

From This Corner

The Cost of Christmas

Larry Baird

Everyone is cost conscious this Christmas. So much so Santa Claus, a.k.a. Michael Graham, has lost his job at Tyson's Corner Mall in Fairfax County Virginia. Michael purportedly has the real stuff. He has the genuine jolly demeanor, real beard, and real belly. Nobody, including the mall management, seems to deny he is the right person. He has been the real thing for eighteen years. Now he has been sacked. It seems the mall did a cost analysis and Santa's part-time salary was ten times the going rate of mall elves which is \$3,000. I suppose it remains to be seen if he will be replaced by a less iconic figure. You've seen them before. They have a folded cushion for a belly and a nylon beard hooked over their ears. Any child can spot the imposters eight mechanical reindeer away. It is a sad day when authentic Claus-ness gets devalued.

Having been spurred on to a degree of righteous indignation over Santa's fate in this year of depressed markets, I invite you to join the quest. How else is Christmas being devalued?

My wife Brenda may have made the most shocking discovery. She found Jesus on the cross for \$1.00. Looking through a church rummage sale she came across this ultimate devaluation. It was a brass crucifix marked to sell quickly. Being found in a Methodist bazaar may explain why it was marked at less than bargain basement price. Wesleyans are not known for crucifix etiquette. It aroused Brenda's sensibilities, so she reported it to the highest authority available. Sometimes it is handy to have a Superintendent husband. After I commented on the fact that "this would preach", she called our oldest son known still to be near the sight of the great devaluation. He (and a dollar) rescued the symbol from its place among the rummage and I am now in possession of my first crucifix. It may be the best and most meaningful Christmas gift I will get this year.

Santa may be too pricey at \$30,000 for the season, but God sending his incarnate love in Jesus and His life-giving sacrifice is absolutely and eternally priceless. God doesn't count the cost.

Maybe we shouldn't either. So let us put an extra generous gift in the Salvation Army pot, and remember your church in your response to the extraordinary generosity of our God. Some things are just too valuable to devalue.

As poet Christina Rossetti has written, "What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb, if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part, yet what can I give him: give my heart."