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# Pro Rege

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Volume 28  
Number 2 *Arts Issue* 1999

Article 5

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December 1999

## Feeling the Subtext

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### Recommended Citation

Vanden Bosch, Mike (1999) "Feeling the Subtext," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 28: No. 2, 7.

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# Feeling the Subtext

Mike Vanden Bosch

As the preacher mumbled and moaned of Joseph's  
merciless brothers, I slumped out of my mother's reach  
half asleep between a real brother and a spiritual  
sister who, to stop the devil, preserve family honor,  
and stick my mind on the preaching, tried saving me  
from sleep with sly acupuncture, slowly stabbing  
her two-inch hatpin into my thigh to pry open  
my eyes and help me hear the sermon on Joseph's  
bloody coat.

I, to prove I was a man immune to pain, gave no  
hint her pin had reached the bone but sculptured  
my boy's face to look lamb-like before slaughter  
and mask my screaming silent prayer for mercy:

“Lord, bless me like Joseph, sunk in cistern,  
carted off by Ishmaelites to Egypt,  
even sold to Pharaoh a world away  
from this pew.”

(This poem has been bought by *The Banner*,  
to be published at some future date.)