

THE CATHOLIC RESEARCH RESOURCES ALLIANCE
ADVANCING THE DIALOG BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE:
BUILDING AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLECTING AND
HOSTING DIGITAL *CATHOLICA* IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

MARTA MESTROVIC DEYRUP

Professor, Head of Technical Services
at Seton Hall University Libraries, USA

JENNIFER A. YOUNGER

Executive Director,
Catholic Research Resources Alliance, USA

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC RESEARCH RESOURCES ALLIANCE

The Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) is a nonprofit membership organization of forty-one academic and religious institutions in the U.S. and Canada. Its mission is to provide enduring global access to unique and uncommon Catholic research materials held by libraries and archives in the Americas. From its beginning in 2005 our vision focused on supporting scholarship worldwide. We had in mind faculty and students at our own institutions but also independent scholars and scholars affiliated with other groups, such as the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California or the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, a consortium of leading academic institutions, and those at secular universities, such as the University of Pittsburgh, which increasingly are expanding their Religious and Catholic Studies programs. We support scholars who study and teach in all disciplines, understanding that their research draws from a wide range of religious and secular resources. As our vision statement notes, we advance the dialog between religion and cultures by:

- creating the freely available portal to Catholic research resources in the Americas;
- sustaining the distinctive network of libraries, archives and other institutions that enable the vision; and
- facilitating internationally the sharing of resources and scholarship.

The Catholic tradition and the scholarship which studies and presents it encompass the experience of a flourishing Church – a billion human beings who live on six continents and whose history reaches back over two millennia. This long heritage is richly documented in hundreds of archives and special collections. However, while many Catholic resources are made known via inventories and catalogs, these materials are not all represented in catalogs. Many resources in fact are not in the world’s largest catalog, WorldCat. The CRRA’s first project was the creation in 2008 of a central index and digital interface (the Catholic Portal) to retrieve and store the cataloging records and archival finding aids of its institutions’ rare Catholic holdings. This was the first project of its kind to create a virtual library for access to rare Catholic materials dispersed across many institutions across the United States and Canada, and make their records accessible through one interface. The results so far have proved successful. A snapshot of the time period between February 2013 and February 2014, shows that 21,000 unique individuals visited the CRRA website and one-fourth of them searched for materials in the portal.¹

The Catholic portal will support the American Catholic Historical Association (ACHA) in its objective:

to promote a deeper and more widespread knowledge of the history of the Catholic Church broadly considered, its growth and expansion from the apostolic age to the present and in all quarters of the Earth; its evolving doctrine, discipline, polity, liturgy, spirituality, and piety; and its missionary, charitable, and educational activities – as well as its external life – its relations with the civil government; its members’ individual and collective influence on the intellectual, cultural, political, and social progress of mankind; and its members’ attitudes toward their contemporary circumstances and problems.²

1. CRRA, update Winter 2014,
<http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/crra-news-and-events/newsletter/>

2. About ACHA,
<http://www.achahistory.org/about/>

Initially, CRRA identified twelve primary collecting themes of particular importance on significant aspects of the Catholic tradition, including social action, education, Vatican II, and Men's and Women's religious orders and missions. These themes include the works of prominent individuals and organizations and bring an often missing religious dimension, in these instances, a Catholic dimension to discussions of critical questions in the world. These materials examine and present the views and experiences of those living the faith, and as shared curated collections, enable other cooperative activities. In 2013, the Alliance hosted a digital exhibit on women religious, which drew from the collections of over a dozen institutions. Currently, the Alliance partners with two women religious congregational archives and intends to work with other smaller religious institutions holding rich and unique collections to assist their participation in the Portal.

In 2010, in an important step to grow our engagement in the Catholic tradition, the Catholic Newspapers Program, whose purpose is to identify, locate, provide access to, preserve and digitize North American Catholic newspapers, was established. Scholars are keenly aware of the ways in which newspapers have documented how the church has helped shape the American experience and significantly influenced our systems of education, social justice, immigration and medical care, to name just a few examples. The first critical step is building a registry of Catholic newspapers in the International Coalition on Newspapers (ICON) database hosted by the International Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, Illinois.

A CONSORTIAL MODEL

Often, digitization projects are an outgrowth of a desire to make accessible online a particular collection or group of collections. These collections drive the project and contribute to the establishment of the parameters of the partnership if more than one institution is involved. When the library directors of the eight founding institutions met, they focused on the need to create a virtual library of rare and unique *Catholica*. Thus, the crucial foundational steps identified the mission, developed the collections policy and

established the portal. This was accomplished by the directors, librarians and archivists who met at the University of Notre Dame (2006) and at Boston College (2007). Next, the directors adopted bylaws (2008), set in place a governance structure, developed principles of membership and set membership dues. All of these documents, including the mission, vision, and goals statements, are accessible via the CRRA website.³

As new members joined, it became apparent that the CRRA needed a new dues model and a more formal institutional structure to achieve its goals. Dues had to meet two criteria. They had to be affordable by individual members and provide sufficient support for carrying out the mission as dues were and are the primary revenue source. Accordingly, the amount of dues ranges from low to high based on the financial strength of the institution. Subsequently, the Board determined that becoming an independent entity would benefit CRRA's ability to obtain gift or grant funds from outside foundations and government agencies as well as attract new members, and thus CRRA became a nonprofit corporation in the United States in 2013. Over the past five years the organizational structure has also evolved to include a Board of Directors, as well as various councils, committees, and taskforces to guide the development and implementation of services and programs. These consist of a Leadership Council, Liaisons Council, Catholic Newspaper Program Taskforce, Collections Committee, Digital Access Committee, Membership Committee, Subject Guide Subcommittee, and Scholars Advisory Committee. The CRRA is principally a volunteer organization that is dependent on the good will of its members. The membership is composed of many different kinds of institutions ranging from large research libraries to small seminaries, diocesan and religious congregation archives. The intent, therefore, was to create a "bottoms-up" rather than "top-down" organization.

The consortium needs to be flexible and agile in its approach, yet it also needed a plan to determine what the Alliance wants to accomplish. In 2011, a Five Year Strategic Planning Task Force embarked on a year-long effort, gathering input from trends in the field as well as from members. The result was an ambitious and visionary plan (2012/13–2016/17) adopted by the Board

3. <http://www.catholicresearch.net/>

in 2012. Each year, members develop goals for the coming year in the context of the five strategic directions:

1. add value beyond discovery,
2. expand scholarly participation,
3. develop important, curated collections,
4. expand CRRA's sharing of resources and scholarship, and
5. secure the future.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CONSORTIUM

The mission envisions an opportunity to create a virtual *Catholica* collection of materials held in American libraries and archives. Opportunity, however, leads us to three immediate challenges. We asked ourselves how we could:

1. enhance the value for scholars,
2. collaborate with other organizations, and
3. secure a sustainable future.

To meet the first challenge, the Digital Access, Collections and Membership Committees will pursue options for collaborative collecting and digitizing, develop strategies to enable members to more easily add records describing (digital) full text content to the portal, and develop strategies to help end users obtain access to the materials found in the portal. Second, we are partnering with the Center for Research Libraries to use the ICON platform as the basis for the Catholic Newspapers Directory. Contributing newspapers metadata to the ICON database will leverage our capacity and, just as importantly, result in greater visibility and access to Catholic newspapers. CRRA is collaborating with other associations by inviting some of their members to serve on CRRA task forces, by supporting their initiatives such as the joint ATLA/CLA/AJL project to survey small religious archives and libraries to assess collection and preservation needs, and by presenting about the Catholic Portal and Newspapers Program at scholarly and library conferences.

Fundraising and grant writing is also critical to securing the future. The Alliance seeks grants and/or gifts to support its mission and for specific initiatives. Sometimes, it is members supported by CRRA who receive the grants, for example, three members obtained a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) to catalog their individual hidden collections relating to Catholic social action. Last year, CRRA supported a member proposal to get funds for digitizing its journal, *The Missionary Catechist*. Current efforts are focused on seeking grants and gifts for newspapers digitization. One of the requirements is that these activities cannot conflict with individual member institutions fundraising activities, so CRRA seeks government grants and private foundations interested in collaborative efforts.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing that we can expand CRRA's impact on the dialog between religion and cultures through collaboration, we are actively reaching out to organizations with shared interests. These include the Catholic Library Association, the American Theological Library Association, the Association for Catholic Diocesan Archivists, the Archives of Congregation of Women Religious, the American Catholic Historical Association, the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. We have high hopes that our mission is gaining momentum. We look forward to working with you in contributing to a global collection of *Catholica*.

ADDITIONAL READING

"The Catholic Research Resources Alliance: Providing Access to Rare and Unique Materials." In *American Catholic Studies Newsletter (Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism)*. Notre Dame, IN, Spring 2013.

An article about the beginning, present, and future of CRRA at:

<http://cushwa.nd.edu/>

Or download the full issue at:

http://cushwa.nd.edu/assets/103432/newsletter_spr13_final.pdf

The ICON database is the most comprehensive source of information about significant newspaper collections in print, digital and micro formats. The *ICON database* includes more than 100 Catholic newspapers with more added on a regular basis:

<http://icon.crl.edu>

Bogan, Ruth, Maher, Diane, Starkey, Edward D. and Younger, Jennifer A. "Toward enduring global access to Catholic research resources." In *Digital Scholarship*, edited by Marta Mestrovic Deyrup, 92–105 (Taylor & Francis, 2009).

Treasures from the CRRA: Women Religious, An online exhibit of images from 13 of our member institutions. This digital exhibit highlights selected rare and unique resources available as bibliographic citations and finding aids through the Catholic Portal. Women religious is one of the major collection themes of the Alliance, however, unlike much textual materials; many images have not been fully documented or cataloged. It is often frustrating for researchers to locate them:

<http://blogs.shu.edu/crra/>

The CRRA website provides access to the Catholic Portal and *Catholic Newspapers Online* in addition to information about CRRA:

<http://www.catholicresearch.net>

- About the CRRA. Vision, Mission, Five year strategic plan, annual strategic plans, brochure and history:

<http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/about-crra/>

- *Collection Policy Statement*

- CRRA Groups including the charges, goals and members of the groups involved in developing CRRA programs, policies and services:

<http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/crra-groups/>

- CRRA member (selected) digital collections

- *Newsletter (CRRA Update)*. The CRRA Update is distributed electronically to CRRA members and friends and details current events and activities of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance. Regular features include an article about a special collection belonging to a CRRA member, introduction of new members, and announcements of conferences and other initiatives from members. All issues are included in the News and Events Archive:⁴

<http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/crra-news-and-events/newsletter/>

- *Principles of Membership* plus documents on membership benefits, dues and a link to the Membership Committee:

<http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/join/principles-of-membership/>

4. To subscribe, send an email to Pat Lawton plawton@nd.edu or Jennifer Younger jyounger@nd.edu