

## Balancing The Books

## 'Gates Of Dannemora'

By Rev. John S. Kennedy

Practically everyone in the country has heard of the Church of St. Dismas, the Good Thief, at Clinton Prison, Dannemora, New York. But few can know the story behind the construction of this full-size church within the walls of a prison commonly referred to as "The Big House."



It is an excellent subject. But at the start of this column on it, I must say that I find the form in which Father Bonn has cast it none too happy. Father Bonn has used this approach in his previous books, so Falls the Elm. And down the Days and House on the Sands.

In each case he has employed a quasi-fictional treatment of facts. Writing of something historically true, he elects to introduce many devices of the novel. He may feel that this insures vividness, but, fluency. But it also makes the reader wonder where a reality leaves off and imagination takes over. It is the peculiar impact of the real in some measure lost.

THE CHURCH of the Good Thief, however, long it stands can never be divorced from the name of Father Bonn. He built it. The book is a story of Father Bonn's life and his work at Dannemora. It is a story of a man who has served in the prison for 30 years, and who has found his life in the service of the church.

He found his 3,000 charges a varied lot, uniformly only in being difficult. Here was a pris-

oner impenetrably hard-boiled, as cold as steel, sending the chaplain's every attempt to reach him. Here, was another, at first glance a man of letters, who in confinement had advanced quite remarkably in the life of contemplation. A third went periodically, of his own free will, into solitary confinement. A fourth was reputed to be possessed of the devil. And so forth.

He threw himself into the unrelentingly hard job of being helpful to them all. And it occurred to him that one of the best ways would be to set them building their own church. His proposal was received with incredulity and ridicule. Building a church on state property would certainly be forbidden as violating the separation of Church and State. Besides, there was no precedent for the project. And how would it be financed?

FATHER HYLAND consulted his bishop. He went from one state official to another. He improvised schemes for raising the money. The obstacles began to disappear, one by one. Permission was granted, a site appointed, and significantly, the stones from an about-to-be-demolished prison wall assigned as building material.

With two or three exceptions, everything about the church, from the gargoyles aloft to the stained glass windows, the woodwork, the wrought-iron fixtures, was to be made by the men themselves. To this end, a set of workshops was started.

Contributions came from unlikely sources (Lucky Luciano's suggestion of a killing in the numbers racket had to be turned down), and the men took delight in the creative work set them. This was a joy to the priest — to watch criminals given up as hopeless by the community finding a keen and lasting happiness in making good and beautiful things for the service of the Lord.

The work went on despite the

strenuous attempts of anti-religious organizations to stop it, despite increasing troubles with the prison authorities, who apparently had begun to believe that the chaplain was imprudently, perhaps unscrupulously, lined up with the enemies of society. But it was completed, a thing of beauty, a residence of God among the outcasts of the world, a place where Mass could be offered daily and its power radiated through the prison.

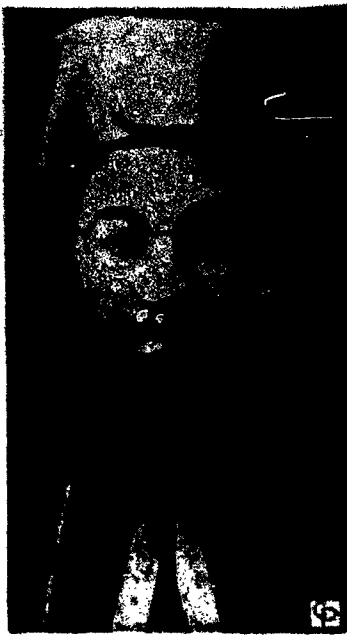
Hyland was the task of getting the inmates to accept their lot as penance, not mere punishment, as a means of making reparation to God and progressing in holiness. He struggled, too, to make possible a fresh start in the world for those released from the prison, men with a stigma upon them which prevented them from getting decent jobs and going straight.

There were consultations in seeing masses of the hopeless inspired again, in seeing the parables making a respectable career, in seeing notable sanctity sprout and grow and come to fruition in unpromising soil (one of his alumni became a Carthusian). All in all, it is a story both sobering and thrilling, typified by the church whose exultant spire tops the prison walls.

To revert to the serious shortcomings of Father Bonn's hybrid presentation, many of the semi-fictional episodes are clumsy, others altogether inept (such as the love scenes), still others marvellous. A particular problem is posed by the presentation of the contents of confessions to the chaplain is not the reader justified in assuming that there is here serious impropriety? It may very well be that these bits are wholly imaginary. Yet they are juxtaposed to passages of straight reporting.

Gates of Dannemora by John L. Bonn. 276 pages. New York: Doubleday. \$5.00.

## Armenian Patriarch Visits U. S.



CARD. AGAGIANIAN

Boston — (NC) — His Eminence Gregory Peter XV Cardinal Agagianian, Patriarch of the Armenians, arrived here last week and was met at the airport by Archbishop Richard J. Cushing and by Gov. Paul Andrew Dever of Massachusetts.

Speaker of 11 languages, the Cardinal conversed in English with the welcoming party and said he is anxious to greet Armenian Americans throughout the country, which he will tour after his visit to Boston. Archbishop Cushing has designated the Rev. Francis J. Lally, associate editor of The Pilot, Boston archdiocesan weekly, to accompany the visitor on the tour.

Following his arrival, Archbishop Cushing welcomed the Cardinal to Boston and the United States in a seven-minute appearance on a television program.

## N. C. Governor For Vatican Ambassador

Raleigh, N. C. (RNS) — Governor W. Kerr Scott, an active Presbyterian layman, says he can see no objection to having a U.S. ambassador at the Vatican. Despite protests of North Carolina Protestant leaders he does not believe that sending a diplomatic representative there constitutes a violation of the principle of Church-State separation.

"We are trying to save lives and work for peace," he said, adding that the Roman Catholic Church is a big anti-Communist voice among European peoples and that the Vatican is regarded as a good listening post.

## Sanctity Eyed In Indian Nun's Life

Palai, India (NC) — The first big step in the possible beautification of a Christ nun was taken here when a diocesan council submitted its report on Sister Alphonsa to Bishop Sebastian Vayalil of Palai.

Sister Alphonsa who died on July 28 has achieved considerable fame throughout India. Numerous people have claimed cures and other favors through her intercession. She died at the Christ convent at Bharanganam.

## No Separation Of God And Country

The following sermon was delivered by the Rev. Paul J. Cuddy at the Armistice Day Mass celebrated for the American Legion, Sunday, November 12, 1951, in Old St. Mary's Church, Rochester. Father Cuddy, spiritual director of St. Andrew's Seminary, was an Army Chaplain in World War II, and has received orders from Air Force Command to return to active duty next January.

The ceremonies of the Legion held in Rochester and elsewhere throughout the country today are a healthy instruction on the aims and spirit of your great organization, namely traditional Americanism.

As citizens who have civic responsibilities to your country; and as religious men who give honor to God, you perform your religious and patriotic rites which manifest the interlinking of religion and citizenship. You do not divorce, but you intertwine your civil and spiritual loyalties. In this you express true American tradition.



Father Cuddy

There is a dramatic episode recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke. The Pharisees and other enemies of Jesus, "being upon the watch, sent spies who should feign themselves just, that they might take hold of him in his words, that they might deliver him up to the authority and power of the governor. And they asked him saying: Is it lawful for us to give to Caesar or not?"

These enemies were not honestly seeking an answer. They wished only to entrap him. If he said: "It is lawful to support the civil government," he would alienate many of his co-religionists. If he said: "It is not lawful," they had a springboard with which to throw him over to the civil authorities.

CHRIST KNEW that these men were not seeking a solution, but were moved by hatred. With divine contempt for their intellectual dishonesty he said: "Show me a penny . . . Whose image and inscription hath it?" Sensing their trap he enigmatically answered: "Caesar's." "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Today violent voices rise in our country, perverting the historic sense of the First Article of the Bill of Rights. If successful, they will render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's. They cry so loudly and so often: "No union of Church and State; let us keep Church and State separate, that the minds of many are unsettled about what is the traditional American practice and principle regarding government and religion. They would destroy a root principle of American tradition, namely: that the things of God are not absolutely divorced from, but are integrated into our American private and official life."

WHAT IS THE technique of these New Prohibitionists? The Bill of Rights states: "Congress shall establish no law regarding an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Our Founding Fathers lived in a day when an established church was the rule rather than an exception. The article was written to prevent the setting up of an established church in a multidenominational country.

Our New Prohibitionists shade

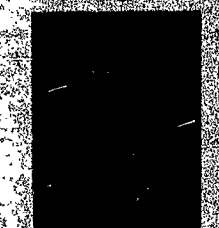
and sacred American way. There was no cry of protest. "This is union of Church and State." The New Prohibitionist, who if he follows the logic of his protest, would prohibit this religious burial, and have these men buried like animals. The New Prohibitionist is silent on this delicate matter.

Members of the American Legion, and in particular you revered Gold Star Mothers, I ask you to remember that when you hear and read the cry "Absolute Separation of Church and State," remember that this same in Cambridge cemetery was multiplied hundreds of thousands of times in the East and in the West, on the seas and in the States. The New Prohibitionists would prohibit free exercise of religion for these service men for they want a State without religion.

Remember that a State without religion is a Monster which has devoured the things of God. Our soldiers and sailors fought, and lived or died, not for a Monster, but for the sacred traditions rooted in true American way of life. Rather than divorcing God from official life, let God permeate our national life, as we remember to Caesar things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

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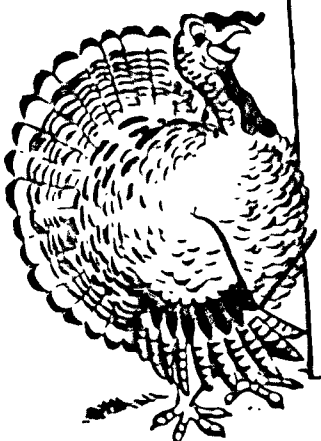
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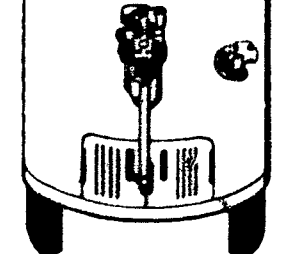
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