

March 26, 2009

To: Special Committee of the Association for International Collaboration  
From: Paul F. Stuehrenberg  
Re: 5<sup>th</sup> conference of the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians

I attended the fifth conference of the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) on behalf of ATLA's Special Committee of the Association for International Collaboration, March 10-14, 2009, at Trinity Theological College in Singapore

The theme of the conference was: "Asian theological libraries moving on and reaching out: professional development and collaboration in the light of emerging technologies." Three workshops were interspersed with the business sessions: Library automation, website design, and advances in technology and digital librarianship.

On Wednesday, March 11, I gave the keynote address entitled "International Collaboration for Theological Libraries" (see attached). At the end, I asked folks to break up into groups of three or four to discuss (1) how their institutions were involved in international collaboration, (2) what international collaboration they would be interested in, and (3) how ATLA might facilitate that collaboration. In the last five minutes I took questions.

In the afternoon there were a series of "country reports." There is a Philippines Theological Library Association that seems to be on life support.

There were five delegates from Myanmar. The country is 6% Christian and has 139 ethnic groups. It seems each ethnic group has its own seminary: the Association for Theological Education in Myanmar has thirty member schools from nine denominations.

The delegate from Payap University in Thailand reported that there are four theological librarians in Thailand, but she has not met two of them (there is no Thai Theological Library Association).

There is also a Malaysian Theological Library Association that encourages resource sharing.

On Thursday morning the country reports continued. Indonesia is approximately 8% Christian and 82% Muslim. There are ca. 200 Bible colleges and seminaries in 20 provinces. There is a total of one librarian who is trained in library science. The Forum of Theological Libraries in Indonesia has eleven members.

The India Theological Library Association has 120 college and seminary members. There are two regional associations, the Kerala Theological Library Association, and the Joint Library Committee (Bangalore), with 17 members. They are developing a union

catalog ([www.catalog.jlcpac.org](http://www.catalog.jlcpac.org)). ITLA is compiling a directory of theses and dissertations.

15% of the population of Singapore is Christian, half Roman Catholic and half Protestant. There are ten seminaries and Bible colleges in Singapore, but no theological library association. Trinity Theological College is by far the largest school, and is supported by the Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches.

Taiwan is four percent Christian and has 40 seminaries. The Taiwan Theological Library Association was formed in 2008 as a subset of the national library association. Five seminaries are accredited by ATESEA.

China has approximately twelve million Christians, one national seminary (Nanjing), five regional seminaries, and fourteen provincial seminaries. The government has just built a new campus for Nanjing Seminary. The student body will expand from 200 to 500. The new library has space for 300,000 volumes (they currently have 60,000).

Hong Kong has seven million people, of whom ca. 500,000 are Christians. There are 26 seminaries, of which four have libraries exceeding 60,000 volumes. Five of the major libraries are networked as the Ecumenical Information Network and share a common catalog. Hong Kong Baptist University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong also have significant theological programs.

Next came reports from representatives from professional organizations. My keynote address was the report from ATLA. Rosemary Watts reported for ANZTLA, Alan Linfield for ABTAPL, and Odile Dupont for BETH.

Michael Poon reported on the activity of the Documentation, Archives, Bibliography and Oral History (DABOH) study group of the International Association for Mission Studies, of which he is now the convener. He observed that DABOH has produced “best practices” manuals for archives and manuscripts (Martha Smalley and Rosemary Seton) and oral history (Jean Paul Wiest). They have commissioned manuals on documentation (Paul Stuehrenberg) and digital projects (Rosemary Seton).

In the afternoon session there was a lively discussion of the proposed Asia theological journal database and the Asia theological theses database. They are proposing using DSpace as a place to index journal articles. They proposed that each country identify the most important journals and then have volunteers index them. They would use key words (English), but no controlled vocabulary. They are looking for someone to host the server. The thesis database is already underway. India has completed retrospective, and Malaysia is nearly there. No provision was made, so far as I could tell, for providing access to the theses. While they seemed interested in TREN, I am not aware of any resolution endorsing it, or even to look into it further. Time will tell what becomes of it.

The ForATL Publications Task Force reported on their accomplishments to date. They brought up their website in 2003. They now have a blog and a list-serve. *ForATL news*

is published on a regular basis (now electronically). The second edition of the *Directory of Asian theological libraries* appeared in 2002. The next edition will be on-line.

In closing remarks I asked for feedback for ATLA. All agreed that ATLA products are prohibitively expensive. Even with a 50% discount few can afford ATLAS. One reported that a consortial price quoted by ATLA was higher than the individual price. This is an issue that should be reviewed, both by marketing, and, perhaps, as a policy issue for the Board. I would note, however, that many of the theological libraries in Asia are quite small. Students at many do not read Western languages. Any program put forth by ATLA should likely be focused on the larger schools, especially those offering advanced degrees.

One of the delegates from Malaysia reported that they were not able to receive materials from the Theological Book Network, as Malaysian customs require that a title list accompany any shipment. I asked her to send me more information, and that we would discuss this at the upcoming ICC meeting.

The next ForATL conference is tentatively scheduled for March 2012.

The next Indian Theological Library Association meeting will be held in October 2009. I was asked if I would be able to attend, and I replied that I was only funded every other year. Perhaps someone could go from the business side of ATLA.