

2007

Interview of Thomas Donaghy, Ph.D.

Thomas Donaghy Ph.D.
La Salle University

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Craig Robinson
History 650
Dr. Allen
Spring 2007
Interview Field Notes

Interview of Father Thomas Donaghy

Narrator: Fr. Thomas Donaghy

Interviewer: Craig Robinson

Date: April 18, 2007; 2:30 P.M.

Location: An office in the rectory of St. Gabriel's Church, 233 Mohawk Avenue, Norwood, PA 19074

Fr. Thomas Donaghy received the vows of an ordained priest at the age of forty-eight. At the start of his education in his hometown of Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania he attended catholic schooling. His first contact with the Christian Brothers came as he attended high school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at West Catholic High School. After graduating from high school, Thomas Donaghy joined the order of the Christian Brothers and took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The mission of the Brothers is to provide young men (and now women) with a Christian education. Upon joining the order, Thomas Donaghy was given the Christian Brother name of Flavius Lewis. He received a B.A. from Catholic University and continued his education at the University of Pittsburgh where he received a PhD in the subject of history. While Brother Lewis attended graduate school he worked as a secondary level teacher at Central Catholic High School located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1961, Brother Lewis became the director of the summer program at LaSalle College. While teaching at LaSalle, Brother Lewis reached the status of full professorship and published five books and a number of historical

reviews and articles, including the centennial history of LaSalle College, entitled *Conceived in Crisis*. After years of teaching at LaSalle, Thomas Donaghy decided to leave both the university and the Christian Brothers to become an ordained priest. Fr. Thomas Donaghy is now residing at St. Gabriel's Parish in Norwood, Pennsylvania.

As part of the oral history project for Dr. Allen's History 650 course, I initially chose to conduct an interview with Mary Butler, a secretary at LaSalle University. Mrs. Butler declined the request to be interviewed and I was forced to choose a different narrator. Brother Joseph Grabenstein suggested Fr. Donaghy as a possible replacement. He stressed the significance of getting Fr. Donaghy's oral histories into LaSalle's archives due to his age and his connection to the university.

My initial contact with Fr. Donaghy was through a phone call which took place on February 15, 2007. I was under the impression that Fr. Donaghy was informed by Brother Joe of a possible interview by a student in the Masters of History Program. However, when I first talked to Fr. Donaghy he was unaware of the oral history project and my interest in interviewing him. He immediately agreed to being interviewed but stated that he was not sure how much information he would be able to recall. I informed him that the interview would not take place for about a month in order to give myself time to do the essential background research on the narrator.

My overall feelings towards the initial contact with Fr. Donaghy were unpleasant. I felt as though he did not truly wish to be part of the oral history project and that I was going to have difficulties in conducting the interview. Due to Brother Joe's strong beliefs in the importance of having Fr. Donaghy's thoughts in the archives I decided to continue on with Fr. Donaghy as my subject.

One February 19, 2007, I visited Brother Joe in the archives of LaSalle University. I was extremely impressed with his professionalism and owe him a tremendous amount of appreciation for the time and effort he put into conducting research on Father Donaghy. We talked for an hour about the best possible way to approach the interview with Father Donaghy and came up with some interesting topics and strategies.

After a few weeks of looking over the research that Brother Joe put together and skimming *Conceived in Crisis*, I felt it was time to schedule an interview with Father Donaghy. I called St. Gabriel's rectory and spoke with the secretary. She informed me that Father Tom was not home but she would leave him a message to call me back. About three hours later I received a phone call from a Father Tom at St. Gabriel's rectory. However it was not Father Tom Donaghy but another Father Tom who also lives at the rectory. I very politely explained to him that I was looking to speak with Father Thomas Donaghy and after a short laugh he assured me that he would give Father Donaghy the messages. The following day Father Donaghy called.

When I reintroduced myself to Father Donaghy he asked if he knew who I was. This question made me extremely nervous but I simply explained that we talked a few weeks back and that he agreed to a formal interview to go into the archives at LaSalle University. I suggested that we conduct our interview during the first week of April, 2007 because I would be off from work and could travel out to Father Donaghy. He agreed and told me to call him at the end of the month.

I called Father Donaghy on March 28, 2007 to confirm an interview time for the following week. However, Fr. Donaghy was going through a family emergency and

could not confirm a date for the first week of April. I thought it was the best to give Fr. Donaghy space and I did not call him until after April 8, 2007, which was Easter Sunday.

On April 10, 2007 Father Donaghy and I confirmed an interview date for Wednesday, April 18, 2007. When Wednesday arrived I left work early to be on time for the 2:30 P.M. appointment. I reached my destination at around 2:15 P.M. and waited in my car, looking over the list of questions.

St. Gabriel's rectory is located to the right of St. Gabriel's Church on Mohawk Avenue in Norwood, PA. Upon entering the building I was greeted by a very nice man named Father Tom, however it was not Father Thomas Donaghy but the other Father Tom who resides at the rectory. As I stood in the lobby he went and informed Father Donaghy of my presences. Fr. Donaghy, wearing a blue sports coat and a blue pair of slacks, came walking down the steps and introduced himself. He directed me into a little office, which did not seem to be his, located on the first floor of the rectory. Very politely he asked if I wish to be the one who sat behind the desk. I responded, "no thanks I will be fine sitting right here." Father Donaghy also did not feel the need to sit behind the desk. He pulled up a chair similar to the one I was sitting in and sat down alongside a chest cabinet.

While in between short-talk, I explained to Father Donaghy the purpose of our project and the importance of the legal release. Fr. Donaghy had no problem with signing the release and we were ready to being the interview.

I decided the best place to station the recorder would be on the chest cabinet, closer to Fr. Donaghy than to myself. The decision was an important one due to how low

Fr. Donaghy spoke during his initial responses and because he has a habit of speaking while placing his hand over his mouth.

Other than Father Donaghy asking for the record to be turned off as he looked over a past article that he had published, the interview went smoothly. There were no interruptions from any outsiders or any noise coming from the rest of the rectory, including courtyard that the office overlooked. Overall, I enjoyed the interview process and became fascinated with my subject.

After the interview was over I thanked Fr. Donaghy for agreeing to being interviewed and we continued to have a causal conversation for a few minutes. He walked me to the door and pointed me in the direction I-95 north bound.