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Crapps was highly respected scholar, teacher, faculty leader

AT THE FUNERAL OF ROBERT W. CRAPPS, Reuben B. Pitts Professor of Religion who died December 30, Jim Pitts, a longtime colleague and retired chaplain, shared an assortment of tributes from Crapps' Furman friends and colleagues.

The stories revealed much about Crapps' 30-year tenure as a teacher, scholar and faculty leader at Furman, from which he retired in 1987. They painted a portrait of a man known for his rigorous classroom standards, shrewd nature, biting wit, and exceptional ability to understand and negotiate the maze-like morass of university politics. Collectively they illuminated the high esteem with which he was held by his closest associates.

A.V. Huff, former academic dean and history professor, recalled visiting Furman as a prospective faculty member in December of 1967. Dean Frank Bonner took Huff to a meeting of the faculty "Privy Council" and told him, "Here you'll find out what Furman is really like."

Huff said, "Clearly, Bob was one of the leaders, and when I returned in September, I found Bob to be friendly, engaging, and a strong advocate of liberal education.

"Before many weeks were out, I discovered that Bob had trouble with at least one of Paul's admonitions in 2 Corinthians. Bob found it extremely difficult to 'suffer fools gladly' — whether among his faculty colleagues, in the administration, or in the classroom.

"In those years," Huff added, "Bob was hard at work on making the faculty handbook a comprehensive statement of faculty-administration relationships. It was a daunting task in an institution that had little history of joint faculty-administration responsibilities. Only a person of Bob's strength and mettle could have changed the course of university governance.

"He often commented that his faculty colleagues were only too happy to have someone crawl out on a limb and hand him the saw to cut it off. But there were immediate benefits to his work, and I only understood years later from the perspective of the dean's office what great work he had accomplished."

Another common theme was Crapps' commitment to students and to the welfare and direction of the university. Religion professor Helen Lee Turner said, "In his mind the world of faith and the world of scholarship might struggle with one another, but they were not incapable of cohabitation. And the relationship was not just one way. The academy



could learn from the person of faith, while requiring its students to engage the larger world."

William Bellinger '72, W. Marshall and Lulie Craig Professor and chair of the religion department at Baylor University, said he would remember Crapps' "passionate insistence that students take an honest and serious look at the evidence when thinking about biblical and theological questions. His contributions to introductory textbooks on the Old Testament and New Testament have influenced many students at a variety of universities throughout the country, and so extended his ministry of teaching."

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Wake Forest University, Crapps earned his graduate degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before joining the Furman faculty, he was pastor of Baptist churches in Indiana and North Carolina, and a hospital chaplain and consultant in Kentucky.

He co-authored two religion textbooks. The first, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, written with Furman colleagues Jack Flanders and David Smith and published in 1963, remains an influential and widely referenced work. He followed in 1969 with *Introduction to the New Testament*, co-written with Furman colleague Edgar McKnight. In 1987 Mercer University Press published Crapps' *An Introduction to Psychology of Religion*.

Crapps and his wife, Dovie, who survives him, had three sons, all of whom graduated from Furman: Stephen '72, John '74 and Philip '81. Bob and Dovie were well known for their congeniality and hospitality toward colleagues and students alike

A picture in the Furman archives illustrates this point. It shows a young, smiling Dr. Crapps, casually dressed and wearing a golf hat, enjoying an outdoor campus event. Around his neck he wears a hand-written sign, evidently presented by students, bearing the title "Friendliest" (actually, "Friendiest").

Despite the spelling, the meaning is clear. As Bill Bellinger said, "Bob Crapps operated from 'the sweetest spirit on campus' tradition."

In addition to his wife and sons, Crapps is survived by three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a sister. Memorials: Department of Religion at Furman, or First Baptist Church of Greenville.

— JIM STEWART