Here are the languages for which there are at least two journals:

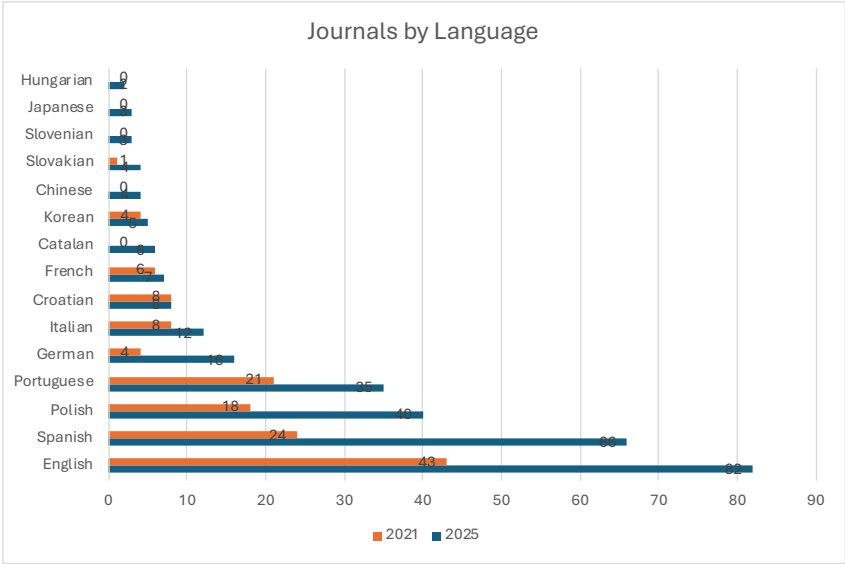


Image 3: Catholic OA religion journals by language.

This chart does not include languages in which only one journal can be found: Czech, Ukrainian, Latin, Lithuanian, Dutch, Romanian, and Bosnian. It is perhaps unsurprising that English dominates at 27%, since it is used in many, often populous, former British colonies. Spanish is a close second at 22%. Polish accounts for 13% because of the large number of Catholic OA religion journals published in Poland, but English is becoming more commonly used there and in many other Central and Eastern European countries.

Rather than look at the rest of the languages, it might be more instructive to look at where the English language journals are published. The vast majority are from the United States (34), with significant numbers from India (7), the Philippines (6), and Australia (5). Otherwise, English is scattered widely across Europe, Asia, and Africa.

JOURNALS BY SUBJECT

Something I did not attempt in 2021 was to categorize each journal by subject, so this section of my presentation is entirely new. I categorized the journals very quickly based on title, scope, and a cursory glance at article titles, frequently using Google Translate.

This section, therefore, is also the least scientific. I assigned one subject to each journal, but many have two or more. First, I am going to offer a broad overview of journals by subject. Then, I will break down a few smaller topics by journal title.

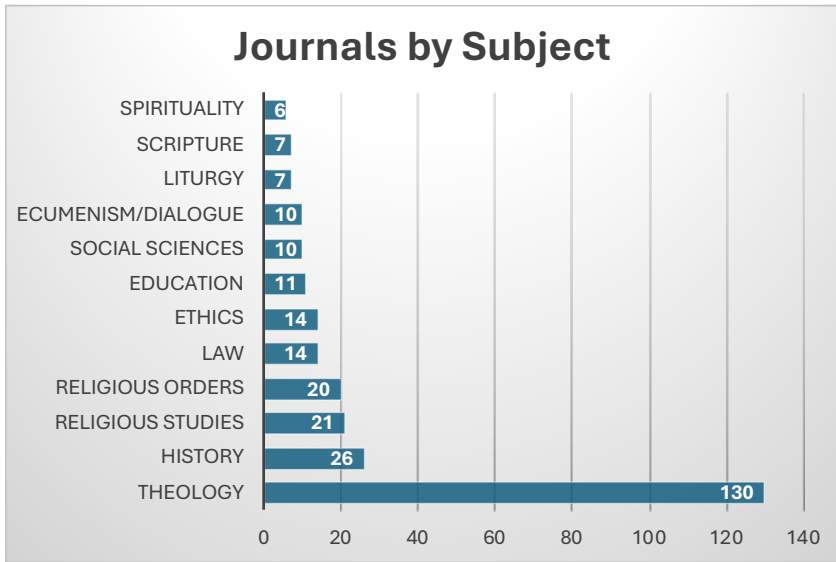


Image 4: Catholic OA religion journals by subject.

This chart shows subjects covered by at least six journal titles. Unsurprisingly, the largest percentage of journals are general theology titles, at 43%. These are mostly produced by Catholic faculties of theology and are not limited to theology, but can also include philosophy, church history, and canon law. Others are focused on Christianity and culture, dialogue, and communication. History comes next, at about 9%. These are mostly church history but include some broader religious history titles. Perhaps 10% or more of the journals are about religious orders, but I assigned some to other topics, like Education and Spirituality. There are a lot of different orders represented here, including the Jesuits, Vincentians, Benedictines, Christian Brothers, Spiritans, and Barnabites. The law category covers mostly canon law journals, but also a few more generally on religious law or religion and law. Ethics usually covers bioethics or social ethics and moral theology. Ecumenism/Dialogue lumps together ecumenical studies and interreligious dialogue.

The more niche topics, covered by five or fewer journals, are Mariology and Person (5 each), Missions and Philosophy of Religion (4 each), Archives (3), Arts (2) and Pilgrimage (1). The category labeled Person is just a shorthand way of lumping together journals focusing on a single individual. Arts is a broad category covering one journal on architecture and one on literature. Lastly, the single journal on pilgrimage is called *Ad Limina*; it is a Spanish journal about the Camino de Santiago.

Now I would like to break down a few other small categories by title. First, let us look at the three journals of archives and library science: *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne*, *Catholic Archives*, and *Memoria Ecclesiae*—all from Europe. The four missions titles are even more diverse: *Annales Missiologici Posnanienses* from Poland, *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* from the Philippines, *Nelen Yubu* from Australia, and *Spiritus* from Ecuador.

The five journals focusing on a single individual are *Herald of the East*, *Merton Journal*, *Oliviana*, *Studia et Documenta*, and *Studia Lulliana*. *Herald of the East* focuses on St. Kuriakose, who was canonized by Pope Francis in 2014. He is the first male saint of Indian origin, a member of the Eastern Catholic Syro-Malabar Church, and co-founder of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. *Merton Journal*, of course, is about the American monk Thomas Merton. *Oliviana* studies Peter John Olivi, a Franciscan theologian and supporter of the so-called Spiritual Franciscans, who interpreted their vow of poverty very strictly. *Studia et Documenta* focuses on St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. Lastly, *Studia Lulliana* studies Ramon Lull, a strikingly original philosopher, theologian, poet, missionary, and Christian apologist from Majorca who primarily wrote in Catalan and Latin, but probably Arabic, too.

The seven journals on liturgy mostly come from Europe. They are *Ars Celebrandi: Revista de Liturgia* (Brazil), *Ex Fonte: Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* (Austria), *Journal of Pastoral Liturgy* (Australia), *Liturgia Sacra* (Poland), *Miscel·lània litúrgica catalana* (Spain), *Notitiae* (Vatican City), and *Una Voce-Korrespondenz* (Germany). *Notitiae* is the only title indexed in *Atla RDB*.

The seven journals on Scripture are *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria*, *Biblical Annals* (Poland), *QOL: Revista Bíblica Mexicana*, *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* (Poland), *Scripta Biblica* (Spain),

Studia Biblica Slovaca (Slovakia), and *Vulgata in Dialogue: a biblical online review* (Switzerland). All the European titles, except for *Scripta Biblica*, are indexed in *Atla RDB*.

JOURNALS IN MAJOR INDEXES

Now that we have a good idea of the variety of titles in the collection, it might be illuminating to see how many are included in scholarly indexes. Because there are hundreds of scholarly indexes out there, I am going to limit the discussion to just two: *Atla RDB* and the DOAJ, two indexes that are both highly relevant and with which I am very familiar.

When I first presented my research in 2021, about one-third, or 32%, of the titles in my 2021 collection were indexed in the DOAJ. Now there are slightly less, at 29%. In 2021, I was pleased to discover that *Atla RDB* indexed about two-thirds of the journals in my collection. Of course, this was probably because *Atla RDB* was one of the first places I searched for titles. Now that my collection has more than doubled, the percentage of titles indexed in *Atla RDB* is much lower, at 42%, despite the addition of dozens of Catholic OA titles in the past four years. Many more titles from my collection have been evaluated and accepted for indexing but have not yet been added. Nevertheless, *Atla RDB* is still a far better resource for Catholic OA religion journals than the DOAJ.

Let us break down the data a little more. Just 14% of the total are indexed in both *Atla RDB* and the DOAJ. In terms of overlap, about half of the titles in my collection indexed in the DOAJ are also indexed in *Atla RDB*, whereas only a third of the titles indexed in *Atla RDB* are also indexed in the DOAJ. 43% of Catholic OA religion journals are indexed in neither *Atla RDB* nor the DOAJ, which means that the majority, or 57%, of the journals in my collection do appear in either *Atla RDB* or the DOAJ. Nevertheless, there is plenty of room for growth in both indexes.

CONCLUSION

Library budgets are as precarious as ever, forcing libraries to do more with less. One way to boost your library's journal collections

is by adding open access titles. As I have shown, there are a lot out there, but they are not always easy to find. When it comes to Catholic OA religion journals, the DOAJ indexes some, but Atla indexes more. I have curated a collection that goes beyond both, and that is somewhat representative of both OA journal publishing globally and of the global Catholic population. Once you have identified journals for inclusion, you will need to create and/or upload the relevant bibliographic records to your library's ILS. Once the records are available for searching, the vital work of telling faculty and students about these Catholic OA religion journals begins.²

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NOTES

- 1 Disclaimer: This presentation is not a product of the author's employment at Atla. The author is also a member of Atla and presented his personal research findings in that capacity. Any views expressed herein are those of the author.
- 2 If you know of other titles that should be included in the author's collection of Catholic OA religion journals, please contact him at bhughes@atla.com.

UK University Librarians in Theology & Religious Studies

Where Are They Now?

Christine Love-Rodgers, College Lead, Library Academic Support and Academic Support Librarian for Divinity, University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT This paper explores the roles of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) librarians in larger UK universities and their participation within the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Librarians (ABTAPL). Beginning by investigating the historical participation trends and current dynamics within TRS librarianship, it utilizes literature review, data analysis, and a bespoke survey targeting TRS librarians across the UK. This article identifies a disconnect between TRS university librarians and ABTAPL, contributing to limited event attendance and organizational engagement. The results indicate that this disengagement is influenced by a shift in librarian roles from subject specialists to more broad-based academic roles, compounded by a significant decline in TRS student enrollments and the shrinking presence of TRS departments within universities. The investigation recommends strategic changes for ABTAPL to increase relevancy and connection with university librarians.

BACKGROUND

Setting the Scene

In volume one of the *The Theological Librarian's Handbook* series, Carisse Berryhill sets out four contexts for defining a theological library. In her fourth and final definition, she states, "In large libraries associated with research universities, there will be many professional librarians, one of whom is designated the religion specialist who selects resources and assists readers with inquiries in religious studies" (Berryhill 2020, 9). I am one of these "religion specialist" librarians working in a large research university and have been so for most of my professional career. I am also a committee member of ABTAPL, the Association of British Theological and Philosophical

Librarians, and have had the pleasure and benefit of meeting theological librarians from all four of Berryhill's types of theological library at ABTAPL events. Gathered together by its purpose of helping those working in libraries containing theological, philosophical, and related materials, ABTAPL's members include theological college librarians, university librarians, cathedral librarians, booksellers, publishers and archivists.

My question for the investigation in this article is that very often when I'm attending an ABTAPL event, or seeing messages on the ABTAPL mailing list, I rarely find that religion specialist librarians like myself are in the room—often I am the only one. I wanted to find out why. Are these university librarians not present in ABTAPL because their roles make it no longer relevant for them? Or are university librarians not present in ABTAPL because they are not aware of ABTAPL as an organisation? Are other reasons to blame? To explore this, my investigation included a literature review, data analysis, and a small-scale survey of UK Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) librarians. As a religion specialist, this was very much a personal quest, and I set out to find my tribe.

Were Large Universities and ABTAPL Ever Together?

Before I began, I took a moment to ask the question, were large universities *ever* a significant part of ABTAPL? Unfortunately, ABTAPL's own membership data is limited to recent years. However, another useful data source is the ABTAPL *Bulletin*, which helpfully lists committee members and their institutions at the beginning of each issue. In its foundation years from 1956 to 1975, ABTAPL activity was focused in and around London, making the University of London a natural partner. Mr. K. Garside from Kings College Library and Reverend F. Courtney, S.J. from Heythrop College Library both took the role of ABTAPL Chairman twice.

In 1975, ABTAPL was reinvigorated under the leadership of John Howard from New College Library at the University of Edinburgh, and the dedicated work of the Honorary Secretary, Mary Elliott, from Kings College, University of London. Over the decades, other university librarians on the committee included Peter Larkin (University of Warwick), Evelyn Cornell (University of Leicester), Judith Shiel (University of Manchester), Honor Hania (University of Glasgow),

and Marion Smith, (University of Birmingham), to name just a few. The *Bulletin* also shows that there were some tensions around the involvement of university librarians. In 1974, John Howard wrote:

The number of university libraries has increased, more qualified staff are employed in all of them, and some have an element of subject specialization in their development of stock and staff. In 1956-66 there were few ABTAPL members from university libraries. I hope these libraries will now contribute an increasing number of members to the Association (Howard 1974).

In her farewell piece to ABTAPL in 2016, after forty years of involvement, Mary Elliott wrote:

I always felt that I was a bit of a fraud, being of necessity a generalist. At King's College London... I was responsible not only for classics, but Byzantine and Modern Greek, philosophy and music as well as theology... My fellow-attendees all worked in specialist theology libraries, so in no way did I feel that I was a true counterpart. I am very grateful for their acceptance of one not totally devoted to theological librarianship. (Elliott 2016).

This comment shows some of the aspects of ABTAPL's historical relationship with universities: key individuals from universities libraries serving on its committee, a wish for wider participation from the university sector, and something of a feeling of imposter syndrome in those university librarians who do engage with ABTAPL.

DEFINING UNIVERSITIES

When approaching the overall questions, I decided that the focus of my inquiry would be the 34 UK universities currently listed as members of the Theology and Religious Studies in Higher Education group (TRS-UK 2025). TRS UK is the professional association for academic departments, units, and subject associations of the study of Religion and Theology in the UK. When I talk about TRS libraries, from now on I am referring to libraries from this group of universities. Often, these universities have large libraries with substantial and significant TRS collections. Frequently, these are integrated into the library as part of the main sequence of collections, usually in a central main library building. These library collections support TRS degrees offered by their university, as well as researchers. Such a library may have a large library staff but may or may not be organised in a way that enables librarians to directly identify themselves with TRS. The University of Glasgow is an example of this kind of library.

Within the membership of ABTAPL, there are many librarians who would identify themselves as librarians providing university education, although they do not work in universities. These are librarians from theological colleges which characteristically have a single purpose theological library and are often solo-staffed or with a very small team. Typically, this small library supports ministry education and plays an active part in the life of the theological college, enabling the librarians to closely identify themselves with TRS. The degree education is validated by another, larger institution. An example of this kind of library is the London School of Theology. Librarians from this kind of library form the majority of ABTAPL's membership and I expect to meet them at ABTAPL events. For this reason, they are not the focus of my inquiry. However, I am grateful to colleagues in this group who responded to my survey and provided data that proved very useful for comparison purposes. I will be identifying this data as from theological college libraries.

There is a third category of library which I would identify as hybrid, or a single purpose theological library on its own site which is a discrete part of a larger TRS university library. It supports TRS degrees for that university, including ministry education, and has some devolved operational responsibilities but relies on the university for some or all its financial, staffing, and infrastructure support. TRS collections may also be held in other libraries in the university. My own library, New College Library Edinburgh, is an example of a hybrid library, as are the theological college libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham Universities.

Whatever Happened to Theology and Religious Studies?

News stories from the last few years have highlighted the closures of departments or courses in TRS, such as at the University of Chester (Paveley 2021) and Cardiff University (Ferguson 2025). While local reasons for proposed closures differ, the underlying situation is that UK student enrollments in TRS are dropping. A report in 2019 by the British Academy exposed the overall downward trend in enrollments into TRS courses in UK higher education, noting, “[t]here were around 6,500 fewer students in Theology and Religious Studies courses in higher education institutions in 2017/18 than there were in 2011/12” (Kain and Clark 2019).

More recent research by the British Academy's SHAPE Project (2025) highlights a dramatic decrease in TRS student numbers between 2011 and 2022. This project aims to understand regional disparity in the provision of different subject areas in higher education and tracks subject areas that have seen an increase or decrease in provision. It focuses on provision for first year UG degree UK domiciled students aged 20 and under and excludes distance learning only courses. The latest data for 2022/23 shows that FTE students have decreased by 53% since 2011/12. Out of a total of 46 TRS providers in 2023/24, only two were showing an increase in numbers (Edinburgh and Durham), while 20 saw no change and 24 saw a decrease. Within the subject landscape, the latest data shows that possibly only Classics is doing worse (27 course providers), whereas Philosophy is doing slightly better (65 providers), and History is doing even better (99 providers). There are regional variations—a different student funding landscape in Scotland may be one reason. For example, “In Scotland, the number of students studying traditional Humanities subjects like History and English Literature and Language has increased or stayed constant. The opposite is true in England. Scotland also sees student numbers in Classics on the rise as of 2022/23” (British Academy 2025).

Against this backdrop of decline, it is also important to remember that at least thirteen UK universities remain centres of excellence for TRS, as evidenced by the QS World University Rankings (QS Top Universities 2025). In 2025, four UK universities—Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, and Edinburgh—featured in the world top ten ranking. You may remember that these four institutions also featured in my definition of hybrid libraries above. It is notable that these four institutions all have outstanding single site theological libraries, and all are members of ABTAPL. This world success is fueled by library power!

CHANGES TO THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARY LANDSCAPE

Broader societal change, including the decline of historically dominant religious traditions, is also affecting students and the libraries that support them. For instance, the 2022 census in Scotland was the first in which 51.1% of respondents said they had “no religion,” up from 36.7% in 2011 (Cook 2024). This is just one of the broader

themes identified in the Atla Global Survey 2024 (Kutsko 2024), which also noted the increasing diversity of populations and cultures, the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of humanities and social science research, and the unstoppable advance of technologies as wider factors affecting theological libraries. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the existing pace of digital transformation in UK higher education libraries, with a rapid expansion of online services and e-source provision which are now here to stay.

For university librarians, the last ten years have also seen some specific changes in staffing structures and roles. Several large universities moved to functional staffing structures and away from a subject librarian model (Hoodless and Pinfield 2018). This change affected some ABTAPL member institutions, including Kings College London, University of Manchester, and University of Birmingham (Ashcroft et al. 2020). Typically, these new functional structures separated staff teams into “academic engagement” and “information literacy delivery,” meaning that there were no longer individual subject specialist contacts.

While there is a body of literature on the general impacts of both the new structures and the former subject librarian structures, I have struggled to find any literature at all that examines the specific impact of staffing structures on university library support for TRS. Nevertheless, it can be imagined that the double whammy of an academic subject area facing cuts and closures and a university library structure that has moved away from personal identification with TRS does not make engagement with a professional association focused on TRS libraries a high priority for university library staff.

METHODOLOGY

Data Analysis – TRS Library Websites and ABTAPL Data

As stated, my target group was the 34 institutions named in the TRS subject network Theology and Religious Studies UK. To understand more about the changes in the last ten years to librarians working in these universities, I visited the library websites of these institutions to see if I could identify a subject librarian for TRS. I was able to identify subject librarian contacts for TRS at 23 out of the 34 institutions, or at a rate of 67%. This meant that for 11 out

of 34 institutions, I could not identify a subject librarian by name. Frequently in this situation, inquirers were directed to a central library inquiries email or webform.

I then reviewed the Directory of Institutional Members (ABTAPL 2024) to identify which of the 34 TRS institutions were ABTAPL members. At this point in time, 12 of the 34 TRS universities were ABTAPL members. This means that only 35% of librarians in TRS universities are receiving the ABTAPL *Bulletin*, one of the key routes of ABTAPL communications.

Finally, I was able to review the membership data for the ABTAPL JISCMail list (JISCM@il 2025). This list is open not just to the UK academic community but worldwide. It is heavily used by ABTAPL members but is not restricted to them. I identified that 17 out of 34 TRS universities had librarians who were members of the ABTAPL JISCMail list. This means that 50% of TRS universities are not receiving ABTAPL communications via this important platform.

Atla 2024 Global Survey

In 2024, the Atla Global Survey reached librarians working in theological libraries across the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. I was fortunate enough to be able to review the anonymised dataset collected from this survey to see if it illuminated my questions.

There were 12 UK respondents to this survey, which was circulated via BETH and ABTAPL mailing lists. The anonymised data gives me limited insight into who the respondents were. However, the text responses to question nineteen, “to whom does the person who is the head of the library at your institution report,” give some insights into the nature of their institutions. I would venture to judge that potentially seven out of 12 UK respondents were working in a higher education context.

Ultimately, although the ATLA survey is revealing of general trends for all librarians working in a TRS context, the Atla survey data did not give me enough granularity to know if any TRS university librarians replied. Given my earlier data analysis, I think it is likely that the Atla survey did not reach librarians in most TRS universities because the survey was distributed via ABTAPL networks, and we know that TRS university librarians are poorly represented on these

networks. Even if it did reach them, I would suggest that a further barrier to survey engagement from a TRS university library is the language and context of the survey. It assumes the respondent identifies their institution as a “theological library,” which a librarian in a large institution and/or multi-disciplinary role is less likely to do.

Survey Distribution (December 2024 – January 2025)

These preliminary investigations revealed gaps in the data that supported the development of my own small-scale survey for TRS librarians in the UK. To create the questions, I drew on the Atla 2024 Global Survey and created some thematic questions of my own. My work surveying library websites had enabled me to identify contact emails of TRS subject librarians, if available, and generic enquiry emails for TRS universities if there was no subject librarian evident. I distributed the survey in December 2024, writing directly to the TRS subject librarians and libraries I had identified. To ensure the maximum data collection, I also shared the survey on the ABTAPL list (206 recipients), the CILIP Academic and Research Libraries Group list (875 recipients) and other smaller forums.

Survey Response

I received 27 responses: 21 responses from 18 TRS universities and six responses from theological colleges. In the TRS universities, there were multiple respondents from Oxford and Cambridge, and the majority (14 out of 18) of TRS responses came from my direct emails to individual librarians.

SURVEY RESULTS – EXPERIENCE OF TRS LIBRARIANS

Job Titles and Time Spent on TRS Work

Of 26 responses, 17 respondents gave job titles which related to academic liaison roles. These titles rarely included the words Theology or Religious Studies. Respondents from theological colleges were more likely to be called just “Librarian.”

Again, out of 26 responses, 17 (66%) indicated they spent less than 25% of their time on theology and religious studies related work, with eight saying they spent less than 10% of their time on

this work. These 17 were almost all TRS university librarians. The seven respondents that indicated they spent more than 50% of their time on TRS were either in theological college or Oxford/Cambridge libraries.

What kind of tasks do you engage in?

The highest scoring tasks identified were academic liaison, inquiry work, information literacy, and collection development. With over 18 different types of tasks plus several ‘others’ receiving responses, there is an extremely diverse range of tasks across library roles. TRS university responses also included “co-ordinating online resource lists” or “supporting academic staff with reading list management,” and teaching tasks such as “subject specific LibGuides [and] video tutorials” and “developing interactive workshops.” Responses from theological colleges were more likely to include facilities and equipment management, shelving, managing volunteers, and organizing displays.

What kind of library materials do you work with?

This question aimed to explore what library work with a variety of faith traditions might look like. Responses show that Christianity remains the most dominant faith tradition in the library materials consulted, but responses made it clear that librarians are working with a wide variety of religious traditions.

EXPLORING THE PURPOSE OF TRS LIBRARY ROLES

I set out five statements about the impact and purpose of their role and asked librarians to respond with their level of agreement. The highest level of agreement was for the statement “my work supports University teaching in Theology and Religious Studies,” and all respondents strongly or slightly agreed with this statement. There was general agreement from the TRS university respondents about the statement “my work supports current research and scholarship in Theology and Religious Studies,” with 19 out of 21 responses strongly or slightly in agreement. More polarised was “my work supports students who are training for religious ministry.” While 21 responses strongly or slightly agreed, six responses which disagreed

or didn't know were all from the TRS group. In contrast, theological college responses strongly agreed with this purpose. "My work supports the spiritual wellbeing of my university community" was the statement that received the highest levels of disagreement. Seven responses that disagreed and four that didn't know were all TRS respondents, while respondents that strongly agreed were from theological colleges. Finally, "my work supports the religious cultural heritage of the United Kingdom" had 18 responses that slightly or strongly agreed. Four disagreements were from TRS universities, where the respondent held an academic liaison role that did not include special collections. Librarians who had replied with job titles that included special collections roles unsurprisingly strongly agreed with this statement.

Have there been changes in the last five years to your work with TRS?

Three respondents commented that they were only recently in post and found it hard to speak for the past five years. Notable changes were the increasing dominance of digital materials over print and academic program changes merging Religion and Philosophy. Respondents also felt their work had changed to deliver more research skills training and embedded information literacy workshops. Pressures included a steep rise of students with additional educational needs and financial threats to library collections in the humanities.

Do you expect that there will be changes in the next five years to your work with TRS?

Strikingly, four respondents to this question expected that the next five years would see cuts to TRS provision, or even that the subject may disappear from their university. Three theological college respondents expected to see fewer ministry students and ensuing changes to ministry programmes. Other predominant themes were the increasing use of AI and the impact of big publisher deals, including Open Access. Other changes reported were the use of the library as study space rather than for reading print resources and the development of new TRS programs.

SURVEY ANALYSIS – TRS LIBRARIANS AND ABTAPL

The next section of the survey explored respondents' understanding and experiences of ABTAPL. The survey asked if respondents were aware of ABTAPL. 17 respondents (63%) were aware of ABTAPL. However, all ten negative responses were from the TRS group. When asked if they had attended an ABTAPL event, 19 respondents, or 70%, had never attended an ABTAPL event. Only three respondents from the TRS group had ever attended an ABTAPL event.

Survey respondents were asked if they would be interested in the services and events that ABTAPL provides. Answers indicated most interest in the mailing list followed by CPD sessions and the *Bulletin*. There was least interest in the annual conference and visits to libraries and archives. A request for event topics of interest produced this range of fascinating comments and topics:

- Special collections and archives.
- The opportunity to talk and network with other colleagues supporting Theology in University Libraries.
- Ensuring the survival of theological, philosophical, and related libraries in the face of declining student numbers and declining religious belief.
- Theological and philosophical librarianship as a form of spiritual practice.
- Collaboration between theological and philosophical libraries and the University Chaplaincy.
- Theological and philosophical library outreach work with local places of worship, schools, and communities.
- Marketing of collections to bring wider awareness.
- I do not have a TRS background so growing my knowledge on the challenges facing TRS collections would be of interest.
- Religious libraries and diversity: what you need to know. An ABC of the key religious texts in world religions and how they are used by their communities. How to handle religious texts of all faiths respectfully.

Finally, respondents were invited to submit any further comments. Some of these comments included:

- I cover half the subject areas at the University. . .and whilst I have attended a few subject area events (History, Chinese, and Medicine), I couldn't possibly get involved with every area and continue to do my job.
- As I have only just started working with Theology and Religion this year and am also responsible for all the other subjects in the Arts and Humanities and Law, it is difficult for me to find time to increase my knowledge of specific subjects and their library provision/needs, but once I have found my feet more in this role, I intend to rectify that.
- I think ABTAPL is great and I've learned a lot from the events that I've attended. I'm grateful for their work and support.

In summary, responses indicated that librarians in TRS universities had a relatively low awareness of ABTAPL and its activities. However, they were interested in a range of activities and topics that ABTAPL provides.

CONCLUSIONS

This investigation began by noting the role of the “religion specialist” in a large library as one of the roles in theological librarianship, and the inclusion of this role within the spectrum of ABTAPL members. It is clear that the academic subject area of TRS and the roles of subject specialist librarians have faced significant changes in recent years. Where are the university librarians in TRS now? For the most part, right where they always were—specialist librarians are still present in some numbers. These librarians are under pressure, with TRS forming only a part of their wide-ranging roles. Heavily time-committed, they may not be able to attend ABTAPL events, even those crafted with a TRS university audience in mind. But TRS librarians both work with digital materials and work digitally. They may find online CPD more convenient to access. And, while they may not self-identify as theological librarians or as working in a theological library, they are interested in what ABTAPL provides or could provide—once they know about it. Rather than defining ourselves as working in theological libraries, I would define a theological librarian as one who

can say yes to any of the five statements of purpose in the survey: supporting TRS teaching, TRS research and scholarship, ministry education, spiritual well-being, and religious cultural heritage. A tick in any of these boxes means there is no need for imposter syndrome for any university librarian joining ABTAPL's activities.

For ABTAPL, I believe this investigation shows that TRS university librarians must not become a blind spot in planning and provision. In fact, changes in the higher education environment mean that TRS university librarians need a subject-based professional network more than ever, especially when navigating new roles or additional new responsibilities working with TRS. We should be alerted to the fact that existing ABTAPL networks may not reach them, and the print *Bulletin* may never be seen by them, and that to reach them we need to widen our promotional strategies. The traditional ABTAPL model of a representative from an institution who attends the spring conference each year may not apply here, as TRS university librarians will need to pick and choose from different subject-related or generic professional development events when allocating their professional development time. Membership and event models need to be flexible to accommodate non-member or other types of attendance. Events remain critical, as I believe TRS librarians must see relevancy and build a personal connection for them to decide to engage with ABTAPL. Events are a key place for this to happen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I recommend that ABTAPL should:

- 1) Consider how we can increase our visibility to additionally appeal to TRS Universities and proactively reach out to them. For instance, our ABTAPL promotional leaflet could be revised to include a version targeted for TRS Universities and large libraries. Our communications plans for events could extend to academic library sector-wide and national mailing lists, as well as ABTAPL lists.
- 2) Consider what digital and/or open services we can provide to this group to connect them with ABTAPL. With Atla's support, we are producing an edited monograph volume in 2026, *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom & Ireland*, which will be open access. The research outputs

from *Theological Libraries* may make potential web guide resources, which could be published as LibGuides using the Springshare platform already in use by many UK and US higher education librarians. We are also exploring the potential of producing the ABTAPL *Bulletin* as online open access.

- 3) Remember what ABTAPL has that is unique and TRS librarians want: ABTAPL knows about theology and religion resources! We are delivering a new series of online seminars in 2026, *Libraries of Faith*, spotlighting the libraries of ABTAPL members and sharing expertise about these unique resources. We are also exploring options for delivering our spring conference as a hybrid event.

Finally, I fully acknowledge that this survey was biased towards subject librarians when talking about TRS university librarians. Further work could explore interest in ABTAPL from other job roles within large university libraries such as Special Collections and metadata.

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Assessing Information Literacy Instruction with TATIL

Gauging Usefulness for Theological Education Students

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ABSTRACT During the 2024-2025 academic year, BSK Theological Seminary examined the institutional assessment potential for the Threshold Achievement Test for Information Literacy (TATIL) in a master's level seminary setting through pilot testing of students near the beginning of their academic career. The student test results themselves, while largely positive overall, were a bit mixed for some individual test takers. The pilot program was successful in helping form plans for institutional assessment and in exploring the administration of external testing and the interpretation of the results. This report addresses the basics and a few important aspects and limiting factors of TATIL, as well as including suggestions for potential use and possible implementation.

The Threshold Achievement Test for Information Literacy (TATIL) is a tool inspired by the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. The tool was developed by Carrick Enterprises and is offered through the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL). It is divided into four modules which roughly correspond to the six frames of the Framework: modules one and three cover two frames each, while modules two and four each cover one frame per module (Threshold Achievement, n.d.-e). The modules were developed and tested over several years and considered to be both valid and reliable (Doyle et al. 2019). TATIL is geared toward undergraduates, but our school was interested in evaluating its usefulness for master's level students in theological education, specifically with an eye toward course/institutional assessment (Threshold Achievement, n.d.-b).

BSK Theological Seminary pre- and post-tested students enrolled in INT 2501: Introduction to Theological Education during the Fall and Spring semesters of the 2024-2025 academic year with Module Three (Research and Scholarship) of TATIL. Preliminary exploration of LIS literature and other sources did not reveal a great deal of information about the test, so we were interested in piloting this module in an attempt to get a sense of TATIL's functionality and how it might fit our assessment goals. A few articles mention TATIL, but we did not find much analysis (Drabinski 2017; Doyle et al. 2019; Davidson Squibb and Zanzucchi 2020; Ibrahim et al. 2024). Clark and Radcliff¹ (2019) address TATIL in more detail in a conference presentation.

Our testing sample size was small: between the two semesters we have data for 16 students for pre-testing, but only 12 who completed both the pre- and post-tests. The difference being that a few students changed registration before post-testing and, significantly, one student in each semester did not have post-test scores recorded for what is assumed to be either technical or user error. We limited our analysis (so far) to only those students who completed both because our main goal was attempting to assess course performance by focusing on overall results for the group.

Our results tended toward improvement but were clearly mixed, with many testers having lower scores in some areas on the post-test than on the pre-test. Reporting received from testing results is extensive. Every student who completes the test can, depending on test setup, receive a summary feedback report. The test administrator receives a longer report (26 pages in our case) as well as individual scores for Knowledge Outcomes and Dispositions and a list of test questions asked. Of the four instances of testing, the list of test questions for Module 3 were all identical. What is not immediately apparent is if the questions were asked in the same order or if the listed answers were randomized. Knowing it is the same batch of questions is helpful as we evaluate our pilot and move forward. Three months is likely too short an interval for pre- and post-testing on the same question set; a few students mentioned that many of the questions seemed familiar.

There are a few practicalities to consider when using TATIL. The first is cost; there are two basic plans: pre-pay (\$8 per student per

module) and post-pay (\$9 per student per module); there is also an unlimited plan for large scale testing (Threshold Achievement, n.d.-c). We opted for post-pay and it is worth noting that we experienced payment disruptions each of the four times we tested. These were all solvable problems and the representatives at ALA, which handles payment, were always helpful and pleasant. However, it was one more thing to have to manage every time we tested, and we could not see testing results until payment issues were eventually sorted out. Secondly, setup before testing requires many decisions to be made about things like authentication for those taking the test, informed consent for those being tested, institutions for comparing scores, and numerous other factors. Third is the time commitment for testing, as “each module is designed to be completed within 50 minutes” (Threshold Achievement, n.d.-d). Our users essentially bore that out, although we had some real outliers, both much slower and much quicker, in actual practice. With a distributed student body, the only feasible testing scenario for us was to set it up to be taken unmonitored at the time of the student’s choice.

We are still interested in using TATIL but would not suggest pre- and post-testing on a course-length timeline. We are currently considering whether pre- and post- on a degree-length timeline would give us meaningful institutional assessment data. TATIL could also be useful for individual student interventions. The detailed reporting could help this to be fairly targeted and this seems closer to its advertised purpose (Threshold Achievement, n.d.-a). We would also recommend being attentive to testing conditions. This pilot testing was very much exploratory in our case, but one hypothesis for our mixed results related to timing/testing conditions. Pre-testing occurred during the second week of class when students are typically fresh and eager but post-testing occurred during the week before finals which can find them busy, behind, and tired. It would be difficult for us at this point to justify expanding our testing to include additional modules covering other aspects of the Framework, not just in terms of increased institutional costs, but also taking into account student time spent testing at an estimated 50 minutes per module.

TATIL is an intriguing tool which was relatively easy for us to pilot test, but the costs could add up quickly with additional modules and/or a larger student population. If we were to start again, we would consider putting one or more of our staff members through all four

modules first, both to get a better sense of testing experience and to gauge which modules track best with our institutional outcomes. There are few substitutes for experience and student testing related to institutional assessment could have been better informed by staff more fully engaging in the role of learner.

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NOTES

- 1 Radcliff is a founder of Carrick Enterprises.

What Does It Take to Build an Open Access Theological Encyclopaedia?

Considerations and Challenges

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ABSTRACT The *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (saet.ac.uk) is a free online reference work dedicated to widening access to theological scholarship. With more than 200 peer-reviewed articles already published, the *Encyclopaedia* is a readily available resource for students, academics, members of faith-based institutions, and interested laypeople. This contribution shares some reflections on the opportunities and challenges involved in building an open access theological encyclopaedia for the 21st century. In particular, how has the publication's online format and open access philosophy shaped its behind-the-scenes strategies for information management? This brief overview focuses especially on enriching, preserving, and accessing theological information in the context of a digital encyclopaedic resource. Finally, it highlights a particular challenge faced by theological e-resources that do not share the static publication model represented by journals and e-books.

St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology (SAET) (saet.ac.uk) is an open access online theological reference work. Users exploring the *Encyclopaedia* will find more than 200 peer-reviewed scholarly articles written from an emic perspective covering topics in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, with the collection continuing to grow. Among the many practical, conceptual, and technical considerations of developing a digital theological encyclopaedia, several pragmatic questions about the SAET's contributions to theological knowledge have accompanied the SAET team since the very beginnings of the project.

First, what *gaps* in knowledge or available information are we addressing, and *who* is this information for? As the project's foundational goal is to widen access to theological knowledge—especially where access to it may be limited—our target audience is broad:

students, academics, ministers and faith leaders, people of faith, and interested members of the public. So, how can we make the information *accessible* and *useful* to these groups of potential readers? Additionally, what *information strategies* might be helpfully applied to theological scholarship? Finally, what is actually *achievable* within the scope of the project? Alongside and flowing from these considerations, there have naturally been certain challenges—some practical, others conceptual, and many technical in nature.

Several of these challenges relate to building and maintaining *SAET* as a reliable resource of theological information: keeping articles up-to-date and accurate for readers to reflect progress in the discipline without loss of information; making sure articles are discoverable by readers, libraries, educators, and other information providers; connecting *SAET* to the wider informational ecosystem; and ensuring the long-term survival of articles and the information they contain.

From a technical standpoint, our focus has been on *enriching*, *preserving*, and *accessing* theological information. As a digital resource, we continue to reflect on how to make the most of digital tools to present and encode theological information. With this in mind, we have paid particular attention to metadata, text encoding, cataloguing, and archiving as strategies to manage theological information in *SAET*'s articles.

To 'enrich' the theological information contained within articles, *SAET* makes use of Extensible Mark-up Language (XML), a format that encodes text using machine- and human-readable mark-up tags. A distinct advantage of XML is that it can hold additional metadata about the information being encoded. For example, if an article uses a word or phrase in a different language from the rest of the text, the mark-up language can embed metadata about which language is being used. This additional embedded information is thus available to anyone accessing the article in XML format. To keep the article XML documents compatible with other systems and legible to human readers outside the project, *SAET* follows the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) standard rather than our own internal coding language.

To avoid loss of the theological information we publish, *SAET*'s preservation strategy works in tandem with its publication and update cycle. A combination of version control and archiving measures allow

SAET to preserve older versions of articles when a newer version is released. Long-term preservation of article files is assured, in part, thanks to access to institutional infrastructure kindly provided by the University of St. Andrews, whose technical support and resources will allow *SAET* archives to remain intact and accessible into the future.

All our efforts to enrich, update, and preserve articles would mean very little if articles cannot be discovered and accessed by readers. How do we make sure readers (and information service providers) can discover and access articles? Metadata is, of course, essential for making articles discoverable and connecting with the digital ecosystem. We are grateful that we have not had to do this alone: Atla, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and ixTheo have all been vital partners in allowing *SAET* to become more integrated into scholarly indexes and institutional library catalogues. Compatibility with Google Scholar and automated search engine indexing has also been significant for wider discoverability, especially in relation to those who are outside of academia or do not have access to institutional library resources.

As its own open access web platform, *SAET* attempts to increase accessibility to its theological scholarship by using lightweight pages, PDF downloads for offline access, and immediate access to *SAET* articles and search tools with no user log-in required. As *SAET* continues to grow, there will be ongoing challenges and considerations to navigate along the way. Like any such project, these will include questions of funding; technical matters, such as potential development of additional digital tools; where and how the resource is used; and continuing attention to reader needs and preferences.

A particular challenge arises from *SAET*'s dynamic, if traceable, editing and revision model: we have found that establishing *SAET* as an open access and updatable theological e-resource positions it slightly out at the edges of the current paradigm for digital scholarship, which is built around static forms of information such as ebooks and journal articles. Developing open access resources in alternative or creative formats in response to reader needs may raise further difficulties for indexing and discovery if those resources are not recognisable to directories or catalogues as anything other than webpages. This, in turn, can obscure the academic nature of such

resources, perhaps implying an absence of peer-reviewed content or a lack of scholarly reliability.

We continue to actively seek partnerships with theological libraries, library associations, and educators to learn from educational and technical insights arising from the experience of those fields which could help *SAET* to be increasingly accessible, useful, and effective as a digital theological encyclopaedia.

Bridging Cultures

Curating Resources for a Vibrant Hispanic/ Latino Theological Collection

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ABSTRACT Over the past decade, ATS accredited seminaries have expanded their outreach to Latino communities by creating Spanish-only, bilingual, or Latino-centric programs at the certificate, graduate, and doctoral levels. The proliferation of these programs has coincided with the shift towards distance-learning modalities, especially after the COVID pandemic. Theological libraries have been tasked with providing access to databases and online catalogs, as well as acquiring resources for courses taught in Spanish or about Hispanic and Latin American theologies. This essay discusses strategies for curating Hispanic and Latin American digital resources for distance-learning programs in Spanish.

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of Hispanic/Latinx academic programs in seminaries presents libraries with the opportunity to expand their collections with the richness of Hispanic and Latin American theologies. The acquisition of digital resources in Spanish requires a process of digital curation to make the most of what is available through ProQuest Ebook Central, EBSCO, and others. This includes becoming informed about digital resources available outside those systems.

The first step for designing a digital curation strategy for our collection is to review the specific goals of the Hispanic/Latinx program and the profile of the intended distance-learners. The seminary might be working with an established denominational or independent Hispanic Bible institute or starting its own program. The curriculum for a Hispanic/Latinx program will differ greatly depending on whether it targets non-Latinx students or the community itself. There might be other emphases requiring different

types of resources. Are these distance-learners living in the US or in Latin America and the Caribbean, or a combination of both? What are the languages to be considered? Due to the bicultural nature of *Latinidad*, most classes will be translingual and expect to have access to resources in English and Spanish.

The second component of our profile should address the specific requirements of the program, such as degree type, educational level, lay ministry involvement, ordination or credentialing processes, and the like. Is the seminary's faculty teaching in the program? Their expectations for resources may differ from those of external or adjunct instructors. Any information related to previous textbooks will be useful to define areas of interest or suggest more recent works to the instructors. Conducting surveys with faculty and administrators provides vital insights to ensure our resources are tailored and relevant. Use the results to set the parameters of your collection.

The resulting parameters will help us to define what we are looking for. Hispanic American theology, as classified by the Library of Congress, was introduced in the 1960's and it was almost synonymous with Hispanic American Catholic theology. It is still the classification for works done by U.S. scholars who identify as Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e (Medina, 2009). Among its many branches we find: Evangelical (or *evangélico*), mainline, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Catholic, Mujerista, Latina Evangélica Intercultural Feminist, Mestizo/Brown, Afro-Latino/a/e/x, and Queer/LGBTQ+ perspectives, with all sorts of combinations of the above. A central tenet of Hispanic American theology is "teología en conjunto," a collaborative effort to theologize together while retaining the distinctiveness of each tradition. This commitment to dialogue and collaboration forms a bridge of cultures between North and South. It broadens the relevance of Hispanic and Latin American theologies for our programs.

Most libraries have these works in their collections even when they might not have been part of the curriculum. This means that even Latinx faculty might need reference guidance to find these resources. Organizations such as The Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI), Hispanic Summer Program (HSP), and the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH) are good

sources of information about Hispanic American theologies. Even the Society of Pentecostal Studies (SPS) has become a place where younger scholars present their work. It also helps that these works are widely available through most content providers.

Latin American theologies are the work of scholars living in Latin America and the Caribbean. There are two main categories: Catholicism and Protestantism or *Evangélicos*, not to be confused with evangelicals. On the Protestant side, we find Misión Integral (integral mission), Pentecostal, Mainline, Indigenous, and other movements. These groups are known for their vibrant expressions of faith and community engagement. The Catholic tradition encompasses Traditional, Liberation, Charismatic, Popular, and Indigenous theologies. Each of these strands offers a different perspective on how faith interacts with social justice, cultural heritage, and personal spirituality. They are written in multiple languages—Spanish, English, and Portuguese.

Catholic Editorial Verbo Divino and Protestant Editorial Clie, both based in Spain, are leading publishers for resources from Latin America. Verbo Divino is well-known for its strong catalog of academic theological and biblical scholarship. Clie, on the other hand, is recognized for its extensive range of non-academic resources for Christian ministry and translations from U.S. authors. Clie has also expanded its academic catalog with the addition of a subscription journal, *Biblia y Teología*, and other titles by Hispanic authors. There are at least fifty other publishers available via content providers. The vast majority are Catholic universities from Spain and Latin America. Ebook Central also includes content from smaller Protestant publishers such as Puma, Kairós, and Patmos, among others.

We find a vibrant landscape of theologies in the US and Latin America, but unfortunately, they do not represent a big market for content providers. Therefore, we must look to other alternatives such as the independent publishing efforts of Latino institutes and organizations. For example, the Center for Latino Studies, affiliated with the Pentecostal Theological Seminary (Cleveland, TN), has published monographs and collective works on topics such as migration and church history. Other schools are following this approach, publishing on practical theology, homiletics, and Christian ethics. These titles feature Latino and Latin American scholars from North and South

and are promoted via social media and during conferences. They are available in digital formats through Amazon.

Something similar can be said of open access resources across the Caribbean and Latin America. Universities and theological and religious organizations are filling the need for more contextualized resources. Many of the open access academic journals are available through the Atla database, and ebooks can be found in the websites of the same organizations. Gasparotto (2018) encourages the use of Google's Custom Search to find resources solely in Latin America, which could be a useful tool for programs with international students.

What about translations? Translations are essential in theological and biblical studies for dialoguing with one another across the world. But, Hispanic/Latinx communities have also been at a great disadvantage to make their contributions known amidst the prevalence of translated resources from English in theological and Christian ministry studies. These days, Latino scholars in the US are working to get their work translated into Spanish to communicate with the diverse Latino community at home and with their peers in Latin America. The same is happening from Spanish to English in a way that encourages others to discover scholarly work from the Americas. Content providers carry very few of these newer translations, but it is important to be aware of their existence.

With all this, let us not forget that our students and faculty in the US are still seeking contextualized content that reflects the experiences of Latino communities in the US. Institutional repositories are an often-unexplored source of research on a variety of issues related to practical ministry among these communities. They feature theses and doctoral dissertations not only from the US, but also from distance students in different parts of Latin America. They can be used as case studies for teaching and further reflection on qualitative research. Atla has a database of institutional repositories and is currently working on Project Eureka, a central hub where institutions can share the work of their graduates. Librarians are working to provide high-quality resources to Hispanic/Latino programs. A digital curation approach could help us to serve better our learning communities.

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Access Beyond Borders

Expanding Open-Access Theological Research Through Digitization

*Colyn Wolmut, Head of Collection Development, Graduate Theological Union
– Flora Lamson Hewlett Library*

ABSTRACT: The Graduate Theological Union (GTU) received an Atla Digitization Grant which was used to pay for staff scanning operators supplied by the Internet Archive (IA). The initial appeal for funds focused on digitizing the John Capistran Borley Collection of Islamic Manuscripts; a collection of manuscripts that is frequently used in class visits and student scholarship. The collection was deemed in need of pre-digitization conservation work and removed from the initial appeal, but new public domain materials were identified to scan. The project also served as a testing ground for the second collaborative initiative between IA and the GTU which involved the installation of their scanning equipment for use onsite at the GTU.

Access Beyond Borders: Expanding Open-Access Theological Research Through Digitization was conceived as a project in response to demonstrated lost access to Archives and Special Collections during COVID closures. In addition, regular year-over-year use of a particular manuscript collection for class visits and independent student projects lead us at Graduate Theological Union (GTU) to believe there was a specific need to digitize heavily used rare collections.

Leading up to the effort described in this paper, the GTU Flora Lamson Hewlett Library suffered a significant loss in physical space and had to reduce its main library printed book count by approximately ~60,000 titles. A collaboration with the Internet Archive (IA) was initiated and volumes were irrevocably donated to IA for eventual scanning and hosting on archive.org. Terms of the donation included IA use of GTU bibliographic records and a record dump of surrogate URLs into the GTU catalog for inclusion in an 856 field. To date, over 90,000 surrogates are available on the GTU Library landing page (Internet Archive n.d.).

As courses returned to in-person instruction, a particular course in the Sacred Texts Program requested a special collections session with the John Capistran Borley Collection of Islamic Manuscripts. This collection is comprised of 106 manuscript texts with one printed work. Clay-Edward Dixon, Collection Development Librarian, and the author brought a significant selection of manuscripts into the classroom. The response was phenomenal, and one student expressed an intention to publish on the materials.

In her excitement, she wanted to work with the library to digitize the materials so she could more easily research them as she traveled frequently. She continued to pressure library staff, and we began pursuing grant opportunities.

Beyond irrevocable donations, in certain cases IA is willing to install a local scanning center which works onsite with materials that an institution will not donate. The terms of this agreement include matching funds from the institution to pay IA scanning operators at the worksite. All equipment is lent and installed at the institution by IA, and as with donated materials, they manage metadata, technical support, quality control, and hosting in perpetuity.

Having learned about this program, we began to solicit funds to employ local operators. Two granting agencies provided enough funds to install a center at the GTU. Operator training began in July of 2024.

Metadata control is processed in two ways. A cart-specific spreadsheet is populated. This spreadsheet is uploaded and the work order is established. No new volumes may be added to the workflow from the point of upload. New volumes will populate a new spreadsheet. Using the bibliographic record on the spreadsheet, IA will access the MARC record via z39.50 for inclusion on the surrogate's public view display.

Unfortunately, the bulk of the Borley condition is in too fragile condition to withstand scanning with the equipment and staff skill available at this time. Consequently, we looked for other types of materials which would benefit the global theological community if made freely available online.

Focused on public domain materials or orphan works, we began scanning early GTU member school theses and dissertations. As a single year's volume comprised many theses, each with their own bibliographic record, we decided to scan each thesis with a target including the titles which preceded and followed it in the hopes that users could easily collocate all theses in a single volume.

Another category of material which was chosen for the project was Shared Print Commitments. The GTU participates in the Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC) Shared Print Program. This program promotes retention commitments from libraries with unique or rarely held circulating print items. Provisions include circulating these collections through Inter-Library Loan and offering titles to member institutions first should unexpected circumstances occur which necessitate the withdraw of materials.

In the GTU's retention commitments it was found that a large number of 19th and early 20th century imprints were being requested through this program. Many of these volumes were in condition too friable to safely circulate. We approached SCELC about a solution to the problem, and they agreed that providing access to a digital surrogate and sequestering the damaged volumes would be a sufficient substitute for physically circulating access. Along these lines, we also routed badly damaged works which could withstand scanning with careful handling, but not further circulation, into the workflow as well.

Conservation issues were revealed as titles were pulled. Very often a rebound book from the 19th century would be found to be stable enough to circulate but bound too tightly to digitize. In other cases, do-it-yourself solutions to handling problems were explored. In addition to commercially available cradles and snakes, custom plastic sheets were cut to gently flatten pages, wooden dowels were used as spine supports, and foam sheets were layered to support either cover as the pages were turned from left to right. It should be noted that no barrier layer was used with non-archival supports, as contact time was short enough to disallow any transfer or damage from off-gassing.

Beyond conservation challenges, some administrative obstacles occurred. We were asked to provide furniture for the scanning equipment and did so to specification, but the equipment is not modular

enough to accommodate ergonomic considerations for the operator. One employee experienced repetitive stress injury symptoms and moved on to other pursuits. Another operator left the area for other prospects. We employed two sets of operators in a period of less than six months. In addition to the training on IA equipment, details of safe handling take some time to become reflexive. At the point at which a team member was replaced we needed to fall back on more stable volumes as they learned equipment and handling practices, i.e., the workflow needed to be flexible to accommodate the various and building skill levels of the operators.

As we did not meet fundraising goals for the entire first year of operator time, invoicing became a small issue. Invoices were based on complexity of image, i.e., foldout or oversize, not hours of operation. At the point of moving from staging to production site, invoices were automatically generated. Unfortunately, this meant invoicing was erratic at first and took some time to become routine.

We continue to seek funding to conserve and digitize the entirety of the Borley Collection. In the meantime, we are working through our unique public domain materials in an effort to provide universal access through surrogates made available and downloadable on archive.org.

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Using an Open-Source Library Catalog for Specialized Bibliographies

Terry Dwain Robertson, Seminary Librarian, Andrews University

ABSTRACT This presentation reports on two specialized bibliography projects: The Andrews Bibliography of Ethnic/Minority Scholarship in Theology (ABEST) and the Hisban Interactive Archive Project (HIAP). An open-source library catalog, Koha, was used. The processes of citation collection and representation are discussed.

BACKGROUND FOR ABEST

As a part of a Lilly Endowment, Inc., Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative Grant to support theological education for pastors in urban settings, the seminary grant team at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary proposed a bibliography of BIPOC authors that enriches Seminary pedagogy. The motivation was to meet a felt need as expressed in 2021, to raise the profile of BIPOC theologians and biblical scholars. The project was supported by the Seminary and approved by the Lilly Endowment. Work began on the project in the fall of 2022.

ABEST Purpose Statement: God asks us to serve all ethnic and cultural groups (Matt. 28:19). This requires us to reflect theologically outside of our own cultural context. To support this, the Andrews Bibliography of Ethnic Minority Scholarship in Theology (abest.andrews.edu) will help you locate academic resources in the fields of biblical, theological, and pastoral studies by Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous authors. ABEST has been created by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in partnership with Lilly Endowment Inc.

The bibliography's expectations included publishing it in a digital interface that was familiar to general users, expandable over time, and sustainable (no cash commitments). Many excellent products would have worked admirably for this project but they would have

required ongoing financial obligations. So we selected Koha, an open-source library management system.

CITATION HARVESTING FOR ABEST

The first problem we faced was to identify relevant authors. Graduate student assistants reviewed public faculty pages from ATS member schools. Potential authors for inclusion in the bibliography were determined based on the evidence from those pages. Of these, approximately 700 were included.

The second problem was to find an efficient way to enter the citations into the database. Several challenges emerged. The most difficult was the prospect of training and supervising student assistants in data entry. We also needed to clarify which entries to include and what “added value” to incorporate. The logistics of growing a live database one entry at a time also were not appealing. We landed on having the student assistants perform author searches in *Atla Religion Database (Atla RDB)* and export the results into the EndNote bibliographic manager. This harvesting tool proved congenial for the students, though they did not discriminate regarding reference types.

MARC RECORD DEVELOPMENT

The third problem was to transfer the data from EndNote to the Koha database. First, we exported the citations into a tab-delimited spreadsheet. This process worked exceptionally well for standardizing and adding fields. The student assistants were assigned tasks on a shared Google Sheet. After the funds for student assistants were depleted, I toggled between Excel and Open Refine to complete the added-value features. These included adding subject headings for the featured authors to distinguish them from other co-authors; delimiting the entries to formal scholarly articles, book chapters, and books; campus access links to content; public access links to content; and curriculum tags. Then I added MARC tags used in Koha as column headings. This final spreadsheet was uploaded into MarcEdit and imported into Koha. Tweaks were needed for titles with Greek and Hebrew fonts, but other than that, records were displayed as intended.

As it stands now, ABEST includes citations for 506 books, 640 chapters in edited books, and 3174 journal articles. This data reflects the work of approximately 700 authors from ATS faculty across North America. Based upon their race/ethnicity as reflected in ATS data, the data distinguishes four categories: Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous.

EVALUATION

In retrospect, I suggest this process proved efficient and allowed for a typical learning trajectory. Contrasted with the direct entry of each citation, which would have required much more training and fixed the fields in ways that were not adequately developed until much later. As such, we could create the added-value features over time and then present the complete final product.

The link to ABEST is <https://libguides.andrews.edu/ABEST>. Documentation on the scope, delimitations, added value fields, and search tips is provided at <https://libguides.andrews.edu/ABEST>. The next steps include updating coverage with new citations, engaging authors for additional citations, including authors who may not be ATS faculty, and promoting the use of the database.

BACKGROUND FOR HIAP

Andrews University has an ongoing program of archaeological digs in Jordan, beginning in 1968. As of the date of the presentation, a team from Andrews University was working on a site in Jordan, and was able to see the missiles flying back and forth overhead from Israel and Iran. This fifty-year-plus legacy of collaboration between Andrews University and Jordan in the Madaba Plains region southwest of Amman is unparalleled. The objective of the HIAP is to facilitate research and access to the findings of these digs. Drs. Oystein LaBianca, Paul J. Ray, Jr., and I were awarded Faculty Grants from the Andrews University Office of Research and Creative Scholarship to digitize and make publicly accessible for ongoing research the hidden collections of the Institute of Archaeology.

PHASE I: THE HISBAN BIBLIOGRAPHY

The challenge this bibliography addresses is that many publications help support archaeological research on Hisban and the surrounding region. However, because these citations represent a variety of publishers and genres from over 50 years, they cannot readily be found in one source. So, we found and/or scanned searchable PDF copies of over 300 articles by the original dig participants and an additional 1,000 publications pertinent to the archaeological story of the region. These PDF files are in a non-public archive with locally controlled access and are available for text mining and controlled access AI tools.

However, the citations are provided in a public-facing bibliography that includes links to where any user can find the content, whether or not affiliated with the project. Many of the citations by the original participants are open access, so the bibliography links to them in the Andrews University institutional repository. Currently, the bibliography exists as a PDF file. The proposal is to move it to a Koha database to enhance public access and searching. See <https://libguides.andrews.edu/HIAP>. The works by Andrews University authors on archaeology are aggregated in the institutional repository, see <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/hiap/>.

PHASE II: THE DIGITAL PRESERVATION OF DIG RECORDS FOR 1968 TO 1975

Deep in the Institute for Archaeology are unique hard copy records for the archaeological digs at Hisban from 1968 to 1975. These include scrapbooks of site documentation photographs, an object index on 5x7 cards, and handwritten field notes in file boxes. All are in a deteriorating condition.

We have scanned over 6,000 photographs and are still going strong. See <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/hiap-photos/>. We explored uploading a subset of photos into an instance of a Koha catalog. However, we are also exploring a repository-based solution to empower a search that correlates photographs with the full text of publications and documents.

EVALUATION

The display features of Koha are limited. Adding thumbnails of the photos would help, though that may be difficult. Full-text searching is not an option in Koha for publications, and the correlation of photographs to text would not be enhanced. Thus, there is interest in finding a repository-based solution. However, we plan to use Koha for the bibliography.

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HISTORICAL ANNUAL CONFERENCES

1947–2026

YEAR	PLACE	HOST
1947	Louisville, KY	Louisville Presbyterian Seminary
1948	Dayton, OH	Bonebrake Theological Seminary
1949	Chicago, IL	Chicago Theological Seminary
1950	Columbus, OH	Evangelical Lutheran Seminary and Capital University
1951	Rochester, NY	Colgate-Rochester Divinity School
1952	Louisville, KY	Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
1953	Evanston, IL	Garrett Biblical Institute
1954	Chicago, IL	Chicago Theological Seminary
1955	New York, NY	Union Theological Seminary
1956	Berkeley, CA	Pacific School of Religion
1957	Fort Worth, TX	Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
1958	Boston, MA	Boston University School of Theology
1959	Toronto, ON	Knox College
1960	St. Paul, MN	Bethel College and Seminary
1961	Washington, DC	Wesley Theological Seminary
1962	Hartford, CT	Hartford Seminary Foundation
1963	Mill Valley, CA	Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary
1964	Kansas City, MI	St. Paul School of Theology
1965	New York, NY	General Theological Seminary
1966	Louisville, KY	Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
1967	Chicago, IL	McCormick Theological Seminary

YEAR	PLACE	HOST
1968	St. Louis, MO	Concordia Seminary
1969	Pittsburgh, PA	Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
1970	New Orleans, LA	New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
1971	Pasadena, CA	Pasadena College
1972	Waterloo, ON	Waterloo Lutheran University
1973	Bethlehem, PA	Moravian Theological Seminary
1974	Denver, CO	Iliff School of Theology
1975	S. Hamilton, MA	Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
1976	Grand Rapids, MI	Calvin Theological Seminary
1977	Vancouver, BC	Vancouver School of Theology
1978	Latrobe, PA	Saint Vincent College
1979	New Brighton, MN	Bethel Theological Seminary
1980	Denver, CO	Iliff School of Theology
1981	St. Louis, MO	Christ Seminary — Seminex
1982	Toronto, ON	Toronto School of Theology
1983	Richmond, VA	United Theological Seminary in Virginia
1984	Holland, MI	Western Theological Seminary
1985	Madison, NJ	Drew University
1986	Kansas City, KS	Rockhurst College
1987	Berkeley, CA	Graduate Theological Union
1988	Wilmore, KY	Asbury Theological Seminary
1989	Columbus, OH	Trinity Lutheran Seminary
1990	Evanston, IL	Garrett-Evangelical Seminary and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary
1991	Toronto, ON	University of Toronto, Trinity College, and Toronto School of Theology
1992	Dallas, TX	Southern Methodist University
1993	Vancouver, BC	Vancouver School of Theology, Regent College, and Carey Theological College
1994	Pittsburgh, PA	Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry

YEAR	PLACE	HOST
1995	Nashville, TN	Divinity Library of Vanderbilt University and Tennessee Theological Library Association
1996	Denver, CO	Iliff School of Theology
1997	Boston, MA	Boston University and Boston Theological Institute
1998	Leesburg, VA	Virginia Theological Seminary and Washington Theological Consortium
1999	Chicago, IL	Atla and Association of Chicago Theological Schools
2000	Berkeley, CA	Graduate Theological Union
2001	Durham, NC	Divinity School at Duke University
2002	St. Paul, MN	Minnesota Theological Library Association
2003	Portland, OR	Mount Angel Abbey, George Fox Seminary, Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Western Seminary
2004	Kansas City, MO	Kansas City Area Theological Library Association
2005	Austin, TX	Southwest Area Theological Library Association
2006	Chicago, IL	Atla
2007	Philadelphia, PA	Southeastern Pennsylvania Theological Library Association
2008	Ottawa, ON	Saint Paul University
2009	St. Louis, MO	St. Louis Theological Consortium Libraries
2010	Louisville, KY	The Theological Education Association of Mid-America
2011	Chicago, IL	Chicago Area Theological Library Association and Association of Chicago Theological Schools
2012	Scottsdale, AZ	Theological Library Cooperative of Arizona
2013	Charlotte, NC	Carolinas Theological Library Consortium
2014	New Orleans, LA	New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
2015	Denver, CO	Theological Librarians and Libraries of Denver/Rocky Mountain Region
2016	Long Beach, CA	The Southern California Theological Library Association

YEAR	PLACE	HOST
2017	Atlanta, GA	Columbia Theological Seminary, Erskine Theological Seminary, Mercer University, McAfee School of Theology, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, The Interdenominational Theological Center
2018	Indianapolis, IN	Asbury Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary
2019	Vancouver, BC	Regent College
2020	Online	
2021	Online	
2022	Baltimore, MD	Mount St. Mary's University
2023	Fort Worth, TX	Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Southwest Area Theological Library Association (SWATLA)
2024	Long Beach, CA	Southern California Theological Library Association
2025	Pittsburgh, PA	Pittsburgh Theological Seminary