

Early Christians, Puritans Spurned Gift-Giving

New York—While millions of Americans give gifts ranging from golf balls to diamonds (by gosh!), few among those who give and receive the gifts this Christmas will realize what a long and delightful history the custom of gift-giving has.

It was the Three Wise Men who gave the first Christmas gifts in history, although the earliest Christians refused to exchange presents. To them, the custom was a heathen one — because gift-giving played a prominent role in many pagan festivals.

In time, they accepted the exchange of gifts as an expression of rejoicing — and legends about the bringers of gifts began to grow.

The jolly gent we know as St. Nick, for example, is based on the real-life St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in the fourth century. Legendary even in his own time for his generosity, and his love of children, he is said to have gone on many a mysterious journey carrying secret gifts to the poor.

Giving to the poor remained a vital part of Christmas celebra-



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brations in the centuries to come. In England, on the day after Christmas, clergymen used to open the church alms-boxes and distribute the money to the needy. Later,

it became customary to give boxes of money on that day to people who had served you during the year. Dec. 26 is still known as Boxing Day in Britain.

The custom of bestowing gifts on friends and family members was popularized in England by King Henry VII. Henry's granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth I, made the most of this custom: she depended on Christmas gifts to replenish her wardrobe, and made it very clear to courtiers that they had better come across handsomely on Christmas Day.

Court records show that the Archbishop of Canterbury gave her \$200 every Yule for clothes. Court ladies presented her with the first silk stockings worn in Europe, and even the royal dutman (garbage collector) came through with two bolts of fine linen for the royal lingerie.

Father Christmas, as the English counterpart of Santa is called, rode high for another 40 years after the reign of Good Queen Bess. Then the Puritans took over. They abolished him and his gifts, and indeed all Christmas celebrations, as fit only for heathens.

The stern Puritans brought their distrust of Christmas merriment to New England's shores as well; in 1659, the

observance of Christmas in Massachusetts became a penal offense!

On the other hand, fun-loving Dutch settlers had already brought "Sinter Klass" to New Amsterdam. Later, a German colony moved to Pennsylvania along with their gift-bringer, Christkindlein — who gave us the name "Kris Kringle."

Many gifts today are wrapped with the aid of Christmas seals, yet few Americans have any notion of when or where these originated. They were first used in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1904—the brainstorm of a postal clerk named Holboell, who dreamed them up as a benefit for a children's hospital.

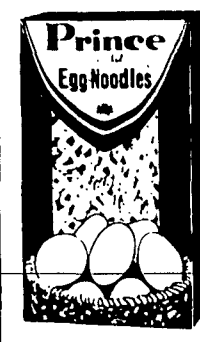
The gift-giving customs of many lands form an interesting contrast to our own. Greek children rustle up their own gifts: on Christmas Day they go the rounds collecting raisins, walnuts, figs and sweets. In Newfoundland, an important Christmas gift is fish! Local fishermen fish for the

church on Christmas Day, donating their catch to the parish.

Some countries enjoy Christmas giving so much that they do it twice: the French exchange gifts on New Year's Day, but the children are visited by Père Noël on Christmas Eve. Italian children receive their main presents on Jan. 6, but they and their parents draw for little gifts on Christmas Eve from an "Um of Fate."

And Icelanders must hurry if they want to unwrap their presents Christmas morning. Almost the entire holiday must be spent in church services—for in Iceland there are only four hours of light on Christmas Day!

Hey, Mrs. Santo



Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti Day... that leaves oodles of time for noodles.

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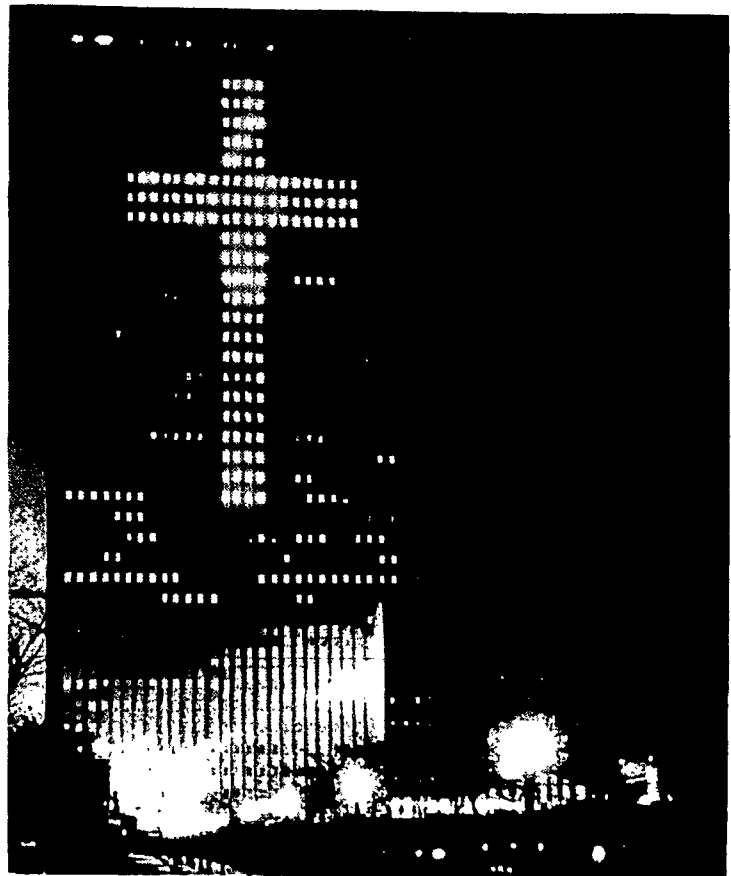
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Christmas Cross

A Christmas cross 275 feet tall and 150 feet across glows on the south facade of Chicago's Prudential Building. Formed by 136 lighted windows on 22 of the skyscraper's 41 floors, the festive illumination will brighten the Chicago skyline nightly through Christmas Eve.

Rabbi Stresses Judaism Political

Minneapolis — (RNS) — Jews committed to the preservation of Israel are a people, not "an ecclesiastical body," and they don't "fit into any Christian definitions," an interfaith meeting was told here.

Rabbi James Rudin, assistant director of the department of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee, said Jews had made the mistake of allowing Judaism to be regarded almost purely as a religion.

The rabbi said that during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war "the specter of Auschwitz hung over every Jew on this planet," but many Christian groups declined to support the right of Israel to exist.

Orthodox Theologian Advocates Mariology

(NC News Service) — Dayton, Ohio — The modern theologian who wants to master the "world in its reality" should turn to studies about the Blessed Mother in his search for answers, Father Alexander Schmemmann, Orthodox theologian, said here.

Speaking at the University of Dayton at the 25th anniversary observance of the university's Marian Library, Father Schmemmann said his suggestion to seek answers to contemporary problems in Mariology admittedly is "different from all things we discuss today."

Referring to Mary as "the secret joy of the Church," he said she is the "convincing syn-

thesis" of what the world seeks — "goodness and beauty, time and eternity."

Mary will "purify the Church, not priests' unions, not marching monsignors protesting something," he said.

Father Schmemmann said there will always be tension between authority and freedom.

The great mystery of the Church as a response to God, he continued, finds "its symbol and expression" in Mary.

Father Schmemmann said knowledge of Mary in the Orthodox Church is expressed not in scientific theology, but in liturgy, in the worship of the Church.

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