

Obituary of Marcel Grandy from IofC xChange

[Marcel Grandy, President of Caux Foundation for Moral Re-Armament 1989-1999, and reconciliation worker in Cyprus from 1960; born Fleurier, nr Neuchatel February 21 1926, married Therese Schaller 1959, died Lausanne, 24 April 2006.]

For 30 years Marcel Grandy, a Swiss, lived and worked in Cyprus in an unofficial but extraordinarily far-reaching capacity. Working for reconciliation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, before and after the division of the island which began in 1963, he extended the hand of friendship to Greeks and Turks, at village level as well as in the highest echelons of government. At one point his life was threatened by those whose interests lay in continued bloodshed. For several weeks in 1964 he and his wife Theri had to leave their home near the 'green line' in Nicosia when bullets were fired across the bottom of their garden.

In the tense years after Independence in 1960, Grandy had almost constant access to Archbishop Makarios, spiritual leader and head of state of Cyprus, and significantly also to the leader of the Turkish Cypriots, Rauf Denktash. Both were warm personal friends of the Grandys. On one occasion Grandy took a visiting British trade unionist to meet the Archbishop in his magnificent Palace. After some conversation, and feeling the interview must be over, the British man suddenly got to his feet, put his hands in his pockets and made for the nearest door. It was not the door they had entered the salon by. Marcel urgently whispered, 'Jack, Jack ...' and tried to stop him, but Makarios indicated to Marcel, 'No no, let him go!' and delightedly followed his guest through the maze of passages until they found the front door.

From Cyprus Marcel and Theri Grandy visited many parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, especially Lebanon and Turkey, becoming valued friends of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, a giant of the spiritual world. A senior British diplomat recently said, 'In our last visit to Istanbul I was moved to observe the personal warmth that the Patriarch showed to Marcel - a mixture of trust, affection and respect. Marcel's personal attributes of friendship and sensitivity to others allow a clarity of insight into matters large and small, the intimate and the global.'

Born in French-speaking Switzerland in 1926, Marcel Grandy was the younger son of a watchmaker. In his early years he considered becoming a missionary and studied at a theological school. But his life's course was set when he decided to work on a full-time and voluntary basis with Moral Re-Armament (MRA, now Initiatives of Change), believing that only through a change in personal motivation would Europe and indeed the world be rebuilt in the aftermath of the Second World War. He visited Germany and France, helped to establish the MRA international conference centre at Caux, above Montreux, and spent six formative years in East Africa. He became a member of the Caux Foundation in charge of the centre in 1986, and was its President from 1989 to 1999.

In 1959 he married Therese Schaller from Zurich, and a few months later they travelled to Cyprus - an intended three month visit which lasted 30 years. Their work, in the words of Swiss journalist Arnold Hottinger, consisted in trying 'to find significant individuals on both sides who were open to the needs of steps towards peace'. One person introduced them to another, and another, until it seemed to me, as Marcel's biographer, (Hope never dies, the Grandy Story, pub. Caux Books 2005) as if there was no one in Cyprus that they didn't know. The 'silent activities of people of goodwill' like them contributed, Hottinger believes, to today's growing trend towards a political solution for the island.

Cyprus was a refuelling stop in the days before long-haul intercontinental flights and through their MRA connections the Grandys had many international visitors whom they introduced to their Cypriot friends - ex-Communist miners from Germany's Ruhr heartland, senior Buddhist monks, militant Japanese students, people from Africa and India, trade unionists from Britain, captains of industry and members of Parliament. Cypriot guests in their home included the leadership of the island, as well as men and women from ex-EOKA freedom fighter and other militant groups, from education, trade unions, industry, the ports, the military - British and later the UN. In the early 1960s the Grandys' ex-EOKA dinner guests 'parked' their guns in the entrance hall while they sat around the meal table discussing how to bring peace to their island.

One of Marcel's closest Cypriot friends, Spyros Stephou a former EOKA fighter and now retired Deputy Director of Customs, wrote last year, 'While Cyprus was celebrating independence in 1960, my gambling and drinking meant divorce was imminent in our marriage. Suddenly, uninvited, Marcel and Theri entered our lives. They led us from dark despair into the bright light of love and responsibility, first towards ourselves and then towards our country.'

Speaking to family and friends of the Grandys after Marcel's funeral in Lausanne on April 29, Stephou offered his own assessment of Marcel's work in Cyprus. "One virtue Marcel displayed to all Cypriots, Greeks or Turks, during his 30 years of stay in Cyprus: truth, combined with objectivity, and the courage and bravery to face the reactions of the recipients of this attitude. During all these 30 years the two communities in Cyprus, the Greeks and the Turks, were at war - killing each other. Marcel was one of the very few people who could visit both parts of Cyprus and speak to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Both the Greeks and the Turkish Cypriots had thousands of foreign friends who always used to tell them what they actually wanted to hear from foreigners - 'you are absolutely right, you are the victims, the other side is absolutely wrong and the other community behaved in a barbarous and cruel way to you'.

"Marcel did not follow that easy and friend-making method. He did not want to gain temporary friendships based on flattery and giving false hopes to hopeless people of both communities. Marcel wanted permanent friendships, with changed and responsible people, built on moral standards and faith in God. For 30 years he continued constantly and unfailingly saying to all of us in Cyprus the truth about ourselves, the truth about the tragic situation in Cyprus, and who was to be blamed for all this. He was doing that not by preaching but by using examples of his own family and his own country. Some of us accepted it, some of us argued about it and some of us rejected it outright. But at the end all of us in Cyprus knew that Marcel was right. We knew that Marcel was the real and genuine friend of Cyprus, and all the Cypriots."

Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross from 1987-99 and the current President of the International Association of Initiatives of Change, also wrote last year, 'Marcel and Theri Grandy have lived their lives in the best spirit of the Swiss humanitarian tradition. They have demonstrated the importance of private and civil society initiatives in the difficult context of the Eastern Mediterranean. The necessary changes in the 21st century will only come through such stubborn commitment by new generations.'

At Marcel's funeral service in Lausanne Cathedral Cornelio Sommaruga said, "Marcel Grandy had a gift and spirit of service founded on respect for people, inspired by a sense of justice and charity. The 21st century has not started well. It needs people like Marcel Grandy. We need to take initiatives for change in this society. As President of the Caux Foundation Marcel was deeply attached to the moral principles of honesty, purity, love and unselfishness, and very attentive to what civil society and Caux

could offer to international relations. We must express our gratitude for all that he gave to Caux, and through Caux to the world.”

By his legion of friends in many parts of the world, Marcel will be remembered with great warmth and affection. His broad smile lit up his whole face, and his sense of humour and active appreciation of the ridiculous made him great company. By nature self-effacing, his life was characterised by his great personal courage and his constancy on the unusual course he chose to follow.

The minister at Marcel’s simple funeral service in Lausanne Cathedral was Marcel’s cousin Pierre-Olivier Heller. He told Marcel’s family and friends, “ ‘Life is the time that is given to us to learn to love’. That was a favourite quote Marcel liked. And, to add, when that time is done we go somewhere else to learn the rest. Marcel, lying in his bed, said to me, ‘I am rejoicing. When the time comes and everyone I love is assembled, Pierre-Olivier, give them a message from me, give them a message of hope. Tell them life goes on and all will be well. All is in God’s hands.’ ”

Ginny Wigan

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