

**DAILY OFFICE WITNESS
SOPHISTICATION**

I was surprised when I heard that we were beginning to talk about Sophistication. I guess I was surprised because I have been concerned about Sophistication for a long time. So I started to brood last night about how my thinking has developed relative to this.

I remember first wondering about Sophistication in high school. My image of someone who was sophisticated was that he had to have traveled around the world, or at least had to have lived in some other country. This idea collapsed for me when, in college, I started to meet people who had traveled extensively and had even lived for some time in other countries; and they were just not what you would call sophisticated. Besides meeting people who were well traveled and were not sophisticated, I was confronted by those who had traveled hardly at all, but were definitely sophisticated. Take Abraham Lincoln for instance, he traveled only from Illinois to Washington. What about Jesus? He never traveled more than two hundred from his birthplace; but he is, for me, the epitome of sophistication.

Then I thought that only famous people were those who could be sophisticated --like Malcolm X, J. F. K., Martin Luther King, Jr., or Churchill. But what about my grandfather, or Joe Lojeski, my "phase-four" next-door neighbor with whom I spent a lot of after-school time in his work shed, listening to great stories and getting advice, good advice. These men had not traveled much at all, were certainly not famous, but were sophisticated old gentlemen.

Then it must be that only those who had hardship in their lives could be sophisticated, because all the people I could think of that were sophisticated had had hardship. But then I thought of all those inmates that I was counseling in the prison -- they all had had hardships but were not the least bit sophisticated.

So I have come to the realization that Sophistication is pure decision. Someone has the possibility of being sophisticated only when he stands in place and has declared: "I'm responsible" -- for the whole thing.

This realization about Sophistication has given me a new screen through which to look at the symbols and images we have been holding before us lately, such as the 100-ton crane. It is not a question of receiving the crane and breaking your back, but standing tall -- three inches off the ground; not to just walk three inches off the ground, but to waltz with the burden! And not just to waltz, but in so doing, entice others to do the same! Or there is fastidiousness. This is not just nit-picking to be clean or look presentable, but a necessary part of acting out that responsibility inherent in Sophistication.

As I brooded at a more reflective level, I began to see some characteristics of Sophistication emerging. It is not about some abstract and elite style of living. Sophistication is about life itself -- the life you have now. Joe Lojeski said one day, "You can, if you decide, get to know as much about life from a square foot of your own garden as you can from traveling around the world." I was not quite sure what he was saying, but I am beginning to get the picture. Sophistication does not depend on the number of experiences you have but on the relationship you take to what is going on. That is where the idea of being responsible for the whole is grasped.

I am clear that Sophistication does not come naturally. You have to work at it. I suspect that it is harder if you are a white Western man. In my attempts at Sophistication, little signs of innate sloppiness creep out, like the mess inside my car (ask my car pool, they will attest) or the way my clothes and things are strewn around my room.

Sophistication is style. This is both a style seen, and a style unseen. The unseen style is the tactical systems and models you build to comprehensively care for the situation you show up in or in which you have intentionally placed yourself. The image which holds this for me is the trend in Hi-Fi equipment in recent years. Six years ago I bought a "sophisticated" stereo outfit that had all kinds of external switches, dials, and gadgets to attest to its sophistication. Today the sophisticated stereo component has a nice brushed aluminum finish, an on/off

switch and a volume control. The complexity of the system has not decreased, but it has become more internalized and integrated, so that what appears to the world is just a simple switch.

Sophistication guards the comprehensive. In every decision a man of Sophistication holds himself before the totality of a global context and decides what is necessary.

Sophistication is all the time, not just when I am doing PLC calling, or a witness, or a collegium, but all the time. You never know when you are going to be present at a crucial turning point in someone's life. This is an important aspect of Sophistication. It is very hard not to revert back to innate slobbism. For me, a difficult and especially crucial time is during discontinuity. So it is an all-the-time thing.

Finally, Sophistication is bringing off the other. I realize that in all my attempts at Sophistication I have been out to bring myself off instead of honoring the group or individual I am with and bringing them off. Here we have got to die a clean death, especially as we actualize our globality in other parts of the world. We are called to be S. O. B.'s to the world: "Sophisticates on Behalf..." all the time.

In this context for Sophistication, I begin to see that living a sophisticated life comes close to living the secular sanctified life which characterizes our turn to the world.

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