

Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts: The Shared Wealth of Scholarly Resources in the Catholic Portal

The Catholic Portal, a gateway to rare Catholic collections, was the first project undertaken by the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA). The creation of the portal not only reflected the organization's mission "to provide enduring global access to rare, unique, and uncommon Catholic research materials held by libraries and archives in North America"¹ but also provided the initial impetus that first led to CRRA's formation.



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

The idea of creating a Catholic Portal originally grew out of the need for easier access to Catholic primary resources and rare print material to support teaching, learning, and research. Out of these discussions by scholars, librarians, and archivists, eight institutions (Boston College, the Catholic University of America, Georgetown University, Marquette University, Seton Hall University, St. Edward's University, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of San Diego) came together in 2008 to "lay the foundation for a collaborative and sustainable initiative through the development of a portal and a supporting membership organization."² Since then the membership of CRRA has grown from this small but influential group of Catholic universities to almost fifty member and partner institutions, each bringing to the portal the promise of shared access to their unique and diverse Catholic collections.

In its first iteration the Catholic Portal closely resembled a consortium's catalog. It contained searchable bibliographic records representing mainly print publications that identified the individual library or archive where this material could be seen in person. In addition the portal also provided a means to search archival finding aids so that users could also search the information contained in these detailed descriptions of archival holdings. Today, with the addition of links to digitized texts and images, as well as access to media in various formats, the Catholic Portal also functions as a virtual library. The portal's ability to provide immediate access to rare Catholic materials from a variety of institutions with one search is potentially a powerful research tool.

The following essays showcase four collections CRRA member institutions have contributed to the portal: the Catholic Church Extension Society records held by Loyola University Chicago; the John Stokes and Mary's Gardens Collection at the University of Dayton; the portal's collection of parish histories; and the University of Notre Dame's Catholic Pamphlet Collection. The collections described in these essays run the gamut from archives and personal papers to ephemera and privately printed publications. Allowing access to these resources through the Catholic Portal also provides the user with a rich and dynamic context for this material — access that also encourages the discovery of related research materials from member institutions and creates the opportunity to make deeper connections and new discoveries.

The Catholic Church Extension Society's records offer researchers one hundred years of material documenting the Society's efforts to develop missionary zeal in the clergy and laity. While this extensive archive is an abundant source of information on its own, the portal also allows easy access to related material held at other member institutions. For example, one of the most fascinating activities the Society pursued was its use of chapel cars: donated railroad

¹ Catholic Research Resources Alliance, "About the Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA)," <http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/about/>, accessed September 10, 2016.

² Catholic Research Resources Alliance, "History," <http://www.catholicresearch.net/cms/index.php/about/history-of-the-crra/>, accessed September 10, 2016.

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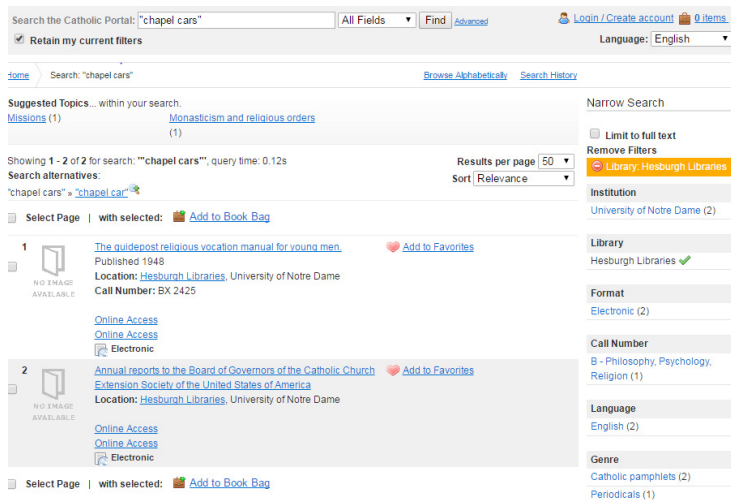


Figure 1

cars used for missionary work. A quick search of the portal retrieves a link to Notre Dame’s digital copy of the Society’s *Sixth Annual Report to the Board of Governors* that provides a detailed snapshot of the Society’s chapel cars circa 1911. This search also points to another digitized publication available in the portal, *The Guidepost Religious Vocation Manual for Young Men*. In this publication, the section on the Redemptorist Fathers notes the use of chapel cars in their “quest of lost sheep in the deep South.”³ (See Figure 1.)

A closer look at the Society’s finding aid reveals a list of the individual Redemptorist Fathers who participated in chapel-car missionary work. Another search of the Catholic Portal using the names on that list finds a work by Byron J. Krieger, one of the

Redemptorist participants in Louisiana chapel-car missions. The Catholic Theological Union digitized his book *75 Years of Service*, which is available via a link in the portal. A keyword search of the text of Father Krieger’s publication reveals references to the Redemptorist Fathers’ missionary work aboard Chapel Car St. Paul.

The University of Dayton’s “Guide to the John Stokes and Mary’s Gardens Collection” provides users of the portal with a detailed finding aid to records that document this unique form of Marian devotion and also to the personal papers of John Stokes, founder of the Mary’s Gardens movement. Searching the portal uncovers another reference to John Stokes in the St. Leo Shop and St. Leo League records that are associated with the Ade Bethune Papers. In this finding aid St. Catherine University contributed to the portal, there are two folders containing John Stokes correspondence dated 1955-1969. These files reference Bethune and Stokes’s collaboration on the Seat of Wisdom statue. The documentation of their collaboration in Dayton’s John Stokes papers allows for the possibility of a more complete picture of their working relationship.

The essay on the value of parish histories discusses the extensive collection of this genre found in the Catholic Portal. Presently there are bibliographic records of almost 3,000 parish histories in the Catholic Portal. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center has contributed records for approximately 500 parish histories that predominantly highlight the founding and development of Pennsylvania parishes. The largest contributor of parish histories, the University of Notre Dame, has a more geographically diverse collection but also contains over 170 histories devoted to Pennsylvania parishes. Consulted together via the portal, both these collections create for researchers a more comprehensive view of the development, concerns, and leadership of parishes in Pennsylvania. (See Figure 2.)

The Catholic pamphlet collection of the University of Notre Dame, like the collection of parish histories, often contains

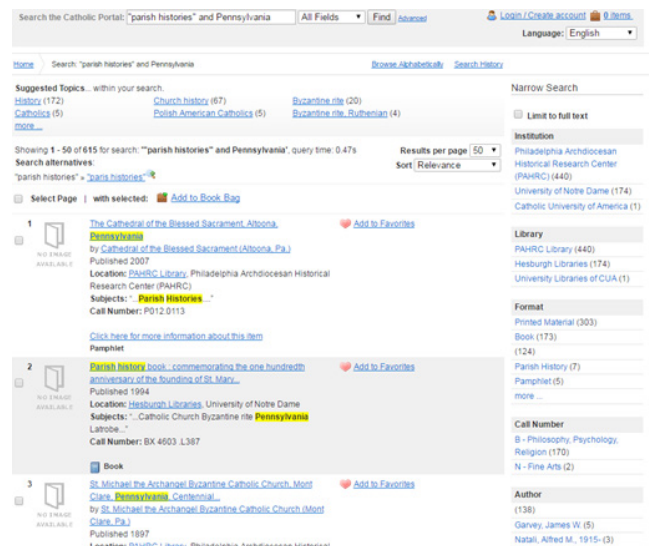


Figure 2

³ “Redemptorist Fathers (C.S.S.R.),” in *The Guidepost Religious Vocation Manual for Young Men*, comp. Catholic University Conference of Clerics and Religious of the Catholic Students’ Mission Crusade (Washington: Academy Press, 1948), <https://repository.library.nd.edu/view/947/000087636.pdf>.

ephemeral works. Fortunately, libraries have preserved these pamphlets through the foresight of collection policies that recognize their research and archival value. Notre Dame has contributed almost 6,000 pamphlets to the Catholic Portal. Of these pamphlets, over 1,200 have been digitized and are available as full text documents. The portal also includes bibliographic records contributed by other members, some of them also available in digital form. The two largest contributors, the University of Dayton with over 11,000 pamphlets and the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center with almost 8,000 pamphlets, have made the portal's Catholic pamphlet collection a rich resource for scholars. Searching portal records for this genre makes it possible to discover a cross section of writing on specific topics that often mark important social or political concerns of the time.

As the examples of collections described in the following essays show, the Catholic Portal's research value resides not only in its capacity to find a specific collection but also in its ability to act as an entryway to related collections of member libraries and archives. As the portal grows with the addition of more collections, especially those with digital content, its ability to make more powerful connections and discoveries will increase. Catholic scholarship serves to benefit when the portal makes visible the shared wealth of its deep research resources freely and easily accessible to all.