



Thanks for the Giving

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We come into the season of American Thanksgiving a bit bewildered. The much-anticipated American election — the most contentiously fought and expensive political orgy of all time — is now over. So there's at least *that* to thank God for. It's over. But as the Obama team puts together its transition strategy, appoints its key players in his forthcoming administration, and has them strut across the stage, what's really being put on show? With their fabulously high-priced votes have Americans once again 'bought a pig in a poke'? It seems we might have.

The British have celebrated their Harvest Festival (October 5th) and, in our dominantly British Anglican church fellowship here in Cyprus, we enjoyed the hoopla. But Nancy and I, nothing daunted, will celebrate American Thanksgiving just the same. The mix of our guests will be both American and British. The turkey on the Weber grill is just not something one would choose to miss. But we also remind our British friends that what is now an 'American' Thanksgiving was originally a British occasion since it was first celebrated when America was the principal colony of Great Britain, and their Harvest Festival is but a knock-off ... almost an afterthought. So ... Thanksgiving it is. And it has definitely become American.

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But what is there to give thanks *for*? Stock markets around the world slosh around with our money and speculators mob around the market barrels as though bobbing for apples. Were it not for the great damage they do, they would be comic. We sing, "We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land," but it's money that's getting scattered, and parasites are the ones rewarded for raking it up and trashing it.

Banks, once friends of the working stiff, have gone over to The Enemy. They play with money as though money were itself a 'commodity', making it rise and fall depending upon their yen for the Yen, the once-almighty Dollar, the British (once sterling) Pound, or the upstart Euro. Money isn't money any more. It's no longer a measure for value of work actually done, of worthwhile things actually created and produced. It's all been debased by the whim of the moneychangers. Mammon is king, and his gospel is the chimera of a quick something-for-nothing.

If I hear the phrase 'volatile stock markets' one more time I think I'll scream (and I reckon I'll be screaming a lot in days to come). While, at their birth, stock markets may have seemed a good idea — gathering investors together with those needing a shot of capital, balancing risk against asset and interest — they have transformed themselves into a bewildering ganglion of siphons, shunts and directionless millraces that bleed off ethereal profits, providing a fabulous feeding ground for financial piranhas. The old bank on the corner of State and Main has joined the feeding frenzy. It's ludicrous! But it ruins our sleep, doesn't it? I can't shake the image of the slashing teeth and dribbling chins of those churning red the waters of today's stock markets.

So, remind me: to whom and for what are we giving thanks? Why on earth do we continue to plough and scatter? The best advice? 'Just don't go near the water!'

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Days are passing now since November 4th, and, yes, Nancy and I *did* vote (all reports to the contrary notwithstanding). And, silly me! I was up at four in the morning our time to hear the end: McCain's short concession speech (stilted and even reluctant but remarkably gracious nonetheless) and Barak Obama's victory speech (oratorically grand but stunningly vacuous). We came away with an armload of mushy emotion, mumbling to ourselves, 'Yes we can!'

But what 'can' we, really? How are things shaping up after the euphoria in Chicago's Grant Park where our Tom and Eve were present? After the high emotion and celebrations, what we emphatically *don't* want to hear is that, far from a 'change' that we 'can' achieve, Obama will lead us toward more of the same with the same breed of politician — the leach, the power parasite — that has ruled us for decades. Obama must be *very careful*. He has raised expectations to unprecedented levels for a people and a nation who need to reaffirm their self-perceived persona. That is: a kinder and gentler people who are concerned not just for prosperity, happiness and peace-and-security at home, but also for truth-speaking, justice and decency both at home and throughout the world. If he should disappoint this expectation he may very well see a grassroots revolt ... even a rebellion. Having mobilized the people, he had better not betray them.

It is ominous, then, that we hear the President-elect's appointed Chief of Staff will be Rahm Israel Emanuel, one of establishment Washington's most fierce, persistent and outspoken Zionists. His father, Benjamin, funded Zionist Irgun terrorists in the 1940s and Rahm grew up 'in the faith' (as it were). He was at Obama's elbow when, following Hillary Clinton's defeat in the Democratic primary in June, Obama addressed the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) in an excessively obsequious manner. So here's Emanuel again at Obama's elbow. The issue is not whether Obama has sympathy for Israel. The issue is whether he can afford to have in his deepest counsels someone who is, to all intents and purposes, a foreign agent ... indeed, an Israeli citizen who has served as a volunteer in their military.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be seen as a localized affair, but, in truth, it has global repercussions. The al-Qâ'idah insurgency in Iraq and elsewhere, and the Tâlibân campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan, sap American lives and treasure, and generate a great deal of propaganda capital out of America's unquestioned and massive support for Israel. The Iranian regime, with its rhetoric and its nuclear ambitions that threaten the Middle East's balance of terror, does the same. Obama, who is extremely well informed on this particular issue, must be free to deal with it (as few American administrations since 1947 have been able to do) if he is going to fulfill his promise of an America that is constructively and honestly engaged in world affairs.

Does the appointment of Rahm Israel Emanuel threaten that? I think it does. In his Grant Park speech Obama, when addressing the rest of the world, spoke of seeking 'peace-and-security' with nary a mention of 'justice'. Who was it slipped that Zionist cliché and its telling omission into the speech? In foreign affairs (and they're *bound* to

include Israel), it's OK to talk peace-and-security. 'Justice' though, in the Zionist lexicon, is defined as a dirty four letter Palestinian and even an anti-Semitic word. Delete! Delete! Delete! ... I think Mr. Emanuel has already been hard at work.

As Americans Nancy and I have gotten warm congratulations. One good friend wrote, "You and Nancy are so lucky to be Americans." I truly hope it will prove to be so, but I don't like the writing on the wall. (Daniel, chapter 5) Will Obama be the doomed Belshazzar or will he be the foretold and messiah-like Cyrus? It is my prayer that Obama, when he is weighed, will not be found wanting. It would be an unmitigated travesty were his magnificent treasure (the fabulous fund of trust and high hopes expressed by the American voter) despoiled by political looters and frittered away. But, as 'Umar al-Khayyâm is said to have phrased it, "The moving finger writes and having writ moves on." It's up to Barak Hussein Obama to decipher this, his destiny's moment. There'll be no more writing after these first few days. The writing finger has moved on; what's written is already fading. No further warning. This is his moment. 'No drama Obama' will have to use all his sagacity and wisdom, his judgment and his feel for justice, and he will have to use it *now*. Later will be just *too late*.

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Thanksgiving? Indeed! We give thanks for those things now past and done, praying that good deeds and good intentions will bear good fruit. We give thanks for the time of decision, with all its unknowns and momentous promise. We give thanks for wise heads that gather to offer sage advice to a young man now catapulted into high office, and we pray that he will have ears that hear and an understanding heart. And we give thanks for those cooler heads now coming forward whose task it will be to redesign the world's financial order, and for them we pray a spirit of true stewardship for the wealth that belongs to others and ultimately to God.

And we will still sing, "We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing!" and "We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land!" praying that God will continue to feed and water our better efforts. Blessed as we are, and putting aside for the moment our anxieties, we gather together to give God thanks for those things that bode well for the path ahead, praying that the tricky footing now showing won't result in a disastrous fall from grace.

We have just observed 'Remembrance Sunday' with our British friends, a moving and solemn occasion that the British take very seriously and 'do' rather well. To their credit, remembering their responsibility for how our world order has evolved, it was an occasion that embraced virtually everyone on our small globe. The youth we graybeards in safe places still squander in the travesty of war we now both honor and mourn ... and we *do* remember. For all that unspeakable gore and soul-distorting violence, we now repent and pray that it will cease. And we give God thanks for the ability to honor innocence and altruism and patriotism and just plain loyalty and decency. We have been blessed in the midst of evil and political cynicism. And we both remember and give thanks to God for the humanity to which we still cling ... to which we still aspire ... that honors sacrifice, that longs for justice, and that strives for peace. In these things we will find our security! *Only* there! They are the gift of transcendent value and for them we say to God, 'Thanks for the giving.'

And I greet you from the Lands of the Morning.

NOTE: The longer Reformed Church in America missionaries serve, the more they come to see the ethical implications of Christian faith with the eyes of the people among whom they serve. We treasure our missionaries and are glad to know what they think. However, RCA Global Mission does not, itself, have partisan political views.