

## Lessons to Be Learned **From the Pilgrims**

**F**our hundred years ago, before setting foot on that famous rock, 41 passengers aboard the *Mayflower* signed the Mayflower Compact, a document of immeasurable influence on the country that would become the United States of America.

The pious congregation of Christians known to history as Pilgrims were in their own time called Separatists, for their schism with the greater Church of England. Dissension from the Church of England was illegal during the reign of King James the First, and the king was determined to brook no effrontery to his royal highness. To enforce his egotistical and tyrannical will, James sent agents far and wide into the country to round up those Separatists reportedly meeting in secret in small groups to avoid detection by the king's sycophantic spies.

Fearing imprisonment or worse at the hands of the royal agents, 400 English Separatists fled their beloved England. They sailed surreptitiously to Holland (leaving England without permission was a crime), where the atmosphere was more accommodating to those given to alternative (read: unofficial) interpretations of the Word of God. The Dutch were historically more tolerant of religious dissidents and would permit, within limits, pilgrims of many religious creeds to assemble without fear of reprisal or persecution.

Although the Pilgrims found a welcoming harbor in Holland, it proved to be a brief respite, as political situations altered as crucial peace treaties with Spain and France expired, leaving Holland politically unallied and therefore exposed to the avarice of other less-progressive states. As the climate in Holland became increasingly inhospitable, the Pilgrims met to formulate a new plan and consider the options open to them. It was decided that, despite the possible implications, they would return to England and immediately set about acquiring investors to fund their ultimate journey: to America.

As I considered the Mayflower Compact on the anniversary of its signing, my mind was brought less to the text of the compact and more to the words of John Robinson, the spiritual leader of the Pilgrims.

I've read Robinson's "Farewell Letter to the Pilgrims" many times. Reading this time, though, certain messages seemed to stand out more than others. I believe it is because our time seems so violent, so cruel, and so devoid of Christian kind-



ness that Robinson's counsel to his congregation sank so deeply into my heart. I sincerely believe that if we were to heed the advice and direction given by Robinson to the Pilgrims some 400 years ago, we could return to a body politic that is much more civil — something for which we would all be grateful to God.

Feeling the sober and historic choices we continue to face in our country, I thought Robinson's words might inspire readers the way they have inspired me.

First, Robinson suggests we must "daily renew our repentance with our God."

This, Robinson writes, would give us "security and peace in all dangers." That is certainly something we could all do with more of.

Next, Robinson counsels his congregants to "carefully provide for peace with all men." In an increasingly violent and vitriolic world, peace is at a premium, but must be sought for if we are to avoid further fighting and bloodshed.

A big part of peace with our fellow man, Robinson explains, is neither offending, nor "easily tak[ing] offense being given by others." One need only spend seconds on social media to know that we aren't doing very well at this. These days it seems we're all too quick to take offense at someone else's opinions and too quick to share our opinions in offensive ways.

In support of his suggestion to not offend or be offended, Robinson writes that in his experience people who are easily offended or who easily offend have never "proved sound and profitable members in societies." Certainly, we'd all benefit from being a little more thick-skinned and a little kinder in our discourse, particularly as it relates to politics.

Finally, more than anything else it was the tireless and unwavering faith of our Pilgrim Fathers that kept them alive and animated their firm resolve to bloom where the Hand of the Almighty God had planted them, no matter how rocky, unknown, and hostile the soil.

On this 400th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims, may we try to live up to their example of brotherly kindness, Christian charity, and reliance on the grace of God to help our "body politic" be much more civil in 2021. ■

For more about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving, go to [thenewamerican.com/tag/thanksgiving](http://thenewamerican.com/tag/thanksgiving)