

In Memoriam

Most of you will be familiar with this phenomenon: an uncle in the family that isn't actually blood related, but everyone calls them "uncle" anyway. Typically, this special kind of uncle is a warm and loving man, the kind you want to consider as part of your family just the same.

Up till a week ago, I too had such an uncle. He was 95 and older than anyone in my entire extended family, and deeply loved by all of us. He was part of our family since long before I was born, but it wasn't until I was in my late teens that I truly learned about who he was—for this man was not just an uncle, he was **Edward Schillebeeckx**: world-renowned Roman Catholic theologian and author.

Over the years that I got to know *Uncle Ed*—as he's known in our family—I often felt inspired by him. He was always warm and gentle, kind to everyone around him and despite his age very sharp, alert and comfortable with the technology-driven modernization of our society. If you're familiar with his work—an impressive oeuvre of 42 books and countless of additional contributions—this wouldn't surprise you, as Edward Schillebeeckx was a very progressive Christian.

It wasn't until I was in my 20s that I found out he'd had several spats with the Catholic Church for some of his progressive views, and it

saddened me. Edward was someone who loved the Church community and the institute very much, and it was out of that love and his dedication to the Church that he was skeptical of Catholic dogma; not because of non-Christian or atheist perspectives, or out of a rebellious nature, but simply because he strongly believed that the duty of the Pope and the Catholic clergy was to express the convictions of Christians in the context of the faith, and not the other way around.

These views got him in trouble, but not as much as they got him worldwide renown—and respect. After all, there are many in the world who criticize, but few who do so out of the same kind of love for and dedication to the Catholic Church like Edward did.

In 1982 he was awarded the prestigious Erasmusprize; my family was there at the award ceremony, an example of how close we were to him. I was there too, in a way: my mother was only a matter of weeks away from giving birth to me.

When I got the news of his passing, I cried. I cried because I was sad, for Edward was a beloved part of our family. I cried because I was happy, for his pain was no more and he lived to 95, the age he'd always wanted to reach. I cried because I was hopeful, as he was a beautiful, wonderful and inspirational example of a human being with the right kind of view on religion in society—and

I cried out of sorrow, because the world has so few of them to lose.

The way I see it, our world would benefit greatly if more Christians—especially more Christians with influence—had the kind of open-minded, tolerant, respectful and modern views on religion and faith that Edward Schillebeeckx so profoundly wrote about. As for me personally, though, I'd say that any family would benefit greatly from having someone like Uncle Ed be a part of it, bringing warmth and wisdom to everyone's hearts and minds.

Farewell, my dear *Oom Ed*.

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