Technological Aspects of a Pro-Life Bibliography

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[slide two] Background of the pro-life bibliography and website

The basis for this paper was my 2013 presentation before the annual conference of University Faculty for Life held at the University of San Francisco. Since writing an academic paper for any conference takes about a year’s worth of reading, annotating, research, draft writing, and perfecting the paper and any accompanying material (such as a PowerPoint), I began thinking about the paper that I wanted to present before UFL in the summer of 2012. Specifically, what more could an English professor say about the life issues in grammar, rhetoric, or literature that had not been said before? This crucial first step in writing a paper, what students know as the planning stage, began a year-long investigation into an essentially bibliographic study. That is, I thought, first, that it was time for the pro-life movement to consider that it had a body of literature as substantial as that of any other social movement and, second, that someone had to begin the discussion of what literature in the movement was crucial for younger generations to study. The 2013 UFL paper, titled “Anthology of Right-to-Life Literature: Establishing the Canonical Maturity of a Vibrant Social Force”, coalesced this thinking about the movement’s literature.

Another factor made the establishment of the pro-life anthology and the eventual creation of the LifeLit Institute website more imperative: many of the first generation pro-life activists were dying, and the frightening thought occurred that many younger activists might not become aware of their contributions. [slide three] People should not forget Nellie Gray (1924-2012), the founder of the March for Life; [slide four] Barbara Willke (1923-2013) and Dr. Jack Willke (1925-2015), customarily called the founders of the pro-life movement; and, most recently, [slide five] Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016), to whom can be credited the Republican Party’s shift from anti- to pro-life values. The significant contributions, activities, and writings that these pro-life pioneers and others generated for the right-to-life movement must not be forgotten.

Establishment of the LifeLit Institute website

Fortunately, as every student and researcher knows, a paper does not end a research project; it begins it. The research begun in 2012 and what was written in 2013 were merely the beginnings of a project that has now taken four years. The chronology since the 2013 presentation is simple. For that presentation, over 300 titles were obtained by scouring WorldCat.org for books written from a pro-life perspective on the life issues.¹ In 2014, while attending

¹ WorldCat.org is an online service which contains bibliographic information on materials catalogued by OCLC, a company based in Dublin, Ohio (north of Columbus). WorldCat allows
another UFL conference, this time at Fordham University in New York, David Mall and I had the opportunity to visit the Dr. Joseph R. Stanton Library under the jurisdiction of the Sisters for Life. The massive quantity of pro-life materials held in the Stanton Library were, first, overwhelming, and second, inspiring. The collection elicited the first reaction since I could see that several persons would be needed to work for weeks, if not months, to catalog or at least inventory the material. The collection was inspiring, since working on cataloging the material would be any bibliophile’s delight. The massive amount of pro-life literature and artifacts in the Stanton Library further motivated me to implement the recommendations made in the 2013 paper.

Unfortunately, various considerations made the use of already existing Internet-based library services impossible or unlikely. For example, at one point I thought that merely creating an account on WorldCat.org would be sufficient to catalog the pro-life materials. [slide six] In a 7 July 2014 email, Rosanna M. O’Neil, Senior Library Services Consultant at OCLC, replied to my query about the propriety of creating an individual vs. a corporate profile on the system thus:

While OCLC is a non-profit membership organization, we don’t offer memberships per se, but rather through subscribing to our cataloging service, what we call “holdings” (a five-letter symbol) are added to existing titles in WorldCat or new records are added if the items are considered unique. Through the cataloging service the titles held by a member are findable in our database to others that subscribe to it. If WorldCat.org was your goal, that would require another subscription as well, WorldCat Discovery, whose price is around $2,600/year. You would need to consider that in addition to the cataloging subscription. OCLC is for libraries and cultural institutions rather than individuals.

Adding material on WorldCat, therefore, would be neither cost effective nor ethical. Ineluctably, I had to consider creating my own website for the express purpose of implementing recommendations in the 2013 paper.

In 2015, I resolved several questions about establishing a website to house bibliographic data on core and additional recommended works of the pro-life movement. Should the website have a personal address, as a dot com? The answer was obvious: no. The site should focus be on the authors’ works, not on the personality of any manager of such a site. Should the website be independent or created in collaboration with another pro-life entity? The answer to this question was bifurcated. Answering no meant that I would have to learn as much as possible about html, web terminology, and various software programs in limited time. Answering yes was much more feasible. Thanks to LifeTech, I could maintain the independence of the site, benefit from the professionalism of LifeTech experts, and feel philosophically assured that the people with whom I would work have the same life-affirming values.

viewers to locate libraries within their areas which have materials they wish to interlibrary loan.
Some speculation is necessary here about the psychology involved in establishing a website, specifically how scary an action it is. Even with the assurance that I would work with pro-life persons, the mere act of buying a domain name for the site was intellectually and emotionally difficult. Buying a domain name is not like buying any other commodity. When one buys a domain, one commits him- or herself to do something on the Internet, and this quasi-contractual act implies a commitment to present and maintain material which must be not only interesting and educational, but also reliable, accurate, and beneficial to other human beings. I remember that I took several months exploring these considerations before buying the domain name. Eventually, all concerns and temerity aside, on 21 July 2016, the domain for LifeLit Institute was purchased through Hover.com.² [slide seven] After many hours in two in-person meetings in Dayton and several more hours in Skype meetings, John O’Neill of LifeTech was instrumental in guiding me through Joomla, the service which creates web content. Basic work began on the site on 6 August 2016; all twenty-four core bibliographic works were added to the site two days later. The remaining over 300 titles on the original list from the 2013 paper were added on 23 and 25 September 2016. Bibliographic data will be continuously added.

Template language on the site

[slide eight] Thanks to the collaboration of Paul Pojman, who, given his forty years’ experience in Library Science, manages the website with me, the twenty-four monographs called “essential works” in the 2013 paper became “core recommended works” so that the remaining over 300 books researched for the 2013 paper could be designated as “additional recommended works.” Nomenclature such as “ancillary”, “background”, and “supplementary” all implied an inferior status to the remaining works, a posture which I wanted to avoid since the entire collection is designed to promote pro-life works in general. It was decided that permalinks to library location holdings identified by WorldCat.org should be provided in the Review section of each bibliographic record, the sample wording preceding the URL being “Availability for this book can be found at.”

[slide nine] Template language was established not only for uniformity within the bibliographic entries, but also to standardize punctuation; for example, no semicolons are placed after the main title since that punctuation mark would affect search results. One problem became apparent almost immediately, given the sameness of main titles in many pro-life works. The Willkes’ 1985 work Abortion: Questions and Answers had to have the subtitle on the main title line since the alias provided by Joomla (“abortion”) was already in use. The author field for the bibliographic information can present significant challenges. For example, the “Daughters of St. Paul” are identified as both an author (specifically, a corporate author) and an editor. This is the case for their 1984 work, Pro-Life Catechism: Abortion, Genetics, Euthanasia, Suicide, Child-Abuse (where they are the corporate author) and for their 1977

² At $19.99 a year, the cost for this site is 130 times less expensive than subscribing to OCLC.
title, *Yes to Life*, where they are identified on the book itself as the editors. A more philosophically complicated author example is that Michael Tooley is listed as the author of *Three Perspectives*; he is anti-life, but two of his co-authors are pro-life.

The notation for photo credit for the monographs’ images became “Image credit:” followed by the name of the source (Amazon.com, WorldCat.org, etc.). Availability and image credit information is not placed in the Note field, since that information would not appear on the site; thus, availability and image credit data is placed in the Review box. When obtaining images for the various works, using the “Copy image location” option is best.

**[slide ten] Specific ethical issues**

Beyond these administrative problems, which are relatively easy to resolve by Library Science standards, there were some specific ethical issues, three of which are illustrative. First, should a work be included on the site if the author or editor is pro-life, yet the title is anti-life? This is the case for Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche’s 1920 treatise *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, which was seminal in Nazi ideology. The work was reprinted in 1992 by the National Legal Center for the Medically Dependent & Disabled, a pro-life group. (This title is on the site.) Second, is it ethical to list a title if the author is not known to be pro-life? Martin S. Pernick’s 1996 work, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915*, is a scholarly study, supporting a strong life-affirming message against infanticide. (This title also has been added to the site; as of 9-25-16, no message has been obtained suggesting that the book should not be included.) Finally, is it appropriate to list a title if the author is known to be pro-life but may not wish to be identified as such? This is not a matter of cowardliness, but professional anxiety. That is, a pro-lifer who has published research work on aborted mothers’ health may want to have his or her work known not as that of a pro-lifer within an admittedly strong anti-life profession, but simply research work on aborted mothers’ health. Similarly, a pro-lifer in the legal profession may not want to have his or her work identified on a pro-life site if that entry may preclude him or her from legal advancement, the legal profession being as notoriously anti-life as its social work or academic counterparts. (Email confirmation has been obtained from the author of the study on aborted mothers’ health to add the title to the site.)

Despite these challenges and problems, the LifeLit Institute site can be a valuable resource for pro-life activists, scholars, and students. At this time, I would like to highlight some of the site’s features and how it works. **[slide eleven]**

**[slide twelve] Future activity and projects**

Of course, much more work needs to be done on the site. Like an architectural work, the initial frame has been established, although that may change as the load of information increases the cyber “weight” of the site.
Ongoing maintenance will require work from the current managers and their successors, yet unknown. Some specific projects include the following. Ongoing site maintenance means adding not only more titles, but also more reviews of the over 300 titles originally identified as pro-life works. This means finding qualified writers to review the works, whether academics, professional writers, or other knowledgeable persons with writing credentials. If permission can be obtained from the Sisters for Life, another project may involve adding the holdings of the Dr. Joseph R. Stanton Human Life Issues Library and Resource Center in New York. As I mentioned above, this library has not obtained as much publicity or use since its establishment; perhaps adding the holdings to the LifeLit Institute site will advance the educational efforts of that institution. If adding holdings from the Stanton Library is successful, then the possibility exists that adding holdings from other pro-life groups could occur.

A constant future activity involves determining how the site can assist pro-lifers in their work. Granted, today’s students (and, yes, even today’s professors, both young and old) do most of their primary and secondary research work on the Internet. Does this site assist them? How can it be improved? Finally, other projects may require attention as time progresses and as the existence of the LifeLit Institute site is publicized.

Usually, as most students know, when a source appears the first time in a work, that source is introduced to the reader with a sufficient apposition so that the reader knows either the credentials of that source or, if it is an organization, its purposes. I would like to close by reversing that well-known axiom of writing since the organizing principles of the LifeLit Institute coincide with the reason why this English professor is delighted to speak before a technical audience. [slide thirteen] To quote the opening paragraph of the LifeLit Institute site itself:

The major purpose of the LifeLit Institute, a non-profit research entity, is to manage the anthology of pro-life literature so that the general reading public, scholars, and students come to know and to appreciate the significant body of literature created by the Right-to-Life movement since the 1960s. It is the managers’ hope that this site will maintain and promote this literature for the benefit of all. [slide fourteen]