

Celebration after celebration – [BETH conference 2023, 10-14 September 22](#) in Rolduc Abbey, Netherlands

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This year's BETH (European Theological Libraries Association) congregation was particularly special with many reasons. Not only was it the 50th year since the BETH foundation but also the 75th anniversary of the Dutch Association (VThB). Secondly, it was the last conference for Geert Harmanny as President, after more than 10 years of dedicated service, Matti Myllykoski as vice president, and Penny Hall as our BETH rep after many years of commitment. If that was not enough, it was the first onsite conference since the COVID pandemic, so participants were glad to see each other face to face. To make the occasion even more special the BETH Festschrift was revealed. The beautifully hardbound copies by Brill were distributed to all contributors. As it is open access, please read it from <https://brill.com/view/title/61181>. Rolduc Abbey was set in a remote location so we had to demonstrate our determination to attend against all the odds, like strikes in Netherlands. Once we were there, we appreciated its tranquillity and peace. This carried on into Sunday with a Holy Mass in Latin which was conducted by HE Mons, Francesco Millito, Bishop of Oppido Mamertina-Palmi, President of the Italian Association on Sunday.

After Sunday afternoon's association report, from Monday 12th September many interesting perspectives and talks were shared under this year's theme, "Facing the Future: Theological Libraries in the 21st Century". Development with digital innovation, the unpopularity of traditional theological studies as a subject, financial constraints affecting many libraries as a whole were discussion points - some were more bleak than hopeful.

For the first session, Matti Myllykoski and Jussi Hyvarinen warned us about the alarming situation in Finland. They pointed out that their library's collections had been moved to the National Repository library which was slowly becoming the central library for printed books. Therefore, local and small libraries are under pressure to move towards a full digital library without any printed books. Susanne van Rijn from Netherlands echoed this concern sharing that theology and religious studies/course were no longer offered in her university so subject specialism is lost with about 70 % reduction of her budget. A new focus is now on interdisciplinary studies.

Despite these less positive prospects, many theological libraries tirelessly work hard together to provide a shared network service, to combine their resources and/or to offer a single comprehensive discovery tool/bibliography database. Spanish, Italian and German colleagues shared their exciting collaboration projects.

The resilience and determination of librarians was exemplified when Agness Balian from Hungary explained the hardship of being in a profession they love and believe in. As wages are minimal, they often get a 2nd job to support themselves financially. It was heart-breaking to learn that even a librarian/cleaner position was advertised. It was inspiring that they are not beaten by these issues. The Hungarian association is turning around this depressing current situation with many strategic plans and projects to preserve their collections and create a digitisation centre as well as repositories cooperatively. They also press on raising their job reputation with specialists.

I believe that we in the UK are also determined to develop our profile with specialised skills. I was thankful to share my thoughts on this with librarians from Europe. Considering many changes have been rapidly brought about by the COVID pandemic and a digital shift in the library and information

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world, I pointed out to our European counterparts was the most valuable asset in libraries are no longer the collections but the staff with digital skill sets to support Digital Humanities, especially Digital Theology.

If you would like to read full reflections on the conference by me please visit <https://beth.eu/2022/10/06/reflection-on-the-beth-2022-jubilee-conference/>.

Next years' conference is going to be held in Cordoba, in Spain from 30th Sep 23 to 04th Oct 23. Its timely theme is "Challenges of Ecclesiastical Libraries in Europe". I hope many of our members will participate in presentations or simply attend in person or online to learn how other librarians in Europe cope with challenges.