
COMMITTEE & TASK FORCE REPORTS

Conference

Vance Thomas, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Chair

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Jessica Boyer, Mount St. Mary's University
- Michael Bradford, Wayne State University
- Craig Kubic, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Jude Morrissey, Yale University Divinity School
- Derek Rieckens, Catholic Theological Union
- Oliver Schulz, Colorado Christian University
- Vance M. Thomas, Central Baptist Theological Seminary

YEAR IN REVIEW

As we reflect on the past year, it's clear that 2022-2023 was a transformative period for the Conference Committee. Building on the lessons learned from the previous virtual conferences, we continued refining the hybrid conference experience. The committee started its work in earnest in October 2022. Attention was given to the timeline for the Call for Proposals and related committee work. Shortly after, the Call for Proposals was announced.

In late January 2023, the committee convened in Ft. Worth at the conference hotel to review the proposals and select from the submissions the sessions for the conference. Once the selection process was completed, a tentative schedule was drafted.

As in past years as the conference date approached, committee members focused on finalizing last-minute arrangements for memorials and local host logistics. With that, we (physically or virtually) made our way to Ft. Worth and to the conference itself.

ATLA ANNUAL 2023 CONFERENCE REVIEW

In mid-June, the association gathered in Ft. Worth and commenced our time together with a hearty, “Hi y’all.” It was another year of hybrid participation with participants both onsite and online. With a trimmed-down schedule, association members commenced the business of sharing insights with and support for one another.

This year, attendees were challenged to consider the role of libraries, and specifically theological libraries, as agents of change. Incoming ALA President Emily Drabinski launched us into the conference by urging us to organize for change. After recounting some of the challenges that are part of the current context for libraries and librarians, Drabinski shared a personal story of an impactful moment that shaped her career. She recounted the power of organizing as a collective group of librarians after a management lockout following an impasse in contract negotiations. Her talk culminated with a discussion of four things that professional organizations like Atla can do to help foster change. Our second plenary speaker, Dr. Walter Fluker invited us to return to our foundational impulses toward archiving and preserving information. This impulse, Dr. Fluker states, pushes us beyond a mere posture of nostalgia for the past but also pushes us forward into the future. He imagines Pentecost as a story that is about more than tongues of fire—it is about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Contributing to the challenges posed by the plenary speakers, many of our colleagues shared experiences and expertise through papers, conversation groups, and panel discussions which kept us busy Thursday and Friday of the conference. Our time together in Ft. Worth concluded with four post-conference workshops; denominational and interest group meetings were held online in the weeks afterward. For those who may have missed a session or two due to conflicts, or maybe you just want to review a particularly engaging presentation, recordings of the sessions are available online through Sched.

This was also the maiden Atla Annual Conference for our new Executive Director, Dr. John F. Kutsko. While the Ft. Worth temperatures may have been a bit oppressive, I hope Dr. Kutsko received a welcome and refreshing reception from the members of this association.

I said it last year, and I will say it again—the real value of the conference, for me at least, is the people. Whether you participated onsite or online, I hope you had an opportunity to connect with one another and to make new acquaintances. Given that we had a larger-than-average number of first-time attendees (42 to be exact), such opportunities were abundant. Even more, I hope you continue to enrich one another and continue to feel enriched by one another in the months to come. I genuinely believe this association and its members are an immeasurable treasure.

ATLA ANNUAL 2022 CONFERENCE: BY THE NUMBERS

Here are the numbers for the 2023 Annual Conference. They illustrate the extent of the participation and the influence of the event:

A total of 235 participants registered for the conference. Of those, 121 were onsite participants and 113 were virtual participants. What is particularly notable is the number of first-time participants—58 (43 onsite and 15 virtual). Also remarkable is the fact that we had 42 international attendees, 29 of which were from outside North America.

The conference featured two plenary sessions, 36 concurrent sessions, four post-conference workshops, and two worship services as well as two vendor-hosted breakfast sessions. Approximately 75 presenters contributed to the program.

Additionally, 15 interest group and denominational meetings were conducted virtually in the weeks following the onsite conference.

MANY THANKS

Before concluding, it is important to express gratitude to the individuals who made the Atla 2023 Annual Conference possible. We extend our sincere appreciation to the committee members who dedicated their time and expertise: Jessica Boyer, Michael

Bradford, Craig Kubic, Jude Morrissey, Derek Rieckens, and Oliver Schulz. Special recognition goes to Craig Kubic and the local host committee for their warm welcome. We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Gillian Harrison Cain, Jamie Lin, and Denise McFarlin whose hard work behind the scenes deserves more praise than I can muster in these few words.

Thank you, friends. I hope to see many of you next year at the 2024 conference in Long Beach, California.