



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEKLY
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Pilgrims, Thanksgiving, and a Failed Experiment: Part 1

A Quick History: The *Mayflower* set sail from England on Sept. 6, 1620, and arrived at Cape Cod on Nov. 11, 1620. The ship moved on to Plymouth with its 102 Pilgrims and on Nov. 21, 1620, they drafted and signed the *Mayflower Compact*, a legal document, "in the presence of God, and of one another, (to) covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic." Weakened from the 65-day voyage and unprepared for the harsh winter, by spring, half had died from starvation and disease. Fortunately, with the help of local Native Americans (Indians), the 53 remaining Pilgrims learned to plant and harvested an abundant crop by fall. Thus, the First Thanksgiving was to celebrate a successful harvest and give thanks to God.

The Experiment: The Pilgrims decided that their new community would create a collectivist model of governance where all labor was communal, with men raising crops for all families, not just their own, and women engaged in domestic chores for their neighbors. Few did more than the minimum because the incentive to excel was destroyed. Within two years, the results were shortages and starvation.

The Pilgrims' Governor, William Bradford, described the folly of collectivism, "For this community was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men, that were most able and fit for labour and service, did repine (complain) that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense (payment)... And for men's wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands brook (tolerate) it." Gov. Bradford also spoke about another problem from this created famine... thievery. "much was stolen both by night and day..."

(libertyunderfire.org; townhall.com; historyofmassachusetts.org; mayflowerhistory.com)

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana, philosopher, poet, cultural critic