

THE BABY JESUS HAS JOINED "THE DISAPPEARED"! ----- ELLIOTT #1778

OCCASION OF THIS THINKSHEET: 16 Dec 83 I walked about 70 Manhattan mercantile blocks and--this close to Christmas!--never saw the Baby Jesus (no creches) or any Christian symbolism amid the "Holiday Greetings" decorations; nor do I remember hearing any Christmas carols.

1. "**PLURALISM**," which had a positive meaning (viz., all free to express their hearts and commitments privately and publicly), has come to have a negative meaning (viz., none free to express their hearts and commitments publicly "if it would offend anyone"). Last Sunday our pastor opened his sermon with something that happened the day before in our postoffice. The customer in front of him, when asked by the clerk "Do you want the Santa stamp or the Madonna stamp?" said "I'll take the Santa; I don't want to take the chance of offending anyone."

2. The polite rule of negative pluralism reads as follows: "In case there's a Jew present, don't mention Jesus; in case there's a humanist present, don't mention God." This **double tabu** is now so powerful that a violator seems, to most folk, gross and insensitive and "unecumenical."....In an ecumenical Thanksgiving '83 worship in "the Kennedy church" on the Cape, Jesus was not mentioned; in a NYC meeting on spirituality a few days ago, neither Jesus nor God was mentioned till I was asked to "close the meeting" (when, of course, both were mentioned --as my religion, Christianity, does not hold verbal witness optional).

3. Within minutes of each other yesterday, a Christian said to me "Happy Holiday!" and a Jew said "Merry Christmas!" Who's hung up on what why? If Christians are to be blessings to their nonChristian neighbors, why should not Christmas cheer spill over into the nonChristian community, including in the greeting "Merry Christmas!"--which need not imply that the hearer is a Baby-Jesus worshipper. Yet I myself find it hard to say unless my hearer is known by me to be a Christian. I can say "Happy Hanukah!" to a Jew, though; but never "Happy Holiday!" to anybody!....Under our new, double-tabu pluralism, **greetings discomfort** is inevitable, and symptomatic of our spiritual adriftness as "a people" (which I put in quotes: is there an American people?).

4. In this thinksheet's title, the quoted expression is the translation of the Spanish term for those who, in Argentina, disappeared under the tyranny of military rule. At year-end '83, the elected president is threatening to punish the generals for the "disappearance" of thousands whose existence they found uncomfortable....In the USA we continue to have demos by the families and friends of MIAs, U.S. military still "missing in action" in Vietnam....Who demonstrates against the **disappearance** of Jesus (and God) from American public life (our public spaces and buildings, including our public schools, are as barren of reminders of our spiritual heritage as are those of the USSR)? This disappearance fires up the Religious Right to try to take over the country, which would be disastrous. The death of public Christmas is disastrous for Jews as well as Christians: Jews fare better in the presence of over Christianity than they do (a) under radical secularism, which rubs out the public memory of Christianity, or (b) under substitute symbolisms in the public eye, e.g., the Swastika. Such "politeness" to Jews as we now have under negative pluralism correlates not with Jewish freedom but with antisemitism.

5. Christmas is a baptized pagan Roman festival, the Saturnalia: we are witnessing the return of the **pagan** festival, as Emperor Julian "the Apostate" (4th c.) hoped would happen and (then) didn't. "When the Son of Man comes, will he find the Faith on the Earth?" (L.18.8)

Will he find "America," our civilization with its roots vigorous, on the earth?