

Two world-class libraries launch online archive of ancient Scriptures

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Two of the world's great libraries — the Vatican Library in Rome and the Bodleian Library at Oxford University — have scanned and loaded the first of 1.5 million pages of ancient Hebrew, Greek and early Christian manuscripts online Tuesday (Dec. 3).

The project brings rare and priceless religious and cultural collections to a global audience for the first time in history.

The website is the first step in a four-year project and it includes the Bodleian's 1455 Gutenberg Bible — one of only 50 surviving copies.

The \$3.3 million project is funded by the Polonsky Foundation, which aims to democratize access to information. Leonard S. Polonsky is chairman of Hansard Global PLC, an international financial services company.

"We want everyone who can to see these manuscripts, these great works of humanity," Monsignor Cesare Pasini, prefect of the Vatican Library, told The Associated Press.

Apart from the two-volume Gutenberg Bible there is also an illustrated 11th-century Greek Bible and a 15th-century German Bible, hand-painted and illustrated by woodcuts.

The Vatican Library was founded in 1451 and it has 180,000 manuscripts; 1.6 million books; and 150,000 prints, drawings and engravings.

The Bodleian is the largest university library in England and contains more than 11 million printed works.

Pasini said the Vatican was embarking on similar digitization projects with libraries in Azerbaijan and China.

Polonsky has been involved in a broad range of charitable activities for a long time. He is an honorary fellow and governor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.