
Digging Deeply in Catholic Studies

The CRRA's Collaborative Approach in Providing Access to Rare and Unique Catholic Collections

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ABSTRACT This paper introduces the work of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA), a non-profit organization comprising fifty Catholic colleges, universities, seminaries, and religious congregations. In service to its mission “to provide enduring access to Catholic research resources in the Americas,” the CRRA has launched two significant initiatives of freely available and collaboratively curated content: the Catholic Portal and the Catholic News Archive.

The paper includes a brief history of the organization and introduces the Portal and the Catholic Newspapers Program. Highlights include innovations in deep indexing and discovery through finding aids across aggregated content, digital content, text mining applications, and links to additional Catholic digital resources.

The homepage of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance's recently revamped website states that its Catholic Portal “provides global, freely available access to rare, unique and/or uncommon materials in libraries, seminaries, special collections and archives.” It is a testament to the CRRA's persistence of vision that this goal goes back to the beginning of the Alliance, which was really launched at a meeting of library directors from six of the eight founding institutions at Georgetown University in November 2004. Following that session, Jennifer Younger, then library director at Notre Dame and the current CRRA Executive Director, noted in a December letter to the directors at Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities schools: “we agreed to focus an

initial project on making special collection materials, defined as rare, unique, or infrequently held materials in print and non-print formats, findable and accessible by scholars working in Catholic Studies. Our job is now to move forward with further definition and discussion with other libraries and archives.” (Jennifer Younger, email message to author, December 22, 2004). This drive to make uncommonly held Catholic Studies materials widely accessible has continued to this day even as the Alliance adds additional resources apart from the Portal, such as the Catholic Newspapers Program.

During the next year and a half or so, participating institutions locally discussed and investigated possible means of building such a portal. “Team Catholic Portal” at Notre Dame initially envisioned a directory of websites related to particular special collections or archives, but we soon realized that many such collections were not discoverable online and those that were listed were often scattered across a larger, institutional site. Even at that time, however, we were also discussing the challenges of collecting metadata records and making them searchable.

There followed a series of three meetings over the next four years, which helped to define the direction of what was called until early 2007 the Catholic Research Resources Initiative (CRRI). In November 2006, representatives from five institutions met at Notre Dame, and discussions produced the agreement that, in addition to increasing the number of MARC records for published works in the Portal, each school would submit five searchable EAD files for collections dealing with American Catholic social action and/or American Catholic intellectual life. This represented an early recognition that the inclusion of archival material would be a key component in the Portal’s development. It also represented the introduction of subject “themes” into the Alliance’s collection scope considerations.

The recently “rebranded” CRRA met at Boston College in November 2007, and this meeting produced two results which would help the effort’s progress: first, the insistence that there be straightforward standards and guidelines for the submission of records; second, the emergence of subject themes as a way of encouraging contributions, as six more were provisionally added to the two introduced at Notre Dame.¹ The CRRA meeting in the summer of 2009 at Loyola University in Chicago featured two new members, Loyola and Villanova, as

well as a new Digital Project Librarian, Pat Lawton. The meeting was also assisted by the contributions of a “scholar participant,” Professor Kathleen Sprows Cummings, an accomplished American Catholic historian at Notre Dame who helped us in our discussions on the goals of the Portal’s search functionality. This meeting also set the direction for the Alliance in other ways as we shall see.

In looking back at the CRRA’s “pilot phase,” six important areas of progress may be identified which allowed the project to gain traction and make progress in the world of Catholic higher education.

1. **Defined the subject scope of the Portal** (2009)—The Loyola meeting approved the twelve themes which are listed in the Alliance’s Collection Policy Statement.² These are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather a way of encouraging the consideration and classification of resources which may be suitable for the Portal. Over time, the themes will hopefully help build a “critical mass” of materials in these areas and thus the Portal’s reputation as well.
2. **Identified schools and archives with special collections** (2006)—A January 2007 Prospectus on the CRRA notes that an online directory of directors of Catholic colleges, university and seminary libraries, archives, and library schools, drawn from the ACCU membership list, had been created.³ A clear requirement for the CRRA’s work is the identification of institutions whose holdings largely constitute the content for Catholic Studies research in North America.
3. **Developed inter-institutional leadership for the project** (2008)—As early as 2006, the CRRI Steering Committee (drawn from all eight founding members) established the Metadata and Collection Committees, with members from different participating schools.⁴ By early 2008, a Board of Directors had replaced the Steering Committee, working with Digital Access and Collections Committees (Jennifer Younger, email message to author, February 14, 2008). Almost from the outset of the Alliance’s work, leadership has been broad-based, with the CRRA’S future never dependent on one institution. The emergence of multiple stakeholders in the effort has given the project momentum and obviously heightened its chances of success.

4. **Developed a Scholars Advisory Committee (2008)**—A CRRA Board of Directors meeting in early 2008 identified scholars who would be invited to join this group; the committee had been formed by the 2009 Loyola meeting. The support and advice of the scholarly community is clearly crucial to the CRRA's products becoming an indispensable tool for research in Catholic Studies.
5. **Developed a methodology for contributing items to the Portal (2008)**—As early as the summer of 2007, Notre Dame's Eric Morgan had designed a technical infrastructure for the Portal. The Boston College meeting, as we have seen, called for record standards and in the summer of 2008, the Digital Access Committee issued minimum requirements for the submission of MARC Records, EAD files, and the Dublin Core elements to which CRRA records can be mapped. The articulation of these requirements is obviously needed in order for the Portal to "ingest" large numbers of records.
6. **Developed an effective search interface (2009)**—The Loyola meeting approved the use of VUFind as the Portal infrastructure.⁵ This open source application, developed at Villanova, features a powerful indexer (SOLR/Lucene) that statistically analyzes search queries and hopefully creates a positive user experience.

Since the end of the pilot phase in 2010, the number of CRRA members and partners has grown to fifty. The progress just described during this early period certainly helped lay the foundation for the Alliance's subsequent growth; however, another major factor is the Catholic Newspapers Program, founded in 2011 and dynamically developed since then.

A 2010 member survey indicated, not surprisingly, that Portal users desired to see more full-text content in the Portal. CRRA realized the need to begin a digitization program, but exactly what should they target for digitization? We took the question to the Scholars Advisory Committee which identified three priorities: Catholic pamphlets, the Official Catholic Directory (OCD), and Catholic diocesan and national newspapers. Currently, several member institutions are digitizing their Catholic pamphlets and making them available in the Portal;

Villanova University had begun digitizing the OCD, and the baton is being picked up by the Catholic Library Association, in collaboration with CRRA.

THE CATHOLIC NEWSPAPERS PROGRAM

The project embraced by CRRA as of the greatest need—and definitely the most challenging—became the Catholic Newspapers Program. The goal and scope of the Program, overseen by the Catholic Newspapers Committee, is to provide access to all extant Catholic newspapers published in North America. Program activities include:

- Catholic Newspapers Online (<https://www.catholicresearch.org/catholic-newspapers-online>): An ever-growing directory of North American Catholic newspapers in digital form, freely available to all.
- Collaborative digitization of priority papers with the help of our Digitizing Partners. Initial efforts are focused here while simultaneously providing encouragement, guidance, and support to others interested in digitizing Catholic papers.
- The Catholic News Archive (<https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org>)

The Archive has thousands of newspaper pages, from different cities, over multiple years... and the collection is growing. The Archive has a robust search mechanism, allowing you to search just one paper, one year, or across years and papers, on any keywords, freely available to all.

Titles in the Archive include diocesan papers from Cincinnati, New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Louis, Newark, NJ, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Hartford, CT, and Miami. National titles include National Catholic Reporter and, thanks to generous grant funding from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the full run of the Catholic News Service newsfeeds, 1920-1970; and the visual complement to the newsfeeds, *The Catholic World in Pictures*. Digitization of The Catholic Worker is in progress.

A sample page from the Archive (see Fig. 1) showing a search result for “Dorothy Day” illuminates the simplicity and power of the Archive. From this page, the user can download a PDF of the article, the issue, or just the text. Users can search any term(s), which are then highlighted in

the results. The Archive includes a text correction module, which allows collaborative correction of the digitized text from which search terms are identified, thus making for more effective and complete results.



FIGURE 1 Article on “Dorothy Day” from the *Catholic Transcript* in the Catholic News Archive

The Newspapers Program continues to grow in support of the goal to provide access to all extant Catholic newspapers published in North America. With the work of the CRRA community and beyond, a rich resource for discovering firsthand news of the Catholic experience through its newspapers has been realized, along with a commitment to preservation of the content in perpetuity. In the meantime, CRRA’s continued commitment to its first project, the Catholic Portal, continues also to develop as a widely used and important asset in furthering CRRA’s mission to provide enduring global access to Catholic research resources.

THE CATHOLIC PORTAL

The Catholic Research Resources Portal, or “Catholic Portal,” provides global, freely available access to rare, unique and/or uncommon materials in libraries, seminaries, special collections, and archives. By electronically bringing together resources in many formats from many collections, the Portal enables easy, effective, and global discovery of Catholic research resources.

The Portal is a core component of the CRRA’s mission and presently contains records to rare and unique member-held resources in

all formats, with a growing number of resources available in digital form, or “full text items.” The Portal (<https://www.catholicresearch.org>) is searchable from any page and includes (as of September 26, 2018) more than 143,000 member-contributed records describing rare and unique holdings of all formats, including archival materials, books, cassettes, and online materials. Of those 143,000 records, 46,000 or 32% of the total, take the user to the full text version of the item, by simply checking the “Limit to full text” box in the upper right hand corner of the page (see Fig. 3).

CRRA is fortunate to have a team of individuals working behind the scenes to make the Portal a truly robust and innovate discovery system. A special shout-out for being the creative geniuses behind the scenes goes to Demian Katz of Villanova University and Eric Lease



FIGURE 2 Search the Portal from any page <https://www.catholicresearch.org>

Search: 'dorothy day' 0 items Login Language ▾

Suggested Topics... within your search.

- Catholic Worker Movement **39**
- Periodicals **37**
- History **31**
- St. Louis University -- Periodicals; Universities and colleges -- Missouri -- Saint Louis -- Periodicals; **23**
- Jesuits -- Periodicals; Monasticism and religious orders -- Periodicals **33**
- Catholic Church **13**

Showing 1 - 50 of 158 for search: "dorothy day", query time: 0.20s

Results per page: 50 | Sort: Relevance

Select Page | with selected: [Add to Book Bag](#)

1 **1964: Events: Dorothy Day** by Mundelein College. Published 1964. "...wlaocaj_col14-1278 1964: Events: Dorothy Day Women and Leadership Archives Mundelein College 1964..." [Get full text](#)

2 **1964: Dorothy Day** by Mundelein College. Published 1964. "...wlaocaj_col14-1425 1964: Dorothy Day Women and Leadership Archives Mundelein College 1964 Dorothy..." [Get full text](#)

3 **The gospel in action** by Day, Dorothy, 1897-1980. Published 1955. **Location:** Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame. [Online Access](#) [Online Access](#) **Electronic**

Narrow Search

Limit to full text

INSTITUTION

- Saint Louis University **62**
- Marquette University **43**
- University of Notre Dame **43**
- Loyola University Chicago **8**
- Catholic Theological Union **2**
- Barry University **1**

LIBRARY

- Plus XII Memorial Library **62**
- Hesburgh Libraries **43**
- Raynor Memorial Libraries **43**
- Women and Leadership Archives **1**
- Paul Bechtold Library **2**
- John M. Kelly Library **1**

FORMAT

- Electronic **41**
- Serial **26**
- Journal **18**
- Book **3**
- Kit **2**
- eBook **2**

FIGURE 3 Limiting to full text results in the Portal

The screenshot shows a search interface with a search bar containing "cora evans". To the right of the search bar are buttons for "All Fields", "Find", and "Advanced". Below the search bar, the text "Search: 'cora evans'" is displayed. A section titled "Search alternatives:" lists "cora evans" » "crra evans", "cura evans", "cor evans". Below this, it says "Showing 1 - 1 of 1 for search: '"cora evans"', query time: 0.05s". On the right, there are controls for "Results per page" (set to 50) and "Sort" (set to Relevance). A checkbox "Select Page" is followed by "with selected:" and a button "Add to Book Bag". Below this, a list item is shown for "1" with a "NO IMAGE AVAILABLE" icon. The item title is "Guide to the Father Robert E. Hughes collection on apparitions and mystics, circa 1980-circa 2002 ML.042". It includes the text "Published circa 1980-circa 2002", "Location: Marian Library, University of Dayton", and "..." Cora Evans 2 ...". There are links for "View finding aid at owning institution" and "View finding aid in Portal display", and a button for "Archival material". A "Save to List" link is also present.

FIGURE 4 Search for “Cora Evans” retrieves Dayton finding aid in the Portal

Morgan and Kevin Cawley of the University of Notre Dame. Two noteworthy innovations include the ability to search the entire text of finding aids in the Portal by keyword, and text mining applications.

Within the Portal, all finding aids that are available from a linked URL are fully indexed by the Solr/Lucene indexer, and therefore any keyword in the finding aid is searchable and retrievable. The power of this innovation cannot be overstated and a simple anecdote illuminates.

Stephanie Shreffler, Collections Librarian/Archivist at the Roesch Library of the University of Dayton, conveyed the story of assisting a scholar in his research on an American mystic, Cora Evans. Material on Evans was not abundant, and the scholar had been unsuccessful in locating materials in the local catalog. When Shreffler suggested he try the Portal, he found that Dayton *did* have information about Evans (Figure 4). The finding aid was listed in the Dayton catalog but was only findable in the Portal, due to the power of fully indexing all words in the finding aid.

Another Portal innovation, spearheaded by Eric Lease Morgan of the University of Notre Dame, is text mining. Taking Catholic pamphlets at the University of Notre Dame as his test collection, Eric provided text mining for the pamphlets. At a glance, the user can see what words are prominent in the text (see Figure 5), and where within the text they occur (Figure 6), making it an effective tool in helping users to grasp quickly the emphases of the document.

Figure 6 shows a mapping of the fifty most frequently used words in the text, shown with sixty letters around each term. The map in the upper right hand corner shows where within the text the words occur. As we can see from this map, the majority of occurrences of the word “work” appear about 70% of the way through the book. A reader interested in this particular topic could then immediately flip to page 45 or so and be assured of finding material on the topic of interest.

In addition to robust search, retrieval, and display of information within the Portal, there are carefully curated subject guides that focus on topics of interest (Figure 7). Ted Bergfelt of Duquesne University has created and generously contributed many of the CRRG guides. Guides include African-American Catholics, Catholic Social Action, and Digital Catholica, to name just a few.

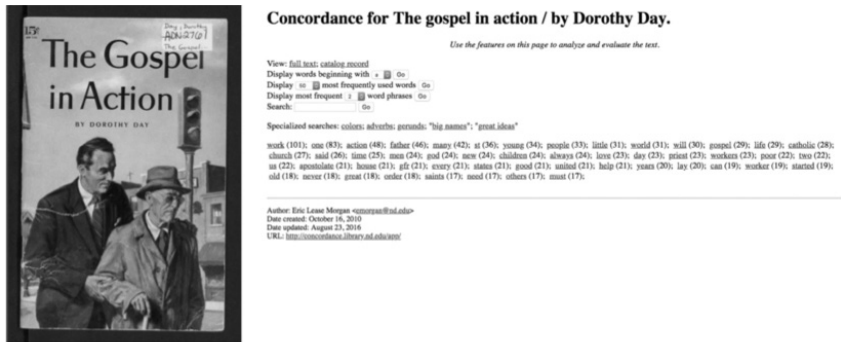


FIGURE 5 Catholic Pamphlet *The Gospel in Action* and word occurrences in the text using text mining techniques

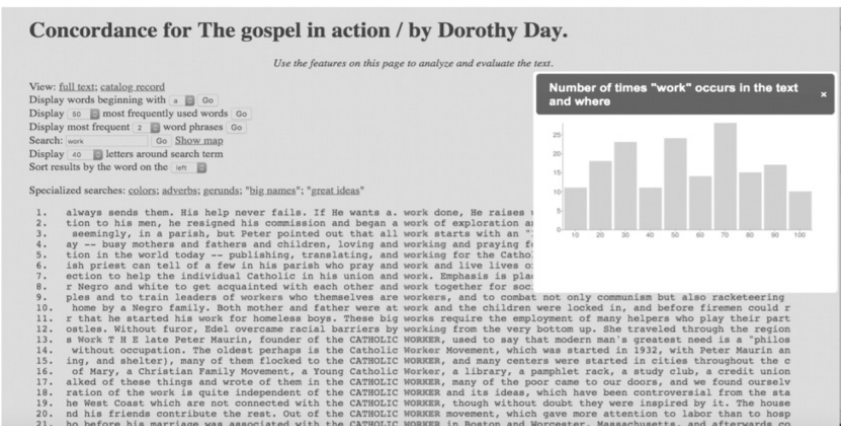


FIGURE 6 Word counts for *The Gospel in Action* by Dorothy Day

