

Remembrances of Friend, Teacher and Colleague

The members of the Carmelite Order esteem Roland Murphy as a friend, as a teacher, and, indeed, as a master of the Sacred Page. As part of the celebration of his eightieth birthday a few of his peers and students share their recollections of Roland.

Roland arrived in Chicago in 1944 fresh out of the seminary, ready for his first pastoral assignment as assistant in the Carmelite parish of St. Clara and teacher at nearby Mount Carmel High School. He had received the best seminary training that the Chicago province of Carmelites had been able to provide to this point in its history. His professional formation was to continue. After the interim year of “seasoning” he was slated for graduate studies in Scripture at Catholic University in Washington. He obtained the M.A. degree in Semitic languages and the S.T.D. in theology with a major in Scripture. This program prepared him well to be teacher, researcher, writer, and editor. Much of the reason for his success was the man himself. He took full advantage of every opportunity in academic training.

Roland had entered Mount Carmel Niagara as a high school freshman in 1931, the year Fr. Kevin Cahill became rector. He had taken the competitive scholarship examination for the seminary as only a seventh grader, and placed sixth in a field with five winners. His good showing led one of the priests in his Carmelite parish of St. Cyril’s to encourage him to take the eighth grade exams immediately, and if he passed, to enter Niagara that fall. And so it was that the seventh grader entered Mount Carmel Niagara in September, 1931.

After high school and novitiate the next step was normally the three year college course at Mount Carmel Niagara. Roland, instead, was chosen as one of four in his class to do his college studies at Catholic University. This was a marvelous opportunity.

His high school years had awakened Roland’s intellectual appetite especially for languages and literature. The Catholic University college experience put him in touch with scholars like John Tracy Ellis, who fired his imagination and pointed him in the direction of an academic career. In summer school he took additional foreign languages instead of getting some required courses out of the way. Becoming multilingual was an invaluable asset for his future research and writing.

Before Roland reached his fourth year, the Province made the decision to move the theologate from Chicago to Washington, D.C. The first class, Roland’s novitiate class, was to arrive in September, 1939. He had to return to Niagara for his final year of college to make room for the incoming theological students. This shift coincidentally placed him in the same class as his younger Carmelite brother David.

Whatever the disappointment for the collegians, the gain for the province was considerable. The theologate in Chicago had lacked the milieu and resources of a theological center that Catholic University and the surrounding religious seminaries now provided. In Chicago there were the distractions of part-time teaching in the high school and outside academic work at DePaul University. The opportunity to study theology full-time at university, to have access to public lectures on campus, to meet scholars, and to mix with students from other seminaries offered a stimulating environment for doing theology. The move was definitely an advance in the Carmelite seminary system.

After his second year of theology at Catholic University, there was another interruption. The University withdrew its policy of reduced tuition for religious seminarians; the Carmelites countered by establishing their own independent faculty of theology at Whitefriars Hall. In the beginning religious of other local communities were engaged as teachers to augment the Carmelite faculty, which included Fr. Kilian Healy among others. Eventually the Province would train its own men, a necessity that was a blessing because it increased the number of trained Carmelite theologians.

Roland's sights on Scripture were set during the two years At Catholic University. He developed an intense interest in Scripture studies under the influence of one particular teacher, William L. Newton, S.S.D.; later his mentors would include Edward P. Arbez and Patrick W. Skehan, who were pioneers in the new approach to Scripture and models of painstaking and courageous scholarship. While at Catholic University Roland had taken a second year of Hebrew and continued to study the language at Whitefriars and in Chicago. When he returned to Catholic University for the S.T.D. in theology in 1945, he was ready to tackle Old Testament studies with a good grasp of the language.

The graduate studies took place between 1945 and 1948; his S.T.D. dissertation was on Psalm 72, and this concluded his formal studies. One could imagine an easier scenario with more continuity on the undergraduate level of college and seminary theology, followed immediately by Ph.D. studies in Semitics under a professor like William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins University or intensive biblical studies at Rome or Jerusalem. But then, Roland would have been less "homegrown," and his achievement less remarkable.

Coincident with the graduate studies Roland began his twenty-five year career as teacher of Scripture at Whitefriars Hall. This

direct contact with a whole generation of Carmelite students was the single most important feature of his influence on the intellectual life of the Carmelites. His achievements and reputation outside the community as university professor, researcher, writer, and editor, gave him a high profile and were a source of pride and admiration among his Carmelite brethren. But the teaching put the man in living contact with the students, where he touched minds and hearts. Here students experienced his contagious enthusiasm for Scripture, his competence as a scholar, his rigorous honesty in both academic and practical matters, his high standards and expectations, and his undeviating commitment to truth. Roland was a giant: physically, mentally, and spiritually. In his religious life he followed the *strictior observantia* and taught by silent example rather than word.

Roland launched his public career in 1948, when he accepted an appointment on the faculty of the Semitic Department at his alma mater: his field was Christian Arabic literature. He remained in that department until 1956. At that time he transferred to the School of Theology as Scripture professor where he taught until 1970.

Through the fifties and sixties Roland was identified with Catholic University: it was the springboard for multiple workshops, lectures, and writing. His role as an editor of *Concilium* placed him on the international scene and involved him in projects inside and outside the Order. He became editor of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* in 1958. Roland excelled in networking with other scholars, knowing hundreds of them on a first-name basis and collaborating with them in various ways. He began his scholarly writing early, writing two interpretive articles on New Testament passages in his first year of teaching at the University. His prolific writings have continued to the present day and have been catalogued by admiring students (see my review of books that he wrote or

edited between 1987 and 1995 in *The Sword* 55 (1995) 77-81).

A mutually beneficial relationship between professor Roland Murphy and the Catholic University ended when he resigned in 1970 over a policy decision. After a visiting professorship at Princeton Theological Seminary, he accepted an appointment as a full-time professor at Duke University in 1971. Duke later awarded him the George Washington Ivey Chair of Biblical Studies, which he occupied until his retirement in 1986. In previous years he had been visiting professor at Pittsburgh Theological, Yale Divinity, and Duke Divinity School, so that working with predominantly Protestant students, many of whom were preparing for the ministry, was not new to him. The opportunity was an enriching ecumenical experience for all concerned. Since retiring Roland has spent his time in writing and in part-time teaching at the Washington Theological Union.

What precisely did Roland contribute to the intellectual life of the Carmelite Order? As a genuine intellectual he inspired individuals both inside and outside the classroom and he raised consciousness and maintained high standards wherever he taught. His presence bore witness to intellectual integrity and gave added credibility to faculties where he served. His word was his bond. His recommendation of a teacher or speaker was warranty enough for most administrators. I received invitations to summer school teaching positions and to full-time employment as a professor at Catholic University on the strength of Roland's recommendations. Painfully honest in his evaluations he promoted his own generously but judiciously. Here as elsewhere he spoke the truth as he saw it, unambiguously and without dissimulation.

Roland was the apostle of higher education in the Province. encouraging those with aptitude and promise, mentoring those interested in biblical studies, and lobbying superiors for greater commitment in this area. For those already involved in studies he was their conscience in promoting research and writing. Publication for him was a sure way of growth and enhancement in the teaching profession.

I want to end, this tribute with two vignettes that illustrate the ways in which he influenced Carmelites young and old. The first is a memory of Roland at sports. In the forties he played regularly in the athletic games at Whitefriars. Once the football or baseball game ended, however, he literally ran for the showers. He never wasted a minute. No matter how quickly we tried to get ready for the 3:00 p.m. study period, he would beat us to the desk. His lamp would be burning brightly and reflecting in his window before the rest of us were quite organized. His discipline was not lost on us.

The second incident took place in October, 1995, at a meeting of Senior Carmelites. Roland brought to the floor a well-prepared statement calling the attention of the provincial council to the fact that the men involved in Carmelite studies were getting older and fewer in number. It was imperative that new people be assigned to studies in Carmelite history and spirituality, so that the momentum of recent years would continue. The motion received attention and immediate approval, largely because it came from Roland. He was the wisdom figure of this group, who spoke with authority both in his field of specialization and in the broader terrain of the Order's life. This great scholar did not forget his roots. Because he is a public authority and a faithful Carmelite, the Order has profited immensely by his life and work. He is gift in our midst.