
Pro Rege

Volume 4 | Number 1

Article 2

September 1975

Proving our Academic Integrity

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Recommended Citation

Haan, B. J. (1975) "Proving our Academic Integrity," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 4: No. 1, 2 - 5.

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Convocation Address

by B. J. Haan
President



Rev. Haan received his Th.D. degree from Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prior to coming to Dordt in 1959 as its first College President, he served as pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center for many years.

Proving our Academic Integrity

Romans 13:14

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Again and again we are told and history apparently confirms the fact that only those private colleges which have a good purpose and live up to it will continue to exist. Thank God that Dordt not only has a well-defined purpose but has successfully withstood the attempts and pressures to alter and compromise that purpose. It is most gratifying to learn that some of the

Dordt supporters who for a brief period wondered a little about Dordt's religious integrity are even more convinced than ever that Dordt College stands unwavering in its basic commitment to the Reformed faith. Perhaps that is one reason why Dordt continues to exist as a strong private college. It is incumbent upon us now and in the future as faculty and students to demonstrate anew to God's people and the whole world the soundness and strength of Dordt's purpose. You can well imagine what it means for Dordt College that we could say so often to the Christian com-

munity, "Do you want to see what Dordt really is? Then look at our students, our products." By and large we are delighted indeed with the convictions, loyalties, dedication and life-style of those who have chosen to pursue their studies at this institution. We dare to say to young people everywhere, "Come with us, we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good things for us as His people."

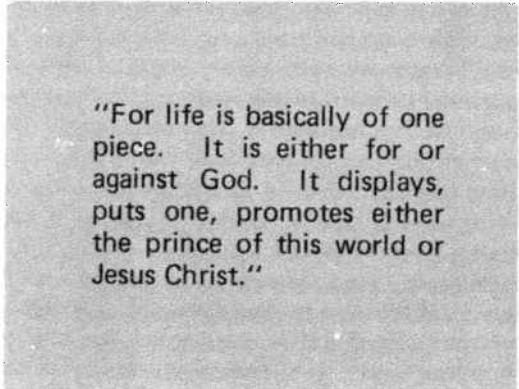
But things can quickly change. Our times are such that institutions can within a short period succumb to secular ideas and habits of life and lose their Christian identity and distinctiveness. It is easy too, to pay beautiful lip service to one's statement of purpose all the while going contrary in practice to it. Jesus warned us sternly about this. "Not everyone that says, 'Lord, Lord,' but he that doeth the will of my heavenly Father...." There are those who are quite concerned about Dordt when it comes to the life-style of some on campus. They want to make very certain that this does not become gradually the prevailing pattern. For these reasons it is good that we make this matter a topic for our convocation and subsequent study and discussion throughout the coming year. What life-style should characterize the Dordt community? What does our statement of purpose recommend and anticipate? What do we really want?

Paul's call to the church at Rome can serve us well in this discussion. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Romans 13:14.

To put on the Lord Jesus Christ means simply to become identified with Him, so that His manner of thought and action is clearly manifest in our lives. Rather than putting on the prince of darkness by living in revelling and drunkenness, in clambering and wantonness, in strife and envy, the believers at Rome are to put on Christ - instead of putting on darkness they are to put on the armour of light.

What does this suggest to us as we carry on our calling here at Dordt College? What kind of life-style is required?

Life at Dordt is rightly divided into two aspects: the academic and the non-academic. This is not to minimize the fact that Dordt exists primarily to carry out the academic task. As such Dordt sees its calling to prepare Christian young people, through their academic work, for leadership service within the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. It means that Dordt is mainly busy in the realm of thought and ideas, Christian scholarship.



"For life is basically of one piece. It is either for or against God. It displays, puts one, promotes either the prince of this world or Jesus Christ."

This is a deeply religious and, therefore, serious business. For we are not dealing with mere impersonal abstractions. Indeed not! Here, perhaps more than elsewhere, we are involved in the struggle between Christ and anti-Christ. Satan's major goal is to conquer men's minds. His hope is in establishing and making attractive the lie. Our concern should be, therefore, to expose the lie for what it is and what it destroys, and to search out truth with all its blessedness for life. Which is to say that we are to put on Jesus Christ, to turn on the light, to let God's glory shine in the realm of thought. Needless to say, such awareness of the power struggle going on in the world of study demands the highest loyalty to Christ and His Word, and the highest commitment to discernment and excellence in scholarship. If we fail in this our chief and most crucial responsibility, we are doomed to failure in all others.

Let Dordt College continue to lead the way in scholarship that is truly Chris-

tian in both name and deed.

But we want to take a special look at the other side of our life - the non-academic. This too is very important. It can be differentiated from but not separated from the academic endeavor. For life is basically of one piece. It is either for or against God. It displays, puts on, promotes either the prince of this world or Jesus Christ. The same issues and struggles are found in the non-academic which are faced in the academic. The form may differ but the essence is identical. The spirits to be tested are no different. In fact whom you really bow down to in the arena of ideas is revealed in the non-academic. The genuineness of Christian scholarship finds its authentication in the habits of life. It is possible to "love" a Christian philosophy without loving the Christ. That will become evident in one's life-style, in the non-academic. You have to watch yourself when it comes to the lusts of the flesh. What kind of battle, testing of the spirits is taking place in this area of life? Are we putting on Christ? How does Dordt College fare when tested on this score by fellow students and others? Again we raise the question, what are we doing and what ought to be done to gain and maintain a godly reputation in this vital area?

You would almost think that Paul was speaking specifically to a college student body in the 1970's when he penned these words. What is characteristic of most college life-styles? Precisely, the three modes of life which Paul warns against - intemperance adultery, and personal bitterness. I need not belabor the point. A quick glance at typical campus living reveals it all - drinking parties and dope clubs; pornographic paintings and magazines, free love, pre-marital sex, open-dormitories, bad movies, and many forms of discontent, rivalry, rancor and rebellion born of strife and envy. According to a recent Gallup poll among 57 colleges and universities, students indicated that their political views moved sharply to the left as they advanced from freshmen to senior, and that their religious beliefs decreased in importance.

With these came liberalization concerning attitudes toward sex, drugs, and alcohol. Satan rejoices in all this. He enjoys such recognition and service. But the price individuals pay for such devotion to licentiousness and libertinianism is tragically costly.

There is a far more beautiful life open to all of us. That is what Paul is saying. It is the life which I know practically everyone of us here at Dordt really wants. It's the kind which causes Jesus Christ to rejoice in. And yet not all of us are agreed on how to attain that quality of life at Dordt College. Mainly due, perhaps, because we are not in agreement on what exactly is the kind of life that pleases Christ. It is this situation which prompts me to speak on this matter and call for subsequent discussions throughout the school year.

This is not to suggest that we should come up with something radically different in life-style from what we now find at Dordt College. I am not assuming that things have to change drastically or that our life-style is in need of overhauling. We may come to the conclusion at the end of our study that the manner of life here is by no means off course basically. But then we will know why that is true. Our problem is that we do not have a well-articulated, well-defined, thought out application of our principles to our life-style as a Christian college community. Fact is, I know of hardly any Christian college that has engaged in such a program of study. In a real sense then we are flying by the seat of our pants in this extremely significant facet of our campus activity.

The result is that the unexamined customs, traditions and mores of the majority become the standards by which all are judged. This can be very unhealthy and ultimately prove to serve Satan's rather than Christ's kingdom. We know that men love to judge by traditions rather than God's laws. Jesus took the Pharisees to task for this. What happens is that then God's people engage in endless and fierce battles over tradition rather than

in struggling to know the will of the Lord for our times. This comes home to us particularly on a college campus where students represent a wide section of God's people with changing customs and mores. Customs and mores change more rapidly in some places than in others. One finds this out at Dordt College. Consequently you can expect some sharp conflicts on this score. Now our duty as a college is to give leadership to the Christian community also on matters of life-style, customs and mores. We must test all in the light of Scripture and we must study what God's Word recommends for our times. If certain customs stand in the way of promoting the kingdom, God's will, in our day, it is our duty to convince God's people of this.

This will require a great deal of understanding, wisdom and patience on our part. It will demand serious study, deep dependence upon the Holy Spirit's leading. For when you touch people's traditions you enter a highly prejudicial and emotional area of their life.

What is of paramount importance, therefore, as we engage in this noble and necessary effort, is to establish confidence and trust. God's people must be assured and reassured by our attitude and conduct that we do love the Christ, His Word, His people and that we want to promote the biblical, God-centered, God-glorifying life. They must see in us the spirit of holiness, a healthy, biblical holiness - not a sickly, pietistic idea of holiness, nor a view of holiness that gives way to fake freedom and the gratification of fleshly lusts.

Both extremes ought to be zealously guarded against. Some have advocated that Dordt be a college which allows no smoking, no drinking, early curfew, and a host of other stringent regulations. We know, as Reformed Christians, that this is not the answer. The issue is deeper and more complicated than that. Such an approach often blocks the way to a true understanding of the Christian life and calling. On the other hand, others call for more freedom. Freedom to come in when

they please and how they please, freedom to participate in the night club life with its senseless abuse of drinking, its foul music, and sensuous dancing; freedom to roam about according to one's impulse and mood; freedom to see, taste, and experiment with all of life in its wide range of offerings regardless of place, people, spirit or purpose; freedom to do all this as those who have found liberty in Christ to live the full life with joy. This too is wrong because it is unbiblical.

However, the intent of this message is not to solve all of the difficulties. It is to arouse to study, to leadership in this crucial sphere of activity, to become a campus that is consciously Christian also in its rules and regulations, is truly an example in godly living. We must know ourselves both as redeemed saints and redeemed sinners, as having a new man in Christ but also constantly under the powerful influence of the old man. We must know how to rejoice in our youth and yet to remember that for all these things God will bring us into judgment. There must be freedom but also restraint; happiness but also fear; familiarity with Christ but also reverence; forgiveness but also justice.

How shall we go about this project systematically and purposefully? The college administrators have spent considerable time discussing and planning how to implement this program. We hope to bring together various representatives of our college community soon to begin the study. It is my prayer that this matter will receive high priority in the coming year and the following. Our student publications could serve us well in giving impetus to the program and keeping us abreast of proceedings. All of us should do our part, become involved. The cause of Christ will profit greatly from it.

Let us walk becomingly, as in the day; not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.