

THOUGHTS FOR OUR TIME

BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MCGUIGAN

LET'S GIVE CHRISTMAS ITS TRUE MEANING
THIS is the time of year when preparations for Christmas take on alarming proportions. I am referring to the vast commercial promotion that surrounds this once Christian and religious feast.

Stores are crammed with shoppers; the public transit system is overburdened with extra passengers; and all through the city there has begun to blossom that weird conglomeration of truly Christian and truly pagan symbolism; Madonna and Child, the Magi, and the shepherds, along with Santa Claus and Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer.

Individually, too, we approach this season with mixed feelings. If we are devout Christians, our thoughts will be primarily about the spiritual aspects of the feast, the true meaning of Christmas and the charity towards our fellow man traditionally associated with it. But even the best of us will also be burdened with those distractions and annoyances which a powerful commercialism has foisted upon our way of life.

It is no longer enough to give a Christmas gift to those who are specially dear to us. Now we must give one to all whom we are afraid of offending, or from whom we expect something in the way of profit. Similarly, it is not enough to renew acquaintance by means of Christmas cards

with friends far away; we also have to placate all those around us—even though we may see them every day; for not to send a card to someone who expects one is considered a kind of insult.

The result is that once good and meaningful customs have now become a kind of frantic necessity, without personal significance and without too much connection with the feast of Christmas.

PAGAN FEAST
Such a pass has the situation reached that many well-meaning people have seriously suggested that the feast of Christmas be abandoned, that the only way of getting rid of the commercial burden is to get rid of the feast itself. They argue that Christ-

mas began as a pagan feast, that today it is once more a pagan feast, and that it should be forgotten.

There is something to be said for this argument, of course, especially regarding the pagan aspects of the modern Christmas. But the solution put forward is no solution at all, and completely unacceptable to Christians.

In the first place, the historical coincidence of Christmas with a Roman feast means nothing more than this: the Christian made use of the pagan feast for the sake of Christianity. This was merely common sense; they "converted" the custom from a pagan one to a Christian one.

The second part of the argument is more cogent. But even here, while it is true that Christmas today is largely an occasion for eating, drinking, and party-making, a lot of the meaning of Christian brotherhood and charity still remains. And it is still the day above all when families and friends reunite. Such things are laudable and retain enough of their traditional association with the meaning of

Christmas to justify their continuance.

TURNING POINT
But such arguments aside, to Christians the idea of abandoning the feast of Christmas is simply unthinkable, for the reason that Christmas is too much at the heart of their belief for Christians ever to neglect its celebration.

To Christians, Christmas Day is the day on which their Savior was born, the day on which God Himself visited His people, taking a human form like theirs, being born of a human mother, enduring all the ills to which human nature is subject—"like to us", as St. Paul puts it. "In all things save sin."

It represents, too, the meeting of Time and Eternity, the redemption of time from the deadly cycle of meaningless existence. Christmas Day, to Christians, is the turning-point of history. Christmas, then, is forever.

Despite the occasional voice raised against it—whether by those who despise its meaning, or by those who feel that its meaning has been lost—Christmas will continue to be celebrated, much as it has been in the past.

But this, however, should not deter every serious Christian from doing his best to get rid of its false trappings—the spurious sentiment, nasty commercialism and un-Christian mythology—or from working towards a restoration of Christmas to its original meaning and spiritual value.

ELIMINATE THREAT
FREJUS, France (Reuters)—The four towns devastated two weeks ago by the Frejus dam night at a meeting of the four mayors and other officials and that they will never again have a dam overhanging their valley. The decision, reached Wednesday during a brief visit he paid here.

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