

More Opinions

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Thanksgiving Account

EDITOR:
We have just read your editorial of Nov. 23, "1st Thanksgiving Really Wasn't" and we would like to comment on what we believe is a loose connection of unsubstantiated assumptions and Euro-American biases about Pilgrims, Indians and the "First Thanksgiving."

First, your source, Prof. Ingersoll of Catholic University, assumes that the Bering Strait theory is fact. Some native people's ancestor undoubtedly crossed the land bridge. The oral histories of countless other Indian people, however, tell of journeys from the east or from the south. Still others affirm that they, "the people," have always been here. We do not read this in our history books because sometimes a Euro-American bias prevents historians from accepting history from others' perspectives.

Second, Prof. Ingersoll assumes that "primitive people" are "pagan" and worship "local deities." His language betrays biases about native people that we thought had long since been recognized and corrected by reputable scholars, particularly anthropologists. The native people of this continent were -- and still are -- deeply spiritual people who believe that all things on earth, including humankind, are sacred and have spirits. It is the Creator who is thanked for the gifts of the earth, not "gods" and "goddesses." Missionaries and other pious people from Europe, not attuned to the spirituality of those who live harmoniously with the earth and its fruits, made judgments about those things they did not understand. Thus they branded native people "pagans" because they were closer to Mother Earth in their worship.

Third, Prof. Ingersoll assumes that the so-called "First Thanksgiving" really happened. Research indicates, however, that such is extremely doubtful. The journal of William Bradford, who was the second governor of Plymouth colony, is probably the most reliable source of knowledge about the period. It does not mention the event, although in 1952 editor Samuel Eliot Morison inserted the subtitle "First Thanksgiving" before a paragraph describing the foodstuffs being prepared for the winter of 1621-22. The little story about Massasoit and his men contributing food to a celebration on the occasion of the "harvest being gotten in" is recounted in a collection of letters which are probably the most unreliable source of information about the colony. They were written to English friends whom the Pilgrims sought to encourage to come over to the colony since so many of the settlers had died during the first winter. Much like travel brochures of present times, the letters paint an idyllic picture of life at Plymouth and of the relationship between Pilgrims and Indians--a picture often refuted by Bradford's own journal! The letters' validity is greatly in question.

Finally, Prof. Ingersoll assumes that the "First Thanksgiving" was a holy day. In a sense it was meant

to be. For the first real proclamation of thanksgiving in the colonies, according to all existing original sources, was made in 1637 upon the occasion of the brutal slaughter of approximately 700 Pequot Indian people near Groton, Conn. It made Aug. 12 a "day of public thanksgiving to God for his great mercies in subduing the Pequots..."

Careful research into the First Thanksgiving" as does careful research into many of our national myths and apocryphs, reveals a history of this nation which we never read in textbooks or heard from our teachers. Such lessons require some hard learning and new thinking but we invite any who is interested in the history of the "First Thanksgiving" to contact us. We will gladly share our sources and results of our research. And we challenge the Courier-Journal to print the Thanksgiving Address of traditional people of New York State as its Thanksgiving editorial next year!

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Film on Tragedy Recommended

EDITOR:
Your article on the movie "Choices of the Heart" may have moved people in our diocese to view this account of Jean Donovan who, along with three other Catholic missionaries, was murdered in El Salvador three years ago this month. The story seems so tragic not only because those responsible for these murders have not been convicted but also because the terrible violence in El Salvador continues.

The archdiocese of San Salvador reports that during the first six months of 1983, 2,527 civilian noncombatants were murdered and 326 civilians disappeared. Yet the U.S. government has voted to send \$64.8 million in military aid to El Salvador in 1984. On Nov. 17, the Congress passed a bill which would continue to require President Reagan to determine that the human rights situation and progress in land reform in El Salvador are improving as a condition to continuing U.S. military aid. President Reagan has vetoed this bill.

The situation in El Salvador and all of Central America is complex and accurate reporting is difficult to find. Yet this cannot prevent us from trying to become knowledgeable and committed to justice for our sisters and brothers in Central America.

If any parish, school, human development committee or other group want to follow up the film "Choices of the Heart," I would recommend viewing the documentary "Roses in December." This hour-long film is available by calling the AV Department at the Diocesan Pastoral Center at 328-3210.

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Freemasonry Defended

EDITOR:
Being both a Freemason and a Catholic, I was truly saddened to see the article which appeared in your Dec. 7 edition ("Joining Masons Still Prohibited," P. 6).

In its declaration the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith refers to Masonic "principles (which) have always been regarded as irreconcilable with the church's doctrine."

Having been on "both sides of the fence," I would be very interested in knowing exactly which "principles" the declaration refers to. The true principles and teachings of Freemasonry can be accurately stated in three words: Friendship, Morality and Brotherly Love. Do these sound contrary to our church's doctrine?

The following is a very accurate description of what a Freemason should strive to be as stated by Bruce D. Hunt, past grand master of Masons in the State of Missouri:

"The real Freemason is distinguished from the rest of mankind by the uniform unrestrained rectitude of his conduct. Other men are honest in fear of punishment which the law might inflict; they are religious in expectation of being rewarded, or in dread of the devil in the next world. A Freemason would be just, even if there were no laws, human or divine, except those written in his heart by the finger of the Creator. In every climate, under every system of religion, he is the same. He kneels before the universal throne of God in gratitude for the blessings he has received and in humble solicitation for his future protection. He venerates the good men of

all religions. He disturbs not the religion of others. He restrains his passions because they cannot be indulged without injuring his neighbor or himself. He gives no offense because he does not choose to be offended. He contracts no debts which he is not certain that he can discharge, because he is honest upon principle."

I earnestly hope that the church's mind is not completely closed on this subject. Freemasonry, as any Catholic Mason will gladly tell you, poses absolutely no threat to our church. Its only goals is to make good men better.

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Deluge of Fire Looming

EDITOR:
Now that the bishops have written their "pastoral on nuclear warfare" and the Seneca Depot rally is a thing of the past and everyone has had the opportunity to view the horrors of "The Day After," it would seem to be wise to spare a thought for "the days before." It would make the real "day after" less hazardous!

Noe was not deterred from building the ark because of the mockery and blind indifference of the people, who rejected God's warnings. The Deluge... which couldn't happen... destroyed them.

The people of Ninive listened to Jona and accepted God's warnings. They humbled themselves and repented in sackcloth and ashes. Ninive was saved!

Again, in our day, the world has become wicked: "... worse than at the time of the Deluge..." "... just punishments are to come upon the world in three ways: 1. disturbances of nature, 2.

bloody revolutions, 3. a purifying deluge of fire..." These words were spoken by both Our Lord and His Blessed Mother to a stigmatized nun, Sister Elena, in the 1950s.

As the Vicar of Christ, the true prophet, our holy father is preaching from his base in Rome, as well as traveling from country to country, to reawaken the morality of the world which has been watered down to placate the deviants. He has offered us the graces of an added Holy Year with its call for prayer (especially the rosary), repentance and penance, to appease the Divine Justice. Are we listening?

We, like the people of Noe's time and of Ninive, have the free will to accept or to reject the warnings: to accept by humble repentance and thus appease the Divine Justice; or to reject by banking on our quality American education or superior American culture, until it is too late... until the "deluge of fire" ... which couldn't happen... has purified the world!

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Put Christ In Christmas

EDITOR:
If a Gallup Poll were taken between Jesus Christ and Santa Claus as to who was more significant this Christmas, Santa would undoubtedly win in a landslide. Every year, he emerges more strongly as the Messiah of Madison Avenue, Savior of our gross national product and prophet of the Almighty Dollar. Santa's a nice, colorful concept for youngsters, but so many adults themselves never seem to have grown beyond this diverted economic symbol of Christmas. Meanwhile,

buried beneath tons of materialism, Christmas wrappings and decorations, lies the real answer of why we have Christmas.

The greatest Christmas gift of all time was not a new house in the suburbs or a Cabbage Patch kid, it was the gift of God's own Son, Jesus, who died for our sins and brought us His lifesaving messages of hope, love and salvation. All the money, wealth and riches of a commercialized Christmas will never alleviate the great depression, emptiness and suicide that also accompany this season. Only Jesus, the true Messiah, can fulfill one's heart.

If Christ cannot be recognized on His own birthday, then when will He ever be? Consequently, for so many today, there's no compelling relevancy to the Gospel any more, that our great nation was founded upon. No wonder some 5 million American youths today are lost in various cults. Millions of others that have never heard the true message of Christmas and Christianity are now hopelessly flocking to everything from astrology to witchcraft in search of spiritual truth and direction. Our nation's moral values and standards continue to crumble and decay, as we try to exalt ourselves and forget Our Savior.

Let's be honest about this day we call Christmas: its true spirit has become twisted, exploited and lost throughout much of our society, and annually we become even further removed from the real Messiah. How about re-establishing Christ back into Christmas, back into our nation and back into our lives -- and get our priorities back in order.

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Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

The Scarlet And the Black

A Christmas message would be appropriate for this Christmas issue of the Courier-Journal, but instead I want to write of a great movie which will be on CBS-TV, Feb. 2 next year, so you can discuss it with your folks visiting at Christmas time.

It is "The Scarlet and the Black" about the activities of Irish-born Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty in German-occupied Rome during World War II. Gregory Peck stars as the courageous and resourceful priest whose heroism saved many lives; brought food and shelter to escaped allied prisoners; food and clothing to nuns, orphans and displaced persons; and assisted in collecting gold and money for the Roman Jewish community to guarantee safety from the sadistic German commandant, chillingly portrayed by Christopher Plummer.

The tensions between the monsignor and the colonel make gripping drama. The finale is a great surprise.

After watching "Thorn Birds" -- with the juicy shenanigans of "Father Ralph" -- I thought, "Lord in heaven! I suppose many will think 'Ah hah! So that's the way it is!'" despite the fact that that's the way it is not. Then add the pile of prurience shovelled out by Andrew Greeley in his novels, depicting racy priests and bishops.

On the "Phil Donahue Show," Greeley declared his novels are religious parables. These sexy pot-boilers depicting priests and bishops as sacerdotal lechers are a puzzlement to people who traditionally and correctly hold the priesthood in honor and reverence.

I used to think the depiction of Father Mulcahy in MASH was a debasement of the priesthood, but have changed my mind. While Father Mulcahy is presented as a kind of sissified male who needs a few shots of hormones, the priesthood is always held in respect; the priest himself is always spoken of and to by his clerical title. His exercise of his priestly vocation is never

desecrated. Even symbols of the priesthood -- the stole, the Roman collar, the sign of the cross, the anointings -- are reverently used. There is never a doubt about the priest's fidelity to his vow of celibacy.

He is cordially regarded by the whole MASH personnel, from Col. Potter to Klinger and Radar, from Hawkeye and Honeycutt to even the snooty Major Winchester. Whoever writes the scripts does so with understanding and respect. A far cry from Greeley and "The Thorn Birds."

About a year ago, "The Scarlet and the Black" was presented on TV. I was appalled that so few people I asked -- and I asked whole congregations -- had seen it, though many had watched "Thorn Birds." The Feb. 2 presentation is a rerun, of course, but will be seen for the first time by many and well worth seeing again by anybody.

The cast includes not only Gregory Peck and Plummer, but also John

Gladys and Raf Vallone. The dramatic unfolding of the activities of Vatican-based Msgr. O'Flaherty will keep you on the edge of the chair to the end.

I phoned Msgr. Richard Burns of St. Thomas the Apostle, who knew Msgr. O'Flaherty when he was vice-rector of the North American College in Rome. "What about Msgr. O'Flaherty?" "One of the most extraordinary men I have ever known. They called him 'Flak,' and whether all the events in the drama are historical they sure could be. He was unbelievable in enterprise. He was the only priest who played on the one golf course in Rome, this at a time when priests were forbidden even to attend a soccer game! Of course, he was in Cardinal Octaviani's office, and a great friend to him."

Do mark your calendar for Feb. 2, 1984, CBS-TV, 8-11 p.m. And tell your friends. And now, a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year to all!

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The Courier-Journal traditionally does not publish the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The next edition will be dated Jan. 4, 1984.

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