

Put “THANKS” Back Into THANKSGIVING

by Raymond F. McNair

Each year the people of the United States and Canada set aside a national day of thanksgiving. Why? Do the inhabitants of fabulously rich North America really know the cause of their manifold blessings?

FEW PEOPLE around the world understand the origin and purpose behind the American and Canadian customs of observing national days of thanksgiving.

Or why these two great nations—blessed with so high a standard of living—each traditionally observe an annual Thanksgiving Day.

The very first day of thanksgiving in North America was observed at Plymouth in 1621. The previous December, in 1620, Pilgrims—103 in number—had landed on the bleak, wintry coast of present-day Massachusetts. The winter of 1620-21 took a frightful toll in sickness and death. Only 56 Pilgrims survived. Spring brought new hope. In spite of the hot summer of 1621, they reaped abundant crops.

In grateful appreciation to God, the Pilgrims, led by Governor Wil-

liam Bradford, set aside a day for feasting and thanksgiving. During succeeding decades, the Thirteen Colonies celebrated numerous thanksgiving days. But the first *national* day of thanksgiving was set aside in 1789 by George Washington, the first U.S. President.

But it wasn't until the Civil War that the peoples of the United States decided to observe an annual Thanksgiving Day. Ever since, following President Abraham Lincoln's *Proclamation* of 1863, the nation has observed a national day of thanksgiving annually.

Canada first adopted Thanksgiving as a national holiday in November 1879. It is now celebrated annually on the second Monday in October.

How Others See It

The former prime minister of Japan, Kakuei Tanaka, once said of the United States: “You have *such an abundance* of resources . . . I think that as a nation you are too

privileged. . . . I think *God has not been very fair in the distribution of resources.*”

Yes, America is renowned—and sometimes envied—around the world because of her natural resources. An estimated 12 million aliens have entered the United States *illegally* because they yearn for the opportunity to work for a share of that great natural wealth.

Today, all too many who do share in the overflowing “horn of plenty” fail to consider the warning of American author John Steinbeck. He once remarked, “If I wanted to destroy a nation I would give it *too much* and I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy and sick.”

How many in the United States and Canada have been corrupted by their superabundance to the neglect of the genuine poor around them?

Did Anglo North Americans acquire their national blessings of and by themselves—by superior intellect, by diligent application, by

wisdom and might? Or were these overflowing blessings given by a Higher Power for a great purpose?

President Lincoln's *Proclamation* of April 30, 1863, during the tragic American Civil War, reveals the answer to these questions: "It is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to owe their dependence upon truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. . . . *We have been the recipients of the choicest blessing of heaven,*" said Mr. Lincoln. "We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in *numbers, wealth and power* as no other nation ever has grown; but *we have forgotten God.*"

And, in his Thanksgiving *Proclamation* of October 3, 1863, President Lincoln said: "No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the most high God. . . ."

Mr. Lincoln, who had for years diligently studied the Bible, knew the real source of America's wealth.

A Warning for Today

Nearly 3,000 years ago, a wise national leader—Moses was his name—foresaw our day. He foresaw that the descendants of the ancient nation of Israel, like all nations, would soon forget the true source of their blessings. In his warning, he foretold that the ancient people of Israel were destined to inherit "goodly cities . . . and houses full of all good things . . . wells . . . vineyards and olive trees. . . . When thou shalt have eaten and be full [as on Thanksgiving Day]; then *beware,*" said Moses, "*lest thou forget the Lord . . .*" (Deut. 6:10-12, Authorized Version).

Moses' description of ancient Israel's national blessings is a prophetic description of what is happening to the modern-day peoples of the United States and Canada: "For the Lord your God," said Moses, "is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive

oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you" (Deut. 8:7-10, Revised Authorized Version).

Then God also inspired Moses to add this solemn warning: "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God . . . you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth. . . . Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods . . . you shall surely perish. . . . because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:11-20).

As a whole, the peoples of Anglo North America have been blessed with the highest standard of living of any people in the entire history of mankind. But we need to bear in mind an important principle that the founder of true Christianity declared: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48, Authorized Version).

President Calvin Coolidge once gave similar advice: "Prosperity is only an instrument to be used, not a deity to be worshipped." He added: "No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

True, the great "have nations" unselfishly helped the needy after World War II. But have we in North America and elsewhere done all we should have done? Did we do it altogether unselfishly? (It should be clearly understood that when food is freely given care should be taken to see that, firstly, it reaches

the truly needy, not the indolent; and, secondly, that it reaches those for whom it is intended, instead of being siphoned off by the greedy, to further enrich themselves.)

Now look at how we have treated our own national inheritances.

No matter where we live, we find pollution of food, water, soil and the very air we breathe. But the worst pollution of all is *mind pollution*. Vast areas of the world are fed a constant stream of violence, illicit sex and sensationalism by way of television and other media emanating from the United States of America. Newsstands are loaded with pornographic material. Homes by the thousands break up each week in divorce. And modern societies murder (abort) millions of unborn infants each year!

There are the twin scourges of drug abuse (with millions destroying their minds through ever-increasing drug addiction) and drunkenness. Millions die prematurely, victims of heart and artery disease, cancer, stroke and accidents. Is this the legacy that America will be remembered for around the world? Why is God allowing these penalties to befall especially the nations most blessed with natural resources? There is a reason!

To our American readers celebrating Thanksgiving Day we say, listen to the admonitions of your past great leaders. George Washington once referred to religion and morality as the "indispensable supports" of the new nation. He spoke of religion and morality as "these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

The insistent words of President Theodore Roosevelt also come to mind: "The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life."

Do we give thanks by sharing our blessings with those near and far who are less fortunate than we?

Do we give heartfelt thanks to our Creator—the Almighty Blesser "who daily loads us with benefits" (Ps. 68:19, RAV)—for the manifold blessings he has so abundantly bestowed upon our nations? □