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Kenneth L. Hirsch

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RONALD ROSS DAVENPORT— AN APPRECIATION

*Kenneth L. Hirsch**

The great cathedrals of Europe—Chartres, Rheims, Notre Dame—endure firm and unperturbed. To modern man they symbolize the unity and placidity of a different time. To stand in their shadow is to glimpse a vision of steady artisans, peasants, priests, and nobles living out their predestined roles in time with the changing of the seasons and the passing of the years. Their cardinal virtues were ordered and circumscribed according to their niche in the hierarchy of life. Loyalty and subordination had their places beside faith and fortitude. So we moderns see their age, though I often think that our vision, foreshortened by the sweep of centuries, glosses the tumult and softens the squalor of their time; that it reflects our longings as much as it does their realities.

The spirit of our times is different. Endurance and steadiness are passé. We crave novelty and progress in their stead. Repose gives way to tumult; unity to complexity. Personal loyalty yields to institutional loyalty as a virtue. The autarch gives way to the administrator whose mandate is to guide an institution for a fixed term, with vision of its potential and with fidelity to its purpose, if possible, while mediating the demands of the groups of people it affects. No institution in modern America stands above the clamor. Certainly no law school escapes it. American law schools, filled with talented people and devoted to the skills of adversary thought and procedure, throb with the spirit of our times.

The measure of a law school dean today lies in his understanding of the spirit of the times, and in his response to it. To serve well he must be a visionary, a leader, and a manager. He must have a vision of the purpose and the potential of his school and of the profession. He must have the leadership capacity to work with his faculty, administration, and students to establish

* Professor of Law, Duquesne University School of Law.

realistic goals for his school; he must manage the resources at hand to preserve and improve it. In an era without men for all seasons, a dean must stand as a man for his season.

Measured against these standards, Ronald Davenport stands tall. He understood from the beginning that a worthy law school needs above all else a vigorous, engaged, talented faculty; that such a faculty will and should participate generously in the governance of the school; that a worthy law school needs a suitable house and a fine library. He has acted well on those understandings.

During his years as Dean, he and the faculty recruited many able new faculty members: Michael Libonati, Sheldon Nahmod, Frank McClellan, John Gedid, Henry Seney, David Hudson, Lowell Schechter, Joy Flowers Conti, Kenneth Gray, Carol Los Mansmann, Robert Taylor, John Lyttle, Bruce Ledewitz, Neil Gotanda, Marjorie Wallace, and Michael Streib.¹

As a leader, Dean Davenport characterized his role as that of "first among equals." He left most important policy decisions to the faculty because he recognized the wisdom of the long established tradition of faculty governance. He departed from this practice only rarely and only on matters that he believed to be vital to the school's interests. Those departures understandably became matters of contention. He responded to that contention with moderation and civility, seeking to protect the interests of the school rather than his ego.

Dean Davenport worked patiently and effectively to build a new home for the School of Law. When I joined the faculty in 1972, he escorted me through the floors of the Law School in Rockwell Hall. Along the way he told me of the many inadequacies of the building and declared his determination to build a new building suitable to the school's needs. The work was neither quick nor easy. To finance the project, he involved himself actively and visibly in the life of the community, serving on local and national boards and in political campaigns to secure the reputation and respect which eventually led to major foundation support for the construction of the new building. Without his dedicated service as an ambassador for the Law School in the community, the fine new law building would surely have remained

1. Ronald Davenport also recruited me for the faculty. I leave it to others to judge my ability. I cheerfully vouch for that of my colleagues.

an unrealized dream. The work was long. Most law school deans today serve five or fewer years. Dean Davenport persevered for eleven years to achieve the vital needs of the School of Law.

When Dean Davenport assumed office, he inherited a modest law library served by one dedicated librarian, one equally dedicated clerical assistant, and a platoon of student aides. Over the years he recognized that the school required a larger collection served by a larger staff. Dean Davenport worked diligently to secure the money we needed to meet those needs. As he leaves office, he leaves a greatly improved library, with a staff of five professional librarians, several clerical assistants, and a number of student aides. The collection and services are today much more suitable to the school's needs than they were when Ronald Davenport became Dean.

A faculty, a building, a library. These visible achievements do not fully describe Ronald Davenport's eleven years as Dean, but they will remain as lasting marks of his dedicated service. Dean Davenport is leaving the School of Law for a well-deserved leave of absence. He leaves with the satisfaction of having realized his visions for the school. He has been, in important ways, a man for his season.

