The Fire and Its Aftermath
Howard Benoist

When the fire alarms went off in the Main Building last May 6, I was in Main 202 along with a dozen graduate students engaged in a seminar on literary theory. We evacuated the building in good order and then watched from across the street as the roof and 4th floor burned and the fire engines poured thousands of gallons of water on the blaze. It was, to say the least, an interesting final class of the term.

Most of my teaching career has been at OLLU and much of that time was spent in Main one way or the other. For my first ten years on the faculty, with the exception of a brief stint in a bathroom/office in St. Ann’s Hall when I first arrived (that’s another story), my office was in the English ghetto on the second floor of Main. I had the small corner room most recently occupied by Nan Cuba. Even when I was primarily an administrator and office elsewhere, I usually taught a course each term and the classroom was usually in Main. Faculty meetings routinely took place in Main 232. The English composition lab was housed there. The Main Building was also the location of the faculty lounge, and until fairly recently faculty mailboxes were in the lounge. That was where, in earlier days, faculty gathered for coffee and conversation at noon breaks.

So the Main Building has really been the main building for me on this campus. Watching the flames stream from the roof that May evening was a very destabilizing experience.

In other ways, though, I’ve been fortunate in this fire. If the blaze had begun on the first floor instead of the fourth, I and my class (which included a wheelchair bound student) could have had serious problems. Providence certainly helped avoid injury or worse to us or the other inhabitants of the building that night. Also, because my office is in Metz Hall, where the Lake warehouses senior citizen literature faculty, rather than on second Main with the rest of the department, I did not suffer the water damage and loss of books, documents, and personal belongings that afflicted my colleagues. My office on Dinosaur Alley now seems a haven of stability when I visit department members in their Ayres Hall temporary quarters.

So while the Main Building fire has certainly upset and affected our campus and my department and colleagues, I can also see positives. The Lord looked after His people that night, and the Southerly winds protected the beautiful Chapel and the Congregation’s living quarters.

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