

## **Theodore Crowley ofm 1910-1990**

Cornelius Crowley was born at Fenit, Co. Kerry on 14 September 1910. He was raised by an uncle who sent him to the Christian Brothers grammar school at Tralee. At the age of sixteen he was enrolled at the Franciscan College at Multyfarnham, and the following year he received the habit in the noviciate at Killarney, becoming Br Theodore ofm on 7 September 1927. The following year he was sent to the Catholic University of Louvain, where he was awarded the *Baccalauréat en philosophie* in 1930. He pursued studies in theology at the Antonianum University at Rome, where he was ordained a priest at the early age of twenty-two. His superiors sent him back to Louvain, first to complete his theology course at the Jesuit Faculty at Egenhoven (1933-1934), then to study successively for the *Licence en philosophie* (1935) and the *Licence en sciences historiques* (1937). In 1939 he was awarded (*summa cum laude*) the degree of *Docter en philosophie* for a thesis on the psychology of Roger Bacon. He spent the war years lecturing in theology to Franciscan students at Galway. In 1946 he was entrusted with the task of re-possessing St Anthony's College, Louvain on behalf of the Irish Franciscan Province. He combined his duties with research under Professor Fernand Van Steenberghen at the *Institut supérieur de philosophie*, and on 18 December 1949 he publicly defended his thesis for the higher doctorate, becoming *Maître agrégé en philosophie* of the *Ecole de S. Thomas* founded by Désiré (later Cardinal) Mercier. Within a short time (1950) this thesis appeared as a book.

Crowley spent a year lecturing at East Bergholt to the students of the English Franciscan Province and pursuing research at the John Rylands Library, Manchester. He was expected to take up a research post at the Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure's, N.Y., but at the request of his superiors he applied for the lectureship in Scholastic Philosophy at Queen's University, Belfast, and was appointed in succession to Arthur Ryan (1951). In 1954 he was promoted Reader, and in 1968 he was given a personal chair in his subject. He retired in 1975 and moved back to Louvain to live in the Irish College (i.e. St Anthony's). Louvain was no longer the place he had known, and so in 1978 he became chaplain to an orphanage administered by the Daughters of Charity at Gravesend in Kent. In 1986 he moved back to Belfast where he continued to live up to the time of his death, which took place in his eightieth

year, on 13 February 1990. His remains were interred in the Franciscan plot at Glasnevin in Dublin. A window dedicated to his memory was placed in St Brigid's Church, Belfast.

In 1960, when the crisis in the Belgian Congo was at its height, the independence of the young Louvanium University was threatened. The academic authorities at Louvain deputed Crowley to go the Congo as Vice-Rector *pro tem.* of the university, placing reliance on his independence of mind, his fluency in French and his Irish passport. He met many of the leading personalities at the diplomatic end of the conflict. As things turned out the Rector of the institution was not targeted politically, so that the crisis passed and Crowley was able to return to Belgium and Ireland, with new African interests and a fund of stories about his experience.

Academic administration as well as teaching occupied much of his time at Queen's, especially as student numbers soared during the 60s. He was appointed External Examiner in Philosophy to NUI in 1957, and apart from some years of intermission he was retained almost up to his retirement, reading all the theses in Psychology, Sociology and Education, as well as Philosophy. He was a popular public lecturer during the 50s, delivering, for example, the Wadding Centenary Lecture at Waterford, the Immaculate Conception Lecture at Adam and Eve's (Dublin), and a St Thomas Lecture at Galway. He made presentations at the Oxford Medieval Society and the Rylands Library (1951), the medievalist seminar at Louvain (1958) and the Irish Philosophical Club, as well as at Newman Societies at various universities in Ireland and Britain, and he spoke at several international conferences. The highlight of his professional life was the principal address at the Medievalist Conference at Kalamazoo (10 May 1974), on aspects of St Bonaventure's life and doctrine. As part of an international Franciscan team he collaborated in the planning of the five volumes commemorating the seventh centenary of the death of Bonaventure (1974).

In his specialised publications Crowley explored historically the reception of Aristotelian philosophy by scholastic authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. His formation in historical method enabled him to make expert employment of the primary

sources in this field, including manuscripts witnessing texts by Roger Bacon. His efforts at reassessing the chronology of Bonaventure (1974) have won widespread approval among scholars. He argued against the ontologist interpretation of Bonaventure's theory of knowledge, and maintained that the latter's views concerning divine illumination were in fact close to those professed by Thomas Aquinas in his teaching concerning the *lumen naturale*, or the created mind whose activity depends intimately upon the uncreated light of truth.

Though he had a good knowledge of Descartes he was firmly opposed to the notion that the *tabula rasa* of methodic doubt could produce a uniquely-valid starting-point for philosophy. In the same spirit he opposed the efforts of Père Maréchal to bring the Kantian transcendental problematic into the centre of neo-scholastic method, believing as he did that critical realism is a chimera. He pursued the same line of criticism against the *Cartesian Meditations* of Husserl.

In a printed symposium on the encyclical *Humani Generis* published in 1952 Crowley set out the nature of Scholastic Philosophy as he saw it. He placed the principles of finality, causality and sufficient reason at the centre of a realist metaphysics--as opposed to an idealist approach. Reviewing some issues that concern philosophy as well as faith and theology, and writing on the relations of reason to faith in the context of the recent encyclical letter, he argued that 'It is only by being true to itself, by respecting its [own] fundamental principles, that philosophy can advance.'

## **Publications**

(Book reviews have not been listed)

### Book:

*Roger Bacon: The Problem of the Soul in His Philosophical Commentaries*. Preface by Fernand Van Steenberghen, Louvain-Dublin, 1950, 223pp.

Translations from French:

E. Lousse, *The Catholic University of Louvain during the Second World War*. Translated by Theodore Crowley, Desclée, Bruges, 1946.

*Hidden God*. By Fernand Van Steenberghen. Translated by Theodore Crowley, Louvain, 1966. (Translation of *Dieu caché. Comment savons-nous que Dieu existe?* (Essais philosophiques, 8), Louvain/Paris, 1961.

Published Minor Theses for the degree of Maître agrégé en philosophie (UCL):

Theses quas cum dissertatione cui titulus 'Roger Bacon's Aristotelian and Pseudo-Aristotelian Commentaries' ... publice propugnabit Theodorus Crowley, presbyter ordinis Fratrum Minorum... Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis in oppido Lovaniensi, divi Thomae Aquinatis Schola. No. XXIII, 12 pp. (The fifty minor theses in this publication formed part of Crowley's public soutenance de thèse [Louvain, 19 Dec. 1949] in view of the higher doctorate in philosophy. Mgr Van Waeyenbergh, Rector Magnificus of the Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis, presided at the session, with Prof. Louis de Raeymaeker chairing the jury d'examen).

Articles

'John Peckham, OFM, Archbishop of Canterbury, Versus the New Aristotelianism', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 33.2 (1951) 242-255.

'Roger Bacon: The Problem of Universals in His Philosophical Commentaries', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 34.2 (1952) 264-275.

'Roger Bacon and Avicenna', in *Philosophical Studies* 2 (1952) 82-88.

'*Humani Generis* and Philosophy, in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 19 (1952) 25-32.

'Metaphysics and Professor A.J. Ayer', in *Philosophical Studies* 3 (1953) 83-99.

Preface to Fernand Van Steenberghe, *The Philosophical Movement in the Thirteenth Century*, Edinburgh (Nelson), 1955.

'The Non Christian in a Scotist Setting', in *De Doctrina Ioannis Duns Scoti. Acta Congressus Scotistici Internationalis Oxonii et Edimburgi 11-17 Sept. 1966 Celebrati*, vol. III: *Problemata Theologica*. Cura Commissionis Scotisticae, Romae, 1968, pp. 757-66.

*Transcendence*. An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the Queen's University of Belfast on 25 February 1970 by Theodore Crowley OFM, Professor of Scholastic Philosophy, (New Lecture Series no. 53), Belfast, 1970, 18pp.

'Illumination and Certitude', in *S. Bonaventura 1274-1974. Volumen Commemorativum Anni Septies Centenarii A Morte S. Bonaventurae Doctoris Seraphici*. Cura et Studio Commissionis Internationalis Bonaventuriana, Grottaferrata (Roma), 1973, 431-448.

'Bacon, Roger', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., 1974, 567-68.

'St. Bonaventure Chronology Reappraisal', in *Franziskanische Studien* 56 (1974) 310-322.

'St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio O.Min. 1221-1274', in *Capuchin Annual* (1975) 56-63.

'Medieval Franciscan Ideology', in *Philosophy and Totality*. Lectures delivered under the auspices of the Department of Scholastic Philosophy, ed. James McEvoy, Belfast, 1977, 23-32.

Eighteen articles appeared under his name in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (see vol. XV: Index, 1967). These included contributions on minor figures of the Medieval Church (e.g., St Bernard of Parma, Eve of Liège), Scholastics (e.g., John de Seccheville, Richard of Conington, Simon of Ghent, Thomas of Bungey) and medievalist historians (Reginald Lane Poole, Alfred Plummer).

The homily preached at his funeral, which includes an appreciation of him, has been published: James McEvoy, *Heart in Pilgrimage. Sermons and Meditations*, Belfast, Fountain Publishing, 1996, pp. 98-105.