

Martin Reardon 1932-2005

The following homily was preached by Dr Mary Tanner, Lay Canon of Guildford Cathedral and former General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England, at the funeral of Martin Reardon on 21st January 2005. Martin was General Secretary of Churches Together in England, 1990-1997. With his wife Ruth he was a founder-member of the British Association of Interchurch Families and a co-chair from 1968-2002. In 2002 he was elected a President of the Association. He died on 3 January 2005, aged 72.

Ephesians 4:1-6
John 17:11b-23

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have come here to remember Martin, to comfort one another as we mourn and to be thankful. We who celebrate in this eucharist the death and resurrection of Christ know that in the midst of our sorrow we have cause for joy and thanksgiving. Sorrow and joy are two sides of the one coin for those who believe in Christ. How appropriate that we gather in the middle of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. How right that we have heard again Jesus' High Priestly prayer, a passage never far from Martin's thoughts.



Martin showed me, more than anyone else I've met, the truth of Jesus' prayer. He had got hold at a deep level of what Jesus meant when he prayed that his disciples then – and we his disciples now – might be one, as he and the Father are one; and even more mysteriously when Jesus prayed that we might be one, enfolded in the life he shared with his Father – 'May they be one in us'. Martin knew that unity is first and foremost about our relationship with God, lived out in our relationships with one another, our relationships patterned on Jesus' relationship with the Father and empowered by our life together in the orbit of God's own life of love. Not for Martin an arid, structural, bureaucratic vision of unity. That wasn't what drove him. But a vision of men and women living and loving and sharing, overcoming barriers of class, gender, race, every wall that separates us one from another, because we are joined together in the love of God.

Martin knew that it is in prayer, when in Christ we pray to the Father, through the power of the Spirit at work in us, that we are drawn into that divine life. It is no accident that Jesus' most profound words about unity are in the form of a prayer. Martin's own life and priestly ministry were grounded in prayer and it showed. His battered Bible and prayer book went everywhere with him, battered not because of careless handling but because of constant use, the daily round of offices, the celebration of the eucharist. Prayer was the deepest expression of his ecumenical commitment.

Martin was convinced that unity is primarily personal and relational, 'the modern jargon', as he called it, for love, a life God



grants to us through grace. He knew that in his life with Ruth and their shared passion for Christian unity, symbolised in the Rublev icon which was there always at the centre of their family life with Sarah and John, a constant reminder of the encircling love into which God eternally invites us, a constant reminder of the cross at the heart of it all that reveals the mystery of love and reconciliation. They knew in their married life both the joy and the pain of any interchurch family. They knew the joy of living ahead of the rest of us and the pain of struggling with institutional restrictions on communion, which led them, with Father John Coventry, to be founding members of the Association of Interchurch Families, challenging the churches to take the interchurch reality seriously.

Not only in his family life did Martin show us that unity is about persons in relationship, but in the way he related to each of us. He was unfailingly gentle, caring, thoughtful, utterly trustworthy, eager to draw out the goodness in others, so ‘unboss’ like to colleagues, encouraging us and ready to forgive faults. It was impossible to listen to that passage from Ephesians which strikingly speaks of qualities of relationship even before unity in faith and baptism, without thinking of Martin:

I beg you to live a life with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.



These were just the gifts of grace God gave us abundantly in the life of Martin. There was nothing showy or pushy about him but a delightful simplicity: the battered panama hat he wore in summer, his red shirt (‘Does Martin have more than one shirt?’ someone once asked me), and that beaten up bakers van he used to drive into Lambeth Palace, leaving the porter expecting a delivery of freshly baked bread, not suspecting under cover the next persuasive ecumenical missive for a cautious Archbishop of Canterbury.

Martin knew that the unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of his own death is about our unity with one another, the fruition of a life hidden in Christ, a life joined in the love of God. That is the gift God offers us, the gift of being enfolded in love, as Mother Julian puts it.

But Martin believed too that it is a matter of Christian obedience to make that precious gift of God’s life visible, audible, and credible in the life of the Church. We are ‘called to be one’, and called to be seen to be one, for God’s sake and the world’s sake. In this Martin stood in a line of distinguished ecumenists: Bell and Temple, Newbigin and Tomkins, the Abbé Couturier. Like them he spent, literally spent, his life and ministry working for the visible unity of the Church pioneering, in Sheffield the role of a

secretary of a Council of Churches, continuing Oliver Tomkin's ministry of forming priests with ecumenical commitment at Lincoln Theological College.

Martin's years as the General Secretary of the Church of England's Board for Mission and Unity were years of achievement, sometimes brought to birth out of what seemed failure. There was naturally disappointment when the General Synod failed to give assent to the Covenant, and the obvious sadness at the sudden death of Bishop David Brown. But determined that all should not be lost Martin guided the formulation of the ecumenical canons making it possible for Christians locally to live more closely together and to witness more effectively. I doubt whether there was anyone else who could have persuaded a cautious Archbishop Robert, or the different parties in the General Synod, to take that particular step. Martin could because he combined knowledge of where theological convergence had reached (Martin was a good theologian), with a care for tedious legal detail, and because he had earned the trust of so many.



Martin was committed to all round and all level ecumenism. He encouraged Christians locally, took a lead nationally, helped to keep the ecumenical commitment of the world wide Anglican Communion consistent and coherent. He forged relations wherever he could, open to receive the gifts of other traditions, held, he believed, in trust for us all. His was a truly inclusive and generous ecumenism. He had a particular care for the Roman Catholic Church but he also championed the cause of a small African Independent Church in an Assembly of the World Council of Churches. It was Martin's readiness to respond to overtures from the Evangelical Church in Germany that led to the signing of the Meissen Agreement and on to agreements with Nordic and Baltic and French churches and, in this country with Moravians and Methodists. It never bothered Martin that others got the accolades for these achievements though his friends rejoiced, probably more than he knew, when he and Ruth together were honoured by both the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope John Paul II.



As if all of these things were not contribution enough, after less than two years as priest at Plumpton, Martin became the first General Secretary of Churches Together in England. He had already contributed so much to envisioning and making possible a new way for a fellowship of churches to work together in a lighter, less bureaucratic style, clearer about where authority lies. What a gift for us all that the fellowship now includes the Roman Catholic Church and the Black Majority churches. We can only guess how much influence Martin brought to bear on those churches giving them confidence to take this new step. No-one understood better than Martin the enabling vocation of Churches

Together. The only times I experienced a hint of sharpness in Martin was when I spoke carelessly of CTE. He would always correct me. ‘You mean Churches Together in England. It’s not an institution: it’s a living relationship’.

So, Martin, faithful to Jesus’ Prayer, worked tirelessly for the visible unity of the Church. But his vision of unity was much, much larger than the unity of the Church. He knew that Jesus’ prayer that we might be one was inseparable from the ‘so that’ - ‘so that the world might believe’. As he wrote ‘we seek unity so that the Church may become a more credible sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s purpose to unite all things with Christ as head. The unity of the Church, grounded in the unity of the love of God, working for the unity of the world, the wholeness of creation, and pointing beyond itself to the unity of God’s kingdom’ – that was Martin’s vision and his passion. He was more successful than any of us in holding on to that all embracing vision, understanding how the different parts of the one ecumenical agenda belonged together. Evangelism, social justice and church unity could never be conflicting concerns but complementary aspects of the one mission of God.

Guided by his vision of unity for God’s sake and the world’s sake Martin worked patiently, with perseverance, never missing an opportunity to ask prophetic questions and never imposing an answer, never losing the grand vision in the necessary detail of ecumenical tasks. In his retirement sermon at Swanwick Martin spoke of the spies Joshua sent out ahead of the people of Israel to spy out the Promised Land. He was someone who had glimpsed a new landscape ahead of the rest and came back to encourage us to move beyond the limits of the landscape in which we now live, and he worked to open a path of pilgrimage along which the churches could take small, but secure steps.



Martin had a yellow sticker on his wall, ‘Write a book on unity (from interchurch family experience) before 2010’. He could have written a persuasive book. But I believe Martin has given us a gift far more precious than words on a page – he gave us a life to remember so full of integrity because the words he spoke to us about God’s precious gift of unity were so all of a piece with the life he lived. That life had, and continues to have, in our remembering, a much greater power to witness to the vision of unity Jesus unfolds in his prayer in John 17 than any book could ever do.

The penultimate chapter of Martin’s book was written in Ruth’s description to us in her late Christmas letter which told of Martin’s dying, symbolically, in Pilgrim Ward. ‘He died’, she wrote, ‘as he had lived, serenely, without hurry, accepting everything. It was very peaceful.’ Martin died as he lived, a holy death, prepared in a holy life. Martin knew that Jesus’ High

Priestly Prayer didn't end with his prayer for the unity of his disciples in time, but for their unity in all eternity.

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory.

Jesus yearns that we may be with him to see his glory - that is the love of the Father given to the Son, returned in the Son's love for the Father, in the encircling love of the Holy Spirit. In Martin we can be confident that Jesus' prayer is fulfilled. Martin is living more fully in God's presence, in the light of God's glory.

So, as we celebrate in this eucharist the mystery of death and resurrection life let us be thankful:



- thankful for all that Martin was for us – beloved husband, devoted father, delighting grandfather, faithful priest, trustworthy friend and, for all of us, prophet of unity;

- thankful for the vision of unity Martin held before us;

- thankful for all that Martin achieved, through his co-operation with God's grace, for the unity of the Church – he did make a difference.

We can be confident that Martin is living more fully now in the unity of God's eternal love and yet is with us still in the communion of saints.

For all of this, thanks be to God.

Amen.



Canon Martin Reardon, O.B.E.
Cross of St Augustine
Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice