

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.