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We the Fallen People

The Founders and the Future of the American Democracy

September 21, 2021 | \$28, 304 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5296-3

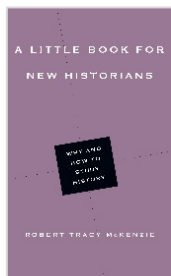
"In the spirit of Reinhold Niebuhr, Tracy McKenzie places original sin at the center of American political history. We the Fallen People weaves American history, historical thinking, and public theology into a compelling narrative that forces readers to rethink the meaning of our democratic experiment."

John Fea, professor of history at Messiah College and author of *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*

New from Veteran Historian Robert Tracy McKenzie

Robert Tracy McKenzie (PhD, Vanderbilt University) is Arthur F. Holmes Chair of Faith and Learning and professor of history at Wheaton College. His books include *Lincolmites and Rebels*, *A Little Book for New Historians*, and *The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning from History*. His research interests include the ways in which evangelicals remember their national heritage and the effects of the Civil War on the economy and society of the Upper South.

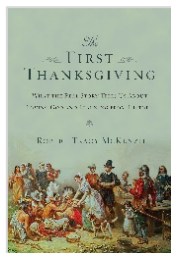
Also by McKenzie:



A Little Book for New Historians: Why and How to Study History

March 12, 2019 | \$14, 120 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5346-5

Veteran historian Robert Tracy McKenzie offers a concise, clear, and beautifully written introduction to the study of history. Laying out necessary skills, methods, and attitudes for historians in training, this resource is loaded with concrete examples and insightful principles that show how the study of history—when faithfully pursued—can shape your heart as well as your mind.



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

August 1, 2013 | \$24, 219 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-2574-5

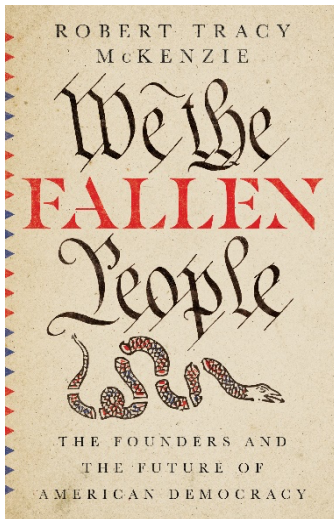
The Pilgrims' celebration of the first Thanksgiving is a keystone of America's national and spiritual identity. But is what we've been taught about them or their harvest feast what actually happened? And if not, what difference does it make? Through the captivating story of the birth of this quintessentially American holiday, 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.



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Q & A



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Human Nature and the Survival of Democracy

What led to your interest in democracy and now sharing about it in the context of political polarization?

Robert Tracy McKenzie: I determined to write this book because of the pronounced political polarization that now plagues our country and because of the challenge that this poses both to American democracy and to American Christians called to exercise the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society. My goal was not to make a political statement but rather to help Christians think more deeply and Christianly about democracy. We must think deeply before we can act faithfully.

What is your main thesis in *We the Fallen People*?

McKenzie: There are really only two reasons to believe in democracy: because you have confidence in human nature or because you don't. As a Christian, I am convinced that a deep appreciation of human sinfulness must be the starting point of our thinking about democracy. As a historian of the United States, I see little evidence that this has been true for most of our past. Although they rarely spoke in the terminology of orthodox Christianity, the Founders who crafted our Constitution in 1787 did so with human sinfulness in mind. Within less than half a century, the Founders' view of men and women as fundamentally self-interested had given way to the Jacksonian exaltation of the people as naturally virtuous.

I maintain that Americans long ago embraced democracy for the wrong reason, and that our misguided thinking both worsens our malfunctioning political system and intensifies the polarization that so bitterly divides us. Part of the problem of American democracy, in other words, is that we Americans think too highly of ourselves. Part of the solution to our democratic malaise, I suggest, is consciously to redefine ourselves as "We the *Fallen People*."

What do you hope your book contributes to the present dialogue on democracy?

McKenzie:

- The book exposes the changing understanding of human nature that both propelled and justified the rise of American democracy in the first half century after the creation of the US Constitution.
- The book revisits the question of the relationship between Christianity and the American founding by arguing that, although they rarely spoke in the language of orthodox Christianity, the Framers' understanding was largely compatible with the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin.
- The book reexamines in depth the critique of American democracy by its most trenchant observer, the French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville (author of *Democracy in America*), who saw both much to admire and much to fear. The book particularly explores Tocqueville's complex assessment of the contribution of American Christianity to the country's democratic system.



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