

Funeral of Mr. Archibald MACKENZIE (96 years), address by Rev. Anthony Craig  
Monday, 30th April 2012, 13h, Buchanan Parish Church

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I hope you have read some of the excellent obituaries that have appeared about Archie Mackenzie's life. Perhaps you have read his own book about his experiences, with its very perceptive title, *Faith in Diplomacy*. Indeed, if you haven't read the book, may I strongly recommend it and say that I'm sure you can buy a copy later!

Archie's life span of more than 96 years takes us back to many marking points in the past century of history. He was there in the British delegation in 1945 when the United Nations charter was signed. He served in the east in Thailand and Burma, in the west in Paris and at the UN in New York. He was consul-general in Zagreb and her majesty's ambassador in Tunisia. He held several other important positions along the way and was called out of retirement to serve as a special assistant to Sir Edward Heath, working on the Brandt Commission on world development.

But more important than what he did where and when, is the person that he was and the spirit in which he carried out his duties. Ruth says of him simply that, 'he never wavered in his commitment'. Others have spoken of his moral courage, which in the context of British public life is perhaps even more difficult than physical courage

Archie by his personal warmth and care for people had an enormous number of friends. Indeed, a fellow diplomat's wife once said to Ruth, 'no one has more friends in the Foreign Office than Archie Mackenzie'. But his unwavering commitment to faith and moral standards also aroused antipathy in some people.

You can read about this and more in the chapter in Archie's book which shares the book's title, *Faith in Diplomacy*. I think it's worth mentioning that he faced opposition, or else we may underestimate the magnitude of what he achieved. With his often quiet and unassuming manner, it could be easy to miss the backbone of steel that underlay his humility and friendliness.

At the same time I think we also should realise that for Archie opposition was just part of the job as he saw it. For him, what was far more important was, as he wrote, 'That a loving God, personified for me in Jesus Christ, should wish to communicate with men and women on a regular basis...'  
p.182

The conviction that the guidance of God in human affairs is a reality was a lifelong conviction. Finding God's plan for the world was far more interesting to Archie than plotting his career. Or to put it another way, he made it his career to search for and follow God's plan.

He liked to quote Adam Smith, whom we think of as an economist, but he was professor of moral philosophy in the 18th century at Glasgow University, where Archie himself studied philosophy in the 1930s. Adam Smith spoke of an invisible hand guiding human affairs. And this was not just an

academic concept for Archie. About the time he started his university studies, through friends and family, he encountered the Oxford Group, which later became known as Moral Re-Armament and is now Initiatives of Change. For Archie, the youngster who five years running scored 100% in a national exam on Bible knowledge, this began an experiment in practical Christianity.

At the age of 18 or thereabouts, it led him to talk honestly to his parents about some aspects of his life, to offer back to his school headmaster book prizes he had been given for an exam in which he had cheated; and to send a letter to a local golf club, enclosing the entrance money for an international golf event. Archie was always keen on golf, as well as other sports, and he had attended this event by clambering over a fence.

In these acts of personal restitution Archie felt God setting him free to do his bidding. More even than honesty of life was the purpose for life. He and other students started asking themselves whether their inner beliefs that 'God had a plan for every man' had relevance also to the millions of unemployed, especially those in the Clyde shipyards, some of them visible from the university campus.

Soon a group of students were going weekly to a church hall in Greenock. They started by playing badminton with unemployed workers. What began with badminton, says Archie, 'gradually blossomed into wide-ranging discussions on life and work and social solidarity... a ripple of new life and hope became noticeable... a culture of teamwork began to challenge the inherited doctrine of class war.' Students and workers forged friendships that have lasted a lifetime, and many of them, like Archie himself, have gone on to be change-makers around the world. (p.16)

Ever afterwards Archie relied on his daily times of quiet meditation to let the guiding hand of God direct his personal and professional life.

He was very humble about this belief and practice. He wrote, 'I do not claim any gifts as a seer, nor do I hear voices in any literal sense; but what I know is that by following this practice, I have repeatedly found that there is, after all, a way out of an impasse; that when I seemed to be alone, I found an ally standing with me; that when I seemed to be facing a solid stone wall, a door would appear... my personal belief [is] that, if one is faithful to one's vision - whether or not that be popular - one gets used in unexpected ways.' (p.183)

Rajmohan Gandhi, the Indian scholar and biographer of his grandfather, the Mahatma, heard the news of Archie's passing as he came in from a walk in a forest. 'I thought of Archie standing out and standing up like a sturdy, tall and straight tree,' he writes. He refers to Archie's 'unwavering commitment,' how 'it opened hearts and minds in key places'. He goes on, 'That commitment, and the sensitive way in which Archie lived it out, enabled the people he encountered... to entertain thoughts of friendliness and forgiveness at difficult times and thus brighten their situations.'

Archie would give God the credit for such brightening. Professor Gandhi underlines Archie's quality of friendship. He and Ruth made friends wherever they went - and kept up the friendships over the years.

Just this past February, in a meeting in Edinburgh, Archie was talking of being ready for the unexpected. He was speaking about Burma, as well he might, because he has faithfully kept up friendships for over fifty years since his first time there. It was so encouraging that he lived long enough to see a new day dawning in Burma.

One of the last things that Archie wrote for publication was an obituary of Lady Gore-Booth. With all the news coming out of Burma, Archie felt it important that people knew of her part in looking after a very young Aung Sang Suu Kyi in London years ago. And of course he had decades of association with both the Burmese and British families.

Friends were made in different ways. As I mentioned, Archie was involved in the Brandt Commission. In 1980, in an international committee drafting the final report, Archie felt an Indian colleague was being obstructive, that important work about international development was being held up. Archie made some sarcastic jokes at the expense of his colleague. Others laughed; the Indian didn't.

That evening, Archie felt God was saying to him, 'Today you made an enemy'; and that he needed to apologise, for his sarcasm and his impatience.

Next morning, who should be alone in the lift going to the committee but the other man. Archie apologised. The other man said little, but from then on the atmosphere changed and the committee worked harmoniously. An international deadlock was averted. 'But the bonus for me,' said Archie, 'was that the troublesome colleague became a permanent friend.' (p.173)

The same openness to the unexpected and the talent for friendship came to the fore in Zagreb. As Archie indicated in his book, this appointment to provincial Yugoslavia seemed like an unpromising posting. Yet it was the start of decades of fruitful friendships in the Balkans.

And the first entry into Zagreb life was rather unusually made by making friends with African students. Archie writes, 'The whole saga of how the Africans in Zagreb grew from being disgruntled and even belligerent students into genuine international bridge-builders did a lot to increase our faith.' One might say the faith effect was mutual. One of those students, a Ghanaian who stayed on as a surgeon in Yugoslavia, right through the civil war, was appointed in 1998 the first Bosnian ambassador to Japan. He wrote from Tokyo to Archie, reflecting on all that had led him to serve in such a capacity. And through Japanese friends, Archie and Ruth were able to help him in his new situation.

There were some profound discussions with Yugoslav officials, atheistic communists since youth, about faith and life. And this friendship to people who might be seen as opposites continued long after leaving Zagreb. In 1992, as Yugoslavia disintegrated, Archie had the thought in his morning time of quiet, "Reach out to the Serbs." That took him to Belgrade and another series of fruitful encounters. One of those Serbs whom he met then wrote last week, "I admire Archie as one of the finest men I ever met... I will miss him greatly and remember him forever."

Moral courage, unwavering commitment; a capacity for friendship. To those qualities I would add, a care and concern for the young people who will make the future. He has taken time to meet and talk with them, he has corresponded with letters or printed material that he judged would help them.

In fact that was Archie's principal, maybe the only reason for writing a book about his life in diplomacy. Archie had a hearty aversion to the sort of memoirs that try to tell the world what a wonderful and wise person the writer is, with a list of the famous and important people they have met. When it was pointed out to him that by his experiences he might help younger people make the right choices in their lives, to find as he had, a purpose in life under God, then he sat down to write, and wrote fluently and quickly.

As one of those younger friends says, 'Archie was always interested in what we were going to do,'... 'interested in the ups and downs and directions of one's life.'

Another wrote, 'I have such good memories of your sense of fun, Archie, your wisdom, your deep care for people, your stories.'

Archie took faith and friendship seriously, but as she says, he had a sense of humour. He enjoyed some of the more ludicrous moments of diplomatic work. Some of them centred on his Scottish identity. He felt that Ruth must have had a disturbing view of what were the priorities of diplomacy, when she first came out to Burma to join him after their wedding in 1963. The military coup had just happened, and the new government were suspicious of everything foreign.

In this delicate situation Her Britannic Majesty's embassy was involved in the import of parcels of haggis from Scotland that had been ordered to celebrate St. Andrew's Day. The military officials were very doubtful about the contents and had impounded them. No amount of diplomatic effort could secure their release and eventually the tropical heat took its toll, by which time no one wanted the haggis anyway.

You will be glad to know that the honour of the Foreign Service, or at least its Scottish element, was upheld, by the rapid import of fresh haggis from Hong Kong, presumably in the diplomatic bag, an early example of Chinese enterprise saving western civilization.

On another occasion, Archie won a prize for one of the best national costumes at a charity ball in Zagreb - wearing his kilt in the Mackenzie tartan. Not only a prize, but handed over by a stunning Miss Yugoslavia! However, the prize envelope when opened revealed a one-way ticket to communist Albania, with which Britain at that time had no diplomatic relations.

You will be aware that there is so much more that could be said about Archie, his career, his work and his convictions. He is surely the last survivor of the British delegation, perhaps of any delegation, present at the signing of the United Nations charter in San Francisco in 1945. Throughout his career, and as UK Minister to the United Nations in New York, he always maintained a positive view of what could be achieved through the UN. The final chapter of his book is a testament to that positive, even optimistic view.

Many will remember the thought that he introduced to one set of fraught international discussions at the UN, when he said all concerned needed to 'cross the philosophical bridge of change'. Or his often expressed view that to deal with the problems on the table it was necessary to deal with the problems sitting round the table. These were not just phrases, but convictions that he spent his lifetime embodying, personally and professionally.

His long and distinguished career can be summarised with the Bible texts that inspired Archie all his life. Along with what we have heard read from Isaiah and John, there is his favourite line from Genesis:

'I, being in the way, the Lord led me...' Genesis. 24: 27 AV

And then that other verse from Isaiah, in chapter 30:

'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it..."'  
Isaiah 30: 21 AV

And perhaps particularly we should emphasise his looking to the future, where his long retirement has been so fruitful in other people's lives. A student wrote to Ruth this week, saying:

'I so much enjoyed my visits to you both in Strathcashel, and conversations over lunches, teas, and walks. The first thought that comes to mind when I think of Archie is that you and he have been an example to me - as I am sure you have to so many others. I started meeting you both as an adult once Archie was already over ninety years old, and long retired. That he kept such an active interest in the affairs of the world - and a human interest, not merely an intellectual one - was something that struck me greatly. I was very moved and encouraged by the fact that - with his age, experience, and connections - he would be so earnestly interested in my opinion.'

The student continues, 'I hope, that with the grace of God, in sixty years' time I can resemble Archie in showing such warmth, interest, and humility to someone a quarter of my age, sharing with him or her the meaningful life experience which you both have with me. If I can, then I would say that I have let God transform me and work through me, and have not wasted the years on earth given me.'

There have been many messages. As well as students, there is one from King Michael and Queen Anne of Romania, another from Son Soubert, High Privy Councillor to the King of Cambodia. He says, 'We Cambodians will never forget... your support in the most difficult period of our struggles for liberation... of our people during the 1980s.'

On the Sunday evening that Archie passed away, the news had already sped around the world and Ruth received an email from Finland. Their friend said that he, his wife and two other Finns had been together when they got the news and had immediately phoned a mutual friend in St. Petersburg. Sergei spontaneously said, 'It is today Easter Sunday in Russia, which gives a special meaning to Archie's homegoing: the victory of life over death!' The email went on, 'We all prayed on our knees thanking God for Archie's life...'

Victory indeed. It cannot happen to too many public servants that when they die, people on both sides of what used to be called the iron curtain are on their knees thanking God for the life lived, for the victory of life over death.

But we should not be surprised at responses like these to Archie's passing, because Archie Mackenzie was perhaps God's most surprising diplomat of his generation. He lived the life.