

The Crisis of Authority Part II

On May 9 of this year, I spoke to the Dolce Holy Name Society of Rochester on the theme—'A Mutual Examination of Conscience' for us who have been called to exercise authority in our community.



On that occasion I proposed the following theology of the role of the public servant:

"In every society there will always be a tension between freedom and authority. The Church is no exception to this tension. And this is a healthy situation. For tension is a sign of life.

"If there were no tension, society would be dead. For it would mean that men had been thoroughly oppressed to the point of silence and indifference and the initiative of man to strive for a better world would have been destroyed.

"Authority does not exist to enhance the position of leadership—but to develop a responsible use of freedom among all men. The word is derived from the Latin 'auctor' which means—one who develops, augments, enhances a person's potential.

"Not every species of tension in society is healthy, however, and today we see developing an unhealthy tension—a disruptive force. I attribute this unhealthy tension to many factors:

Guest Columnist

'The Lake Dreams of the Sky'

By Father Leo Lynch

The title words are taken from a Spanish philosopher who either lived in a land of lakes not yet polluted or remembered lakes of shining blue, sunlit waters—like the myriad eyes of the earth. Scuba-dive into a lake and find under its surface the rocks, the brown sand, the muddied clay, or whatever its basin may be or contain, and you begin to realize that the blue waters are but the reflection of the blueness of the sky above, and that lakes grow palid when the sun is obscured.

Our Spanish philosopher was a poet as well—the lake in its blueness dreams of the sky. Take a cupful or glass of water, and it is colorless; add to it the vast reflecting mirror of the lake and it becomes as blue as the sky above.

Editorial

Hollywood Ratings Can't Be Trusted Anymore!

Last month official Catholic and Protestant film-reviewing agencies told Hollywood they would no longer cooperate with the movie industry's rating system. They will no longer let their lists carry the symbols of the Motion Picture Association's estimation of the moral quality of its own films. They said the Hollywood code was a joke because its ratings were unreliable.

The religious agencies said: "The MPA ratings do not take into account sufficiently the total context of a given film . . . They place too much weight on overt visual sex and not enough on the implicit exploitation of sex and the overall impact of violence and other anti-social aspects of the film on the child." They took particular aim on the GP rating ("All ages admitted; parental guidance suggested") and stated: "This pivotal rating has become worse than useless because a parent having been once misled, has no way of knowing whether other 'GP' rated films contain similar material".

- "There is a philosophy of permissiveness which abounds today and creates this climate of disorder. There is a generation today of youth raised under theories associated with Dr. Spock. His ideas are by no means novel. They represent the revival of a heresy declared deadly years ago. It tells us that people are naturally good and, if left alone and untouched by social systems and agencies, will live good, emotionally sound and productive lives. This concept is diametrically opposed to the Catholic theology of original sin or whatever people wish to call it today.

"It is the story of the tension inherent in every man of which St. Paul spoke years ago when he said: "The things that I do, I should not, and the things that I should do, I fail to do".

"Choose any way you wish to describe it, the man of least humility is forced to admit its presence in his life. I am sure if I were a young man, I would not be at all adverse to a permissive philosophy which tells me that if I follow my instincts, I will be a good loving person—but that authority—whether parental, civil or ecclesiastical might very well stunt my growth or possibly corrupt me.

"Herein, we find some explanation of why young people can be so easily recruited to sympathize with those for whom the police are 'Fascist Pigs' and the F.B.I. are some kind of Storm Troopers.

- "There is the factor of adult hypocrisy

—and here we must deeply examine our consciences. All parents who have ever said "Do as I say not as I do" are responsible for the seeds of this situation. It has developed in all too many anti-authoritarian attitudes which have become persistent in their lives. "The older generation is evil"—our young are saying—and only we can be relied upon to act with pure motives. The news media have fostered this attitude by the publicity of scandal of lives of those who are expected to reflect the image of responsible leadership and which are ideally synonymous with virtue. Thank God, scandal is still newsworthy and has not become a 'ho-hum' occurrence.

- "There is, too, the climate of war—which surely has been a disruptive force in our society. There are some in authority who have suffered its presence and who are not convinced that a climate of peace will silence anti-authoritarian outbursts. I cite, for example, Dr. Holland—our United States Ambassador to Sweden who has suffered the insults of anti-Americans in his mission. He feels the radicals would soon hop on another band wagon to voice protest.

"I am inclined to agree with him. If the protestors whom I know personally are indicative of the majority of demonstrators, I must say I find them negative people who never achieved in the demands made on those who are called to be creative and constructive and who latch on to a 'down with this or that apostolate' to achieve a modicum of notoriety for which they seemingly desperately hunger."

Father Leo Lynch is pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

When we think of the Trinity it is well to think of such thoughts, because all we have and are, although different hued from the surroundings that affect us, whether it be wealth or poverty, race or color, all of it comes from God. Young or old, drunk or sober, high or low, palsied or steady; hair, in the long or short of it; sleeping in the Bowery or shackled up in a hippie commune—we should be reflecting back the glory of God.

The polluted lake cannot do so because it has a color of its own; the polluted man cannot do so because he has darkened his reflective qualities; he has taken on a color of his own and separated himself from the glory of God.

In speaking of the Trinity, because of our human limitations, we generally attribute one

quality to one or the other Person—to the Father, Son or Holy Spirit. If we were to do that in the imagery of the Spanish philosopher, we would say that God, the Father, made us; that God the Son, in redeeming us, gave us the reflecting qualities—the ability to reflect the magnificence of God; But the Holy Spirit gives us the true color of God. Through the action of the three Divine Persons; taken by the cupful or the handful, or as individuals, we have the color of God. The lakes may dream of the sky but never become part of it; we can dream of God and absorb some of God Himself. Taken in a vast panorama, we reflect the great beauty and magnificence of God; but even as an individual, we have the color or the grace of God. We are not dreamers of the sky, held inexorably to the earth; rather, dreamers of God, drawn inevitably into His eternal orbit and Being. We may have some who ask, even as they asked the ancient Hebrew: "Where is their God?" Behold, He is within us.

Yet can any parent who knows that GP means "parental guidance suggested" claim that he has shown proper concern and exerted adequate guidance unless he has viewed the picture himself before letting his younger children attend? Merely checking for the "GP" symbol in the newspaper advertisement is not using intelligent parental guidance.

Considering the wide range of ages in movie goers and the variety of their experience and moral standards it seems that the movie industry has a social responsibility to let the prospective viewers have a clear idea of what they will see before they put their two or three dollars under the boxoffice wicket. A better and clearer rating system which recognizes the average sensibilities of adults—to say nothing of respect for the sense of parental responsibility—is surely needed.

—Father Richard Tormey