

Lent - A Mirror without Distortion

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

A popularity poll of days and seasons on the liturgical calendar would undoubtedly rate Ash Wednesday and Lent on the bottom of the list. For it is the rare person who looks longingly to a period of self-discipline and to an inventory designed for self-revelation. We tend by nature to follow a path of least resistance in direct opposition to the straight and narrow route of discipline, and to foster a self-image that bears little resemblance to reality.

Today can be the beginning of a period of great grace only if we will to accept it as such. For the harsh and haunting truth that Lent proclaims is this — there is but one way that leads to a personal resurrection from our status quo and that is the path of mortification. The readings for the first Sunday of Lent remind us of this in terms which speak of the casting aside the old Adam who is the progenitor of inertia and selfishness, and putting on the new Adam who is Christ, the unique source of personal vitality.

The Church in recent years has in no way

Guest Columnist

The names Sorochin, Unwin and Tolstoy are impressive. Historians of note, they seem to say that empires and cultures collapsed because the family deteriorated. If I had a family of growing youngsters and a loving wife, I would worry about the effects contemporary society was having upon them. My concern for brothers and sisters in Christ causes me to worry. Today and yesterday we are all barraged by movie advertisements more salacious than movies and movies more salacious than advertisements. Books, magazines, newspapers tell you plainly, pornography is king, immensely popular, available and evidently highly saleable. Try to escape it if you can or want to.

Review your theater fare (it should be un-

minimized the importance of self-denial. God Himself could not dispense fallen humanity from it. The reduction of the long list of Lenten regulations for fasting and abstinence only reflects a hope and confidence that we have reached a certain degree of maturity which recognizes the priority of voluntary and internal discipline over scrupulous adherence and external conformity to a series of detailed imperatives.

Self-examination cannot be dispensed with either, if we are to reach even a small measure of what we are tempted to think we are. The diocesan Lenten program this year invites us to examine ourselves in terms of our alienation from God and fellowman, and to seek reconciliation. The philosophy of the times stresses personal independence and in its wake we seem to have lost an awareness of our need to be reconciled to God and to our brothers. It has, therefore, become fashionable to regard sin as a myth — a guilt feeling developed in the culture of puritanism.

"If we say, 'We are free of the guilt of sin,'

we deceive ourselves; the truth is not to be found in us.

But if we acknowledge our sins,

he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins

and cleanse us from every wrong.

If we say, 'We have never sinned,'

We make him a liar

And his words find no place in us."

1 John 1:8

The new Ash Wednesday program recommended by our Liturgical Commission with my wholehearted approval is designed to be a grace for all of us and especially for those who need to be forcefully reminded that Lent is much more than a fleeting ritual of one day in the year. I still marvel at the cult of ashes which seems to be interpreted by many as a special sign of predestination. Witness the crowded church this day to be followed by the faithful remnant who persevere through Easter. I have recommended that the ashes be distributed within a service that stresses the theme of Lenten conversion and the need for constant renewal in the Christian life.

May this Lent be like a plain mirror that helps us to see the reality of ourselves — without distortion. The blind man in the Gospel uttered the perfect Lenten prayer, "Lord, that I may see."

By Father Anthony Calimeri

Aspirin or Heroin

fair) of the past few years. You will see that pornography is on the increase along with drug use, divorce, adultery, suicide, rape, homosexuality, abortion. Are these the products of a sick society or are these products making society sick? Does it really matter which? Fire can destroy if started by a sinner or a saint, just as illicit sex can destroy even if you call it "communication."

In this great land of freedom, we have missed the point that freedom carries with it consequences — something dire. Many feel that pornography provides just the sort of vicarious kick that will keep things in control. But the increases in VD, illegitimacy, rapes, adultery seem to say you don't settle for pictures when you can get the real thing. The mirage of pornography isn't going to make you less thirsty, and if you dip people in dung, they are not going to smell like roses.

People interested in the family structure,

thinking people should begin to ask themselves, "What possible good can come of advertising perversions, removing all dignity from sex, moving the bedroom into the living room?" For the people of pornography and associated sciences it means a lot of money. Ah, there is the rub. In days gone by, theater managers have advertised the fact that family movies barely kept them in business, but sexy movies have devoted clientele. "What choice do we have, we have to make a living." If your local druggist isn't quite making it on the sale of aspirin — the answer is obvious, let him sell heroin.

If you still read your Bible, some pretty plain things are said about pornography and its associated ills. Are we exaggerating when we say that youth and young adults are being scandalized out of their souls? If you still believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the Judgment Factory has to be turning out millstones as its most important product.

Editorial

Anti-Abortion Fight Needs Action Now

Although right to life groups across the state and nation sense a strong and growing grass-roots opposition to liberalized abortion, this danger and others related to it seem to be gaining ground in official circles.

As for those becoming increasingly vocal in condemning the New York State law, two Jewish groups have recently issued powerful statements.

The Rabbinical Alliance of America categorically condemned the New York State law. Another organization, the Rabbinical Council of the Syrian and Near Eastern Jewish Community in America also denounced the law as "legalized killing."

And on a strictly non-religious front, the National Observer, a secular newspaper, editorialized on Jan. 22 that "as we decide whether or when to permit abortions, we should remind the abortionist that, without this surgical action, a human being very probably would be born."

The editorial urged "consistency" in discussing three areas in which human life is devalued — the Vietnam War, capital punishment, and abortion.

In the face of such mounting disapprobation, however, pro-abortionists are pushing ahead, most ominously in a U.S. senator's bill for a national abortion law.

The next step in this denigration of the sanctity of human life is already in motion as more and more groups subtly bless the idea of mercy killing.

Those opposed must write early and often to their senators and representatives in the Congress and even to President Nixon who has indicated his personal dislike of liberalized abortion. This is a presidential election year and abortion has become a national issue; each voter must determine where all candidates stand on such vital issues.

Closer to home, a meeting of the state legislative Joint Senate-Assembly Committee on Health is holding a hearing on abortion March 8 in Albany. Members of the Rochester Right to Life Committee will attend and they urge any others who can attend the 10 a.m. hearing to do so and make their presence felt.

For those unable to make the trip to Albany, there is an alternative. Write to either Sen. Tarky Lombardi, head of the

Senate Health Committee, or Assemblyman Ginsberg, his Assembly counterpart. Both can be reached at the State Capitol.

Sen. James Donovan's bill to repeal the current law and restore the earlier law never reached the floor of the Legislature last year. It faces a sterner test this year as legislators are reluctant to make waves in an election year. Therefore write to your legislators to bring this bill to a vote.

Everyone can help. The state's bishops are on record as condemning abortion. Pastors can exhort their flock to take notice of the creeping terrors of mercy killing, sterilization and abortion.

On Page 16 of this issue, Father Albert Shamon begins a two-part series on forming of conscience. It is a necessity and as Father Shamon points out, it means fostering the habit of "making good choices."

We all must assiduously form our consciences on these issues before it is too late. More important, once we have done this, we cannot but follow the dictates of our consciences.

If one values human life beyond the comforts extolled by Madison Avenue, he must take an active part in opposing these degrading practices.