

God Became One of Us

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The mammoth Thanksgiving-Day parades, staged in three of our larger cities, are, thanks to television, fast becoming a national institution. This year, one of them gave the material for a modern parable.

The three hours of tramping feet, whirling batons, and gorgeous floats were a veritable feast for children and all who have a weakness for parades. But there was one harshly dissonant note, one monumental exhibition of bad taste, that spoiled the whole picture of spirited happy marchers.

Toward the end of the parade, a group of twisting, high-stepping majorettes approached the television camera. Behind them a band was playing. The tune was familiar but somehow eluded the listener. Suddenly, with a shock like the blast of cold air, you recognized the music. It was the Adeste Fideles, and the band was playing it with all the crash and clamor of a college song. It was as though someone tried to turn the solemn music of the Requiem Mass into a drinking song.

But yet, another and greater shock was to come. Behind the band was the Nativity float. It was a magnificent creation, larger than life size. The poverty and peace inherent in the scene were in strange contrast to the twirling majorettes and bouncing band that introduced it. The Nativity float was shockingly out of place. One felt embarrassed merely watching.

The climax of embarrassment was yet to come however. Immediately behind the Nativity float came a larger, lavishly decorated, brilliantly colored creation. It was huge and towered over the whole parade. High above the street, enthroned on this float rode Santa Claus. This was the high point of the parade; the glorious end of a magnificent spectacle.

It also gave rise to some questions: What was Christ doing in the parade at all? To whom does Christmas belong—to Christ or to Santa Claus?

Well, that is the parable of the parade!

To be struck by the shattering incongruity of this scene in the Thanksgiving Day parade is not at all to deny the joyful spirit proper

to the preparation for Christmas. But this remarkable bit of bad taste most certainly dramatizes the danger of forgetting the meaning of Christmas.

It is not to be denied that Christmas has been commercialized. Santa Claus, bargains, lavish displays, all aimed at moving huge quantities of merchandise, have become part of the Christmas Season. But, the least we can do is draw a few lines so that Christ and His birthday are not completely swallowed up by our commercialized culture.

This is a danger that threatens us from all sides. We can become so interested in the glitter of the gifts that we can forget why we exchange gifts at all. It is as though we were to celebrate the birthday of someone who was never born.

So we must close our ears to the bedlam and noise of the market place and do some serious thinking. That is what 'Advent' is for. 'Advent' means 'approach' and it designates the four weeks immediately preceding Christmas. These weeks are a time of preparation; they are days set aside to prepare our hearts and spirits to fittingly welcome Our Saviour on His birthday.

But what is a fitting preparation? What is the real meaning of Christmas? Now, Christmas is a day of joy and happiness. It marks the great visitation of God to His people. On Christmas we celebrate the stunning fact that God became one of us. The miracle of Christmas is so overpowering that it paralyzes the mind; only with eyes of faith do we see and understand what actually happened at Bethlehem.

So quite understandably, a spirit of joy will permeate our preparation for this great event. However, it must be a spirit of joy tempered by penance. And this penance makes Christmas and its preparation profoundly meaningful. As a matter of fact, to surrender ourselves to a superficial gaily at this time is to reduce

the feast of Christmas to a day of good-fellowship.

The tone of our preparation during the time of Advent is set by the collect prayers of the Advent Masses. These four Masses, said on succeeding Sundays, explain perfectly the true meaning of the great Feast. In words, moving and beautiful, they express the yearning and hope of a lost people waiting for the Saviour. But the collect prayer of each Mass distills into a few glittering phrases the spirit of Christmas, and the preparation necessary for it.

Three of these prayers begin with the Latin word 'excita' — 'arouse'; they express a plea, amounting to a demand, that God hear us and help us. We ask "to be rescued from the threatening danger of our sins." And then we beseech God to hear us that "through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Him with purified minds." The theme of the four prayers is repeated again and again; "that the grace and merciful forgiveness, the good which our sins obstruct, may quickly be brought to us."

Our Lord said that only the pure of heart will see God. How tragic would be our Christmas, and our lives, if we failed to recognize Christ! And this danger is very real. Like the parade on television, we can miss the point. Our exchanging of gifts, our trees decorated with tinsel and bells, our singing of carols is but a mockery if we do not beg God to "hear our prayers, and lighten the darkness of our minds with the grace of His coming."

Eleven Join In Court Plea

Baltimore — (NC) — The attorneys general of 11 states have so far agreed to join Maryland Atty. Gen. Thomas B. Finan in backing public school religious exercises before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Finan recently invited the attorneys general of the other 49 states to join him in an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief on the subject to be submitted to the Supreme Court.

In addition to the 11 attorneys general who have responded favorably, seven have declined on the grounds that local laws prevent their entering the case, it was disclosed here.



A Girl's Best Friend

Yonkers — (RNS) — Rita and Jo go to college together. The seeing-eye dog accompanies Rita Ragosta of Meriden, N.Y., her blind mistress, from classroom to classroom at the new Elizabeth Seton College in Yonkers, N.Y. Miss Ragosta makes the full academic program without apparent handicap, helped by her dog. She tape-records lectures in classes as other students take notes and she is able to type her own assignments. A music major, Miss Ragosta won several oratorical contests in high school. Where she goes, Jo, the five-year-old boxer, goes. When she received her "cap" at the freshman investiture from Sister Miriam Imelda, president of Elizabeth Seton College, the dog stood beside her.

From Around The World

Washington — (NC) — The National Catholic Educational Association reported here that 5,545 foreign students studied in Washington, with 538 foreign students, ranked first.

The foreign students, it said, came from 119 countries, with most of them from Canada. The total from that country was 510. About 37 per cent of the students were receiving some type of financial assistance outside of their own resources.

Vatican Foresees 'Permanent' Council

Vatican City — (RNS) — There is a distinct possibility, Vatican sources say, that a permanent coordinating body of the Church may be established as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

Frequent rumors in Rome have intimated that the Council itself — or "a" Council — might be formed as a permanent instrument of the Church.

Vatican sources state that reports of a definite plan are not to be credited.

However, they do say that it is possible that a permanent body might be constituted with personnel quite similar to that of the Central Commission which prepared for the Council — in other words, a body not only including members of the Sacred College of Cardinals but bishops, archbishops, abbots and heads of religious orders.

The Central Commission coordinated the work of all bodies engaged in preparing the agenda for the Ecumenical Council.

'Socialized Education'

Tax Favoritism Usurps Rights

Vancouver, B.C. — (NC) — Many Canadians oppose socialized medicine, but they freely accept socialized education, a priest-educator said here. Father Edwin C. Garvey, C.S.B., told a public meeting of the British Columbia Catholic Teachers' Association: "The state is not by nature a business man, a medical practitioner, nor is it an educator."

He said that most countries in the world and all Canadian provinces with the exception of Manitoba and British Columbia, support schools which teach religion.

Father Garvey stressed that it is up to the layman to press for government support of schools teaching religion.

"Unless free people are allowed to educate according to their basic beliefs, the very foundations of democracy are neglected and in time democracy itself tends to decay," he said.

THE STATE has the right to protect society by setting suitable academic standards, Father Garvey said. But he warned that "it has no right to determine the philosophy or religion which is taught in schools."

Father Garvey said it is not sufficient for the state to permit schools in which religion is taught. "Such schools have

a right to receive tax support," he added.

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Men's Chorus At Pageant

Washington — (NC) — The men's chorus of St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., will be featured at the opening of the National Capital Pageant of Peace here December 17.

Highlight of the ceremony will be the lighting of the national Christmas tree by President Kennedy.

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