

IS IT ENOUGH TO PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS?

By E. STANLEY JONES

The movement "to put Christ back into Christmas" is long overdue. The commercialization of Christmas has become nothing less than a scandal. People who care nothing about Christ personally use Him for their own selfish purposes. There is a very close kinship to the scene where at the crucifixion the soldiers were throwing dice on His seamless robe to see who would get it—commercialization on redemption.

The commercializing has become so all-pervading that a woman could say as she looked into a store window at Christmas time and saw a replica of a church: "Well, of all things—the church is horning in on Christmas!"

It's time a reaction set in. But if the reaction is real, then we must put not Christ back into Christmas, but Jesus.

Is there a distinction here? Yes, and a very real one with very real consequences.

A Hindu said to me one day: "We Hindus are all interested in the Universal Christ."

"Not in the historic Jesus?" I asked.

He slowly shook his head and said: "No, we are interested in the universal Christ."

Why was he interested in the universal Christ and not in the historic Jesus? Because into the universal Christ he could put any content, even a Hindu content, for it is not anchored in history, in fact. But you cannot put any

content you desire in the historical Jesus. By His life and teaching and death and resurrection He has put His own content there.

The Christian faith is founded upon the Incarnation, the Word become flesh. It begins with Jesus—the Incarnate. You cannot legitimately say Christ until you have first said Jesus. For Jesus puts character and content into Christ. The Jews put a very definite content in the term Christ—a conquering hero who would restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus redeemed Christ by making the term Christ stand for the spirit of Jesus—something quite different.

You cannot say God until you have first said Jesus, for Jesus puts character and content into God. Apart from Jesus our ideas of God range from a vague Cosmic Energy (the God of many scientifically-minded moderns) to a Grandfatherly old gentleman

Simple Christmas Best for Children

Crowds of faces glowing with the Christmas spirit, Santa with his laughing eyes and hearty chuckle, gifts you can use and some you can't—that's a grownup's-eye-view of the holidays.

A forest of legs, a frustrating heap of things to touch and see and an endless journey of being pushed and pulled through a hot, noisy place—that's a child's-eye-view of the holidays.

If you give children a happier view of the holidays they'll give you a happier one too.

First of all, avoid crowds with your children. If they shop with you, it's best to take them immediately after a rest and not stay too long.

Preschool children often don't understand Santa Claus. Take them to see him if they want to go. Forcing them to sit on his lap often makes them cry and leaves unpleasant memories because they were frightened.

Children often receive so many gifts that they're confused and can't decide which one to play with first. After they open the gifts, put some away for a rainy day. See which they'd like to save for later.

The holiday season will be a pleasant time for your children if you keep it simple.

As you store holiday foods in your freezer, you'll save time if you put them in the pans in which you're going to heat them.

To decorate a fruit cake, dip one side of candied fruit in syrup and press it into the top of the fruit cake.



BOY, OH, BOY . . . If this isn't the biggest and brightest candle this youngster ever discovered, it will do until some future year when maturity will bring the deeper significance of this great holiday.

Observance Grew With Christianity

The observance of Christmas as we know it today is one of joy and peace, making it difficult for us to realize that the holiday has not always been universally recognized and observed.

When Pope Gregory sent out missionaries in 601 A. D., he told them to let pagan converts weave the harmless features of their festivals into the spiritual fabric of Christmas observance.

The popularity of the Christmas observance grew with the progress of Christianity, but there were setbacks. Abuses of Christmas reached such a pitch in feudal England that the Puritan Parliament outlawed the holiday in 1644. The observance declined until the middle of the 19th century when Charles Dickens published his heart-warming "Christmas Carol."

TRUE CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Wesley, a Methodist minister in England wrote "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" on a Christmas morning. The brother of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was inspired by the pealing of church bells when he penned the famous carol.



TELL ME, TELL ME . . . This lovely lady has succeeded in bringing Old Santa into view by gazing into her crystal ball, yet it seems that the vision isn't clear enough to foretell the gifts that he is bearing. Oh, well, Christmas is only a short time away.



UP SHE GOES . . . It takes plenty of horsepower to hoist the huge Christmas tree in New York's Rockefeller Plaza. The three ton white spruce shown above is estimated to be 65 years old.

word in human affairs? How did they come to that strutting conclusion? Did they find that the touch of Jesus upon life was the touch of God? That He was doing something that only God could do? And were they forced to the conclusion that Jesus is Lord? Yes!

They found He was Lord of the past, forgiving sins and releasing men from the bondage and guilt of the yesterdays. They found Him to be the Lord of the present,

releasing men from temptation and sins and giving them power to face up to tragedy and sorrow and make something good out of them. They found Him to be the Lord of the future, pulling the sting of death and making men unafraid of anything that might happen. They cried: "We don't know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future." They were secure with an invincible security—Jesus is Lord! Not will the Lord—is Lord here

and now!" This Jesus as Saviour and Lord must be put back into Christmas! Then Christmas will be redeemed as we, too, will be redeemed! So the movement to put Christ back into Christmas must gather momentum and go deeper—it must put Jesus, the Incarnate, back where God put Him—"Jesus is Lord!" If this is done then Christmas and Christendom will be saved and with it the world.



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seated in heaven (the God of many, even in our churches). The question of whether there is a God is important, but the question of what kind of God is even more important. For what God is like, we must be like. We cannot be at cross purposes with God, the Ultimate Reality, and not get hurt. But apart from Jesus we know little or nothing about the character of God. Jesus is God revealing Himself in terms. He is God showing His understandable terms, human character where our character is wrought out, namely in the stream of human history. Jesus is that part of God that we have been able to see. He is the human life of God. He is God simplified, God understandable, approachable, lovable. When I say God I think Jesus. And I can think of Him in terms of Jesus. We believe with Canon Wilberforce, "in the Jesus-Christness of God." He is God's authentic self-revelation.

So Christmas is the celebration of God's first step in the Incarnation with us—becoming like us as a baby. It is God's identification that we may become like Him. The birth was the first step in that identification. The identification was progressive: He was born as a human. He was baptized into the toil of the human. He worked at a carpenter's bench. Then he was baptized into the world's sin when He took a baptism of repentance alongside of sinners as one of them—He who knew no sin. And then that identification became complete when at a cross He was crucified between two sinners as one of them. He became sin for us. He cried the cry of dereliction that you and I have to cry when we sin, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The identification was almost complete. But not quite. At the cross He was identified with our sins. But at the tomb He was identified with the results of our sins—death.

But now that He has become identified with us, He opened the possibility of our being identified with Him. He reached bottom with us that we might reach the top with Him by surrender and obedience, then we become identified with His victory. We get under a process of redemption that will end in our being made into His likeness.

So putting "Christ into Christmas" is more than substituting Christ for commercialization. For that might substitute a name for a name.

Two things must become facts if we are to put Christ back into Christmas. We must begin with Jesus—the Incarnate—and make Him first of all Saviour. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His People from their sins." The name "Jesus" means "Saviour" and He must become that to us. A Saviour from what? From hell? To Heaven? No, from sin! If He doesn't save us from sin, He doesn't save us from anything. The business of the Chris-

tian redemption is not to get us out of hell, but to get hell out of us, not to get us into heaven, but to get heaven into us.

And moreover, His redemption is not to make you healthy and not to bring you happiness—except incidentally. If you make your health the aim of the Christian redemption, then that makes God serve you; you're the center, not God. And if the end of that redemption is to make you happy, then again God is the servant of your happiness; you are the center. But the end of the Christian redemption is to save you from the central sin—the sin of making yourself God. God becomes eternal, God becomes God, noa you. When that takes place, then health, happiness, effectiveness, success, are added as by-products. The Kingdom of God is first and then "all these things are added." You haven't put Christ into Christmas except marginally, until Jesus becomes Saviour.

The second thing is to make Jesus Lord. He cannot be Saviour unless we also make Him Lord. To make Him Lord means that He has the final say in our lives. We have moved over and have given Him the wheel. We finally bend the knee at His feet and only His feet, Jesus is Lord! That phrase, "Jesus is Lord," is very important. It was the earliest Christian creed: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord . . . you will be saved." Again, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (R.S.V.) Here also is the simplest and profoundest creed.

It is said that all great discoveries are a reduction of complexity to simplicity. The false hypothesis is always complex for lots of words have to be used to cover up the falsity. But the truth is always simple. Of all the reductions from complexity to simplicity, this is the greatest: Jesus is Lord!

How did it happen? How did a fiercely monotheistic people whose characteristic statement was: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord"—God was Lord—how did these people come to the conclusion that Jesus was Lord? How did they believe that this Man, who was born in a stable, walked our dusty roads, died upon one of our trees, was buried in a rock tomb—how did they believe He was at the place of final authority and would have the last

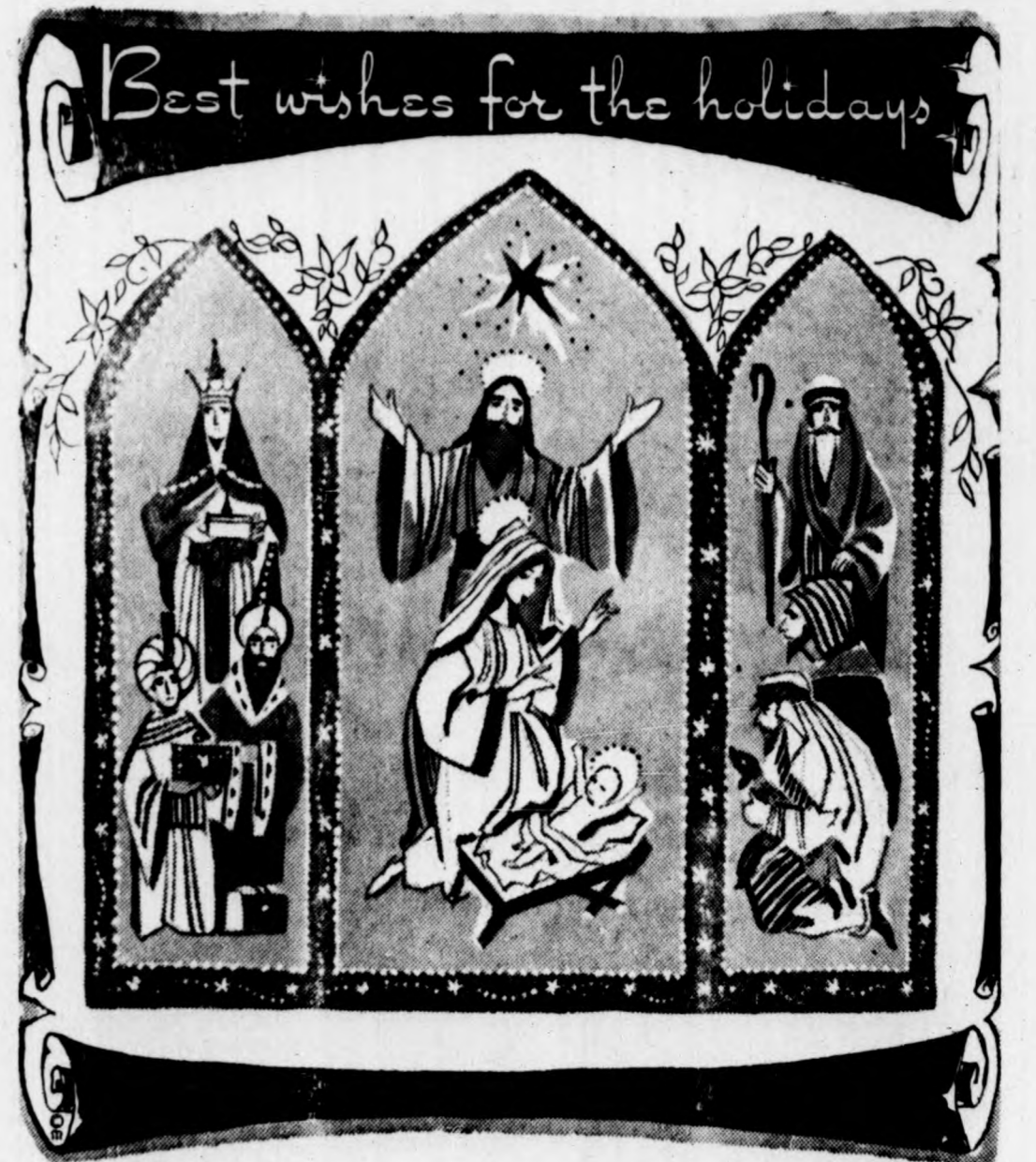


SEASON'S Greetings

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