
DOMINICAN HOUSE OF STUDIES LIBRARY

by Marty Rothwell

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THE DOMINICAN HOUSE of Studies (DHS) is located just across from the Catholic University of America (CUA), a short five-minute walk from the Brookland/CUA Metro station. It is shaped in the monastic fashion; four sides with an open courtyard in the center for quiet meditation and reflection. The building's shape reflects the Dominican way of life: the four sides or hallways being the chapel (prayer), the refectory (community), the library (study) and the front foyer leading out to the street (apostolic preaching). It is also home to 50 Dominicans, some students preparing to be bearers of the Word of God wherever the Order sends them; others already priests, sharing the fruits of their contemplation through teaching and preaching, or even as a military chaplain.

I had the pleasure of being escorted around the House by Fr. Kevin McGrath, who has been the House's librarian for the past two years. We discussed the history of the library, its function as it relates to the Dominican House of Studies, and its outlook for the future.

History of Library

One could say that the DHS Library is as old as the Dominican presence in the United States. When those four friars of the English Province arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, a good portion of their baggage would have been their books. When the first Dominican *studium* or house of studies was founded in Somerset, Ohio, in 1832, its library included not only the books of

the recently deceased Bishop Fenwick [who willed his personal to the Province for just that purpose] but also the personal library of Bishop Luke Concanen, an Irish Dominican and first bishop of New York. Bishop Concanen never made it to the United States; he died in Naples waiting for a boat, but his books did; these he also had willed to the fledgling Dominican presence in America. These together with a few other donations made the Dominican Library in rural Ohio, oddly enough, one of the best theological collections in the country. It was at this first house of studies that the early American Dominicans studied, prayed, preached, and spread the Word of God throughout the "Old Northwest."

By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become obvious that rural

Ohio was not the best location for a center of learning like the Dominican *studium*. So the decision was made to move the house of studies to Washington, D.C., partly in response to an invitation from the American bishops for religious communities to locate their houses of study near the new Catholic University of America. The present building, directly across Michigan Avenue from the University, was completed in 1905; the library was located in the western wing of the building's first floor and basement.

Since that time, the Library's collections have expanded considerably. The Library has always tried to keep its collection up to date, but it has also retained much of that original collection. In the 1920s and 1930s a good number of rare books were acquired, some dating to the very earliest days of printing, some manuscripts from as



Marty Rothwell (left) and Fr. McGrath discuss selections from the Library's extensive collections. Photo: Marty Rothwell

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 as they pursue
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 The library has over
 55,000 books
 in areas of Scripture,
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 Theology, Patristics,
 and Canon Law....
 The catalog became
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 so anyone with access
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 in its collections.”

early as the fifteenth century. These together with a handful of more recent additions and some of the books from the Province’s earliest Library constitute our present-day Rare Book Collection.

Library’s Purposes

The Library’s main function is to support the brothers as they pursue

their graduate studies in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. The school serves other religious communities and lay students. The Library is open to the general public as well. This is a great resource for all Dominicans, lay and religious, as they pursue their own personal studies. The library has over 55,000 books in areas of Scripture, Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Patristics, and Canon Law. The caliber of books in the library is superior. There is an extensive section on the works of Thomas Aquinas. Another section, called *Dominicana*, contains important and hard to find volumes dealing with the history of the Order and significant personages in the Order. The Library catalog became available online in June 2006, so anyone with access to the Internet can see what the Library has in its collections.

Periodicals

I am very impressed by their periodicals section. To keep abreast of current topics the library has 400 different current periodicals as well as over 15,000 volumes of older, bound periodicals. There are periodicals dealing with everything from psychology to Byzantine hymnology. The Library also has access to a number of online databases where visitors are able to browse hundreds of thousands of citations from periodicals, church documents, and popular and scholarly Catholic books. The Library’s holdings of Dominican periodicals is especially good, including theological journals from many of the Order’s provinces. There are journals in French, Spanish, German, and even Dutch, although most of our serials are in English.

Rare Books

We visited to the Rare Book Section, which is normally reserved

for scholars. We open the door and the smell of old leather permeates the room as I gaze at books from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Books called “incunabula,” that is, books printed when Gutenberg’s moveable type press was still “in the cradle,” are stacked unceremoniously on shelves in a small, cramped storage area. I squeeze by shelving to see medieval manuscripts and huge, beautiful leather-bound books with hand-painted art work in old vellum sheets. Unique, one-of-a-kind books—with worm holes running through them. Right next to these ancient books there is a bucket catching water leaking from the ceiling. Books of this kind deserve better, but the library lacks funds to care for them properly. Julian Herron of Saint Catherine’s chapter conducts an annual golf tournament to help raise funds for the rare books section, but any donations are most welcome because once these books are lost they are lost forever.

In addition to the large collection of books, the library has online databases where people can search for numerous articles and often read the full text online. The librarians can also assist visitors in finding a certain book or suggesting books or periodicals that might be of interest.

What I enjoyed most was immersing myself that afternoon in the whole Dominican experience: praying, studying, meeting and talking to the other Dominicans—then going out the door invigorated to encounter the world.

To learn more about the Dominican House of Studies and the library, go to <http://www.dhs.edu> and click on the Library tab. ❏