

**A Sermon preached on the Occasion of  
A Service of Celebration for the Life of Canon Kenyon Wright  
by the Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth,  
on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2017 in Coventry Cathedral**

**Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.14-21**

*As prepared*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

It was not difficult to love Kenyon Wright. That is not just because of the remarkable achievements of his life, the inspiring stature of his person, the endlessly fascinating story of his life, the power of his convictions and so on. So many people loved Kenyon because he first loved us. He was someone so shaped by the Christian gospel of which St Paul speaks, so 'compelled and urged on by the love of Christ' that 'he lived no longer for himself' but for others, because of Jesus Christ. In his presence you felt that – you felt loved: you felt God's love in and through him.

### **Kenyon and Bishops**

Lindsey, Shona, Shelagh: it's a very great honour for me to be invited to preach at your father's memorial service, and there's a strange twist of irony and perhaps a glint of humour in Kenyon's eye about it. Kenyon's associations with Coventry Cathedral goes back to his service in India where, as it were, he was talent spotted in the late 60's by some of the remarkable team of Provost and Canons who led the Cathedral in the early years after the consecration of the new Cathedral. They arranged a transfer from the Methodist Church in India to the Church of

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<sup>1</sup> The service included a moving tribute (relayed by Canon David Stone) by the Rt Revd Ashoke Biswas, Bishop of Calcutta, in which Bishop Ashoke said, 'To know Kenyon Wright was to love him'. The delivered form of this sermon began by quoting these words.

England in Coventry. But the plans for this eventual Canon of Coventry were way ahead of the canons – the rules – of the Church of England.

The Provost wanted Kenyon to be ‘in residence’ – a technical ecclesiastical term that would allow him to lead the daily offices in the Cathedral. ‘Not advisable to be in residence because I cannot grant permission to take the statutory services of Matins and Evensong’, judged the Bishop. When he heard, the saintly Canon Joseph Poole wrote to the Provost, ‘Bill this is desolating. The Bishop’s staff at their dirty work again’.

Kenyon recounted how ‘Joseph with typical imagination, found a way. He simply changed the weekly name ‘in residence’ to ‘hebdomadary’ (whatever that means) and the Bishop seems to have relented’.

Thank God he did. And thank God that soon many of the Indian churches united in the Church of North India which allowed Kenyon, a presbyter of the Church of North India to be licensed as an Anglican priest while remaining a Methodist minister. Kenyon became a living embodiment of the reconciliation of the churches.

### **Kenyon – a prophetic figure**

That little story tells a great deal, actually.

Something about the vision and determination of the Cathedral, of which Kenyon said, ‘Looking back, I doubt whether any other Cathedral would have taken the risk of inviting an obscure Methodist working in a far away land’.

It also says something about Kenyon – he was always living ahead of his time in the purposes of God which, though not fully manifested to the rest of us, were the reality in which Kenyon lived and for which he gave his life.

We call this way of being living, seeing and speaking – *prophecy*. Kenyon was a prophetic figure, he saw God's purposes, he spoke God's purposes and, he spoke them into being.

We can see that in his understanding of the Church. Kenyon knew that God wants the Church to be one, and he lived and ministered on the basis of that theological reality and he worked for that reality to become an actual.

Kenyon was not interested just in the Church, of course. He was deeply interested in the world. 'All this is from God!' he would echo from St Paul's words again. Just look at his remarkable theological précis from his Cosmic Crisis which we heard earlier. Jesus defines the kingdom for which we pray as those conditions where the will of God is done. The kingdom of God is the *governance of God* in 'all the affairs of the real world'.

And Kenyon was passionately committed to 'all the affairs of the real world', and he was always ahead of his time with a prophet's eye and a prophet's word.

That's why we loved this Cathedral so much and why he contributed so much to the evolution of its identity. Together with his colleagues, he was utterly committed to it being immersed in the affairs of the real world near and far.

We've heard from Kenyon's successors on his work as Canon for Reconciliation so I won't repeat that except to pay tribute to his prophetic actions in that ministry:

- Establishing the Community of the Cross of Nails
- Co-founding One World Week
- Imagining, in his words, 'the true unity of Europe, not as an end in itself – and certainly not as a way of rich countries getting richer – but as an agent for a betterment of the world, always motivated by Europe's responsibility to the

poor of the world, and that led practically to the Europa-Calcutta Consortium.

### **Kenyon on Reconciliation and Relationships**

Kenyon's prophetic capacities were perhaps most evident at the Sewanne Conference of 1975 which he organised on the theme of Ecology and Responsibility. Let me quote from the Conference's Statement, words no doubt drafted by Kenyon.

Our world is one – not just in geography or economics – but in the sense that all major issues are inter-related. A 'problem-oriented approach' which tackles each issue piecemeal as it arises, is doomed to failure. Each is related to all the others, so only a 'crisis-oriented approach' which operated from a clear thesis about the nature and causes of humanity's global predicament can be large enough to bring about the revolution in thinking, relationships and institutions necessary if we are to avert the disaster."

In 2012, looking back at the Conference, Kenyon wrote,

'The Conference saw the primary cause of this [potential disaster] in global institutions and lifestyles rooted in a false and exploitative relationship both with people (in the Oikumene, the inhabited world) and with the earth and the environment (in the Cosmos, the world of nature).'

He referred to these as the 'two great universal 'wounds of history' with which we all have to live in the new Millennium'

He went on to say:

They are wounds that could be fatal for us all, and for our global human Society, if we cannot heal them. They affect the lives of every man, woman and child on earth. They are

the context of all that we do. In shorthand, they might be called the wounds of Poverty and of Pollution. Our whole global society still depends on relationships, within and between nations, and with the earth, which are both unjust and unsustainable.'

In 2015 some of us were privileged to hear Kenyon address a conference in this Cathedral on the theme of 'Reconciling a Wounded Planet'. It was the direct – though belated successor – to the Sewanee Conference (it took most of us a long time to catch up with Kenyon). He repeated the Sewanne's prophetic challenges not only to individuals and their values but also to institutions and their influences, and said now, forty years later, '*what is God saying to through this*'. Let me give me answer that in seven words – he went immediately went on to say:

*'Get your relationships right, or else.'*

Individuals and institutions: '*Get your relationships right, or else.'*

Kenyon saw those relationships in three dimensions<sup>2</sup>: up to God, across to each other and all humanity and down into the earth.

## **Conclusion**

Kenyon began his short address at the 2015 Conference by saying, 'I am here [he meant 40 years on from Sewanne] for one reason alone: because I survived.

Well, our dear brother Kenyon Wright, no one survives on earth for ever. And the time came for you to leave us, and our hearts are sad because of that.

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<sup>2</sup> This was Kenyon's understanding of a three-way Covenant as described by Lindsey at the beginning of the service.

But our hearts are also glad this day because you survive in our hearts and minds, in our Church and this Cathedral, in the Parliament of Scotland and in other institutions around the world. Your influence as one who lived not for yourself but 'for him who died and was raised for us', and as one to whom Christ's ministry of reconciliation was entrusted, lives on in us, in the church and in the world.

And our hearts, though sad are even more glad because we are confident that, as St Paul says, by Christ's great act of reconciliation on the cross and through the resurrection, a new creation has been made which you saw during your life on earth, and which you called others to reach out to and step into – and that now alive in Christ waiting with all the saints of heaven for us and the rest of the Church, country and cosmos which you loved, to catch up with you.

May we heed your call *to get our relationships right.*

For that is why Jesus Christ came to live for us, to die for us and to be raised into new reconciled life for us.