
Perhaps They've Overlooked Something.

We haven't attended any of the sessions of the World Congress of Religions (or whatever they call it) in Chicago this summer. And we can't feel bad about it.

Specific details are lacking. We haven't been interested enough to keep clippings - and the affair has lacked some of the bombast one would expect from the press agents of a world gathering of the kind usually ballyhooed by experts - but we pass on to you our vague recollection that there was held in the windy metropolis this summer a free-for-all religious discussion, convoked by Protestants of the modernist type, exotically flavored by representatives of Shintoism, Taoism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Parseeism, et omne id genus.

In our reflections in things of this sort, two things stand out: 1. Somebody has too much money to spend when a conference of this sort can be financed; 2. Somebody is going pretty far to search for the truth when he thinks he can find it in the sterile religious thought behind the stagnant civilization of India and China. And we conclude that somebody has missed a bet.

But why? Why hasn't the United States discovered the Catholic Church?

The answer is, of course, complex. You can't put your finger on any one cause and call it final. There is innate prejudice at work in myriads of cases; there is propaganda, fostered by salaried promoters; there are false standards of culture, which lead people to despise Catholics, especially Catholics of non-English extraction; there are political, social, economic and moral obstacles which keep people from examining the claims of the Catholic Church.

But one by one, as means of communication improve, these barriers are breaking down -- and still converts to the Catholic Church in this country do not pass 40,000 a year. What other barrier is there that perhaps we can remove?

There is still the barrier of bad example by individual Catholics. Mahatma Gandhi, we are told, was once very close to being a Catholic. He found great power and beauty in the doctrines of the Catholic Church - but he also found very bad example on the part of individual Catholics, so he turned away from the final step, with his foot on the threshold of the Church.

The Updikes tuned in on the Catholic Hour, out of reverent curiosity. They tuned in again the following Sunday, and four Sundays after that. They were favorably disposed. But the Mulligans failed to return the lawnmower they borrowed, and their wild party on Saturday night disturbed the sleep of the Updikes. The Updikes tried again the next day, but the program suffered from interference by the Mulligans, who were seeking a hot jazz number. Again the Updikes listened and were profoundly impressed. The conversation turned to Catholic truth. Then there was a pause. Each read the other's thoughts: "But the Mulligans....."

Clarence Updike finally came to Notre Dame. Clarence made the Mission as far as a non-Catholic could; his Catholic roommate skived. Clarence placed his mother's picture on the wall; his roommate plastered the wall with pictures from the movie magazines (and Clarence put his mother's picture back in the trunk). Clarence talked football and horses; his roommate talked football and girls - mostly girls. Clarence transferred at the semester; his roommate stayed on, but failed to make his Easter duty.

Perhaps both the Updikes and the Mulligans have overlooked something. But we have the word of Our Blessed Lord that in the day of Judgment it will be more tolerable for the Updikes than for the Mulligans.