



# THANKSGIVING

It won't be long now before we begin hearing about "the true meaning" of Christmas. But there is seldom much discussion about "the true meaning" of this month's holiday, Thanksgiving. There is nothing like Dickens' Christmas Carol or Seuss's Grinch for Thanksgiving. Charlie Brown's Great Pumpkin doesn't come close to addressing the challenges and problems of gratitude.

Even believers tend not to complain about Thanksgiving's having become mostly a secular "Turkey Day," a day for family get-togethers and big meals and football games. Although our U.S. Presidents can be depended upon to issue an annual statement calling the nation to devote itself to the Christian God and to be thankful to that deity, even our politicians fail to recognize, much less exploit, the idea of gratitude. Appealing to our fears, our complaints, and our frustrations is a surer way to win votes and campaign cash.

The historical roots of the American Thanksgiving holiday are known to most of us. The early Pilgrims of Massachusetts experienced a devastating first winter after their arrival on December 11th of 1620. Although the newcomers, after first making landfall on Cape Cod, basically looted corn stocks that they "found" there, were lucky enough to get the help of native Americans after landing at Plymouth Rock. Without this help they almost certainly would not have survived. As it was, 46 of the original 102 immigrants had died by the time of the successful harvest in the fall of 1621. It was this bounty that was celebrated with a three-day traditional harvest feast at "the first Thanksgiving."

Now consider what the Pilgrims had to be thankful for. The group had obviously had a terrible time establishing themselves in the new land. Their continued survival was still a long ways from assured. And even back in civilized Europe, the early 17th Century offered conditions which, by today standards, amounted to horrible poverty and squalor.

Thanks to appallingly high infant mortality rates, barely half of those born lived to age 20. Famines and malnutrition were common. Plagues and wars still swept across Europe. Effective medicines were nearly nonexistent. The indoor toilet, invented by Sir John Harrington only 25 years previously, remained a luxury. There was no electricity. Heat came from open fires. Humans and animals supplied most of the power for agriculture and the rudimentary industry that then existed. In politics, "the divine right of kings" held sway.

Slavery was still practiced and the status of most women was little better than that of slaves, all justified, of course, by Christian theology.

The status of human understanding, of science and technology, was equally primitive in 1621. Copernican heliocentrism was less than a century old and remained controversial. Books were expensive and limited in availability. Isaac Newton and Leibniz, to say nothing of the great 17th Century scientists, had not yet been born. At that time, witches were still being burned and hung all over Europe. Galileo had only been using his telescope for about 10 years and had yet to undergo his famous persecution by the Catholic Inquisition.

Yet amidst all this the surviving Pilgrims in the fall of 1621 celebrated. And why not? For all their hardships and distress, they had survived. And even for all their ignorance and superstitious fears they could look at the world and a future with hope. Just as we do.

Yet we have a great deal more to be thankful about in this country in this, the tenth year of the 21st Century. Everywhere we turn, every day, we see the amazing advances and improvements of the last four centuries of human progress. We take for granted what to the Pilgrims would have been seemed nothing short of miraculous, or, alternatively, witchcraft.

Think of all these commonplace things: our homes with their central heating and air conditioning, hot and cold running water, toilets, telephones, the internet, our modern roads and automobiles, effective vaccines against microorganisms that once killed or maimed millions, medicines for everything from headaches to birth control to deadly cancers and other conditions that once killed surely and swiftly. Even infection with the HIV virus is becoming a chronic condition. And where once it took weeks and months or even years to travel long distances, we now travel from one continent to another in hours. Instead of primitive telescopes like Galileo's we look at the Jovian moons he discovered with high resolution cameras aboard spacecraft.

Unless our attention is drawn to these things, and unless we are led to see them in this context, they may seem – indeed, they are! – commonplace. Yet this, perhaps, should be the essence of a holiday of thanksgiving. Anyone can be thankful for something they badly wanted and then acquired. Anyone can be thankful for receiving a gift or an unexpected stroke of good luck. Anyone can be thankful for making it through a crisis or escaping some terrible danger or threat.

## 2010 TEXAS FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION BEST YET!

Nearly 250 atheists, freethinkers, humanists and other unbelievers attended the 3-day Texas Freethought Convention this past October 8-10th in Dallas-Fort Worth. Dr. Michael Newdow, American Atheists' President Ed Buckner, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America Sean Faircloth, Communications Director of Atheists For Human Rights' Marie Castle, author (*The God Virus*) Darrell Ray, author (*Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*) and *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*) John W. Loftus and others spoke at the gathering. Entertainment was supplied by the NTCOF's "Faithless Companions" band, musician George Hrab and Atheist Evangelist Brother Sam Singleton.

Dr. Newdow spoke on Saturday evening in spellbinding, encyclopedic detail on many aspects of the history and current status of state-church separation. "Don't Be Sequacious" was both the title and the message of his remarks, the 3-syllable word meaning "intellectually servile." This, he said, is the essence of the atheist worldview: a courageous willingness to question and doubt all sorts of received wisdom, the goal being to test the foundations of what we think we know and, when they are found wanting, to show them for what they are: not truth but rubbish.

The 2011 Texas Freethought Convention will take place in Houston, the date and place yet to be determined. The 2010 convention was the biggest and best yet in its short three-year history. But, of course, as we know, everything really is bigger in Texas!

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There is no special effort needed to feel gratitude for these things.

But our commonplace comforts, abilities, assets and advantages, those ordinary, largely dependent-on- if not determined-by-chance "blessings" that we enjoy while seldom even thinking about them, take an effort to appreciate and feel gratitude for. This effort is worthwhile and it is right that we take the time and trouble to do it at least once a year and, through habit, much more often than that.

**COMING NEXT MONTH:  
OUR ANNUAL  
CHRISTMAS/MYTHMAS SERVICE!!**  
SANTA CLAUS HAS VISITED US IN THE PAST ...  
OUR DECEMBER SERVICE IS ALWAYS A TREAT!

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS  
TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED,  
APPRECIATED,  
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar (if it doesn't work, we're working on it!), or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) - **JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP to get email updates too!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Wyndham, take the SOUTH exit from the parking lot (turn your head left as you walk out the main entrance), then drive across Esters Blvd onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114). Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

**Freethought Salon:** Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest to Freethinkers. Second Sunday monthly, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine this month; see the meetup site!

**Game Night:** The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

**Secular Singles:** Freethinkers have met their life-partners with whom they have begun families through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

**"If equal affection cannot be,  
let the more loving one be me."  
-W.H. Auden**



# DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
A Fellowship of Unbelievers

Music by "Faithless Companions" Jay Purrington,  
Ed McGuire,  
Cathy & Kevin Smith  
and Scott Williams

Equipment Wrangler: John Hendricks  
Videographer: John Gauthier

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