
Collecting Catholic Open Access Religion Journals

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ABSTRACT One way that librarians can do more with less is by adding open access (OA) journals to their library's holdings. But how does one identify and evaluate what is available? In his Atla Annual 2021 Listen and Learn session titled "Open Access Religious Resources for your Students," Jeff Siemon shared his collection of approximately 800 OA religion journals. Siemon inspired me to create my own collection of Catholic OA religion journals, which I presented later that year at the Catholic Library Association's Fall Conference. Nearly four years later, my collection has more than doubled. I describe how I found these journals, highlighting specific journal indexes, including a comparison between the Directory of Open Access Journals and *Atla RDB*. I also present updated analyses of journals by continent and country, by language, and by subject, highlighting remarkable trends.

Librarians are constantly being asked to do more with less, especially when it comes to maintaining library collections on a reduced budget. Considering the current economic and political situation, budgets will probably be shrinking again. One way that librarians can increase their periodical collections without spending more on journal subscriptions is by adding open access (OA) journals to their library's holdings. But how does one identify and evaluate what is available? The simple answer: careful curation. At present, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which is perhaps the most comprehensive such index, includes 21,588 journals. However, most of what it contains is likely outside the scope of your library's collection development policy.¹

COLLECTING THE DATA

In his Atla Annual 2021 Listen and Learn session titled "Open Access Religious Resources for your Students," Jeff Siemon, of Anderson

University in Indiana, shared his collection of approximately 800 OA religion journals. I immediately wrote to him and asked for his spreadsheet, which he kindly shared with me. As a Catholic who primarily indexes Catholic subject matter for *Atla RDB*, I decided to sift through Siemon's collection and single out what is of most interest to me: Catholic OA religion journals.

My criteria for judging which religion journals qualify as Catholic are essentially two: journals published by Catholic universities, Catholic faculties of theology, or Catholic scholarly associations; and journals whose contents are explicitly Catholic. The vast majority of the journals in my collection are Catholic in the first sense. One notable exception is *The Journal of Jesuit Studies*, published by Brill.

What counts as a religion journal? Most of the journals I have selected focus on Catholic theology, canon law, liturgy, church history, Catholic education, moral theology, and religious orders, but some cover religious studies and philosophy of religion more broadly. I have excluded journals published by Catholic faculties of philosophy, since these lack religious content. Perhaps one day I will expand my focus to include these.

I have also excluded journals that are not peer-reviewed, since the focus is on scholarly journals. A notable exception is the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, which is included for its obvious importance. I have also excluded preceding titles, since this could skew and inflate the results. For example, the Polish journal *Biblical Annals* had three earlier iterations, which I have not included. Lastly, I have mostly excluded journals that have ceased publication.

And finally, a word about Open Access (OA). In his influential book *Open Access*, Peter Suber defines OA as "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (Suber 2012, 4). I include both gold and green OA journals in my collection, but not hybrid OA journals. Some do not have a Creative Commons license but are nevertheless freely available online. Moreover, some have embargoes, while others have only been partially digitized.

Once I applied my criteria for rejection or inclusion to Jeff Siemon's data and added a few dozen of my own, I ended up with a total of 146 Catholic OA religion journals. I presented these just a few months later at the Catholic Library Association's Fall 2021 Virtual Conference

and then revised it for publication in *Catholic Library World* (Hughes 2021). Following my presentation, Arthur Quinn, Library Director and Archivist at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach, Florida, sent me a list he had been collecting of OA journals in Spanish. Although most were already on my list or fell under my excluded category of philosophy journals, I was able to add a few. I have continued to add new titles to my collection every year. When I wrote my Atla Annual 2025 conference proposal last year, I had not yet doubled that initial 146. I have now surpassed it with 300 journals, even after removing some.

How do I find Catholic OA religion journals? While preparing this presentation and updating my data, I found many more journals in the DOAJ that I had not seen before. I have found others through the Central and Eastern European Online Library. Some have been found simply by looking at the bibliographies of published articles and others have been found through targeted searches of Catholic university websites.

Unfortunately, I have had to remove four journals from my original list. Two are due to my newly tightened criteria of excluding ceased titles, both of whose websites are gone. These are *New Theology Review* from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and *Scripture Bulletin* from the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain. Fortunately, they are now available full text in *Atlas* and *Atlas PLUS*, respectively. The third title is the *Saint Anselm Journal*, which was acquired by the Catholic University of America Press and is now a subscription journal. Lastly, the *Australian eJournal of Theology*, which is still listed on the DOAJ, seems to have disappeared from the internet and I have not been able to locate a replacement. All four journals, however, can still be found in various web archives, with a little digging.

ANALYZING THE DATA

Having explained how I collected my list of Catholic OA religion journals, I am now going to analyze this data in various ways, sometimes using my first dataset from 2021 for comparison. First, we will look at journals by continent and by country. Second, we will look at journals by language. Third, we will look at journals by

subject. Lastly, we will look at journal inclusion in relevant indexes, such as Atla and the DOAJ.

JOURNALS BY CONTINENT AND COUNTRY

European journals clearly dominate the field at 51%. Why? There are several reasons: wealth, number of well-established Catholic universities, and government support for OA publishing. South America (20%) has the largest Catholic population, large Catholic universities, and strong government support for OA. North America (14%), despite its wealth and abundant Catholic universities, has received government support for OA publishing that is, at best, mediocre. Asia (11%) has a growing number of OA journals, but Christians are few and not well-established, except in a few places, such as the Philippines and India. Africa (2%) is the poorest of all, and despite the growing number of Catholics, publishes few Catholic journals.

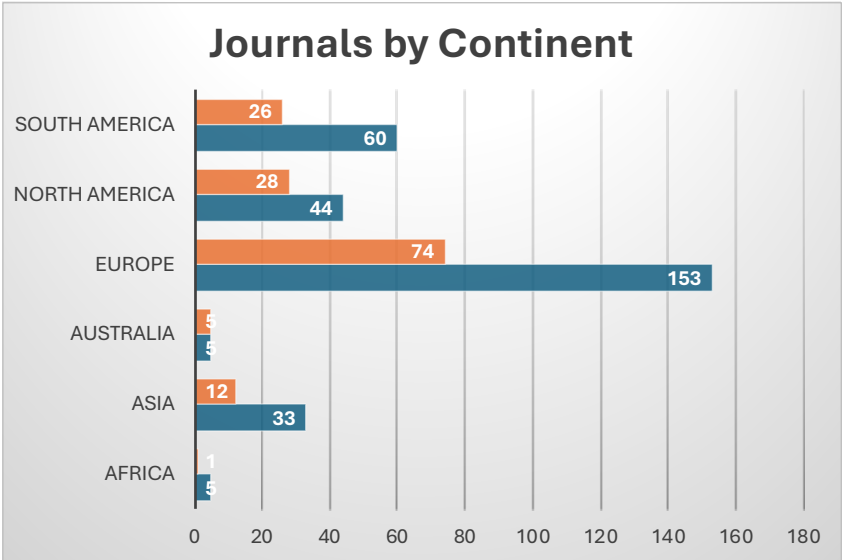


Image 1. Total number of Catholic OA religion journals published on each continent.

Comparing my current data with that from 2021, it remains clear that Europe dominates, doubling the number of journals (from 74 to 153) and maintaining its share at just over half of the total. Australia also remains about the same (5 in 2021 and 5 in 2025). What is most

remarkable are the clear gains in South America (from 26 to 60), Asia (from 12 to 33), and Africa (from 1 to 5). Although North America has gained too (from 28 to 44), its portion of the total has shrunk. This could be simply due to my greater knowledge of North American journals from the beginning, since that is where I am located and what I know best.

For further illustration, one can compare the number of Catholic OA religion journals by continent to the percentage of Catholics by continent (Wikipedia n.d.). This shows that Europe's dominance has shrunk by nearly half, from 51% to 26%. If one combines North and South American journals, the result is about one third, or 35%, of the total, compared to nearly one half, or 49%, of the global Catholic population. The proportions of Catholic journals compared to Catholic population for Asia (11%) and Oceania (1%), however, are about what one would expect. The most glaring imbalance, of course, is Africa, which publishes just 2% of Catholic OA religion journals while boasting 13% of the global Catholic population.

How does this compare to all OA journals by continent? A study of the DOAJ published in 2019, which is getting rather dated now (Pashaei and Morrison 2019), is consistent with my findings above relating to Europe, which publishes half of all OA journals and half of all Catholic OA religion journals. Where my data differs is primarily in relation to Asia (my 11% compared to their 22%) and North America (my 14% compared to their 8%) and this can probably best be explained by the percentage of the Catholic population on those continents.

JOURNALS BY COUNTRY

Instead of updating the 2019 study myself, I have opted to show the ten countries that publish the most OA journals, as indexed in the DOAJ. Indonesia ranks first with 2,481 journals, followed by the UK with 2,200, Brazil with 1,543, the United States with 1,234, Spain with 976, Iran with 971, Poland with 929, Switzerland with 780, Russia with 616, and Türkiye with 575. Of these ten countries, four have significant Catholic populations: Brazil, the United States, Spain, and Poland. As we will see below, these four countries also publish the most Catholic OA religion journals.

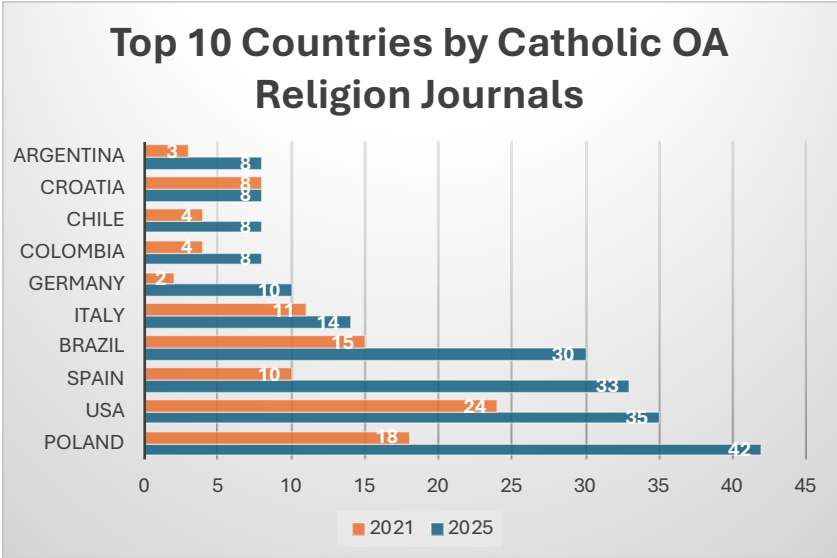


Image 2: The top ten countries by Catholic OA religion journals.

Of the ten countries that publish the most Catholic OA religion journals, Poland (42 journals), the United States of America (35 journals), Spain (33 journals), and Brazil (30 journals) publish the most, as expected, but not in the expected order. The number of journals I have collected from all four countries has grown considerably, especially from Spain, whose numbers have more than tripled (from 10 to 33), and Germany, whose numbers have grown fivefold (from 2 to 10). With 8 journals, Croatia consistently publishes more than its share of journals, considering its diminutive size. Perhaps what is most surprising, however, is that the UK and Indonesia, which dominate OA journal publishing worldwide, each publish just two Catholic OA religion journals. From the UK, I can name several Catholic journals that all require a paid subscription: *British Catholic History*, *Innes Review*, *Downside Review*, *New Blackfriars*, *The Way*, and *Heythrop Journal*. What is holding the United States back? One single American Catholic publisher dominates, publishing nearly twenty journals, but they all require a paid subscription.

It is also illuminating to break down some continents to show journals by country, especially Europe, South America, and Asia. Of Europe’s 44 countries, 22, or half, publish a Catholic OA religion journal. Again, notice the dominance of Poland (42 journals), followed by Spain (33 journals) and Italy (14 journals). Since I only

found two journals from Germany in 2021, I looked very hard to find more—eight more. Romania, Hungary, and Portugal each publish five and Slovakia publishes four. The Netherlands, Slovenia, Austria, France, and Switzerland each publish three. Lastly, the following countries publish only one or two Catholic OA religion journals each: Vatican City, UK, Czech Republic, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Malta.

My findings for South America are also quite comprehensive and well-substantiated: of South America's 12 countries, 8, or two-thirds, are represented in the data. OA Catholic religion journals have at least doubled in every country, not just in previously represented ones like Brazil (15 to 30), Colombia (4 to 8), Chile (4 to 8), and Argentina (3 to 8), but in putting others on the list for the first time: Peru (2), Bolivia (2), Uruguay (1), and Ecuador (1).

The change of findings in Asia is similar. Three countries appear for the first time: Japan (7 journals), China (3 journals), and Taiwan (1). The results for Japan are unusual in that all seven journals share the same publisher: Nanzan University, which is run by the Society of the Divine Word. Similarly, five of India's seven journals share the same publisher: Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram. In the Philippines, my findings have doubled (3 to 6)—and I expect that number to continue increasing. I hope to find journals in Vietnam soon. Of the 48 countries in Asia, 8, or just one-sixth, are represented, however, which makes these findings quite weak.

JOURNALS BY LANGUAGE

Before presenting the data, it is important to note that I have categorized each journal by only one language, even if the journal is published in multiple languages. In such cases, I have designated it by the most used language of the journal or by the language of its editorials or website. Here are the languages for which there are at least two journals:

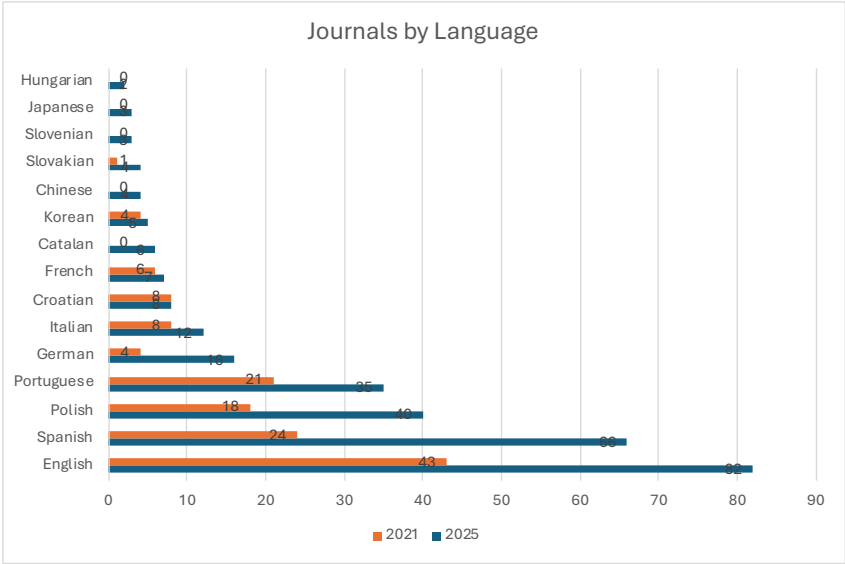


Image 3: Catholic OA religion journals by language.

This chart does not include languages in which only one journal can be found: Czech, Ukrainian, Latin, Lithuanian, Dutch, Romanian, and Bosnian. It is perhaps unsurprising that English dominates at 27%, since it is used in many, often populous, former British colonies. Spanish is a close second at 22%. Polish accounts for 13% because of the large number of Catholic OA religion journals published in Poland, but English is becoming more commonly used there and in many other Central and Eastern European countries.

Rather than look at the rest of the languages, it might be more instructive to look at where the English language journals are published. The vast majority are from the United States (34), with significant numbers from India (7), the Philippines (6), and Australia (5). Otherwise, English is scattered widely across Europe, Asia, and Africa.

JOURNALS BY SUBJECT

Something I did not attempt in 2021 was to categorize each journal by subject, so this section of my presentation is entirely new. I categorized the journals very quickly based on title, scope, and a cursory glance at article titles, frequently using Google Translate.

This section, therefore, is also the least scientific. I assigned one subject to each journal, but many have two or more. First, I am going to offer a broad overview of journals by subject. Then, I will break down a few smaller topics by journal title.

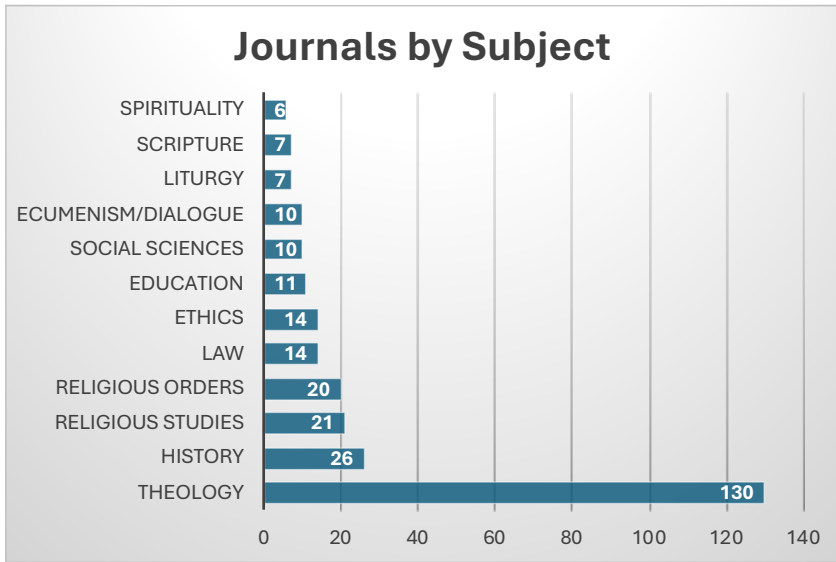


Image 4: Catholic OA religion journals by subject.

This chart shows subjects covered by at least six journal titles. Unsurprisingly, the largest percentage of journals are general theology titles, at 43%. These are mostly produced by Catholic faculties of theology and are not limited to theology, but can also include philosophy, church history, and canon law. Others are focused on Christianity and culture, dialogue, and communication. History comes next, at about 9%. These are mostly church history but include some broader religious history titles. Perhaps 10% or more of the journals are about religious orders, but I assigned some to other topics, like Education and Spirituality. There are a lot of different orders represented here, including the Jesuits, Vincentians, Benedictines, Christian Brothers, Spiritans, and Barnabites. The law category covers mostly canon law journals, but also a few more generally on religious law or religion and law. Ethics usually covers bioethics or social ethics and moral theology. Ecumenism/Dialogue lumps together ecumenical studies and interreligious dialogue.

The more niche topics, covered by five or fewer journals, are Mariology and Person (5 each), Missions and Philosophy of Religion (4 each), Archives (3), Arts (2) and Pilgrimage (1). The category labeled Person is just a shorthand way of lumping together journals focusing on a single individual. Arts is a broad category covering one journal on architecture and one on literature. Lastly, the single journal on pilgrimage is called *Ad Limina*; it is a Spanish journal about the Camino de Santiago.

Now I would like to break down a few other small categories by title. First, let us look at the three journals of archives and library science: *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne, Catholic Archives*, and *Memoria Ecclesiae*—all from Europe. The four missions titles are even more diverse: *Annales Missiologici Posnanienses* from Poland, *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* from the Philippines, *Nelen Yubu* from Australia, and *Spiritus* from Ecuador.

The five journals focusing on a single individual are *Herald of the East, Merton Journal, Oliviana, Studia et Documenta*, and *Studia Lulliana*. *Herald of the East* focuses on St. Kuriakose, who was canonized by Pope Francis in 2014. He is the first male saint of Indian origin, a member of the Eastern Catholic Syro-Malabar Church, and co-founder of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. *Merton Journal*, of course, is about the American monk Thomas Merton. *Oliviana* studies Peter John Olivi, a Franciscan theologian and supporter of the so-called Spiritual Franciscans, who interpreted their vow of poverty very strictly. *Studia et Documenta* focuses on St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. Lastly, *Studia Lulliana* studies Ramon Lull, a strikingly original philosopher, theologian, poet, missionary, and Christian apologist from Majorca who primarily wrote in Catalan and Latin, but probably Arabic, too.

The seven journals on liturgy mostly come from Europe. They are *Ars Celebrandi: Revista de Liturgia* (Brazil), *Ex Fonte: Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* (Austria), *Journal of Pastoral Liturgy* (Australia), *Liturgia Sacra* (Poland), *Miscel·lània litúrgica catalana* (Spain), *Notitiae* (Vatican City), and *Una Voce-Korrespondenz* (Germany). *Notitiae* is the only title indexed in *Atla RDB*.

The seven journals on Scripture are *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria, Biblical Annals* (Poland), *QOL: Revista Bíblica Mexicana, Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* (Poland), *Scripta Biblica* (Spain),

Studia Biblica Slovaca (Slovakia), and *Vulgata in Dialogue: a biblical online review* (Switzerland). All the European titles, except for *Scripta Biblica*, are indexed in *Atla RDB*.

JOURNALS IN MAJOR INDEXES

Now that we have a good idea of the variety of titles in the collection, it might be illuminating to see how many are included in scholarly indexes. Because there are hundreds of scholarly indexes out there, I am going to limit the discussion to just two: *Atla RDB* and the DOAJ, two indexes that are both highly relevant and with which I am very familiar.

When I first presented my research in 2021, about one-third, or 32%, of the titles in my 2021 collection were indexed in the DOAJ. Now there are slightly less, at 29%. In 2021, I was pleased to discover that *Atla RDB* indexed about two-thirds of the journals in my collection. Of course, this was probably because *Atla RDB* was one of the first places I searched for titles. Now that my collection has more than doubled, the percentage of titles indexed in *Atla RDB* is much lower, at 42%, despite the addition of dozens of Catholic OA titles in the past four years. Many more titles from my collection have been evaluated and accepted for indexing but have not yet been added. Nevertheless, *Atla RDB* is still a far better resource for Catholic OA religion journals than the DOAJ.

Let us break down the data a little more. Just 14% of the total are indexed in both *Atla RDB* and the DOAJ. In terms of overlap, about half of the titles in my collection indexed in the DOAJ are also indexed in *Atla RDB*, whereas only a third of the titles indexed in *Atla RDB* are also indexed in the DOAJ. 43% of Catholic OA religion journals are indexed in neither *Atla RDB* nor the DOAJ, which means that the majority, or 57%, of the journals in my collection do appear in either *Atla RDB* or the DOAJ. Nevertheless, there is plenty of room for growth in both indexes.

CONCLUSION

Library budgets are as precarious as ever, forcing libraries to do more with less. One way to boost your library's journal collections

is by adding open access titles. As I have shown, there are a lot out there, but they are not always easy to find. When it comes to Catholic OA religion journals, the DOAJ indexes some, but Atla indexes more. I have curated a collection that goes beyond both, and that is somewhat representative of both OA journal publishing globally and of the global Catholic population. Once you have identified journals for inclusion, you will need to create and/or upload the relevant bibliographic records to your library's ILS. Once the records are available for searching, the vital work of telling faculty and students about these Catholic OA religion journals begins.²

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NOTES

- 1 Disclaimer: This presentation is not a product of the author's employment at Atla. The author is also a member of Atla and presented his personal research findings in that capacity. Any views expressed herein are those of the author.
- 2 If you know of other titles that should be included in the author's collection of Catholic OA religion journals, please contact him at bhughes@atla.com.