

Ralph P. Martin 1925-2013

Ralph P. Martin (1925-2013) passed away Monday, February 25, 2013, in his home in Southport, England, from lymphoma. Born in Anfield, Liverpool, England, he attended Anfield Road School and then The Liverpool Collegiate. His early education was interrupted in 1939 by the war, and he was conscripted to work in the coal mines of Lancashire as one of the “Bevin Boys.” This was not an auspicious start for a future New Testament scholar. However, after the war he pursued ministerial training at Manchester Baptist College and in 1949 earned his B.A. at the University of Manchester. In the midst of early pastoral ministries in Baptist churches in Gloucester (1949-53) and Dunstable (1953-59) he earned his M.A. at Manchester in 1956, writing a thesis on “Eucharistic Teaching in 1 Corinthians” under T. W. Manson. From 1959 to 1965 Martin was lecturer in theology at London Bible College, and in 1963 he completed his Ph.D. at King’s College, University of London, under D. E. Nineham. His thesis was later published as *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (SNTSMS 4; Cambridge University Press, 1967). Following a year (1964-65) as visiting professor at Bethel College and Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, Martin became lecturer in New Testament at the University of Manchester from 1965 to 1969. There he was a colleague of fellow New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce.

In 1969 Martin joined the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he would serve as professor of New Testament from 1969 to 1988, and director of the graduate studies program beginning in 1979. His retirement from Fuller was premature, necessitated by a decline in his wife Lily’s health. The Martins returned to England, taking up residence in Southport, and he served as professor associate in biblical studies at the University of Sheffield for several years. After Lily’s death in 1995 he continued his writing, editing and teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary (beginning in 1995 as Distinguished Scholar in Residence), the Graduate School of Theology of Azusa Pacific University, and Logos Evangelical Seminary. Throughout his academic career he stayed involved in preaching, teaching laypeople and other pastoral ministry.

Martin was a significant figure in the post-World War 2 resurgence of British evangelical scholarship associated with the Tyndale Fellowship and Tyndale House, Cambridge. The publication of *Carmen Christi* justly established him as an authority on the Christ hymn of Philippians (the book was reissued by Eerdmans in 1983 and as *A Hymn of Christ* by InterVarsity Press in 1997, each edition with an extended preface covering the passing decades of scholarship). And that work remains a touchstone for any serious study of Philippians 2, despite the mushrooming of studies produced in the four-plus decades since its publication. In his 1997 preface Martin concluded by saying that this latest survey of scholarship was “the outcome of my latest lucubrations; and I mean it to be final.” But his interest in Philippians 2 was not final, for an edited volume (with Brian J. Dodd), *Where Christology Began: Essays on*

Philippians 2 (Westminster John Knox), appeared in 1998, contributing further to the literature, and he jointly revised his friend Gerald F. Hawthorne's volume on *Philippians* in the Word Biblical Commentary (2004).

Martin wrote a number of commentaries, including two early ones on Philippians, one in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (1959, rev. ed. 1987) and another in the New Century Bible (1976). Colossians was also a focus of commentary, with *Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty* (1972), *Colossians and Philemon* in the New Century Bible (1974) and *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* in the Interpretation series (1992). But his greatest contribution to the genre was his role as New Testament editor of the Word Biblical Commentary, a project begun at Fuller Seminary during the 1970s. In addition to guiding this series through the decades, he contributed substantial volumes on 2 Corinthians and James.

Students and colleagues were often impressed with Martin's encyclopedic knowledge of the New Testament and its Greek text. And his command of the secondary literature was equally formidable, stocked as it was by decades of reading and aided by a memory that seemed to recall everything of importance and many details of lesser significance. This not only informed his teaching and writing but also his work as editor (with Gerald F. Hawthorne) of the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* and (with Peter H. Davids) of the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. For the latter volume it was characteristically Martin's idea to extend its reach to the mid-second century, in order to introduce students of the New Testament to a broader historical context in which the "germination and flowering" of Christian truth might be viewed.

Martin's interest in the hymn of Philippians 2 overflowed into a broader interest in early Christian worship. His early book, *Worship in the Early Church* (1964, rev. ed. 1974), long filled a gap in the literature. And he had a continuing interest in identifying hymns and other pre-formed material in the New Testament (particularly in Paul), both as apertures into early Christian worship and as reshaped traditions in their literary contexts. His later thinking on worship may be observed in *The Worship of God* (1982) and his expansive article on "Worship and Liturgy" in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*.

The range of his work is also exemplified in his *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (1972), which not only surveyed and analyzed recent interpretation, but also contributed to the redaction-critical analysis of the Gospel, and "The Theology of Jude, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter" in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* (with Andrew Chester, 1994), which explored how these letters offer insight into early Jewish Christianity. Nor was he hesitant to tackle the larger questions. Martin's *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (1981) was not simply a thematic study but a bid to locate the *centrum Paulinum* in a robust understanding of reconciliation in all its dimensions. This book, along with J. Christiaan Beker's *Paul the Apostle*, was the subject of a memorable session at the 1981 Annual Meeting of the SBL.

Martin had a speculative mind, but was always grounded in the text. Among evangelical scholars he was known for staking out a habitable space between faith and criticism. In posing a non-Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastorals (where he favored the hand of Luke), he challenged his students to think beyond the scope of what they so easily assumed to be the case, yet always with a nuance that demonstrated a critically informed but confessional faith. Thus in his widely used introduction, *New Testament Foundations* (2 vols., 1975, 1978) he frames Ephesians by suggesting:

The Epistle to the Ephesians, in our understanding, adds considerably to our appreciation of Paul's ministry since it represents and embodies not only the substance of the apostle's missionary message, but the development and extension of that message to a new set of conditions. Ephesians, with its clearly discerned distinctive, adds a superstructure to the Pauline kerygmatic base. (*NTF*, 2:238)

Martin's moderation in dealing with sensitive issues of New Testament criticism are a model in a fractious age. And his deft pen, with its signature clarity and grace, calls for emulation. On his passing, several younger scholars have commented on their experiences of his generosity and sincere interest in their work, traits that characterized this true gentleman and scholar.

Ralph Martin is survived by his wife Doreen, his daughters Patricia Losie and Elizabeth Knode, seven grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

(A *curriculum vitae* reminiscences by Leslie C. Allen and a bibliography of his work, up until 1992, may be found in his Festschrift, edited by Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige, *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin* (JSNTSupp 87; Sheffield, 1992)

- **Daniel Reid**