"The Constitution of the People"

Calvert, Robert E.

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This book was the idea of Richard F. Rosser, then president of DePauw University, who asked me to plan a symposium here in the spring of 1987. My charge was to select speakers whose lectures might form a book that would honor both the Constitution and the Sesquicentennial of the university's founding, which happened to coincide with the Bicentennial of the Constitution. The actual theme of the symposium—the meaning of membership in a constitutional order requiring political unity and committed to cultural diversity—was inspired by DePauw's new president, Robert G. Bottoms, whose campaign to diversify the university in light of the changing character of American society seemed to unite the two commemorations. Prompted by this theme, the title of the book is taken from a phrase of Thomas Paine's, who argued that the constitution of the people, their character as citizens and as a society, is "antecedent" to the government formally established by a written constitution.

The essays by Robert N. Bellah, J. David Greenstone, Michael Novak, and Michael Walzer were originally delivered as lectures at the symposium. Greenstone's and Novak's, as those present at the event may recognize, are substantially revised versions of their lectures. The essays by Jean Bethke Elshtain and myself were written especially for this volume.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the university's continued and unstinting support of this project, both the moral and financial support given at every turn by President Bottoms, the administrative and clerical help provided by Associate Dean John White and his most cooperative staff, the technical assistance offered by the people in Media Services and in Academic Computing, and the resourceful work of the reference librarians in the Roy O. West Library. I am indebted as well to the Dana Foundation for supporting three student assistants, Douglas Driemeier, Donald Featherstone, and Vikash
Yadav, who as Dana Apprentices worked tirelessly and imaginatively with me on the editing of this volume and served as discerning critics in particular of my own essay. “Apprentices,” they taught me as much as they learned.

I also wish to thank Director Fred Woodward and his able staff at the University Press of Kansas, for their wise advice and editorial talents as I encountered the problems, many of them new to me, associated with putting together a book of this kind. Special thanks are due Wilson Carey McWilliams, for his willingness to write an introduction for the book and for his many helpful editorial suggestions. Finally, the inevitable frustrations and sheer work associated with such a project were reduced enormously by the essayists themselves, who to a person met deadlines cheerfully and otherwise responded positively to the requests, some of them no doubt unreasonable or whimsical, of their editor.

Not the least of the rewards of serving as editor of this volume has been my good fortune in coming to know personally its several contributors. This is true above all of David Greenstone, who died, after a long illness, shortly after completing the final revision of his essay. My collaboration with David was especially close and intense, and in the course of many long letters and conversations, by telephone and in person, I came to appreciate and feel improved by his intellectual acuity, his compassionate wit, and the depth of his humanity. This book is dedicated to his memory.

Robert E. Calvert
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