

ROBERT DARWIN CROUSE

On the night of the 14th of January, in his 81st year, the last of the founding Editors of *Dionysius*, the Reverend Professor Robert Darwin Crouse, died in his sleep in his childhood home in Crousetown, Lunenburg County, where his family has been established for more than 200 years. He had been very ill for several years but played the organ for the Liturgy at St Mary the Virgin, Crousetown, the Sunday before his last. He continued to assist in the editorial work of *Dionysius* until three years ago. His contributions of the highest level to the Classics Department of Dalhousie University, to the University of King's College, and to their students, to international scholarship, to the Church, and to the musical life of Nova Scotia make his passing momentous. The Department of Classics has received condolences from many parts of Europe and North America.

Robert received his primary and secondary education in the village school of Crousetown and at King's Collegiate School in Windsor, which contributed much to his love of music and of learning. One writer at the Collegiate School judges him the most outstanding scholar it graduated in its 223 year history. He arrived at Dalhousie University and King's College in 1947, the year James Doull began teaching in the Classics Department. Robert graduated in Classics in 1951 and then spent a year studying philosophy at Dalhousie and theology at King's. He organised at King's a "revolutionary cell" of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, devoted to bringing together Marxism and Anglo-Catholicism; members read Aquinas and Marx. The authorities of the Anglican Diocese and King's were unable to decide which was the more subversive and established a body, labelled the "Inquisition" by the students, to root out the theological and politically erroneous. It continued its work into the 1960s.

When Robert decamped to Harvard to read Divinity, he moved into the Cambridge Oratory of the Society. He broke with it in 1953, although he continued to inspire students to read *Das Kapital*, and his cousin, Dr Gary Ramey, now the socialist member of the Provincial Legislature for Lunenburg County, reports that his last meeting with Dr Crouse was when Robert dropped by to contribute to his campaign. He and the satirist Tom Lehrer were room mates at Harvard and from him Robert handed on the lyrics of "The Vatican Rag" and "God Bless Free Enterprise, System Divine." In the Harvard Divinity School, Harry Wolfson pushed him to add German to his Greek, Latin and French. Robert consolidated it with a year of study at Tubingen in 1955. By way of his work on Dante, and his years of teaching in Italy at the Ambrosianum and the Augustinianum, he acquired Italian. Robert was a paradigm of the union of complete rootedness in his birthplace and international sophistication which has characterised seafaring Nova Scotia with its face to Europe, its right arm extended to Boston and the

Caribbean, and its back to Canada. Harvard granted him an S.T.B. (*cum lauda*) in 1954 and he was ordained priest by the Anglican Bishop of Nova Scotia. Nonetheless, the Diocese of Nova Scotia and the Canadian church never ceased suspecting him of subversion.

As the liberal and neo-liberal revolutions spread north from the USA, Robert remained an unflinching adherent of the traditional liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* together with its lectionary, valuing its Patristic origins and structures. When the tactics of the ecclesiastical revolutionary authorities turned totalitarian, he became a tireless missionary for the liturgical, musical, and spiritual heritage. In this he kept faith with Anglo-Catholic inner-city parishes and with priests of the most impoverished fishing villages of the Maritimes, in some of which he served as a divinity student and when first ordained. Later he united in the same cause with Evangelicals from what once seems the opposed wing of the Anglican church. After Harvard, Robert moved to Trinity College, Toronto, where he was a Tutor in Divinity for three years and earned a Master of Theology (First Class Honours) in 1957. Trinity awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 1983. Trinity's citation celebrated him as the "conscience of the Canadian Church"; one both that church and the author of the citation took great care was not heeded.

Robert's full-time teaching career began with an appointment as Assistant Professor of Church History and Patristics at Bishop's University, in the Province of Quebec. When he returned to Nova Scotia in 1963 to join the Classics Department of Dalhousie, several of his former students at Bishop's followed him; one of them, the Augustinian scholar Dr Colin Starnes, became Professor of Classics and President of the University of King's College.

At Dalhousie, together with James Doull, Robert played an essential role in creating a distinctive way of presenting Classics. Lovers of the ancient languages and masters of these and of philology, they subordinated them to bringing out the argument of texts so as to expose their logic, allowing it to persuade the attentive student. The scholarly sciences were used, not to enforce historicism, but to break down the barriers between past, present, and future. With both teachers, question and silence were fundamental. Their vision of the scope of Classics—for Doull and Crouse it must include Hellenism's relation to the Middle Eastern cultures with which it united to form our actual historical realities—, and the priority they gave to the argument of ancient and mediaeval texts enabling them to speak to us now, have made the Department exceptionally successful both within Canada and internationally.

Professor Crouse was neither an Anglican nor a Christian theologian, but, simply, as he tirelessly made clear, a theologian, *tout court*; practicing the science the Greeks invented. He situated himself at the present terminus of the tradition of Homer and defined his work as creative recollection of the whole movement. When theology turned from myth to science, what Robert called his favourite theological book appeared early: Book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For him the fundamental question of the science was stated best by Plato: how the coming forth of the Many from the One and the union of the Many with the One are thinkable. Like Plato himself, Plotinus, and Boethius, Robert understood that this thinking was not possible apart from the grace of the One and this depended on prayer. His theology of grace was that of the old Hellenes, the Fathers and the Mediaevals: grace and works were two sides of a single divine-human activity.

For him Augustine's account of the Trinity contained the best path into the perennial question of the One and the Many. However, he did not hold Augustine's doctrine to be true because revealed; the revelation could be understood to be true because shown to be the best way into the deepest mysteries of philosophy. For him, no one who had not mastered the fundamental problematic of philosophy in its origins and total development could be a theologian. The present descent of Christian theology into the mindless fideism of personal and corporate story-telling, with the consequence that truth is qualified as mine and thine, was simply the end of theology and its only future could be either a proclamation of exactly nothing or interminable sectarian, ethnic, and religious war.

Robert's method was to dissolve or deconstruct oppositions, primarily the nature-grace, philosophical- revealed oppositions within the western theological tradition, constructed by the collusion of Protestant and neo-Thomistic scholarship, which he frequently took as the starting points of his deconstructions. This can be done either by moving back from Aquinas with the refusal to take his differentiations anachronistically with you (Robert's usual direction of work), or by moving forward via Eckhart and Cusanus, who cancel them, to Hegel, and the method and assumptions of speculative comparative religion. By way of the latter, Professor Crouse initially supposed that he could work within James Doull's framework. However, Doull's Hegelian history turned out to require an opposition between Proclus with Dionysius, on the one hand, and Augustine with Aristotle and Descartes, on the other, which Crouse thought false. Doull accused Crouse of Neoplatonising the whole history and thus being unable to explain Modern secularity. However, Robert did not believe in the substantiality of the secular—there were only the sacred secular and the secular sacred—and with its collapse, for him, Hegel's system fell down as well. Robert's pedagogical aim was to lead students back to the original unity of revelation and philosophy as two modes of the same. Both his classes and his sermons drew those who listened to Plotinian-

Augustinian-Proclean silent *visio*, perhaps best explicated by Nicholas of Cusa, the disciple of his beloved Eriugena.

Together with Hilary Armstrong and Patrick Atherton, in 1977, Crouse and Doull founded *Dionysius*. In 1981 Robert helped establish St Peter Publications in Charlottetown and the Atlantic Theological Conferences, both of which continue strongly. For five decades Father Crouse delivered uncounted theological and spiritual addresses, conferences, and retreats and guided the hundreds who came to him for help. The extent of his labours, which embraced North America and Europe, was suggested when the Diocese of Saskatchewan made him its Canon Theologian.

In 1970 Robert became a PhD of Harvard University; his dissertation was a critical edition of the *De Neocosmo* of Honorius Augustodunensis. He supervised scores of MA theses at Dalhousie and directed and examined dozens of doctoral dissertations there and throughout North America and Europe. His lectures, sermons, and scholarly publications (he published over seventy articles, reviews, and translations) were polished artefacts characterised by the greatest economy, precision, and beauty of language. He served as Chairman of the Department of Classics from 1971 to 1976 and was made full Professor in 1976. He retired as Emeritus Professor in 1996. In 1990 the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum in Rome named him Visiting Professor of Patrology, a post he took up repeatedly until 2004; he was the first non-Roman Catholic to be given this distinction.

In 1972 he joined other members of the Department of Classics, as well as members of the Departments of German and Sociology, at Dalhousie University, as the first co-ordinators responsible for the structure and lectures of the Foundation Year Programme at King's. At the time, the College was bankrupt in every sense and this Programme became the basis of its eminently successful reconstruction: intellectually, religiously, and financially. His Section on the Middle Ages was a model of the integration of literary, philosophical, religious, social and artistic culture. With camera in hand, Robert crisscrossed Europe bringing back the history of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. His lectures on architecture and music opened many students to hitherto hidden mysteries. His lectures on Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the Programme were so loved that he continued them well after retirement, giving his last series in 2003. Former students returned annually to hear them. Suitably his last lectures in the University were delivered on the *Confessions* of St Augustine in 2004 in the Foundation Year Programme.

At King's he was a Carnegie Professor from 1979 and Clerk of Convocation between 1972 and 1994, responsible both for the choice of honorary degree candidates and the conduct of the Encaenia ceremonies; he served as Vice-President for two years and

Director of the Foundation Year Programme for one. King's awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 2007. The closing words of his Convocation Address epitomise his convictions, work, and hope:

The past is always and inevitably here, and our choice is only whether to possess it consciously in recollection, or to possess it in the form of unreflective prejudice, devoid of understanding. The implication of the latter choice, as Dante shows us, in Canto X of the "Inferno" in the shocking figure of Farinata, is imprisonment in an insubstantial present, in which dissociated past and future can appear only as fragmentary, totally abstract, and essentially irrelevant information. Dante paints for us a picture of an empty present, which, he says will be the death of all our knowledge; and that is, in Dante's judgement, a virulent form of hell. Recollection is the fundamental business of the University—not recollection as dwelling in the past, but recollection as basis of renewal in the present, and hope and expectation for the future. Thus, King's College, 'beloved community of memory and hope', among the most traditional of universities, has been able to be most fruitfully innovative.

Outside the classroom his greatest contribution at King's was in the Chapel. His celebration of the liturgy and his sermons had enormous influence on the lives of students and faculty, and were crucial to making the Chapel into a North American centre of theological and spiritual rebirth; among its fruits were several scores of vocations to the priesthood. Many of those he moved along that path in that place returned for his Requiem and were described as "like an army terrible with banners." Moreover, Dr Crouse established the choir for the Thursday Solemn Eucharist which is now the foundation of the musical renaissance at King's.

Robert's gifts as an organist and choirmaster were extended to parishes (notably in his home parish of Petite Riviere, Lunenburg County; Holy Trinity, Bridgewater; and St James', Halifax). Soon after he returned to Nova Scotia, he assisted in the rescue and restoration of an early 19th century tracker organ which became the centre of forty-seven years of Summer Baroque concerts at St Mary's Crousetown. While such concerts of early music have now become staples of the Summer fare in the Maritimes, Robert was a pioneer.

After the concerts, receptions at his house allowed musicians and their audiences to admire Robert's extraordinary gardens. He was always an organic gardener, and inspired many to imitate his practices; his salads provoked awe, and his rosary, with 129 varieties, delight. A superb cook, his hospitality to students, colleagues, and all who visited, seemed without limit. A King's President remarked that his table was a constant

reiteration of the miracle of the feeding of the 3000. However, this home was also a sanctuary for mind and spirit. He eschewed radio, television, and telephone. Around the walls of the room where Robert spent most of his time, the same President carved, in Carolingian script, words St Bernard took from Isaiah for the habitations of his monks: *LAETABITUR DESERTA ET EXULTABIT SOLITUDO ET FLOREBIT QUASI LILIUM ET ERIT IBI SEMITA ET VIA ET VIA SANCTA VOCABITUR NON ERIT IBI LEO*. At the heart of all Robert's apparently endless practicality lay a carefully guarded silence which enabled the depth of his thought, his communion with God, nature, and humanity, and his unmovable independence of mind. Among his greatest gifts as a teacher was his communication of the necessity, goodness, and beauty of contemplative silence.

In mid October, 2011, the Department of Classics will celebrate Robert's indelible contribution to its life with an academic act of remembrance. A portrait by an alumna, Andra Striowski, matching the one she painted of James Doull, will be unveiled. Contributions to the cost of the portrait and to a memorial fund supporting guest lectures on Ancient, Patristic, and Mediaeval philosophy, religion, and literature in the Department will be welcomed. They may be sent to Ben McIsaac, External Relations, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, B3H 3J5 and should be marked for the Robert Crouse Memorial.

A Requiem Mass was celebrated in the University of King's College Chapel on the 18th of January at which Dr Starnes delivered the address. He was interred in the cemetery of his beloved St Mary the Virgin Church in Crousetown, which he embellished exquisitely for fifty years, after a Funeral Mass at which the Right Reverend Michael Hawkins, Bishop of Saskatchewan, a former student, preached.

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