
Pro Rege

Volume 8 | Number 4

Article 1

June 1980

Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Hulst, John B. (1980) "Editorial," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 8: No. 4, 1 - 3.

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Editorial

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From its beginning *Pro Rege* has functioned as a window through which readers could view the academic program and activity of Dordt College—a Christian institution of higher education. This issue of our faculty publication places Dordt's newly-formed Lectureship Institute before the window.

The Institute, which is in its first year, consists of two parts: the Lectureship Committee, which is the governing body of the Institute, and the Lectureship Center, which is composed of a number of chair occupants. While it is understood that the early years will

be formative years for the Institute, its purpose has been quite clearly stated:

1. To enhance the perspective and influence of Dordt College as a Christian institution of higher learning;
2. To serve and support the faculty and the student body of Dordt College in the development and transmission of serviceable insight;
3. To share with the constituents of Dordt College, other academic institutions, and the Christian community-at-large

the results of its research and scholarship;

4. To serve various Christian social organizations and institutions with the biblical insight necessary to their growth and development.

As indicated in an earlier issue of *Pro Rege* (December, 1979) the first appointment to the Center was that of McKendree Langley to the Abraham Kuyper Chair. A subsequent appointment placed Rockne McCarthy in the Visiting Lecturer's Chair. Since McCarthy teaches several courses in the Political Science Department, James Skillen was freed to work one-half time in the Center. Next year McCarthy and Skillen will be joint occupants of the Political Theory Chair. I have been appointed Director of the Center and occupant of the Christian Perspectives Chair.

Throughout the year the members of the Center have been engaged individually in research, writing, teaching, lecturing, and delivering public addresses. But the organizational statement of the Center also calls for cooperative, communal activity:

In seeking better to realize the purpose of the Institute which is to enhance the perspective and influence of Dordt College as a Christian institution of higher learning, the appointees shall function in designated chairs as cooperating members of the Center.

Early in the year the Center members discussed what the focus of their communal activity should be. Given their areas of expertise, their common basic perspective and their convictions concerning the needs of the Christian community in general and the Dordt community in particular, it was soon

decided to work toward the publication of a reader which would "explore the contemporary significance of principled pluralism for our society and for the contemporary world" (p. 32).

Work on the reader—a two-year project, at least—has involved the members of the Center in collecting, translating, evaluating, and editing for publication essays of social pluralists who sought a "third way"—a way other than an individualist tradition which assumes an atomist view of society or a collectivist tradition which advocates an organic view of society. The focus of the reader will be principled pluralism as a social philosophy, which rejects both the individualist and collectivist traditions and seeks "a normative order in which the entire creation, with its plurality of institutions, authorities and associations, is empowered by the Word of God for the good of humanity" (p. 11).

The three feature articles in this issue of *Pro Rege*, first presented as a series of lectures entitled "Sovereignty: The Contemporary Significance of Principled Pluralism," will not appear as such in the reader. They do, however, reflect the nature and direction of the communal study and discussion taking place in the Center, and out of which the reader will be developed.

As McCarthy makes clear in "Liberal Democracy and the Rights of Institutions," left-wing and right-wing Liberalism is rooted in an Enlightenment-atomistic social philosophy which fails to recognize and/or uphold the rights of social groups or institutions. This is the thesis of his essay, and also the thesis of the Center study. American Liberalism has defended the rights of individuals but failed to develop an adequate framework for recognizing and defending the rights of such institutions as the family, church, and school. In England the collectivist state

has threatened a loss of freedom for non-political institutions. John Neville Figgis (1866-1919), an Anglican cleric, early sensed the English situation but sought the solution in individualistic fashion by denying that the state has a positive role in society. However, states McCarthy, we must take political sovereignty seriously and "clarify the rightful sphere of authority, the unique structural identity and the special task of the many institutions, including the state, in society" (p. 11).

Langley, in "God and Liberty," as his subtitle indicates, concentrates on the "Catholic Quest for Democratic Pluralism from Lamennais to Vatican II." In describing that quest Langley takes the reader from Lamennais (1782-1854)—who sought to return society to God in a pluralistic framework—to Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum" (1891), to the Popular Republican Movement (1944), and to the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" of Vatican II (1965). He observes that, through isolated insights and accomplishments, there has been a Catholic contribution to the quest for pluralism. But the ever-present nature/grace dualism has kept Catholicism from fundamentally confronting the "secularization process with the Gospel of the Christ who is the Lord over all the creation" (p. 23).

Skillen's article, "God's Ordi-

nances: Calvinism in Revival," picks up on the closing assertion of Langley: "... we must examine the Kuyperian tradition to see if any clearer theory and practice of Christian pluralism is possible" (p. 23). And, as he describes the anti-Revolutionary thinking of Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), the sphere-sovereignty idea of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and the radically scriptural position of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), it becomes clear that such a theory and practice is being developed. But we must also listen when Skillen declares that "the question is not whether we must become disciples of Kuyper and his followers. The question is, will we take up the historical struggle of our day in the spirit of biblical revival?" (p. 32).

A positive answer to Skillen's inquiry involves us—the Center, Dordt College, the Christian academic community—in more than "scholarly professionalism" or "a propaganda ploy to give visibility to some largely unknown heroes" (p. 32). It means that "we quit trying to ride through history and begin trying to shape history in obedience to" God's ordinances (p. 32). We trust that the following articles reflect that normative, history-shaping concern.

J.B. Hulst