TRIBUTE TO DOUG HOEKSTRA

IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO KNOW AND LOVE AND RESPECT DOUG HOEKSTRA.

SOON AFTER I HAD ARRIVED AT JAMES MADISON COLLEGE DURING THE FALL OF 1974, I HEARD DOUG SAY, "THE HEART OF OUR ENTERPRISE IN THE CLASSROOM IS DISCIPLINED ANALYSIS--MAKING STUDENTS MORE CAREFUL AND CRITICAL THINKERS." I NEVER FORGOT THAT APT PHRASE AND GUIDING LIGHT.

IN THE EARLY 1980S, THE M. S. U. FOOTBALL TEAM ONCE AGAIN GRASPED DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY, LOSING TO THE IOWA HAWKEYES IN THE LAST SECONDS OF THE GAME. TWO DAYS LATER, I WORE MY IOWA SWEATSHIRT TO MADISON. "YOU'RE FROM IOWA?" DOUG ASKED ME IN THE HALL. "YES, I AM," I REPLIED. "I WAS BORN THERE, I WAS RAISED THERE, AND I WANT TO BE BURIED THERE." "IF YOU KEEP WEARING THAT SWEATSHIRT," DOUG SAID, "YOU'LL GET YOUR WISH SOONER THAN YOU THINK."

WHEN DIXIE PLATT RETIRED IN 1996, SHE WAS GIVEN A BANQUET TO HONOR HER. DOUG HOEKSTRA GAVE THE NEXT-TO-LAST TALK THAT NIGHT. THE SPEECH WAS THE FINEST AFFIRMATION OF A FELLOW HUMAN BEING THAT I HAVE HEARD IN MY LIFE. WIT AND MORAL SERIOUSNESS WALKED HAND IN HAND IN THAT LOVING TRIBUTE.

ON MARCH 27 THIS YEAR, DOUG WROTE ME A NOTE IN THAT WONDERFUL HANDWRITING OF HIS. I HAD ASKED FOR A COPY OF HIS REMARKS AT THE DINNER HONORING JACK PAYNTER. "FRANKLY, I DON'T RECALL WITH MUCH PRECISION <u>WHAT</u> I SAID. . . <u>AND</u> MY 'NOTES' ARE ATTACHED. I WROTE THEM AT THE TABLE WHILE LISTENING TO OTHERS." THE ATTACHMENT WAS THIS PINK PARKING TICKET, WITH FIVE NOUNS, POINT A AT THE BOTTOM AND POINT B AT THE TOP, AND BRACKETS, SLASH MARKS, AND UNDERLINING EVERYWHERE. (SEE APPENDIX.)

WHATEVER THE DECADE, WHATEVER THE OCCASION, DOUG HOEKSTRA WAS SPECIAL.

IN HIS FAMILY LIFE, HE WAS A KIND, GENTLE, AND LOVING HUSBAND, A VERY CARING FATHER, A BELOVED SON, BROTHER, AND UNCLE. IN HIS PROFESSIONAL LIFE, HE WAS A BRILLIANT TEACHER, AN ENGAGING SCHOLAR WHO FOUND HIS NICHE, A FIERCELY DEVOTED CITIZEN OF MADISON COLLEGE, AND A COMMITTED PUBLIC SERVANT IN A LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY. HE WAS A REMARKABLE WIT AND CONVERSATIONALIST. HE WAS A CONSERVATIVE, TRYING TO CONSERVE THE BEST OF THE PAST. HE WAS AN OLD-FASHIONED

GENTLEMAN, A PILGRIM ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH, AND A DEAR, DEAR FRIEND--IN THE COLLEGE, IN OUR CHURCH, AND IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY.

HIS SUDDEN DEATH IS ALMOST UNBEARABLE. YOU KNOW, ELLEN, DAVID, ELISABETH, AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY, THAT DOUG WAS DEEPLY LOVED ("I JUST LOVED THAT GUY!" ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES SAID AFTER HEARING THE NEWS), AND YOU KNOW THAT WE EXTEND OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES TO YOU IN YOUR SADNESS AND SORROW.

TIME WILL REMIND US OF WHAT WE HAVE LOST AND WHAT WE CAN HOLD ONTO. DEATH MAY ROB US OF A PHYSICAL PRESENCE, BUT IT DOES NOT END A RELATIONSHIP.

NOW LET ME SPEAK BRIEFLY ABOUT DOUG'S TEACHING, RHETORIC AND WIT, AND LIFE AS A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH.

DOUG WAS A MASTER TEACHER.

HIS LOVE WAS POLITICS. FROM 1970 ON, "HE INFUSED THE STUDY OF AMERICAN POLITICS, THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION, AND ESPECIALLY THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY INTO THE MADISON CURRICULUM, AND HE DID THAT IN A MARVELOUS WAY." IN HIS OWN WORDS, HE WAS AN "EXPERT ON PRESIDENTIAL STATESMANSHIP, THE WAYS THAT PRESIDENTS' BELIEFS AND VALUES AFFECT POLICY DECISIONS, AND CHANGING MODELS OF THE PRESIDENCY." HIS SCHOLARSHIP IN PARTICULAR STRESSED THE ROLE OF CHARACTER IN DECISION-MAKING. HIS MOST RECENT RESEARCH, AN ESSAY ON "FORD IN TIME," WHICH RAN TO 131 PAGES, AND "THE NON-RHETORICAL PRESIDENCY," WHICH INCLUDED A 137-WORD SENTENCE, FOCUSED ON THE PRESIDENT "WHOSE FOOTBALL LOCKER [DOUG] USED IN HIGH SCHOOL." ABRAHAM LINCOLN, ABOVE ALL, WAS DEAR TO DOUG'S HEART. AND PROF. HOEKSTRA WAS INTERESTED IN THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF POLITICS--ESPECIALLY THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY AND THE CONGRESS, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, THE MEDIA, AND OTHER INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC POLICY MAKING.

CHARACTER COUNTS, HOEKSTRA TAUGHT, AND HIS CHARACTER WAS EXEMPLARY. A PHI BETA KAPPA, HE POSSESSED A KEEN MIND--CLEAR, SHARP, QUICK, PENETRATING, AND INTELLECTUALLY ALERT. HE HAD HIGH STANDARDS--FOR HIMSELF, FOR HIS STUDENTS, FOR THE COLLEGE, FOR THE COUNTRY. HE DIDN'T CUT CORNERS, AS FACULTY SECRETARIES KNEW. HE WAS A MAN OF GREAT INTEGRITY, TRYING TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE COMPLEXITY AND AMBIGUITY OF LIFE AS HE SAW IT. IN HIS COURSES, HE EXPOSED THE TENSIONS BETWEEN LIBERTY AND EQUALITY, PRIVATE POWERS AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST, CHANGING DEVELOPMENTS IN POLITICS AND THE ENDURING

INSTITUTIONS UNDERLYING THOSE CHANGES. IN CHARACTER, HE WAS TOUGH-MINDED AND TENDER-HEARTED, PROMOTING BOTH LIBERAL AND PRACTICAL EDUCATION, FINDING A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN STUDENTS' CYNICISM AND THEIR IDEALISM.

DOUG HOEKSTRA WAS CHALLENGING AND DEMANDING. I DON'T KNOW HOW HE FELT WHEN STUDENTS CALLED HIM DOUGIE FRESH OR BATMAN. SEVERAL HAD CRUSHES ON HIM. OTHERS SAID HE WAS THE RIGHT PERSON TEACHING THE COURSE ON THE PRESIDENCY BECAUSE HE LOOKED SO PRESIDENTIAL. HE DID EARN BOTH THE RESPECT AND AFFECTION OF STUDENTS. "I DON'T KNOW HOW HE DID IT," ONE STUDENT SAID, "BUT HE MADE [ME] LOOK FORWARD TO MY FIRST CLASS OF THE DAY ON MONDAY MORNINGS. HE HAD A WAY OF MAKING US ALL FEEL WELCOME AND UNAFRAID TO SHARE OUR OPINIONS AND QUESTIONS. I ENJOYED HIS CLASS BECAUSE I DIDN'T FEEL I WAS BEING FORCED TO STUDY, BUT RATHER I WAS BEING WELCOMED TO LEARN." ANOTHER STUDENT SAID PROF. HOEKSTRA TAUGHT HIM THAT "POLITICAL THEORY IS NOT JUST IN BOOKS. NOT EVERY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY MAJOR WANTS TO KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT POLITICS, BUT [PROF. HOEKSTRA] ENCOURAGED STUDENTS TO LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING" IN THE POLITICAL WORLD. A THIRD STUDENT WROTE: "ONE OF MY FAVORITE ASPECTS OF HIS PERSONALITY WAS HOW EASY IT WAS TO DISAGREE WITH HIM. I DISAGREED WITH HIM ON SO MANY POLITICAL ISSUES THAT I HAVE LOST COUNT, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY I COULD ALWAYS COUNT ON HIM TO LISTEN TO MY CONCERNS, FIND ADVICE, AND SHARE A GOOD LAUGH." "THROUGH HIS LESSONS AND HIS EXAMPLE, HE TAUGHT ME AND OTHERS THAT CHARACTER STILL MATTERS IN POLITICS," ADDED A FOURTH STUDENT. AIDED BY HIS WIFE, ELLEN, HE WAS ABLE TO HELP STUDENTS GET INVOLVED IN MICHIGAN POLITICS.

DOUG HOEKSTRA <u>WAS</u> A MORAL FORCE IN THE COLLEGE--ONE OF THE CREATORS OF ITS EXCELLENCE. "HE HAD THE VIRTUES OF A GOOD SOUL."

WHEN I TALKED TO MY COLLEAGUES ABOUT DOUG HOEKSTRA, WHAT THEY SAID THEY WOULD MISS MOST OF ALL WAS HIS INTELLECTUAL VITALITY. THEN THEY TALKED ABOUT HIS VOICE. "HE HAD A BEAUTIFUL SPEAKING VOICE," ONE SAID, "BUT IT WAS NOT JUST THE TIMBER OF HIS VOICE. HE WAS THE MOST ELOQUENT OF US, A REAL ORATOR, SOUNDING UNREHEARSED YET AS IF EVERY WORD WERE IN ITS PLACE. HE COMMANDED ATTENTION WITH WHAT HE SAID." HE SAID WHAT HE HAD TO SAY, THEN SHUT UP. HE WAS A PRINCIPLED AND FORCEFUL DISSENTER. HE DIDN'T LIKE MUSHY THINKING,

SPEAKING, OR WRITING. THE SYLLABUS OF HIS SENIOR SEMINAR INCLUDED SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS ON PUBLIC SPEAKING. RHETORIC, AFTER ALL, WAS ONE OF THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS.

AT THE SAME TIME, COLLEAGUES WERE ALWAYS IMPRESSED BY DOUG'S WIT, ESPECIALLY IN FACULTY MEETINGS. JUST WHEN WE WOULD TIE OURSELVES IN KNOTS, VISITING AND REVISITING THE SAME ISSUE FOR THE FIFTH TIME IN THREE YEARS, DOUG COULD DEFUSE THE SITUATION WITH SOME POINTED REMARK. I DID NOT HAVE THE TIME OR DESIRE TO GO THROUGH MINUTES OF FACULTY MEETINGS FOR EXAMPLES, BUT DURING THE WEEKEND AFTER A FACULTY MEETING, DOUG WOULD E-MAIL A COLLEAGUE, SUGGESTING WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO RECOVER: "WELL, THAT WAS A ONE-MARTINI MEETING, WASN'T IT? OR A FOUR-MARTINI FACULTY MEETING?" IN HIS ASSIGNMENT ON WATCHING NATIONAL T. V., HE REFUSED TO SENTENCE ANYONE TO A WEEK OF DAILY WATCHING LARRY KING. HE GAVE THE SAME ADVICE ALL THE TIME TO STUDENTS WHO COMPLAINED ABOUT THE INTENSITY OF SOME MADISON PROFS: "TAKE TWO LINDAHL'S AND SEE ME IN THE MORNING." HE REMEMBERED THE ACRONYM ASSIGNED TO THE AIRPORT AT SIOUX CITY, IOWA: SUX. "THIS IS OBVIOUSLY EITHER HOSTILITY [BY THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION] OR TRUTH IN ADVERTISING." AND HE COULD BE CRITICAL OF HIMSELF: "THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP IN SAVING THE COLLEGE," HE SAID JACK PAYNTER TOLD HIM IN 1981, "PARTICULARLY SINCE IN THE LAST CRISIS YOU CHOSE TO BE SO INACTIVE."

WITTY, KEEN, BITING, THIS HUMOR WAS NEVER CRUEL. AT ROASTS, IT WAS BARBED BUT NOT BARBARIC, POINTED BUT NOT PAINFUL, AND AFFECTIONATE NOT OFFENSIVE. IT GREW OUT OF THE WAY DOUG LOOKED AT LIFE. I LIKED THE WAY HE COMBINED MORAL SERIOUSNESS AND ENGAGING WIT.

BEHIND THAT ARTICULATE RHETORIC AND PENETRATING WIT LAY A GENUINE PUBLIC-SPIRITEDNESS: A FUNDAMENTAL CONCERN ABOUT, CARE FOR, AND FIERCE DEVOTION TO THE COLLEGE. HE CARRIED THAT SENSE OF PUBLIC SERVICE INTO HIS LIFE AT OUR CHURCH. COMING FROM A REFORMED TRADITION, MARRYING A LUTHERAN, AND GOING TO EDGEWOOD UNITED CHURCH, HE HAD, HIS BROTHER TELLS ME, BEEN A PILGRIM ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH. DOUG AND ELLEN JOINED OUR CHURCH IN 1992, IN PART, BECAUSE THEIR SON, DAVID, WANTED TO RECEIVE A BIBLE AND THEY WANTED TO GIVE HIM A BIBLICAL EDUCATION. NOW DAVID IS A REMARKABLE YOUNG MAN. I WAS VERY HAPPY TO WELCOME IN WORSHIP AND ADULT EDUCATION SOMEONE WITH WHOM I WORKED.

DOUG'S INTELLECTUAL VITALITY, GIFTS IN SPEAKING, QUICK WIT, AND PUBLIC-SPIRITEDNESS CAME WITH HIM. ON THE 25TH OF MARCH, 2003, FOR INSTANCE, HE GAVE AN OUTSTANDING TALK ON PEACE AND WAR AS PART OF A LENTEN SERIES. DOUG TOLD US THAT HE HAD INVITED BILL AND MARGARET GUNN TO SIT BESIDE HIM AT THE SUPPER BEFOREHAND. "I PREPARED WELL FOR THIS TALK," DOUG SAID AT THE BEGINNING. "I SAT BETWEEN TWO GUNNS." HE DISCUSSED VARIOUS RELIGIOUS POSITIONS ABOUT WAR. HE EVEN MADE A BET--DURING LENT--THAT THE MAJORITY OF PROTESTANTS IN THE U. S. SUPPORTED THE WAR IN IRAQ. HE ENDED BY SUPPORTING THE CHRISTIAN REALISM BASED ON REINHOLD NEIBUHR--A PHILOSOPHY THAT TOOK SERIOUSLY THE PRESENCE OF SIN, THE NEED FOR HUMILITY, AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT A COUNTRY COULD BE WRONG WHEN ITS PEOPLE FELT MOST RIGHTEOUS. DOUG ALSO PREDICTED THAT THE PROBLEMS AFTER THE INITIAL INVASION WOULD BE OVERWHELMING.

IN MARCH, 2001, DOUG AND ELLEN DID SOMETHING QUITE RARE IN OUR CHURCH: THEY GAVE A PRESENTATION TOGETHER. "DOES PUBLIC RELIGION IN THE U. S. CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMON GOOD?" DOUG TALKED ABOUT THE FOUNDERS, ELLEN ABOUT CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES AND SOCIAL GROUPS. THE DIFFERENCES WERE FASCINATING. WHATEVER THE OCCASION --THESE LENTEN SERIES, AN EVENING SERIES ON KING DAVID, A COURSE ON BIOGRAPHY, A CLASS ON PARKER PALMER'S BOOK, THE ACTIVE LIFE AND CONTEMPLATION, ANOTHER ON CHRISTIAN WRITERS, WHENEVER THE HOEKSTRAS APPEARED, THEY RAISED THE LEVEL OF DISCOURSE, ASKED PENETRATING QUESTIONS, AND MADE US THINK.

AT SCHOOL MEETINGS, THEY WERE ALWAYS TOGETHER. AT CHURCH, DOUG GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED CHURCH WORLD SERVICE; ELLEN WALKED FOR CROP, WORKED ON HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, AND MADE MEALS FOR LOAVES AND FISHES. DAVID HAS ALSO WORKED FOR HABITAT AND WALKED FOR CROP. IN THE SPRING OF 2002, ELLEN AND ELISABETH JOINED 11 OTHERS FROM THIS CHURCH ON A WORK MISSION TRIP TO LOS FRESNOS, TEXAS, AND MATAMOROS, MEXICO. IN THE HEAT, THEY SHOVELED SAND AND GRAVEL AT THE GOOD SAMARITAN CENTER FOR REFUGEES. AT YOUTH SUNDAY SOON AFTER THEIR RETURN, ELISABETH GAVE A MARVELOUS REPORT OF THE TRIP TO THE CONGREGATION. IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE CAUSES THEY SUPPORTED, THE HOEKSTRAS HAVE GIVEN GENEROUSLY OF THEIR TIME AND TALENTS.

DOUG HOEKSTRA DID NOT WEAR HIS RELIGION ON HIS SLEEVE. ONCE

HE ASKED ME TO COME INTO HIS OFFICE. "CLOSE THE DOOR," HE SAID, AND I FELT LIKE A TRUANT SCHOOL BOY, WONDERING WHAT I HAD DONE WRONG. FOR TWO HOURS, WE DISCUSSED A RELIGIOUS ISSUE THAT WAS VEXING HIM. ON OTHER OCCASIONS, HE WAS MY SOUNDING BOARD AND FRIEND, WHO COULD ADMONISH WITHOUT HUMILIATING, CRITICIZE WITHOUT STINGING, AND DISAGREE WITHOUT LOSING CIVILITY. IN PUBLIC, IN THE CLASSROOM, HE EXPOSED HIS STUDENTS TO RELIGIOUS ISSUES AS THEY AFFECTED PUBLIC AFFAIRS. ON ONE OCCASION, HE ASSIGNED ROBERT BARTLETT'S ESSAY ABOUT TODAY'S STUDENTS, "SOULS WITHOUT LONGING." "IS THAT STUDENT YOU?" HE ASKED MEMBERS OF THE CLASS. VIGOROUS DISAGREEMENT FOLLOWED. "ARE AMERICANS RELIGIOUSLY SERIOUS? SERIOUSLY RELIGIOUS? RELIGIOUSLY TRIVIAL?" HE ASKED ON ANOTHER OCCASION. DOUG HOEKSTRA ASKED HARD QUESTIONS.

BUT HE ALSO PROVIDED POIGNANT ANSWERS. FIVE MONTHS AFTER 9/11, DOUG PARTICIPATED IN A PANEL DISCUSSION ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE TERRORIST ATTACKS. AT THE END OF THE PROGRAM, SOMEONE ASKED THE PANEL MEMBERS: "HOW HAS 9/11 CHANGED YOU? WHAT CHANGES DO YOU SEE IN THE AMERICAN PEOPLE?" DOUG GAVE THREE ANSWERS: (1) THE ATTACKS REINFORCED THE MACHIAVELLIAN TENDENCIES IN HIS OWN PERSONALITY. (2) THEY RENEWED HIS COMMITMENT TO HIS FAMILY. (3) AND, MOST IMPORTANT, THEY IMPRESSED UPON HIM THE CONTINGENCY OF LIFE.

"THOSE WHO ARE WISE," THE PROPHET, DANIEL, TELLS US, "SHALL SHINE LIKE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE SKY [FIRMAMENT], AND THOSE WHO LEAD MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS [SHALL SHINE] LIKE THE STARS FOREVER AND EVER." DOUG HOEKSTRA WAS WISE, LEADING MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HE WILL SHINE IN THE MADISON AND MICHIGAN FIRMAMENT FOREVER.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OKEMOS
OKEMOS, MICHIGAN

RON DORR
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