

## THANKSGIVING DAY '88: WITNESSING FOR GOD VIS-A-VIS THE GOD HOLIDAY

As an island is a land body entirely surrounded by water, God on this one day of the American calendar is to be entirely surrounded by grateful attention.....But the media, increasingly God-shy, each Thanksgivingtide mentions God less: Thanksgiving is becoming a doughnut, a hole entirely surrounded by grateful attention to being thankful intransitively, with no object for the verb-gerund-gerundive ("thank," "thanks(-giving)," "thankful").....The point of this Thinksheet is theists' obligation and seasonal opportunity to fight this **God-amnesia**. This here letter is an instance of this warfare.....(My gradeschool English teacher taught me never never never to say "this here," the double anaphor, precisely useful in this context. I honor her by showing that I'm not amnesiac about what she taught me; nobody's always right.)

1. My letter is about God via expletives via a complaint of mine against a public blasphemer. Even if a reader concentrates on Walsh (a radical right leprechaun of liquid tongue and vivid imagery, a regular columnist in the CAPE COD TIMES, my letter appearing three days after the column of his I'm attacking) or on profanity or on me (as a familiar feisty letterwriter), the truth will seep through that the letter (1) has to do with how to talk about Thanksgiving Day and (2) **centers in God**, in what happens to God as we talk about Thanksgiving Day, about thanks-giving. It is thus a specific, an intended cure, for the culture's current God-amnesia.

2. In addition to jogging people's God-memory, my letter objects to the media's eroding of the **taboo against profanity**, the use of expletives demeaning deity and degrading humanity. Personally, I never use, never have used, any such words--unless you're going to include "hell," "damn," and "shit," which I don't include and do sometimes find the most appropriate diction.

3. I consider **blasphemy** (language demeaning deity by taking God's name[s] emptily, out of devotional context) more offensive than sexual **obscenity** (which demeans sex), and obscenity more offensive than **scatology** (also called coprology; references to animal-and-human excrement to express loathing or disgust)....I am puzzled that even educated people, most of them, blur these distinctions and even reverse the order of seriousness. Of these, I'm most put off by blaspheming clergy. The Holy Name Society is Roman Catholic, but I've known a number of Protestants who need to join for group support (yes, the HNS got there a long time before AA).

4. Note my letter's speech-options vis-a-vis talking about Thanksgiving Day: the blasphemer, the faithful (to Biblical religion and to American history), and the unblaspheming atheist. The last is an unpopulous category, for the reason that the giving up of pious references to God creates a God-talk vacuum that is very apt to be filled with impious references to God. To me it's especially painful to hear blasphemy out of the mouths of children who've never learned to speak piously of God.

5. No laws, but charity & the universal censorship of the citizenry.

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### Complains about Walsh's 'blasphemy'

I object to Don Walsh's mention of God in his Nov. 20 Thanksgiving Day piece, "It's the season of giving thanks." I object not that he did so, but the way he did it.

His only reference to God is a blasphemous phrase: "Just give thanks ... How would you like to be living in Chelsea ... for god's sake"? Whatever happend to the Holy Name Society, Don?

If you're going to mention Thanksgiving Day at all, and the practice is decreasing, you have three ways to go:

1. Refer to God only blasphemously ("in vain," as the Ten Commandments put it). That was Don's way.

2. Refer to God reverently, as the logical and historical point of Thanksgiving Day, America's most specifically religious holiday. (Centering in Jesus, Christmas and Easter are Christian adaptations of pagan festivals.)

3. Eliminate all references to God, both reverent and blasphemous. Atheist Americans give thanks into thin air, which is better than nothing, but not much.

The president has just signed into law a bill with sanctions against pornography. We'll not be getting any laws punishing the populace for profanity. That's something we have to manage on our own, in the private sphere. But how?

I suggest two guidelines in one definition. Profanity is language demeaning deity and degrading humanity.

The definition is narrow enough to warn against irreverence and indecency, yet wide enough to permit colorful language vis-a-vis the pieties.

Set your own nether limits. If anyone drops below your limits, complain -- as I am in this letter.

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