

Why Write for Peer Review?

At the recent conference in Scottsdale, the editorial board members presented a (gratifyingly) very well-attended workshop, “Writing for Theological Librarianship.” Participants expressed enthusiasm about writing for the journal, and came up with a number of excellent topics and ideas for articles, essays, bibliographic essays, and columns. This contrasted sharply with our uncertainty (at the time when the journal was launched in 2008) whether we would be able to solicit enough content to make *TL* fly!

We know now that we have a viable, continuing product; we should have no trouble producing our promised two issues per year. However, one sector of the journal has yet to reach its full potential: the section devoted to peer-reviewed articles. This probably finds partial explanation in the fact that, in the world of theological librarianship, librarians do not have much incentive to engage in the type of research lending itself to articulation in a peer-reviewable article. So “why should theological librarians make the effort to do research and write it up for peer review?” is both a timely and a fair question.

I offer two reasons for your consideration. First, I wonder if it’s helpful to re-conceptualize the peer-reviewed article as an act of communication (rather than a test of one’s ability to perform to a certain standard). Rebecca Watson-Boone has urged librarians to think of themselves as “practitioner-researchers.”¹ She argues that much of what librarians do in terms of problem-solving on a daily basis parallels what researchers do in studying a particular issue. It is but a short step for librarians who think of themselves primarily as practitioners to become “practitioner-researchers.” In writing up the results of practitioner-research for peer review, you are 1) initiating (or continuing) a conversation in which you are communicating to your professional colleagues something of value you have discovered in the course of performing your professional duties, and 2) including in that conversation others who have made contributions previously.

Second, the peer-review process is of primary value to the author.² Reviewers (as well as editors) provide important feedback to the author, not only in the form of criticism but also in the form of coaching. Good reviewers (like good editors) prefer to see authors succeed. The purpose of peer review for *Theological Librarianship* is not primarily to accept or reject manuscripts but to improve the quality, if necessary, of any manuscript submitted for peer review. The desired outcome is that a submission will be not merely be publishable, but that it also make the best possible contribution to our discipline.

Ultimately, the best reason to write for peer review is that you are making a contribution to the professional lives of your colleagues. There is no shortage of topics and issues confronting

¹ Rebecca Watson-Boone, “Academic Librarians as Practitioner-Researchers,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 26 (2000):85-93.

² See Alain R. Lamothe, “The Importance of Encouraging Librarians to Publish in Peer-Reviewed Publications,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 43 (2012):156-167.

theological librarianship and warranting engagement that is supported by solid, practical research. If you have an idea you want to run by the editors before launching into research, feel free to contact us. We are happy to work with you every step of the way. Take advantage of the benefits offered to those who submit manuscripts for peer review; the editors and reviewers will make every effort to help you succeed!

