

Archpriest Robert Anderson (1946–2010)

Logos is not in the habit of publishing necrologies for every cleric of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church. We are rather selective in this regard, focusing mainly on theologians and other ecclesiastical leaders whose legacy is particularly imposing. Those who are close to the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies are perhaps more likely to be remembered by this journal. The man to whom we pay homage here was an unflagging supporter, a confidante and friend to many among the faculty and students of this institute, and hence to the editors of *Logos*.

The Archpriest Robert Anderson, known affectionately to everyone as Fr. Bob, was spending Christmas with his sisters on Staten Island, New York, when, in the early hours of 27 December 2010, he suddenly collapsed and fell asleep in the Lord. He was 64. He leaves behind his three sisters, Nancy, Lynn, and Debbie, all residents of Staten Island; friends and colleagues in Europe and North America; and many spiritual sons and daughters around the world.

The priestly parastas took place on Staten Island along with the funeral and burial in a plot beside his father, Alexander Anderson, who died in 1954 when Fr. Bob was eight. Bishop Paul of the Stamford Eparchy of the UGCC concelebrated the liturgy with over a dozen priests, most of whom traveled from across Canada. A panakhyda was celebrated at Holy Spirit Seminary in Ottawa, where 40th-day services were also held.

Fr. Bob was born in Brooklyn on 18 May 1946, but grew up on Staten Island. His family was of Greek ancestry, making him, as he once remarked, among the few actual Greeks in the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church!

After graduating from Xaverian High School in Brooklyn in 1964, he received a B.A. in French language and literature from St. Peter's College in Jersey City and then several diplômes from the Institut Catholique in Paris. He also received a B.Ed. from the University of Toronto, and a Masters degree in Eastern Christian theology from the John XXIII Institute, conferred by Maryknoll Seminary.

He was ordained priest in the Holy Land on 5 March 1972 by the Melkite Archbishop Joseph Raya of blessed memory. Shortly thereafter, he accepted his first pastoral assignment to the Ukrainian Catholic parish in Wilton, North Dakota, which he would serve from 1973–1974. Then Bishop Isidore Borecky of blessed memory appointed Fr. Bob pastor of the UGCC parish in Chatham, Ontario. For his excellent service there, Bishop Isidore elevated Fr. Bob to archpriest in 1986. Fr. Bob would often comment that he wore a flower pot on his head, in a self-deprecating reference to his purple kamilavka. He was pastor there until 1990 before Bishop Isidore appointed him pastor of St. Michael's UGCC parish in Kingston, Ontario, the assignment he held until his death. He greatly loved his parish, and they loved him in return.

1990, of course, was the year that the Sheptytsky Institute moved to Ottawa from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Fr. Bob took up residence in Aylmer, Quebec, just across the Ottawa River from the national capital. He commuted to his parish in Kingston from the Ottawa area, a formidable undertaking in the treacherous winters of Eastern Ontario. In this pastorship, Fr. Bob followed Fr. Joseph Andrijisyn, the rector of Holy Spirit Seminary in those years. Fr. Bob thus took his first steps acclimatizing to Ottawa at the same time our Institute was doing so. Our lives would become bound together.

Along with pastoral work, Fr. Bob was a teacher for over three decades in Catholic schools in the Bronx (New York), Chatham and Ottawa, teaching all grades from 5 through 13. He taught French, various courses in Christianity and world religions in English as well as in French immersion programs. He retired from teaching in June 2004 but remained active not only in his parish but in many other activities, including the St.

Irenaeus Mission Society (www.stirenaeus.net), which he established under Bishop Isidore in the late 1980s as a means of spreading the riches of Eastern Christianity in North America. He was one of the *dukhovnyks* (spiritual fathers) at Holy Spirit UGCC Seminary in Ottawa. Fr. Bob was sometimes officially acknowledged in this capacity and sometimes not. That did not stop him from offering moral, spiritual and physical support to the seminarians. He knew they often needed someone to talk to and would lend an eager and receptive ear. Often enough seminarians would be regaled by this New Yorker's wit, which he deftly used to subtly offer spiritual counsel in an unobtrusive manner. In Ottawa he also assisted at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine as coordinator of Saturday and festal Vespers and as head of Light and Life, a successful adult catechesis group he, set up in 2005 along with Adam DeVille and Rebecca Visser.

Perhaps more than anything, he most loved spending his summers in Ukraine. Beginning in 1999, and continuing through the summer of 2010, Fr. Bob was spiritual director of the English Summer School (ESS) of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. He faithfully went every year except 2009, when surgery and illness left him dangerously near death and prevented him from going. He greatly loved being a part of the ESS and found the Church thriving in Ukraine in a way that gave him hope for the future in North America as well.

His belief that the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church was not just for Ukrainians was at the heart of his dedication to the St. Irenaeus Missionary Society. On occasion he would wryly describe the activity of this society as "making available wall calendars with the society's imprint on them," but there was much more to it than that. He had a heart for Quebec and in his early years in Aylmer he often would voice his dream that perhaps after the spiritual devastation of the Quiet Revolution in which so many Quebecois had turned their backs on the Catholic Church, some might find their way back to the Lord through Eastern Catholicism. But it was his association with Holy Spirit Seminary and the Sheptytsky Institute that would bring him into close contact with a number of non-Ukrainians who felt drawn to the UGCC. Fr. Bob would be a constant

source of encouragement to them. Indeed, he was living proof that a non-Ukrainian could not only survive, but also thrive in this Church. Of course, he was an equal source of hope to many who were entirely Ukrainian in their ethnicity, by the simple fact that he loved their Church and he loved them personally.

It was only recently, after his retirement from teaching in Ottawa Catholic schools that the Sheptytsky Institute was able to avail itself of his services as a sessional lecturer. In the autumn of 2009 he taught the foundational course “General Introduction to the Eastern Churches.” On many other occasions he would somehow find it possible to make room in his schedule for liturgical services in the institute chapel of Sts. Joachim and Anna.

Fr. Bob lived in a charming little house in the woods of Aylmer, Québec on Ch emin de la Montagne, enabling him to refer to himself sometimes as a “mountain hermit.” That house was the setting for many deep conversations with friends and associates, many meals, and much laughter. All manner of liturgical music could be heard wafting through the house. Fr. Bob’s many, many, *many* books were kept in his basement, where many a friend would spend hours perusing rare volumes of Eastern Christian arcana.

He was not only a bibliophile, but a polyglot who had taught himself Ukrainian with all of the inflections that many non-native speakers find so troublesome, and numerous other languages besides. Fr. Bob was, as Fr. Roman Galadza used to kid him during the summer English Summer School in Ukraine in 2001, a “walking encyclopedia” almost invariably guaranteed to have read at least six books on any topic, no matter how obscure.

Fr. Bob was fond of drawing on an endless supply of fascinatingly “useless trivia” (as he would put it) about New York City and environs, about famous and infamous characters in Eastern Christian history, and about the joys and challenges of several decades of priestly ministry in the Eparchy of Toronto. Many a child was especially awed by what he called his “big rug” (i.e., long beard), which was roughly a quarter of his diminutive height.

His passing was sudden and has left many with a sense that his particular place in our lives will be very hard to fill. For so many – in the US, Canada, Ukraine, and elsewhere – he was a great spiritual father and mentor, a master teacher, and a model priest whose extraordinary gifts and talents, it must be said, were all too seldom recognized or utilized by our Church in Canada. Fr. Bob Anderson is not dead, of course. He is just not here to help the rest of us with the often-difficult task of not just surviving, but really living. As Fr. Bob liked to put it: “Christianity is a way to survive death.”

Those of us who are academics are often in danger of over-complicating things, but Fr. Bob, a master teacher with a New Yorker’s impatience for obfuscation and nonsense (he would have used a much more direct term which might be confused with a Bachelor of Science), had a gift for getting right to the heart of the matter: Christ has destroyed death and His followers can live forever. Following Fr. Bob’s example, when we try to explain to our students the wonderful, if maddeningly complex, world of Eastern Christianity, we are able to say that if they don’t remember the date of the Union of Brest, or the name of a particular icon, or how various Orthodox jurisdictions are related to each other, they must at least remember the one simple, beautiful truth at the heart of all Christianity, Western and Eastern: *Christos Anesti!*

And the rest is silence.

Andriy Chirovsky and Adam DeVille

