



BE GOOD, BE GRATEFUL !

Thanksgiving is an interesting holiday. Historically, its origins are, like Halloween, that of a Harvest Festival. It is primarily observed today in the United States and Canada although some other nations have similar holidays. It is a US federal holiday because Abraham Lincoln declared it so in 1863 and it was fixed on the fourth Thursday of November by Congress in 1941. This year the date falls on November 22nd.

Thanksgiving is the only holiday celebration named for and dedicated to a feeling. Valentine's Day would be a close second for the emotion of love, but it is identified with romantic love and courtship, not with love of others generally or of life or the things that make life satisfying.

Like Christmas, Thanksgiving has been claimed by some as the exclusive holiday of their own religion on the basis of the feast enjoyed by both the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Native Americans in 1621. This is not just mistaken but embarrassing given that the very first official proclamation of a "Day of Thanksgiving" by Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop was not until 1637. The occasion was the safe return from Connecticut of Puritans that had gone there to massacre some 600 Pequot natives who had already converted to Christianity and laid down their weapons. It is very nice, of course, that in 1621 the Puritans and the Wampanoag natives had gotten along so well, but both before and after this the native Americans in the area had basically been exterminated. This is why some descendants of native Americans now observe Thanksgiving as a Day of Mourning. [see <http://americanindiansource.com/mourningday.html>]

Giving thanks, or gratitude, is a positive feeling that promotes both individual happiness on the part of giver and receiver as well as social harmony and cohesion. "Thank you" are important words, as important as words such as "I Love You." But being thankful and feeling gratitude is especially important as a kind of internal experience, not just as an outward expression that may be little more than mechanical. How, for example, can it even be possible to express gratitude towards others when those others are not present, have died, or may even be unknown to us? What does it mean when, for example, expressions of appreciation and love are made at the famous Tomb of the Unknown Soldier?

Sometimes those towards whom gratitude may be felt may never even have intended to help us. The Dalai Lama, for example, has expressed gratitude towards the Chinese authorities who invaded, conquered and now control his country of Tibet. Before that, he has said, "In our country we could pretend that everything was in order because it was shrouded under a cloak of pomp and show. ... It is quite possible that I could have become narrow minded, but because of the Chinese threats and humiliations, I have become a real person." The Buddhist idea is that gratitude "turns poison into medicine."

Importantly, thanksgiving – the important essence of thanksgiving – is not something that is expressed as much as felt. Gratitude doesn't even have to be felt toward anything or anyone in particular. The important anchor of thanksgiving is that it be felt for someone or something. We feel gratitude for being alive, for having a measure of good health, for our family and friends, for our means of survival, for our ability to think and understand, and many other things. We would consider with astonishment and pity someone who did not feel that they had anything to feel thankful for.

Of course, this is the box that some believers would like to put others into, particularly those who do not believe in their deities. "How can you celebrate Thanksgiving when you don't believe in a god to be thankful to?" they ask. Their question betrays an incomprehension of what it is to be grateful, of the fact that gratitude has to do with what we are grateful for and how that gratitude benefits ourselves and everything that matters to us. Thankfulness is not simply an element of a transaction of some kind as "thank you" is the opposite bookend of "please."

The alleged need or demand of a deity for human gratitude is nearly as incomprehensible if such an alleged deity is truly supreme, eternal and omnipotent/omnibenevolent. For why would such a being want or require such a thing? The question is made even more difficult if the alleged deity has the character of a loving parent. For does a human parent demand that children express gratitude? Is that why parents

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provide for their children, in order to get a "thank you" or perhaps flowers or a soap-on-a-rope on the appropriate Mothers' or Fathers' Day? Expectations of gratitude are, in fact, a kind of "dark side" of the notion of thanksgiving, the idea that we or others may "deserve" expressions of gratitude and that those who fail to render them are to be condemned as "ingrates." It spoils the whole idea of thanksgiving, because it imposes gratitude on people from without when such feelings are significant only when they come from within us. And such feelings may come, at times, only long after that for which we feel grateful.

Thanksgiving is a good thing. But, like authentic religion, it is personal. In a sense, it is possibly even "selfish." For gratitude is for our own benefit primarily and even its secondary benefits come from how it affects and improves us inwardly. This is why it makes sense to think of it thus: be good, be grateful. For gratitude felt or expressed to serve another purpose is not thankfulness. As with goodness, it is its own reward for those who practice it.

Please, THINK ABOUT IT!

"Not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them, is the true measure of our thanksgiving." - WT Purkiser

"The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than these who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving." - HU Westermayer

"I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder." - GK Chesterton

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!! (YOUR MONEY IS BEWITCHED! GIVE IT TO THE NTCOF TO DE-DEMONIZE!)

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH: "MERRY MYTHMAS!"

**>>> Sunday, December 2nd, 2012 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!

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 Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. 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. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; 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!

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others."

- Cicero



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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