

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

A PERSONAL MEMORY OF THE LATE

REV DAIJO FONS MARTENS

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EKŌ TEMPLE, DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY.

I cannot remember when I met Rev. Fons Martens for the first time, but perhaps it was during the 2001 Hōonko festival at the EKŌ temple in Düsseldorf. In the following years Fons participated in them so regularly that memories of him have blurred. But I will always be able to vividly recall his bright expression, his smile and the way he was able to talk to people in English, German or Dutch.

Even when his teacher Shitoku Adrian Peel was still alive Fons was already playing a leading role in the Jikōji temple in Antwerp. After the death of the founder of the Jikōji temple Fons was officially the appointed to be the head of the temple, and he performed this function so well that people almost identified Jikōji with him. This came from his extraordinary organizational talent. He knew how to prepare events, from small dharma evenings to large-scale conferences, and he always used the most advanced media for his websites, membership contacts or presentations. Certainly, his profession as a teacher of information technology in a graduate school helped him and one could learn a lot from him.

Fons had always clear ideas on what was supposed to do, and he expressed his positions directly without hesitating. Sometimes he even could get angry if a something went wrong in his eyes, but soon he smiled again and searched for a compromise.

What was so fascinating in Shin Buddhism for Fons that he devoted the best part of his life to it? I think the openness and non-exclusivism Shin Buddhism teaches – Amida Buddha’s commitment to save all sentient beings without discrimination or limitation – fitted well to Fons’ personal

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character. He himself was open-minded and approachable.

Originally, Fons came across Shin Buddhism through his interest in the Japanese culture. He traveled to Japan and had many friends there. And later, when he came back from Kyōto as a fresh Shin Buddhist priest in 2009, he was on cordial terms with many officials of the Hongwanji and the Hongwanji International Office. Fons took his priesthood very seriously, and finally it was for him a kind of full-time job.

Jikōji means “Temple of the light of Compassion”, and in this name Fons discovered a very concrete mission: Practice empathy for all other beings. Even more than seeing one’s afflictions in the light of the Buddha, for Fons it was most important that we become aware of the active power of the primal vow. At one of the European Shin Conference he once called out to the audience that included many prominent Shin Buddhists and scholars: *Don’t say “I’m a Buddhist”- be a Buddha!*

Despite this, Fons never played the role of an “enlightened Buddha” and he never wore his priest’s robe to pretend to be something special, but only in the way the situation required. I observed in smaller services with Europeans he preferred to wear a sheer summer’s robe through which his western style shirt and trousers could be seen shimmering through. This is quite unusual, and it was his way of expressing himself as “neither a priest nor a layperson”.

What I finally learned from Rev. Fons Martens was the attitude of gratefulness. Reflecting his life in his final weeks he expressed gratitude for his life, the chances he had received and the people he had met. In his last e-mail, he sent to me, he put a blinking smiley at the end and signed with the words: “See you again.”

Just as this issue of PLN was being finalized we were further saddened to hear that Marcus Cumberledge, English Shin Buddhist Poet who live in Bruges, Belgium passed away on 30th December 2018. A tribute to this extraordinary and talented person who made his way to the Pure Land in a most individual manner will be published in the next issue of PLN.