

Thanksgiving, 2001 Stan Stahl, Ph.D.

Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery ... I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.

*Patrick Henry
March 23, 1775*

Thursday, November 22, is the first Thanksgiving since the World Trade Center atrocity. The last 2 ½ months have been a time of anger and grief, war and reflection.

This is a Thanksgiving of reflection, a time of deep considerations about who we are, what we value, and how we must act.

I am most thankful for *freedom, liberty, and a civil body politic*, for it is through these that the myriad blessings of Providence emerge. And it is through reflecting on these, America's fundamental principles, that we can see most clearly how we must now act.

What a powerful moment in human history when our species first imagined *freedom*, the difference between those who controlled slaves and those who were slaves. In imagining the freedom of his people, Moses, the son of slaves and the step-brother to a Pharaoh, set in motion the revolution whose fruits would include Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The modern world would not exist but for this divine moment, a moment for which I am profoundly thankful.

Three thousand years after Moses, our forefathers in Congress articulated the self evident principle that *all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*. In this, a second divine moment, the American revolution gloriously burst forth upon the world stage, bringing with it *a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal*.

The Pilgrims, who came to America in their search for religious freedom and who gave us our first Thanksgiving, faced the profound challenge of how to implement order in the midst of the freedom that was theirs in the new world. Their solution, the *Mayflower Compact*, is a third divine moment in human history as a free people mutually agree to combine themselves into a *civil body politic*:

[We] doe by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civill body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte, constitute and frame shuch just and equall lawes, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete and convenient for the generall good of the Colonie, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. [I have left the original spelling.]

The war against terrorism will not end with the destruction of Osama Bin Laden and his al Qaeda network; this struggle can only end when young boys and girls no longer feel the need to grow up to become terrorists.

There is no other path to accomplishing this than to create a world in which all feel free, a world in which all have the liberty to pursue their dreams, a world in which all the peoples of the world voluntarily combine into a civil body politic.

In the darkest days of World War II, Winston Churchill wrote *Our qualities must burn and glow through the gloom ... until they become the veritable beacon of [our] salvation.*

And so must we act in these challenging times.

Our obligation—and our opportunity—is to live the fundamental principles of the American dream—*freedom, liberty, and a civil body politic*—with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might so that future generations throughout the world can, like those of us here today, give thanks that they live free.

Let freedom ring.