

Founding president of Christendom College dies at age 79

FRONT ROYAL, Va. – Warren H. Carroll, founding president of Christendom College in Front Royal and a leading Catholic historian and author, died July 17 in his sleep at his Manassas home, according to Timothy O'Donnell, Christendom's president.

Carroll, who was 79, had suffered several strokes and was in a weakened condition from a recent bout of pneumonia when he died, said O'Donnell. Cardiopulmonary failure was the official cause of death. O'Donnell said Carroll was given last rites a week before and he had received holy Communion the day before he died.

A funeral Mass was to be celebrated July 26 at All Saints Church in Manassas. Carroll was to be buried on the college campus in a new plot behind Regina Coeli, the main administrative building, overlooking the Shenandoah River.

Growing increasingly concerned that American Catholic colleges were abandoning Christianity during the early 1970s, Carroll envisioned establishing an institution of higher learning dedicated to teaching the truths of the Catholic faith.

"Amid chaos, he brought a beautiful sense of the faith," said O'Donnell.

Fewer than 10 years after he joined the Catholic Church, Carroll joined four other Catholic laymen to found Christendom. But Carroll attributed the college's success – as he did all successes in his life – to the grace of God.

"I always tell my students that God will never allow any enterprise he favors to fail for lack of money," said Carroll in a 2008 interview with the Arlington Catholic Herald, newspaper of the Arlington Diocese.

While growing up in Maine, Carroll was influenced more by his mother's faith than by his agnostic father. As a boy, he read the writings of C.S. Lewis, who was well-known for his faith journey from atheism to Anglicanism to Catholicism. But Carroll put thoughts of Christianity aside until years later while attending the University of Colorado law school where he met his future wife, Anne, a Catholic.

The couple married in July 1967, and Carroll was baptized before Christmas 1968.

O'Donnell said his friend and colleague "brought a freshness, a newness to the faith; his enthusiasm for the faith was the deepest thing in him."

After abandoning the idea of law school, Carroll became involved in the political arena, eventually moving to Washington, where he worked for a California congressman. When the congressman failed to get re-elected, Carroll combined his religious fervor and his love for history (he had earned a master's and doctorate in history from Columbia University in New York) and writing by obtaining full-time employment with the Catholic magazine *Triumph*.

Eventually, he became known as a Catholic historian and author, publishing numerous articles and books, including "The Rise and Fall of the Communist Revolution" and a major multivolume work titled "The History of Christendom." The final volume, completed with the help of Anne, will be published later this year, according to O'Donnell.

Carroll served in the CIA's anti-communism division during the 1960s and wrote "Seventy Years of the Communist Revolution."

"I was always anti-communist, but that deepened the strength of it," Carroll said of his experiences as an analyst of communist propaganda.

Carroll was the college's president until 1985, then chairman of the history department until he retired in 2002. Carroll still maintained ties at Christendom by presenting monthly lectures on historical figures. After the lectures, he could be found joining undergraduates at the dinner table – a practice Anne said not only inspired the students but him, as well.

O'Donnell reflected on the special relationship between Carroll and the undergraduates. "He had a kind of intellectually paternity with his students," he said.

"He touched literally thousands of lives," said O'Donnell. He did so as founder of the college, "but also as a beloved teacher. Students never forgot years later taking his lectures or forgot his goodness," he said.

Both Carrolls were strong supporters of Catholic education. In 1975, concerned that there was no Catholic high school in the area, Anne founded Seton School in Manassas.

The duo was passionate about education and the church and also deeply committed to each other. “

The couple displayed “the beauty of Christian marriage; both lived unselfishly as a witness to each other,” said O’Donnell.

In addition to his wife, Carroll is survived by his sister, Sally Watson of South Berwick, Maine; a niece, Carolyn Jones of South Berwick; and a nephew, James Watson of Virginia.