

BETH: European Theological Libraries

As the President of BETH, it is my place, on the occasion of this first session for religious libraries sponsored by IFLA, to thank those who organized this day for the invitation to our association of theological libraries to address the assembled participants in this place that is so full of history and significance for us.

This presentation will review the history of BETH, its accomplishments past and present, and the possibilities that lie before us for the future.

The Origins

Following the Second World War, some directors of European theological libraries put their heads together, inspired by two main ideas:

- The development of the theological libraries is essential for the development of the Christian faith
- Mutual collaboration is necessary to improve the professional quality of our institutions.

The Beginnings

- In 1954, The International Association of Theological Libraries came into being under the auspices of UNESCO.
- In 1957, the first international meeting of librarians from Germany, France, Great Britain and The Netherlands was held.
- In 1961, saw the creation of the association of *The International Coordinating Committee of Theological Libraries* with Germany, France and The Netherlands. In 1967 Belgium joined this association.
- In 1970, *The International Coordinating Committee of the Associations of Theological Libraries* became *The International Council of Theological Library Associations* and grew with the adherence of several additional national associations.
- In 1971, the statutes of the ecumenical association were registered.

The International Council of Theological Library Associations: 1961-1999

In the spirit of rendering service to the libraries, the following publications were developed:

- *Scripta recenter edita*, a current bibliography of philosophical and theological works 1959-1973
- *Bibliographia ad usum seminariorum*, a presentation of the principal tool used in theological, liturgical, missiological and ecumenical studies 1959-1965

The Collaborative Relationships were developed:

- The Council is a member of IFLA from 1971 to 1986
- Collaborations among both national and international associations are developed

BETH since 1999

In 1999, in a desire to emphasize the European composition of the association, the Council became BETH: *European Theological Libraries* .

In the same year, the association set up a website: www.beth.be , hosted by the Catholic University of Leuven

In 2008, a Hungarian graphic artist designed the logo, which expresses the theological tradition of the book, open on a lectern, the shape of which may represent the rivers of Europe or the countries north and south of the Mediterranean, with four touches of a computer keyboard on which rest the letters, expressing the modern nature of our profession.

Today we have 12 national associations as members, 13 extraordinary members, which are individual libraries, to which the Theology-Philosophy Department of the National Library of France has come to join us, and 11 personal members.

Here is the list of our Member Associations:

[ABCF](#): L'Association des Bibliothèques Chrétiennes de France - France

[ABEI](#): Associazione dei Bibliotecari Ecclesiastici Italiani - Italy

[ABIE](#): Asociación de Bibliotecarios de la Iglesia en España - Spain

[ABTAPL](#): Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries - United Kingdom and Ireland

[AKThB](#): Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholisch-Theologischer Bibliotheken - Germany

[EKE](#): Egyházy Könyvtárak Egyesülése (Hungary)

[FIDES](#): Federation of the Polish Ecclesiastical Libraries - Poland

[FTRB](#): Forum for teologiske og religionsfaglige bibliotek - Norway

[URBE](#): Unione Romana Biblioteche Ecclesiastiche (Rome, Italy)

[VkwB](#): Verband kirchlich-wissenschaftlicher Bibliotheken in der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Archive und Bibliotheken in der evangelischen Kirche (AABevK) -Germany

[VRB](#): Vereniging van Religieus-Wetenschappelijke Bibliothecarissen - Flemish-speaking part of Belgium

[VTB](#): Vereniging voor het Theologisch Bibliothecariaat - The Netherlands

What are our assets?

- the marvellous patrimony of our European theological libraries
- the number and variety of European cultures
- the very rich on-line catalogues that are already operational
- the very large libraries that are involved in the association and which support the group
- the Internet

What are our difficulties?

- The number of languages at the time of our meetings that complicates understanding and slows down our debates
- The national organisations differ greatly from one another which impedes certain developments
- Our meagre financial resources.

Present day activities of BETH and the members

- an annual conference in Europe
- our catalogues and free databases that are available on-line
- numerous publication
- the international collaboration
- digitization projects
- exhibitions

Some collected catalogues that are available from the BETH website

- VThK: <http://www.vthk.de> [German ecumenical catalogue] (6 M ref. / 10 M books)

- URBE: <http://www.urbe.it> [the catalogue of the Roman pontifical libraries] (3,6 M ref.)
- Bibsys: <http://ask.bibsys.no> [the catalogue of the Norwegian universities]
- FIDES: <http://www.fides.org.pl> [the collected catalogues of the theological libraries in Poland]
- EKE: <http://www.eke.hu> (click on Theca) [the Hungarian catalogue]
- VRB: <http://www.kuleuven.be> [Belgium]
- UDESCA : coming soon the collected catalogue of the 5 French Catholic universities (1 M ref.)
- Union catalogue : the collected catalogue of theological periodicals in Great Britain

Some databases that are freely available

- IXTHEO- a database for theology that is freely available, developed by the University of Tübingen, at the urging and with the financial help of the German Episcopal Conference: www.ixtheo.de (Tübingen University Library)
430000 documents, + 800 periodical titles
- a database for Biblical studies that allows one to search according to the Biblical reference: <http://ipac.icp.fr/> (Catholic Institute of Paris : 90000 articles referenced et 95000 references awaiting retro-conversion
BibiL (Computerized Biblical bibliography of Lausanne)
BildI (Documentation for Biblical literature Innsbruck)

Publications

BETH publications:

The website which has been running since 2000 where one can find the reports of the Assemblies and other activities

A project in progress to update the publication, *International council of theological library associations 1961-1996* on our website

Various publications of our member associations and our member libraries

ABEI

[ABTAPL](#) : [Bulletin of the association of British Theological and Philisophical Libraries](#)

[ABCF](#) : Bulletin de l'Association des Bibliothèques Chrétiennes de France

[AKThB](#) Analecta Coloniensia, Libelli Rhenani, *Jahrbuch*

FIDES...

International Collaboration

Our primary partner, ATLA (the American Theological Library Association) www.atla.com

Reciprocal participation in our annual meetings

BETH is invited to discuss with the ICC (International Committee for Collaboration) which gives us the opportunity to meet other representatives from theological libraries around the world

We are invited to contribute to the International WIKI for theology: [ATLA's Wiki](#)

We have been introduced to the new on-line journal for theological librarianship which is freely available: *Theological Librarianship: An Online Journal of the American Theological Library Association*; our secretary, Penelope Hall, is a member of the editorial board

We are building consortia to help our members gain access to the ATLA databases at a more competitive price.

Other intercontinental contacts:

[ANZTLA](#) : <http://www.anztl.org/> (Australia – New Zealand)

[ATLA](#) : <http://www.atla.com/> (Canada and USA)

[ITLA](http://www.geocities.com/itla_in/home.html) : http://www.geocities.com/itla_in/home.html (India)

[ForATL](http://www.geocities.com/foratl/) : <http://www.geocities.com/foratl/> (Asia)

[RedLIT](http://www.ibiblio.org/rilit/) : <http://www.ibiblio.org/rilit/> (South America)

As a part of this continuing contact, this year the president of BETH attended the Asian Conference of theological libraries: ForATL in Singapore.

Additional collaboration

[TBN](#) : Theological Book Network: this organisation aims to provide academic books and periodicals for libraries in seminaries, colleges and universities in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, to support theological education of workers, professors and members of the clergy, within the Christian churches.

[Bibliothèques sans frontières](#), an agency under UNESCO

[VLIR](#): Flemish Interuniversity Council that helps institutions in Africa, Latin America and Asia

International Collaboration in progress with libraries in the Mediterranean region

Aware of the absence of any international associations of theological libraries in the countries of origin of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, BETH is actively pursuing contacts with theological librarians in Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco.

These libraries hold resources of the three monotheistic religions, as do our European libraries, but assuredly Islam is better represented there.

First contacts taken in 2009:

Lebanon: [Bibliothèque Orientale de Beyrouth](#), the library of the University of Kaslik

Egypt : [Institut Dominicain d'études orientales](#)

Contacts to make:

[Ecole biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.](#)

[Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie...](#)

Beyond Ecumenism to Interreligious Contacts

Some Jewish and Islamic libraries are already members of the association in Great Britain, ABTAPL

5 Jewish libraries, among them the Jewish Library in Oxford

1 Islamic Library: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation Library,

Some contacts have been taken this year with the National Library of the Realm of Morocco which is ready to develop collaboration with a catalogue of Arabic works that belong to Jean Mohamed Abd El Jalil, a Moroccan who converted to Christianity and became a Franciscan.

Computerization projects

International collaboration with the public institutions

[Europeana](#): Professor Mel Collier, a member of the staff of the library of KU Leuven is a member of the selection committee for the documents to be included in Europeana.

[Bivimed](#): The Catholic Institute of Paris is a partner for the website of the Virtual Library of the Mediterranean.

[Gallica](#) a mutual work with several of our members

National collaboration

[EKE Digital Library](#) the Hungarian libraries

[FIDES Digital Library](#) the Polish libraries which already count some 665 digitized volumes and hope to join Europeana in the future

Project at the level of the individual libraries

The Maurits Sabbe Library of the Catholic University of Leuven has created a website which gives access to the collected works of the Jesuits: www.jesuitica.be

Exhibitions

To demonstrate the value of their collections, our members mount exhibitions in all of the countries represented among the members of BETH.

And today, how are we situated?

It is imperative that we reflect on and make a comparison of the respective policies of our European association, BETH, and those of the North American association, ATLA

The philosophy of BETH

Our libraries offer numerous catalogues, databases and digitalized works on-line without cost.
Our libraries collaborate on a number of national projects
BETH has developed international collaboration more rapidly than our budget really permits

The philosophy of ATLA

ATLA offers their products on-line by subscription
ATLA draws profits from these products
ATLA gives help to theological libraries around the world. Especially in non-Christian countries or areas where Christianity is in a minority, such as India, China, ...
ATLA also gives help to those of us in Europe, and without their help our activities we would be obliged to curtail our activities even more

What needs to be done

Our libraries have developed the professional tools that are adapted to the European cultures and beyond
The world needs the academic references in the religious domain in order to develop the dialogue between the various religions
We offer the tools necessary for this dialogue
We ought to make these tools better known in the academic world

The current developments that are helping to make us better known at the national level

Participation in the collected national catalogues: Bibsys (Norway); KVK/ KThK (Germany) is available in open access, via the German interface, by the KVK; SUDOC (France),...
The sharing of the acquisitions of our associations of theological libraries and in the national resources, for example the associated sector of the BNF dealing with the theology of the Greek world that is provided by the Catholic Institute of Paris
The increase of members in the theological departments of the national libraries
Participation in the national projects of digitalization

The current developments that are making us better known on the international stage

Welcoming the libraries from the countries of early Christianity and Islamic nations
Continuing intercontinental collaboration
Developing relationships with partner such as FIUC, and COCTI

We are well positioned to help in research and in interreligious dialogue

We ought to

Devote more time:

To the development of the website
To the strengthening of our contacts and collaborative partnerships
To preparing publications
To travel so as to gain from the experience of others

Conclusion

We have our projects, our enthusiasm, but very few means.
With our ideas, our collaborative projects, and by the grace of God, we can contribute to the improvement of our world.