

TOM HOOYMAN

A colleague remembers Dr. Tom Hooyman

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"The glory of God is a human being fully alive." If Saint Irenaeus of Lyon was correct when he wrote these words in the second century, then to be in the presence of Tom Hooyman was nothing short of standing before the glory of God on fire.

In the Catholic tradition that animated Tom's life both personally and professionally, those in whom God's love blazes with an especial brilliance, are called saints. Tom Hooyman was what I would call "an everyday saint." In other words, he did ordinary things, such as teaching and simply being present to others, in truly extraordinary ways. Prestigious organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, came to recognize how, in his professional work, Tom regularly transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary. Most important to Tom, however, was the arena of everyday life. There he followed his unwavering conviction that he and his students, colleagues, friends, and family could, in the words of writer Annie Dillard, redeem the area of the world entrusted and allotted to each of us (See *For the Time Being*, 201). Tom's students who are among us today, or those present through the testimonials in the book of remembrance at the chapel entrance, can bear witness to how Tom transformed a three hour Friday afternoon classroom into an extraordinary event.

But for the moment please walk with Tom across the Regis campus--just as I did on the night before his fatal accident. Tom and I planned to have dinner together after the Chester Alter lecture. Long after the lecture Tom is still absorbed in conversation with yet one more person at Regis--in this case it is Steve Jacobs. There is no question that Tom is entirely present to Steve and, yes, Steve seems to love the interaction as much as Tom. I finally manage to wrestle Tom free. As we walk across campus virtually every person we pass knows Tom and

he knows each by name and communicates genuine care for each person--even Ron the janitor. (It turns out that he remembered each of their stories--even though his memory was "terrible" according to his wife Nancy--because he prayed the Ignatian Examen exercise every evening.)

When he turns to me at the restaurant, Tom is fully present to me in the moment. In his presence, I come to feel more alive and at home with myself. When we shift to discuss our Catholic Health Care Ethics course that we will team teach, Tom glows with passion as he tells me how he wants to help our students develop a deep sense of their own values and vocation. He bursts forth with creative and inspiring assignments to invite students into this journey. According to his students "He opened our eyes to an aspect of our profession that was human not textbook" and "I'm probably not going to remember what he taught us but how he taught us"--most especially how "he

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taught us to live."

What made Tom's death so shocking was precisely that he was so exceptionally alive--simply brimming with energy, enthusiasm, and vitality. What made his death so difficult to accept was that, as one of his students wrote "every moment with him was a blessing". Yet this same fact--along with listening to the people he touched--has helped me to move beyond his death. If his death seemed unexplainable and undeserved, so did the incredible gift of his presence. Remembering Tom's exuberantly joyful and yet calming spirit helps us to grieve his loss. Moreover, he showed us how to embrace the paschal mystery. Each day he was willing to die to a self alienated from others--yes he would get annoyed with people--through self-transcendence. Each day he passed over into a deep-

er communion with others even in their suffering. Each day he found new life in this communion. Indeed, as Nancy suggested Tom entered each day as if it were the first day of his new life because it was. He listened to others with all of his compassionate heart. According to his students, "he took our minds off the stress in our lives", "He made us laugh and think critically at one and the same time," and he was not afraid to take risks.

In the 1950 film Harvey (one of Tom's favorite films), the main character, Elwood P. Dowd played by Jimmie Stewart says:
"Years ago my mother used to say to me, she'd say, 'In this world, Elwood, you must be' - she always called me Elwood - 'In this world, Elwood, you must be oh so smart or' oh so pleasant. Well, for years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me,"

Well in Tom Hooyman, the two became one quite seamlessly. Perhaps this was because he was so energized by how his work touched

others. It is such a rare and precious thing to find someone who can hold together the qualities Tom did: an insightful intellect and prodigal kindness; a stimulating and yet calming presence; a sharp wit and a generous spirit; a challenging provocateur and someone who stubbornly looked for the good in others; an inclination to be mischievous and yet also deeply reverent; a willingness to go with the flow at times and yet to run a highly efficient meeting at others.

It may help you to know that during his early life, Tom lived in community with Catholic anarchists in a Catholic Worker house in St. Louis. (Indeed, if you want to understand and honor Tom spend a day at a local Catholic worker community). Somehow when he moved into the corporate world of healthcare and worked closely with the folks running

Catholic hospitals, he managed to hold onto his radical passion for the gospel from his Catholic Worker days. Tom was able to be at home in wildly diverse worlds. And when you were in Tom's presence, he made you feel like you were at home. And that is just how it feels to be with God--to be utterly at home with yourself and your neighbor. Can there be any doubt that Tom feels at home in whatever mystery lies beyond our mortality?

I want to close by returning to an image from Annie Dillard. She writes "The one transcendent God made the universe, and his presence kindles inside every speck of it" (*For the Time Being*, 137). She suggests that creation scattered sparks of the Divine everywhere. Dillard then presses her central question: How should we live for the time being? Her answer, at least in part, is that we must find ways to release these Divine sparks until they become a holy fire in us. Tom Hooyman found pure joy in releasing these sparks until they became a holy fire within him. Through Tom we have been touched by His fire. And it continues to glow in our hearts today.

Since Tom loved books and he especially loved stories, it seems fitting to end with the closing line of one my favorite novels. The Brother's Karamazov, although slightly modified to fit the occasion. That novel also ends right after a funeral mass attended by an unlikely communion of friends gathered by the hero of the story. **Hip Hip Hurray for Hooyman!**

Dr. Leininger shared these words at Dr. Hooyman's Mass of Resurrection this past Saturday, Dec. 6. Dr. Leininger and Dr. Hooyman, in addition to being good friends, were to co-teach Catholic Healthcare Ethics for the Spring 2009 semester.

vice. Sleeps Tight.

-DR. TOM HOOYMAN