Focus on Religious Freedom

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This Thanksgiving Day:

Thank God for His Gift of Free Will
and for America's Founding Principle of Religious Freedom

On Thursday, November 26, America pauses to observe our annual national day of Thanksgiving.

It is a tradition that dates back more than four centuries, when, as President John F. Kennedy described in his 1961 Thanksgiving proclamation, "the Pilgrims of New England, after a year of hardship and peril, humbly and reverently set aside a special day upon which to give thanks to God for their preservation" and for a bountiful harvest.

It is a tradition institutionalized by our first President, George Washington, who in 1789 proclaimed "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God" upon the newly founded United States of America.

And it is a tradition that would become, beginning with Abraham Lincoln's October 1863 proclamation, an annual national observation on a Thursday at the end of November.

Lincoln reminded the nation of all that America had been blessed with, even while in the throes of a terrible Civil War—economic strength and prosperity, the friendship and respect of other nations, and a commitment to freedom and equality so deep that young Americans were every day laying down their very lives for its preservation and advancement.

And, in words that resonate powerfully in our own increasingly secularized times, he lamented that the blessings bestowed upon America "are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come."

"No human counsel hath devised," Lincoln wrote, "nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God"—a conviction reiterated by every President since in their annual Thanksgiving Day proclamations.

Moreover, as official documents issued annually from the highest office of our national government's executive branch, they belie the false assertion that the Constitution requires the exclusion of religion from America's public square. They affirm, instead, that America has always been, and remains, one nation *under God.*

Read More: ***https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/analyses/evolution-the-thanksgiving-proclamation***