

# A Reflection On Robert Crouse

## By The Rev'd David Curry

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### **Celebrating an Outstanding Scholar: Robert Darwin Crouse (1930-2011)**

The sermons, lectures, and writings of Robert Darwin Crouse have influenced generations of students and clergy world wide. Clear and concise, scholarly yet pastoral, they address many of the current confusions of a post-secular and post-Christian world by way of connecting the contemporary world to its Christian origins and principles. A remarkable scholar with a poetic soul and gift of expression, his writings speak across the ages and generations with clarity and charity. His sermons are the pastoral distillation of decades of careful reading of ancient, biblical, patristic, medieval, and modern writings with a deep appreciation for the power of the arts to draw us into an engagement with Christian spirituality. They address the waste land of modernity without leaving us in the waste land and without defaulting to a romantic longing for some imagined golden age. Perhaps no collection of sermons captures better the character and concerns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by bringing the perennial wisdom of Christ before the thoughtful reader. The sermons are a refreshment and a source of spiritual renewal for many a community of souls and for all times. For those of us who had the privilege of being his student and spending time at his place in Crousetown, these sermons are like being once again in his presence and hearing his voice, partaking of his hospitality and generosity of mind.

Dr. Crouse was the most outstanding scholar ever to come out of the School (1944- 1947) and College. A theologian and Anglican priest, a musician, poet and preacher, he had a remarkable career as a scholar of Medieval Philosophy and as a beloved teacher at King's College in the Foundation Year Programme and at the Dalhousie Classics Department in Halifax. He taught at Trinity College, Toronto, and at Bishop's University, Sherbrooke, Quebec (where Guy Payne first met him). He also taught at the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum in Rome where he lectured for many years as a visiting Professor of Patristics. He was a graduate of King's College and Dalhousie University, of Trinity College, and of Harvard. A number of the faculty and the board of the School have also had the privilege of being taught by Fr. Crouse. He baptized, for instance, Christian and Zachary

Lakes, the twins of Kevin and Penny Lakes, at the School Chapel. He was one of my mentors. As Trevor Hughes, former Chairman of the Board, remarked, Robert had the nicest way of telling you that you were wrong. I think this is captured in his response to students' comments on whatever subjects were before us: "You might say that," he would say, meaning "I wouldn't," which (by interpretation) suggested that it was foolish or at least mistaken.

Sunday, January 14th, and Monday, January 15th, mark the book launch in Halifax of two books by the Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse, a book of sermons and a meditation on the theme of pilgrimage, the beginning of a publication project that we hope will include many of his scholarly writings. The first two volumes are available through Amazon: *Images of Pilgrimage: Paradise and Wilderness in Christian Spirituality* and *The Soul's Pilgrimage Volume 1: From Advent to Pentecost*.

In many ways, I think his time as a student here at King's Collegiate School was formative and indicative of his interests and talents. It was where his deep love of botany, of plants and flowers, was encouraged, where his love of music, especially the organ was pursued - he used to slip down to Christ Church to play the organ there to avoid rugby practice! - and where the faculties of his mind were allowed to flourish and grow. He probably read almost every book in the library at that time. His prodigious knowledge and memory, driven by his passion to learn, were certainly increased by his years as a student here at the School and contributed to his future life as a scholar and teacher. Christ Church, as he once told me, shaped his sense and imagination of the Church as a holy place. He would have gone there on Sundays. But the School Chapel, too, held a special place in his mind and was where he played the organ for services. The *Windsorian*, the School yearbooks from those years, contains some of Robert's 'juvenalia', or to use Augustine's term, 'adolescentia', his writings as a teenager which already point to the themes which would distinguish his life: an abiding interest in nature, in music and architecture, and in poetry and religion philosophically understood.

One of his favourite texts from Scripture belongs to the theme of the Epiphany, to the idea of things being made known or manifest: "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12.2). Regarded as "the conscience of the Canadian (Anglican) Church," he remained committed to the essential Catholicism of Anglicanism as embodied in the classical Book(s) of Common Prayer. His "Ode to Hensley Memorial Chapel" in the 1944/45 *Windsorian*, written when he was fifteen, already shows something of his measure as a scholar and a metaphysical thinker:

A beauteous little Gothic Chapel stands  
On the crest of a gently sloping hill  
Within its walls all is peaceful and still  
As shadows softly fall o'er all the lands  
And light seems lifted by some mystic hands,  
The twilight dwells inside these walls until  
The darkness shrouds the earth by some strange will.  
It is then the human soul understands  
The labour of both architect who worked  
To plan this very wond'rous work of art,  
And those who make his plans reality.

'Twas not the work of one who duty shirked  
So craftsman take this lesson to thy heart  
And plan thine art for immortality.

At the very least, it is fitting for the School to remember its outstanding scholars and so recall something of its own life and purpose.

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