

## Theological Librarianship Talks Open Access

### How Theological Librarianship Came to Be, and Came to Be Open-Access

by Andrew Keck, Director of Library Services and Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

The idea of a journal had been around for a while before *TL* launched in 2008. The minutes from the 2000 meeting of ATLA's Publications Interest Group had one group member state that a "journal idea for the society fizzled because it seemed like extra work." By 2001, the Publications Committee, as it was then called, again brought up the idea of an "online journal" in the context of considering whether some items then appearing in the *Newsletter* might actually form the basis for an "ATLA Quarterly" journal for theological librarianship. The minutes indicate some concern about the supply of articles and the "raised expectations" for a journal as opposed to a newsletter.

During 2002, the Publications Committee considered creating a guide to, or handbook of, theological librarianship that might include a one-time supply of articles and essays to build scholarship in theological librarianship and provide a better basis for training theological librarians. The "guide" was conceived as an international collaboration, and there was a desire to be published by an international publisher to ensure global access and impact. In 2003-2004, the committee began thinking about an occasional paper series that might have different "threads" with editors and peer reviews for each thread. Questions of expense, revenue, and access emerged here too.

Under the leadership of Jack Ammerman, the idea of an occasional paper "thread" around bibliography was reformed into a proposal for the "Journal of Theological Bibliography" that came to the committee in Fall 2004 and to the ATLA Board in January 2005. The "Journal of Theological Bibliography" proposal draft from September 28, 2004, included a section on access:

*The Journal of Theological Bibliography* is an electronic journal available via the Journal's Web site. The Journal provides open access to all of it[s] content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Such access is associated with increased readership and increased citation of an author's work. It also makes access to the information possible for students and scholars in the developing world where fees for access are prohibitive.

For historical context, the first set of international declarations around open access were in 2002-2003, with the first Creative Commons licenses released in late 2002. So the 2004 journal proposal was relatively close to the beginning of a broader open access movement.

With encouragement from the board and from membership surveys in 2005, a parallel effort was started to explore a professional journal for ATLA. Lynn Berg proposed a roundtable for the 2006 Annual Conference to explore this idea with the membership. The Committee was delighted to have more than forty members attend the roundtable. According to the *Proceedings*, "It was recommended that the journal be an open access journal." At a Publications Committee meeting at that same conference, it was noted that the launch of the *ATLA Journal of Theological Bibliography* was being postponed due to the loss of editorial assistance.

By the November 2006 meeting of the ATLA Publications Committee, it was decided to merge the efforts of the two journals into one journal. The initial scope was determined thus:

This open access journal publishes essays, columns, critical reviews, bibliographic essays and peer-reviewed articles on various aspects of theological librarianship and its contribution to theological education.

While the Committee continued to discuss how to maximize revenue and minimize cost while sketching out the journal, there was now an unambiguous commitment to "open access" and a reference to Creative Commons licensing. As the work of the journal shifted away from the Publications Committee, the editorial board became regular advocates of open access and led broader forums on open access at Duke University and the American Academy of Religion.