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November 28, 2013: The Theology of the Disappearance of Thanksgiving

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Title: The Theology of the Disappearance of Thanksgiving

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11/28/2013—The disappearance of Thanksgiving is sad, but hardly surprising. For years, Christmas music on the radio crept up earlier and earlier, so as to eclipse Thanksgiving. For years, stores have put up Christmas decorations earlier and earlier, so as to crowd out any reference to Thanksgiving. For years, Black Friday sales have edged closer to midnight and even began in the late evening of Thanksgiving. This year, the invasion of Thanksgiving has become quite obvious. Large retailers are now open all day for special sales. There is no sense that the day of Thanksgiving should be set aside for family gathering or that the employees of retail establishments might want the day off. This is not surprising because this the way that capitalism works. There is no money to be made, after all, from Thanksgiving. So Thanksgiving had to give way to the shopping orgy of Christmas. This blog entry is not another criticism of capitalism. Instead, the question I would like to raise is, where is the voice of the church? After all, when there are commercial threats to Christian holidays, there are Christian voices to object. The religious right has been strangely silent about this latest affront to Thanksgiving even though the forces are the same that marginalized Easter and commercialized Christmas. I believe the failure of the church to criticize this latest form of capitalist invasion of family life has to do with the fact that Thanksgiving is not specifically a Christian holiday. That is an unfortunate shortsightedness. I notice in other areas as well that, increasingly, religious believers treat themselves as an interest group. God is not the representative of an interest group. Christian voices should be raised to object when one of the few noncommercial celebrations of American life is downsized. As to what could be done, solutions are by no means not obvious. We just are prey for capitalism. But, at the very least, government could require doubletime pay for nonunionized workers on Thanksgiving. That at least would be a start. Happy Thanksgiving.