Hailperin Collection Unearths Scholarly Links Between Catholics and Jews

By Martin Sivitz, Overdues Assistant

One little-known but remarkable fact of intellectual life in the Middle Ages was the influence of Jewish scholars on Catholic scholars. This phenomenon contrasts significantly with what history books often say about the position of Jews in Medieval Europe.

The study of this relationship was a specialty of Rabbi Herman Hailperin (1899-1972). Dr. Hailperin was spiritual leader of Tree of Life, a Conservative synagogue in Pittsburgh, and a professor of both Theology and History at Duquesne University.

Dr. Hailperin donated more than 2,600 volumes to the Duquesne University Library in 1968, which began the Rabbi Herman Hailperin Collection.

The heart of the Hailperin Collection consists of books that explore Jewish-Christian intellectual relations during the Middle Ages. The work of Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105), a rabbi from Troyes, France and a major commentator on the Torah and the Talmud, was of particular interest to Dr. Hailperin. The Torah is literally the Five Books of Moses or Pentateuch, but can be loosely applied to the entire Old Testament. The Talmud is interpretation and application of the Torah. Dr. Hailperin authored some noteworthy books on Rashi and the impact of Jewish ideas on Christian thought.

Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) relied heavily on Rashi’s scriptural comments in his own commentary on the Bible. One of Dr. Hailperin’s instructors informed him about Lyra. This information came as a revelation to Dr. Hailperin and prompted him to do extensive research and writing on this previously obscure phenomenon. The Hailperin Collection houses one interpretation of the Psalms by Nicholas dating from 1326.

University Librarian Dr. Paul J. Pugliese recalled the genesis of the Hailperin Collection: “The Rabbi was doing a biography of Rashi and in the process he identified sources he chose to purchase rather than borrow from a library.”

Dr. Pugliese also recognized the role of the late Dena Jacobson, a reference librarian in charge of the Library’s music collections. “Without Dena Jacobson, I do not think we would have had this collection. I think she nurtured it along—it was dear to her heart. She became the reference librarian in charge of the Hailperin Collection.”

Dr. Albert LaBriola, Distinguished University Professor and Professor of English at Duquesne University, attests to the value of the collection.

“I use the Hailperin for research in early Christian iconography (the visual interpretation of scripture). I also use it for research in biblical typology, which is the interrelationship of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The Hailperin has abundant resources that enable me to compare rabbinc commentary on scriptures with Christian commentary on them. It is invaluable because of its size, number of sources, and its diversity. It has many specialized items that are virtual treasures for my research.”

Among the cherished items are 74 volumes in Latin, 873 volumes in Hebrew, and some incunabula (materials published from the earliest printing presses) up to 1550.

One addition in more recent times was from the late Solomon B. Freishof, who was rabbi at Rodef Shalom, a large Reform congregation in Pittsburgh. Dr. Freishof donated 150 books, many of them rare, to the Collection. They are housed in a special alcove, in honor of Eugene Strassburger, who was a professor in Duquesne University’s Law School.

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For all its riches, the collection has not grown in recent years. Dr. Pugliese noted that the collection is unlikely to develop until the Library is in the position to find a curator. He added that the Collection covers "a fascinating period of time and a significant and interesting angle."

The Hallperin Collection is located on the 2nd floor of the Gumberg Library. For information contact the Gumberg Library Administrative Office at 412-396-6136.

**Thinking About Donating Gifts to the Library?**

*Submitted by Tracie Mineo, Gifts Librarian, and Amy Swackhomer, Collection Development Assistant*

We consider gifts to be an important addition to the Library’s collection. Through gift donations, the collection has gained many significant items that have become valuable resources for Duquesne researchers. In recent months we have received a number of requests for information about donating gifts to the Library. The following points summarize the Gumberg Library’s donor agreement:

- The Library will accept gifts of books, journals, and non-print material only if the material is judged to be a potentially significant contribution to the collection. The Library seeks gifts that can support the University’s curriculum, and/or faculty research. The Library also seeks gifts to fill specific needs such as the support of newly developed programs.

- Because of the Library’s limited resources for handling books requiring special treatment, the Library will only accept books in good to excellent condition. Books that are written in or highlighted will not be added to the collection.

- If a list of donated material is not received from a donor, the Library will not be responsible for creating a list to return to the donor with the acknowledgement.

- The Library will determine the classification, housing, and circulation policies of all gift items. Gift collections will not be kept “intact” but will be integrated into the Library’s existing collection.

- The Library retains the right to dispose of duplicates and unneeded materials. Items will be returned to the donor at the donor’s request and expense. The request to return materials must be made prior to the donation.

- The Library staff is not authorized under IRS regulations to appraise gifts or to provide a signature to any document that applies a monetary value to said gifts for income tax purposes.

Small gifts of less than 10 books (approximately) may be dropped off at the Library. For larger collections of books, we ask that you contact the Gifts Librarian to arrange for drop-off or potential pick-up of the materials. Managing the influx of gifts into our collection has necessitated setting the guidelines listed above, however, we do try to be as flexible as possible with donations. Lastly, we ask all donors to sign the Donor Agreement Form, which the Library keeps on file. Upon processing gift materials, each donor will receive a letter of acknowledgement and appreciation for their contribution to the collection.

The Gumberg Library has always gift-plated donated materials. In an effort to keep our gift recognition up to date, Gumberg staff members have researched and implemented a system to display donor information (accessible by a keyword search) on the records shown in DuCat. In February 2000, the Library began adding past and present gift statements to DuCat records. Over 20,000 of our online records now show the names of specific donors and/or special collections. Currently, all newly added gifts receive a gift statement in DuCat unless the donor requests to remain anonymous. We are continuing to work on entering gift statements for the thousands of donated books added to the Library’s collection prior to 2000.

Since the Library began adding gift statements to DuCat, several people have inquired about donating funds toward the purchase of materials in memory or in honor of members of the Duquesne community. These types of gifts can benefit the Duquesne research community and provide a lasting tribute to friends, loved ones, and colleagues.

*To inquire about making donations to the Gumberg Library, accessing donor information, or related topics contact Tracie Mineo at 412-396-4560 or eisel@library.duq.edu.*