

Nation Observes Thanksgiving Day On a Somber Note

By MURRAY SCHUMACH

Thanksgiving Day church services in the nation, in contrast to the feasting in many millions of homes, sounded solemn notes yesterday, with reminders of war in Vietnam, internal racial tensions, and concern that God was becoming meaningless to large segments of the populace.

But though the congregations listened gravely to these sermons, rendered fervent prayers and listened to choirs sing Bach compositions, their celebrations at home were joyous over the traditional turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and candied yams.

Across the country, most family reunions and gatherings

Continued on Page 50, Column 1

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HOLIDAY SERVICES TAKE SOMBER NOTE

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

of friends paid more attention to the football games on television than to bulletins from Vietnam or sociological discussions of domestic issues.

One of these gatherings was that of President Johnson, at his Texas ranch. The President, however, spent his spare time keeping in touch with conditions in Cyprus, where clashes have raised the possibility of war between Turkey and Greece for control of the island.

The President, who had gone to church Wednesday night, did not attend services yesterday. His aides at the ranch near San Antonio said his concern about Cyprus was one reason he stayed home.

Scores of deaths in highway accidents—the figure was above 125 late last night—testified to the extent to which Americans had driven to Thanksgiving parties to celebrate the holiday that was decreed by President Lincoln in 1863, though the Pilgrims first observed the occasion in 1621.

President Lincoln, in calling for Thanksgiving Day in the middle of the Civil War, said:

"I fervently implore the intercession of the Almighty hand to heal the wound of the nation, and to restore it as soon as it may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union."

In keeping with another Thanksgiving tradition, community and church groups and branches of the Salvation Army arranged turkey dinners for thousands of needy families.

East Village Feast

One of the most unusual gatherings was held in the gymnasium of the Tompkins Square Community Center, at Avenue B and Ninth Street. The food was donated by local merchants and cooked by volunteer housewives. But of particular interest was the fact that hippies and Puerto Ricans, who have been antagonistic in this hippie enclave of the East Village, joined in the feast in apparent friendliness.

Thanksgiving was used by some groups as an excuse for protest. In Allentown, Pa., 10 youthful demonstrators ate dog food outside a dog-food plant to show that dogs in the United States were better fed than humans in many parts of the world.

Outside the Philadelphia City Hall, several other young protesters said they were fasting to protest the nation's gluttony on Thanksgiving while starvation existed in other countries.

Catholic Church Picketed

In New Haven, six persons who represented an anti-Communist organization picketed St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church because an interfaith Thanksgiving service there was attended by a rabbi they claimed "had engaged in un-American activities."

The rabbi, Robert E. Goldberg, had been outspoken in his opposition to the war in Vietnam and has hosted such controversial speakers as Stokely Carmichael at his synagogue in Hamden, Conn., just north of New Haven. The Rev. Francis X. Finnegan of St. Mary's said the protesters accused the rabbi of "aiding the enemy" and of being wanted by the F.B.I.

But some of the strongest protests came from the pulpits of churches in this rain swept city, where the clergy spoke out against injustice and worried about whether Americans had forgotten the meaning of Thanksgiving Day.

At Riverside Church, the Rev. Allen Fisher, the director of the youth ministry there, said he was delivering a "requiem" for the holiday.

'Triggers of Destruction'

"Each year," he told some 300 persons, "on the fourth Thursday of the 11th month we gather in solemn assemblies to offer Thanksgiving to God with one hand, while the other one presses buttons and pulls the triggers of destruction, which murder our brothers of another land and bring the farthest emotion from Thanksgiving to their families.

"We roast our stuffed turkeys with tasty seasonings, while other of our chemicals are being used to roast people alive."

In Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Dr. Bryant T. Kirkland told more than 300 persons to remember that "we still have class war and economic war." He said there were too many who were saying: "What's God got to do with it anyhow?"

Prejudice and Hunger

The clergyman said religion has been "intellectualized" and so has Thanksgiving. He cited the Biblical exhortations to be deeply joyous in showing faith in God.

At Temple Emanu-El, Rabbi Richard C. Hertz of Temple Beth El, Detroit, said:

"We cannot be thankful for hunger or famine in any part of the world. We cannot be thankful for sickness, misery, pain or fear. We cannot be thankful for the prejudice in men's hearts that divides one race against another. But we can on this day turn to the Giver of all good and seek His blessing."

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