

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Real Loneliness

Although there are good working charities in the field of leprosy today, Hansen's Disease is really a conquered force, and the dreadful sequestration of its sufferers described in the Bible no longer happens. Thank God.

Isolation From Others

Still, many people find that they are doomed to share a similar fate in *our* society. We have policies about criminals which effectively excludes people from our community, often for life; not by a custodial sentence - these are often relatively lenient - but by the tribunals that pass irrevocable judgments in people's hearts. There are similar policies in force against the mentally ill, the addicted, and the many who for whatever reason don't have the wherewithal to buy a place in the lives of others. Instead of uniting people in a generous commonwealth of interest and concern, we see people falling through the net in increasing numbers, so that the gap between prosperity and poverty continually widens, and the number of the lonely and isolated keeps growing.

Our Society Can't Cope

A society can be judged by the number of people it expels. Its success would show itself in a complete inclusion of everyone who ought to belong; its failure, in the making of so many exiles and enemies that the central structures go down in ruins. The great cities of the past show their success in their great monuments, the space and room they made for their citizens, the dignity they encouraged people to assume, the care they extended to the needy and the stranger. In our Britain, we find people so lonely and so self-obsessed that they're capable of appalling crimes of theft, destruction, lust, violence, hatred; and the only answer we can think of is to build more prisons, employ more police, install more cameras and pass more laws. Even so, we refuse our police forces their certificates because they are manifestly failing to enforce the laws; insurance-premiums are sky-high because criminality is succeeding every time; we've caved in to fear and mistrust to the

point where we daren't go out in the dark and have to police our children and old people every step they take. There's a growth industry in locks, safes, and alarms, and what we call "security equipment", which only teaches us that nothing is secure. I know people who've installed steel bars across their windows: without any sense of irony, they've turned their own homes into prisons, to quieten their fears of what's outside.

A Policewoman's Fate

Recently a policewoman was shot dead in Bradford. She was a happy policewoman, who, said the Chief Constable, *gladly gave herself to making life better for her fellow-citizens*. So she was shot dead on her daughter's fourth birthday. If *she* had stayed in a barred house, she might have been saved; it was because she gave herself to make life safer, that she lost her life. I was struck by the similarity of her story and the Gospel story today. There's a leper, who is isolated lest he contaminate others. Jesus un-isolates him (*stretches out his hand and touches him*). This breaks the isolation of the leper, and he goes off to the priests, to re-establish his standing in the community. But Jesus - now getting famous for miracles - finds *he can no longer go openly into towns, but has to stay outside where nobody lives*. Do you see where this is going to end? *He will be taken outside the gates and crucified* - because he wanted to reconcile the whole community with God. He will lose his life - and the people who will engineer his death will be the very priests who reconcile the leper he saved.

Only Holiness Will Do

By themselves laws and policemen and security devices are pointless. If we don't all seek *holiness*, we won't be safe. Even our religion will only help if we sacrifice everything to the search for holiness. Only God can make us right. Tell the bad news to Westminster, and Scotland Yard. Then tell them the good news. Maybe we'll yet have a chance to turn the corner, like Jonah's Nineveh, and make Britain good. *Fr Philip*