



CHRISTMAS IN HAITI

by Joseph Augustin

In Haiti, there are three different ways of celebrating Christmas. Devout Christians mark it by their own religious festivities; the great mass of people celebrate it in their own original way; Voodoo adepts in still another. As early as November, Christmas carols are broadcast on the radio or sung with gusto within the family circle. A joyous atmosphere reigns everywhere, announcing renewal.

Christmas is a busy day for the priests who hear confessions from morning until evening. Catholic churches are packed for Midnight Mass during which old French hymns are sung, alternating with local Creole carols. After Midnight Mass, family gatherings are held and a

festive meal is served to all relatives. A favourite item on the menus is *gros bouillon*, a delicious blend of coffee laced with rum. In some places, however, such a meal is served before Midnight Mass. This is customary especially among Protestants who spend the rest of the night celebrating the birth of the Christ Child in their churches.

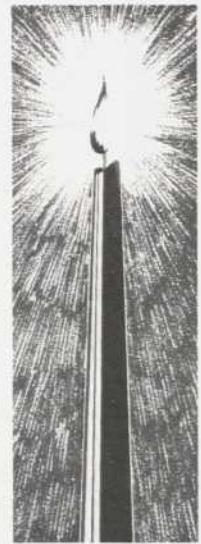
A modest crib is set up in the great majority of Haitian homes on Christmas Eve. In the evening, groups of friends and relatives go from house to house to admire these household crèches. Visitors usually sing appropriate carols before moving on to another house. Such creations are ingeniously fashioned out of superposed cardboard boxes, papier mâché, plants, lichens, etc.

The most curious exhibit is *Mèt Olivie*, a rudimentary doll bought at the public market, on Christmas Eve. It consists of a large nut to which stout twigs, covered with coloured paper have been attached. The whole thing presents a vague resemblance to a human form. The sharpened edge of the bottom twig allows it to be fixed to the interior of the crib. *Mèt Olivie* seems to be the Haitian equivalent of our Santa Claus. It is the personification of a spirit supposed to launch the Christmas festivities. A popular ditty invites him to play his role to everyone's satisfaction.

Market booths on December 23-24 are piled high with twigs, green branches, and mosses which are used in domestic decorations. Some women concoct drinks from certain kinds of plants on sale at this time. Such infusions are believed to contain healing qualities, but a great many people consider them to be sacred infusions. In

Merry Christmas

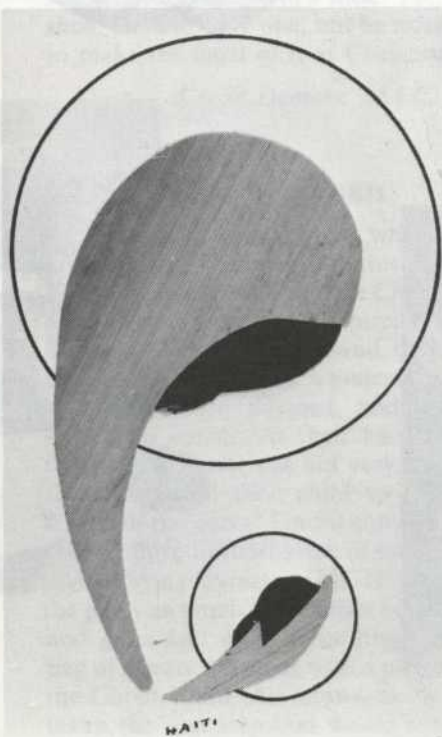
*This is
 our prayerful
 wish for you
 on the Birthday
 of our Saviour
 — that his peace
 and love
 be yours
 forever.*



this they are close to the voodooists who endow Christmas with cultural values of their own.

Great voodoo gatherings are held on Christmas Eve. These gatherings are perhaps the most joyful and dynamic in the whole Island. All those who have benefited by voodoo favours throughout the year, make it their duty to gather in temples during this night to attend solemn rites of thanksgiving and of purification. A spirit of renewal inspires ritual baths which signify cleansing and a new beginning. Adepts sprinkle one another with branches of various trees steeped for hours in large buckets or tubs of water. Such water is considered laden with blessings obtained through fervent invocations. Dances are then performed to the rhythm of songs and of sacred drums.

In Haiti, people do not usually exchange gifts at Christmas. For them this is a foreign custom which very few are inclined to imitate. The formal gift exchange comes on New Year's.



**May our hearts and hands reach out,
spanning distance, to all the world's needy
every day of the new year.**

1978





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CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

MALAWI, C.A.

For our Christians more particularly, Christmas is a great feast. People flock to the mission centre from as far as 30 or 40 miles on foot. Some cheerfully walk several days on end. They arrive by little groups, dead tired, but happy to have made it. While waiting for midnight Mass, some lie down on the floor for a snooze. The church is packed. You should hear with what fervour the Christmas carols in Citumbuka are sung by the whole assembly. A few non-Christians are also present, caught in the festive atmosphere. After midnight Mass, the assistants file past the Crib and each one offers the Christ Child a present. You would be surprised at the variety of objects which surround the Crib: eggs, little pieces of soap, corn on the cob, small change, an empty bottle or two, safety pins, a tiny blanket... The Christ Child must smile on the loving simplicity of his friends. The Christians then gather in the mission centre for refreshments. Nobody goes to bed, but all take turns dancing and singing until the morning Mass. People dress in their best clothes for the occasion. A woman who has two dresses shares with a neighbour in rags. Little boys often sport a big brother's shirt. I once saw a lad who was dressed in a shoe! Yes, in a shoe. He had only one, but he intended to make the most of it at Christmas.

Cécile Demers, M.I.C.

KORIYAMA, Japan

From the first year when our kindergarten was opened in this city, we made it a custom to celebrate Christmas on a grand scale. Our pupils were invited to a party. Beforehand, they had of course been told the wonderful story of the newborn Saviour, and taught Christmas carols. As their number, in those early years, was not very impressive, we urged each child to bring a friend to the party. Thus it came about, that Chihiro Sato was one of our guests invited by a playmate of his. He enjoyed the party as much as the other little boys and girls, and went home hugging his bag of sweets, together with a picture of the Christ Child. All unawares, he had taken the first step that would eventu-

ally lead him into the Catholic Church. After following the usual course of primary and secondary school studies first in Koriyama, then in Sendai, he entered Tohoku University where he majored in economics. While he attended this university, he came under the influence of a Japanese Dominican priest, requested instruction in the faith, and was eventually baptized under the Christian name of Raymond. After his graduation, in 1949, he entered the Dominican Order. Msgr. M.J. Lemieux, O.P., then Bishop of Sendai, ordained him to the priesthood on March 3, 1959. After several years spent as master of novices and as instructor at Seisen Girls' College, he became leader of the Student Federation of Japan and entrusted with the spiritual direction of the students in Sendai (1965). In 1973, he was put in charge of the diocesan office and became Bishop Kobayashi's assistant. Finally, in 1976, Pope Paul VI nominated him as fourth bishop of Sendai. And it all started, once upon a time, on a bright Christmas Day in Koriyama. While the little boy who came as the guest of a friend eventually entered the Fold and was blessed with God's choicest gifts, his friend has remained a non-Christian to this day. We are here on the brink of one of these mysteries which remind us that God's thoughts are beyond our thoughts, and who are we to question them?

Lucienne Renaud, M.I.C.

ESPINAR, Peru

Christmas in the Andes... You are no doubt wondering how it is celebrated here in our lonely Espinar region. The four weeks of Advent are spent preparing the people to penetrate more deeply into the wonderful mystery of God made man. On the last three evenings, we give appropriate slides in the largest room available. Everybody enjoys these as a real treat. Seven young boys agree to turn carollers for the occasion and troop out, on Christmas Eve, to awaken the congregation with their hymns sung in Quechua. As accompaniment, they use rustic musical instruments from which they draw surprisingly melodious sounds: empty tin cans, combs, buttons strung on a

piece of wire, flutes held together with shoe laces, etc. They wear tattered clothes and go barefoot, but their hearts are young, and they play their makeshift instruments with gay abandon. Watching them go by, I remember Saint Exupéry's remark, in the last pages of his book, *Man and his World*, where he speaks of "assassinated Mozarts". These young boys are all bright and talented. Some are perhaps budding musicians, poets, or singers. Alas! Their parents are too poor to provide them with schooling, even on an elementary level. Perhaps some kind friends overseas might like to wave a magic wand and make sure these children can develop their latent skills.

Agnès Bouchard, M.I.C.

LES CAYES, Haiti

This is a description of the Crib in our church. In the centre, on a little hill, stands a typical thatched hut. The mistress of the house can be seen sweeping away. Grandma sits on a small stool, near the kitchen fire, cooking the main meal of the day. A little boy with a pail on his head has just fetched water from a well nearby. On the winding road, around the house, a number of people, on foot or muleback, wend their way to their daily occupations. At the foot of a little hill, lies a typical country market. Coffee, fruit, cloth, vegetables, and chicken vendors haggle their wares. Behind the hut, men till the family gardens. We could go on and on... Very nice! Quite colourful! Very amusing! But, you may ask yourself, "What's the point?" In his Gospel, Saint John answers this question very succinctly. "And the Word (of God) was made flesh and dwelt among us". Yes, Christ came to live among us to show us the true value of everyday life. He came to bring light where there was only darkness, hope where there was only despair. More fantastic still, he came to show us that God respects us more than we oftentimes respect ourselves, because it is his intention that we collaborate with him in building a world of Peace and Love. Impossible? Yes, if we count solely on our little old selves, with our likes and dislikes, selfishness and hate. But with the Christ of Bethlehem as our guide, it is possible!

Facets of Délia Tétreault's Personality

A Trusting Heart

The well of Providence is deep. It is the bucket we bring to it that is too small.

Délia Tétreault was never one to remain idle, expecting divine Providence to make up for human negligence. The senior Sisters can testify how hard she worked and how wisely she planned to put the Community in the way of meeting its obligations. But, strong in her faith, after she had done all that was in her power, she placed absolute trust in the Lord's Providence for the rest.

Her feelings on this score are revealed in the following note: "Lately, the thought has struck me that the Lord is always ready to provide what we need in order to perform the apostolic works entrusted to our care. This thought has affected me so deeply, that I feel ready to attempt building a cathedral! We often rely so much on our own feeble means that we do not give Providence the 'chance' to act..."

To a superior of our convent in Rome, she wrote, "You have every reason to say that God is a 'mother'. He is indeed an incomparably tender 'mother' in the manifestations of his divine Providence." She encouraged her daughters struggling against difficulties of all kinds: "Don't look too far and too anxiously into the future. Be satisfied with doing what you can, day by day. Cast your worries into the Lord's merciful heart. You may be sure that even what to you may appear as obstacles will turn out to your best

advantage if you trust in his love. He alone knows through what ways and byways we must pass in order to accomplish his holy will."

An apostolic enterprise launched at the cost of great sacrifices was put into jeopardy, due to the selfish interference of outsiders. Délia wrote to the superior who felt downhearted: "Hardships and contradictions are the price one must pay to ensure the success of God's work. No matter what happens, never lose heart. Always act in all sincerity, for God's dear sake. Nothing else really matters. Hold on to our Lady's hand and go your way cheerfully and courageously... Put your trust in the Lord. He will unravel the tangled skein of your affairs."

In the early days of the foundation, when the future of the Institute hung in the balance, trust in divine Providence gave way to unwavering certitude in Délia's heart. She replied to a Sister who once remarked, "Mother, how anxious you must have been when you did not know what the answer from Rome would be..." "Having placed the issue in God's hands, I never entertained the least doubt as to its outcome." This firm trust in God's Providence was with her to the end. She was able to do great things because she knew she had God on her side.

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