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TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR ROBERT P. LAWRY

REFLECTIONS IN HONOR OF BOB LAWRY

William E. Deal[†]

Soon after joining the Case Western Reserve University faculty in 1989 as a member of the Religious Studies department, it was suggested that I meet Bob Lawry. I was told that we shared an interest in ethics, and that Bob was *the ethics guy* on campus. As it turned out, not only was Bob *the ethics guy*, he was an *ethical guy*—kind, caring, concerned, considerate, compassionate—with a deep interest in the life of the mind and in ethical reasoning. Since that first meeting, I have always thought of Bob as my mentor in understanding the role that ethics plays—and should play—on a university campus. More than this, I consider Bob my role model for the kind of professor worth aspiring to be. Let me elaborate.

Over the years, Bob has endeavored to engage our campus in discussions of, and reflection on, ethical issues that are central to the work and well being of a major research university. He understands the need for all members of the university community—students, faculty, staff, and administrators—to consider the ramifications of their actions and attitudes. This concern spans the gamut of moral responsibility—including academic integrity, research ethics, and moral leadership.

Though Bob has been involved with professional ethics on campus and beyond, he is motivated by concerns that run much deeper. Bob cares deeply about his students. This passion derives not only from

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his sense of responsibility as a teacher, but from his regard for his students as human beings. In short, Bob sees the big picture. It is one thing to teach lawyers to be ethical, but it is an altogether greater challenge to inspire students to reflect on the wider ramifications of their actions and the impact that these behaviors have on larger communities. Bob helps his students understand why acting ethically is important at all levels of their lives—professionally, personally, socially, politically, and as friends, citizens, family members, and parents.

Like most ethicists, I often think about what makes some people act out of narrow self interest and others out of genuine empathy for the common good. The answer is undoubtedly complex, touching upon both nature and nurture. I cannot claim to have any insight into the biological Bob, but I do know something of the cultural Bob. His passions for Shakespeare, poetry, and music are grounded both in his rich appreciation for the aesthetic and in his own creative impulses. Bob is both a poet and playwright. His engagement with literature and the arts enriches his ethical perspectives. Bob utilizes insights into the human condition derived from his own reading and writing to make connections to ethical dilemmas. In so doing, he imparts to his students the important lesson that moral courage and moral failings are often intertwined.

Bob's life at the university has been punctuated by the service he has provided to his colleagues across schools and disciplines. I have never seen Bob turn down a call to contribute, either in spirit or substance, to the university. I have had the privilege to work with Bob on a number of projects, some ultimately successful and some not. But the common denominator in all of these endeavors is the seriousness of purpose with which Bob approached problems and issues, and the respect with which he treated competing ideas, and the grace with which he dealt with conflicts and potentially divisive perspectives. These are skills and sensibilities well worth emulating in our often contentious cultural discourse.

I recently had the good fortune to accompany Bob to the annual conference of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE), in which he has long served as a prominent leader. I knew that attending with Bob would enable me to talk with others interested in the role of ethics on college and university campuses. This conference turned out to be one of the best professional experiences of my career. Thanks to Bob, I had the opportunity to interact with and learn from some of the world's most respected ethicists. But more than this, I was deeply moved by the consideration that was afforded

me because of my connection to Bob. At the conference, Bob was warmly greeted by many participants. What was interesting to me, though, was that I was also treated with warmth and respect because I came, in effect, recommended by Bob. The great esteem which Bob enjoys—both as a friend and colleague—was palpable in the welcome extended to both Bob and myself.

There is not sufficient space here to recite the impressive list of lectures, symposia, seminars, faculty development, and other ethics-related programming that Bob has directly sponsored in his years at Case Western Reserve University. Such accomplishments attest to the depth of Bob's commitment to the intellectual and ethical life of this campus. I have never asked him, but I would be surprised if Bob considers the life of the mind and the life of ethical reflection to be two different matters. In my experience, Bob holds a life worth living as one rooted in the examination of moral considerations and in ethical reflection.

We are still some distance away from building a university ethics center widely embraced by the campus community. Such a project is a dream long dear to Bob. As we move forward and attempt to turn this dream into reality, we cannot do any better than to follow Bob Lawry's example, for he is a person dedicated to the idea of building a campus-wide ethics center that truly represents the interests of all and is inclusive in its vision.

I know that Bob is looking forward to retirement. He has spoken with me about several projects—both creative and scholarly—that he plans to pursue in retirement, projects put on hold until now. I am certain that Bob will engage in these projects with passion and conviction, and I look forward to enjoying and benefiting from the fruits of these labors of love.

So, a toast to Bob Lawry, Renaissance man. It has been a privilege to work with you and to learn from you. All best wishes in your future endeavors. And please don't be a stranger. Your voice and your vision are still needed here.

