

# EVOLUTION OF ANCIENT

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Have you ever wondered what the world would be like without you?

In some minds, the sounds of Christmas, for 1980, began the day after Thanksgiving. For those on Wall Street, those sounds began on the 26th day of December a year ago. A large number of people were disappointed, then, because the gifts they received were less costly than those they had given. Others felt guilty because the gifts they received were more expensive than those which they had given. The former decided to give less expensive gifts this year while the latter decided to give more costly gifts. Once again, the final results were the same. Only the positions of the participants are changed. The cycle goes on and on and on - year in and year out. What was intended to be a time in which the ultimate gift of salvation is reflected upon and acknowledged, instead, has become a time in which great disappointments and

hostilities are manifested by an army of consumers. Cycles continue because Christmas, as everyone realizes, has become simply a commercial adventure.

Centuries ago, those Africans who ultimately came to America did not profess to be Christians. Those from the area of the Niger River had had some exposure to Islam, but only for approximately 700 years. Most still held fast to their traditional religions. Those were generally polytheistic with one of the gods being supreme to all of the other lesser gods. For the Bakongo, the supreme god was named Nzambi. The Yoruba had Olurum and the Ibo had Chukwu. Africans did not celebrate Christmas because they had no god called Christ. When they acknowledged or participated in a festival of the Gods, it was the gods who were central.

The people brought offering and gifts to their gods. Those items were of their own making and they

epitomized the very best work which they could do.

That tradition was a part of all the ancient religions partially because the people all had a common ancestry and a common evolution of religious practices. When Christ was born and when a portion of the world began to think of time in terms of the time before his birth (B.C.) and the time afterwards (A.D.), the practice was still in effect. The visitors brought myrrh, frankincense, gold and lapis lazuli to the God Child. They left with only the belief that they had paid homage to the son of God. Thus it was in all of the ancient world.

Black people, on a large scale, received their first major exposure to the Christian religion 361 years ago when they began to arrive to English North America in 1619. They were tangent to a totally different culture from their own and, as is usually the case, cultural borrowings took place. Since Africans were the minority, they borrowed most. Among the cultural exchanges

were food, language and religion.

During the next 244 years, Black people became more and more acculturated to the life styles of the transplanted Europeans. They gradually accepted aspects of Christianity. Initially, they were not made privy to all of the teachings of Christ. He had personified a belief in the universal brotherhood of man, while the favorite teaching of plantation owners was simply "slaves, obey your masters."

Through their own efforts, they became more aware of the true teachings of Christianity. Even though their tormentors did not fully believe or follow their own teachings, Black people had not then learned hypocrisy - a characteristic which is naturally repugnant to most sensible, thinking people. Africans adapted Christianity to their traditional religions. They replaced Olurum and Nzambi and others with Christ. They adapted to the conditions in which they found themselves and, initially as a

means of survival, they slowly became Christians. Each succeeding generation had less religious connections with Africa.

As recently as 115 years ago, a large number of Black people, living in the United States, looked forward to Christmas for much different reasons than those which are common today. To them, Christmas was intended to be a very festive time and they looked upon it as such. Being a slave was nothing to cheer about. There were few times, in the course of a year, that the drudgery of slavery even began to approach tolerability. It was "sixteen tons and what do you get?" For two and a quarter centuries, in this country, it had been that way.

During the Christmas time, slaves were given as much as six days off from their normal duties of all work and no pay or play. For that brief bit of time they could visit friends at neighboring plantations and, on Christmas morning, they were permitted to line up at the "big house" and greet the plantation owner with chants of

"Christmas gift. Christmas gift." Upon saying such, Black men were given a bit of tobacco and a dram of whiskey. The women were given snuff, bright ribbons and pieces of gingham to make their limited clothing of - for the year - without benefit of a pattern and the children, whom the plantation owners affectionately referred to as "pickanin-



nys." were given little ginger bread cakes. In return for such generosity, they all were expected to sing and dance and entertain the "marster" and his family and friends.

To the slaves, Christmas was initially a holiday from work and

**answer**

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