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## Towards Social Stewardship

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by Marv De Young

## **Towards Social Stewardship**

"Why do we not see a unified body of Christ rising against the obvious secularization which is the spirit moving across the face of our land?"

These are the words of attorney Rex Downie, Jr., of Beaver Falls, Penn. Downie, along with Dr. James Skillen, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass., lectured on a Christian response to justice and political reform. These men were the latest guest speakers in Dordt's Bicentennial Lecture Series.

Downie is presently engaged in a court case involving the allocation of public funds to all schools. He is working for equal distribution of monies for each student, regardless of whether that student attends a public or non-public school. "Secular

humanism has been defined by the U.S. Supreme Court as a religion," said Downie, stating the impetus for his action, "and it is a violation of my clients' constitutional rights" to be compelled to support "an established secular religion in the public schools which is in direct conflict with their own."

Dr. Skillen stated that in the present system our beliefs have "nothing to do with our defining of justice." In a lecture dealing with electoral reform Skillen termed the existing lawmaking framework as "useless, worthless nonsense," claiming that Congress acts solely as a "broker for competing interests." He went on to say that the system "assumes that all men adhere to the same public profession of faith which proclaims all men to be rational individuals."

As an alternative Skillen proposed a "proportional representation system that would represent people, as we define ourselves, rather than representing geographical districts."

In summing up their effort in the courts, Downie said, it is "primarily a call for public justice." He said we are "com-

manded by the Lord to seek justice," and we have a responsibility to "utilize that which God has given us to advance the Kingdom." In conclusion he stated we must "consider the very roots of our consumeristic life-style in order to be truly social stewards in this pioneering effort."

by Kevin Kelley

## Christianity and Latin America

Dr. Sydney H. Rooy, Professor of Church History at the Evangelical Faculty of Theology in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and teacher in the Seminary by Extension for church members and pastors, challenged Dordt students and faculty last February with several gripping lectures to present a relevant Christian witness in Latin America.

The present problems in Latin America, Dr. Rooy explained, find their origin to a large extent in what Roman Catholicism did between 1500 and 1800, and also in what Protestantism believed and practised during the Nineteenth Century. Spanish and Portuguese kings and soldiers, assisted by royal patronage, conquered, civilized, and "christianized" Latin America. The goal was the ideal of a corpus christianum and its implied feudalism. The 1810-1820 Revolutions resulted in the conflict between church and state. Roman Catholicism became divorced from the state, and the doors to Protestant evangelism opened up.

With the arrival of traders from North America and Northern Europe, many Protestant churches were transplanted into Latin America between 1850 and 1920. These foreign churches, eager to retain their original cohesiveness, functioned as "social islands" in a strange world. As late as 1910 the Edinburgh Conference excluded Latin America as a mission field. Only in 1915, it was decided at the Panama Mission Conference, organized by U.S.A. Protestantism, that Latin America must be evangelized. The Protestant mission churches and their

missionaries did not understand, however, the political, social, and economic conditions of Latin America. They preached a truncated gospel: "Know these things; be baptized, and live together." The mission churches became a-political "spiritual islands," retreats for the refuge of the masses, who expected Christ to return soon.

During the last several decades, many indigenous churches have arisen. These churches, often with pentecostal leanings, and at times tinged with spiritism, have caught the attention of the numerous socio-economically oppressed. These masses of poor people have discovered a measure of dignity in their church gatherings, where they can, through free participation, be fully human.

Dr. Rooy described the three main cross-ecclesiastical, sociological, and political forces, viz. (1) the "law and order people" who are supported by the Roman Catholic, ultra-conservative rich and culturally influential intelligentsia, and who are backed up by the 90-95% fundamentalist, pietistic Protestants who, in most instances, are also pre-millinnarian and dispensationalist; (2) young, radical dissidents, who look for liberation from a ghetto-life and from an oppressive and rigid establishment; (3) the "seeking church" which refuses to compromise or to revolutionize; wanting instead to reform and restructure life and culture in an indigenous and authentic manner.

Dr. Rooy warned against the belief