



## Focus on Religious Freedom

*It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favors.*  
- George Washington, Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, October 3, 1789

### Pilgrims, Thanksgiving, and a Failed Socialist Experiment

Each year, Americans celebrate the First Thanksgiving recalling the heroic Pilgrims who, seeking to escape religious persecution and longing to practice their religious beliefs in peace, sailed from England on Sept. 6, 1620, to the unknown New World. With the help of local Native Americans, the Pilgrims learned to plant crops and survived. At the harvest they gave thanks to God with a Thanksgiving feast.

While most Americans know this story of the First Thanksgiving, few know the tragic story of what happened at the harvest after two years of... "The Experiment."

**The Experiment:** The Pilgrims had 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 sharing the harvest equally. Women engaged in domestic chores of cooking, sewing, etc. for themselves as well as their neighbors. The result was that few did more than the minimum amount of work because the fruits of all labor were shared equally whether a person worked hard or a little. Incentive to excel was destroyed. Within two years, the result was 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." <sup>(1)</sup>

The Pilgrims had unwittingly adopted a form of governance that, if made permanent, would soon deprive them of the religious freedom they had just fled England for. Two centuries later, describing the requirements for a socialist economic system, philosopher Karl Marx wrote, "Religion is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness." <sup>(2)</sup>

(libertyunderfire.org; townhall.com; historyofmassachusetts.org; mayflowerhistory.com (1)  
catholicworldreport, 11/11/19(2); crisismagazine.com

*"Socialists, therefore, by endeavoring to transfer the possessions of individuals to the community at large, strike at the interests of every wage-earner, since they would deprive him of the liberty of disposing of his wages, and thereby of all hope and possibility of increasing his resources and of bettering his condition in life." - Pope Leo XIII, in Rerum Novarum*