

Catholic Pamphlets at the Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame

Introduction to the Collection

The Catholic Pamphlets Collection in the Rare Books and Special Collections Department includes more than 5,500 pamphlets, published between the 1830s and the present. This extensive collection includes pamphlets on saints and sacraments, daily Catholic life, moral issues, Catholic social thought and action, Catholic history, and a wealth of other topics. The bulk of the collection has been digitized, and digital copies are available through the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries catalog, <https://library.nd.edu>.

Catholic pamphlets, like Catholic newspapers and parish histories, were identified early on by librarians building the Catholic collections as a genre of particular interest to Catholic studies. These often ephemeral publications span the “high” and “low” church, ranging from Vatican documents (e.g., *The council and the liturgy: a commentary on the Constitution on the sacred liturgy*, ca. 1965) to didactic and humorous aspirational pamphlets aimed at teens (e.g., *Instructions on dating exclusively for boys in high school*, 1960).

Willging's Index

The heyday of Catholic pamphleteering was probably the 1930s through the 1950s, when Father Eugene P. Willging, SJ, director of the library at the Catholic University of America and dogged compiler of guides and indexes to Catholic literature, published a series of indexes describing the scope of Catholic pamphlets. In his *Index to Catholic Pamphlets in the English Language* of 1949, Willging lists 847 Catholic pamphlets published between May 1946 and 1948 and says a staggering 37,000,000 total pamphlets were distributed in the United States. He notes: “The sales figures carried below . . . indicate that *the pamphlet is a major tool* in spreading Christ's truth. As the presses pour forth increasingly attractive titles, the *public demand seems to be growing*” [emphasis added].¹

To illustrate the growth of this genre from the 1930s forward, Willging in his 1949 edition cites a very precise number of American Catholic pamphlet sales for the year 1936: 4,439,705 copies. In 1947, by his estimate, “one could say that American Catholic pamphlet production and distribution is approximately 13,000,000 copies annually.”²

In the 1950 edition, covering 1948-50, the tone of the introduction is less celebratory of the essentially flat sales: “While distribution facilities have increased notably in the past ten years, the annual sales volume of approximately 13,000,000 copies is a clear indication that *many Catholics are not using this form of literature*. It is of further significance that no new firm of major status has entered the field in the past few years.”³

In the 1953 edition of the *Index* (covering the years 1950-52) Willging is perhaps heartened when he goes back to the micro-level of analyzing the unique titles produced in the two-year span (481 titles) and showing output by publishers, which now include many names familiar to this genre (Table 1).

While not providing the previously reported statistics on millions of pamphlets produced and distributed, he notes details such as this: “Significant among the new developments of these two years have been the superbly designed and

¹ Eugene P. Willging, *The Index to Catholic Pamphlets in the English Language*, 1949, vol. 4 (June 1946/Nov. 1948), iv, https://repository.library.nd.edu/view/1624/777007_c.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Eugene P. Willging, *The Index to Catholic Pamphlets in the English Language*, 1950, vol. 5 (Dec. 1948/Sept. 1950), iii, https://repository.library.nd.edu/view/1556/777007_a.pdf.

well-printed publications of the Grail . . . [and] . . . the Liguorian Pamphlet Office that has shown that *a 5 cent vest-pocket title is still a possibility.*⁵

No one before or since has considered the significance of the “5 cent vest-pocket” Catholic pamphlet, but Willging, through his *Index*, captured the height of Catholic pamphleteering in his mélange of statistics and subjects.

Steps in Creating, Curating, and Accessing the Collection

Willging’s work gave librarians developing the University of Notre Dame collection a checklist to use when approaching Catholic pamphlets and also inspired the building of a distinct collection with a simple organizing principle: size — small; matter — Catholic. After bringing together pamphlets from the existing holdings in both the Rare Books and Special Collections and the general circulating stacks, the collection grew, especially by gift and sometimes by purchase. Questions of scope have been asked since the beginning of the development of the collection. One of the earliest Catholic pamphlets in the collection was produced well before Willging was born: the *Report of the committee, relating to the destruction of the Ursuline Convent, August 11, 1834, Boston*⁶ (Figure 1).

This particular pamphlet raises many questions about scope. For instance, should the Catholic Pamphlets Collection include historical documents? Rare items? Titles aimed only at a Catholic audience? Only titles written by Catholics? Anti-Catholic materials? We have erred on the side of inclusiveness for all characteristics except size, limiting the pamphlet collection to items of generally fewer than fifty pages. Recent collection development efforts have resulted in modest numbers of additions related to particular Catholic authors and themes, for instance, titles by Fulton Sheen, pamphlets related to saints’ causes, social and moral issues (e.g., birth control), and pamphlets aimed at children, teens, and young adults. These types of pamphlets receive significant attention from students and researchers alike.

The character of the Catholic Pamphlets Collection has been determined at least in part by regional differences in publishing, topics of local Catholic interest, and the availability (or not) of older material from booksellers. As a benchmarking exercise in 2009 showed, comparison of the Catholic pamphlets at the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries (5,500-plus pamphlets) and those at the Catholic University of America (8,000-plus pamphlets) using OCLC showed largely unique holdings at each institution — the overlap or duplication between the two collections was only 30 percent. Regional availability and pamphlets of local interest may explain the significant number of unique titles in each respective of collection. Other collections possess even larger collections of Catholic pamphlets, including the University Archives at the University of Notre Dame, which counts 10,000 pamphlets in its holdings, and the Marian Library at the University of Dayton. At the very least the expectation of regional uniqueness points to the need to describe, uncover, and digitize many more Catholic pamphlets collections.

Bruce Publishing Co.	14
Catechetical Guild	13
Catholic Information Society	25
Catholic Truth Society (London)	35
The Grail	33
Irish Messenger Office	11
Knights of Columbus, Religious Information Bureau	13
Liguorian Pamphlet Office	36
Our Sunday Visitor (including Catholic Hour, etc.)	35
Paluch	13
Paulist League	17
Paulist Press	52
Queen's Work	24
Radio Replies (Rumble & Carty)	11
Sub-Total:	348
Miscellaneous publishers (of fewer than ten titles)	133
TOTAL:	481

Table 1: Publishers of Ten or More Titles⁴

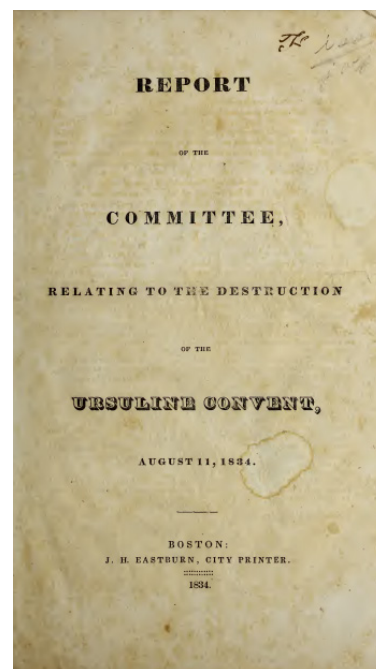


Figure 1

⁴ Eugene P. Willging, *The Index to Catholic Pamphlets in the English Language*, 1953, vol. 6 (Oct. 1950/Oct. 1952), iii, https://repository.library.nd.edu/view/1602/777007_b.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ C. Loring, *Report of the committee, relating to the destruction of the Ursuline Convent, August 11, 1834* (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, 1834).



Figure 2

the collection has been treated, and the deacidified print pamphlets now serve as the preservation masters. Digitization has been very important to improve access both locally and globally. More than 5,000 pamphlets from the collection have been digitized, and work continues to make the copies discoverable, downloadable, and extensively read — through text-mining, corpus building, and remote use.

Planning for digitization built on the cataloging work already done to provide control and access to the collection. Most of the funding for the digitization came from generous internal university grants and made possible two initiatives to outsource the digitization work, starting in 2011 and finishing this year. Much related work — further digitization, metadata creation, cataloging, preservation planning, and project management — was carried out in-house. The preservation librarian, in consultation with metadata and cataloging librarians, developed the digitization specifications. The specifications were used twice, in the first round of digitizing in black and white and in the second in color through the efforts of the Internet Archive. The Hesburgh Libraries' growth in digital services and support means that future digitizing will likely be done in smaller batches in-house, employing the same specifications and workflows developed for outsourcing. The support from the local project management team proved indispensable. During the second round of out-sourcing, the project manager greatly increased the efficiency and communication among a multi-department digitizing team.

Access

Primary access to the print and digital records of the Catholic Pamphlets Collection is through the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries catalog, <https://library.nd.edu>. The genre term “catholic pamphlets” is assigned to all of the titles. Records for the digital copies will include links to the full text and to text-mining tools. Preservation copies of the Catholic pamphlets will also be archived in CurateND, <https://curate.nd.edu>, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

The University of Notre Dame's Hesburgh Libraries is a founding member of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA), a nonprofit membership alliance of institutions collaborating to deliver projects and services in support of its mission “to provide enduring global access to Catholic research resources in the Americas” (www.catholicresearch.net). Records for all the Hesburgh Libraries' digitized Catholic pamphlets will be available in the Catholic Portal, with associated text-mining tools. The CRRA's Catholic Portal provides a robust platform for discovering the collective, curated holdings of CRRA members, thus increasing access to our collections.

Themes in the Collection

A discussion of themes in the Catholic Pamphlet Collection usually starts with a list of topics, broad and imperfect. If one explores the genre term “catholic pamphlets” in the Hesburgh Libraries catalog, some themes will clearly be represented: Catholics and schools, children's activities, social and moral issues, liturgy, prayer, devotions, Catholic action, saints, politics, labor, evangelization, religious life, and sacraments. Subjects that don't appear in title words are much harder to discover, e.g., attitudes of or towards Catholic lay persons in a given era. Availability of full text searching of digitized pamphlets will enable more nuanced examination of the whole collection. Through browsing users will be able to examine colorful and interesting cover art of Catholic pamphlets, especially those of early twentieth-century titles (Figure 2).

Planning for the Print and Digital Collections

Once benchmarking established the uniqueness of a major portion of the Catholic Pamphlets Collection, the physical collection was considered high priority for preservation through mass deacidification. The bulk of the

Yet another “way in” to our digitized Catholic pamphlets is through the Internet Archive University of Notre Dame Catholic Pamphlets page at <https://archive.org/details/universitynotredamecatholicpamphlets>. Although this collection page includes only the 3,900 pamphlets digitized by the Internet Archive, the thumbnail images and sorting capabilities of the site make it a highly useful reference for our collection.

Future Uses

With digitization comes vastly improved local use as well as global access. As a collection in the Rare Books and Special Collections department, the Catholic pamphlets were previously accessible only during limited hours. Digitization thus helps to solve a local service problem as well as increase the base of Catholic research items available globally.

The Catholic Pamphlets Collection at the Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, represents just a small part of this ephemeral Catholic output, but our hope is that these local efforts will spur partner libraries in the CRRA and others also to digitize their unique titles and provide enduring global access to these Catholic studies riches. As Fr. Willging said, “The public demand seems to be growing.”