

Kenneth J MacKenzie CB: 1 May 1943 – 27 November 2020

Eulogy given by the Rev Tom Cuthell at St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh on 7 December 2020

Kenneth John was born in Glasgow on the 1st of May, 1943 – the second son of Captain Iain and Mrs Betty MacKenzie, and younger brother of Murdoch. In 1948, the family moved south to Birkenhead to enable Kenneth's father to take up the post of Assistant Marine Superintendent on Merseyside. Kenneth was educated at Woodchurch School and thereafter at Birkenhead School. Such was Kenneth's undoubted flair for academia, that he carried on with his studies, reading History at Pembroke College, Oxford. Following graduation in 1964, he continued with his academic work for another year at Stanford University in the US. In 1965, he returned to Scotland to embark on what would turn out to be a career of the utmost distinction in the Civil Service. Sadly, Kenneth's father was denied the opportunity of witnessing his younger son's flourishing career, as he died at a comparatively young age in 1967.

To turn now to Kenneth's career in the Civil Service. From the very start, he was identified as a rising star and, before long, was making his own unique and indelible mark on the various departments of the then Scottish Office – for example, Home and Health, Education, Agriculture and Development, to name but a few. London beckoned and Kenneth found himself serving as Private Secretary to the then Secretary of State, Bruce Millan. He was also involved to the hilt when the convention for devolution was set up. Not surprisingly, for several years Kenneth became a familiar face on the London sleeper and stoically accepted a lifestyle that could, at times, be hugely disruptive.

Following retirement, an interesting assignment came Kenneth's way, namely to spend some time in countries which were emerging from Communism – countries such as the Baltic States and Kosovo – advising them on the principles of democracy.

It was perhaps fitting that, in 1996, Kenneth's outstanding contribution to the life and times of the Civil Service should be acknowledged with the award of 'Companion of the Bath' (CB).

So, what were the gifts, qualities and attributes which shaped not only Kenneth's career in the Civil Service but also his family life, his Church life and his recreational life? Endowed with a formidable brain, he was a brilliant organiser and the epitome of efficiency, yet he never displayed any sign of intellectual snobbery. Kenneth could relate to all sorts and conditions of people. Moreover, he was a transparently honourable man, a man of consummate integrity. He was remarkably astute at sizing up a situation and equally astute at sizing up people. Straight as a die, he sought to be scrupulously fair in his judgments. At the same time, he was never retiring when it came to speaking his mind. True, some people were intimidated by him. Yet Kenneth's listening ear was always available, even if it was necessary occasionally to tear a strip off someone. Kenneth never held grudges. Many of his colleagues, many of his staff would testify to his instant readiness to show kindness, understanding and support. In fact, Kenneth sought by grace to live out the Christian faith and embody Christian principles wherever he lived and moved and had his being. Ever the gentleman, he possessed an olde worlde charm, seasoned by a dry sense of humour which was invariably accompanied by a subtle twinkle in the eye.

If the Civil Service benefitted hugely from the abundance of brainpower, energy, skills and aptitude which Kenneth placed at its disposal, so too did the Church, in particular this Church of St Cuthbert. Now I had only been Minister of St Cuthbert's for just over a year when, in 1977, a heaven-sent opportunity presented itself to appoint a new Session Clerk. Praise be – the mantle fell on Kenneth's shoulders. It was a crucially important appointment. As a comparatively young Minister, I somehow felt empowered with someone like Kenneth at my right hand. Yes, we still had to run the gauntlet of some sticky and frustrating Kirk Session meetings. On these occasions – which were not many – Kenneth suggested the right antidote. "Let's adjourn to the bar at the Caledonian Hotel for a gin and tonic". Lest there be any misunderstanding, it was just the two of us!

An unapologetic traditionalist to the core of his being, Kenneth loved the distinctive ethos of this Church, with its sumptuous style of worship, the male elders attired in solemn morning dress – as was the de rigueur uniform for male elders until just over 20 years ago. I don't think he ever forgave me for restricting the use of the Authorised Version of the Bible to rare occasions such as the Christmas Nine Lessons and Carols service or whenever he happened to be on Bible reading duty!

He was a traditional AV enthusiast! Moreover, I can still see him arriving at Church, wearing his bowler hat and gracefully wielding his immaculately rolled black umbrella.

However, it was in 1987 that the Kirk Session unanimously – note 'unanimously'; no dissenting voice! – took the bold decision to undertake a radical re-ordering and refurbishing of the interior of St Cuthbert's. There are no prizes for guessing to whom was entrusted the convenorship of the committee appointed to bring the plan to fruition. I have no doubt at all in my mind that the resounding and unqualified success of such a venture of faith was due, in no small measure, to Kenneth's inspirational leadership. The evidence is all around you. As London became increasingly demanding, Kenneth stepped down as Session Clerk in 1991, though this did not inhibit him from becoming the first Convenor of the newly-formed Congregational Board for a three-year spell. Kenneth rose to the top of any organisation in which he was involved. It was inevitable.

Being ecumenically-minded, he enjoyed warm relationships with members of other Churches in the city centre and did a stint as Chairman of the Cornerstone, the ecumenical café situated in the subterranean depths of St John's. It almost goes without saying that Kenneth was a most diligent and welcome visitor in his elder's district in the Palmerston Place and Wester Coates area of the city.

Despite a diary brimful with engagements, Kenneth always succeeded in fitting in 101 commitments covering work, Church and family. Let one little example suffice: frequently at lunchtime, Kenneth would slip out of his office and nip down to Trinity to visit his mother.

Thus, we move on to family – the third major sphere to shape Kenneth's life. The fact that Kenneth succeeded in pursuing a hugely busy life was due, in no small measure, to the support and understanding he received from Irene. They complemented each other beautifully. Yet their very first meeting, which took place at a New Year party in Dublin Street, had what could have been a somewhat inauspicious start. At one point, Irene thought Kenneth was behaving in a particularly rude manner. It all proved to be a complete misunderstanding. Praise be – love blossomed and, as the saying goes, the rest is history. Kenneth and Irene were married in Palmerston Place Church on the 3rd of September, 1975 and it wasn't long before the pitter-patter of infant feet was heard in the MacKenzie household; John condescending to put in an appearance in April 1977 and Mary in October 1979. Many years later, the family expanded to include a son-in-law Simon, a daughter-in-law Julie and the wonderful bonus of seven grandchildren.

Equally loved, John and Mary were the apple of their father's eye and, in turn, they adored him. Kenneth relished every opportunity to bath the children. For them, the bedtime treat was to listen to some wonderful stories Kenneth read to them. Moreover, he never shied away from taking his turn in nappy-changing. When on holiday, the bait Kenneth used to entice the children out for a walk was to promise them an exciting story or two. Happy memories!

Among his pastimes – being a man of history, Kenneth was in his element visiting Churches, stately homes and ancient castles. He loved swimming and amateur dramatics. I well recall him playing the part of a Pharisee in 'The Life of Jesus', enacted in the grounds of Dundas Castle. Incidentally, as well as being co-producer of the play along with Sir Jack Stewart-Clark, I also enacted the role of a rabble-rouser yelling abuse at Jesus!

Alas, when it seemed that his cup was full and running over, something of a shadow came over Kenneth's life, a shadow that would deepen and darken with painful inevitability. In 2006, Kenneth was diagnosed as having Parkinson's Disease – this cruel, wasting disease from which there is no recovery. Eventually the time came when Kenneth was reduced to being a shadow of his former brilliant, dynamic self when at home, in the bosom of his family, he could do no other than submit to the ministry of professional carers. It was Irene, however, who went the second, if not the third, mile to ensure that Kenneth would not lack for tender, loving care, that his dignity as a human being, made in the image of God, beloved of God, belonging to God, would be fully respected. Thus it was that on the 27th of November – to paraphrase the words of St Francis – kind and gentle death intervened and hushed his latest breath. He was 77 years of age. Already, Kenneth has been welcomed home by the words of his Saviour – "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord" – to which we respond with a resounding AMEN.