

Not-a Eulogy, for Robert

ROBERT DARWIN CROUSE – October 12, 1930 – January 15, 2011

I imagine that for many who are here—and for others who are not—Robert’s death has torn a great hole in the fabric of all our lives. It certainly has for Suki and me. We would not have lived in Nova Scotia were it not for Robert. I want to say something to mend this—but I cannot. What I can say today is neither a sermon nor a eulogy. It is no sermon because I do not speak with any authority—as Robert the priest did so often and so faithfully. It certainly cannot be a eulogy. He would see to it that the eggs and butter in my Hollandaise sauce always separated if I stood here lauding his talents or any of the great and good things he accomplished. His focus was never on we, who do things, but only on the thing done.

And, of course, it would be very inappropriate to go down the list of things he did that were vastly irritating—like the fact that every week he would solve the NY Times crossword puzzle, without looking anything up, in a few hours, and in ink. How did he do that when the answers were often names like Shaquille O’Neill or Lady Gaga? Or what are we to make of his dictum that apart from toothpaste and, possibly electricity he could not think of any reason to prefer the Modern World to the Medieval?

Robert himself had the courage of his convictions. Faced with such a conclusion that there was little he could say—legitimately, in conscience, or appropriately—he would have said little. I am not made of such firm stuff. Without speaking too much of Robert I still want to say *something*. So let’s turn our thoughts to what it means to be what he was—a teacher, in this place.

And by this place I mean right here, in this Chapel, which can seem like such an anachronism—a confessional Anglican Chapel on a modern non-confessional campus in the information age. There *is* a kind of teaching which primarily has to do with passing on information from those who possess it to those who don’t. Robert placed himself in that tradition as one who could see back so far only because he stood on the shoulders of others. Wipe from our minds the history that has brought us to this point and—like one who suffers from Alzheimer’s—we find ourselves in a empty place that comes from nowhere, has no reasonable content, and from which no prospect is possible. Robert recognized that the prevention of such a malady—in our interactions with one another and in our entire civilization—depended on those courses of recollection that are the basic tool of all education. The meaning of our academic labors is to make what is hidden from our senses clear and contemporary to our minds. It is to evoke the past, recent and remote, in

all its fullness and coherence. And that past, held in present memory, is the thing that gives each of our fleeting moments substance and importance. This was the side of Robert that preferred the Medieval world to the Modern, this is the Robert who had no TV, no dishwasher, no computer, and no phone number.

If that was all the teacher Robert was it would still be a very great thing just because he was so good at it. But there was more. All that points to the past: the other half points to the future. Our present, which only gains its significance by taking in the past, establishes the possibility of a future for us. It gives us a horizon that provides, as he put it, “the context of our hope and expectation.” Robert acted like a kind of living signpost to the future by directing our attention up as well as back. He did this by continually pointing out the strange ways in which entirely separate, parallel, universes exist beside one another and yet interact.

Some, like the music he loved, lie very close to the surface of the physical universe and communicate with it easily. Other worlds, like the mathematical, are farther from it, harder to reach, and yet more deeply inform the character of matter. And beyond these lie the worlds of the soul, of the intelligible universe, of angels and, ultimately, of God. At each level, even as our communication with them, from our base in the physical universe, becomes increasingly difficult, yet we also find the mysterious ties that bind them grow steadily stronger and deeper.

For Robert a wonderful example of this mysterious co-existence was found right here, in this room. A confessional chapel, whose principle is faith seeking understanding, on a secular campus, whose principle is understanding apart from faith. It seems impossible that they can be together and yet here we are in such a Chapel, in such a College, in a room whose focal-point—the stained-glass window over the altar—actually shows such an impossible moment uniting two separate realities.

The glass it is made of is treated in a way that ruins it—if you think that the whole point of glass is to be clear. Staining the glass compromises that reality. But it also allows another, seemingly opposed, reality to appear. Not light working from the inside out but light working from the outside in. In this glass, one thing—clear light—becomes many things, in the representation of Jesus and the Elders. The story refers to the time when Joseph and Mary, who had gone up to Jerusalem with the twelve-year-old Jesus, had travelled a whole day back towards Nazareth before they realized he was not with any of the people with whom they were travelling. Returning, they found him in the Temple, sitting amongst the teachers, listening, and asking questions. *And*, as Luke puts it, *all who*

heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers. The questions of this child were so full of understanding that, of themselves, they revealed the answers. In this world, where one kind of our knowledge can only be won through long experience, and where the other kind comes only through the even more difficult task of getting beyond experience, such understanding in a twelve-year-old is simply not possible. Robert assumed that such things were possible. His firm faith in the coincidence of separate realities—of the parallel but interconnected worlds of matter and thought, of body and soul, of men and of God, was at the heart of his teaching. It is also at the heart of this improbable College—whose future, coming out of its past, will continually renew it just as Robert helped it to become new in his day. His expectations were, quite literally, boundless—and, as he taught us for almost half a century, so too may ours be.

January 19, 2011

Colin J. Starnes is a retired professor and author, and former President of the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Dr. Starnes joined the faculty of King's in 1972, and the Dalhousie University faculty in 1977. He taught at both of these universities until retiring in 2005. Although retired, he continues to lecture in the Foundation Year Programme at King's, including such topics as The Divine Comedy. He also lectures in Halifax Humanities 101, a university level programme for those living below the poverty line.



*Dr. Starnes is an authority on Saint Augustine and Thomas More. His published works include the book *The New Republic: A Commentary on Book I of More's Utopia Showing Its Relation to Plato's Republic* and *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions, I-I**

On Sunday, June 26 at 7 p.m. a Requiem Eucharist will be celebrated for the remembrance of Father Robert Crouse. The service will take place at St George's (Round) Church, 2222 Brunswick Street, Halifax, with a sermon by The Rt. Rev'd Anthony Burton, Rector of Church of the Incarnation, Dallas, Texas; and formerly Bishop of Saskatchewan. A reception will follow. This will be an opportunity for former students, parishioners, friends and colleagues to gather and give thanks to Almighty God for Fr Crouse's witness.

"Finding the Sacred in the Modern Secular: How the Sacred is to be discovered in Today's World"

The 31st Annual Atlantic Theological Conference
Sunday, June 26 (evening) to Wednesday, June 29 (noon), 2011
University of King's College Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Papers by The Rev'd Dr Gary Thorne, Dr Alyda Faber, Dr Philip Davis, and The Rev'd Christopher Snook with a paper on the Theological Legacy of Robert Crouse given by Dr Wayne J. Hankey

For more information, visit www.stpeter.org/conf.htm
To register, phone (902) 368-8442 or email office@stpeter.org

A Lenten Pilgrimage Meditations on Bonaventure's "The Journey of the Soul to God" (referencing pages 53-116)

This notice may be too late for registration please call to inquire

March 19, 2011 9am-5pm
King's Edgehill School, Windsor
Morning Prayer at 9am in the chapel,
addresses to be held elsewhere on site

\$10 registration fee- includes lunch and photocopies of reading
Please register by phone to Jane Neish -902.405. 6652
or Elizabeth Curry 902.877.1150
By e-mail to janeneish@yahoo.ca

To purchase the text check Amazon.ca
Bonaventure "The Journey of the Soul to God"
translated by Ewert H. Cousins,
Classics of Western Spirituality series