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A. Kenneth Pye

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A. KENNETH PYE[†]

Walter E. Dellinger III

What I remember best about Ken was his laugh; it came easily and often, frequently following one of his own irreverent remarks. As perhaps only Judy and Henry are aware, the world could know only some of what this great man was all about.

In a vocation surrounded by pomp and circumstance, there was about Ken not a trace of pretense or pomposity. As Dean, he knew no limits to his job description; I remember seeing him early on a Saturday morning cleaning up the Moot Court room in anticipation of Law Day. And I remember seeing him late in the evening, calling around the country to lawyers he knew personally trying to place in jobs the most hard-to-place of his graduating students.

To many outsiders he must have seemed like a bull in an academic china shop, grudgingly admired for his hard-headed management skills. But to those on the law faculty who knew him as a colleague, Ken was a brilliant intellect, widely reading in the classics, in history and in biography. As he became a university leader he reveled in immersing himself in the great intellectual pursuits of the many and varied departments under his purview.

On the surface, Ken was always jauntily irreverent, never pious, a Catholic leader of Methodist schools whose wit at times seemed to teeter on the brink of an anti-clericalism. And yet, those who know him well knew that his deep religious conviction was a fundamental guide for his life and work. He read Aquinas and Cardinal Newman; he studied the lives of Saint Thomas à Becket and Sir Thomas More; and on their examples he modeled his life.

As Ken was to religion, he was to law. Although he often laughed about silly laws and foolish lawmakers, and told wonderful stories about the foibles of the bar, at the end of the day he was deeply devoted to the concept of the rule of law, to the profound idea of norms binding even on government itself.

To work with Ken day after day was to be constantly dazzled by his decisiveness, his gift for solving problems, his keen sense of strategy and timing, his vision of where a law school, and then a university, should go. But there were still more important things to learn from Ken—things like

[†] This tribute was originally delivered by the author at a memorial service honoring A. Kenneth Pye held at Duke University in July 1994.

integrity, candor, and fairness. His devotion to family was inspiring. In Ken, decency went all the way down.

In the end, what mattered most about Ken was a simple matter: his deep and abiding integrity. He went through life and work determined to do the right thing, every time, wholly regardless of whether it made people like him or dislike him—which, in the end, was why so many people loved him.

I have never known a better man.

A TRIBUTE TO A. KENNETH PYE[†]

E. J. McDonald

I want to pay tribute today to a giant presence in an uncomplicated man. It is difficult to speak complicated words about this simple man. And, above all, Ken Pye was a simple man. He was simple in his values and his dedication to them; simple in his appetites and his appreciation of them; and simple in his devotion to family, friends, and the institutions he graced. He was a dear friend of mine who affected a lot of people, and it won't be easy to adjust to his absence.

Thirty-seven years ago this month I was privileged to meet Ken Pye when he took me under his wing, first as a graduate student and then as a colleague on the Georgetown Law School faculty. Thirty-seven years later, as a close witness and sometimes participant in his progress through mounting careers, I remain as awed by his unique qualities as I was that first summer. His core was untouched and, I believe, untouchable. He was, and remained, a simple man.

If it is true, as the dictionary instructs us, that to be "simple" is to be "free from duplicity or guile; honest, open, ingenuous; free from pride or ostentation," then Ken was at heart the simplest of men, and that is the beauty of his measure.

Yes, he was brilliant, blunt, decisive, courageous, and a bastion of integrity—all these things said about him are true. But they are secondary. What undergirded these visible signs was an essential quality of virtue. We are told that Diogenes vainly wandered the streets of ancient Athens with his lantern lit, searching for a virtuous and honest man, teaching all who would listen that the virtuous life was the simple life. Ken Pye epitomized that life. What you saw of him in word or actions was exactly what was there. Neither artifice nor guile found harbor in him. It was frequently said of Ken that he was sometimes wrong but never in doubt. He would accept that appraisal. He followed the truth where he saw it, changed his mind and his decisions when he saw reason to, and invited the world to witness the process.

Surely threats to that simplicity mounted as he moved through escalating levels of responsibility and accomplishment as faculty member and administrator, culminating in his greatest challenge and accomplishment as President of Southern Methodist University. Most people are altered by such surges in responsibility and influence, but this man stayed the

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same throughout. Ken Pye was always the agent of change rather than the object of change.

Yes, there was a noticeable softening in his rigorous, nonstop lifestyle when he met and married his beloved wife, Judy, and more yet again with the birth of his son, Henry. These key events influenced Ken greatly but they didn't change him. Nothing could. He remained the same simple person of simple virtues throughout his life. Diogenes would have snuffed out his lantern had the two ever met.