

University of Notre Dame

Religious Bulletin

May 16, 1933

Why Don't People Go To Church?

We learn from the New York Times that the "Congregational and Christian Minister's Federation of the Metropolitan Area of New York" held a seminar recently to discuss "How to Get People to Attend Church." We summarize a few significant paragraphs:

Rev. Edwin Bradford Robinson, pastor of Grace Congregational Church, Holyoke, Mass., stated: "There is nothing that sets worse with the layman than the length of the summer vacation ministers take." He quoted a layman's remark concerning his pastor's vacation, as follows: "That lazy lobster was off two-and-a-half months for his annual vacation, and then the first Sunday he was home he preached a sermon all about the beauties of nature he had enjoyed, throwing it in my face when I stayed at home and worked for the uplift of the city."

Rev. S. Parkes Cadman (whose daily column is familiar to millions of readers) stated that the best preaching never gets reported - that when ministers stick to preaching the Gospel they never get in the newspapers. He cited as an instance the preaching of Dr. Robbins, of the General Episcopal Theological Seminary, saying that although Dr. Robbins is one of the best preachers in New York, his sermons are seldom reported. "His sermons have a deep spiritual note," he said, "and there is no news in that."

Dr. Robinson was in agreement with this observation of Dr. Cadman, and stated that in the thirty-one years of his present pastorate he had seen sixty "world-killers" come and go. Perhaps as an instance of "world-killing," Dr. J. Stanley Durkee, pastor of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, said that recently he had seen a young pastor advertised to preach on the subject, "If I Were the Devil, What in Hell Would I Be Doing?"

Earlier in the discussion Dr. Cadman made a plea for more ritual, saying: "It has taken me thirty years to educate my people to a proper appreciation of the spiritual values of the Holy Eucharist, and today it is the most supreme act of Christian worship."

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There must be a candidate for the red hate, usque ad genua, somewhere in that report. 1. The Congregational Church (founded 1583) and the Christian Church (1813) are now "federated;" 2. Dr. Cadman is one of the most publicized ministers in the United States - does he advocate preaching the Gospel and going "unreported" or turning to sensationalism and making the newspapers? 3. The Congregational Church, if we remember our history, was in its origin an expression of a desire for four bare walls in a meeting house; now its leaders plead for ritual. 4. If there are more than forty thousand Protestant churches in this country without pastors (as we are assured by reliable statistics, some of the figures coming from the Federation of Churches and others from the U. S. Census), it would seem more reasonable to worry about the all-year-round vacation of the ministers than the two-and-a-half months period of the summer season.

Some years ago Dr. Cadman wrote the following lines in the Western Christian Advocate: "The Church of Rome takes care of its priorities. We throw them away to the winds and where are we? For example, in New York today there are a million so-called Protestants. They are not even decent pagans. They go nowhere to church and make no contribution to any part of the church. They come to New York from every part of this country, and if they had church letters they are never presented. On Sundays the sons of class leaders and deacons and elders are among the automobile riders, and if they ever come out at all you have to dig them out from under a pile of filthy Sunday newspapers. When they come to church they walk in as though they were bestowing a compliment on Almighty God by being there. We cannot have a church that way even though you raise ten million times ten million. There has got to be a new church consciousness."

PRAYERS: Tom Gately (infection); Joe Droucker's mother (ill); 5 special intentions.