

We're All Librarians Now?

Recently ATLA's director of member programs, Gillian Harrison Cain, penned a thoughtful reflection on the question of what makes a librarian.¹ "What is it that defines someone as a librarian? A degree, a job title, the work they do, where they work?" she wrote.

I sympathize with Gillian and the unconventional library career she details in her column. I too have spent as much time in other roles (professor, pastor, magazine editor) as I have sitting behind a desk in a space clearly marked "library" with a title clearly stating "librarian."

It was during one of those periods when I did sit behind such a library desk that I discovered ATLA eighteen years ago. But during all the years I have been other things, I have never once stopped paying my dues, reading *ATLANTIS* and the *Newsletter*, keeping up with the literature, and even attending and presenting at conferences. Why?

Gillian notes ATLA's new Organizational Ends and their expanded definition of why ATLA exists: so that "all those involved in the practice, study and teaching of and scholarly communication in theology and religion worldwide are connected to others in the field and have the tools, skills, and primary sources needed to advance their work." A big goal, and one that may include bringing people into the life and work of our association who don't have "library" as part of their title, their place of employment, or their self-definition.

Scary? Maybe. But the more I think back on the history of librarianship in general, and of our association in particular, the more I realize we've always been concerned with these questions. The publisher's description of the fine book *A Broadening Conversation*, prepared for the 60th anniversary of ATLA, notes: "A mix of trusted routines with perpetual change is what has always been on the menu for theological librarians in their daily work."² Proving its point, that very book included contributions from scholars, administrators, and publishers as well as librarians.

Theological librarians have always talked to professors and students and deans and editors, always sought to bring books to their readers and readers to their books and readers to each other, always looked to increase scholarship in theology and religion. The pace of technological change may mean that all that happens faster and more globally now. But it's not a new task.

I've kept up my membership all these years because I wanted in on that conversation. The conversation continues in this issue. Read it, inwardly digest it, and join it in issues to come.

Jennifer Woodruff Tait

¹ Gillian Harrison Cain, "Am I, or am I not, a librarian?" *ATLA Newsletter*, last modified January 16, 2018, <https://newsletter.atla.com/2018/librarian/>.

² Melody Layton McMahon and David Stewart, ed., *A Broadening Conversation: Classic Readings in Theological Librarianship* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006). For the publisher's quote, see the Google Books description, accessed February 26, 2018, <https://books.google.com/books?id=9iKXvI9ru3kC&dq>.