

ACT pioneer

Charles Martin: a personal appreciation



Charles passed away early on Sunday morning, 22 October 2009, at the age of 86, after some two years of illness. A man of deep Christian commitment, 'His accomplishments were many and his capacity for work was phenomenal' says Richard Wilkins, long-time General Secretary of the Association of Christian Teachers, of which Charles was a founder member in 1970 and Chairman from 1980–1988.

I first met Charles through our shared involvement in the work of the Inter Schools Christian Fellowship (ISCF), Scripture Union's outreach to the maintained secondary schools. He and his wife Eleanor were key members of the team which led New Year Conferences for sixth form Christian Union leaders in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As a teacher, and later as the Principal of Bilborough Sixth Form College in Nottingham, Charles thought through the implications of his Christian faith for education at a deep level. Intelligence, energy, vision and enthusiasm characterised his approach to education, as to his whole life. He edited and wrote a series of sixth form general studies textbooks almost as a sideline. On his way to preach at a church in Stapleford, he noted a former Methodist Chapel up for sale, and saw its possibilities as a base for weekend courses for teachers wanting to explore their work in Christian terms. Without much support

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from the Christian world he brought this vision to life, committing both cash and hard physical labour with perseverance to the project which became Stapleford House, the Association of Christian Teachers' residential centre, and subsequently metamorphosed, with Charles' continuing understanding and support, into the Stapleford Education Centre, which has developed an international reputation as a Christian 'think tank' and resource developer.

Charles was an encourager. His trademark encouraging comment, delivered somehow from the corner of his mouth with all the warmth of his personality behind it, could lift the mood of almost any gathering. I have a vivid memory of him, too, as a formidable debater, speaking powerfully against HJ Blackham, the then leader of the British Humanist Association, in a meeting at Ilford in the early 1970s.

Charles' Christian roots were in the Christian Brethren, but his sympathies were broad, and he was a valued speaker and preacher across a wide range of evangelical churches. In retirement he and Eleanor were much involved in bringing new life to the Methodist Church which they joined in Burniston.

Charles and Eleanor lived a simple life-style. Growing affluence they saw, above all, as offering the scope for increased giving to the many Christian causes they supported. They rejoiced in the love and fellowship of their family.

The last note we received from Charles expressed his gratitude for all God's provision for his needs, quoting from Psalm 23. 'Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

With many others I am grateful for knowing him in this life. In John Bunyan's phrase, he was indeed 'Mr Valiant for Truth'.

■ George Oliver



Stapleford House, the former National Centre for ACT training courses.