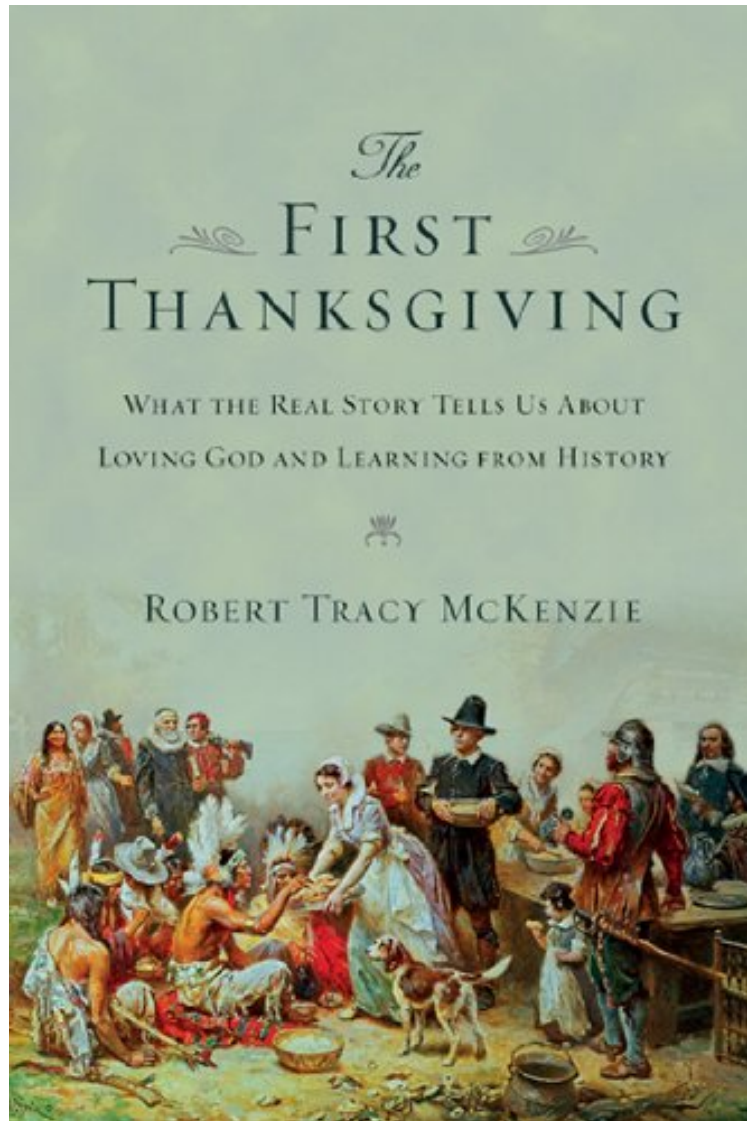


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## The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History

*Robert Tracy McKenzie*

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**Robert Tracy McKenzie : The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Historic and romanticizedBy R. DelPartoOne of the unique aspects

about reading about history and the events that shape its narratives is the different perspectives and interpretations that also arise as one looks further to a particular event. Historian Robert Tracy McKenzie examines the most quintessential holidays celebrated each year for his book *The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning From History*. Thanksgiving day has been observed as a holiday for over 100 years but does one know exactly the origins and story behind the day? McKenzie provides great detail in his narrative and sheds light on what became the most romanticized events in history through folklore, art and literature, and historical memory. The legend of Thanksgiving as depicted in early history textbooks dating back as far as the nineteenth century was based on Mayflower Compact and the landing of religious separatists from Leiden, England onto Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts in 1620. However, there has been different perspectives written such as William Bradfords experiences in 1621 and artist and Bradfords assistant Edward Winslows portrait of the first Thanksgiving that differ from the real-life pilgrims that may not have peacefully sat and gave thanks along side with the Wampanoag Indians. Despite that sentiment McKenzies intent of examining this historic day is not to debunk the past but rather to present to readers more insight of how and why the holiday has transcended through time from its early beginnings and has been portrayed in its most identifiable form; as a historian McKenzie also asserts his Christian faith in the book and uses examples from brief quotes from scriptures from the Bible and parallels it to the past. McKenzie writes with utmost honesty and with a critical eye of how the past is written and retold through collective memory and subjectivity, and present-day events that have an effect on how history is presented at a particular time and place. Thanksgiving has experienced a transformation from how it was originally portrayed 200 years after 1621, and importantly, stereotyped from the types of foods were actually eaten to the attire that was worn; inaccurately displayed in a Currier and Ives painting in 1876 of pilgrims wearing dark clothing with white collars, silver buckle shoes, and black hat in actuality they wore bright colors, a red suit and violet cloak. After reading *The First Thanksgiving*, readers may wonder which story they would prefer the legend that does not appear to be going anytime soon or simply understanding what McKenzie has presented with much enlightened details. The bottom line, the past is the past, but how one chooses to observe historic holidays such as Thanksgiving turkey dinner with oysters and scallop shells or a game of football, it is up to the reader. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Not an "everything you thought you knew was wrong" kind of history! By James C. McGlothlin Excellent and readable book! This is not your typical "everything you thought you knew about historical event or person X is wrong"--though there are some well-liked ideas about Thanksgiving that are surprisingly burst. I highly recommend it if you're interested in the history of America's beloved Thanksgiving holiday. Also, more generally, the author does an excellent job of explaining good historical research while also highlighting likely pitfalls of such research. I greatly appreciated his insights on not making idols of our historical heroes as well not using history for self-serving or self-justifying ends. As he says, this is easier said than done; but it is a good word of warning. I bought this as just a fun and informative read. I did not suspect that I would be enlightened to so much about the moral virtues of scholarly research. Though not a historian, I want to thank you Dr. McKenzie for writing this wonderful little book! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. a very helpful way to understand history By Jason G The First Thanksgiving by McKenzie ostensibly about the Plymouth Colony's 1621 harvest celebration and its effect in creating modern America's annual Thanksgiving celebration, is really three books in one: a examination of what actually happened that led up that harvest celebration, an examination of how it effected what became American life in the centuries that have followed, and showing how real historiography is done, particularly in McKenzie's case, as a Christian who is called to examine the facts, interpret them fairly and perhaps show what they mean for how modern people interact with their own past. It is in this roughly 200 page book's examination of what real historiography really looks like, is where it really shines. If, as some theologians have said, that every person who thinks about God and spiritual things, is a theologian, then McKenzie show how every person who thinks about past events is a historian, and how each person does historiography in understanding and interpreting the past matters greatly. His examination and fair attempt to place these Pilgrims in their context and make them understandable to people today is great because it helps show how foreign they are, and at the same time, makes them accessible. He has done some serious research in work with the original documents and even the later colonial and state Thanksgiving proclamations. By showing how the Pilgrims became a device for later generations to have a historical anchor for an annual reflection for a receding year. For those of us today, he councils and warns against using these events as props, for our own hobby horses, but to treat them fairly, as fallen people struggling to honestly live out a life before their God honestly. This little volume succeeds in doing three things quite well, and interweaving them into a compelling narrative.

ForeWord 2013 Book of the Year Award Finalist (Adult Nonfiction, History) The Pilgrims' celebration of the first Thanksgiving is a keystone of America's national and spiritual identity. But is what we've been taught about them or their harvest feast what actually happened? And if not, what difference does it make? Through the captivating story of the birth of this quintessentially American holiday, veteran historian Tracy McKenzie helps us to better understand the tale of America's origins and for Christians, to grasp the significance of this story and those like it. McKenzie avoids both idolizing and demonizing the Pilgrims, and calls us to love and learn from our flawed yet fascinating forebears.

The First Thanksgiving is narrative history at its best, and promises to be an indispensable guide to the interplay of historical thinking and Christian reflection on the meaning of the past for the present.

"McKenzie helpfully calls us away from the use of 'revisionist' as a pejorative for history we do not like. History is not received like Scripture. And the history of Thanksgiving was subject to lots of revision over the years, especially in the middle of the 19th century. The Pilgrim story, McKenzie points out, was not culturally convenient prior to and immediately after the Civil war, with the New England connection to the tradition quite strong, abolitionist governors using their Thanksgiving proclamations to decry slavery, and Native Americans not especially respected. . . . McKenzie argues for an alternative, for the practice of history done Christianly. . . . Combining knowledge with humility should be our goal in the study of the past. Refraining from self-flattering moral judgment, we should pursue history as an opportunity for moral reflection, looking to what figures in the past say about their own time, and for all time." (William Thomas Mari, Books Culture, November 2013)"If you want to rediscover the 'first Thanksgiving' and learn what difference studying history makes--well, you couldn't do better than reading this one volume. By looking at the Pilgrims afresh, they come alive to remind us 'how we mean to live and do not yet live.'" (Mark Galli, Christianity Today)"It is no doubt too hopeful to imagine that The First Thanksgiving will change how large numbers of Americans understand the Pilgrims or look upon Thanksgiving. But one can hope that the book makes its way into the hands of a wide range of audiences including Christian college students and faculty, elementary and secondary education teachers, adult Christian education classes, general Christian readers, and even secular university classes interested in an excellent primer on thinking historically. If it does, there is some chance by the time Americans sit down to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving in 2021, more of us will be better equipped to receive well the gifts that historical study can provide, including the feast that our Pilgrim forefathers and mothers offer." (Richard W. Pointer, Christian Scholar's , Summer 2014)"Tracy McKenzie has written two books in one. The first may be read for fun and profit by anyone interested in the 'real story' of Thanksgiving. The second is primarily intended to help American Christians think in a Christian manner about our nation's history. There are a host of books that smugly dissect popular 'myths' or 'lies' about American history. Fortunately, this is not one of them. It is true that McKenzie dispels a number of common beliefs about Thanksgiving, but he does so in a winsome, engaging manner." (Mark David Hall, Anglican and Episcopal History, Vol. 88, No. 4)"The First Thanksgiving emphasizes the Pilgrims' firm commitment to God and highlights beliefs today's Christians might disagree with, such as refusing religious tolerance. Throughout the book, McKenzie uses carefully selected biblical scriptures to assure readers that history has a place in Christianity, but Christians must be careful not to place faith in historical figures or America. Instead, they should follow the Pilgrims' lead and strive to make heaven their home. . . . Christians who embrace the strategies used by historians that McKenzie skillfully teaches, may never view the past the same again." (Kaavonia Hinton, ForeWord Magazine, Fall 2013)"McKenzie's book is both an engaging account of New England's first Thanksgiving and an excellent introduction to how to think both critically and constructively about history." (George Marsden, author of A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards)"What makes The First Thanksgiving such a refreshing read is that McKenzie gives fewer pages to debunking folk tales about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving than he does to inspiring desire for a kind of historical inquiry that enriches human wisdom through moral and spiritual reflection. Warm-hearted, intelligent and wonderfully surprising, this book will be read and appreciated by students and scholars alike, and especially by history lovers interested in what history is and what it is good for." (Lendol Calder, Augustana College)"Tracy McKenzie's clearly written and thoughtfully accessible book should be read with appreciation by a wide audience. It combines solid historical treatment of early American Thanksgivings with a perceptive understanding of historical method in general, and it does so by underscoring the profound Christian stake in history. It is one of those rare books that is perfectly suited for young readers but also of real value to those of us who have been around for a long time." (Mark A. Noll, University of Notre Dame)"As a teacher, I am always on the lookout for brief, well-written models of historical thinking that I can immediately thrust into the hands of undergraduates. I absolutely loved the chapter on why it took Thanksgiving so long to take root. This work models historical thinking with incandescent lucidity." (Sam Wineburg, Stanford University)"Revisionist histories were once the rage, as academics sought recognition by shaking us from deeply and dearly held perceptions of the past with revelations of novel and counter 'facts.' McKenzie works the opposite direction, resurfacing the history we have forgotten regarding one of our most treasured holidays-- Thanksgiving--to help reexamine and reinforce our most important convictions regarding faith and culture." (Bryan Chapell, president emeritus, Covenant Seminary)"McKenzie shows readers how historians arrive at their necessarily limited understanding of the 'real story': by evaluating and analyzing primary sources, by placing sources in context, and by imaginative reconstruction. . . . McKenzie makes his argument with brevity, clarity, and wit." (David Torbett, Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 69, no. 4)About the AuthorRobert Tracy McKenzie (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University) is professor and chair of the department of history at Wheaton College, where he teaches courses in U.S. history, the Civil War and historiography. McKenzie is the author of two award-winning monographs: One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil-War Era Tennessee (Cambridge, 1994) and Lincolntes and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War (Oxford, 2009). He has also written numerous scholarly reviews and articles

including "Don't Forget the Church: Reflections on the Forgotten Dimension of Our Dual Calling" in the book *Confessing History: Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation* (Notre Dame, 2010).