

Inside Looking Out*

J. A. V. BURKE

GOD IS FOR REAL, MAN. By Carl Burke. (Fontana, 3s, 6d.)

Delinquency and Guilt. By Michael De-La-Noy. (Newman Neame (Training) Ltd. 2s. 0d.)

A prison governor once said to me: "The general public is always eager to see criminals incarcerated; once they are in prison, the public conscience is tender as to whether the inmates are comfortably housed; when the men come out, public anxiety vanishes and nobody bothers about rehabilitation". Within this cynical frame the two small books under review may be said to have their context.

Delinquency and Guilt, the smaller, little more than a pamphlet, is the more pointed in its comment in that it specifically charges the general public with lack of concern for young offenders. "It is time we stopped labelling the majority of children who come before the courts as 'delinquents' ". Rightly, in my view, the author claims that "Society has only one basic responsibility towards criminals, to reform and educate. Both tasks can be very difficult. Once someone has deliberately embarked on a life of crime, or has slipped into it without

wishing to, the further he gets in, the harder it is for him to get out".

But compassion, which all normal people feel for the delinquent is not enough. Where the fashionable modern school of psychiatric penology seems inadequate is that, in my view, it leaves too little room for that mental and physical discipline which all of us, whether inside or outside prison, need, in order to lead complete and useful lives. Religion encourages just such a discipline. The problem is how to make this discipline, presented in stilted terms and often incomprehensible action, acceptable to the young mind, resentful precisely because it is religious. When the young man at the borstal to which I am chaplain replied "Thank God!" to my invitation: "The Mass is ended; go forth in peace", he was not speaking liturgically.

How to get across to them; how to convince them that religious values are real; how to speak to them in their own terminology without condescending. These are some of the problems facing those who have the religious care of delinquents.

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In *God is for Real*, Man, Carl Burke, chaplain to an American prison, has brought together a number of paraphrases of Biblical stories, from both Old and New Testaments, made by young underprivileged people, in their own beatnik jargon. To judge by these essays, which one should regard as enlightening rather than intentionally amusing, the youngsters seem willing to accept, on their own terms, not according to the forms of a Church which has seemingly deserted them, the concepts of God as Maker and Christ as Saviour. They relate the Bible stories to their own experiences of hate and love and meanness and kindness. They are beginning to understand that, maybe, God is for real.

What emerges from both these little books is that children often become criminal because they lack love and understanding from those who should be standing in the place of God to them. They are young persons in need of God's love and care, who cannot be expected to have respect for the idea of God as Father when their own parents are depraved or inadequate. As a young borstal lad once said to me: "Why are they surprised if I am violent? Violence is the only thing I have known in my life".

If these small books, each in its own special way, help anybody to penetrate only a little to the minds of the alienated young ones in prisons and borstals, they will have done well.

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