

Growing Alongside *TCB*

Reminiscences of an Outgoing Editor-in-Chief

by Christa Strickler

My relationship with *TCB* began in 2015 when Leslie Engelson, the editor-in-chief of what was then called *Theology Cataloging Bulletin*, asked me to write the first article in the new “Testimony” section. Only a few years out of library school, I hadn’t published anything and couldn’t imagine that I had anything to write worth reading. With Leslie’s encouragement, however, I forged ahead and wrote an [introduction to linked data for catalogers](#). I have no idea if that article was helpful to anyone. It wasn’t peer-reviewed, and it was never cited anywhere that I can find, but it was helpful to me. That first published article gave me confidence, so I wrote a few more. In 2018, I wrote about [using genealogy tools to research information for Library of Congress name authority records](#). I don’t recall that anyone asked me that time. I had an idea that might be helpful, so I shared it.

Fast-forward to early 2020. *Theology Cataloging Bulletin* posted open positions for an editor-in-chief and a section editor. Clearly, I wasn’t qualified for editor-in-chief, but I could compile Library of Congress Subject Headings, so I applied for section editor and made it onto the editorial board, working alongside the other section editor, Anna Appleman, under our new editor-in-chief, Cindy Snell.

Since my first article in 2015, *Theology Cataloging Bulletin*’s “Testimony” column continued to produce valuable content for catalogers. Elizabeth Miraglia described a [project to create MARC and MODS 3.5 records for a Syriac manuscripts collection](#) at Union Theological Seminary’s Burke Library. Leslie Engelson drew on her experience with a data migration at Murray State University to share [lessons on the migration process](#). Ann Heinrichs from the Catholic Theological Union described her [love of cartographic cataloging](#), talking MARC fields and sharing images of beautiful old maps. Michael Bradford wrote about [increasing the discoverability of unique Unitarian Universalist Church newsletters](#) at the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, and Armin Siedlecki of Emory University’s Pitts Theology Library outlined the process of [creating a Library of Congress name authority record](#) for the author of a German-language theological book.

When I began as section editor in 2020, the editorial board knew that it was time for *Theology Cataloging Bulletin* to grow beyond cataloging into topics across the spectrum of technical services. One of Atla’s organizational ends is to help its members navigate the changing landscape of the information profession, and we believed that expanding the journal’s scope would help us better serve that end. Even though our title still proclaimed we were all about cataloging, we ventured into the realms of electronic resources and acquisitions with Christina Torbert’s August 2020 article about [managing concurrent demand-driven and evidence-based acquisitions programs](#) at the University of Mississippi. In the meantime, we brainstormed ideas for a new title. In January 2021, we renamed the “Testimony” section to “Perspectives & Practices” and continued venturing into new areas of technical services with Jennifer Hughes’s article on [establishing and assessing a textbook collection](#) at Coastal Carolina University.

In the summer of 2021, we needed a new editor-in-chief, and Atla’s scholarly communication and digital initiatives manager, Christine Fruin, asked me to step into the role. I still felt underqualified for the position, but I was personally invested in the publication’s success, so I agreed. Christine

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patiently guided me through the steep learning curve, and I gained confidence in my ideas and leadership skills. My promotion left a section editor vacancy, so in November 2021 the editorial board welcomed Brinna Michael, who a year prior had published an article on the difficulties of [describing digital ephemera for an exhibition on American evangelicalism](#) at Emory University's Pitts Theology Library.

With a new team in place, we continued preparing for the coming rollout of our new title and expanded format. We were still experimenting with broader technical services content, so the October 2021 issue featured Megan Ruenz's description of [gathering usage statistics for electronic resources](#) at Wheaton College.

In January 2022 we unveiled *TCB: Technical Services in Religion & Theology*, a title that nods to the past while looking to the future. *TCB* calls to mind the acronym that has referred to the *Theology Cataloging Bulletin* for years, while the new subtitle reflects the expansion from cataloging to technical services and mirrors Atla's motto: "Collectors & Connectors in Religion & Theology." The "Perspectives & Practices" section in our inaugural issue featured Charlotte Lew's description of a [project to promote Vanderbilt University Divinity School publications on Wikidata](#). We also debuted a new section of software reviews with Philip Evans's [review of Microsoft Power BI in technical services](#).

Expanding our content scope has also expanded our author and reader base. Previously, most of our content came from Atla members, but to publish on more topics we needed to recruit new authors. I began scouring conference schedules and technical services listservs to see who was doing interesting projects and then sent out recruitment emails to potential authors. It was a lot of work, but it paid off in a 293-percent increase in article downloads that first fiscal year. The additional activity also earned us an editorial board expansion, so we welcomed Nicholas Friesner to the board in September 2023.

The momentum of the scope expansion continued to inspire new ideas, so in October 2023 we published our [first themed issue](#), which included ten articles about varying aspects of system migrations. At one of Atla's [Technical Services Interest Group](#) meetings, several members mentioned that system migrations were a topic of interest to them, as many were either involved in a migration or saw a migration on their horizon. When *TCB*'s editorial board decided to publish a themed issue, we discussed several topical ideas and decided to go with the one that would serve our core audience at Atla. Since a typical *TCB* issue contains only one or two articles, ten was a major stretch for us, but in spite of an unexpected medical leave on my end, the editorial board completed everything early to accommodate other important deadlines happening across Atla Open Press around the same time. Christy Karpinski, Atla's digital initiatives librarian, did an amazing job putting together the layout for an expanded number of articles.

My time as editor-in-chief of *TCB* will conclude at the end of June 2024. I'm pleased with how it's grown and proud of all of the work that our board has put into it. My goals for *TCB* arose from my personal experience. I wanted to provide a place for technical services librarians to share their work without the pressure of the peer-review process. I still remember my imposter syndrome struggles as a new librarian, so I aimed to build *TCB* into a publication that promotes interesting, high-quality work but especially encourages early career librarians to share their expertise and gain confidence in their writing and publishing abilities.

I also wanted *TCB* to expand the sharing of technical services stories and information in the affordable format of an open access publication. My entire career has been in libraries that specialize in theological collections, and like many others in that sector, I know what it's like to be unable to afford professional conference travel and peer-reviewed journal subscriptions. I've had to rely

on free content for much of my professional development, so I've been invested in seeing that *TCB* can provide more such content.

I also believe that theological libraries can learn from the broader library community and vice versa, so I've worked to recruit content from that community and market it beyond Atla, while still striving to include content by and for our core audience of theological librarians in technical services.

Thank you to the wonderful community at Atla for granting me the privilege of growing alongside *TCB*. I look forward to watching where it goes in the future.