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Theology & Religion Online

Larry Sheret

ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Theology & Religion Online

Date of Review: August 10, 2021

Composite Score: ★★★★ 1/4

Reviewed by: Larry Sheret   <sheret@marshall.edu>
                Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia

Abstract

Theology & Religion Online (TARO) is a digital repository consisting of four library collections that focus on Protestant and Catholic doctrine, studies into the historical Jesus, and religion in North America (see Figure 1). It includes newly digitized primary texts by major theologians, multi-volume works, references, e-books, chapters, articles, an image library, peer-reviewed secondary readings on core topics, and commentary on lectionaries. This Christ-focused resource is rounded out with a library covering the diverse religious traditions of North America and the hot topics spawned at the intersection of ethics, social movements, and religion. This database is curated and presented in a way that high school students, college students, and scholars will find easy to navigate with authoritative resources that are comprehensive and regularly added to.

Pricing Options

Subscriptions to the four library collections that comprise TARO may be purchased individually or as a bundled set. TARO is a multi-collection research hub. Each collection is available via annual subscription or perpetual access and pricing is based on institution type and FTE. Subscription pricing ranges from $567 to $5,187 for each collection and perpetual access pricing ranges from $3,401 to $31,122 for each collection. Customers who purchase T&T Clark Jesus Library and Library of Catholic Thought via perpetual access pay an annual hosting fee ranging from $200 - $600, and customers who purchase T&T Clark Theology Library and Bloomsbury Religion in North America via perpetual access pay an annual content update fee ranging from $600 - $1,000. Both sets of perpetual access fees are based on institution type and FTE. Consortia pricing is available.
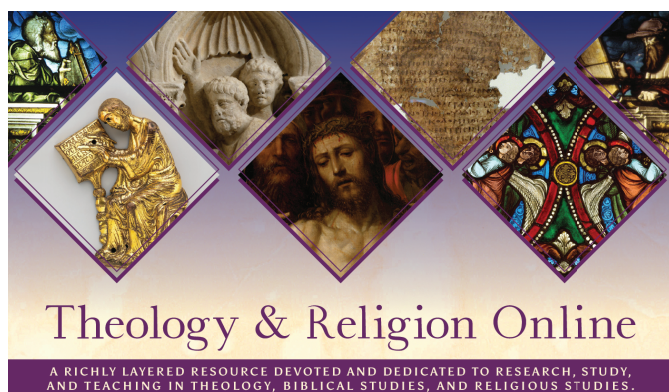

FIGURE 1   **Theology & Religion Online Home Page Image and Description**

Product Overview/Description

Founded in 1986, Bloomsbury Publishing is a relatively young company. Known for its Harry Potter series, it branched out into academic publishing in 2008. The breadth and depth of its academic products has come, in part, by purchasing other publishers, such as T&T Clark, which was founded in 1821, A & C Black (EST 1807), Methuen Publishing Co. (EST 1889), and Fairchild Publications (EST 1892). Although these are established publishers, it is their newer and digitally exclusive titles that are included in TARO. Having assembled a vast list of fiction and non-fiction books in a wide variety of topics, Bloomsbury created collections of its premier titles in religion and made them available online along with other curated and invited works. T&T Clark Theology Library was the first collection launched in the fall of 2019.

Theology & Religion Online (TARO) consists of four (soon to be six) distinct collections which include the T&T Clark Theology Library, the T&T Clark Jesus Library, the Library of Catholic Thought (T&T Clark Catholic Library) and Bloomsbury Religion in North America. The focus of the collections is Jesus, Christian doctrine and history, with its roots in Judaism and the Old Testament. However, Bloomsbury Religion in North America includes all major faith traditions including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and lesser-known sects.

T&T Clark Theology Library | Theology and Religion Online (106 titles, consisting of multi-volume encyclopedias, books, book chapters and articles) <https://www.theologyandreligiononline.com/tt-clark-theology-library>

"Includes primary texts and exclusively commissioned introductory articles written by key academics on theologians and theological doctrines. Search and browse recently added titles or browse by topic. The first of several collections presented on the Theology & Religion Online platform." This collection is anchored by an exclusive digital version of Carl Barth's 6,000,000-word magnum opus Church Dogmatics, a 31-volume set, which is one of the most important 20th century works on Protestant theology.

T&T Clark Jesus Library | Theology and Religion Online (67 titles) <https://www.theologyandreligiononline.com/tt-clark-jesus-library>

The T&T Clark Jesus Library offers core resources for studying the life of Jesus and his impact in history and culture. Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries was published in 2020 and includes Vol. 1: From Paul to Josephus: Literary Receptions of Jesus in the First Century CE; Vol. 2: From Thomas to Tertullian: Christian Literary Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE; Vol. 3: From Celsus to the Catacombs: Visual, Liturgical, and Non-Christian

Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE. As with the other collections, topical articles are included that have been written by leading academics exclusively for this resource.

Library of Catholic Thought | Theology and Religion Online (55 titles) <https://www.theologyandreligiononline.com/library-of-catholic-thought>

The Library of Catholic Thought, part of Theology and Religion Online, presents essential resources for studying the development of Catholic thought and theology. A key element of the library is the new fully revised third edition of the Jerome Biblical Commentary, titled The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century. This 2-million-word project by leading Catholic biblical scholars features a preface by Pope Francis and is digitally exclusive to this resource. In addition to the biblical commentaries themselves, which are linked to a digital edition of the New American Bible, topical articles cover such themes as social justice, ethics, the Bible in the life of the Church and the Bible in diverse contexts.

Bloomsbury Religion in North America | Theology and Religion Online (228 titles) <https://www.theologyandreligiononline.com/bloomsbury-religion-in-north-america>

"Peer-reviewed articles are organized around key themes for courses in religion in North America. 'The Basics' sections cover broad global introductions to religious traditions suitable for introductory courses on Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. 'Religious Traditions' and 'Themes in Religion' Sections give more of an in-depth approach to the North American context and combine overview articles, main articles, case studies, hot topics as well as e-book content."

User Interface/Navigation/Searching

Most users will feel instantly familiar with how to get around the site as the layout is similar to the EBSCO*host* platform. The search bar appears at the top of every screen. The default setting is for a keyword search across all four collections, or of those subscribed to. Search results are displayed in the center of the page with the left margin displaying numerous facets that are available to narrow the search. Depending on the search, facets that have no content are not shown. The search term appears in yellow highlight wherever it appears in the search results that may be displayed by ascending or descending date, ascending or descending title, or relevance, with 5, 10, or 20 hits per page.

The Advanced Search function accommodates phrase and Boolean, but not wildcards, truncation, or proximity searches. A "content type" menu is provided in the Advanced Search that includes articles, audio, book chapters, case studies, exhibition, hot topics, images, Jesus Library introductory articles, main articles, museum, museum objects, overview articles, reference scripture, theologian introductory articles, and e-books. Selected items on the hits page may be saved to a personal account, printed, or shared via Google, Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest.

Citations are provided for all content in the database in Chicago, APA, and MLA styles. Citations include DOIs down to the chapter level. A list of related readings is also provided with the search results.

The site is mostly in compliance with accessibility standards Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1. Content is full text and is displayed in HTML for ease of resizing and reading with assistive technology. Mark-up allows screen readers and keyboard only controls to navigate the site and text. Audio and video content is closed captioned, and transcripts are synchronized. Color contrast ratios ensure accessibility for colorblind and visually impaired users. The World Map, the Timeline, and Museum browse page thumbnails are not yet keyboard-only navigable, but those resources constitute a relatively small percentage of the whole library.

The site works well with any screen reader and any size display, including mobile devices. It functions well with major browsers.

Critical Evaluation

The collection is a great resource for background information as well as scholarly research. To see what would come up on the topic of Monophysites, a search of "became the Son of God" provided information about the Ethiopian Church, which has held that the Logos became the Son of God when his divinity admixed with physical nature when he was conceived in Mary. The passage can be printed, and a link generated so as to get back to the passage easily, but it cannot be copied. Print Screen will not work. Snagit Capture was used to get this image of the passage (see Figure 2).

The text is in HTML, which makes it highly accessible, but pagination would normally be lost. This problem has been resolved. Observing the insert, notice the line near the top of the text and the number 261 on the right side of the text. This indicates where the page appears in the PDF version of the book. This feature makes it easy for students to cite the proper page number without requiring the PDF version of the book.

Catholic theology is expounded in modern commentaries of Jerome and others, and Protestant theology by Carl Barth and others. Orthodox Christianity and other sects are covered throughout the collection although no section is specifically dedicated to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Scholars have access to something about every subject, with ample scholarly exposition on important topics. Because of the careful curation of the collection, there is not much overlap, but there are some gaps which are being addressed by annual updates to the collections. For example, a new digitally exclusive five-volume Encyclopedia of Christian Theology as well as handbooks and companions have been commissioned and will be added to the T&T Clark Theology Library.

TARO will bring significantly more breadth and depth by adding two stand-alone collections by the end of 2021. The six-volume Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, totaling 7,000,000 words, and the Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries.

The theologians called Qab'at, "Unctionists," maintain that Jesus became "the natural Son of God by the unction (= anointing) of the Holy Spirit.' For them, the flesh that the Son took was created by the Holy Spirit at the annunciation/conception.   261

The Täwahado, "Unionists," saw a subordination of one of the three persons in the Trinity, the Son, in the Unctionists' concept of the role played by the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation. They insisted on replacing the formula of the Unctionists, "natural Son of God by the unction of the Holy Spirit," with their own, "natural Son by the union" (of humanity and divinity). They maintain that unction is a role played by all three persons of the Trinity. If the Holy Spirit is unction, they say, the Son too is unction. This makes the Son a participant in the creation of his flesh.

FIGURE 2   Passage Image from Theology & Religion Online

Theology & Religion Online
Review Scores Composite: ★★★★ 1/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★ 1/2
Exclusive online content, authoritative texts, well-rounded variety of curated texts with topic breadth and depth.

User Interface/Searchability: ★★★★
The search is similar to the EBSCO*host* platform which is the industry standard. Minor glitches when browsing with Brave.

Pricing: ★★★★
Pricing for perpetual access the best value.

Purchase/Contract Options: ★★★★ 1/2
Each of the four collections may be subscribed to separately or together as a package.

The topics in eBooks are broken out by chapter. Different chapters appear in different subject and topic areas rather than assembled within a single book. An exception to this is the multivolume eBooks that may be read from beginning to end. Searchable "content types" include Overview Articles, Reference, Case Studies, Theologian Introductory Articles, Image, Scripture, Exhibition, Museum Object, Museum, Audio, and Main Articles, which are usually derived from chapters in the eBooks collection. Articles run from short, a page or two, to as long as a book chapter.

Hot Topics and Case Studies reside primarily within the Religions of North America collection and Museum primarily within The Library of Catholic Thought. It is not possible to search within only one of the four library collections unless only one of them has been subscribed to. Searches always include all the content to which the user is subscribed.

Hot Topics tend to be short, a page to several pages in length. Almost everything in the collection includes a list of references for further

reading. Hot Topics and Overview Articles provide an excellent orientation to the sides that opponents have taken on various social and religious issues, but they do not provide the breadth and depth needed for serious study. For that, one would turn to an entire e-book about a hot topic. These are available on a hit or miss basis. If this is a weakness in the collection, perhaps it will be addressed by the publisher's aggressive collection development efforts.

Although the Hot Topics are well written and interesting, they sometimes tend to advocate for a particular culture war position rather than simply providing facts. Since Religions of North America and its Hot Topics content represent a newer part of the library, one would hope that it will become more balanced in time as additional material is added.

Competitive Products

Gale eBooks has similar collections, but they might not include the types of invited peer-reviewed articles and multi-volume works offered by Bloomsbury, nor does it offer the content types provided by Bloomsbury. Credo Online Reference Service is an aggregator that includes books from both Gale and Bloomsbury. Credo provides a good place to begin research, but it lacks the depth of coverage found in Theology and Religion Online. ATLA is much larger, and subscriptions may include both books and journal articles, if so desired. Libraries already subscribing to JSTOR or ATLA may have a harder time justifying the cost of adding this database, but they lack the collection curation that TARO offers.

Purchase & Contract Provisions

All contracts come with unlimited simultaneous users. Subscriptions may be for any one or all four of the collections. All the digital books in the collections may be purchased separately from Bloomsbury. Inter-Library Loan is permitted. COUNTER 4 and 5 usage statistics are provided, but COUNTER 4 will be phased out at the end of 2022. MARC records are available at the volume level for all book titles, and your institutional logo will display on the interface.

Free Text Keywords: theology | biblical studies | religious studies | patristics | church history | philosophy | arts | catechism | lectionaries | missals | Catholic theology

Primary Category: Philosophy & Religion

Secondary Categories: General Reference; History & Area Studies; Humanities; Sociology, Education, Anthropology, Psychology

Type of product being reviewed: Ebook collection; Encyclopedia/Handbook/Directory/Dictionary; Primary source digital content; Publisher or Organization content/repository

Target Audience: Secondary; General public; Undergraduate (including community colleges); Graduate/Faculty/Researcher

Access: One-time purchase; Subscription

TARO's Non-Disclosure Agreement can be removed from contracts if this is required by funding agencies.

Pre-authenticated links to content are not available, but instructors are permitted to place links or portions of a work into course packs.

Authentication

Primarily by IP-authentication, proxy server, user name/password, Shibboleth, WAYFless URL, OpenAthens, and WAM tables.

Author's References

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. "Theology & Religion Online Promotional Materials." Accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.theologyandreligiononline.com/promotional-materials>

About the Author

Larry Sheret is the Scholarly Communications & Open Educational Resources Librarian at Marshall University. He manages copyright and ingestion of peer-reviewed manuscripts and published articles for Marshall Digital Scholar, Marshall University's open access institutional repository. He also promotes faculty adoption of open textbooks. ■