

Outgoing

From the Departing Vice-President

Personal Reflections on BETH

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My first BETH meeting was in Nice, back in 2010. My institution, the Theology Library at the University of Helsinki, had joined BETH but soon after that it ceased to exist, becoming part of the central Helsinki University Library. Since 2012, my new job in the brand-new Kaisa house has had nothing to do with the acquisition of theological materials. After the integration of nineteen faculty libraries, both large and small, the Helsinki University Library became, little by little, step by step, a great digital library trying to satisfy the needs of tens of thousands of users. We still have our collections of printed books, but the future belongs to the digital library with its great variety of connections to all available knowledge and research. Clearly, my institution is now quite different to how it was back in 2010. But BETH has also changed significantly in these years.

I joined the BETH Board in 2012, and I have been privileged to work with great colleagues and to know so many fine librarians. One of the decisions we made was to organise each annual meeting around a particular topic, which would be both inclusive and compact at the same time. I think this decision has made it easier to get to know other colleagues, their libraries, and their particular situations in various different countries. The Digital Revolution has had a notable impact on all theological libraries, and the revolution itself is constantly changing. We still do not know what kind of roles theological libraries will take in the future, with the advance of Open Access and various forms of social media, which also are becoming part of scholarly communication. I still think that BETH is the right place for theological librarians to come together, a space to get the courage to face the future and to find new ways of being professional librarians in the changing academic world. There are good things that no one will do if we do not do them. We just have to find what they are and work on them.

One of our BETH veterans who is now retired once described the BETH annual meetings as 'ecclesiastical tourism'. Sometimes the best things are written between the lines and great things happen outside the official programme. Personal contacts among the attendees of BETH meetings are valuable, and often we do not even see ourselves how great an impact they have on us and our professional integrity. We all noticed the lack of these informal connections when the corona pandemic forced us organise two annual meetings, both in 2020 and 2021, as online only.

BETH was founded in Western Europe, but in the past 10 years, it has been spreading towards the East. There is no need to explain how important this is for the future of BETH. And besides, I think we all are waiting to meet one day in Ukraine.