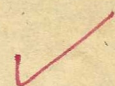




*Christmas 13  
for anyone*

# Perspective



By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Yesterday evening, digging through some old papers, I found a note I had written my parents on Christmas, 20 years ago. At that time I was a junior in college and the note contained a cynical, know-it-all attack on the hypocrisy and commercialism that surrounds the celebration of Christmas in America.

I sat cross-legged on the floor of my writing studio, the box of old papers in front of me, the yellowed note in my hand. How vividly I recalled that Christmas morning when I had pinned the note on the tree in the big, two-story house near the golf course. The night before, Christmas Eve, I had taken my girl friend home and then driven through town on my way back out to the house. The streets were almost deserted except for a single drunk, staggering toward his car at the end of the block on 14th Avenue. He looked up as I passed, and I recognized him as one of Vero's leading citizens.

Something inside me shattered. If this is Christmas, I thought, then I want no part of it. I went home that night and wrote the note, condemning Christmas and all those who celebrated it. I arose early the next morning, before the others got up, and drove to the First Baptist Church. I took the money I had saved for presents, put it in a blank envelope, marked the words "foreign missions" on the outside, and slipped it under the door near the pastor's study. It was my way of saying, "I believe in Christ, but I'll not have any part of Christmas."

For several years after that, when I preached a Christmas sermon, I would use such topics as "No Room For Jesus" or "Christmas, More Farce Than Force." But time mellows people, gives them a broader perspective. And

today, 20 years later, I suddenly realize that Christmas is the most beautiful time of year.

One night last week my wife and I had a few hours before our plane left California for the east coast. We spent it walking through Macy's in downtown San Francisco. All that day, driving down from the Oregon border, we had sensed God's presence in the car as we drove through the redwood forests, covered with snow, and through the little lumber towns, the rooftops white, the windows decorated with twinkling Christmas lights. Then the scene changed and we were in Macy's, the heart of Christmas commercialism. But I have changed too, and suddenly I was aware of my sensitivity to the bright colors, the music in the air, the smiling faces and the squeals of little children. The cynic had softened.

Last week Communist Cuba officially abolished Christmas. From now on July 6 will be observed as Children's Day, at which time presents may be exchanged. Christmas will be just another day to harvest sugar cane. The decision was made by the Communist Party's Revolutionary Orientation Commission.

Twenty years ago I might have applauded such a decision, and hoped it would happen in America. Now, when I read the announcement in the paper, I felt sad. We need Christmas. Not only children, but college students, and communists, too. Pious preachers and drunk businessmen, angels and shepherders, we all need Christmas. For Christmas is God taking on human form and dwelling among us.

"Emmanuel," the angels called Him. God with us. Ah, what a beautiful time of year.