

Creating the World's First Entirely Open Access Library in Religious Studies: Introducing the Open Access Digital Theological Library (OADTL)

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“Yes, librarians, there is a Santa Claus...” and Santa’s toy shop can be found on the web. You — and everyone else on Earth — can discover and access over 135,000 ebooks for free. These books are fully catalogued and easily discoverable at the website of the Open Access Digital Theological Library.¹ That’s the climax of the story (free books, no strings). Now, let us give you the back story.

What is the OADTL?

The OADTL is the world’s first (and as of this time only) fully open access library powered by the cataloging, search, discovery, and retrieval capacity of OCLC’s World Share (WMS). The mission of OADTL, as operated by the non-profit Digital Theological Library, is to make all open access content in religious studies and related fields discoverable and free for everyone, everywhere through a single search experience in a non-commercial environment. The OADTL is web-based — born digital and exclusively digital — and uses an Integrated Library System (ILS) to curate and deliver its collections. The OADTL’s splash page houses the OADTL’s instance of WMS so that patrons can conduct advanced searches which draw upon metadata from WorldCat.

What can be found in the OADTL?

As of October 1, 2018, the OADTL was drawing upon over 370 open access collections in the WMS knowledge base (over 200 of which these collections were created by the DTL staff). These collections contain over 135,000 ebooks, over 3,000 journal titles, and nearly 2,000,000 articles indexed at the article level (nearly 200,000 of which are full text and peer-reviewed).

Here are a few examples of OA book collections curated by the OADTL:

Ancient Near East Monographs (SBL)	18 titles
Ancient World Digital Library	168 titles
Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) Papers	18 titles
Bloomsbury Open Access 2013	24 titles
Brandeis University Press OA Books	39 titles
Cambridge Open Access Books	23 titles
De Gruyter Open Access Ebooks	1,492 titles
AA Big Book (English, Spanish, French)	3 titles
Theological Commons (Princeton Seminary)	28,562 titles
Andrews University Religion Dissertations	200 titles
Baylor University Religion Dissertations	44 titles
Asbury First Fruits	207 titles

¹ <https://oadtl.org/>

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University of Chicago Oriental Institute	433 titles
Liberty University Dissertations & DMin Projects	421 titles
The MET Ebooks	400 titles

The OADTL curates content from:

- Publisher websites (e.g., Brill, de Gruyter, Gorgias)
- University presses (e.g., University of Chicago, Brandeis, MIT)
- University repositories, especially dissertations (e.g., Baylor, Andrews, Liberty)
- Scholarly societies (e.g., SBL, ARDA, Numismatics Society)
- Museums (e.g., MET, American Museum of Natural History)
- Libraries (e.g., Library of Congress)
- Stand-alone publications (e.g., Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, AA Big Book)
- Public Domain collections (e.g., Theological Commons, Hathitrust, Internet Archive)

The collection policy allows for the curation of ebooks from any source which meets the following criteria:

1. Relevance (content must be relevant to religious studies, broadly defined);
2. Stability (content must have permalinks);
3. Open Access (the OADTL does not link to pirated content); and
4. OCLC catalogued (the OADTL does not currently do original cataloging).

The OADTL collects content related to all religious traditions without discrimination. Presently, content from Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism is more fully represented than content from other traditions. The OADTL collects content in all languages supported by OCLC.

Who can use the OADTL?

The OADTL's mission is to provide these resources to everyone, everywhere for free, as long as the user has internet access. Users are asked to register for an account, but these registrations are anonymous and registration simply allows the librarians to generate more granular usage statistics. Because it uses OCLC's management and delivery tools, the OADTL has almost unlimited capacity. Feel free to add the OADTL to your A-Z database list, to provide the link to your alums, and to encourage increased use in any manner you wish.

How was the OADTL built?

The OADTL was built using the collection manager in OCLC's WMS. Libraries which use this ILS can activate many of the OADTL collections by searching for the prefix "DTL OA" in the knowledge base. The collections with this prefix were created by OADTL librarians. The OADTL uses a two-step process where one librarian creates the collection, and then a second staff member checks each link to ensure that the link goes to the correct content and that the content is truly available in OA form at that site.

The ebooks in the collection have been more carefully curated by the OADTL librarians than has journal content. The metadata for the article indexing has come entirely from third parties (like the Directory of Open Access Journals). We regard the metadata and linkage for ebooks as highly reliable, but the metadata for articles is somewhat less reliable.

The OADTL does not practice censorship in any form. There is no ideological filter imposed on OADTL collections.

Who funds the OADTL?

The OADTL is funded by the Digital Theological Library (DTL), a 501c3 not-for-profit corporation which manages digital resources, both OA and proprietary, for Claremont School of Theology, Denver Seminary, Evangelical Seminary, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary, Lexington Theological Seminary, International Baptist Theological Study Centre (Amsterdam), and Singapore Bible College. The DTL originally curated these OA resources for these seminaries. Then, in keeping with the values and mission of these seminaries (and with the approval of the DTL board), the DTL decided to provide this content to the global community without charge by securing a separate instance of OCLC's WMS to disseminate OA content. The OADTL is currently seeking outside foundation and endowment assistance to increase the pace of content curation in the OADTL.

Is the OADTL permanent?

The DTL is committed to managing the OADTL in perpetuity and doing so without ever imposing any sort of paywall. The DTL will maintain this open library permanently with or without external funding because the members of the DTL share a *moral commitment* to make high quality, OA content discoverable to the global community.

Can other librarians participate in the OADTL?

The OADTL currently uses professional librarians who work at the sponsoring seminaries, student workers, and library interns to create its collections. Librarians (and non-professionals) who share a moral commitment to free dissemination of high-quality content can support the OADTL by (1) using the OADTL; (2) encouraging others to use the OADTL; (3) suggesting content for inclusion in the OADTL; (4) volunteering to work in OADTL collection curation (remotely from anywhere on the planet); and/or (5) making tax deductible contributions to the OADTL which will fund developing more OA collections within OCLC's knowledge base.