

Atla Down Under

The Impact of International Collaboration Between Atla and ANZTLA on Theological Librarianship

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The Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA) and Atla are two like-minded organisations on opposite sides of the planet, focused on very similar goals. The origins and history of Atla and ANZTLA also follow a very similar path, despite being separated by four decades. The commonalities of the progression, development, and growth of both associations have demonstrated familiar ups and downs for both.

ANZTLA's Origins

ANZTLA and Atla's origins begin in similar circumstances, although separated by about 40 years. ANZTLA started out of a series of special library consultations between the ANZATS (Australian & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools), the ANZSTS (Australian and New Zealand Society for Theological Studies), and the AASR (Australian Association for the Study of Religions). The fifth such consultation culminated with the official beginnings of ANZTLA in 1985 (Robinson 2010).

With a mission of “seek[ing] to foster the study of theology and religion by enhancing the development of theological and religious libraries and librarians,” ANZTLA’s history has always been focused on supporting the libraries and librarians of its membership. Working together, members have achieved great outcomes on behalf of the Association that have benefitted not only the relatively small theological library community but the wider library community as well.

Elliott (2006, 242) outlines that the beginnings of the then American Theological Library Association (now known as Atla) were discussed by the AATS (American Association of Theological Schools) in 1946-7. Comparing ANZTLA’s mission to Atla’s mission of “foster[ing] the study of theology and religion by enhancing the development of theological and religious studies libraries and librarianship,” it is clear that the two associations are well and truly on the same path. The greatest shared characteristic between Atla and ANZTLA persisting to this day is collegiality (Bollier 2006, 234).

Twenty-two librarians and eleven representatives of theological colleges and seminaries witnessed the birth of ANZTLA. The meeting took place at Luther Seminary in North Adelaide (Zweck 1985). ANZTLA became officially established on Tuesday, August 27, 1985 (Zweck 1995). The following librarians formed the provisional executive of the association:

- President: Trevor Zweck
- Secretary/Treasurer: Hans Arns
- Executive member: Robert Withycome

The establishment of ANZTLA was not all smooth sailing. As early as the 1970s, stakeholders were in discussion about setting up ANZTLA. The President’s report in 1987 stated that the constitutional questions with ANZATS had not been finalized. The report also highlighted the inability to secure a financial base (“Report on ANZTLA Inaugural Conference” 1987).

Conferences serve as a “forum where new ideas, proposed projects, and long-established interests” (O’Brien 2006, 252) can be shared, tested, and receive feedback for both associations. At the 1985 consultation, prior to ANZTLA being formally established (“Report on ANZTLA Inaugural Conference” 1987), Lawrence McIntosh delivered the keynote address. His paper, entitled “Professionalism in Theological Librarianship,” emphasised the importance of the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) (Zweck 1995, 13). On the second day of the conference, Gary Gorman presented a practical workshop on collection development policy and practice. Hans Arns, on the other hand, presented a report with an international focus on European theological libraries (Zweck 1985, 71).

The first official ANZTLA Conference, held in Canberra from Monday, August 25 to Wednesday, August 27, 1986, saw several theological librarians gather to discuss topics such as: library standards, collection development and resource sharing, user education, and subject headings. Averil Edwards, the Chief Librarian from the National Library of Australia, delivered the keynote speech (Edwards 1988, 23). Twenty-six librarians reportedly attended the conference. This included two librarians from overseas: Don Huber from Ohio and Makis Dumni-ib of Lae, Papua New Guinea (Zweck 1995).

Similarly, the first Atla Conference, held in Louisville, covered topics such as the needs of theological libraries, the library's contribution to theological instruction, and cataloguing and classification (Elliott 2006, 243). Practical, helpful and useful session topics are features of each association's conference programs. Even the format of both association conferences has followed a similar schedule throughout the years: worship, devotional time (Elliott 2006, 244), and conference excursions are common to both (White 2006, 266).

Since their foundings, the constitutions of each association welcome membership from all libraries and librarians involved or interested in theological education, regardless of the tradition, denomination, or religion (Elliott 2006, 245). To demonstrate this, the first object of the ANZTLA Constitution is:

to provide a framework whereby librarians and other people and groups interested in theological and religious libraries and librarianship can interact, learn and work towards the development and improvement of theological and religious libraries and the role and function of such libraries in theological education. (ANZTLA 2007)

Spirit and Ideals

Cooperation between libraries and librarians has been a constant feature for both associations. Elliott (2006, 246) describes the Atla Serials Exchange as an early tangible project completed by Atla members. ANZTLA members continue to offer duplicate periodicals between libraries, often at no cost, to enable each other to complete holdings and share duplicates in the most beneficial way possible.

The member values of both associations are strikingly common and could almost be interchanged. Both associations thrive on friendliness and cooperation, members who willingly accept responsibility for tasks that will benefit all, and a spirit of volunteerism in order to keep the associations functioning. Today, ANZTLA remains a voluntary association of professionals, whilst Atla moved to paid staff during the course of its development. We are "drawn together by some

common interests and goals” because, generally, “we serve institutions that have a general educational goal of training persons for professional service in ministry” (O’Brien 2006, 251).

Atla is a considerably larger organisation with over eight hundred institutional, individual, and affiliate members, whilst ANZTLA has just over one hundred members at the time of writing. The majority of Atla members are located within the United States and Canada, though interest from outside the continent has increased in recent years. This has not always been the case. Paul F. Stuehrenberg, in his keynote address at the ForATL conference, reported that formerly Atla did not allow institutions or individuals outside of the United States and Canada to join (Stuehrenberg 2009). On the other hand, the majority of ANZTLA members are from Australia and New Zealand. ANZTLA also welcomes a handful of members from Pacific nations libraries who are eligible to apply for free ANZTLA membership through the Jeanette Little Scholarship Scheme (JLSS).

Atla and ANZTLA Collaboration, 1990–2020

Relationship Beginnings

Atla reached out to ANZTLA in 1990 when Richard H. Mintel attended and presented to the ANZTLA Conference held in Brisbane, Queensland (Mintel 1990). In 1995, Al Hurd, Atla Executive Director at the time, attended the ANZTLA conference in Canberra. Hurd (1996) presented a paper entitled “Maximizing Theological Resources” at that annual gathering. He also took the opportunity to attend the Australasian Religion Index (ARI) editorial board meeting on September 21, 1995 as an observer. His position and knowledge were greatly accepted and appreciated at the meeting. According to the minutes of the meeting, Hurd stated that VLTS (software), which was developed by Atla itself, had been developed and could be supplied to ARI at a lower cost. Hurd also indicated that Atla might be able to provide its thesaurus, to which Australian headings could be added. The Atla thesaurus became the subject descriptor source for ARI because it was “truer to the spirit of an index...; was reliable in its revisions; contained very many specialised religious terms not found in *LCSH*...; was consistent with [Atla’s] *Religion Index One*; and was easy to manage and consult” (Harvey 1989, 18).

In recent years, the co-operation between our associations has steadily grown. In 2014, Brenda Bailey-Hainer, Atla Executive Director, accepted ANZTLA’s invitation to be the keynote speaker for the 2014 Melbourne Conference, “Past, Present, Future.” Since then, Maria Stanton, Atla Director of Production, has been

a regular ANZTLA Conference attendee and was the keynote speaker at the 2018 Brisbane Conference, “Connecting People, Ideas, Learning.” The title of her keynote address was “It’s a Wonderful Library!” (Stanton 2018).

Conferences

A number of ANZTLA members have made an effort to attend Atla conferences over the years. The location of Atla conferences—usually the United States and occasionally Canada—does not seem to hinder members who see the importance of networking among fellow librarians from the other side of the world. As early as the mid-eighties, ANZTLA members realised the importance of professional development. In 1986, Trevor Zweck, the first president of ANZTLA, attended the 40th Atla conference in Kansas City, Missouri, held at Rockhurst College (Zweck 1987).

Prior to the conference, Zweck took the opportunity to meet Al Hurd, the preservation officer of Atla at the time. According to Zweck’s wife, Pam, he recorded a meeting in his diary with Hurd on May 29, 1986 in Chicago. The main content of the meeting is not documented, but it is clear that the discussion related to Religion Index One and Two.

In his conference report, Zweck (1987, 8) stated that the Atla focal points were collection development and evaluation of applications and preservation. There were many highlights for Zweck, such as the denominational group meetings and hearing about the development to Atla Religion Indexes. Zweck also presented at the conference on June 17, 1986. His talk, entitled “Australian and New Zealand Theological Libraries and Librarianship” (Zweck 1986), received positive feedback and interest from theological education institutions and theological libraries.

The main highlight for Zweck was Michael Gorman’s address on June 19, 1986, titled “Bibliographic Control in the Smaller, Specialized Library.” Zweck (1987, 15) recommended to ANZTLA colleagues that it was essential for theological librarians to read this article when it was published in the *Proceedings*. Given by a compiler of AACR2, the talk encouraged librarians to conform to acceptable standards for the sake of sharing, despite each library having its own differences for its users. At the end of his own article, Zweck encouraged members of ANZTLA to attend future Atla conferences, as he saw the benefits of it.

According to Pam Zweck, her husband’s attendance at the conference was followed by a visit to thirteen libraries in the United States that lasted for thirty-nine days. No doubt Zweck’s involvement in the wider context influenced his leadership during his decade-long term as president of ANZTLA. Following his premature death, the 1997 Atla conference included a reading of Zweck’s memorial tributes

during the members session (Olson 1997). This recognition is due to the close relationship and the partnership Zweck had with Atla.

In subsequent years, a number of ANZTLA members have attended Atla conferences, including Helen Greenwood, one of the founding members of ANZTLA, who attended the 1993 Atla conference in Vancouver. Theological library issues and solutions seem to be common conference topics, no matter where the theological library may be located.

Conference collegiality has increased over recent years. In 2016, Atla held its conference in Los Angeles, making it one of the easier locations for Australians and New Zealanders to get to. That year featured a record five attendees from ANZTLA member libraries. The 2019 Atla Annual in Vancouver also attracted four ANZTLA member attendees (Stevens, Ng, Derrenbacher, and Burn 2020). Various other Atla conferences over the years have welcomed ANZTLA members with open arms. The international grant for people living outside the US and Canada makes it possible for many ANZTLA members to attend. The strategic vision to offer an international grant, first established in 2006, resulted in international collaboration and partnership with professionals from other continents (G. H. Cain, pers. comm., October 30, 2019). Attendance at conferences helps to build relationships between both parties, resulting in collaboration on projects, publications, and conference presentations. International travel, particularly to and from Australia, can be very expensive due to the large distances that must be covered. Whilst Atla member attendance at the ANZTLA Annual Conference has been minimal, we realize and appreciate that Australia and New Zealand are a long way from just about everywhere else!

Sponsorships

ANZTLA initiated the Jeanette Little Scholarship Scheme (JLSS) in recognition of Jeanette Little “to honour her many years of dedicated work with theological librarians in the Pacific” (ANZTLA n.d.). The scholarship enables Pacific Island theological librarians, who would otherwise not be able to attend, to participate in the annual ANZTLA Conference and receive training and support. The fund receives contributions from a percentage of ANZTLA and conference profits each year. Over the years, the JLSS has enabled numerous theological librarians from the Pacific Islands to attend the ANZTLA Annual Conference.

In a 2017 ANZTLA board meeting, Maria Stanton (Atla) initiated the introduction in 2018 of the Atla-ANZTLA Scholarship to allow for additional librarians from the Pacific region to attend the ANZTLA conference. This developing cooperation between Atla and ANZTLA helps to grow and develop

theological librarianship in an under-resourced area. Theological librarians from Fiji and Papua New Guinea are recipients of the scholarship and have reported on the immense value and benefits of attending the ANZTLA Conference. This would have been impossible for them without the scholarship assistance (Premadish 2018; Lola 2019).

Both the JLSS and Atla-ANZTLA Scholarships not only benefit the theological librarians successful in receiving them; they also provide an excellent opportunity for Australian and New Zealander theological librarians to gain a greater understanding into the issues and hindrances faced by theological librarians in our region. Hearing of issues such as limited electricity supply that impacts database searching and catalogue access, different cultural practices regarding the provision and distribution of information, and common issues such as budget limitations and lack of library staff respect, helps to build a common ground of collegiality and support between theological librarians throughout the Pacific region. Assistance can be requested by any member and others strive to assist as best they can, creating a community reliant on and supportive of each other in many ways.

Consortium Agreements

ANZTLA's consortium has been in place for many years, allowing for many smaller libraries to take advantage of buying power when many work together for journal and database subscriptions. Currently, consortium and bulk bargaining power are in place for EBSCO databases, Oxford Biblical Studies Online database, Alexander Press databases, and various SAGE journal subscriptions. Subscription costs to many titles and products individually would be beyond many member libraries. By working together, ANZTLA enables many libraries to have access to a number of products that greatly benefit staff and students.

This sense of co-operation has benefitted many ANZTLA member libraries since consortium implementation in 2003 (Millard 2010, 49), when a task group was set up to investigate access to the then ATLA Religion Database online and ATLASerials. Participation in the ANZTLA consortium has steadily increased from year to year ever since. ANZTLA library members subscribing to AtlaSerials benefit hugely as their users are able to access the wide range of resources from the database. This includes journal titles from the Pacific region such as the *ANZTLA EJournal*, *Australian Biblical Review*, *Australian eJournal of Theology*, and the *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology*.

Publications

Australasian Religion Index (ARI)

ANZTLA's Australasian Religion Index is the major product produced entirely by ANZTLA volunteers over the last thirty years. In 1993, Atla "expressed interest in producing a CD-ROM version of ARI" (Zweck 1993, 2) but later decided against it. ARI indexes theological serials primarily produced in Australia and New Zealand. Atla's Religion Database is a much broader and much larger index than the ANZTLA counterpart, but the aims behind each product are similar—to index articles, reviews, and essays in all fields of religion and theology. Similarly, "the ATLA Religion Index was started using volunteer librarians" (Bailey-Hainer 2014, 7) until the work was gradually taken over by staff employed by Atla.

ANZTLA EJournal

Formerly the *ANZTLA Newsletter* (1987–2007), the *ANZTLA EJournal* (2008–) is the main form of formal communication amongst the Australia and New Zealand association. It contains papers presented at the Annual Conferences, statistics collected annually from member libraries, and other submissions from members and others that are of great interest to the membership. Its main audience is ANZTLA members, but it would be of interest to theological librarians worldwide. It is similar to Atla's *Theological Librarianship* ejournal, but with a slightly more regional focus. Both are open access and free and, coincidentally, both are hosted by Atla.

Hosting

Atla has enabled numerous ANZTLA publications and products to continue being produced through its hosting services. Since its online inception in 2008, the *ANZTLA EJournal* was hosted by the National Library of Australia (NLA) using the Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform. In 2014, the NLA stated that they were unable to continue hosting the *ANZTLA EJournal*. ANZTLA faced an uncertain time trying to find a suitable replacement hosting solution. Atla came to the rescue and the *ANZTLA EJournal* moved to the Atla domain. The migration to a new domain in October 2015 was virtually seamless. The *ANZTLA EJournal* continues to be produced by ANZTLA member volunteers and is published twice per year. It is open access, continues to use OJS, and can be found at serials.atla.com/anztla/.

Other Publications

"*So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*" (McIntosh, Harvey & Pryor 1995) was produced by ANZTLA in 1995 to celebrate the immense contribution to theological librarianship of Dr. Lawrence D. McIntosh. It has also now been published open access by Atla,

which has made this publication available through Books@Atla Open Press—another example of the ongoing cooperation between our like-minded associations. The ebook has an updated synopsis by Philip Harvey and is accessible from the Books@Atla Open Press website. The digitization and hosting of this publication were only made possible by generous support from Atla.

It is a splendid show of cooperation that ANZTLA publications and products can be shared via this relationship with Atla. As a comparatively small organization, ANZTLA does not have the infrastructure nor negotiating power to deal with large vendors and utilizing this aspect of Atla's publication process has been mutually beneficial in many ways.

International Theological Librarianship Education Task Force

As far back as 1995, Al Hurd (1996) recognized that “no one theological library association or religion indexing agency by itself can survive.” Although this related directly to the introduction of new technologies, the overall premise is as applicable today as it was then. The recent development of Atla's International Theological Librarianship Education Task Force (ITLETF), of which ANZTLA member Kerrie Burn is a member, aims “to strengthen and connect theological and religious studies librarians worldwide by identifying resources, creating educational opportunities, and developing skill-enhancement materials through collaborative efforts” (Atla 2018). A recent publication produced by the task force, *The Theological Librarian's Handbook* (Ćurić 2020) is designed for those new to the profession or who may have limited options for acquiring formal training. By allowing and encouraging ANZTLA members to contribute to such worthy areas of great importance to theological librarians, such as this task force, Atla is demonstrating the importance of, and commitment to, our ongoing cooperation.

In 2019, the task force piloted the first Atla International Theological Librarian Leadership Institute at the annual conference held in Vancouver, Canada. Three librarians from majority-world countries were selected as participants in the institute. The week-long experience included classroom teaching, conference participation and presentation, and touring several theological libraries in Vancouver. This initiative is one of the examples of Atla's (2015) vision to be globally recognized as a strategic collaborator with other theological library associations. ANZTLA is encouraging its members to be part of this international professional development partnership.

A Global Future for Theological Librarianship

Changes in Theological Education

No doubt many of us have noticed the numerous changes in theological education over the last century. Demands of the church and society, developments in information technology, and declining numbers of church attendance and stretched finances are some of the influences that have shaped these changes (Jones 2019, 41).

A number of institutions seem to have moved from offering traditional models of theological education to an interdisciplinary approach. Dietrich Werner supports this by stating that theological education should include a “living encounter with different cultural ways and idioms to read and interpret the Bible” (quoted in Kahl and Andrée 2017, 9). The shift mainly reflects the changes and challenges theological students are facing in a rapidly changing world. Learning theology within the context of a ministry and the ability to understand the culture in which they serve are crucial skills for successful ministry and longevity. Werner, who has been influenced by a number of theologians in his theological journey, further argues that theological education is a process of growing into a wider and more inclusive understanding of the realities of churches that is not restricted by denominational differences (Kahl and Andrée 2017, 7). This raises a challenge for us as theological librarians: how are we adapting to the changes in our day-to-day operations?

Traditionally, in both Australia and New Zealand, institutions tend to run their operations in isolation. However, in recent years, a rise in significant collaboration among institutions has resulted in the formation of consortia (Ball 2018, 97). The University of Divinity, Australian College of Theology (ACT), and other colleges incorporated into larger universities, such as Charles Sturt University, are examples of institutions working together (Ball 2018, 89). Such developments have involved libraries merging and new partnerships forming among different institutional libraries (Burn 2019).

Sharing Strengths

Theological libraries all over the world face similar issues and concerns. By working together, we can assist and help each other work through them. Theological libraries have been cooperating globally in negotiating with publishers and other

groups for reduced prices and more equitable subscription rates for theological journals for decades (Harmanny 2016, 25).

Sharing knowledge is a strength of the Atla-ANZTLA relationship. ANZTLA members (and others from around the world) are encouraged to take on active roles within Atla, such as Board positions and membership in relevant task forces. Both associations utilize email discussion forums to pose questions, request assistance, share initiatives, and more. Willingness to accept feedback, comments, and assistance from each other is evident, with both Atla and ANZTLA members regularly contributing to the others' forums.

Continued Growth

Theological libraries in Europe have been working together for many years. As like-minded associations collaborate, the impact and reach of resources and staff strengths are beneficial to all (Hall 1997). There is room, too, for growth and further development of the collaborative relationship between ANZTLA and Atla. Sharing knowledge by contributing to each other's publications is an important and valuable way to share information and ideas. Participating in each other's events, such as conferences and professional development activities, can only stand to enhance our individual knowledge and expand our international reach as we create and develop international colleague networks through such opportunities.

Global collaboration between like-minded associations is important as it helps all participants to stay relevant and current. Our world is constantly changing and with that change come both opportunities and challenges. By working together, we can make the most of opportunities and confront challenges with a combined force, distributing the workload and enhancing the overall impact.

"Libraries have always worked in partnership to support their communities whoever and wherever they are with the diverse needs, that are often unique to that community, driving the offerings of that service" (Paull n.d.). The theological library community is made up of its own unique communities, from seminarians and ministerial candidates to members of the general public interested in matters of theology. Together, theological libraries can trial ideas, implement new services, and coordinate services to offer those that suit their local communities best.

Whilst there are similarities between theological libraries around the world, they are also quite different in many ways: different denominations, different clientele, different purchasing foci. Diversity brings innovation to organizations as well as to library associations (Smith 2016) through the presence and contributions of more nationalities, countries, and groups around the table. By focusing on a

worldwide vision for theological libraries, Atla enables diverse voices to contribute in new and exciting ways.

Despite so much being achieved through the increased international focus of Atla, there is still much that can be done. How can we all contribute effectively to assist majority-world libraries in ways that may truly benefit them? Some collaborations, such as the Theological Libraries Ebook Lending Project (Campbell 2017), are currently only available to libraries in North America. Investigating how these resources can be accessed by theological libraries in all nations is an area for potential future development. Being able to share such resources amongst theological libraries throughout the world can distribute not only access to information but cost savings as well.

Budgetary and financial instability are major issues across almost all libraries. Exchange rates and conversion to local currency from USD and GBP can at times be unfavorable. Current ANZTLA consortial arrangements with major publishers such as SAGE, Oxford, and ESBCO, to name a few, have been extremely helpful. However, there are still a number of major players in the theology discipline that could be approached to offer reduced rates for members in a consortium. Atla's advocacy to publishers could be increased further afield for libraries outside North America. Another area that needs attention is communication and raising awareness of current trends. Greater organization and planning around communication strategies may help the global community of theological libraries increase its effectiveness. For example, there are opportunities to raise awareness of open source scholarly journals as freely available, tangible assets. A good and consistent communication plan that informs information professions, regardless of location, on such things as consortium pricing and free scholarly journals would make a significant impact.

Conclusion

ANZTLA and Atla are like-minded associations with similar histories and development pathways on opposite sides of the world, striving to achieve common outcomes and goals. Library cooperation and collaboration is far from dead in the theological library arena with our ongoing and growing relationship. Atla's collegiality is deeply valued by ANZTLA, and it is hoped that it will remain mutually beneficial long into the future. Atla's professionalism and strategic approach to move beyond the North American continent, as well as its relationship with and outreach to other theological associations such as the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Librarians (ABTAPL), the Bibliothèques

Européennes de Théologie (BETH), and the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL), are also worthy of commendation.

Theological librarianship, no matter where the librarian may reside, is becoming more collaborative, more cooperative, and more communal. There are areas for potential further development, and if anything can be based on the growth of the continuing relationship between Atla and ANZTLA, it is that the future of theological librarianship everywhere is bright.

On the occasion of this special anniversary, ANZTLA is committed to continued collaboration with Atla in order to further our collective knowledge and expand our combined wisdom. We acknowledge and celebrate Atla's 75th anniversary with an eye to the future because, if we think of the possibilities offered by continued international collaboration, we can only see benefits to be shared by our patrons, staff, and researchers.

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