

OBITUARY FOR A HERO

Henry Chadwick was one of the first people I met at Oxford while a student, and I was privileged to hear him lecture on early Church Fathers. He was gentle, urbane, open, and was an absolute master of his material. I could scarcely count myself even an “acquaintance,” but he impacted my own life, both as a student and as someone fervent about ecumenical dialogue. Below are excerpts from an obituary in which the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, makes some poignant and important comments:

The Rev. Henry Chadwick, a Church of England priest and renowned scholar of the early centuries of Christianity, has died at age 87.

Chadwick died Tuesday at a hospital in Oxford, his family said. The cause of death was not announced.

Much of Professor Chadwick's work involved controversies in the early church, which he sought to explain with sympathy for the individuals involved; the same attitude was evident in his work in Anglican ecumenical dialogues with Roman Catholics and the Orthodox church.

"He once proclaimed ecumenism 'a good cause to die for,' and was certainly deeply committed to finding consensus - not by coining a conveniently vague formula, but by a real excavation of common first principles," Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said in an obituary written for The Guardian newspaper....

Williams praised Chadwick as "an aristocrat among Anglican scholars" and an important figure in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations. He served both on the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and the Anglican-Orthodox Commission, both of which sought to resolve doctrinal differences and promote Christian unity.

"No one could replace Henry and no one will," Williams wrote.

"The Anglican church no longer shows so clearly the same combination of rootedness in the early Christian tradition and unfussy, prayerful pragmatism, and the ecumenical scene is pretty wintry with less room for the distinctive genius of another Chadwick. But the work done stays done, and it is there to utilize in more hospitable times," Williams said.

Ecumenism is still ‘a good cause to die for,’ and as Catholics we embrace the definitive statement of Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, that as a Church we are ‘irrevocably committed’ to working for the unity that Jesus Christ prayed for (John 17), and which He wishes for us now.

***Requiescat in pace, Professor Chadwick: ad multos annos* in the only place where it really matters: the final, truly and perfectly united Body of Christ.**