

# Editorial: Why We Publish This Online Journal

Dean Blevins, Editor

As a reminder to our readers, I thought I might offer a few reasoned reflections on “why” we publish this online journal. No one can doubt the rapid rise of scholarly publications on the Internet. Both journals and newsletters increased dramatically from 110 in July 1991 to 3414 in December 1997, including an increase in the humanities from 318 to 1440 (McEldowney, undated). Research in 1998 revealed at least twenty of these journals, offered free on-line, were associated with Religious Studies (Bellinger 1998, Chapter 4, p. 5-6). By 2001 the Association of Research Libraries reported over five thousand electronic journals (Hovav and Gray, 229).

Not all journals survive this rapid expansion, nor supervising organizations like the Association for Peer Reviewed Religious Journals (<http://rosetta.reltech.org/apejr/apejr.html>). The influx of Internet publications makes the need for central databases and clearinghouses a priority (Chodrow 2000, 90-91). However, the number of quality collections and clearinghouses remains low as respectable sites like Project NewJour (<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/>) record new publications on a regular basis.

In addition, access to specific journals remains a limiting factor for those not familiar with Internet search engines designed to navigate the voluminous number of independent or “home grown” web-publications. General search engines often do not discriminate between sound academic resources and well-marketed private distribution. Scholars attempting to locate even efficient search engines, like Muse (<http://muse.jhu.edu/>) or INFOMINE (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>) often resort to print resources to help them judge the most appropriate resources (Schlein, Sankey and Newby 2002, 113).

Some scholarly Internet resource collections like INFOMINE no longer take suggestions for new resources. The rationale given reveals one of the problems with on-line publication now and in the future.

Recently, INFOMINE has been plagued by commercial Web site operators who have submitted sites without academic value, and who have submitted every page on their sites. (Some commercial service is probably “selling” these registrations.) After receiving 30,000 worthless suggestions over the last month or so, we have decided to stop taking suggestions until we find a reliable way to filter out this junk. Further, any suggestion made after December 20th 2002 will probably be discarded. (InfoMine, Suggest a Resource, <http://infomine.ucr.edu/feedback/suggest.php>).

Regardless of the limitations, on-line publishing continues to grow and includes portions of many print journals, though often as archival or promotional ventures (Peek, Pomerantz, and Paling 1998). At best, the two publishing forums will co-exist, so early expectations of either venture’s demise are long discarded (Sweeney 1997). On-line publishing of new, free-access, journals continues to gain acceptance and endorsement by organizations like the Association of Research Libraries and other academic groups who perceive their need on primarily economic grounds.

## Economic conditions for on-line journals

A coalition of faculty and research libraries currently stimulates the growth and advocacy of on-line scholarly publications, seeking to offset the limited and expensive number of research journals available through print (Bellinger 1998, SPARC Strategy 2003). Organizations like the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) indicate a burgeoning need for more diverse and inexpensive outlets for scholarly publication (Case, 2002). The organization describes itself as “an alliance of universities, research libraries, and organizations built as a constructive response to market dysfunctions in the scholarly communication system” (SPARC para. 1). The coalition perceives the current publishing ethos as one where dysfunctions

“reduced the dissemination of scholarship and crippled libraries” (para. 1). Many academic institutions see SPARC representing a vital concern since expenditures for serials by research libraries increased 210% between 1986 and 2001, over three times greater than the increase in the consumer price index in the same time (ARL Office of Scholarly Communication, section 2, para 2).

Theorists attribute the cost increase to the rise of institutional demands for new research. The need for new research not only determines faculty worth but also, following the Merrill act that created land grant universities, justifies the academic institution's own existence as contributors to society. This demand shifted the need for publication from the free exchange of information among scholarly societies to an economically-driven, commercial publishing venture supporting institutional effectiveness (Chodrow 2000, 86-89). Stanley Chodrow, chair of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library and Information Resources, summarizes the problem

The marriage of the gift-exchange economy of the academy and the commercial economy of journal publishing has had very unfortunate results. The commercial publishers have exploited the division between the producers and the purchasers of information. The faculty gives its research to publishers for free; the publishers sell it back to the university library at high prices (89).

In response, SPARC and others employ a new strategy, a web-based initiative titled Create Change (<http://www.createchange.org/home.html>), calling for new journals; often controlled by faculty rather than publishing houses, and providing open access to these new, often less expensive, academic publications (Rogers and Oder 2001).

Libraries are not alone in the endeavor to add additional avenues of scholarly discourse. Faculties, discovering the possibilities of electronic access, advocate a broader dissemination of their work. Scholars call for a “subversive” program where papers are shared cheaply through file transfer protocol (FTP) sites, gophers, or other accessible formats, including Internet websites, which allow for the open exchange of information (Harrasowitz: Electronic Journal Providers). Faculty members advocating this format often frame their argument in the language of sharing “esoteric” or specialized information for a limited academic audience that has non-trade, no-market value (Okerson and O'Donnell 1995, 11-12). Often scholars disseminate these electronic versions in the form of pre-publication papers called preprints (67) that are later developed into peer review articles (67). Scholars admit that when the electronic publication is more formal there will remain several needs: rapid, expert peer review; rapid copyediting; peer interaction and commentary; and permanent archives that are searchable and retrievable (90). Advocates note such open access faces obstacles, particularly in the economic consolidation of scholarly publishing efforts and current copyright laws (ARL Office of Scholarly Communication).

Internet use, however, may not solve all economic or access issues often associated with print publications. As indicated by INFOMINE's statement above, the Internet itself is increasingly seen as a commercial venture. While Internet sites provide open access, discerning between scholarly versus marketing ventures remains a difficult task when Internet providers blanket sites with marketing schemes. Scholarly writings enjoy some “gatekeeping” not only through the editorial control of print publications, but also in the selectivity of libraries to house more reputable academic journals. For all of the limits of print publications they do help limit the workload of libraries in determining which journals to house or recommend. Professional organizations may prove helpful if they too do not buckle under the weight of multiple submissions. If the American Theological Library Association's efforts maintaining up-to-date database resources provide any indication (ATLA 2003, para. 15), this will remain a constant challenge. The national tensions of on-line publishing reveal both the hopes and concerns of faculties, libraries and even publishing companies engaging this new medium. In the midst of the ongoing struggle to provide new, free, on-line resources, new journals are being conceived and implemented. Fortunately, library standards like the establishment of an ISSN publication number help serious publishing ventures.

In the midst of this movement *Didache: Faithful Teaching* emerged, cognizant of the struggles of on-line publication, yet developed with an additional agenda. Our goal remains to explore the intersections of Christian conviction, culture and education for the Church of the Nazarene and other international Wesleyan communities in higher education. With a global context in mind, our hope remains to resource smaller communities around the globe who have little access to scholarly sources and who may find this journal helpful in shaping their education endeavors. We have also provided research from quality scholars and educators from around the world who have little opportunity to publish in other settings.

For this venture to remain successful we need to hear from you. We continue to need your submissions and referrals. While our context is global, our resource pool of scholars and writers remains relatively small by professional association standards. The challenge for this journal remains that we have no singular organization, no professional society that serves as the primary resource for scholarly writings. What we do have is a large array of scholars and educators dedicated to the same vision of "faithful teaching." Hopefully this journal will continue as a resource as we participate in this exciting yet unstable forum of on-line publishing.

**Dean G. Blevins, Editor**  
**J.B. Elizer Chair of Christian Ministry**  
**Trevecca Nazarene University**

## Resources

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