



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Leaving The Banquet

Despite all the indications of godlessness, this nation is founded on a basic principle: God is. God controls.

No American has ever been forced to believe that. But woven into the very warp and woof of our constitution is the concept that this nation trusts in God.

Beginning with the first Continental Congress, our leaders have invoked the blessing of God on both social and state functions. City council meetings open with prayer. So do school board meetings, sessions of the state legislature, Congress and the Senate. Presidents and governors sponsor prayer breakfasts. Football games, from the junior high level to the Super Bowl, are blessed with invocations. There is prayer in the Pentagon, aboard aircraft carriers and at the military academies. Our nation, whether it believes in it or not, is founded on prayer. It is our way of life.

Thus what happened in New Orleans three weeks ago needs close examination.

The president of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, was being honored at a dinner planned by the Mayor's International Trade and Relations Committee. Five days before the dinner the mayor's director of international relations met with Ceausescu's chief of protocol and outlined plans for the banquet. The Romanians expressed no hesitation when informed the meeting would open with prayer.

However, when Ceausescu balked, and said he refused to be present during the prayer, New Orleans Mayor Moon Landrieu agreed to accompany him from the room.

Ceausescu had every right to stand up for his convictions and march out when the executive director of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches began to pray. Only in America, it should be noted, could a visiting dignitary

make such a brazen protest and get away with it. If Vice-President Mondale were to spit on Lenin's tomb you can bet there would be trouble.

The problem arises in that the mayor of New Orleans, who also officiates at the largest religious celebration in the nation, the Mardi Gras, agreed to accompany him from the room.

American statesmen visiting communist lands are expected to sit through outrageous talks exalting communism. It would be refreshing to see one get up and stalk out in protest. But no one would expect the communist leader to be hypocrite enough to escort him out and then bring him back in again to receive an award.

Why then, do Americans feel they have to keep bending their convictions? Especially for the sake of second rate atheist leaders who flaunt human rights in our faces.

I think we've backed down far enough.