

## Gift Places Historic Gospel Text In Heart Of Church

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ATLANTA—The evening of Jan. 20 Frank Hanna III, his wife Sally, and daughter Elizabeth descended into the vault holding the rarest documents of the Vatican Apostolic Library to view the Bodmer Papyrus XIV-XV, the oldest manuscript in existence of the Gospel of St. Luke and one of the two oldest of St. John's Gospel.

They were accompanied by the prefect of the library, Bishop Raffaele Farina, SDB, Father Laurence Spiteri, and Pat Cipollone, an attorney who assisted with the acquisition. They first viewed the world's oldest Bible that dates to the fourth century, the "Codex Vaticanus." Bishop Farina then showed the Hannas leaves of the famous Bodmer Papyrus, each encased in glass.

The papyrus was handwritten in Greek around the year 200 and contains about half of each of the Gospels of Luke and John. It holds the oldest copy of the Lord's Prayer in Luke. The manuscript was originally discovered in Upper Egypt in 1952 as part of a larger horde of manuscripts, the majority of which were acquired by Dr. Martin Bodmer. The Vatican acquired the manuscript in late November from the Bodmer Foundation in Switzerland through the purchase by the Frank and Sally Hanna Family Foundation and the Solidarity Association. The Hannas were originally contacted about the papyrus by the Pave the Way Foundation, a Jewish group which seeks to build peace and good will with other religions.

The Scriptures are written on 52 pages comprising 51 leaves, or part leaves, from a codex that is made up of 36 double leaves, and folded in the middle to form a single quire.

"It was a beautiful color, an amber color in the light. That night it almost had a golden glow. As we stood there Father Spiteri, just behind us, calmly whispered, 'There it is, the word of God' and it was," recalled Hanna. "We have two key components of our faith. We have the church and her tradition, and we have holy Scripture. We were there at the Vatican, at the tomb of St. Peter where the church resides, and here we were looking at the word of God itself. It was nice to see the combination of these two elements, this ancient manuscript of the word of God residing there in the church."

Hanna, the chief executive officer of HBR Capital Ltd. in Atlanta, recalled in a phone interview Feb. 16 the inspiring experience and how the papyrus "found us." He is a parishioner at Holy Spirit Church and through his foundation has financially supported the Solidarity School for low-income Hispanic children and other Catholic schools in the archdiocese. He also served as a co-chair of President George W. Bush's Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

After his family beheld the handwritten, fragile leaves in ancient Greek he contemplated the historical foundation of his faith—how this copy of the Gospel was used in the liturgy and was part of the accepted set of four Gospels of the nascent church. He contemplated how people may not believe that Jesus is indeed God, and other messages of the Gospel, but they can't deny the authenticity of the Gospels as historical documents, and how Jesus' life led to the birth of Christianity which rapidly spread across the Middle East and beyond.

“Our faith does require belief, but it is a belief grounded in reality. When you go to Rome, St. Peter's is a reality, built on the tomb of St. Peter. His bones are there. And he knew Jesus and was martyred for that belief,” he reflected. “This papyrus is 1,800 years old, dating back to 200. It really does exist. Somebody really wrote it down, and its existence is not a legend. It's up to each individual to accept what Scripture says, but the authenticity of that Scripture and what we base our faith on, these are historical facts.”

The morning of Jan. 22 the family attended Mass in the Clementine Chapel near the tomb of St. Peter on the bottom level of St. Peter's Basilica. Later that day a ceremony was held in the Apostolic Palace, where heads of state are received, with the Vatican Apostolic Library's archivist and librarian Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, Bishop Farina, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Father Richard Donohoe of Birmingham, Ala., Cipollone, the president/founder of Pave the Way Foundation Gary Krupp, and other Vatican staff. Pope Benedict XVI greeted each person and discussed the importance of the documents, and he thanked everyone present for making the gift possible.

Cardinal Tauran presented the Hannas and then displayed pages of the papyrus under glass to the pope.

Hanna told the pope that it was a privilege for his family to assist the church in acquiring such a precious relic from the roots of Christendom.

“We first thanked him for his service to the church and told him we were praying for him and grateful for his dedication, and we told him we were grateful for the privilege of being in Rome with him and being able to be part of this effort with the papyrus,” Hanna recounted.

In the conversation Hanna referred to the pope's message in a homily before the conclave about how money, buildings and books do not last, but what remains eternally is the human soul.

“We told him this papyrus would not last forever, but the imprint it would have on the souls of those who see it and believe in it can indeed last forever. We were hopeful of that. I told him how his focus and devotion to the liturgy and his book ‘Soul of the Liturgy’ had been an inspiration to us, particularly regarding the church's teaching that liturgy is a sacred action surpassing all others,” he continued. “We told him we are

hopeful that the papyrus would help all who see it to grow in appreciation of the word of God and in appreciation of the liturgy that embodies that word.”

Pope Benedict remarked about the treasure of the liturgy for the church, then put his glasses on and began to peruse the papyrus and then read introspectively out loud the Greek text.

“You could tell he immediately recognized it. ... You could tell he enjoyed reading it,” Hanna said.

He described the room as warm and beautiful but not ornate. He found Pope Benedict to be a gentle man.

“He is very warm and engaging, and is a very kind, peaceful and serene man. Obviously he is a world class intellect and theologian, but he’s also a very simple and peaceful man, and I think all of us were struck by that.”

The new acquisitions join the Bodmer Papyrus VIII, a copy of the First and Second Letters of St. Peter, which Martin Bodmer personally gave to Pope Paul VI in 1969. The Gospel papyrus will be accessible to qualified scholars worldwide.

The document purchase was finalized on Nov. 21, which was the feast of the Presentation of Mary, a fitting date since they had named the trust they established for it at the Vatican the Mater Verbi (Mother of the Word)/Hanna Papyrus Trust. Both sides agreed not to disclose the purchase cost.

“The Gospel of Luke is also known as the Gospel of Mary because it contains certain details that could only be attributed to Mary,” Hanna said, such as Jesus being lost as a child after a visit by the Holy Family to the temple in Jerusalem.

Father Donohoe, rector of the Cathedral of St. Paul in Birmingham, initiated the project when he learned through his goddaughter on Thanksgiving 2005 about the sale of the papyrus by the Bodmer Foundation through Christie’s auction house. The Bodmer Foundation holds a vast collection of world literature, ranging from comedies by Greek playwright Menander to a Gutenberg Bible. Father Donohoe contacted the Pave the Way Foundation, knowing they had worked on other Vatican projects, and got the Vatican library phone number. He called and staff members were “ecstatic” to learn the twin papyrus was for sale. Within a week Cardinal Tauran called the priest directly to discuss the importance of acquiring it. And soon thereafter he had a mandate from the Holy See to raise the funds for the purchase and was crisscrossing the country from February through June 2006 speaking to cardinals and bishops about it. He was advised in fundraising by Pave the Way, which was “extremely helpful.” Archbishop Pietro Sambi, apostolic nuncio to the United States, was also instrumental in helping to realize this historic acquisition.

Hanna's friend Harry Epstein, brother-in-law of Pave the Way founder Krupp, contacted Hanna and told him about the project and sent a packet of information. This wasn't the type of endeavor that Hanna's foundation usually supports, but as he contemplated the importance of this acquisition to the church library, which specializes in preserving ancient documents, and his own love of liturgy, Hanna agreed. He made the decision "given the fact that this was very important to the Holy Father and important to the church and given what it contained."

"I thought, we have one God in the universe. He came to earth one time, and he gave us one prayer to pray, and this is the oldest copy of that prayer. And he left us a church that is his bride, and this copy of that prayer should be within the church. We concluded at the Solidarity Association and the Sally and Frank Hanna Charitable Foundation that this is something important for the church and that we were being called to do."

He added that "one point the papal nuncio made to me was that if we don't seize the opportunity when it's available it may not be again. He was very concerned that it could be lost to the church."

Solidarity is an association of the Christian faithful that provides financial and logistical support to other entities within the church and undertakes corporeal works of charity, he explained.

The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* reported that until the 1952 discovery in Egypt of the papyrus, biblical scholars relied on references to the Gospels in the writings of early church theologians to assert that by the year 100 the Christian community had accepted only four Gospels as inspired texts. The newspaper said the papyrus provides concrete evidence that the four Gospels were circulating among Christian communities as a complete set by the year 200, although the twin papyrus containing the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark has not been found.

As the writer of Luke wrote in chapter one, after the middle of the first century the need began to be felt in the Christian community to "compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses." The four books of the Gospel were then brought together in the second century.

The article also reported that the papyrus was probably used by a Greek-speaking Egyptian parish. As the ancient manuscript became unusable and lost pages, it was given a modest binding which was reinforced with a hard binding with the rest of the first and last surviving pages. It was then probably venerated as a relic and conserved, "perhaps beginning in the fifth century, in the library of the Pachomian monastery of Middle Egypt." In the face of unspecified danger, it and some 40 other Greek and Coptic volumes were hidden in a "mound sheltered from the floods of the Nile," it reported.

The Vatican, upon receipt of the manuscript, discovered that while in Switzerland some 30 fragments of external pages that were recovered by a partial restoration of the hard

binding in 1961 by the Bodmer Foundation had not been identified, and others had not been documented. So now Vatican staff members are excited to find they have additional documents to study, Hanna said.

Krupp was happy to assist with the project, in accordance with his organization's mission to make concrete gestures of good will to bring together good Christian, Jewish and Muslim people, as well as other people of faith, to fight hatred, which endangers mankind, and to focus on common values. The seventh Jew in history to receive a papal honor of knighthood, Krupp said the foundation's many projects now include working to formalize Vatican relations with Israel and trying to organize a conference at the Holy See opposing religious extremism. He said this manuscript is now the second most important work at the Vatican after the "Codex Vaticanus," and that it is probably the best-equipped library in the world to preserve it.

"We feel very wonderful about this, that two Jewish men and two Catholic priests were able to make this happen, and, of course, the Hannas," he said. The papyrus "has got enormous value to the Christian world."

He commended Father Donohoe for working over a year on the project, clocking 110,000 sky miles. He called the Hannas "an enormously generous family" and Mr. Hanna a kind, benevolent and religious man.

Over in Alabama Father Donohoe prays that more people will come to understand the importance of these documents and how they manifestly communicate the unchanging truth.

"In our society, we are constantly confronted with documents and concepts contrary to the Gospel: the Judas Gospel, 'The Da Vinci Code' and countless other things that are contrary to the teaching magisterium of the church. The Bodmer Papyrus should cause us to center in to better appreciate the deep and profound reality of the gift of the Good News that comes to us," he said. "It is the Bodmer Papyrus that reminds us of the validity of the deposit of faith; it is the Bodmer Papyrus that should turn us to the magisterium, the teaching authority of the church, encouraging us to give thanks that through these ancient texts we are continually authenticated in what we believe."

Hanna also left Rome with a sense of gratitude for the priests and bishops at the Vatican who have selflessly dedicated their lives in service of the church.

"They are human beings and subject to the same failings of us all. But it's remarkable how much they love the church and how much of their lives they dedicate to it," he reflected. "We have priests throughout the world and in our archdiocese who give their entire lives in service for the church, so when we in the laity have a chance to make a fraction of that sacrifice, it's a privilege. We left Rome with a profound sense of gratitude (that) we had a chance to participate in this event for the church. We felt like we were the ones who received the gift."

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