

FRIENDS JOURNAL



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UNDER THE RED AND BLACK STAR

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

James Reeb Memorial Fund

The American Friends Service Committee has established a fund for the family of James J. Reeb, Unitarian minister who died on March 11 after a beating during a voter-registration demonstration in Selma, Alabama. The fund will also be used for the families of others who suffer in the civil-rights struggle. (Contributions may be sent to the James Reeb Fund, 160 North Fifteenth Street, Philadelphia 19102.) Similar funds have been established by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

For the past six months James Reeb had been director of the AFSC's Metropolitan Boston Housing Program, in which he had worked with low-income groups—both Negro and white—in their efforts to overcome deprivation and discrimination in housing, education, and employment. His concern to go to Selma was described by his wife, Marie, as "not a shot in the dark, but a continuation."

In an official statement at the time of his death the Service Committee emphasized that it does not "single out James Reeb's sacrifice from the many made in the civil-rights struggle by Negro and white men and women—and even children—as being more significant than any other," but that it is "moved to record the passing of a beloved colleague. . . ."

Colin W. Bell, executive secretary of the AFSC, and Stephen G. Cary, associate executive secretary, were in Selma during the demonstration. Together with John Sullivan, interim executive secretary of the New England AFSC office, they were with James Reeb in the hospital in Birmingham until shortly before his death.

In Memoriam: James J. Reeb

By CARL F. WISE

On Calvary

They broke the bones of his legs
And a spear made a hole in his side
That my sins might be forgiven me.

At Selma

They crushed the bones of his head
That my sins might be forgiven me

That every reservation, every reluctance
Every condescension
Every open warmth withheld
Every substituted smile of politeness
That every unwillingness
To love my neighbor as myself
Might be forgiven me.

O sharing guilt

Wash the color of thy heart
In the expiation of Selma.

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FRIENDS JOURNAL

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Editorial Comments

"To Help Men Be Free"

ALL that's past is prologue. We think of Elijah Lovejoy, murdered in Illinois while defending his printing press from a mob which disapproved of his abolitionist sentiments. We think of Mary Dyer, hanged on Boston Common because she dared to advocate and practice freedom of religion. We think of Anne Frank and of the untold numbers like her who lost their lives because Nazi leaders ruled that Jews were racial offenders and must be eliminated. We think of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified for sentiments and leadership considered subversive by those in power, yet murmuring with his final breath: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

And now we think of James Reeb, murdered in Alabama because his conscience would not permit him *not* to go to Selma—because (as he wrote on his application form when he joined the staff of the American Friends Service Committee) he wanted "to help men be free."

Sometimes it takes a shock like the tragedy of James Reeb to make many of us realize, to our shame, how inadequate is our normal capacity for identification and sharing. For months, for years—for more than a century, in fact—we have been reading and hearing about the grave indignities suffered by Negro American citizens who never have been permitted to enjoy the most fundamental of citizenship's rights. We have felt vaguely sorry for them, but how seldom have their sufferings moved us to any significant action, even when their search for freedom has brought death!

Why must we need the murder of James Reeb to move us to action? His death (according to John Sullivan, the Service Committee's executive secretary for New England, where Reeb was working) "stirred the consciences and the moral responsiveness of the highest officials in our land—of the clergy and church people of America, of simple Negro and white men and women who wired, prayed, marched, and wept because of his sacrifice in the human struggle that now goes on without him—but not

without his spirit, his memory, and his unfailing determination that justice and right will overcome."

Occasionally a superhuman share of faith seems needed for belief that justice and right *will* overcome the frenzied tactics of maddened men like those who, on the very day after President Johnson made his solemn plea for racial equality before both Houses of Congress, rode their horses deliberately into a group of unarmed civil-rights demonstrators at no great distance from where James Reeb was attacked—clubbing, flailing, and trampling with such gusto that many of their victims had to be hospitalized. Arrayed against any such tendency to discouragement, however, is the rich store of patience and fortitude revealed by those who, rebuffed time and again for many years on end, can still sing (as reported by Michael Yarrow elsewhere in this issue):

Ain't going to let nobody turn me 'round.

Going to keep on a-walking up to Freedom Land.

Another source of hope that these determined walkers eventually *may* reach Freedom Land is to be found in the formation of a group called "Concerned White Citizens of Alabama," whose members are now buttressing the Negro vote drive with demonstrations of their own, while crowds of indignant white men curse and insult them, even as they have been cursing and insulting the Negroes. "We have remained silent too long," one of the Concerned White Citizens' leaders is quoted as saying.

Doubtless these white Alabamans who are now listening, however belatedly, to the voice of conscience, are being denounced by Selma's police commissioner as "scum," which is what he called the many religious leaders who flocked into Selma around the time of James Reeb's death to lend their support to local workers for Negro rights. It may even be that they will learn to accept this derisive label hopefully, knowing that, in the long run, scum is bound to rise to the top.

Until such time as the scum *does* rise, those of us who have signed various statements and expressed our indig-

nation freely in conversations with friends may not find it amiss to ponder a statement made in a recent article in *The Christian Century* by E. Raymond Wilson, executive secretary emeritus of the Friends Committee on National Legislation: "There is with all of us a temptation to confuse resolutions and pronouncements with social action."

One of the most telling comments not only upon the

tragedy of Alabama and Mississippi but also upon certain other confused courses of action in which our troubled country currently finds itself embroiled is contained in a newspaper cartoon showing a Negro soldier in uniform and helmet being halted sternly on the street by a sheriff of traditionally deep-South lineaments and costume. "Me?" the soldier is replying to the challenge. "I'm just on my way to Vietnam to help save democracy."

Friends and Unbelievers

By CAROL R. MURPHY

DISCUSSION continues from year to year on the subject of how or whether a noncreedal religious society can set a minimum standard of religious belief for membership. Do Friends believe more, or less, than other Christians? And what do we say to those who seek fellowship with us on solely social or ethical grounds?

A recent book, *Varieties of Unbelief* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), by Martin E. Marty, associate editor of *The Christian Century*, provides a helpful framework for the thinking of those who need to decide what is belief and what is unbelief. What follows is an adaptation of Dr. Marty's classification of unbelief to Quaker experience. The classifications are Dr. Marty's, the application to Friends is my own.

Crucial to the dialogue between believers and unbelievers, asserts Dr. Marty, is the presence or absence of an open mind. There can be no genuine communication with a mind which has closed all doors either to genuine faith or to genuine doubt. To talk fruitfully to each other, both skeptics and Christians need the kind of humility thus described by the deeply believing yet open-minded von Hügel: "It is by my not denying as false what I do not yet see to be true that I give myself the chance of growing in insight." This, a Friend would add, is the attitude of the genuine seeker for whom Friends always have had an affinity. And if the Quaker watchword "continuing revelation" means anything, it means, not that George Fox knew more about God than Jesus did, or that Rufus Jones knew more than Fox, but that openness to growing insight should always be at the heart of our religious life.

This tradition of friendly seeking should stand us in good stead in the dialogue with unbelievers. But there are still difficulties from the other side. Irreligious or antireligious types of unbelief can be very stubborn. The

most extreme of these, according to Dr. Marty, is the complete normlessness and acute boredom of those who have given up any attempt to find values or to adopt ideals. This is a morbid reaction to the impersonality and clash of value systems in modern society — a reaction which can end either in suicide or in flight into some local dogmatism, unless the sufferers are helped to spiritual maturity. Nihilistic despair is another severe type of unbelief, which may, however, overlie a longing for meaning to which a believer can speak. A defiant atheism which claims a disproof of God is closed, but a genuine agnosticism, Dr. Marty thinks, is open to dialogue with believers who share the awareness that in this world evil is certainly apparent, while God is only ambiguously so.

Someone who cannot find God is more approachable than one who thinks he has found a god in a state, a race, or a materialistic dialectic. The communist's or the fascist's closed mind can deal with the believer only as conqueror to conquered. The dangers and possibilities of dialogue with the atheist attracted to a false god have been well described by the present Pope in his encyclical: "For the lover of truth, discussion is always possible. The difficulties are enormously increased . . . by the absence of sufficient freedom of thought and action and by the perversion of discussion so that the latter is not made use of to seek and express objective truth but to serve predetermined utilitarian ends. . . . We do not despair that they [atheists] may one day be able to enter into a more positive dialogue with the church. . . ."

The determined atheist or totalitarian is not as likely to approach us as is the agnostic or his cousin, the scientific empiricist. However, in a closed mind, the scientific attitude, which should be open to novelty, becomes scientism—a rejection of any but laboratory evidence and measurable facts. The humble scientist should be able to talk with the believer who himself respects the discipline of science and has outgrown the god that is pulled into the gaps of scientific explanation.

A certain longing, a search after the ultimate, then,

Carol R. Murphy, a member of Swarthmore (Pa.) Meeting, is the author of several Pendle Hill Pamphlets, the most recent of which is *Revelation and Experience* (1964). Her brief essay on the Grimke sisters, "Two Desegregated Hearts," appeared in the autumn (1964) issue of *Quaker History*, published by the Friends Historical Association.