



Religious Rivalry in Jail

ONE BUDDHIST AND TWO MOHAMMEDANS were received within the gray walls of Sing Sing during the last fiscal year.

During the same period the doors of the great prison closed behind 855 Catholics, 518 Protestants, 177 Hebrews, twenty Christian Scientists, and eight of no religion at all.

This doesn't mean that the Catholics are any more criminally inclined than Buddhists, Mohammedans, Protestants, or Jews. It means, we are told, that the Catholics form a larger part of the population in the area from which Sing Sing draws its unwilling guests. New York State hasn't many Buddhists and Mohammedans, but it has a large population of Roman Catholics.

"The religious census of a prison," writes the Rev. John P. McCaffrey in *The Commonwealth*, a New York Catholic weekly, "follows the population of the area that feeds the prison." And Father McCaffrey uses statistics of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in "Five Hundred Criminal Cases" to show that in a Massachusetts prison the Protestant group in the section from which the prison draws its inmates contributed slightly more than its proportionate share, the Hebrew appreciably less, and the Catholic slightly less than its percentage of the general population.

"It can be stated as the result of many such studies," says Father McCaffrey, "that the figures of the general population are reflected in the populations of the prisons. There are certain prisons where the Protestant inmates are in the majority. The answer to the question that naturally arises is not an indictment of any particular religious group, but rather a study of the population statistics of the area that is feeding the prison."

But why does the prison roster contain so many people who tag themselves as belonging to one church or another, and so few who are of no religion at all? Father McCaffrey answers:

"One can say as a general thing that most of the men in prison gave up the active practise of their faith before they faced the judge for sentence. Some of the judges in the New York area and Westchester County are of the opinion that 90 per cent. of the men who faced them had stopt going to church.

"A good Catholic practising his religion rarely comes into conflict with the law on a major issue. The same is true of a church-going Protestant, and of a devout Jew.

"The indictment is not so much against the Church as it is against the men who have cut themselves off from the influence of their church. Most men in prison are there not because of the religious influence of their faith, but in spite of it.

"It is not the Church that has failed, but the man."