

## From the Departing BETH Representative

### ABTAPL, BETH, and Me

**Rev. Dr Penelope R. Hall**

Retired member and Church Minister in Canada

Shortly after I joined ABTAPL, I discovered, at one of the general meetings, that the British Association was a member of the Le Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie and that they needed someone who spoke both French and German to represent ABTAPL at a Conseil meeting. As I met this prerequisite and was willing to go, I was appointed as the ABTAPL representative to the Conseil. This was the beginning of a very interesting and challenging part of my life.

Very quickly I found myself making some very valuable connections with our European colleagues, as well as, a few years later, our North American colleagues, members of the American Theological Library Association, too. Presented with the burgeoning field of automation, digital tools, and internet access, we began working together on a multi-lingual indexing project which would help us make resources available to all member libraries: ETHERELI (European Thesaurus for Indexing in Religious Libraries). With financial help from the EU, we launched a pilot project, which proved to be extremely challenging. Although we did manage to develop a

workable index tool for certain limited areas of study, we failed to secure additional funding past the pilot and eventually had to disband the project. Nevertheless, participation in this project put me thoroughly into the working of the Conseil and subsequently, I was elected to serve as Secretary of the association.

It was an honour to serve as Secretary of the Conseil and to have the responsibility to plan the annual meetings, which moved from country to country, hosted each time by a different European members' association. This gave me the opportunity to get to know our members better and to appreciate the strengths and the unique collections held by some of the great historical libraries. At the annual meeting of the Conseil in 1999, we voted to change the name of the umbrella association to Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie – the BETH we know today – in order to more accurately reflect the actual composition of the association.

In addition, while I was in office, I had the privilege of representing the European Associations at the annual meetings of ATLA, and, for a couple of years, served on the editorial board of their online journal *Theological Librarianship: An Online Journal of the American Theological Library Association*.

I also helped the Indian Theological Library Association draw up the articles of their formal constitution at a meeting in Bangalore, and briefly visited some of the other libraries in the Asian Forum of Theological Libraries (ForATL) and member libraries of the Australian- New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA). By far the best part of my job was making friends and learning from my colleagues in Britain, Europe, and around the world. At times, I was able to serve as consultant to other theological libraries and help them solve some of the difficulties that they were facing. In particular, as the academic world became more and more automated, libraries moved to using more digital resources. This, in turn, led to the possibility of sharing resources more easily over the internet and the necessity of drawing up guidelines and security protocols for internet usage. This put me on a steep learning curve bringing more challenges to keep me on my toes, but also increasing my thankfulness for various connections with colleagues with expertise in information technology. This knowledge has served me very well in so many other endeavours beside the library world.

It really is impossible to sum up a delightful thirty-year association with ABTAPL and BETH in a few words. I am grateful to my colleagues for their support and for the honour of serving these associations. Please accept this very brief memoire as my thank you note for the privileges you have given me.