

Libraries in Catholic Universities: Unanticipated Sites for Interreligious Dialogue...and Conflict

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Abstract:

Vatican II called for all Catholics to "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found in other religions, and the values in their society and culture" in order to "join hands with them to work towards a world of peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."¹

This paper argues for a deeper understanding of a practical reality for libraries in Catholic colleges and universities as sites for dialogue and for potential conflicts over differences within and across religious and spiritual communities.

Using the concept of collection development as a "social process" as theorized by Lee,² we examine the value placed upon social differences in libraries against practical realities of hegemony of one faith tradition and interpretation over others. Three case examples in the Raynor Memorial Libraries of Marquette University (USA) are explored: conflict over a conservative leaning collection of Catholic materials, acquisition of the papers of social activist Dorothy Day, and the presence of the archives of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions, all of which pose challenges to documenting changing narratives and definitions of social justice. The paper concludes by considering the meaning and implications of information access and services to an increasing diversity of religious and spiritual experiences in a university driven by Catholicism.

¹ Nostra Aetate (1965) (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)

² Hur-Li Lee, Collection Development as a Social Process, *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29/1 (January 2003): 23

In speaking before a world assembly of Jesuit higher educators in 2018, Father Arturo Sosa, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, stated,

“We are anxious about the diminishment in social conscience, democratic political systems, and public decision-making mechanisms. In the middle of all that, we are also facing the enormous challenge of sharing in the new digital culture that is rapidly changing how human beings relate to each other and think. This development is not simply a revolution in technology. Rather, it is bringing about a new world which we must inhabit. The digital ecosystem is radically shifting what human culture is all about.”³

Father Sosa’s sentiments are not only relevant to the global network of Jesuit colleges and universities but to higher education more broadly and specifically on the experiences of libraries as sites of social and cultural memory in our digital era. There are important relationships between divisions at local, national, and societal levels over a variety of social and cultural forces and the print and digital information resources that document those forces and are preserved for academic use by students and faculty. In her study on collection development as a social process Hur-Le Lee found information resource development to be “under tremendous social influences from both individuals and their institutions...individuals’ standpoints and ideologies...influenced their interpretation of user needs and their judgment on the best means to satisfy user needs.”⁴ Father Sosa’s specific reference to the impact that digital ecosystems are having on “what human culture is all about” has a specific meaning to access and preservation of resources about different religious and spiritual experiences in Catholic and other religious-centered or faith-based institutions of higher learning. As a Jesuit institution, Marquette University and its faculty continue to wrestle over the question of human culture in a theological and spiritual context. Consequentially, corresponding collections in the Raynor Memorial Libraries, the university’s main library system, are also subjected to changes in understanding and interpreting their *raison d’être*. The following exemplify fissures between the original intent of collections reflecting religious and spiritual experiences associated with the Catholic Church and changing cultural and social forces that reframe these as contested sites for understanding Catholic and Jesuit intellectual traditions.

Balancing Act: the Ciszek Collection

Marquette University Libraries has a strong and comprehensive theology collection which supports the theological curriculum and scholarship of the University. The Walter Ciszek, S.J. Catholic Spirituality Collection is a source of spiritual resources for students to use in exploring their personal spiritual needs and as guidance in their own faith journey. The collection consists of Catholic devotional literature, mediations, prayer books, catechisms, lives of the saints, apologetics, conversion stories, and works on vocation. The Ciszek Collection was established as a gift from the Marquette University Student Council of the Knights ⁵of Columbus and is funded in part by a generous donation by the alumnus William R. Burleigh (Journalism '57) family. The collection is named for Father Walter Ciszek, S.J. (1904-1984), a Jesuit priest who was imprisoned in the former Soviet Union for twenty-four years. The

³ Father General Arturo Sosa SJ, *The University: Wellspring of Reconciled Life*, World Meeting of Jesuit Universities, July 10, 2018, page 4

⁴ Lee, *Collection Development*, 30

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collection materials are selected by a committee consisting of members of the University's Knights of Columbus student chapter and faculty members in consultation with library staff.⁶

The collection was well received upon its inception but was also a cause for concern among some university community members due to its fundamental and traditional Catholic theological perspective. This led to a call to disband the Ciszek Collection or reintegrate it into the general library collection. Ultimately the Ciszek Collection remained intact through the creation of the Manresa Collection, devoted to Christian diversity and contemporary Christian spiritual life that mirrored the Ciszek Collection yet representing a broader spirituality, mostly, but not entirely, Christian. Its materials include Christian diaries, poetry and prayers on topics such as contemplation, discernment, humanity, philosophy, vocation, discipleship, and Christian leadership.⁷ The Ciszek and the Manresa Collections sit side by side on the second floor of Raynor Library available to browse by students, and items from each collection circulate regularly.

Time Changes Perspective: Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions

Catholic evangelization of the Americas' indigenous peoples is an epic chapter in the history of the Catholic Church. Recognizing the value and preservation needs of Church records pertaining to Native American peoples, the Marquette University Libraries; Special Collections and University Archives made a commitment to collect and preserve this unique heritage. In 1977, Marquette University Libraries became the repository for the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions and hereafter acquired more than 50 other collections, which collectively document Catholic evangelization, pastoral, and social justice concerns encompassing civil rights of indigenous peoples, economic justice, education, Christian inculturation in indigenous cultures, social reform, and government relations and accountability. Extensive audio visual, photographic, and textual holdings present indigenous and Christian beliefs, practices, music, and oral testimony/histories among several ethnic groups. A number of recordings and textual records feature indigenous languages, most of which are endangered, and many of which have translations. Most holdings pertain to urban and rural people in the United States and former dependencies, especially the Dakota-Lakota, Inuit-Yupik (Eskimo), Ojibwa-Ottawa (Odawa), Apache-Navajo (Dené), and Piman (Akimel O'odham-Tohono O'odham) Indian peoples. The records present the pioneering, spiritual, and social justice legacies of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (Mohawk-Algonquin), Saint Katharine Drexel, Holy Nicholas Black Elk (Lakota), Père Jacques Marquette, S.J., Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. (Potawatomi), and other notables, as well as local history records by/about parishes, schools, communities, and racially mixed people. The Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions is the largest of three record groups within the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records and the oldest of three affiliated agencies in the Black and Indian Mission Office (Washington, D.C.).⁸

While the collections preserve and make available elements of a difficult history between and indigenous people of North America, it also preserves their heritage. Once perhaps a source of pride in the work of the church with Indigenous people, in recent years the

⁶ Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries. Ciszek Collection.

<https://www.marquette.edu/library/about/ciszek.php>

⁷ Marquette University. Raynor Memorial Libraries. Manresa Collection.

<https://www.marquette.edu/library/about/manresa.php>

⁸ Marquette University. Raynor Memorial Libraries. Special Collections and University Archives. Catholic Native America Collections. <https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/indians.php>

collections represent sources for difficult conversations regarding mission and evangelism work on reservations and among Native communities.

Social Justice in Action: the Dorothy Day and Catholic Worker Collection

A strong commitment to social justice is reflected in the Libraries' Dorothy Day and Catholic Worker collection. The Marquette University Archives began to acquire the records of the Catholic Worker movement in 1962. The movement was founded in New York City in 1933 by Dorothy Day (1897- 1980) and Peter Maurin (1877-1949) and has evolved into a faith-based, grassroots movement for peace and social justice through nonviolent direct action. The collection is comprised of the personal papers of Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and others involved in the movement; records of past and present Catholic Worker communities; photographs; audio and video recordings of interviews, talks, television programs, and peace demonstrations. The papers of Dorothy Day contain her correspondence (largely incoming) with family members, friends, and associates including Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Eileen Egan, James Forest, Ammon Hennacy, Thomas Merton, and Gordon Zahn. The surviving papers of Peter Maurin, including manuscripts and scattered correspondence, as well as other members of the Catholic Worker movement form another part of the collection. The records of the New York Catholic Worker (NYCW) community include the back files of *The Catholic Worker* and letters to the editor and other general correspondence, published information and correspondence documenting the NYCW's involvement in the labor and peace movements and its ties to related communities and organizations; and records of the houses of hospitality and farms maintained by the NYCW in and near New York City.⁹

The Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Collection clearly supports the social justice mission of Marquette University. However, the tenets of the moment's social activism in support of labor and protest of war and Day's own abortion as young woman prior to her conversion to Catholicism are at odds with conservatism within and beyond the Catholic Church.

Implications for Academic Libraries

These three case studies point to several key challenges for libraries at Catholic colleges and universities and, for that matter, at any religious or faith-based institution. First, there is a challenge to reconciling ideological and intellectual traditions that create fissures in the broader milieu present in the formation and response to the Ciszek Collection. In this example, the social process of collection development entailed working across differences to quite intentionally provide separate ideas in the same space. Second, social processes of collection development change over time. The primary records of the involvement of the Catholic Church in Native and Indigenous communities in the U.S. are subject to changes in the interests of researchers seeking to revisit anew the lessons of history. In this case, laying bare the historical record regardless of its important and at times ugly truth takes on a new and evolving shape perhaps from those who originally preserved these vital resources. Finally, there are those narratives in history that capture social movements within the Catholic Church that pressed important social agenda and continue to challenge assumptions. In this case the library is both sensitive to and protective of political and social movements and forces within the Church itself and among those that profess faith within the religious tradition.

⁹ Marquette University. Raynor Memorial Libraries. Special Collections and University Archives. Dorothy Day – Catholic Worker Collection. <https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/day.php>

If universities exist to create new knowledge and to teach students, it follows that libraries provide access and preserve knowledge not simply for the sake of access and preservation but to serve as a place for working with controversial and contested ideas around theology and spiritual practices. As the case examples demonstrate, libraries in religious institutions of higher learning will need to be flexible with the reinterpretation and reimagination of existing collections that may induce discomfort in users. Moreover, libraries can serve as a bridge between contested territories of interpretation between religious, theological, and spiritual traditions by providing intellectual free spaces for the pursuit of ideas beyond classrooms and co-curricular, social, and cultural environments within campuses.