

Religion and Life

By PADRE W. A. YOUNG

IF YOU ASK ME — The future depends on people who can discipline themselves.

MANKIND can stand all sorts of evils, but he can't stand chaos and disorder. When things get out of control in our society, some strong force must arise to bring order out of confusion. Dictatorship of all kinds is a last resort to put a bridle on a wild horse, and bring unruly things under control.

It is equally so in our individual lives. Whether we like it or not, we are faced with an alternative in our personal lives. Either we discipline ourselves from within, or we will have discipline imposed upon us from without.

It follows therefore, that self-discipline is the condition of freedom in our individual lives, and it is the only condition under which democracy can work. Democracy presupposes a citizenship that is intelligent enough to discipline itself, and thus be worthy of freedom.

Unfortunately, self-control is not an outstanding characteristic of the day in which we live. Sometimes I wonder as I look upon scenes of mob action, and as I read accounts of irresponsible conduct on the part of those who should know better, if we are really ready for democracy. Our accomplishments and our achievements have been great, and as a people we have gained tremendous power. But having gained that power, we are like an uncontrolled stream that bursts its banks and causes destruction. No saying of Jesus is more pertinent to our day than this, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

There is something in all our lives that resists this truth. We resent constraint and control. We want to be free, forgetting that the freedom that does whatever it pleases is headed for a fall. We resent laws, forgetting that laws are made by ourselves for the protection of our freedom, and the safeguarding of our democracy.

We want a full, abundant life, and that is exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said these words. He said that a loose, sprawling, meandering course never reaches it—only the narrow way and the straightened gate of a disciplined life.

The characteristics of greatness in any life can be described as a "narrow way". Concentration, the focussing of our minds and wills; decisiveness, the ability to make decisions; loyalty, the devotion to a great cause; all these may be described as a narrow, restricted way. Nothing left loose ever does anything creative. No horse is useful until it is harnessed; no gas drives anything until it is confined; no Niagara drives anything until it is tunnelled. No life becomes great until it knows the wisdom of the narrow way. How wide is the gap between our ambitions and our ideals, and our willingness to pay the cost of their achievement! The cost in every realm is self-discipline.

Long ago, St. Ignatius Loyola wrote about a man who put on spurs but no bridle to ride a fiery horse. I am terribly afraid that too many of us, especially our young people are doing just that today—spurs and no bridle.

It is right that we should rebel against coercion. The religion of Jesus is a religion of freedom—"Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". But the "spirit of the Lord", is a spirit of self control, and obedience to the highest laws of life.

Mark Twain, for example, once lost his fortune. The accumulation of his life's work became a pile of debts. He could have escaped responsibility by the law of bankruptcy. Why didn't he? Why did he, in his old age, work, and speak, and write, until he had paid the last penny? He told us the answer in one memorable sentence. "Honour is a harder master than the law". There was something inside himself that he had to live up to.

In the challenging days that are before us, we in Canada are going to need more people who discipline themselves from within, so that they are self-propelled, and do not need to be run from the outside.

Our democracy, it seems to me, will stand or fall according to whether we have enough people who have learned the art of self-discipline.