

Kenneth L. Brown Papers – Memorial for Fred Tackitt

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The sixth of seven brothers, Freddie Lee Tackitt was born on February fifteenth following Pearl Harbor. A few months later his parents, Robert and Nellie Tackitt moved to this area. Fred spent his entire boyhood near this community and in 1960 graduated from this school. In July 1960, he joined the United States Navy, and after twenty-six months in the service, spent two more years in Bethesda, Maryland, near Washington D.C. In 1964 he came home and enrolled at Manchester College. Since that time, he has been a student and, in many ways, a teacher to us all. A writer since his early adolescence, Fred has distinguished himself in literary and dramatic activities on campus. But even more, he has distinguished himself as a compassionate friend to men.

Seldom are kindness and humility coupled with talent and sensitivity. In Fred, such was the case. Listen to these words from Micha:

With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Like Micah, Fred was suspicious of every kind of burnt offering . . . either in work or deed. But also like that prophet, he was passionately concerned with justice. He was kind – so very kind –

to all of us; and he was humble before man and the Mystery that is God. And that, my fellow sufferers, is what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God. I say with absolute honesty: if ever I have met a Christian, by my understanding of that word, it was my meeting and subsequent love for Fred Tackitt. He would have been wary of the term, and rightfully so. How the world needs such honest suspicion!

But praise of one who gave honor to humility would not be his desire. We must speak now of death and the Christian hope.

Death is not an easy challenge; it threatens everything we are and everything we have been. If we, as persons, are cut off totally by death – if that is the only consequence of our living – then this world, for us at least, is ridiculous and absurd. And every breath we breathe, everything we undertake, all for which we laugh and cry, is meaningless.

Fred, in his body and in his soul, lived in constant awareness of this challenger, death. For years, with ever increasing sensitivity and insight, he has battled this opponent who would impose meaninglessness upon our species. And, in living so close to death, as he did, Fred has known despair. He has understood the meaning of the cross: of man in agony and travail, because he himself has been tortured . . . much.

And so he became a quester, seeking for the answer which would answer death. Fred deserted the little gods that most of us worship because they are helpless when challenged by death. Wealth, security, intellectuality, all our gods – he forsook them because they are silent precisely at such moments as this one. Those who tend to cynicism, skepticism, materialism, capitalism, nationalism: I ask you, what have they to say to this moment? Recall the verse in

Judges: "Go and cry unto the gods you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."

Hence, Fred moved on in his quest. He knew death and he sought resurrection. In his later writing, as in his life, it is clear that he found it. Despair was coupled with a deeper joy, which is a much greater thing than mere happiness. And his sense of death found an enduring opponent in a life of love that brought him to a new love of life.

He was a seeker. He found freedom and joy. And he spoke them to us in many ways.

Now, the question haunts us: is this life, in all its marvelous and tender uniqueness . . . is it ended? The depth of the Christian Faith is that it speaks to this most difficult of questions, whereas other remain silent. Let us speak as we can, from faith.

The earth and all that grows, animals and the whole of nature – everything moves toward the height of creation – the thinking, loving person. Nothing is more marvelous, more complex, more valuable than personality. The message from deep within the hearts of men in all generations, and written in the Bible, is this: a miracle so great as this personality can only be explained as coming from Person: human consciousness comes from divine consciousness: from God. God, the Creator, moves all his created world toward his own nature. Everything sweeps toward personality, the peak and direction of creation. I ask then, if all the universe moves toward achievement of personhood, if that is the end to which everything is directed (the supreme value) then would God, in his love for personality, allow so great a consciousness as this one we have known to end? Suddenly and finally and totally? It makes no sense to say, "yes."

The Christian hope, then, is found in the meaning of the resurrection. Fred lives. People who love, overcome death, because in their loving, they become one with God who is love. In loving we conquer death.

Fear then, not this or any other moment of death. What should be most feared is the emptiness of living without loving. Fear that your own life will not be lived for justice, kindness, and humility . . . fear most that your lives will not reflect that life in whose memory I speak. You see, my friends, we should fear not that this breathing of ours will never come to an end, but that our life will never have had its beginning in love.

And so, for Fred Tackitt, we have no fear. May God, who is love, sustain us all.

Amen

Let us pray.

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up his countenance unto you and give you peace, now and forever more.

Amen