

"DISORDER, DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLESHIP"

INTRODUCTION

Three years ago this summer, Bayard Rustin went to Los Angeles shortly after the first Watts riot. Trying to speak to a group in the ghetto, he was interrupted by one of the youngsters who shouted, "Have you read our manifesto?" "No" said Rustin, "I haven't. If you give me a copy, I'll be glad to take a look at it". The crowd laughed at that, and the youth who was the spokesman stepped forward and asked, "Don't you know what our manifesto is?" He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of matches. He lit one match, put it to the rest, and they went up in flames. "Mr. Rustin - that is our manifesto" "Burn, baby, burn".

It would be disturbing enough if we could isolate that manifesto as the manner of some minority, here and there. But not so. That manifesto speaks for a way of life that is not confined to any one section of age or race or class. That manifesto is evident in the general rise in violence in our country, high-lighted by the murders of three of the most illustrious sons of America in five years. That manifesto is evident in the campus turmoil from Berkeley to Columbia. And in a more sophisticated fashion, that manifesto is evident in the arrogance of some of the affluent, in the cynicism of some of the politicians, in the strong-arm methods of some labor leaders, in the cut-throat tactics of some business people, of the pettiness of some church people - in short, in the selfishness that is found to some degree in all of us. Put in another way, that manifesto means: "Get what you want. Do what you want. Without concern for the rules or the rights of others".

LACK OF DISCIPLINE

In the Old Testament, the Book of Judges describes a period in the development of Israel before there was a king, who later came to be regarded as the symbol of law and authority. Writing from that later perspective, the author of the Book of Judges was describing the disorder of the earlier and more primitive time, and the book concludes with this rather sad postscript: "In those days, there was no king of Israel, and everyone did exactly as he pleased". At times this seems to be our situation. From homes in suburbia, to streets in cities, to buildings on campuses, to rooms in business and government - there seems to be a lack of discipline and restraint with so many people demanding to do exactly as they please.

EXTERNAL DISCIPLINE

Confronted with such a display of disorder, an increasing number of voices are asking for the recovery of discipline. The most common expression of this yearning is a call for "law and order" - in other words, external discipline. And surely there is that high sense in which this cry needs to be heard and heeded. For by and large, the laws and regulations governing human conduct are the outcome of man's experiences, the lessons he has learned, the wisdom he has accumulated. So laws reflect a concept of justice and a concern for human rights and responsibilities. Imagine an athletic contest without any rules for the game, or a school without any requirements to be fulfilled or regulations to be observed. Imagine a community or a nation without any laws regarding traffic or health or property. Hopeless disorder and anarchy would come without any rules. If people are to live together, there must be rules and regulations, and this is what our founding fathers were talking about when they wrote:

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice.....do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America".

In order to live together - laws!

TENSION FOR THE CHRISTIAN Granted, this sometimes means tension for the Christian, for he understands that his highest allegiance is to the law of God and not the laws of man. As the World Council of Churches expressed it in a document in the month of July:

"No man can render his conscience hostage to the state, and when a conflict arises between what the state demands, and what conscience requires, priority must go to conscience."

So there may be those instances when the Christian responds to a higher law, in the name of conscience and religion. And if he does this responsibly and is willing to accept the consequences, then his decision is to be respected.

But never let religion be introduced as an ally of anarchy. Great religion has had its large influence on the emergence of a code of laws, and great religionists have had large respect for the law. No one was more fiercely independent and more responsive to God's holy law than the Apostle Paul. Yet he also had a healthy regard for the law and so he wrote to the Romans: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities...."

In our time, Martin Luther King knew something about civil disobedience in the name of Christian conscience; nonetheless, he was one of four Negro leaders who issued a statement a year ago, at the height of the racial crisis which, in part, said:

"We call upon Negro citizens throughout the nation to forgo the temptation to disregard the law. This does not mean that we should submit tamely to joblessness, inadequate housing, poor schooling, insult, humiliation and attack. It does require redoubling of efforts through legitimate means to end these wrongs and disabilities...."

And Jesus himself, in a sense, the greatest revolutionary of all, never rejected the law. "Think not" he said, "that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come to fulfill them....whosoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven".

"The law" Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "embodies the story of a nation's development through many centuries....the life of law has not been logic; it has been experience" And before the wisdom and the experience of mankind, woven into law, a man should stand with respect and gratitude - and all the more so when he realizes that anarchy may be waiting in the wings.

INTERNAL DISCIPLINE But having tried to say a good word for external discipline, one must go on to say that decidedly this is not enough, and that the real hope of a nation is in the recovery of internal discipline. That the real hope and strength of a nation rests in correcting conditions which cause riots and tempt men to disregard law and legal channels for bringing about change. And all the emphasis on law and order cannot guarantee the greatness of America so long as injustice remains.

What we are talking about is illustrated by that story of a headmaster in an English boys' school who once lectured the students in a chapel period saying, "Boys" "Be pure in heart, for I'll flog you if you're not." This is absurd, for no amount of flogging can ensure purity of heart. So all the external discipline in the world cannot guarantee strength of character....greatness in a life, greatness in a nation.

The story, of course, is as modern as this morning's paper and as personal as practically every person in the congregation. There is a place and a need for external discipline in a home, a school, a community - but it is a sad and a pathetic life that responds only to outwardly imposed laws and disciplines. Parents can set up all kinds of rules and regulations to govern their children's study habits - but nothing is so powerful as a day when a teacher or an idea gets through to a youth, and with excitement, he sets out to search and study for himself. Parents can provide all kinds of opportunities for musical education and athletic training, but nothing is so powerful as a day when a young person really feels the glory of music or the zest of sports and then is ready to pay the price in training. Parents can set up all kinds of rules for conduct, but nothing is so powerful as a day when a young person has a vision of the importance of his own honesty and integrity and maturity and again is willing to pay the price. Human nature does not change much across the centuries and just as Jesus painted it in that simple parable read for the scripture, it is a great day when after shouting "no" to all the rules and regulations of life, a young person responds to a discipline from within that puts iron and integrity into his life.

This kind of self-discipline helps to explain the hold of the martyred Kennedy brothers upon the affections of so many in this nation. Surely their childhood had something to do with it - the example and the expectations of parents - the external discipline, if you will. But it was also something more than that - for the day came when the choice was theirs. They could have lived safe, comfortable, uninvolved lives. But deliberately they chose paths of public service - studied, stretched, became concerned with problems of people vastly different from themselves, ran risks, got involved, revealed a singular inner drive and discipline.

It is this kind of inner discipline that finally counts in a person and in a nation. We talk about the break-down of law and order in our time, but that is not by any means the whole problem, or perhaps even the basic problem. Primarily there is a breakdown of inner discipline. We and our fellow-citizens tend to want freedom without responsibility. We want the dividends of an education without the discipline of getting an education. We want the comfort of religion without the cost of religion. We want a better nation and world without becoming personally involved. The positive alternative to disorder is discipline in our lives and in our land, and discipline from within is infinitely to be desired over discipline from without.

ROOTS OF INNER DISCIPLINE ARE SPIRITUAL

Still this sermon would not be complete unless it leads us to see that the roots of a self-disciplined life are finally deeply spiritual. It is no mere coincidence that the word "discipline" and the word "discipleship" are related. They are related - not only in spelling and etymology - but in a certain interdependence of meaning.

So in the New Testament, the word "disciple" denotes a follower of Jesus, and especially, one of the twelve. But at the beginning of their journey of discipleship no one would have seen much similarity between the life of a disciple and the life of discipline. They were notoriously undisciplined - disorderly, disorganized - Peter, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas. Then came One who called them and ordered them and organized them so that out of discipleship with Him there came the strongest sort of inner discipline.

And so it has been across the centuries, and it still holds true today. There is no greater miracle than the eternal relevance of Jesus Christ - that One who

wandered across a distant strip of land in a distant stretch of time still stands in our midst - disturbing us with values and ideals that will not let us rest content with what we are; pursuing us with a love that is patient and personal; confronting us with no other credentials than that "though He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor and humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross", and saying to us still, "behold - I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him"...

Remember the student's description of Teacannini's last concert in Carnegie Hall. The maestro was past eighty, and he came out on the stage and raised his baton. After a moment of silence, "the orchestra, a hundred pieces or more, stole softly into the first quiet movement of the symphony. On and on, until as the volume grew, first one and then another of the orchestra lifted his eyes from the notes and fastened them on the conductor there, with the wistful smile on his lips. And all the music they had in them swept up - toward that face!"

How better could we describe the mystery and the mastery of Christ? All the music that we have in us swept up - toward that face - "the glory of God in the face of Christ". And all the disorganized possibilities of our lives called to order in a discipleship that means discipline and in a discipline that means freedom!

LET US PRAY As we direct our thoughts, O God, to the great problems of our day, help us, to think clearly, and then lead us out of ourselves toward him who is the purpose of all men, that we may show forth in our lives something of his life, that we may catch the secret of his style whose life had an inner discipline. Remember his example, we ask this in his name.