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November 24, 2007: Hallowed Secularism and Thanksgiving 2007

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Title: Hallowed Secularism and Thanksgiving 2007

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11/24/2007--It may just be my own family circumstances. I am visiting my gravely ill mother this year. But it seems to me that Thanksgiving this year was unusually devoid of giving thanks. There was football and that was about it. Has our culture finally and irretrievably lost the capacity for thankfulness? Of course it is true that things are not very good for America right now. We are bogged down in a war that does not promise victory no matter what happens. The best that can happen is a stable, Iranian leaning Shiite government. The economy is bad. The dollar has crashed. The Democrats are not igniting popular hope, at least not yet. So, what is there to be thankful about? Christians ought to be more concerned about renewing Thanksgiving than about putting Christ back in Christmas. Christmas is narrow in appeal. It is a Christian holiday. Thanksgiving is potentially all-encompassing. A genuinely religious spirit in Thanksgiving would really change the culture of this nation. And such a change would in fact promise to reduce the commercialization of Christmas as well. Thanksgiving is the first American holiday of Hallowed Secularism. So I have a particular commitment to it. We need to think about recovering its meaning. Two Jewish holidays come to mind in regard to Thanksgiving: Succoth and Passover. Succoth is the precursor to Thanksgiving as the fall biblical harvest festival. Passover is the family meal holiday, like Thanksgiving in that way. So, we need to think about nature themes for Thanksgiving—the ways in which we are cared for by the world. And we need texts for the meal, like the Jewish Haggadah used at Passover, which will serve to cement the themes of the day. Otherwise, Thanksgiving will just slip away into football, family and shopping.