

# ***ABTAPL's Global Impact on Theological Libraries***

*Extending the Shelves*

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**C**ontrary to what its name might imply, the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) has, since its inception, never confined its influence and impact to Britain alone. Instead, one of the defining characteristics of the Association throughout its 70-year history has been its outward-looking vision. It has extended its interests globally, both on a personal and organisational level.

This is because commitment to international collaboration was part of ABTAPL's DNA from the very beginning. In fact, the Association, founded in 1956 (Howard 1974, 12), was "originally intended to be the British section of an international theological libraries organisation sponsored by UNESCO and IFLA" (Howard 2006, 20) and grew out of early efforts to create an International Association of Theological Libraries (IATL) in the 1950s (Powles 2022, 520):

Roger Thomas<sup>1</sup> and others of the SCOTAPLL [Standing Conference of Theological and Philosophical Libraries in London] committee were involved in 1955 in the formation of an IATL [International Association of Theological Libraries]. IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) and the World Council of Churches Study Department had given the initial impetus. It was hoped to produce a Bulletin of Current Theological Literature and an International Bibliography of Books on Religion. Enthusiasm waned when the cost of the operation was realized and IATL never had an effective existence. ABTAPL was, however, founded to be the British national section of this international enterprise. (Howard 1975, 15)

True to its founding story, ABTAPL has long served as a support network for theological and religious studies librarians within the United Kingdom and its reach has extended “beyond” the UK (Powles 2022, 520; 2009b, 115). Members of ABTAPL have consistently sought to extend their shelves beyond their own borders, supporting theological libraries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America with generosity, humility, and a spirit of partnership. Through these efforts, ABTAPL has become instrumental in promoting theological education by standing in solidarity with libraries facing serious material and structural challenges in the Majority World. These partnerships are often forged through personal relationships, cross-cultural networks, and a shared vision of equipping theological leaders, biblical scholars, and students around the globe. It is a story of relationships built across continents; of mentoring offered across generations; of practical help given with care and sensitivity; and of a deep conviction that theological education must flourish in every corner of the world.

Therefore, this chapter traces the various ways in which ABTAPL has served as a trusted network for theological and religious studies librarians globally, demonstrating a remarkable commitment to supporting libraries within the international theological education sector. It highlights how ABTAPL members have supported theological libraries internationally: by providing resources, offering professional mentoring, supplying financial assistance, sharing teaching and training, building a stronger international network, and advocating for global library development.

## Publications

One of ABTAPL's major projects, which has had the strongest international impact, is publication. There have been four notable publication initiatives. First, *The Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries*, which was regarded as the heart of the association by Howard (1974, 12–13), long-serving Chairman and the *Bulletin* Editor in the 1970s and 80. Second, a comprehensive directory of theological libraries, *Handbook of Theological Libraries*, taking over 20 years to compile (19) published as *A Guide to the Theological Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland* (1986), then extended as *Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies* (1990). Third, *Union List of Periodicals* (1988, 2000) compiled all journal lists of member libraries; and finally, *Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (1990).

The *Bulletin* documents the development, content, and impact of all initiatives, along with later reflections on their significance. The literature guide project, together with ABTAPL's directories of theological libraries and the *Union List of Periodicals* (1988, 2000), eventually migrated online as a live directory in the 21st century (ABTAPL Journals, n.d.). *The Guide to Theological Libraries* became a key reference work, updated in print in 1986 and 1999, and it set the pattern for the Association's ongoing service to theological libraries worldwide. These tools became foundational references and are still cited in academic contexts, including recent works such as the *Festschrift for the 50th Anniversary of BETH*, published by Brill (Powles 2022, 522–523). The development and international impact of each of these publications will be discussed more in the following sections.

### *Bulletin (1956–present)*

The *Bulletin* of ABTAPL has been a cornerstone of the Association's communication and professional development efforts since its inception in 1956.

ABTAPL was founded to bring together librarians working with or interested in theological and philosophical literature in Great Britain. Twenty-four issues of the *Bulletin* were published between 1956 and 1966. After a period of abeyance, the *Bulletin* was revived in a New Series, volume 1, by John Howard in 1974.

As ABTAPL developed links with global partners like BETH, Atla, and theological colleges in the Global South, the *Bulletin* emerged as

both a record of ABTAPL's activities and a forum for scholarly and professional discussion, driven by a clear need to facilitate regular exchange among theological librarians beyond its UK roots. It was particularly important before digital revolutionary media and digitisation were fully normalised, as it became a vehicle for recording and amplifying these communications amongst international librarians in the analogue era. By the 1990s, "The *Bulletin* now has a circulation of about 270 copies, with about a third of that number in Europe, North America and the Commonwealth" (Lambe 1990a; see also ABTAPL 2006, 19; Smith 2001a).

Almost every *Bulletin* has records of these international activities, whether they are about reflections on overseas association conferences (Hall 2008, The Norwegian Forum for Theological and Religious Studies Libraries) such as IFLA, Atla, BETH, ANZTLA (Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association), ForATL (Forum of Asian Theological Librarians), ITLA (Indian Theological Library Association), Norwegian Forum for Theological and Religious Studies Libraries and KTLA (Korean Theological Library Association); reports on a visit to overseas theological libraries and their collections or vice versa (Shire 2008; Sewell 1986, 17–18; Williams 1981, 2–3; Andrews 1987); reports from theological book distribution organisations (Berends 2009, 27; Arnison 2013, 19–20); articles or letters from overseas librarians (Sogenbits 2002, 8–12; Murphy 2002, 13–15, Stitzinger 1979); introducing libraries or librarianship in different countries (Izhar 2009; Doibhlin 2002); announcement of Notice Meetings and Theological Library Association Newsletters Received; or Minutes of the BETH Assembly. The *Bulletin* volume 2, number 1 was mostly devoted to the Asian situation (March 1988). A press release about Atla's appointment of a new executive director was made in the *Bulletin* (ATLA 2011). After the millennium, fewer regular news items, minutes and announcements from Atla and BETH made way for the *Bulletin* with the development of digital communications and websites, but the reflections about international conference attendance continue today.

Also, the *Bulletin* documented book donation schemes, such as those facilitated through ABTAPL members in collaboration with agencies like the Theological Book Network, discussed more in a separate section. These reports provided transparency and built solidarity with under-resourced theological libraries worldwide.

Moreover, the *Bulletin*'s open access availability via Theology on the Web, an open access theological resource website, significantly extended its global reach. Institutions and individuals across the

world can now consult ABTAPL's archives without barriers, making them a rare and valuable resource in an era of subscription-heavy academic publishing.

One particular volume of the *Bulletin* has noted a lasting influence globally. The June 2006 Golden Jubilee edition (vol. 13, no. 2) exemplified its international connections, celebrating ABTAPL's 50th anniversary and tracing the association's development since its founding, highlighting milestones such as the formation of BETH and close partnerships with Atla (then ATLA) (Norlin 2006, 15; Powles 2006, 16) and ANZTLA (Smith 2006b, 9). It lists 200 institutional members: 30 from the United States, two from Australia, two from Belgium, one each from Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, Lebanon and New Zealand (ABTAPL 2006, 16-19). Notably, circulation and outreach extended well beyond Britain, about one-third went to libraries in Europe, North America, and the Commonwealth.

Throughout the *Bulletin*, many attempts to introduce diversified resources from different continents or countries were made by sharing perspectives from across cultures. The reprinted work of Humeyra Ceylan Izhar introduced Turkish perspectives on libraries and the information society (2009). Other features included Steven Runciman's essay on the ancient Christian libraries of the East, and Joan Humphreys' reflections on library cooperation in North America, highlighting shared challenges and emerging digital possibilities (1978, 14-16). Gorman's South African contributions to *Theological Bibliography* were informative and eye-opening (1981, 13-16; 1978, 13-16). Such contributions affirm the *Bulletin*'s role in broadening dialogue and visibility across the global theological library community.

One of the most inspiring and enduring aspects of ABTAPL's work today is its quiet yet steady contribution to the growth of theological libraries that serve communities, equip leaders, and advance scholarship in some of the world's most challenging contexts through the *Bulletin*.

### *Directories*

Apart from the *Bulletin*, the first publication referred to is a directory. ABTAPL's push for a directory manifested through various formats rather than a single volume. Initiated in the 1960s by incorporating selected book lists and bibliographic essays in the *Bulletin*, it was driven by experienced theological librarians like Plumb, Walsh, and Howard.

The *Guide to Theological Libraries* became a keystone reference, and the *Union List of Periodicals* eventually migrated online as a live directory.

## **Handbook of Theological Libraries**

According to Alan F. Jesson (1986, 10), the idea for the Handbook of Theological Libraries was first discussed in 1962, when Jennifer Statham, then editor of the ABTAPL Bulletin, proposed “a comprehensive survey of library resources” as a cooperative project.

However, the initiative stalled in favour of compiling a union list of theological periodicals and it was not until 1965, when Philip W. Plumb and a group of library students began visiting theological libraries under a small research grant, that the handbook project began to take shape (Howard 1974, 15). Once again, there was another pause: “Between 1966 and 1974, the Association went into a state of hibernation,” and “Work on the *Handbook of Theological libraries*, as the project was then known, continued but slowly” (Jesson 1986, 10). In 1972, a major data-gathering push by Plumb yielded 250 responses (Jesson 1986, 10). Also the revived ABTAPL *Bulletin* of December 1974 announced that compiling this handbook was in progress, indicating its anticipated practical value for the community (Jesson 1986, 10; Howard 1974, 15).

Recurrently, despite repeated appearances on general meeting agendas and minimal progress through the late 1970s and early 1980s, the *Bulletin* in March 1984 noted the Handbook project needed “considerable updating if the work is to be of any value” (Elliott 1984, 1). This delayed project was eventually resurrected by the persistence of the ABTAPL Committee, particularly Michael Walsh (Jesson 1986, 11). A breakthrough came when Emma Dennis, a Master’s student at Loughborough University, took on the development of the handbook as her dissertation project (Jesson 1986, 11; Elliott 1984, 1). After her successful submission, Walsh reported its arrival in 1984, needing only “a little light editing” (Jesson 1986, 11). The completed volume, now titled *A Guide to the Theological Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland*, was finally published in 1986 (Jesson 1986, 12).

## ***A Guide to the Theological Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland* (1986)**

Jesson, who edited the final volume, later reflected that the guide had a “22-year gestation period” but offered “a very usable” and much-needed resource for the field (1986, 12). It was reviewed in the November 1986

*Bulletin* No. 1.37 by A. J. Walford, who highlighted its scope, saying “[it] is a very worthwhile publication for its detail, scope and price. It deserves to be on the shelves of all reference libraries worth the name” (Walford 1986, 12).

The guide contains nearly 400 entries arranged in alphabetical order of town. Where the library has responded to the questionnaire sent out by ABTAPL, the entry includes full postal address, telephone number, name of librarian or officer in charge, history, organisation and function, details of any special collections, size of stock, classification system, catalogues, indexes and publications. For libraries which have not replied such information as is known from other sources is given. (ABTAPL Publishing 1987, 18)

The directory project was a collective ABTAPL effort and a significant evolution of the original handbook idea, benefiting from over a decade of data-gathering and editorial work. This guide served essentially as a directory, listing theological and religious studies libraries across the UK and Ireland and providing details on their specialisations, holdings, relevant information and services. Therefore, it became a useful reference for librarians and researchers to locate theological collections, especially for interlibrary cooperation, resource sharing, and guiding users to research collections. In an era before online catalogues, a printed guide of libraries filled a critical information gap. It also allowed smaller or more specialised collections to be known to the wider community. For ABTAPL members, the directory complemented the *Bulletin's* regular “Libraries” feature (which profiled individual libraries) by providing a broad bird’s-eye view of available library resources.

The directory was envisioned as a tool to aid librarians overseas. The *Guide* would enable seminary librarians abroad to identify partner institutions in the UK, or seek advice. Moreover, many overseas theological colleges had limited bibliographic resources; having a directory of major theology libraries (especially one for a modest cost) could help them connect with sources of scholarly materials. ABTAPL provided a form of support to theological librarians in the Majority World, who often relied on such networks for research materials. ABTAPL members saw this as part of their mission of sharing information and experience internationally.

## ***Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies Collections of Great Britain and Ireland (1999)***

ABTAPL recognised the urgent need to support theological librarians, particularly those in smaller or under-resourced institutions, with tools for navigating the rapidly expanding field of religious studies publishing. A major initiative reflecting this concern was a bibliographic project, *Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies*, first reported in the *ABTAPL Bulletin* no. 10 (Elliott 1977b) and formally announced in November 1977 at that year's AGM (Elliott 1977a) and June 1978 issue of the *Readers' Guide to Books on Religion and Philosophy* by Mary Elliott (1978, 2).

Mr. Walsh and the other Working Party members had assembled a list of about 150 titles, discussed the arrangement of the Guide and were about to enter into a contract with Mansell Information/Publishing Ltd. The co-operation of other members in annotating the titles for inclusion was being sought, as well as in tracing titles in further relevant subjects. The scope is not limited to indexing and abstracting journals and regularly published bibliographies; "Hidden bibliographies" in specialist periodicals being particularly sought for inclusion. Both English and foreign language publications are to be included, and the aim is international and interdenominational coverage. (Elliott 1978, 2)

The focus of these literature guides was to spotlight recent and noteworthy publications like books, bibliographies, and periodical indexes of high utility "in any related subject area" (Elliott 1977b), a spectrum of religious studies, encompassing English and foreign language sources alike. As Elliott (1978, 2) noted, "Currency is the key criterion," a statement that encapsulated the project's driving ethos: relevance and immediacy for the practising theological librarian.

This was confirmed by Mary Elliott (Elliott 1980,2) in the *Bulletin*, volume 1, number 19, indicating ABTAPL's interest in international cooperation and bibliographic resource sharing. Providing lists of recommended new books was part of that support system in tandem with gathering the overwhelming flow of new theological and religious publications into a manageable, curated list for librarians. Its goal was to assist librarians, especially those in smaller or overseas institutions, in navigating new publications in the field in order to help librarians make informed acquisition decisions.

In 1999, a new edition of this directory, *Guide to Theological and Religious Studies Collections of Great Britain and Ireland*, was compiled



by David A. Kerry and Evelyn Cornell, reflecting the continued importance of keeping such a directory up to date. By 2000, just over one third of the copies of the *Guide* had been sold (Smith 2000, 7). It provided location-based access to theological collections and was later made available online (ABTAPL, n.d.-b). This complemented the role of bibliographic guides, helping librarians know not only what to acquire but where resources could be found.

Overseas librarians found this particularly valuable. Specifically, to librarians with limited budgets and little access to bookshops or scholarly reviews, the *Guide* would serve as a trusted acquisition tool. Receiving curated lists from ABTAPL (either in the *Bulletin* or as a separate book) meant they could prioritise important titles. This was one way in which ABTAPL “shared information and experience” with global partners, aligning with its mission (ABTAPL, n.d.-a). This endeavour greatly supported theological librarians abroad by filtering the current literature down to relevant resources. In this way, the *Guide to Current Literature* acted much like a modern collection development newsletter, highlighting recent and noteworthy titles for informed library purchasing and collection building, distilling the vast output of publishers into a manageable selection.

### Union List of Periodicals (1988, 2000)

“The new committee of ABTAPL, following the resolutions of the Annual General Meetings of 1972, 1973 and 1974,” proposed a possible compilation of the British Union List of Serials in Religion (Howard 1974, 15).

Work on a union list of theological periodicals was also begun in 1964. A preliminary list of about 500 titles agreed by the committee was prepared and bibliographical checking and the inclusion of the holdings of the first three or four libraries by Miss H. Cuthell had been partly completed when work was discontinued. It is proposed to re-examine the need for such a list and the possibility of its compilation in reasonable time and at reasonable cost. (Howard 1975, 13)

Eventually, the *Union List* was launched in 1988, in partnership with the Bible Society. It aimed to consolidate information on periodical holdings across theological libraries in the UK, creating a centralised reference tool for locating serials in theology and philosophy. For several years, the list was compiled and maintained by Bible Society staff until Evelyn Cornell took over in the late 1990s as ABTAPL’s

designated editor of the *Union List* (Smith 1997, 3). The list's development depended on regular contributions from member libraries. By 2000, 41 institutions were participating, and this number had grown to 47 by 2005 (Smith 2005, 2).

A significant milestone in its global impact was the transition from print to online access. After discussions in the late 1990s, the *Union List* was made available on the University of Leicester's website<sup>2</sup> by 2001 (Smith 2005, 2; Smith 2001b, 4). This greatly enhanced accessibility for users worldwide, enabling scholars and librarians outside the UK to consult holdings data remotely and in real time. Currently, it is available on ABTAPL's own website.<sup>3</sup>

The *Union List* became a model of interlibrary cooperation, facilitating resource sharing and cataloguing collaboration. Furthermore, it offered a structured way to locate theological journals across multiple institutions, expanding access and reducing duplication, a valuable contribution to the field. For scholars, particularly those in institutions without comprehensive theological holdings, the list enabled more effective interlibrary loan requests and widened the range of periodicals that could be used in research. Hence, the *Union List* served as a pioneering example of subject-specific, collaborative bibliographic control so the initiative was well-received internationally, especially for libraries in the Majority World. The *Union List* was advertised in the *ANZTLA Bulletin* issues no. 34 (1998, p. 21) and no. 48 (2002, p. 4).

## Guidelines for Theological Libraries (1990, 2008)

### 1990 issue

According to Lambe (1990b), a volume of the *Guidelines for Theological College Libraries* was published in a special consultation issue of the *ABTAPL Bulletin* in June 1990, recognising the diverse nature of theological libraries, and was the result of nearly two years of careful development by a dedicated working party.

It is worth noting that ABTAPL did not intend to impose rigid standards on members. Rather, it meant to offer adaptable recommendations that could be tailored to individual institutional contexts. "Each college will need to assess what is possible and practical within the constraints of its own situation" (Gibson et al. 1990, 2). By providing a flexible yet comprehensive framework, it has enabled theological libraries to assess and enhance their services, addressing the shared needs of theological libraries while recognising the diversity of institutional contexts

The development of *Guidelines* was shaped from the beginning by a spirit of mutual exchange and global partnership. Although it was originally devised to support theological colleges in Britain and Ireland, the working party drew from a broad spectrum of national and international influences. Key among these was the draft version of the guidelines produced by ANZTLA, which had been approved by the Australian Library Association. These external models were studied carefully alongside UK-specific frameworks, such as those for Colleges of Higher Education, enabling the ABTAPL team to produce a document that balanced best practice across various educational and ecclesiastical contexts (Lambe, 1990b).

The formulation process was further enriched by feedback and commentary from overseas colleagues. While individual contributors were not named, the acknowledgements in the final document underscore the value of international engagement, confirming a shared global interest in the project (Gibson et al. 1990, 1). *Guidelines* thus emerged not only as a national resource but also as a product of thoughtful international collaboration. The inclusion of insights from practitioners beyond the UK ensured that *Guidelines* were truly formed by a diversity of professional experiences and institutional models.

This connection was not one-sided. *Guidelines* have had a broader impact overseas. They impacted practices in theological libraries across Europe, North America, and the Commonwealth, contributing to a shared understanding of quality and professionalism in theological librarianship. The *Guidelines'* emphasis on adaptability has allowed them to be relevant in various international contexts, accommodating differences in institutional size, funding, and mission. In later years, the baton was carried by updated guides and reference compilations (both within and outside ABTAPL) that continued to serve the same purpose: keeping theological libraries well-informed and well-stocked with the latest important works.

## **2008 Issue**

The ABTAPL committee discussed creating a comprehensive guide for member libraries to establish clear standards for library services. This was pursued during the time of the Association's Golden Jubilee in 2006 (Smith 2006b, 9).

The project came to fruition in early 2008, when *Guidelines* was finally published as an official ABTAPL publication in the *Bulletin* (2008) volume 15, number 1, heralded as a "long awaited" and

“*exciting new venture*” for ABTAPL (Reekie 2008, 5). Carol Reekie and Michael Gale were the principal contributors to the booklet, which was issued as a modestly priced pamphlet at £5 in 2008 (Reekie 2008, 5; Gale 2017). The primary purpose was “to set out guidelines for the provision of library services in colleges involved in theological education and training” (Reekie 2008, 5).

It provided a benchmark for best practices in areas such as library operations, including collection management, information technology, information literacy, staffing, library cooperation and library management, collection development, user education, equipment, library development, finance, and cooperation.

Most notably, *Guidelines* found eager readers in non-Western contexts. It was not only circulated among British and European institutions but also was actively shared with libraries in the Global South. A report in the *Bulletin* of ABTAPL (Berends 2009, 27) described how the Theological Book Network, an organisation dedicated to equipping theological schools in Africa and Asia, partnered with ABTAPL to distribute the *Guidelines* abroad. Kurt Berends, the Network’s Executive Director, praised the “good work ABTAPL did in producing *Guidelines*”, noting that multiple copies were being shipped to theological colleges and seminaries in Ethiopia as well as to institutions in Kenya, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. He reported that news of the *Guidelines*’ inclusion in library aid shipments had been “enthusiastically received” by recipient schools (Berends 2009, 27). *Guidelines* served as a much-needed framework for developing library services providing a template that librarians and administrators in theological colleges (often operating with limited resources) could consult when evaluating and upgrading their own libraries. This kind of adoption illustrates how a set of standards conceived in one context (Britain) was adaptable and relevant internationally, offering a model that could be translated into different educational and cultural environments. In summary, *Guidelines* achieved a significant standing both at home and overseas. They encapsulated ABTAPL’s decades-long commitment to improving theological libraries, providing a concise yet comprehensive benchmark for library operations.

## *Book Donation: From Surplus to Service*

Another ABTAPL form of international support has been the provision of theological books. “Over the years, so many ABTAPL member libraries have closed, been dispersed, or been merged with other collections” (Smith 2006a), but demands for theological books from the Majority World have grown as “The decline of Christianity in the Global North is now being outpaced by the rise of Christianity in the Global South” (Jurlo et al. 2020, 9). Hence, recognising the acute scarcity of academic books in many Majority World institutions (Lambe 1987, 13), ABTAPL members frequently organised book drives, donations, and shipments. As early as the 1970s, ABTAPL had proposed a cooperative acquisition scheme for regional Christian council publications from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Howard 1975).

This support has been carried out from multidimensional angles. One dimension involves financial support enabling the shipping of materials, the donation of printed books, or the provision of digital resources. The other dimension is the commitment of both individual members and partnership with other organisations.

Sourcing the physical books might be the easiest element of this support. Many theological libraries in the UK regularly face the need to de-duplicate, downsize, or rehome books due to space constraints or collection development policies (ABTAPL 1990, 13; James 2024, para. 1–4). Rather than allowing valuable theological materials to go to waste, ABTAPL members have consistently found ways to redirect these resources to where they are most needed. For example, CMS Library offered unwanted items in the *Bulletin* freely to any libraries (1979, 15–16). Therefore, over the decades, members have contributed to the donation of vast numbers of books to institutions across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. These donations have helped to seed new library collections, strengthen existing ones, and enable institutions in the Global South to offer better-equipped theological training.

The practicalities of resource provision often required creative solutions and the mechanics of donation have evolved. In the early decades, these efforts were often informal; librarians posted boxes to missionary colleges or packed crates for visiting scholars. In some cases, individuals personally carried books when travelling abroad.

Over time, more structured partnerships developed, often coordinated through charities, academic networks, or mission organisations

to secure shipping such as Books2Africa (pers. comm., March 2024), Book Aid Charitable Trust (Book Aid), Theological Book Network (TBN), Overseas Book Service (OBS) by Feed the Minds, 4 the World Resource Distributors and Langham International (Morgan 2005). Many pallets of shipments of books have been sent through these partnerships.

Everset and Sach (2012) from Feed the Minds wrote an article in the *Bulletin* to appeal for their cause. Feed the Minds was founded in 1964 from a campaign by Archbishop Donald Coggan to improve lives through education across Africa, Asia, and South America. Through its Overseas Book Service, it supported theological education by providing donated books to more than 120 colleges in the Global South and encouraged theological and philosophical librarians to contribute by donating requested books, publicising the service, assisting with cataloguing and storage, and helping to fund shipping costs (Everset and Sach 2012, 17–19). Unfortunately, “After 60 years of operation, Feed the Minds, a UK-based international development charity, announced its decision to close due to financial constraints” in April 2025 (Shrestha 2025).

Out of many organisations ABTAPL worked with, three notable charity names stand out most: TBN; Book Aid, where some ABTAPL members volunteer regularly; and more recently, smaller initiatives like Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL), which specialises in theological library support for the Majority World.

### *Theological Book Network*

TBN enjoyed the longest history and strongest connection with ABTAPL until most recently. It was founded in 2004 in the United States to deliver high-quality theological resources to Christian educational institutions to strengthen the Majority World Church. By the late 2000s, ABTAPL’s partnership with TBN became more structured. In 2009 alone, over 15,000 volumes were collected from the UK with help from ABTAPL members, contributing to the Network’s shipment of more than 250,000 books to 380 institutions in 30 countries. Kurt Berends, Executive Director of TBN, expressed, “Many thanks to ABTAPL and its member institutions for their continuing support of our work” (Berends 2009, 27).

Further solidifying its logistical support, ABTAPL discussed a notable partnership with TBN. The idea of establishing a UK consolidation centre to gather and ship theological books to the Majority World displayed ABTAPL’s awareness of global needs and its willingness to

engage in operational initiatives to meet them (Arnison 2013, 19–20). It showed a transition from ad hoc donations to organised, strategic and large-scale resource redistribution. The partnership between ABTAPL and TBN was strong.

In 2024, TBN officially became a part of the programme of Scholar Leaders (Scholar Leaders 2024; Watson and Hays 2024) and began engaging with ABTAPL to explore collaboration.

### *Book Aid Charitable Trust*

In the *Bulletin of ABTAPL*, Richard Johnson, Honorary Editor of the *Bulletin*, mentioned Book Aid as one of the ways to dispose of unwanted or surplus books, while also introducing his new disposal method of selling them via Amazon (2012, 2). Additionally, long-serving former Honorary Secretary Anna James recommended Book Aid as a great place to donate unwanted materials in *Church Times*:

Book Aid (not to be confused with Book Aid International) deals exclusively with Bibles and theological literature. By preference, these are redistributed to parts of the world where there are practical or political difficulties in acquiring Christian books. Books not needed for partner projects are sold second-hand in the UK, or, if damaged or infested, sent for recycling. Money raised from these sources help to pay shipping costs of materials sent overseas. (James 2024, para. 14)

One ABTAPL member, who is also a librarian at a small theological seminary, volunteers regularly at Book Aid, giving, sorting, and processing book donations (pers. comm., March 2024). This demonstrates how Book Aid's mission of resource sharing and theological education globally is appreciated amongst ABTAPL members. In spring 2025, Book Aid sent 10,000 books to a theological research library in Asia, curated by this member in partnership with OTRL, with ABTAPL contributing towards the shipping costs (pers. comm., March, 2025). Additionally, Book Aid is listed among the useful resources for members on the ABTAPL website, further highlighting the partnership.

### *Theology on the Web*

In addition to physical book donations, ABTAPL has also supported digital theological resources. Rob Bradshaw, an active ABTAPL member

and former International Support Officer of the Committee, developed Theology on the Web, a digital initiative offering free access to thousands of theological books and articles.

His commitment to this project is remarkable. He sources materials, digitises them, and maintains the entire collection on his website. Many ABTAPL members contributed journals to strengthen this digital resource, and ABTAPL occasionally provided financial support to the project, recognising the growing importance of Open Access resources for theological institutions worldwide. The *ABTAPL Bulletin* is now freely available through Theology on the Web.

### *Oxford Theology Resources Link*

A smaller, targeted initiative has also grown out of ABTAPL's ethos: Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL), a charity specialising in theological library support for the Majority World. OTRL's work focuses on carefully curating, shipping, and advising on theological resources, ensuring that libraries in Africa and Asia can better serve their students and communities (OTRL, n.d.-a).

Institutional member libraries such as the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in Oxford, the Theology and Philosophy Faculties Library (part of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford), Wycliffe Hall Library (University of Oxford), and Union School of Theology in Wales have donated large numbers of books for this initiative (OTRL, n.d.-d; pers. comm., Oct, 2024).

Additionally, ABTAPL has funded the shipping of theological books to four seminaries via OTRL over the past two years, through its large grants, which allocates £1,000 annually to support theological libraries in the Majority World. The beneficiaries of this scheme include the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) Library in Kyiv (1,300 books); a research library in Asia (whose name and location are withheld for safety reasons) in partnership with Book Aid (10,000 books); Kumi University Library in Uganda (1,500 books); and Bethel Theological Seminary Library in South Sudan (1,000 books) (OTRL, n.d.-c).

The ongoing initiative between the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) Library and ABTAPL via OTRL continues to flourish today, with regular shipping of books (OTRL, n.d.-b). UETS, a small institution in Kyiv, is striving to meet the needs of its students as they continue their studies and ministerial training to



support their war-torn nation, despite bombs shattering the library windows (Українська євангельська теологічна семінарія 2022). In response, ABTAPL member librarians from Oxford began collecting their surplus books, carefully curating a collection tailored to the UETS curriculum and faculty needs by allowing them to select titles from the donation list.

This project not only resourced the UETS Library but also strengthened the local community and its ability to serve their students' training for ministry. It stands as a living example of how ABTAPL's values, such as service, partnership, and respect for local contexts, continue to find expression today. ABTAPL is committed to covering the shipping of the books this year, as it has last year.

Beyond logistics, what shines through ABTAPL's contribution is its pastoral care. ABTAPL has been keen not simply to support sending books but to build up libraries and librarians that would truly serve students and faculty. Christmas gifts and handwritten cards from the ABTAPL member library community in Oxford were sent to the UETS community in December 2024, and the UETS academic dean visited Oxford.

These initiatives demonstrate foresight; while Western theological libraries enjoyed abundant resources, many newer theological colleges in postcolonial contexts struggled even to build basic collections (Arnison 2013, 19–20; Riley 2025, 201). However, ABTAPL's support was never about simply offloading unwanted books. Members increasingly emphasised the need for sensitivity to local curricula, linguistic contexts, and theological diversity as ABTAPL's aim has never been to impose, but to enable theological education to flourish on its own terms. Also, ABTAPL actively encourages dialogue with recipient institutions to ensure that donations meet genuine needs by careful curation and supporting indigenous theological reflection.

## *Global Networks*

Theological librarianship thrives on relationships and ABTAPL has long been a hub of international networking and a bridge builder in the global theological library community. From its outset in 1956 as a network for sharing theological library resources and expertise, ABTAPL quickly cultivated international ties with sister organisations such as the International Theological Library Association (formerly ICI), Atla, ANZTLA, ITLA and ForATL, and has been an active member

of BETH. These international friendships have multiplied opportunities for collaboration and advocacy, helping to raise awareness of the needs – and strengths – of libraries across diverse global settings.

Two key pillars of ABTAPL's global engagement have been its partnerships with Atla and European theological libraries through BETH. These relationships, built over decades, have profoundly shaped ABTAPL's development, fostering mutual learning and advancing its mission of professional exchange.

### *BETH (Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie)*

As early as the 1970s and 1980s, ABTAPL members actively exchanged resources and attended international meetings with BETH. Much credit is due to John Howard, whose dedicated commitment to international collaboration was particularly evident in his support for the *Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie*, the European council of theological library associations. "Although ABTAPL was represented at the 1957 meeting, the *Conseil* was formed without British participation" in 1961 (Howard 1982, 11–12). This body, reflecting its evolving identity and European focus, was officially renamed BETH in 1998 (Geuns 1998, 7–8).

John Howard talked about his intention of joining BETH in the second *ABTAPL Bulletin* of the new series, "As soon as ABTAPL could adequately demonstrate its own existence, it could join this European international group, contribute to its activities and benefit from being associated with it" (Howard 1975, 16).

Smith acknowledged Howard's commitment: "John had a strong commitment of ABTAPL's relationship with overseas theological library associations, particularly the *Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie*" (2009, 3). Powles also confirmed this saying, "John had always been a supporter of ABTAPL's links with Europe" (2009, 8).

Over time, what began as occasional visits and information exchanges evolved into a sustained collaborative network. ABTAPL became an active member of BETH, participating in its committees and contributing to BETH leadership with key figures such as Mary Elliott, Penny Hall and Marion Smith amongst others representing ABTAPL for many years (Powles 2022, 522). Currently, Hannie Riley, the Chair of ABTAPL, also has sat on the board as Vice President of BETH since 2021 (BETH, n.d.-a) as well as Christine Love-Rodgers, Deputy Chair

of ABTAPL, as one of the *BETH Bulletin* editors (Love-Rodgers 2025, 4). Representatives of each association have regularly attended the other's annual conferences, often reporting back in the *Bulletin*.

Furthermore, ABTAPL participated in joint projects such as the European Thesaurus for Indexing in Religious Libraries (ETHERELI) project and a multilingual theological thesaurus with ATLA (Smith 1999, 10). Judith Powles states that "John's help with BETH's ETHERELI project was just one of the ways in which this support was demonstrated" (2009, 8). ABTAPL was a strong supporter of this European network.

Moreover, ABTAPL hosted BETH gatherings. For instance, in the year 2000 ABTAPL combined its own annual conference with the 29th General Assembly of BETH, drawing librarians from across Europe and even North America in York (Smith 2000, 6–8). The 48th Conference was held in 2019 in Oxford (BETH, n.d.-b). Such events cemented ABTAPL's role as a bridge between British theological libraries and the wider European community.

### *Atla (American Theological Library Association)*

Early *Bulletin* records reveal that collaboration with Atla has an equally long history, with numerous chronologically recorded exchanges, including visits and shared projects. Representatives of each association have regularly attended the other's annual conferences, often reporting back in the *Bulletin*.

In 1985, a delegation of Atla librarians toured libraries in Ireland and Great Britain in a landmark study trip co-organised with ABTAPL. Lawrence Hill's detailed account in the *Bulletin* captures the spirit of camaraderie and mutual learning that characterised this tour (1986, 4–9). "The ATLA tour of Ireland and Great Britain was an opportunity for everyone to travel hundreds of miles to see not only the countryside, towns, villages, the well-known cities, the cathedrals, etc., but especially the libraries" (Hill 1986, 4).

Hill noted that theological libraries were the focal point as the Atla visitors explored libraries ranging from "a national library, a public library, a convent library, a palace library, cathedral libraries, and denominational libraries and archives" (1986, 9). Hill observed key differences between British and North American practices, particularly noting the diversity, historical depth and curatorial care of British theological collections, contrasting them with American practices such as regular weeding. British libraries often retain materials indefinitely

as treasured holdings, enhancing their archival richness, despite some cathedral libraries having ceased active acquisitions (Hill 1986, 9). The tour highlighted the advantages of the UK's denser scholarly landscape, where a wide variety of theological libraries are accessible within a relatively small geographical area, a contrast to the vast distances between institutions in North America (Hill 1986, 9).

In the late 1990s, formal liaisons were established. Penelope R. Hall, an ABTAPL officer, served as the council delegate to ATLA (Powles 1998, 3), and she noted "a growing sense of the need for co-operation between ATLA (now Atla) and the Council" (now BETH) that would benefit theological librarianship "on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond" (Hall, 1998).

This spirit of partnership yielded concrete outcomes. For example, discussions between British and American librarians led to cooperation on an English-language theological thesaurus for Europe and US involvement in the ETHERELI library project (Smith 1999, 10; Powles 1998, 3). The synergy has also enhanced ABTAPL's capacity to serve its members. Through Atla, ABTAPL librarians gained access to American developments in library automation, digitisation, and consortia resource sharing, while through BETH they engaged with continental European perspectives and initiatives. These inputs have enriched professional practice in British theological libraries, keeping them abreast of global trends. ABTAPL's own mission "to help those working in theological libraries by sharing information and experience" (ABTAPL, n.d.-a) has been greatly amplified by its international alliances.

Likewise, ABTAPL members learned from Atla's initiatives. A 1985 *Bulletin* report by John Howard on Atla's ambitious "Project 2000" (a long-range planning project for theological libraries) observed that while American theological libraries operated on a scale "totally unfamiliar" to the UK, they faced familiar challenges in areas like budgeting, staffing, cooperation and computerisation (Howard 1986). Such insights proved that British and American theological librarians shared common concerns despite structural differences and could benefit from each other's innovations. Also, while ABTAPL has not formally participated in Atla's Task Force on Training for Theological Librarianship, its members have long shared a common commitment to professional development and international training initiatives (Stewart 2001, 15) and joined in an advisory capacity (Campion 2018, 11–12).

By the 21st century, ABTAPL was not an insular British body but part of a worldwide fraternity of theological library associations. Its

leaders explicitly recognise this fact. In 2018, Rachel Campion, the Chair of ABTAPL, affirmed in the *Bulletin* that “I was also keen to strengthen and develop ABTAPL’s relationships with ATLA” (8) and BETH (14) and pledged to nurture these ties to “...make connections with others and to share experiences...between UK theological libraries and those around the world” (8).

More recently, a growing interest in “reciprocal partnerships” has emerged between Atla and ABTAPL (pers. comm., Gillian Cain, 2024)<sup>4</sup>. This reflects a maturing understanding of the global associations. This network has provided fertile ground for collaborative projects and grants, including the publication of ABTAPL’s seventieth anniversary book as an Open Access resource through Atla Open Press, participation in Atla’s 2024 global survey, and attendance at each other’s conferences and networking opportunities.

In summary, the collaborative network with Atla and BETH has become integral to ABTAPL’s identity and impact. Historically, these partnerships grew out of common professional interests and gradually formalised into enduring structures of cooperation. The nature of the collaboration is multifaceted, from joint conferences and exchange of publications, to shared projects and representation in each other’s organisations. All are grounded in an ethos of collegial support. The contributions to ABTAPL’s mission have been profound; thanks to Atla and BETH, ABTAPL members benefit from an international exchange of ideas and resources, ensuring that British theological libraries remain connected to broader scholarly and technological developments. This international engagement has enhanced professional standards and innovative practices within ABTAPL, while also allowing ABTAPL to contribute British insight to the global theological library community. ABTAPL’s alliance with Atla and BETH over the decades exemplifies how working collaboratively, whether with other librarians or other professionals, is necessary for the delivery of library services in an increasingly connected world. The partnerships continue to enrich theological librarianship and uphold ABTAPL’s founding vision of shared knowledge and mutual advancement.

### *Other Associations*

ABTAPL has actively fostered international collaboration beyond Europe and America. Among these partnerships are the Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA) and the Forum of Asian Theological

Librarians (ForATL); both of which have contributed meaningfully to mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and the development of best practice in the profession.

In 2002, ABTAPL hosted Mr. Chacko Chacko, then Secretary of ITLA, during its annual conference in Chester (Smith 2002, 5). Chacko “suggested that exchanges could be arranged between libraries in India and Europe” (Smith 2002, 6). The positive reception of his proposal reflected a shared commitment to strengthening global library networks and mutual relationships. Hall also reported that she helped when ITLA “drew up the articles of their formal constitution at a meeting in Bangalore” (2023, 23).

ForATL was founded in 1991 in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Karmito 2005), and supported by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA). In 2009, ABTAPL representative Allan Linfield attended the 5th ForATL Consultation, which focused on cross-regional collaboration, database development, and librarian education, further deepening ties between ABTAPL and Asian networks (Sellan 2009, 1–2) and Hall made visits to some of ForATL libraries (Hall 2023, 23).

ABTAPL’s commitment to international engagement was further demonstrated at the 2008 theological librarians’ conference in Moscow, co-hosted by the Moscow Theological Seminary and the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association. The event brought together librarians, educators, and IT professionals to address challenges in theological education, including digital resources, cataloguing standards, and open-source tools. ABTAPL’s participation helped shape discussions that led to the formation of a Euro-Asian theological library consortium and a regional library association, expanding the global network of theological librarianship (Zakharov 2009, 21–23).

The most recent exciting development occurred when Hannie Riley, Chair of ABTAPL, visited the Korean Theological University and Seminary Library Association (KTLA) in 2023 to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary (Riley 2023, 48–49). Further collaboration between ABTAPL and KTLA to support libraries in the Majority World is currently under discussion. Eight delegates from KTLA will visit Oxford in June 2025 for a five-day exchange of ideas (pers. comm., 2025).

These are only a few examples. ABTAPL’s sustained relationships with ITLA, ForATL, and other global bodies have helped ensure that the association remains a vital contributor to the international theological library community.

## *Other Provisions*

Support for overseas libraries has not been limited to physical items like books or publications. Beyond this resource provision, ABTAPL invested heavily in mentoring and professional development by providing training, mentoring, consultation and exchange opportunities to overseas colleagues.

In many cases, theological seminary libraries in the majority world tend to have no full-time library staff, operating only through intermittent help or are overseen by staff without formal library or information qualifications or education. Recognising this reality, the Association of Christian Librarians' CILA (Christians in Library and Information Service) has "a strong tradition of providing help and support to Christian libraries and colleges overseas" via their Overseas Assistance provision (CLIS, n.d.). Dennis C. Tucker of the Association of Christian Librarians notes that the mission of its Commission for International Library Assistance is "to provide support for libraries in developing countries where there is a lack of formal training or financial resources" (Tucker 2001, 28). This absence of trained personnel is one of the biggest problems such libraries face, even though these untrained or volunteer librarians manage important college and seminary collections. The need for professional development and training remains acute.

Recognising this gap, ABTAPL members have been offering their expertise through both formal training programmes and informal mentoring relationships in regions where formal training in librarianship is scarce. Whether through in-person visits, remote support, or co-hosted workshops at international conferences, our members have helped create *Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (ABTAPL 1990) and freely provided it to overseas libraries via TBN (Berends 2009), sharing expertise and encouragement with remarkable generosity.

Also, members frequently volunteered their time to mentor new librarians by correspondence, offering advice on cataloguing, acquisitions policies, preservation techniques, and library management. In some instances, this mentoring involved hosting visiting librarians in UK institutions.

One example is found in the contribution of Rita England to theological librarianship in Asia. England contributed to the transformation of the Tao Fong Shan library in Hong Kong into a dynamic Asian theological resource centre. Drawing on institutional and missionary

collections, the library required extensive restoration, reorganisation, and contextual cataloguing. England advocated for a theological librarianship that reflects Asian contexts, challenging Western classification systems that often misrepresent or obscure indigenous Christian thought. She described her vision as one of “rice roots” rather than “grassroots,” underscoring the need for libraries embedded in local cultural and theological realities. Her consultancy extended to the development of a new Resource Centre in Osaka, Japan, intended for Asia-wide use, with a focus on reclaiming and augmenting regional theological collections (England 1987).

Similarly, Emma Walsh, a college librarian and ABTAPL member, led a project at the East African Mission Orphanage (EAMO) in Nakuru, Kenya. Thousands of donated books had remained in storage due to a lack of staff and space. Walsh coordinated the sorting, shelving, and training efforts, personally travelling to Kenya to establish the library and equip local staff and students (2015, 20–21). Her work exemplified ABTAPL’s mission to support practical, transformative projects and was supported by donations and partnerships from within the ABTAPL network. These involvements demonstrate the Association’s commitment to advancing access to education worldwide.

Also, ABTAPL has promoted the value of cross-cultural exchange by facilitating placements between theological libraries in the UK and overseas institutions. In one example, a Sri Lankan theological librarian visited a UK college in 2023, learning about electronic resource management, digital theology archives, and rare book care. Meanwhile, the host institution benefited from insights into oral history preservation and community-based reader services. These short-term exchanges foster mutual learning and cross-cultural understanding, strengthening global networks of theological librarianship.

Another example, as recounted in the *Bulletin*, volume 16, issue 1, Ania Andriamihaja, a librarian from Madagascar, undertook a month-long volunteer placement at Westminster College Library, Cambridge (2009, 14). Such exchanges allow for skills transfer, professional networking, and the strengthening of global theological library communities. This exchange exemplified ABTAPL’s role in facilitating meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and solidified its place within the global network of theological libraries.

ABTAPL also recognised that resource provision and mentoring were insufficient without addressing the infrastructural and financial realities many libraries faced. One particularly innovative model explored by ABTAPL was the provision of large grants for overseas



theological libraries. These grants typically cover the acquisition of a core theological collection, a computer system for cataloguing, and some basic furniture. Though modest by Western standards, such grants often make the difference between success and struggle for new theological colleges.

Moreover, financial support extended to assistance with shipping costs for donated materials, ensuring that well-intentioned donations were not left stranded in warehouses or ports due to lack of funds. In partnership with the Theological Book Network and other organisations like OTRL, ABTAPL members helped cover these practical, often overlooked expenses.

## *Challenges and Opportunities*

Lambe (1987) pointed out challenges and opportunities in the *Bulletin* 38 years ago and these remain true today. British theological libraries, marked by institutional diversity and fragmentation, face challenges in coordination and professionalisation when compared to more structured models in North America and Europe (12–14). In the UK, theological collections span private libraries, seminaries, church libraries, higher education, and mission agencies, making unified development difficult (13–14). By contrast, networks such as Atla in the States and denominational associations in Europe have enabled stronger collaboration, training, and standardisation (12–13).

Lambe argued that international engagement offers vital opportunities for British theological librarianship. He highlighted how theological libraries in the global South, such as in Sri Lanka, Mozambique, and Nicaragua, have innovatively integrated theological education with social development and literacy initiatives (1987, 13). These models demonstrate that theological literature can support not just formal education but also grassroots discipleship, making theological libraries part of a global communication network.

Crucially, Lambe called for a shift in mindset, from isolated helping to genuine partnering, that values the wisdom and innovation of Majority World contexts. His appeal for British librarians to learn from and collaborate with international peers continues to resonate, as ABTAPL plays a key role in fostering global theological dialogue and professional exchange: “[By] communicat[ing] with colleagues in different environments, is to learn more about the possibilities and value of theological and religious literature. Despite the idiosyncrasy so

characteristic of the British scene, the international perspective – west, east and south – is imperative” (1987, 15). These rich opportunities still remain as theological librarians in the UK possess resources, experience, and networks that can make a significant difference, especially coupled with humility and attentiveness to local needs.

## Conclusion

Over the past seventy years, ABTAPL has consistently demonstrated that theological librarianship transcends borders. Rooted in a vision that began with international aspiration, first as a proposed British section of a global theological library network, ABTAPL has lived out its founding ethos by fostering meaningful partnerships, sharing knowledge, and extending practical support to theological libraries across the world.

This chapter has traced ABTAPL’s multifaceted contributions to global theological education. From the production of enduring reference tools like the *Guide to Theological Libraries* and the *Union List of Periodicals*, to the publication of adaptable and widely circulated *Guidelines for Theological Libraries*, ABTAPL has built a legacy of offering trusted, professional resources that assist institutions far beyond the UK. These publications became vital not only for British theological institutions but also for under-resourced seminaries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The emphasis has always been not on imposing uniformity, but on enabling local theological institutions to flourish according to their own context.

Yet ABTAPL’s global impact goes far beyond publications. Its members have embodied a deeply relational, incarnational model of professional service. As seen through projects such as Emma Walsh’s library creation at EAMO in Kenya, or the mentoring support provided to institutions in Madagascar, Nairobi, and Ukraine, ABTAPL’s work has made a tangible difference. These actions reflect a theology of librarianship grounded in presence, partnership, and pastoral care, offering not only books, but hope, dignity, and encouragement to communities committed to theological learning under challenging circumstances.

Equally important has been ABTAPL’s strategic collaboration with global partners, including BETH and Atla, its support of regional networks like ForATL, ITLA, and the emerging library communities in Eastern Europe and the Global South. Through these networks, ABTAPL has helped shape professional standards, advocate for access

to knowledge, and amplify voices from diverse traditions and settings. The international theological library community is stronger today because of ABTAPL's active presence.

At its best, ABTAPL has modelled what it means to be a learning community in service to others – open to mutual exchange, sensitive to difference, and grounded in a shared conviction that theological education matters. ABTAPL members have recognised that a book is not simply a commodity but a theological witness. A well-catalogued library is not merely an efficient system, but a gateway to deeper reflection, academic growth, and ecclesial service. A gift of surplus materials, when thoughtfully curated and lovingly delivered, becomes a seed of transformation in the life of a seminary.

In a globalised and increasingly unequal world, theological libraries have a critical role to play as spaces of inclusion, dialogue, and formation. ABTAPL's global impact reminds us that these spaces flourish not through isolation, but through relationships. As we look ahead to the future of theological librarianship, may ABTAPL continue to extend its shelves, reaching not only into new geographies but into deeper practices of hospitality, justice, and shared learning.

As we celebrate seventy years of ABTAPL, we recommit ourselves not only to excellence in our own libraries, but also to the global theological education's call to justice, generosity, and learning. In a world of growing disparity, theological librarians have a unique role to play in bridging gaps and fostering genuine partnerships across cultures and continents.

To all ABTAPL members past and present who have contributed to this legacy, thank you. Let's keep turning the page together.

It is our hope that this contact will bring to the academic community a wealth of knowledge and a valuable contribution to theological learning, as well as a sensitivity to co-operation that crosses linguistic, cultural and even traditional religious lines worldwide. (Geuns and Hall 1998, 15)

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### *Links to Other Institutions Mentioned*

American Theological Library Association (Atla) <https://www.atla.com/>

Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA) <https://www.anztla.org/>

Association of Christian Librarians (ACL) <https://www.acl.org/>

Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie (BETH) <https://beth.eu/>

Book Aid Charitable Trust (Book Aid) <https://book-aid.org/>

Books2Africa <https://books2africa.org/>

East African Mission Orphanage (EAMO) <https://www.eastafricanmission.org/>

Feed the Mind <https://feedtheminds.org/>

Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) <https://www.foratl.org/fhead.htm>

Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA) [https://www.oocities.org/itla\\_in/home.html](https://www.oocities.org/itla_in/home.html)

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) <https://www.ifla.org/>

Korean Theological Seminary and University Library Association  
(KTLA) <https://www.ktla.or.kr/>

Langham Partnership <https://langham.org/global-resources/>

Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL) [https://  
oxfordtheologyresourceslink.web.ox.ac.uk/](https://oxfordtheologyresourceslink.web.ox.ac.uk/)

Theological Book Network (TBN) <https://www.scholarleaders.org/tbn/>

Theology on the Web <https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/>

Overseas Book Service (OBS) by Feed the Mind [https://www.  
feedtheminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Donating-Books-to-  
OBS.pdf](https://www.feedtheminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Donating-Books-to-OBS.pdf)

4theWord Resource Distributors (4WRD) <https://4wrd.org/>

## Notes

- 1 The Rev. Roger Thomas was a librarian at Dr. William's library in the 1950s (Powles 2022, 521).
- 2 <http://www.le.ac.uk/abtapl/>.
- 3 <https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/>.
- 4 Gillian Cain is the Director of Membership & Engagement of Atla; <https://www.atla.com/person/gillian-harrison-cain/>.