Application for Research Leave  
1 August 2002

RECUSANT LITERATURE

Descriptive inventory of Donohue Rare Book Room collections by and about Catholics in England during the period of the Penal Laws, beginning with the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558 and continuing until the Catholic Relief Act of 1791.

Elizabeth’s 1559 Act of Uniformity created the crime of “recusancy” or refusal to attend Anglican church services. A battle of the books ensued over the next two centuries and more. On one side were those English Catholics unwilling to surrender their faith, stubbornly arguing against the religious authority of the state-backed Protestant establishment. Printed replies and counter-attacks flew in equal numbers from government officials and Anglican divines, branding such Catholic resistance as treason. Both groups of writings were simultaneously addressed to the wider audience of European opinion.

Thanks to the collecting zeal of Fr. William Monihan, the USF library houses a wealth of contemporary specimens from this propaganda war. Not until the decade of the 1990s, however, were authoritative bibliographies compiled. Using these, among other sources, I propose to enumerate and describe this literature, setting it against the cultural background of its creation. Its ongoing significance is documented by extensive current scholarship overlapping many disciplines, including history, theology, literature and bibliography.

John Hawk initially suggested to me the potential for a useful, substantial guide of this nature. For want of such an instrument, it remains difficult to account for the scope and significance of our Recusant holdings. Such an endeavor carries special appropriateness for USF, as it will foreground the works of Jesuit missionaries and martyrs who labored at the center of the Recusant controversy, all too frequently becoming its victims.

With John’s collaboration, I have already begun to identify and upgrade relevant cataloging records. The seven weeks of research leave, if granted, will be used to examine individual volumes in detail, and to write the guide itself, ultimately to be printed and distributed under the sponsorship of the Donohue Rare Book Room. In consultation with Eric Ewen, Head of Cataloging, I would anticipate scheduling this leave during the summer of 2003. I agree to return to service with the University for one academic year following the completion of the leave, and to submit a written report on the extent to which I have achieved its purpose.

Benjamin Watson  
Librarian, Cataloging