

CONCRETE PHILOSOPHY, THE MYSTERY OF LOVE, AND THE ABSURDITY OF EVIL

As a lad of eighteen who spent more time playing football and basketball than reading literature and philosophy, I entered Maryville College in the fall of 1960. After a year of liberal arts courses, the time arrived to select a major field of study. My decision was significantly influenced by three factors: Sputnik, basketball, and puberty images of masculinity. As a member of the post-Sputnik college generation, I was aware that all the money and prestige belonged to the sciences and mathematics; consequently, there was never any serious consideration of majoring in the humanities and especially no consideration of majoring in philosophy. As an undergraduate, I would not have been caught dead in a philosophy course: not only were the people who taught philosophy somewhat queer, but those who studied it were wimps; real men mastered the sciences. So, the humanities were out, and the question became which of the sciences? It was basketball and laziness that provided the answer. First, the natural sciences were much too messy and required long periods in the laboratory, in other words, lab time would infringe on my time playing basketball and trying to actualize my masculinity through the puberty rites of seeking feminine companionship. But mathematics was another matter: it required no labs, and mathematics was simple, clear, concise (no long term papers for example), and relatively easy. So, I became a math major. Fortunately, however, Maryville College was a good liberal arts school, and I was required to study a foreign language, explore literature, examine history, survive a Bible class taught by a missionary's widow, and register for several other kinds of classes. To my surprise I found myself completing a literature minor, but this was excusable to my masculine side because, after all, I was a math major, and I managed to evade those strange, effeminate philosophy classes.

Upon graduation from Maryville I accepted a NASA fellowship for graduate study in mathematics at the University of Kentucky and was able to propose to and marry an English major because the fellowship

was financially generous. As I began the study of mathematics at Kentucky in the fall of 1964, she returned to Maryville to complete her final semester. At Kentucky, I studied nothing but mathematics eight hours a day. It was then I discovered that what had made my education at Maryville so enjoyable and fulfilling was not only the mathematics but even more so the courses in literature, world history, and religion. In other words, I discovered that it was really ideas, values, and beliefs that excited me. After much soul-searching, I called my wife Jeanie in Maryville and told her that I had made an important decision. She asked with concern, "Oh, no! You haven't decided to vote for Lyndon Johnson (the 1964 Presidential election), have you?" I responded, "Nothing as drastic as that; I am resigning my fellowship and going to Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary." Besides struggling with what to do with my life, there was an important religious question I needed to answer, and it seemed that it could best be explored at seminary.

At Louisville I first encountered philosophy in the person of Sam Keen, who introduced me to Gabriel Marcel: an introduction which was to become a lifetime blessing. It was Sam who seduced me into the study of philosophy but a view of philosophy that was somewhat less than orthodox. Sam taught philosophy as though it were what Zorba the Greek did in his semi-reflective moments. Thus, on the basis of Marcel and Sam Keen's Dionysian image of philosophy, I applied for and received an assistantship in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma during my last year at Louisville. Upon graduation, we moved to Oklahoma.

It took less than one week to discover that graduate philosophy was little concerned with Marcel and more prone to worship Apollo than Dionysus. For three months I did not even understand the questions that students were asking in class. Every week I wanted to quit, but our only source of revenue (we now had a baby daughter) was the assistantship; thus, I "hung-in-there" for a semester and slowly began to understand and appreciate the field of philosophy. I was also most fortunate to be at Oklahoma because it had a department that had not sold its soul to any of the modern schools of philosophy. As a consequence, I was allowed to do a thesis on Marcel and a dissertation on Marcel and Camus. I have always believed that this represented a kind of indulgence on the part of the faculty, but I was a good boy who also took every class in logic and the philosophy of science in their curriculum.

In the summer of 1972, I began to teach philosophy at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. As a teacher I believed that I had a responsibility to teach SERIOUS philosophy; so, Marcel was

put aside as I turned to Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, the British empiricists, the Continental rationalists, logic, analytic philosophy, etc. At this time in my philosophical life, serious philosophy meant teaching students about Forms, the Agent Intellect, the Cogito, monads, the principles of logic, idealism versus empiricism, synthetic a priori, ontological arguments, Geist, phenomenological epoches, etc; but my philosophical heart still belonged to Marcel. On rare occasions I would backslide and submit a paper on Marcel to a conference. On those few occasions when I could get a paper on Marcel accepted at a conference--never the "big, prestigious" ones--the papers were never a big draw: they were usually scheduled for the last session of the conference and consisted of me and a couple of members of a Catholic order. Then, ten years into my professional career, three events transpired which changed my understanding of philosophy and the nature of my teaching philosophy; events which led me back to Marcel and Camus and their recognition of the centrality of the mystery of love and the absurdity of human suffering for both human life and the love of wisdom.

Before briefly recounting these events, it is helpful to describe the fundamental insights which they revealed concerning the nature of, the content of, and the teaching of philosophy. During my first decade of teaching I taught a philosophy of religion class several times in the traditional manner: that is, **the class examined** the arguments for and against the existence of God, for and against the occurrence of miracles, the free will-predestination and foreknowledge problem, the attributes of God, the nature of religious language, and the **PROBLEM OF EVIL** . Each time that I taught the class I must confess to a vague uneasiness over the Western bias and the abstract nature of such an approach and such issues, but this was the way I had been taught that serious philosophy was to be done. Further, I never examined the Problem of Evil in other philosophy classes (except Modern Philosophy when we examined Leibniz) because it seemed to be a problem specific to religion. What I discovered in these three events is that experiences of human love and human suffering are as central to philosophy as to religion, that suffering is not a **PROBLEM**, and this led me back to Marcel and Camus. Three brief quotes should suffice to illustrate this:

A genuine problem is subject to an appropriate technique by the exercise of which it is defined: whereas a mystery...transcends every conceivable technique. It is no doubt, always possible (logically and psychologically) to degrade a mystery so as to turn it into a problem.... The problem of evil, as the philosophers have called it, supplies us with a particularly instructive example of this degradation. (Marcel, *Being*)

and Having, p.117)

I think and I say that the science of ontology will not get out of its scholastic rut until it takes full cognisance of the fact that love comes first. (Marcel, *Being and Having*, p.167)

There is but one truly serious philosophical question, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest--whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories comes afterwards. If I ask myself how to judge that this question is more urgent than that, I reply that one judges by the actions it entails. I have never seen anyone die for the ontological argument. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.3)

If Marcel and Camus are correct, as I believe they are, then the mystery of love and the absurdity of suffering are more than just theological questions and issues, they are concrete human experiences which are fundamental to human life and to any relevant and respectable search for wisdom, that is, to philosophy. Three experiences powerfully revealed this truth to me.

On a fall afternoon in October 1982, I was at a local Texaco station filling my car with gas when a former student who had become a lawyer in the community arrived for gas. When he saw me, he stepped over to the pump I was using and shared something most precious, in his words: "Bert, there is something which I think you should know about a former student who took your class in The Literature and Philosophy of Existentialism [the only class where I ventured to discuss Marcel and Camus]. When he entered your class he was an active member of the Ku Klux Klan. As a consequence of the questions and issues you raised in the class he has left the Klan and is struggling to relate to blacks as human beings rather than things. You should know that you make a difference in other's lives." This revelation was both exhilarating and humbling: exhilarating because it came at a time in my teaching career when I badly needed to know that what I was struggling to do as a teacher was of value and humbling because of the sacred responsibility of teaching about human life and relationships.

Several months later, during early spring, I received a telephone call from the brother of a student who had attended one of my classes during my second year at Austin Peay (eight years earlier). After he identified himself, he told me that his brother had committed suicide the previous day. As I inadequately tried to express my sadness to his brother, I was desperately trying to remember this student. He had only

taken one class, the course in Existentialism. Vaguely I remembered him as an older student (early thirties) who was shy, serious, occasionally asked insightful questions, and wrote passionate papers. But I hardly knew or remembered him; consequently I was puzzled by his brother's call. This puzzlement was quickly clarified. In a note left for his brother, this young man I barely knew or remembered had commented upon the importance of this class in his life and requested that I perform his funeral service. As difficult as this request was, there are petitions of such human sacredness that there is only one acceptable response. I asked to borrow a diary he had also left for his brother and his class notes from the course. In both I discovered that the readings and the discussions in the Existentialism class had touched him in many good and healthy ways, especially the insights of Marcel concerning love and Camus concerning suffering.

Finally, during early summer of the same year, two friends of mine lost their two year old son to a defective heart. The boy passed away on a Friday afternoon in the intensive care unit of a local hospital. Later that evening I received a call asking me to come to their home early Saturday morning. To this day I still cannot recall what any of us said as we exchanged greetings at the front door. We moved to a large living room and sat down. A moment of silence followed which was probably only seconds long but seemed like hours, when the mother broke the silence with a sobbing cry: "Bert, you have to tell me why this has happened." After I partly recovered from the piercing pain in her voice and the shock of her question, I quietly struggled to respond. What was she asking me? I thought quickly of three possibilities: medical, theological, or a third which was neither but even more basic. I ruled out the medical possibility because I am not a physician. The religious question, "Why did God let this happen?," was a possibility because the parents were members of a Presbyterian Church to which I also belonged. However, I think that her excruciating question was more fundamentally existential: she was asking me the most difficult question of human existence (a question concerning the mystery of love and the absurdity of suffering and death):

BECAUSE THIS PRECIOUS HUMAN PERSON WHOM I LOVE WITH ALL MY BEING HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM MY LIFE, CAN YOU TELL ME HOW I AM GOING TO GET OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING AND GO ABOUT MY LIFE? CAN YOU TELL ME HOW I CAN FIND THE MEANING, VALUE, PURPOSE, AND MOST OF ALL THE HOPE I NEED TO GO ON TOMORROW AND THE DAYS AFTER?

There is no more burning or difficult question any human being can face; this is a fundamental question of human life; consequently, it is a fundamental question and issue of philosophy: the mystery of love and the absurdity of suffering and death are not only experiences that philosophy cannot avoid, I believe that they are the givens with which philosophy must begin. As a result of these experiences, I made a decision and a commitment that have determined the approach, content, and nature of my teaching:

WHILE I WILL NOT IGNORE THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY, THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS, AND THE GREAT PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS AND ISSUES, AS I ATTEMPT TO SHARE THE LOVE OF WISDOM WITH STUDENTS, I WILL STRUGGLE TO RELATE THE TRUTHS AND INSIGHTS OF PHILOSOPHY TO THEIR CONCRETE, FLESH AND BLOOD LIVES, AND I WILL NEVER FORGET THAT THE MYSTERY OF LOVE AND THE ABSURDITY OF SUFFERING AND DEATH ARE THE FUNDAMENTAL EXPERIENCES OF HUMAN LIFE AS WELL AS THE **GIVENS** WITH WHICH PHILOSOPHY MUST INITIATE ITS REFLECTIONS AND EXPLORATIONS.

Developing from this commitment and awareness over a period of several years and many revisions, I now present students in my Introduction to Philosophy class with the following description of the love of wisdom:

PHILOSOPHY IS AN EFFORT TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEMS OF, TO ENOUNTER THE MYSTERIES OF, AND TO STRUGGLE WITH THE ABSURDITIES OF HUMAN EXISTENCE.

The rest of the semester, then, is spent in exploring this description. For me, any adequate exploration of this understanding of philosophy would require more than a book length manuscript; it would require a lifetime. Thus, in the remainder of this essay, I hope to accomplish two humble goals: (1) to further clarify the description, and (2) to suggest several concrete examples of problems, mysteries, and absurdities. As I do so, I remain cognizant of Abraham Kaplan's great warning about professional philosophy and philosophers given at the end of his extensive interview in *Time* magazine over fifteen years ago:

The word philosophy means the love of wisdom, and the love of wisdom is, I suppose, like most kinds of love: so often it is the professional who knows the least about it.

PHILOSOPHY AS PROBLEM

While there are many passages in Marcel's works which describe the distinction between a problem and a mystery, one of the clearest and most descriptive is found in his essay titled "The Mystery of the Family":

...there can only be a problem for me where I have to deal with facts which are, or which I can at least cause to be, exterior to myself; facts presenting themselves to me in a certain disorder for which I struggle to substitute an orderliness capable of satisfying the requirements of my thought. When this substitution has been effected the problem is solved. As for me, who devote myself to this operation, I am outside...the facts with which it deals. But when it involves realities closely bound up with my existence, realities which unquestionably influence my existence...I cannot consciously proceed in this way. That is to say, I cannot make an abstraction of myself, or if you like, bring about this division between myself on the one hand and this ever-present given principle of life on the other; I am effectively and vitally involved in these realities. (*Homo Viator*, pp.68-9)

These latter realities are mysteries. For Marcel, then, both problems and mysteries are experiences, but experiences of a significantly different existential nature. A problem is an experience that I can effectively SEPARATE from myself. I confront a problem; that is, I put it in front of myself (this is the etymological meaning of the term PROBLEM, "to put in front"). In other words, a problem is an experience that I can treat OBJECTIVELY because I can separate it from myself. This allows me to analyze, measure, define, describe, test, collect information concerning, and evaluate the problem. If these operations have been performed adequately, then I have solved the problem. Unquestionably human life is filled with problems. An example should help. My bank statement arrives in the mail. Upon examining it, I find that the bank statement indicates there is \$100.00 less in my checking account than my checkbook records. While my first response to this problem may be passionately, subjectively emotional, I should shortly be able to set my emotions and frustration aside, get a calculator, analyze my checkbook, and discover the error in a rational, objective manner. In thus confronting the problem I solve it.

Because human existence is everyday confronted with many problems, it follows that philosophy (the love of wisdom) is partly an effort to understand and solve the problems of life. Under this category much of the traditional content of philosophy is to be found, especially epistemology, logic, and the philosophy of science. However, much of

traditional metaphysics is also approached as a problem, especially Aristotelian philosophy, Modern philosophy, logical positivism, pragmatism, analytic philosophy, etc. Philosophy as problem incorporates the vast majority of the philosophical corpus. Philosophy is an **EFFORT TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEMS OF** human existence.

BUT there are experiences in which I am so "effectively and vitally involved" that I cannot bring about the objective separation which characterizes a problem: for example, the miraculous wonder of holding my daughters immediately after their births, the joy of laughter of a child in a park swing, the love my wife freely offers each day, my hope that a reunion awaits those who love after the death of the body, and the loneliness I experience when separated from those I love, especially when the separation occurs because of death. These experiences are of a different existential nature: mysteries and absurdities.

PHILOSOPHY AS MYSTERY

Love, faith, wonder, joy, hope, prayer, and beauty are but a few of the experiences of mystery in life. I shall use love to clarify the category of mystery as distinct from both problem and absurdity. There is an assignment which I give students in the Introduction to Philosophy class. First, I write the following statement on the chalkboard: "I know that _____ loves me." Second, they are required to write the same statement on a sheet of paper and put a human name in the blank. If they are having trouble with a name, I tell them to put their mother's name in the blank, or if they cannot put her name there, they should see the people in the Counseling Center. Third, having supplied a name, they are to determine whether the statement is true or false and to write this judgment on their paper. Finally, they are to answer this question: "What reasons or evidence can you offer to support your previous judgment?" After a period of time, I collect their papers, and we begin to examine the assignment in class. I turn to the statement on the board, write the name Jeanie (my wife) in the blank, and proceed with the assignment; that is, I try to prove that it is true. From their faces, I am certain some students think that if the statement is true, then Jeanie must be both myopic (if not blind) as well as very slow witted. However, due to the omnipotent power of the grade which I hold over them, they keep this evaluation to themselves. What we discover as we explore the evidence for its truth is that love is a mystery rather than a problem. I usually list a half dozen different kinds of evidence to try and prove the truth of this

statement: such as shared experiences, sacrifices, spoken words, etc. However, eventually we realize that none of this evidence really proves the statement is true. Inevitably I must admit that while I cannot deductively or inductively prove its truth, nonetheless, it is true FOR me. Does this mean that I am a poor philosopher engaged in either a misuse of the term TRUTH or, even worse, engaged in self-deception. I hope neither; yet I must clearly admit that the statement, while unprovable, is true FOR me. This is to claim several things: (1) There are experiences (and a kind of truth associated with them) that go beyond the empirical; that is, science is not going to develop an instrument to measure love. (2) There are experiences that are ineffable; that is, there are experiences that cannot be adequately defined, measured, explained, or described. In other words, there are experiences and truths that are **INEFFABLE**. (3) There are experiences that are so intimately a part of me and I a part of them, that I cannot separate them from who I am any more than I can will the blood to stop flowing through my veins; in other words, there are mysteries. We do not confront and therefore solve mysteries; we encounter them.

What has just been stated concerning love is just as true of faith, hope, wonder, joy, beauty, and any mystery. Realizing this, the fundamental characteristics of mysteries are three. First, the experience of mystery touches such a deep part of a person that the experience can never be treated in a completely objective way. I may be able to step back from the experience (or relationship) and struggle for some objectivity, but if the experience (or relationship) is truly a mystery, it always remains deeply a part of me. Second, a mystery is ineffable. While I may be able to provide a description or definition, neither can ever be adequate. In other words, I can talk ABOUT love at great length, but this is significantly different than experiencing the mystery of love. Finally, the experience of mystery is a transcendent one. Not only does mystery touch the deepest part of who I am, it involves me in a truth and a reality that go beyond (transcend) the tiny **world of myself**. It is this last characteristic that distinguishes mystery from absurdity.

While the majority of the corpus of **philosophy concerns** problems, there ARE philosophers who also examine experiences such as love, faith, hope, beauty, wonder, joy, etc. Unfortunately, the majority of those who do so have made, in my judgment, two mistakes: their examinations reduce these mysteries to problems for reflective analysis and explanation, and in doing so, they LOSE sight of the concrete nature of these experiences and GET lost in abstractions. As a professionally trained philosopher, when we explore these mysteries in class I constantly

struggle against these common philosophical tendencies. The best corrective is to continually return to concrete human examples. In other words, there are two kinds of narrative that are central to both philosophy and the teaching of philosophy: biography and autobiography, because these are the most concrete forms of narrative. It follows from this recognition that literature is also of great philosophical significance because it best describe to the concrete nature of human existence. Philosophy is an effort **TO ENCOUNTER THE MYSTERIES OF** human existence.

PHILOSOPHY AS ABSURDITY

Philosophy is also an effort **TO STRUGGLE WITH THE ABSURDITIES OF** human existence. As an introduction to the meaning of the term **ABSURDITY**, I introduce students to the myth of Sisyphus, use many of the insights concerning absurdity in Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and then ask them to respond to a question: "What about Sisyphus' punishment is so overwhelmingly torturous?" While many responses are forthcoming, the most important recognize the following: futility, meaninglessness, purposelessness, unending exhaustion, monotony, and, most importantly, loneliness and hopelessness. Absurdity is then described as a collective noun for such experiences.

From this description we move to a most important question: "What is the most common, inevitable experience that presents people with these absurdities?" The answer is death and, most especially, the death of someone loved. When a person who is loved dies, those who remain after (or should we say under) begin to struggle with many of these absurdities, particularly loneliness. It is important to realize that the death of a loved one is not a problem that confronts a person and has a solution. This death will be a part of their lives until the day that they die. When someone I love dies, I can no more separate the loneliness I experience from their death than I can the love that I have for them. For this reason, absurdities share two of the characteristics of mysteries: the inability to separate and thus treat as a problem and ineffability. While we can study the grief process, science is not going to develop an instrument that will adequately measure it. Nor is knowing about the process the same as experiencing it. There is, however, a significant characteristic of difference from mysteries that indicates a serious danger in the human struggle with absurdities. While the experience of mystery is one that is transcendent, that is, takes the self beyond the self, the danger of struggling with an absurdity is self-absorption. The pain of loneliness and hopelessness can turn persons in upon themselves,

sometimes so powerfully that they cut themselves off from the external world. Consequently, among the healthiest responses to absurdity are several of the mysteries just mentioned, but this is to get ahead.

When struggling with an absurdity, we face the question, "how do humans respond?" Class exploration of these responses divides into two categories: healthy and unhealthy. (Neither term is meant to include moral judgments.) Not surprisingly, the first unhealthy response the class explores is suicide. When a friend or a loved one takes his life, we face several absurdities, most significantly, loneliness, meaningless, and hopelessness. The loneliness and hopelessness of suicide are powerfully described by Karl Menninger in *The Vital Balance* when he relates the "ultimate form of suicide" to a "hopelessness so great" that there is only one solution: "self-annihilation." This "hopelessness so great" is almost always supported by a terrible loneliness. Suicide is often the result when such terrible loneliness becomes hopeless, as Menninger indicates by sharing the following incident:

We are indebted to Dr. William Simpson of our staff for the following poem written by a fourteen-year-old girl who suffered intensely from depression and despair. She made numerous suicidal attempts, one of which was successful about a year after this poem was written:

I wandered the streets I was lonely; I was cold. Weird music filled the air. It grew louder and louder. There was no other sound-Only weird, terrible music.

I began to run as though I was being chased. Too terrified to look back, I ran on into the darkness. A light was shining very brightly, far away.

I must get to it.
When I reached the light,
I saw myself,
I was lying, on the ground.
My skin was very white.
I was dead. (p.267)

While we should be careful about generalizing from a single poem, the existential anguish of loneliness is both clear and overpowering in the first stanza. However, the second stanza seems to introduce a desperate hope in the "light...shining very brightly, far away," but this light, this hope, is a mirage: "I saw myself.... I was dead." The loneliness that constituted the world of this fourteen-year-old was intense, but it was her hopelessness that became the overpowering killer. Suicide is, indeed, an ontological datum. As we explore the absurd nature of suicide in class, Camus'

sensitivity to human suffering offers many insights to students.

Following the exploration of suicide and absurdity, the class considers a number of other unhealthy responses to absurdity such as alcoholism, drug abuse, some forms of mental illness, some acts of violence (especially in conditions of poverty) as well as attempts to escape absurdity through addiction to the television or excessive sleep. These, however, are only a few of the many unhealthy ways that humans respond to the absurdity of their existences.

After exploring unhealthy responses to absurdity as well as the foolishness of treating these responses as mere problems, we turn to healthy responses, such as self-honesty, the use of reason, the actualization of courage, laughter, wonder, and, most importantly, intimacy (love) and hope. In other words, we turn to an exploration of those experiences and realities that Marcel calls mysteries, but we struggle to explore them as concretely as possible.

PHILOSOPHY IS AN EFFORT TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEMS OF, TO ENCOUNTER THE MYSTERIES OF, AND TO STRUGGLE WITH THE ABSURDITIES OF HUMAN EXISTENCE!

As I explore the nature and content of this understanding of the love of wisdom with students, I struggle to remain faithful to the spirit of philosophical reflection exemplified in Marcel and Camus, for I live not only after them but also under their influence. While never having known either, each has become both teacher and friend. As Marcel reminds us--only a fool claims to be self-made. The best of who I am has always come as the result of a gift from those who have loved me and who have taught me.

AN EPILOGUE

While contemporary psychological studies of grief have identified several stages in the grief process, there is an ancient Hasidic proverb concerning human loss that more adequately recognizes the transcendent dimension which is necessary to any adequate healing process:

Humans experience grief on three levels: On the first level one's grief emerges in tears; On the second level one's grief is reduced to silence; But on the third level grief turns into song.

The third level can only be reached through the pain and silence of the first two levels and requires the healing of both time and love. Since all three levels partake of silence, for there are no words or thoughts which can magically heal the tears or make the silence go away, I would speak to you of this silence.

The Hindu Upanishads tell us there are truths from which words turn away. In other terms, there are experiences which cannot adequately be measured, defined, described, or explained. These experiences are of two kinds, absurdities and mysteries, and the silence associated with each is different.

Absurdities are experiences such as loneliness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, and purposelessness. The brutal murder of precious human beings at Taco Bell this weekend was an absurdity; do not try to explain it or feel embarrassment because you do not have the words to express your fear, loss, and pain. It was an act without meaning, purpose, or value, and it reduces us all to the silence of pain and tears.

For those who most deeply loved and knew Kevin Campbell, it reduces us to the silence of loneliness, for our world is more lonely without him. But there is another level of grief that grows out of the music of love and turns grief into song.

While there is the reductive silence of absurdity, there is another kind of silence that speaks louder than words and is best expressed, although inadequately, in song: the silence of mystery. Beyond words are those mysteries of love, wonder, faith, joy, laughter, and hope. At this time of overpowering grief, these mysteries may seem so very distant as to be unreachable, but they are as close as your tears, for the tears and grief you share are based on love, wonder, faith, joy, laughter, and hope.

As I remember Kevin Campbell, I experience both a sense of overwhelming loss (the silence of the absurdity created by his death) and a deep sense of gratitude for the sacred joy and honor of having been one of his teachers. There are no words which adequately describe this honor or joy, so I must turn to poetry (which is a form of song) to celebrate his short life:

Then said a teacher, speak to us of
Teaching. And he said:
No man can reveal to you aught but
that which already lies half asleep in the
dawning of your knowledge.
The teacher who walks in the shadow of
Temple, among his students, gives not of his
Wisdom but rather of his faith and lovingness.
If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter

the house of his wisdom, but rather
leads you to the threshold of your own mind.
(K. Gibran, *The Prophet*)

Since there are no experts in either philosophy (the love of wisdom) or religion, and my areas of ignorance are vast, the most important contribution I can share with students is not my knowledge, which is limited, but my love of philosophy (my love of wisdom, and wisdom is a pilgrimage rather than a possession). It is this love that separates the scientist from the lab technician, the historian from the scribe who merely records events, the creative artist from the reproducer, and the philosopher from the reductive skeptic or cynic. Even if a student makes an "A" in a class but leaves it without at least some passion for the search that is philosophy, then both I and the class have been a failure for that student.

There is no greater joy or sacred honor for a teacher than to encounter a student who shares your passion. In the best sense of the words, Kevin Campbell was a lover of wisdom. In his presence the classroom became a temple of learning, and those of us privileged to share in this pilgrimage and temple with him are forever blessed. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel writes:

There is one thing I have discovered since my parents' deaths: what we call being a survivor is in reality to live not so much after as under; those we have never ceased to love with whatever is best in us become something like a living, invisible arch which we sense and even brush against, on the strength of which we are able to go on even as our powers diminish...toward that moment when everything will be caught up in love. (*The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, p.84)

Thank you, Kevin Campbell¹ for your joy in learning the quiet dignity of your search for knowledge, and the sacred honor of sharing in your love of wisdom. Even though I continue after you in this world, for the rest of my teaching career as I enter the classroom, I shall be blessed to know that I stand under the dome of a temple you have helped to create, a temple which sings of the joy, wonder, laughter, and love of learning.

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BERT RANDALL

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