

## EDITORIAL

# Renunciation Self-Denial | *Outmoded?*

Perhaps the very mention of these virtues for discussion must be raising not a few quizzical eyebrows. For among the least understood, and we could also add, least popular aspect of christian life for us moderns is the demand for renunciation and self-denial.

The variety and quantity of things available for one's comfort today and the corresponding desire to see, possess, experience and enjoy everything has reduced the concept of renunciation and self-denial to near absurdity. Even those who want to live an honest and decent life want to enjoy, within the bounds of what is reasonable and permissible to be sure, but yes, to enjoy as much as possible with no thought of any limitation.

This humanistic and hedonistic tendency is so widespread that it has not spared even the christians' way of thinking. Hence we find christians similarly tucked in the soft cushions of comfort that our highly technical civilization can offer. But lest our position be misconstrued and branded sheer hypocrisy, there should be a clear delineation of what is proper according to man's dignity and what values should be held supreme according to right order.

Jesus Christ whom we christians recognize as our mentor and model warned that "a man's life does not consist in his possessions" (Lk., 12:15). A christian cannot have and enjoy everything. There must be a choice. It's either God or mammon. 'No man can serve two masters' (Mt. 6:24).

The concept of choice pervades through the gospel, the word of Christ. And side by side with it is the concept of renunciation. "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds a single pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it" (Mt., 13:45-46). In fact, from the very start of Christian life itself, the demand for renunciation is made. Was it not in baptism where we were first told to renounce Satan and all his works and pomps? And so forth?

No one disagrees that not everything in the world is good. But then in the course of life, the distinction between what is good and what is not becomes very difficult especially when one refuses to admit a fixed ethical criterion and is blind to a superior teaching authority. To impose renunciation on one's self, to accept discipline and self-denial and to choose a norm in order to be in the right tract are conditions that cannot be disregarded by anyone who wants to consider himself a christian.

The cross is the mark of the true christian, and although carrying it means a denial of many things, it nevertheless limits our experience of what is harmful and really makes us free and living temples of God. Pope Paul denies that self-denial is an arbitrary ascetic and monastic discipline. On the contrary, he calls it "an authentic christian life style, first, because it implies a hierarchical classification of life's good things; second, because it stimulates us to choose the 'better part'; third, because it gives man practice in self-control; and last, because it establishes that mysterious economy of expiation which makes us participants in Christ's Redemption".

Today we need valiant christians, generous souls educated in the school of discipline and mortification to neutralize the confusing force of modern hedonism and materialism. Then, the question of whether renunciation and self-denial is out-moded becomes very academic.