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KINGDOM AND CHURCH IN NEW ENGLAND

Puritan Eschatology from
John Cotton to Jonathan Edwards

By

William C. Eamon

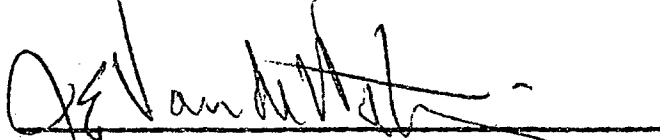
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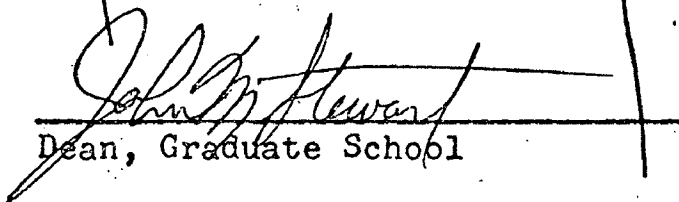
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Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

JEREMIAH 1:9-10

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PREFACE

One of the more enduring myths in European history has been the belief in a future golden age, or messianic kingdom, during which an elect people would reign in a world perfectly peaceful and perfectly happy. Recurrently, from the early middle ages to our own century, people have been seized by an eschatology, or body of doctrine concerning the last state of the world, foretelling of a millennium in which the world would for a thousand years be transformed into a Kingdom of Saints, a world purged of suffering and sin. Sometimes such beliefs took on the wildest tones of phantasy, sometimes they were the serious occupation of respectable scholars. Often they became full-fledged historical movements, varying from the most aggressively militant to the mildest pacifism; and they could be deeply spiritual or utterly materialistic. The slogans changed from age to age, but the basic myth remained the same.

This study is concerned with the ways in which traditional beliefs concerning the apocalypse and the millennium fit into the larger context of the theology of American Puritans. It will attempt to show that eschatology provided the thrust of the Puritan mission, that it furnished

the assurance that their mission could in fact be accomplished. The Puritans came to the New World with the intent of completing the Reformation of the Christian Church, and of erecting the foundation upon which Christ would establish his millennial Kingdom on earth. Eschatology was thus never separated from the desire for church reform; it continually associated the Kingdom with the Church. But as New England society gradually moved in the direction of becoming a secular community and a commercial commonwealth, theologians somehow attempted to update religion, to make the church relevant not just to an elect body of saints but to the larger populace. Puritanism changed partly out of the necessity to preserve the churches, since it found that the rigid standards of reformation in 1630 were far too rigid for the society of 1700. But it changed also because theologians earnestly desired to accommodate religion to the Age of Enlightenment. Eschatology survived this transition, even though it was far different in the eighteenth century than it was at the beginning of the seventeenth. By the time of Jonathan Edwards, eschatology took a place among the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment, foretelling of a millennium gradually occurring through the normal course of history, and of a future embodying endless progress for the world.

In a narrow sense, then, this study concerns itself with the religious background of the idea of progress. But

that was only my secondary purpose, for I believe the Puritans are worth studying in their own right, without drawing implications for later historical movements. The decision to become a Puritan was essentially a decision to withdraw from the world, or at least from the sin of the world.

Hence it is a decision not altogether confined to the seventeenth century. The attempt to remain one, however, was far more difficult than the decision to become one: as the American Puritans found, they confronted at every juncture forces which compelled them to take up more of the world, not less of it, to hold on to their mission. This, then, is a study of how Puritans, and their eschatology, grew less sectarian, less pious, less medieval; and became more universalized, more pietistic, more modern, as they converted the meaning of religion from a way of worship to a way of living.

CHAPTER I

KINGDOM AND CHURCH

— Early in April, in the year 1630, a fleet of four small vessels, carrying about four hundred Englishmen together with livestock and supplies, slipped out of the Cowes in the Isle of Wight and headed for New England, in America. Crossing the cold North Atlantic in April and May, the company braved stormy seas and heavy rain without "fear or dismayedness" until it finally cast anchor in the Massachusetts Bay in early June.

It would have taken a discerning eye to spot the essential differences between this and the numerous other companies already settled up and down the Atlantic coast of America. They were men and women of common social status, for the most part, led by men of influence and education. But they went with a larger purpose in mind than many of their predecessors who sought mere private gain; for they came to the New World not to erect a plantation of traders but a plantation of saints. Never before, they believed, had men embarked on a mission with such profound purpose as this: theirs would be a Holy City, a plantation built upon the Word of the Lord. It would in

fact be the work of God himself, for they were the men God had chosen to complete the work of fulfilling His prophecies concerning the last age. Their task, set clearly before them, was to prepare the way for the Kingdom of Christ.

These devout souls were members of a vociferous minority movement of religious non-conformity, called Puritanism, which since the middle of the sixteenth century had proved equally annoying to both the Anglican clergy and the British Crown. Whatever their individual differences, Puritans were all dissatisfied with the religious establishment in England because they thought the English Reformation had not gone far enough. It brought purity in doctrine, but not in the forms of church polity. They espoused, therefore, a radical rupture with the immediate past and were bent on establishing new churches based entirely on Scripture. Most importantly, they were not carrying on this enterprise on their own, but believed they had a clear appointment from God. They were, as one of their ministers told them in a farewell sermon, a "people of God's Plantation," a chosen people "commissioned" by God to complete the work of reformation. Their plantation, said the leader of the company, was to be a "citty on a hill," in plain view for all to see the proper course for the reformation of the churches.

The impulse to erect pure churches, in both form and in substance, was not without precedent. From among

the earliest Christians there arose groups which thought the Church of Christ could achieve in this world a holiness "without spot and wrinkle."¹ St. Augustine, in the fourth century, warned against attempting to completely purify the churches; while the visible church on earth must strive for purity, it must inevitably contain many spots and wrinkles, since it operated in the world of human corruption. Reformers often found the efforts of the Catholic Church insufficient, however, and in the sixteenth century a host of zealous Protestants left the Church to build new ones of their own. Many reformers even found the efforts of normative Protestantism lacking. In their impatience with mere reform, they called for a more radical break with the forms and policies of Catholicism and for the erection of new churches, all in an eschatological mood far more intense than anything in normative Protestantism or Catholicism.² The Puritans who settled in Massachusetts in 1630 were part of this movement. While they continually disclaimed separatism, they saw little hope for the Church of England in its present course. An intense sense of mission characterized these New England Puritans. They would with the

¹Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 2.

²George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 857.

help of God establish not only holy churches, but a Holy Commonwealth, preparing the way for the New Jerusalem.

This sense of mission and of expectancy was the driving force behind the Puritan migration to New England. By the time they reached the New World, the Puritans had inherited--from medieval Christianity, from the Reformation, and from English Puritanism--an eschatology, or a body of doctrine concerning the final state of the world, which when combined with the impulse to purify the churches, provided the most convincing justification for the New England experiment. The Puritans believed that the visible church could be made to correspond closely, in certain ages, with the Kingdom of Christ to be erected at the end of human history. As they read and interpreted the apocalyptic prophecies, they concluded with many Protestants that they were then living in those very last days. It was therefore likely that God would complete the Church's reformation now, and He would do it in New England. Thus the Puritans erected the Holy Commonwealth with the conviction that they were the forerunners of the imminent Kingdom of Christ.

Apocalyptic ideas were potentially highly explosive. Recurrently during the middle ages millennial prophets, seized by a tense expectation of some final struggle between the hosts of Christ and the hosts of Antichrist, which would suddenly transform the world, arose to lead discontented

masses into the millennium.³ During the sixteenth century as well, eschatology raised the hopes of many of the radical reformers to a feverish pitch. New England ministers, in spite of the tenseness with which they awaited the end of history, suppressed the more revolutionary implications of eschatology. When such notions did arise, as in the "enthusiasm" of Anne Hutchinson or in the separatism of Roger Williams, they were quickly and decisively dealt with. At times the most orthodox and respectable clergymen verged dangerously close to apocalyptic speculation which might have been, under different conditions, transformed into revolutionary action. Yet no self-appointed Messiah, no Thomas Muntzer, arose out of New England Puritanism. Throughout the New England experience the clergy engaged only in "sober chiliasm" and eschewed all form of "wild Phansies of Enthusiasts."

* * *

The materials from which all Christian eschatology was built consisted of a miscellaneous collection of prophecies and "visions" produced by the ancient Jews. Early Jewish apocalyptic literature, as one author claims, was "essentially a literature of the oppressed who saw no hope

³Norman Cohn gives a full account of these movements in The Pursuit of the Millennium (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1961).

for the nation simply on the plane of human history."⁴ Yet it was not just a literature of despair, for it persistently held to the conviction that God would one day set right the injustice done to his people Israel. Thus it gave history both inevitability and meaning, promising that God's chosen would be delivered from the oppression and suffering of this world into a messianic kingdom in an "age to come." The earliest of these writings, the Book of Daniel, foretells of the destruction of the earthly kingdoms and the coming of a Messiah, who will inaugurate a new epoch in history in which the saints shall rule with the Lord:

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High.⁵

Early Christians readily inherited the apocalyptic image of history, responding to hardship ever more vigorously by asserting their belief in the ultimate destruction of their enemies and in the imminent second coming of Christ. The first-century apocalypse known as the Book of Revelation became the model for Christian eschatology. For four

⁴D. S. Russel, The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 17.

⁵Daniel 7:14, 27.

centuries after the death of Christ people took this prophecy in the most literal sense, anticipating with feverish excitement the advent of Christ's Kingdom.⁶ By the fifth century, however, chiliasm came under increasing criticism from the Catholic Church, now a powerful and prosperous institution. With St. Augustine, ecclesiastical disapproval became emphatic, and the Augustinian interpretation of the millennium became official doctrine. According to Augustine, the Book of Revelation was to be understood as a spiritual allegory, and the millennium, begun with the birth of Christianity, was already fully realized in the Church. In 431 the Council of Ephesus condemned belief in the millennium as a superstitious aberration.⁷

Nevertheless, the apocalyptic tradition did not die; officially a heresy, it survived in the "underworld" of popular religion, often taking on extremely radical orientations. As Norman Cohn has shown, apocalyptic phantasies thrived especially among such displaced groups as the unsettled peasantry, unskilled workers, beggars, and vagabonds--"such people, living in a state of chronic frustration and anxiety, formed the most impulsive and unstable elements in medieval society"--and it was out of these that self-

⁶Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium, pp. 7-12.

⁷Ibid., p. 14.

appointed saints and messiahs emerged, leading hundreds of their kind to do battle against the hosts of Antichrist.⁸

In the sixteenth century millennial thought re-entered the mainstream of Western religion, at least among Protestant theologians. At the height of the Reformation, when Europe became divided into two bitterly warring religious camps, Protestant theologians recognized more and more the need for a new set of ideas about the history of the Church. They needed to explain, for example, how it had happened that the Church had fallen into the hands of a lot of evil-doers. Why had the Reformation been delayed so long? Clearly these were pressing questions; so pressing in fact that, unless they could be explained by Scripture, there could be no real justification for the Protestant movement. Martin Luther responded to this need by accepting once again the Apocalypse as an authentic prophecy of the future of the Church, not simply as a spiritual allegory. According to Luther, the Apocalypse was "intended as revelation of things that are to happen in the future, and especially of tribulations and disasters for the Church."⁹ The prophecy, therefore, answered the objections to the

⁸Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁹Quoted in Ernest Lee Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia (1949, repr. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 26.

Reformation by foretelling of the betrayal of the Church to heretics and angels of Antichrist, who was now identified in Luther's theology with the institution of the papacy. It foretold also of a group of chosen people coming forth to combat the forces of Antichrist, a group of valiant men armed with the truth of the Gospel and holding against tremendous odds, but destined to enjoy a final triumph.

Luther's approach to the Apocalypse provided a basic outline for practically all Protestant thinking on the subject. While others differed in the importance they placed on certain epochs, or on the nature of the Kingdom of Christ, all followed substantially the method Luther employed. Since the Apocalypse was revelation of things to happen in the future, said Luther, the way to interpret these prophecies was "to take from history the events and disasters that have come upon the Church before now and hold them up alongside of these pictures and so compare them with the words."¹⁰ After Luther, hundreds of commentaries on the Revelation appeared, not just as part of a "fringe" movement but by respected Protestant thinkers. Eschatology among Protestants was perfectly serious business, as theologians throughout Northern Europe delved into the apocalyptic literature in an effort to answer the mystery of the Church's bondage to Satan. In the sixteenth century,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

millennialism captured the minds of the most respected and influential Protestants. Prophetic books were for almost two centuries the "mirror of Western European history."¹¹

Luther failed to develop eschatology beyond these preliminary stages, and his attempts to relate the prophecies to actual events in history remained confused and ambiguous. Yet he raised a question of immense importance for later Protestants, since they were forced to define the relationship between the Kingdom and the visible church with greater precision than Luther attempted. Luther believed that the true church existed only as a small, scattered body of the redeemed, "united only in the bond of the spirit."¹² His desire to establish a territorial church, however, led him to abandon the idea of limiting the visible church only to the elect. Instead he concluded with Augustine that the church could never be disengaged from its sinful involvement with this world, and that the Kingdom of Christ existed only in the hearts of the redeemed. Within the institutional church the Kingdom of Christ and the temporal world existed side by side, in constant dialectical tension. Until Judgement Day the two realms would never be separated, and until then the true church would always remain invisible.¹³

¹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹²Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1950), p. 242.

¹³Joy Bourne Gilsdorf, "The Puritan Apocalypse: New England Eschatology in the Seventeenth Century," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1964), pp. 3-4.

The relationship between Kingdom and Church has occupied the minds of practically all Protestants, in one way or another, since Luther. The problem was in a sense fundamental to Protestantism, since the degree to which Protestants felt the church could be made to correspond to the Kingdom often determined for them the extent to which the church could be made universal in this world. Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between "Church-types" and "sect-types" in medieval Christianity thus applies to a degree to reformed Christianity as well.¹⁴ Lutheranism, insisting that the true Church must remain invisible until Judgement, belongs essentially to the Church-type: it aspired to universality, it accepted the secular order, and it attempted to cover the whole life of humanity. Luther's concern with universality was greater than his concern with purity; by sacrificing the urge to erect pure churches he gained a territorial church. The same was true for Calvin, who put off hope for a complete pure church until the Judgement. The more radical reformers, however, were more confident about reproducing the structure of the apostolic church, or as some saw it, the invisible church of the Kingdom of Christ. Comprising relatively small groups, they aspired after personal inward perfection. At the same time they were less

¹⁴Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), Vol. I, pp. 331-43.

concerned with establishing a universal or territorial church.

While Luther believed that the visible church participated in the Kingdom only insofar as it contained a hidden body of the elect, Calvin was willing to assign the Church a greater role. Since the church was the "mother of believers," Calvin held that the Kingdom existed somehow--actually and historically--within the church.¹⁵ This did not mean, however, that the institutional church could become perfect in this world. Since it was "at the same time mingled of good men and bad," it was bound to be imperfect, often impure and corrupt. Yet the church was no less holy for this, for its holiness was simply incomplete, and would remain so until Judgement:

The Church is holy, then, in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness, . . . the Lord declares that the church is to labor under this evil--to be weighed down with the mixture of the wicked--until the Day of Judgement.¹⁶

The Church, in other words, will never become completely pure until Christ returns to make it so, and therefore the hope of the believer lay not in the earthly church, but in the Judgement:

¹⁵Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by John T. McNeill, Trans. Ford Lewis Battle ("Library of Christian Classics," Vols. 20-21; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Vol. II, p. 1016.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 1028.

It is true that the church has been sanctified by Christ, but only the beginning of its sanctification is visible here; the end and perfect completion will appear when Christ, the Holy of Holies, truly and perfectly fills the church with his holiness.¹⁷

The same was true for the individual saint. Projecting history's end far into the future, Calvin insisted that the individual believer, like the church, was a pilgrim in this world, finding his hope for fulfillment in the Judgement. He therefore discouraged "dangerous speculations" about the end of the world, and enjoined his saints to find encouragement in a daily witnessing of their faith. He conceived the life of the saint as a pilgrim's progress between calling and consummation, a life filled with danger and surrounded by wickedness but borne up by the hope of a heavenly future. "If a believer's eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection," Calvin assured the elect, "in their hearts the cross of Christ will at last triumph over the devil, flesh, sin, and wicked men."¹⁸ Meanwhile God hid from the eyes of believers the time of the Judgement as an inducement for men to constantly watch for Christ's coming. Men in this world must simply leave the future to God, and "be satisfied with the 'mirror' and its 'dimness'

¹⁷Ibid., II, p. 1160.

¹⁸Ibid., I, p. 719.

until we see him face to face."¹⁹

The millennium as such did not play a central role in Calvin's theology, and he was reluctant to speculate further on it. His hesitancy was not shared by many other reformers, however. In England, reformed theologians adopted the substance of Calvinism, but were far less hesitant to examine the Apocalypse and to draw historical judgements from it. English Calvinists--or Puritans as they were called--were convinced that the Book of Revelation contained the entire history of Christ's church, prophesying the full course of His earthly Kingdom. The Revelation, they believed, was "a full clearance to all the chronicles and most notable histories which hath been wrote since Christ's ascension, opening the true natures of their ages, times, and seasons."²⁰ When they examined the Apocalypse, Englishmen could arrive at no other conclusion than that they were living in the last age of the world. The millennium, or the

¹⁹Ibid., II, p. 1007. Calvin viewed the time of the end as being deliberately obscured from men's minds, and hence discouraged men from inquiring into this forbidden knowledge. Men need only know that their hope lies in Christ's coming, "yet when these things are spoken of, they remain utterly remote from our perception, and, as it were, wrapped in obscurities, until that day comes when he will reveal to us his glory, that we may behold him face to face." Institutes, II, p. 1004.

²⁰John Bale, "The Image of Both Churches," Select Works of John Bale," ed. Henry Christmas (The Parker Society Publications, Vol. I; Cambridge: The University Press, 1849), "preface," p. 243.

thousand-year binding of Satan, consisted in the thousand years since Christ's ascension, when the church flourished in purity and truth of doctrine. But now Antichrist, released in the form of the Papacy, was free to persecute Christians. The future held in store for believers continuing afflictions and more encounters with the forces of the devil until the final victory over Antichrist. Not surprisingly, sixteenth-century Protestants all over the world tried to determine when the end would arrive.

One of the earliest of these works was written by a converted monk, John Bale. Born of a poor family in Suffolk and educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, Bale left his order, married, and subsequently became one of England's most ardent propagandist of the Reformation. His bitter denunciations of the Catholic Church twice got him into trouble for heresy and forced him to flee England. In 1548, when he returned from his first period of exile, he published a commentary on the Book of Revelation entitled The Image of Both Churches. The purpose of this work was to instruct the believer in how to discern the true church from the false. Revelation, Bale felt, provided the key to that understanding:

... Herein is the true christian church, which is the meek spouse of the Lamb without spot, in her reigh-fashioned colours described. So is the proud church of hypocrites, the rose-coloured whore, the paramour of antichrist, and the sinful synagogue of Satan, in

her just proportion depainted, to the merciful forewarning of the Lord's elect.²¹

The Book of Revelation was an authentic prophecy of the entire history of the church. Bale, however, was most interested in the application of the prophecy to recent events. While Antichrist had seized power in Rome, he insisted, the cause of the true church had not yet perished. Countless devout men--Wyclif, Hus, Luther, and others--had led the elect into battle against Satan. Bale wrote excitedly that the prodigious final struggle between the saints and the host of Antichrist, through which history would attain its fulfillment, was near. This fact, he emphasized, should be of great comfort to the faithful.

While all of this was familiar enough in Protestant eschatology, in Bale's work there appeared a difference which would set off English eschatology from eschatology produced in other nations. Continental reformers were content to give a place in their pages to all persons who had suffered under Antichrist, whatever their nationality, but "those to whom Bale gave place were preponderantly English as well."²² This view gained tremendous popularity in the years after Bale. One book--John Foxe's Acts and Monuments--expressed it more memorably than any other. This

²¹Ibid., p. 251.

²²William Haller, The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 69.

work, known popularly and affectionately as Foxe's Book of Martyrs, appeared in England in 1563, and within a very few years became the most popular book, next to the Bible, in England. More than any other narrative, the Book of Martyrs made plain that by all the evidence of scripture and history the will of God was about to be fulfilled in England. From the Book of Martyrs Englishmen gained concrete assurance that they were indeed an "elect nation."²³

In spite of the patriotic tribute made to Elizabethan England by Bale and Foxe, Puritans were clearly dissatisfied with the lack of reform of Anglican church polity. By the end of the century this dissatisfaction made itself evident in apocalyptic thought, as later Puritans tended increasingly to view the Kingdom in terms of the purification of the church. Thus, in the late sixteenth century, eschatology combined with a vigorous program of church reform: while the martyrologists rarely used the Apocalypse to formulate a reform program, later Puritans drew upon the tradition to fashion a far more radical policy concerning the church and its discipline.

Already this transformation was apparent just one generation after Bale, in the work of Thomas Brightman.

²³For a full account of the Book of Martyrs and its meaning, see Haller's Elect Nation, a brilliant analysis which goes far beyond its announced subject to illuminate Christian eschatology and historiography as a whole.

Born in Nottingham in 1562, Brightman became a fellow at Queen's College in 1584. He wrote a number of works on the Apocalypse, all of which he claimed were written under divine inspiration. The most important of these was his Revelation of St. John, published in 1616, nine years after his death.²⁴ While Bale had insisted that the Kingdom existed only in the hearts of the elect, and could not be identified with any earthly church, Brightman held that at certain points in history the Kingdom of Christ existed to a great extent in the visible church of this world. In fact, for Brightman the Kingdom of Christ on earth corresponded with a specific form of church government--the presbyterian--and he found evidence for this in the second chapter of the Book of Revelation.

In this chapter, St. John described seven letters written by Christ to the churches of seven Asian cities. Taking each of the cities as types of churches existing in the ages after Christ, Brightman interpreted the chapter as the history of the Christian Church through seven ages. According to Brightman, the purity of the apostolic church lasted only until the time of Constantine, when the Church began its headlong descent. The city of Pergamus represented the church at the depth of its corruption, lasting

²⁴"Thomas Brightman," Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: 1908), Vol. II, p. 1247.

until about 1300, when such pious men as Wyclif, Hus, and Luther came forth to challenge the evil practices of the Papacy. These reformers made great progress, but the most noteworthy advances were made in the Calvinist churches. In the church of Philadelphia--which Brightman took to represent the reformed churches of Geneva, Huguenot France, Holland, and Scotland--"the ordinance of God was in vigour of old." The reason for this, he explained, was that the presbyterian churches exercised strict discipline. Philadelphia prospered first because it uncompromisingly cast out all the relics of Antichrist,

but most of all because the true use of excommunication is restored, whereby the gates of heaven are both shut and open, as also the dores of every mans conscience are unsealed, that so Christ may come easily in without any stay.²⁵

The last letter, written to the churches of "luke-warm Laodicea," described the Anglican Church. The Church of England was not cold, "in asmuch as it doth professe the sound, pure, and sincere doctrine of salvation, by which wee have renounced that Antichrist of Rome, and are risen out of that death as cold as yce wherein wee lay before." Yet neither was it hot, for its "outward regiment is as yet for the greatest parte Antichristian & Romish."²⁶

²⁵Quoted in Gilsdorf, "The Puritan Apocalypse," p. 37.

²⁶Ibid., p. 40.

The purpose of Brightman's treatise on Revelation was to show the correspondence between the millennium and the visible church of this world. He believed, with most Protestants, that he was entering the age of the New Jerusalem. But in his eschatology, the Kingdom would not be realized only in the hearts of the elect, but in the church reformed, purified, and maintained by the proper form of discipline:

This new Jerusalem . . . is not that citie which the Saintes shall enjoy in the Heavens, after this life, but that Church, that is to be looked for upon earth, the most noble and pure of all other, that ever have been to that tyme.²⁷

Thus he thought of the Kingdom as appearing in a gradual fashion with the progress of the Reformation. The millennium had actually begun about the time of Wyclif; and Brightman expected the woes of the world to gather and increase around the faithful, purifying them by their trials, as the forces of Antichrist prepared for that final struggle. When that occurred, of course, Antichrist and the Papacy would be utterly overthrown:

The victory being obtained, the souls gather to the prey and do fill themselves with the spoils . . . That whole late popish nation shall be subject afterward to the Reformed Church. Every country being a nourrison of the purer truth, shall have some part of the regions, before time given up to the superstition, made subject to them.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., p. 39.

²⁸Quoted in Michael Walzer, Revolution of the Saints (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 292n.

Puritans living at the dawn of the seventeenth century could not have avoided feeling that they were living in the most momentous times of human history. John Bale and John Foxe--whose authority in the minds of Englishmen was unimpeachable--had discovered scriptural justification for England's break with Rome, and had proven her chosen destiny in God's design for the world. In Brightman, Puritans found support for the idea that there existed only one divinely ordained form of church government. These apocalyptic writings, in other words, set Puritan activity within a world-historical context; their agitation for reform of church polity was not only according to Scriptural standards, but actually set English Puritanism at the forefront of the work of redemption. Even as Brightman wrote his Revelation of St. John, another generation of Puritans reached maturity explicitly correlating the Kingdom with a program of church reform. These Puritans, steeped in sixteenth-century millennial thought, took up a program far more revolutionary than those of their predecessors. By 1630, in fact, many Puritans were convinced of the practicability of themselves erecting the Kingdom of Christ on earth, modeled after a pure visible church.

CHAPTER II

THY KINGDOM COME

— By the end of the sixteenth century the Puritan clergy constituted a vigorous, radical element within English society. Exiled on the Continent during the reign of Queen Mary, increasingly dissatisfied with the Church after their return, many of the ministers became convinced that little by way of reformation could be accomplished within the established system. Many advocated independent political action, and ultimately radical overthrow of the traditional order. Others gave up hope for reform and left England altogether. Still others left England to begin these reforms, independently, hoping that England might follow their example. All of them, however, shared ideas incompatible with the traditional system, ideas which tended to produce radical and innovative activity.¹ Whatever their programs were concerning the specifics of church reform, all Puritans were deeply influenced by the apocalyptic image of history. Millennialism continually nourished Puritan radicalism, instilling confidence that the purposes of God could be ascertained and carried out by humans.

¹See Ibid., Chapter IV.

Puritans demanded that all remnants of the Catholic hierarchy be completely torn down; it had not been enough to defy the Pope. They considered it the duty of Christians to determine from scripture the proper form of church organization, and by this standard they found glaring abuses in the English Church. All Puritans knew that there must be an end to bishops and archbishops, an end to idolatrous ritual, but disagreed about what Scripture required to replace them. One group, still thinking in terms of a national church, insisted that bishops be replaced by another organization, with churches and clergy arranged in a pyramidal structure, embracing all members of the community. These were known as Presbyterians. Another group, who ultimately took the name of Congregationalists, preferred to carry the reformation further by destroying bishops completely, substituting for the national church independent churches sufficient to themselves. Presbyterians preferred a church coextensive with society, Congregationalists viewed it as a covenanted body of elect saints. Presbyterians eventually gained a majority in England, while the majority of those migrating to New England were Congregationalists.

At first the Puritans attempted to institute reform through the established channels of government. In 1604, a group of presbyterians petitioned King James I to reform some of the more glaring abuses of the Church, asking that

the religious life of the people be placed in the hands of the clergy along the lines of presbyterian policy. James, however, while assuring the Puritans that he adhered to orthodox Calvinism, would have nothing to do with presbyterianism. Rather foolishly he promised to harry non-conformists out of the land. "No bishop, no King," James insisted, thus committing the monarchy against the Puritan program.²

Alienated from the monarchy, the Puritans lay their hopes for reform in the Parliament, where they gained a vociferous minority. Parliament seemed to the Puritans the last bulwark against an obstinate monarchy, and Puritan leaders in the House of Commons resolutely set about to affirm their privileges and their independence. But if James seemed obstinate, his son, Charles, proved to be an implacable foe of Puritans. As if it were not enough to defy the independence of Parliament, Charles proclaimed his sympathy to Arminianism!³ He consistently appointed Arminians to fill vacated government posts, and in 1628, he made William Laud, one of the most notorious of them, Bishop of London. The King met Parliament's demands with

²M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 324-25.

³Arminianism was the belief that men could by their own will power achieve faith and win salvation. Such a belief was heresy to Puritans, who believed that men gained faith, hence salvation, not through human endeavor but by election.

a heavy hand. In March, 1629, Charles dissolved Parliament and made it clear he had no intention of calling another. At the same time he pledged his support to the Church of England and promised to admit no "backsliding either to Popery or schism."⁴ With Parliament dissolved, the last channels of opposition were closed. The saints saw but two choices for accomplishing their reforms: radical conspiracy or emigration. Ultimately, when the political situation became desperate, the first alternative would be taken. But between 1630 and 1640 a growing number of Puritans found the second more palatable. "This land growes wearye of her Inhabitants," wrote one. "If the Lord seeth it wilbe good for us, he will provide a shelter and a hidinge place for us and ours."⁵

The idea of leaving England altogether was not new, for a small band of separatists had been living in Plymouth in the New World since 1620. The Puritans who emigrated after 1630, eventually settling the Massachusetts Bay area, shared many of the emotions which guided the Plymouth pilgrims. They both were intimately conscious of the trials of the elect in a sinful world; both groups had abandoned

⁴Quoted in Maurice Ashley, England in the Seventeenth Century (3d ed.; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 66.

⁵Quoted in Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958), pp. 36-39.

hope for reform through established legal channels; and both experienced the frustration of being estranged from the English political situation. There the similarity ended. The Plymouth pilgrims, following Robert Browne's dictum of "reformation without tarrying for any," separated completely from the English Church on the grounds that it was so corrupt that it no longer deserved the name of church. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans, however, left England for quite another reason. Disavowing separatism, they continually professed their attachment and gratitude to the Church of England. They were not withdrawing from the world or from the struggle for reformation. Instead, they were leaving to furnish Protestantism with a model for reform, and to demonstrate to England what yet remained to be achieved.

It was this authentic reforming impulse that made Puritanism unique in the American experience. They associated with their enterprise an eschatological purpose far more intense than anything in the other colonies, conceiving their migration as a crucial turning point in history. The Puritans insisted that they had not simply fled an undesirable situation in England, but that they had entered into a covenant with the Lord regarding this mission. If the reformation were to be delayed in England, God would have it completed elsewhere; thus He commissioned a select body of devout men to carry on the reformation in the wilderness.

As John Cotton told the emigrants in his farewell sermon, "The placing of a people in this or that Countrey is from the appointment of the Lord."⁶ God provides a place for all nations to inhabit, but there was a great difference between this company and other nations. Here, as in the case of ancient Israel, God's involvement was far more direct:

Here is meant some more speciall appointment, because God tells them it by his owne mouth; . . . that is, He gives them the land by promise; others take the land by his providence, but Gods people take the land by promise: And therefore the land of Canaan is called a land of promise.⁷

Cotton gave great encouragement to the company, comparing them to vines planted and sustained by God: "every plantation his right hand hath not planted shalbe rooted up, but his owne plantation shall prosper & flourish."⁸ Finally, lest some of the company harbor separatist impulses, Cotton admonished them to be mindful of England, the "Jerusalem at home." Their reform must never come to separation, as it had at Plymouth. "As God continueth his presence with us," said Cotton, "so be ye present in spirit with us, though absent in body: Forget not the wombe that bare you and the brest that gave you sucke."⁹

⁶John Cotton, "God's Promise to His Plantations" (1630), Old South Leaflets, number 53, p. 5.

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

John Winthrop, leader of the company and later governor of the colony, expressed similar sentiments. In a lay-sermon delivered aboard the flagship of the expedition, he outlined the purpose of Massachusetts more succinctly than did any other Puritan. It was "through a speciall overruleing providence," he told the company, that they had gone out "to seeke out a place of Cohabitation and Consort-ship vnder a due forme of Government both ciuill and ecclesiastical."¹⁰ There stood a cause between God and these emigrants; "We are entered into Covenant with Him for this worke. Wee haue taken out a commission."¹¹ "This worke" was of no small importance, for the Massachusetts Bay settlement was to stand as a model and a guide for the still uncompleted reformation of the church and civil government of England and the world. If New England remained faithful to her commission, "men shall say of succeeding plantations, 'the Lord make it likely that of New England.'" But if they rebel against God, surely there would be calamitous times ahead:

For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are uppon us. Soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our God in this worke wee haue undertaken, and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and

¹⁰John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, VII (1838), 45.

¹¹Ibid., v. 46.

a by-word through the world. Wee shall open the mouthes of enemies to speake evill of the wayes of God, and all professors for God's sake. Wee shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause theire prayers to be turned into curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are going.¹²

In justifying their migration to New England on these grounds Puritans made a profound departure from the eschatology of both Calvinism and English Puritanism. The eschatology of reformed Christianity generally held that the millennium had already begun, that Christians must look for the fulfillment of history in Christ's coming to Judgment. Then, after the destruction of Antichrist, the rule of the saints begins. For the New England Puritans, however, the Book of Revelation implied a millennium to begin in the future. Since the binding of Satan was yet to occur the future took on a different aspect. New England saw the course of history during the Reformation as an upward movement leading inevitably to Christ's earthly Kingdom, and their expedition as the vanguard of that movement. Only a decade later, Puritans in England found in these arguments a program for radical political action.¹³ A century later this interpretation, brought within the normal course of history, implied a progressive view of all human history. But for New England Puritans, it provided scriptural

¹²Ibid., p. 47.

¹³See Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia, pp. 75-77, and Walzer, Revolution of the Saints, pp. 290-99.

justification for the Congregational form of church polity. The Puritans believed that the final stages in the preparation for the Kingdom of Christ on earth would be to purify the churches in both form and substance. The Congregational system provided the model for organizational reform, but to purify the churches in substance meant building churches whose membership included only the regenerate. It was possible even in this world, Puritans thought, to tell who was a saint. Hence membership could be rightfully conferred only on those who were truly regenerate. The Puritans, in other words, would themselves erect Christ's Kingdom by completing the work of reforming the visible church.¹⁴

This was a new direction in eschatological thinking. It did not, however, constitute a revolution. Rooted deep in the English Protestant tradition, it was but a logical extension of the demands Puritans had made upon the Church since the middle of the sixteenth century. The raison d'etre of Puritanism during the Tudor and Stuart dynasties had been to purge the English Church not only of "popish influence," but of all wickedness and corruption. The failure of the Anglican Church was that it embraced evildoers

¹⁴For the development of Puritan ideas concerning church membership, based upon the ideal of the pure visible church, see Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea.

and wicked persons along with the regenerate or sincerely repentant. Whatever their dispositions were regarding the details of organization--whether they were inclined toward Presbyterianism or Congregationalism--all Puritans agreed that the churches should expel the wicked.

By projecting the millennium into the future, the Puritans carried these arguments one step further in the direction of making the millennium the guarantor of religious progress.¹⁵ While Thomas Brightman had correlated the Kingdom with the visible church, he insisted that the millennial reign of Christ was already in progress, and that the future of the world until Judgement was uncertain. But the New England Puritans focused their eyes on the beginning of the millennial Kingdom, convinced that at that very time the Kingdom was being unfolded in history. The preparations for Christ's reign on earth were being made through the calling of the saints in the American wilderness.¹⁶

¹⁵Tuveson finds this process developing in England at about the same time through the writings of Joseph Mede. For his comparison between Mede and Brightman see Millennium and Utopia, pp. 75-80. For the implications of this view for political developments in England at mid-century see Walzer, Revolution of the Saints, pp. 290-99.

¹⁶The question of whether Christ would reign personally during the millennium or only in spirit seemed to cause little contention among New England ministers. While everyone spoke of His reign in the most literal terms, most thought of it as a "powerfull Presence and Glorious brightness of his Gospell." This was the opinion held by John Cotton, Edward Johnson, Thomas Shepard, and others. John

Thus the reforms of previous generations were notable, but the New Jerusalem being erected in New England was a representation of the imminent Kingdom of Christ.

The foremost exponent of early New England eschatology was John Cotton. Born in Derby in 1584, Cotton was educated for the ministry at Trinity, and migrated to the New World in 1633. There he settled at Boston, and soon became the Bay Colony's most respected minister.¹⁷ When he examined the course of history Cotton assumed, as the existence of Antichrist implied, that he was then living in the last age of the world. But he felt that Christ's earthly Kingdom would be perfected only upon completion of the Reformation, and that the Reformation had to include the purification of the churches. In his eschatology, as in other aspects of his theology, Cotton stressed the necessity of a pure visible church. By 1639-1640, he was positively associating the notion of a visibly regenerate church with the second coming of Christ. In that year, he preached a long series of sermons on the Book of Revelation, most of which were taken down in shorthand and published later in

Davenport, however, was considered staunchly orthodox, and he believed in a personal reign of Christ. There was never, however, any "official" position taken on the matter.

¹⁷See Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), for details concerning Cotton's English and American careers. Ziff writes that Cotton was "the acknowledged leader in the acknowledged leading class" of New England, vii.

London.

Like many of his predecessors, Cotton felt that the sixteenth chapter of Revelation was particularly relevant to his age. In the text, the Spirit describes the pouring out of seven vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. These vials, Cotton felt, began the Reformation and would bring it to an end in the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on earth. The first vial was poured out "upon the lowest and basest Element in the Antichristian world, and that can bee no other, but the lowest sort of vulgar Catholiks."¹⁸ This began during the reign of Henry VIII, and was continued by martyrs in the time of Mary and Edward VI, "who discovered unto you, that all their Religion was but the worship of God after the devices of men."¹⁹ But during the time of this vial, reformers did not penetrate to the root of the trouble; they "fumbled at the lives of the Papists," blaming men, not religion, for the evils in the church. Early reformers, including Luther, failed to realize that "the whole part was sicke, and the whole head and body mortally distempered."²⁰

The next vial, however, was poured out on the

¹⁸John Cotton, The Powring Out of the Seven Vialls (London, 1642), "First Viall," p. 4.

¹⁹Ibid., "First Viall," p. 5.

²⁰Ibid., "Second Viall," p. 23.

Catholic ordinances themselves: "the Viall is poured on them so farre as they differ from Reformed Churches."²¹ The "holy Saints of God" to whom Cotton attributed this action included such eminent English divines as William Ames, William Perkins, and William Whitaker.²² Queen Elizabeth was responsible for the third vial, which she poured on the "fountains and rivers" of the Catholic religion. Elizabeth accomplished this in 1585, by assenting to a law expelling Jesuits, who were "these rivers and fountains of waters that run to a fro to fill all the world with their sea, with their Religion."²³

The fourth vial, said Cotton, could be interpreted in either of two ways. The reader might take it to have emptied on the House of Austria, "the chief governor in the Antichristian state." The instrument of this action was the King of Sweden, who during the Thirty-Years War "came forth to represent the Angel, he and his followers, to pour out a Vial of GODS wrath upon the Imperiall state of Germany, and consequently upon the rest of that house that were allyed to them, whether Spaniards or others."²⁴ It was also reasonable that Queen Elizabeth poured out this vial upon the Pope, when she made it treason for anyone to acknowledge

²¹Ibid., "Second Viall," p. 18.

²²Ibid., "Second Viall," p. 19.

²³Ibid., "Third Viall," pp. 3-4.

²⁴Ibid., "Fourth Viall," p. 6.

his supremacy. "Take the one, or the other," said Cotton, "both will stand together."²⁵

All "Nationall, Provinciall, and Diocesan Churches" were the targets of the fifth and most recent vial. The attacks on episcopacy began in the sixteenth century with the work of such men as Theodore Beza and Thomas Cartwright, "but these were drops." The real instruments of this vial were at work elsewhere, for it was out of this background that Christ decided to call up a select body of saints and bring the Reformation to the wilderness of America. Having made clear the laws of His covenant, God assigned the Puritans the task of ordering their churches "according to his holy ordinances," in order that the world might be instructed and the reformation completed. Cotton therefore gave the Puritans a strong admonition not to default on the articles of that covenant:

If you be corrupt in New-England, if you be unfaithful here, if you be worldly here, false of you words and promises here, injurious in your dealings here, beleieve it one of these two will follow, either all England will judge your Reformation but a dilusion, and an invention of some of your Magistrates, or Elders, or otherwise look at you, as not sincere but counterfeit.²⁶

But for God's elect saints the times were encouraging. As Cotton preached these sermons in 1649, the reformation proceeded apace in Scotland: "you now see whole

²⁵Ibid., "Fourth Viall," p. 8.

²⁶Ibid., "Second Viall," p. 23.

Vialls full of wrath powred out by the whole Church of Scotland."²⁷ King Charles, unsuccessful in his efforts to chastize Scotland by arms, once again summoned Parliament in 1640. Every Englishman knew that the convening of a Parliament meant that grievances would be dealt with before any grants, and that the turn of affairs represented a severe check to Archbishop Laud.²⁸ The time was at hand, Puritans felt, when the English Church would be reformed according to their principles. Cotton wrote:

I doe conceive and believe, that this Viall will goe on from our native Countrey to all the Catholickes Countries round about them, until it come unto the very gates of Rome, it selfe.²⁹

Events in England, Scotland, and the success of the New England experiment seemed to Cotton clear evidence that the time was ready for the pouring out of the sixth vial, which would be manifested in the reformation of religion in other nations and in the cutting off of revenues to the Papacy:

Now as these Christian Kings are so far converted unto God, as that they shall see the wickednesse, of all these revenues, then will they suffer no more Image worship, no more sorceries, nor murders, and when these things are thus remooved, then is the Euphrates dryed up, that maintaineth old Babylon; then is the Fountaine

²⁷Ibid., "Fifth Viall," p. 4.

²⁸For Cotton's response to political events in England and Scotland, 1639-1640, see Ziff, The Career of John Cotton, pp. 170-179.

²⁹Cotton, Seven Vialls, "Fifth Viall," pp. 6-7.

of the Turkish maintainance cut off also.³⁰

How soon these things would come to pass Cotton could not say for certain, but "the next newes you shall heare of, will be, that Christian Princes begin to see the lewdnesse that is found in their worship."³¹ The angels would stand ready with the seventh and final vial, which would accomplish nothing less than the complete overthrow of Antichrist, the binding of Satan, and the perfection of Christ's earthly Kingdom. Upon pouring this vial,

the Lord will send forth such a bright and cleare knowledge of his Christ, and Church, and Saints, and holy things which will prevaile so far, as to dispell all the fogs and mists of darknesse, not alone in the Antichristian chate, but in all the World: so that all Nations shall be brightened with the knowledge of God.³²

In his sermons on the millennium, Cotton associated the Kingdom with the church reformed along Congregational lines. After the pouring of the seventh vial there would be two resurrections, one immediately, another a thousand years later. The last resurrection, which Cotton projected far into the future, would come with the Judgement. But the first resurrection occupied his attention the most, for it would inaugurate the millennium. This resurrection itself consisted of two parts, according to Cotton. Its early

³⁰Ibid., "Sixth Viall," p. 20.

³¹Ibid., "Sixth Viall," p. 28.

³²Ibid., "Seventh Viall," p. 4.

stages, the resurrection of "particular persons, . . . lifted from a State of sinne to a state of life and Grace," had been going on for centuries. But the second part was a resurrection "also of churches, when as they are recovered againe from their Apostatical and dead estate in Idolatry and Superstition."³³ This resurrection--"the Reformation of the Churches after the ruin of Antichrist"--Cotton compared to the resurrection of Christ:

They had a time to be established by the Apostles, and such as they appointed: Afterward they grew to a dead frame. . . . And as they had a time of dying, that is to say, of Apostacy by the Catholicke Mother Church, so afterward they came to a new Reformation, such a Reformation as doth not onely reform the outward face of Worship and Doctrine, but the inward fröme of the Members of the Church, that they are reformed by a regenerating power: they arise from a state of formal-ity to the power of Godlinesse.³⁴

The millennium Cotton described, coming after the first resurrection, sounded very much like the New England system he spent his life defending from its critics. During that time, men "begin clearely to see which is the true Church of God, that it is not Cathedrall, nor Provinciall, nor Diocesan, but congregational only, the officers whereof are godly Pastors and Teachers, and ruling Elders, and Deacons."³⁵ Moreover, the saints "shall reigne in the Church, and have the Judicature and Government of the Church

³³John Cotton, The Churches Resurrection (London, 1642), p. 8.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 16-17.

³⁵Cotton, Seven Vialls, "Seventh Viall," p. 16.

together with these Angells or Messengers, and Ministers of God, that have the keys in their hands, they shall execute spirituall Judgement according to the will of Christ, for a thousand yeares."³⁶ These were precisely the principles upon which New England was based. Thus by 1640, just ten years after settlement, Puritans had achieved the essential purpose of their exodus, to establish a pure model in the wilderness. While still anticipating Christ's return, Cotton was satisfied that the Congregational way was the model for the millennium. For the time remaining until the return of Christ, Cotton foresaw no further fulfillment of the prophecy.³⁷ It had already been fulfilled in New England: now the saints needed only await Christ's descent to his Kingdom, and in the meantime remain exemplars of Christian virtue.³⁸

³⁶Cotton, Churches Resurrection, p. 6.

³⁷Jesper Rosenmeier, "The Teacher and the Witness: John Cotton and Roger Williams," William and Mary Quarterly, XXV (July, 1968), 424. Rosenmeier illustrates this point further by contrasting Cotton's two versions of the Song of Solomon, one given in sermons preached in England at the beginning of the Thirty-Years War, the other in sermons preached between 1646 and 1649. In the earlier of these, Cotton stressed the future glories of Christ's Kingdom. In the later ones he stressed the marriage of Christ to his Churches already consummates; see 425-29.

³⁸Cotton apparently came to this conclusion shortly after his arrival in New England. Years later John Davenport reported that in 1636, when Davenport was living in Holland, Cotton wrote him "that the Order of the Churches and of the Commonwealth was so settled, by common Consent, that it brought to his mind, the New Heaven and New Earth, wherein dwells Righteousness," quoted in Ibid., p. 427. Persuaded by Cotton's appraisal of New England, Davenport

By 1640 this brand of eschatology prevailed in New England. The intellectual leaders of the colony almost without exception agreed that the light of the resurrection had been shed on America. They agreed too that the final stages leading to the culmination of world history had begun, and that the reign of Christ's saints on earth was imminent. In 1640, Cotton thought the Kingdom so far advanced that he tentatively set 1655 as the date for the beginning of the millennium.³⁹ Clearly the phrase, "Thy Kingdom come," had undergone great change since the time of Calvin. First-generation Puritans in New England no longer uttered it with the hope for its fulfillment in a far-distant future. Instead it expressed the very essence of their wilderness experiment: New England had brought the Kingdom to earth by proving to the rest of the world what remained to be accomplished in preparation for Christ's millennial Kingdom.

himself came over to the colony a year later, and subsequently became one of the most immovable supporters of New England orthodoxy. As minister of the New Haven congregation, Davenport, like Cotton, endeavored to bring the New England reformation to its eschatological conclusion. Cotton Mather later wrote, "He did all that was possible to render the renowned church of New-Haven like the New-Jerusalem," Magnalia Christi Americana, ed. Thomas Robbins, 1852 (repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), Vol. I, p. 238.

³⁹John Cotton, An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation (London, 1655), p. 93: "So far as God helps by Scripture light, about the time 1655, there will be then such a blow given to this beast, and to the head of this beast, which is Pontifex maximum, as that we shall see further gradual accomplishment and fulfilling of this Prophecy here."

While the times were encouraging for New England saints, the age of the millennium had not yet come. Hence the ministers of the colony warned their followers to maintain a strong defense against Antichrist. "These thousand yeares . . . doe most properly begin from the throwing down of Antichrist and destruction of Rome," Cotton reminded them, and clearly Satan still exerted his power undiminished in many parts of the world.

Here is in the text . . . Satans Satanicall power restrained before this thousand yeares begin, And that will not be . . . till Satan be cast into the bottomlesse pit, and the Roman Catholicke Church damned from the face of the Churches also, and cast out: which yet continues though they be taken, and not a little restrained, but into the bottomlesse pit then the thousand yeers are not yet begun, and so the first resurrection not begun.⁴⁰

While the saints had erected the foundation for the Kingdom in New England, Christ would not descend to his Zion until Popery was banished from the earth. New England, meanwhile, would remain the bulwark of reformed religion, the exemplar of what was to come during the rule of the saints.

New England's overriding importance in the advancement of the Kingdom was the theme of the first full-length historical work to come out of the colony. This work, entitled The Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Savior in New England, was written in 1651 by Edward Johnson, a militia captain and prominent member of the General Court.

⁴⁰Cotton, Churches Resurrection, p. 20.

Deeply influenced by medieval apocalyptic lore, Johnson wrote that when the English churches began to sink in religion, "like luke-warme Laodicea," Christ decided to raise an army of saints out of England to create "a New England to muster up the first of his Forces in."⁴¹

Accordingly, He personally issued a proclamation for volunteers to do battle against Antichrist's armies:

Oh yes! oh yes! oh yes! All you the people of Christ that are here Oppressed, Imprisoned and scurrilously derided, gather yourselves together, your Wives and little ones, and answer to your severall Names as you shall be shipped for his service, in the Western World, and more especially for planting the united Colonies of New England; Where you are to attend the service of the King of Kings.⁴²

The proclamation was essentially a call to arms, commanding the saints to re-group their forces in the wilderness. But it also included instruction for organizing the foundations of Christ's Kingdom. Thus the main task for the Puritans was to carry forward the reformation in accordance with Christ's command:

Let the matter and forme of your Churches be such as were in the Primitive Times (before Antichrists Kingdome

⁴¹John Franklin Jameson, ed., Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, "Original Narratives of Early American History," (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 23.

⁴²Ibid., p. 24. The idea of being issued a divine revelation, often in the form of a letter, appeared recurrently in medieval millennial movements. Dozens of prophets believed that since the last days were at hand, Christ was communicating directly with his elect, and that he had commissioned certain men to summon the elect for the final struggle against Antichrist. Johnson thus took up a tradition centuries old when he wrote about this proclamation. See Norman Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium.

prevailed) . . . neither Nationall nor Provincially, but gathered together in Covenant of such as might meete together in one place, and built of such living stones as outwardly appeare Saints by calling.⁴³

New England's mission, then, was to prepare the way for Christ's advent by erecting Congregational churches in the American wilderness. In this, without question, Johnson felt, the Puritans were eminently successful.

Most of the eschatology produced in New England followed the moderate tone of Cotton, emphasizing the influence of the Holy Spirit in the reformed churches, working toward the inauguration of the millennium. Johnson's work, however, was far more chiliastic in the sense that it emphasized with greater detail the final struggle of Christ against His adversaries. At that very moment, Johnson believed, Satan prepared his forces for that great battle. "Assure your selves," he warned his countrymen, "the time is at hand wherein Antichrist will muster up all his Forces, and make war with the People of God."⁴⁴ The saints' struggles would not be just spiritual conflicts, but real, physical skirmishes. Antichrist had to fall both spiritually and physically before Christ could reign in His Kingdom:

Behold the Lord Christ marshalling of his invincible Army to the battell: some suppose this onely to be mysticall, and not literall at all: assuredly the

⁴³Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 33.

spiritual fight is chiefly to be attended, [but] the other not neglected, having a neer dependancy one upon the other, especially at this time.⁴⁵

This battle, by which Satan's armies would be "utterly overthrown," would prepare the world for Christ's ascendancy. Like other New Englanders, Johnson thought this rule forthcoming immediately, and he awaited Christ's advent with anxious anticipation:

Now is the time, when the Lord hath assembled his Saints together; now the Lord will come and not tarry . . . every true-hearted Souldier that falls by the sword in this fight, shall not lye dead long, but stand upon his feet again, and be made partaker of the triumph of this Victory.⁴⁶

When John Cotton bade farewell to the Winthrop company in 1630, he encouraged them to preach the Christian faith to the Indians, to "winne them to the love of Christ, for whome Christ died."⁴⁷ The Puritans, in fact, frequently listed the conversion of the natives among their reasons for removal to New England. Partly this was an expression of the missionary spirit characteristic of Christianity since its beginnings. For the Puritans, however, it rested firmly upon eschatological grounds as well. The Bible clearly prophesied a great outpouring of the Spirit just before the establishment of the Kingdom, resulting in the conversion of the heathen and the calling of the Jews.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 270.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 270-71.

⁴⁷Cotton, "God's Promise to His Plantations," p. 14.

Hence many Indian missionaries undertook their work with the sincere conviction that they were furthering the advance of the kingdom. Now that they had "settled these Churches, according to the institution of Christ," they considered it the duty of the saints to work actively at converting the heathen throughout the world as a prelude to Christ's rule in His Kingdom. Richard Mather thought the missionary work was rapidly fulfilling the prophecies,

For Hereby it will appear, That the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus which every faithful soul, doth so much desire to see enlarged, is now beginning to be set up where it never was before, even amongst a poor people, forlorn kind of Creatures in times past, who have been without Christ, and without God in the world.⁴⁸

Many Puritans considered these missionaries to be modern-day John the Baptists, preparing the way for Christ's Kingdom in the wilderness:

The utmost ends of the earth are designed and promised to be in time the possessions of Christ; and hee sends his Ministers into every place where he himself intends to come, and take possession. Where the Ministry is the Harbinger and goes before, Christ and Grace will certainly follow after.⁴⁹

These "apostles to the Indians" believed they were

⁴⁸Richard Mather, "To the Christian Reader," in John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, Tears of Repentance (London, 1653), Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, Vol. IV (1834), 218.

⁴⁹"Epistle Dedicatory" in Thomas Shepard, The Clear Sunshine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New England (London, 1648), Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, Vol. IV (1834), 29. This preface was signed by twelve eminent English Puritans, including Philip Nye and John Goodwin, friends of Cotton, leaders of English Independency, and supporters of New England.

making much progress in the wilderness. To charges that they actually converted few Indians, they had a ready answer. After all, had not Christ said that many are called but few chosen? Moreover, conversions among "such rubbish" (as Mather put it) required some time, and miracles could not be expected immediately. Still, there was reason to be encouraged. Thomas Shepard, minister of the Cambridge Church, hoped that "these beginnings are but preparatives for a brighter day than we yet see among them, wherein East & West shall sing the song of the Lambe." He had reason to hope, he thought, for

God is at work among these [Indians]; and it is not usual for the Sun to set as soon as it begins to rise, nor for the Lord Jesus to lose an inch of ground in the recovering times of his Churches peace and his own eclipsed and forgotten glory (if these bee such times) untill hee hath won the whole field, and driven the Prince of darknesse out of it.⁵⁰

There was another reason for these efforts, however, for it seemed clearly possible to some that the Indians had descended from the lost tribes of Israel. A frequently-quoted source for this belief was a certain Rabbi-ben-Israel of Amsterdam, who suggested that some of these tribes migrated to America by way of Asia. If the evidence was not entirely conclusive, it seemed at least that

It is not lesse probable that these Indians should come from the Stock of Abraham, then any other Nation this day known in the world: Especially considering the juncture of the time wherein God hath opened their

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 60.

hearts to entertain the Gospel, being so nigh the very years, in which many eminent and learned Divines, have from Scripture ground, according to their apprehensions foretold the conversion of the Jewes.⁵¹

Since they were living in the last days, then, Puritans thought it even more likely that the work among the savages was of great historical importance. If the Indians had indeed descended from the Jews, then the missionary work was related directly to the Apocalypse: as Cotton predicted, "once God pours out the sixth vial, "down falls Popish, and Turkish tyranny together, and the Jewes shall come forth marching to fight that great battell of the Lord God almighty."⁵²

When after 1645 events in England seemed to signify the rising of the Kingdom there as well, Indian missionaries increasingly began to associate their work with those English developments. For John Eliot, minister of the Roxbury congregation and one of New England's most energetic missionaries, the Indian conversions and the ascendancy of English Puritanism seemed to be parts of one historical movement. Eliot thought, therefore, that the work "in these Western Parts" ought to be of great encouragement to the English saints, for it indicated the first fruits of a great

⁵¹Edward Winslow, The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England (London, 1649), Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, Vol. IV (1834), "Epistle Dedicatory," 73-74.

⁵²Cotton, Seven Vialls, "Sixth Viall," p. 22.

outpouring of the Spirit prophesied for the last age of history. Hence he implored his English brethren to promote the advancement of the Kingdom on the New England frontier also:

Now this glorious work of bringing in and setting up the glorious kingdome of Christ, hath the Lord of his free grace and mercy put into the hands of this renowned Parliament and Army; . . . And when the Lord Jesus is about to set up his blessed Kingdome among these poor Indians also, how well doth it become the spirit of such also, being the same businesse in some respect which themselves are about by the good hand of the Lord.⁵³

Political events in England after 1640 intensified the expectations not only of missionaries but of all New Englanders. The Puritan Revolution signalled the extension of Christ's Kingdom to the Old World as the very next stage in the work of redemption. Encouraged by the success of their English cousins, many colonists returned to their homeland to take part in the activities of the Long Parliament and the Protectorate. Hugh Peter, one of the earliest promoters of the Massachusetts Bay Company and prominent minister of the Salem church, returned to England in 1642 to become a chaplain in Cromwell's army. Thomas Weld, who went along with Peter, prepared a number of booklets advertising the accomplishments of New England to encourage Englishmen to invest in the interests of the colony. Other

⁵³Henry Whitfield, The Light Appearing More and More Towards the Perfect Day (London, 1661), Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, Vol. IV (1834), 120-21.

New Englanders took an active part in Interregnum politics; no less than five of them served as members of Parliament.⁵⁴ Edward Johnson believed that the exodus of prominent Puritans from New England was a decisive factor in the victory of the Puritan Parliament.⁵⁵

Those who remained in New England expressed fond expectations about the state of religion in the home country. John Cotton hoped in 1645 that the Puritans would "reduce the estate of the Congregations in England, to such a reformation, as is suitable to the patterns revealed in the Gospel, according to the way of Primitive simplicity."⁵⁶ Others took their role as advisors more seriously than Cotton. John Eliot even drew up plans for a new government for the "Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ" in England, a government based entirely on Scripture.

⁵⁴John Cotton, however, was cautious about the widespread zeal to return to England, and he warned, "If men be weary of the Country and will back to England because in heart they are weary . . . I feare there is no Spirit of Reformation," Churches Resurrection, p. 21. On the return of the colonists to England after 1640, see William L. Sachse, "The Migration of New Englanders to England, 1640-1660," American Historical Review, LIII (January, 1948), 251-78.

⁵⁵"What assistance the Gospel of Christ found there by their preaching, is since clearly manifested; for the Lord Christ having removed that usurping power of Lordly Prelates, hath now enlarged his Kingdom there, and that not onely by the means of these men, but by divers others, both godly and eminent servants of his, . . . who have since gone from hence." Wonder-Working Providence, p. 262.

⁵⁶Quoted in Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650 (1933, repr. Boston: The Beacon Press, p. 276.

Eliot composed his tract in 1650 and published it under the title, The Christian Commonwealth. "The late great changes, which have fallen out in great Britain and Ireland," he said, were sign of the coming of Christ to set up His Kingdom there. According to Eliot, the Catholic religion so deeply corrupted civil institutions that in order to overthrow "that dirty Roman Religion," Christ and his saints had to "beat down withall the strongest Iron sinews of civil States, which are propugnators, and supporters thereof, whether professed or secretly."⁵⁷ Thus the English Puritans had not simply torn down the monarchy in order to replace it with a government of their own design, but had attacked the corrupt English religion. The government, rotted to the core with that religion, simply fell in the process:

Now it seemeth to me that the Lord Christ is now accomplishing these things in great Britain. The faithful Brethren in Scotland gave the first blow at the dirty toes, and feet of this image; with whom the faithful brethren in England, presently concurred. But the Iron of the Civil State, stuck so fast to the miry clay, that according to the Word of Christ, they are (beyond all the thoughts of men) both fallen together.⁵⁸

Surely the fall of the English monarchy, coming so close to the end of human history, was a clear sign that Christ prepared to erect His Kingdom there as well. John

⁵⁷John Eliot, The Christian Commonwealth: or, The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ, Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, Third Series, Vol. IX (1846), "Preface," 131.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 132.

Eliot was not about to let such an opportunity pass. There could be no clearer evidence, he felt, that God was now instructing England to follow the example of Massachusetts in setting up "a forme of Civil Government instituted by God himself in the holy Scriptures":

That which the Lord now calleth England to attend is not to search humane Politie and Platformes of Government, contrived by the wisdom of man; but as the Lord hath carried on their works for them, so they ought to go unto the Lord, and enquire at the Word of his mouth, what Platforme of Government he hath therein commanded and prescribed; and humble themselves to embrace that as the best, how mean soever it may seem to Humane Wisdom.⁵⁹

Thus Eliot outlined a system of government sanctioned by Scripture, a system which he himself tried unsuccessfully to establish among the Indians a year later. The plan he offered was to choose one man for every ten of the people to judge small matters, another for every fifty and still another for every hundred to judge greater matters. Not only was this the plan chosen by Moses, but it was the one governing the "Myriades of Angels . . . and so the Saints shall find them ordered when they come to heaven."⁶⁰ Surely England could do no better than this. Never would there be a time more opportune, he thought, to hasten the advance of the Kingdom. The English saints, long sustained by God's grace in spite of a corrupted government, now had

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 133-34.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 137.

the chance to erect a new government. Eliot begged them not to succumb to the devices of men, but to remain steadfast to the Word:

Therefore in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of Saints (whose Kingdom I desire to advance, with all my might and heart) I do beseech those chosen and holy and faithful Saints, who by Councils at Home, or by Wars in the Field, have fought the Lords Battels against Antichrist, and have carried on the Cause of Christ hitherunto, That you would now set the Crown of England upon the head of Christ, whose only true inheritance it is, by the gift of his Father: Let him be your Judge, Let him be your Law-Giver, Let him be your King.⁶¹

John Eliot's plea rested squarely on his understanding of the New England experiment. The Puritans were not merely pilgrims, but apostles in the wilderness, preparing the way for the advancing Kingdom of Christ. They intended not merely to reform, but to completely refashion the religious life of England. Yet this purpose would not be achieved through radical conspiracy or political action, but by taking up a covenant with God to build a model of that to which England might yet be reclaimed. This is what Winthrop meant by a "Modell of Christian Charity": in order to save England, the elect needed to demonstrate by a strict performance of articles in a covenant how a society thrives.⁶²

In the apocalyptic prophecies of the Bible they found evidence which incontestably proved that the times

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 138-39.

⁶²Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 29.

were ready for the kind of reformation they proposed. Entering the last stages of the drama of human history, the Puritans could be sure that the model for the Kingdom established in New England would, by God's grace, be established in England as well. Yet their millennialism was not the kind conducive to radical messianism. New England produced no Thomas Muntzers; no self-appointed millennial prophet tried to lead the populace to a state of carnal security. Their "commission" required them instead to erect a form of ecclesiastical and civil government based upon Scripture only, a foundation upon which Christ might begin his millennial rule with the saints. Not by revolutionary action, but by religious reformation would the Kingdom come; and it did not guarantee salvation for the discontented masses, but only for those who had unquestionably experienced the saving grace of God's mercy.

New England was superbly successful in carrying out its mission. By 1650, the Kingdom was a reality in Massachusetts; the city on a hill was complete. The Puritans had established a "due forme" of government for both Church and State that had withstood all the threats Antichrist could muster up. In order to translate the philosophy of a city on a hill into action, however, the Puritans had to not only make it work in their own right, but to make other nations see the practicability of it. It had to be a city clearly visible to the rest of the world, especially to England.

Thus when Eliot drew up his plans for the Christian Commonwealth he did it with the assurance that the English saints would emulate the New England Way. But to their surprise--to their horror--Puritans found that after 1650 they were no longer listened to in England. The English Independents, in whom the New England Puritans placed such great hope, yielded to the heresy of toleration, and even established a dictatorship to impose it by force. The model built by Winthrop and the clergy of New England made not the slightest impact, it seemed, on the Puritans in the mother country. After twenty years of struggling in a wilderness to erect a model for civil and ecclesiastical reformation, the Puritans lost their audience. "Having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill, they were left alone with America."⁶³

⁶³Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1956), p. 15.

CHAPTER III

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH NEW ENGLAND

The Puritans who migrated to the New World in 1630, and in the decade or two after, believed they were at the forefront of God's work of redemption. The inevitable outcome of the Reformation, they held, was the millennial reign of Christ in His earthly Kingdom. Hence while they were constantly watchful of Satan's forces, they looked forward to the further progress of the work of redemption, anticipating the immediate return of Christ to assume His reign with the saints. They expected hardship, even setbacks from their larger mission, but still the pattern of history was progress toward the Kingdom. They were, after all, brought to the wilderness in covenant with God, so that He might discipline His chosen. The task of setting up a city on a hill embodying the most rigorous ideals of the Reformation was itself not an easy one. But when even England rejected the lesson of the city on a hill, the Puritans were forced to turn inward upon America. When their errand into the wilderness seemed no longer part of a world-historical movement, they were forced to find in it a purpose sufficient unto itself.

The Puritans, fond of comparing themselves to the ancient Israelites, based their enterprise entirely upon a theological argument. Long before migrating to New England, they had inherited the doctrine now known as "federal" or "covenant" theology.¹ According to this revised form of Calvinism, personal redemption consisted not simply of an infusion of grace, but an explicit contract between the saint and God, wherein God promised salvation and the saint promised to remain steadfastly faithful to God. This contract, called the covenant of grace, was modelled after the one made between Abraham and Jehovah in the Book of Genesis. In it Puritans found not only a determinate relationship between God and His elect, but the basis for the church and state as well. Thus the essence of Congregational polity was a voluntary consociation of saints in covenant with God, joined together for the purpose of worship. As Thomas Hooker argued, "Mutual covenanting and confederation of the Saints in the fellowship of the faith according to the order of the Gospel, is that which gives constitution and being to a visible Church."² The Puritans argued that a nation of saints was also bound in a covenant with the Lord, swearing allegiance to God's law in return for temporal prosperity.

¹For a full explication of federal theology, see Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), pp. 365-462.

²Quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 170.

Other societies might come about by accident or through natural growth, but in New England, as the Puritans never tired of declaring, a voluntary agreement existed between God and His Chosen, the specific purpose of which was to erect a holy commonwealth.

This formulation of social theory had important implications for the New England mind. It meant that God, himself bound by the articles of the covenant, would deal justly and rationally with New England. It guaranteed that if the colonists performed the articles of the agreement they would be rewarded with peace and prosperity. If, on the other hand, the Puritans failed to uphold these articles, they would surely bring down the wrath of God upon themselves. "When God gives a special commission," Winthrop reminded the settlers, "he lookes to have it strictly observed in every article."³ The social covenant, then, made the course of civil society rational and predictable. Any hardship or disaster that confronted a covenanted community came as a result not of the caprice of nature but of God's anger with his people when they breached the covenant. As Winthrop summarized the matter,

there is now sett before us life and good, Death and evill, in that wee are commanded this day to loue the Lord our God, and to loue one another, to walke in hii wayes and to keepe his Commandements and his Ordinance and his lawes, and the articles of our Covenant with him, that wee may liue and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may blesse us in the land whither wee goe

³Winthrop, Modell of Christian Charity, p. 46.

to possesse it. But if our heartes shall turne away, soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worshipp . . . other Gods, our pleasure and proffitts, and serue them; it is propounded unto us this day, wee shall surely perishe out of the good land whither wee passe over this vast sea to possesse it.⁴

The focal point of the Puritan migration, however, was not the state but the church. They were not political revolutionaries. They wished chiefly to establish churches organized exactly as God commanded. "The partes of Church-Government are all of them exactly described in the word of God," the ministers concluded, and they found there the basis for the Congregational system.⁵ The Puritans held that churches were organized by the mutual gathering of believers, bound together in a covenant, an "Agreement, or consent wherby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society."⁶ The church covenant, they argued, was essentially the same as the covenant God made with Abraham and his family, and Puritans carefully pointed out that both the converted saints and their children were parties to the contract. "The same Covenant which God made with the Nationall Church of Israel and their Seed," Cotton said, "is the very same (for substance) and none other which the Lord

⁴Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁵"The Cambridge Platform" (1648), Chapter I, par. 3, Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), p. 203.

maketh with any Congregationall Church and our Seed."⁷

The concept of the covenant committed Puritans to an apocalyptic view of history. Theirs was no ordinary migration, but a company of believers whose sole purpose was to erect the New Jerusalem. In their frequent defenses of the New England system, the Puritans emphasized that Christ led them out of England not simply to provide them a refuge, but to put them to the task of erecting the Kingdom of Christ on earth:

And what if God will have his Church and the Kingdom of Christ go up also in these remote parts of the World, . . . and to this end will send forth a company of weak-hearted Christians, which dare not stay at home to suffer, why should we not let the Lord alone, & rejoyce that Christ is Preached howsoever, & wheresoever?⁸

If the congregational churches were to become reformed enough to qualify as microcosms of the Kingdom of Christ, they had to correspond as closely as possible to the invisible church in heaven. For the Puritans, this meant that the churches had to be restricted only to the regenerate saints. "Visible Saints," said Hooker, "are the only true and meet matter, whereof a visible Church should be gathered."⁹ But how does one distinguish between the

⁷Quoted in Ibid., p. 246.

⁸Thomas Shepard and John Allin, A Defense of the Answer (1648), in Massachusetts: or, the First Planters of New England (Boston, 1696), p. 35.

⁹Thomas Hooker, "The Way of the Churches of New England" (Preface to Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, 1648), Old South Leaflets, no. 55, p. 11.

regenerate and the unregenerate? According to Puritan theology, a mere confession of faith or intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine did not constitute salvation. Salvation was a free gift of God, given to men not because they earned it, but because God was infinitely merciful. Yet the parties to the covenant of grace were known only to God, so how could the Puritans hope to restrict church membership to them alone?

When they first arrived in Massachusetts, the Puritans required only a profession of faith for membership in the church. But as the demands for purer churches grew more intense, another system evolved for determining one's qualifications for membership. This required that the prospective member somehow demonstrate that the work of grace had actually taken place in his soul. Generally this "test" consisted of having the individual present a narrative describing his conversion experience; if the congregation were convinced of its truth, they would vote to admit the individual into full membership.¹⁰

The practice of requiring prospective church members to offer proof of their conversion became entrenched in the colony by 1636. The extent to which the test was emphasized, of course, varied from congregation to congregation. John Davenport, for example,

¹⁰On the origins and development of the New England system of church membership, see Morgan, Visible Saints.

used a more than ordinary exactness in trying those that were admitted into the communion of the church . . . very thoroughly, and, I had almost said, severely strict, were the terms of his communion.¹¹

Thomas Hooker, on the other hand, required no relation of experiences before the church (he examined the candidates privately), and maintained that a man was fit for church membership if he "live not in the commission of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any known duty, and can give a reason of his hope towards God."¹² In fact, the colony's enthusiasm for the test offended Hooker so much that he led his Newtown congregation from Massachusetts into the Connecticut Valley. Nevertheless, the majority of the ministers supported the use of the test. In 1648, a group of them met in a synod at Cambridge and made the system official doctrine:

The doors of the Churches of Christ upon earth, doe not by Gods appointment stand so wide open, that all sorts of people good or bad, may freely enter therein at their pleasure; but such as are admitted therto, as members ought to be examined & tryed first; whether they be fit & meet to be received into church-society, or not. . . . A personall & publick confession, & declaring of Gods manner of working upon the soul, is both lawfull, expedient, & usefull, in sundry respects, & upon sundry grounds.¹³

The Puritans, of course, did not literally close the doors of their churches to the unregenerate. The

¹¹Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, I, p. 238.

¹²Quoted in Morgan, Visible Saints, p. 107.

¹³"Cambridge Platform," Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 221-23.

Massachusetts General Court, in fact, passed a law in 1635 requiring all persons in the colony to attend regular church worship. But full membership was granted only to those who could demonstrate saving grace, and it entitled the saint to certain privileges not granted to non-members. Only members could partake of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, just as Jehovah had entered into a covenant with Abraham "and his seed," Puritans permitted only the children of saints to be baptized, as a sign of the sealing of the covenant. When these children reached maturity, it was expected that they too would experience conversion, thus insuring the growth of the churches.¹⁴ The early Puritans never doubted that the land would be fully supplied with converts because God, according to the conditions of the covenant, would pour forth His blessing where the external conditions were maintained.

While insisting that the work of grace depended only upon God's will, Puritans attempted to limit God's arbitrariness by devising what became known as the doctrine of preparation. According to many Puritan theologians, every man could in a sense "prepare" himself to receive God's grace. In other words, by diligent study of God's word and of the morphology of conversion, men could make themselves ready for the infusion of grace. It was chiefly Thomas Hooker who

¹⁴As Morgan rightly points out, this was an arrogant and absurd assumption, for it implied that salvation was hereditary. Morgan, Visible Saints, p. 126.

expounded the notion of "preparation for salvation." He insisted that "The soule of a poore sinner must bee prepared for the Lord Jesus Christ, before it can receive him."¹⁵ Not every minister concurred, and the idea never became official doctrine in New England. But preparation came into increasing prominence as a descriptive term as theologians were obliged to distinguish the stages of regeneration. In addition, the concept had social implications: all men could be called upon to prepare themselves, thus bringing themselves to fulfill the terms of the external covenant.

The Puritans expected that in a Bible Commonwealth many would "prepare" for, or "endeavor" toward, salvation. If God responded to these efforts, as many thought He would, the clergy might expect a great outpouring of the Spirit in New England. This was precisely what the scriptures prophesied for the last days, and as the end of history drew nearer, Puritans anxiously anticipated a great release of the Spirit and a universal awakening of religion. As John Cotton predicted of the last days,

The Lord will send forth such a bright and cleare knowledge of his Christ, and Church, and Saints, and holy things which will prevaile so far, as to dispell all the fogs and mists of darknesse, not alone in the Antichristian state, but in all the world: so that all Nations shall be brightened with the knowledge of God.¹⁶

¹⁵Quoted in Perry Miller, "Preparation for Salvation in Seventeenth-Century New England," Nature's Nation (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1967), p. 68. This article is the authoritative statement of the subject.

¹⁶Cotton, Seven Vialls, "Seventh Viall," p. 4.

New England, the Puritans hoped, would be a gathering place for the saints.

After 1650, however, it became clear that the expected outpouring of the Spirit had been delayed. As New England's children grew to maturity, the majority of them did not experience conversion at all. While the children of church members were often virtuous in the extreme, they "could not come up to that experimental account of their own regeneration, which would sufficiently embolden their access to the other sacrament."¹⁷ In the decade following the Cambridge Synod of 1648, the clergy grew painfully aware of the awesome possibility that the Holy Commonwealth's churches would soon be filled with unregenerate adults.

Some ministers recognized this possibility as early as 1645, when the problem revealed another dimension. By that time many of the unconverted children of church members had children of their own. Were these children also in some sense members of the church? Should they be baptized? In 1646, the Massachusetts General Court reported that many ministers simply ignored this difficulty by baptizing "ye children if ye grandfather or grandmother be such member, though the immediate parents be not."¹⁸ In order to establish

¹⁷Quoted in Miller, Colony to Province, p. 89.

¹⁸Journal of the upper house, in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 169.

some uniformity in baptism and membership policy, therefore, the Court summoned the ministers to meet in a synod at Cambridge. In 1648, the synod released a formal statement of church policy. The hope of ministers who wished the synod to deal directly with the problem of the unconverted children and grandchildren of church members were not fulfilled. The synod reinstated the doctrine that only "the children of such, who are holy" were entitled to membership.¹⁹

Most historians have concluded that the Cambridge Synod failed to face up to the problems of baptism.²⁰ Doubtless this is true, but Miller's conclusion that this was due to the clergy's cowardice is somewhat exaggerated. The problem was not urgent enough in 1648 to warrant this judgement, and the ministers were not merely pretending (as Miller suggests) when they ignored these complex questions. What seems more likely is that many, if not most, New England ministers viewed New England's destiny in terms of the apocalyptic, and were content to leave the future of the churches up to God. Even if they could not agree with Cotton that the millennium would commence in 1655, New Englanders daily expected the outpouring of the Spirit which would immediately precede the millennium. The Synod's

¹⁹"Cambridge Platform," Chapter III, par. 2, Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 208.

²⁰See, for example, Miller, Colony to Province, pp. 89-90; and Morgan, Visible Saints, p. 126.

inaction was thus predictable; since they were nearing the last days of history, there was really no need to be concerned about their grandchildren's salvation, for the work of the Spirit would soon be greater than ever, and the bright day for the church was within sight. As the Synod prayed, "he who is the King of his Church, let him be pleased to exercise his Kingly powr in our spirites, that so his kingdome may come into our Churches in Purity & Peace."²¹

If the questions of baptism could be ignored in 1648, however, they constituted a crisis by the late 1650's. By then, the unconverted children of the first-generation church-members had produced a full generation of their own children. Naturally, they wished to raise their children as members of the church. But when they asked that their children be baptized, the ecclesiastical leaders found themselves in a dilemma. Had the clergy consented, they faced the possibility of having the majority of the third generation's church membership unconverted. Had they refused to baptize these children, the churches would doubtless dwindle in membership and ultimately vanish completely. When Christ did not descend to His Kingdom as expected, it became clear by the end of the decade that some more artificial solution to the problem was needed.

Since the future of the churches was clearly at

²¹Preface to "Cambridge Platform," Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 202.

stake, another synod met in 1662. This time the ministers decided both to allow the unregenerate second generation to remain in the church and to have their children baptized. Neither they nor their children, however, were allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. This arrangement was derisively labeled the "Half-Way Covenant" by its opponents, and it prompted a pamphlet war in the colonies which lasted for two decades. The opponents of the Half-Way Covenant shrieked that the decision was stark apostacy, that the Synod had surrendered the city on a hill to dissemblers. Its supporters, even though a majority, had to plead that it was no innovation: "this is onely a progress in practising according thereunto, as the encrease of the Churches doeth require."²² The dissident minority, of course, was right, for the Covenant decision was innovation, it was a departure from the original tenets of federal theology. But in the three decades since the founding, the Puritans had learned that not all problems could be solved adequately by the strict logic of the covenant; this was one of the lessons learned by the loss of their English audience, which shook the concept of the city on a hill at its very foundations. Already the American experience had changed the criterion of New England's accomplishment. "It is the way of Christ in the Gospel," said John Allin in 1664, "to set up the practice of his Institutions as the necessities of the

²²Quoted in Miller, Colony to Province, p. 97.

people call for them."²³

Still, the reaction of the minority to the Half-Way Covenant was typical of the response of the clergy in general to the "Americanization" of the wilderness experiment. The fact that the young men of New England came of age lacking the spirit of their fathers seemed to most ministers symptomatic of a larger problem: all of New England appeared to be backsliding in its religious zeal. Beginning as early as 1652, and reaching a crescendo in the 1660's and 1670's, the clergy lamented over the "declension" of New England. In scores of jeremiads preached in the second half of the century the ministers reviewed the shortcomings of society and railed against the sin that had beset the land. Always the message was that New England was failing to fulfill the articles of its covenant with God, and that unless New England hastened to restore the model of holiness, God would surely lose favor with His Chosen.

The facts of the matter, however, seem to be not so much that New England was declining, but that it was changing.²⁴ The society had been founded by men who were motivated solely by religion and dedicated to realizing on earth the revelation of God. Yet by the very necessities of their situation, the people became increasingly involved in the work of settlement, of fishing, and of trade, so that the

²³Ibid., p. 97.

²⁴Perry Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth," p. 45.

society gradually emerged into the pattern not of a community of saints but a commonwealth of farmers and merchants. The founders had envisioned, and erected, a society of status and subordination, where the lower ranks of men were obedient to gentlemen, scholars, and ministers. But by the middle of the century, class lines weakened, scholars and ministers became less important as businessmen became more influential, and class lines increasingly became drawn on the basis of wealth. New England, in short, had become something other than what it started out to be; it ceased to be, even in the minds of the people of New England, a city set upon a hill. Powerless in their attempts to stem the tide of this transition, the bewildered clergy held up the ideal of the founders and chastised the people for forsaking that ideal.

The theme of New England's declension was first fully set forth in 1662 by Michael Wigglesworth in a lengthy verse meditation entitled God's Controversy with New England. In it Wigglesworth represented the monarch of creation wringing His hands in distress over the languishing state of New England: could this be the men, God asked, who at His command "Forsook their ancient seats and native soile" to follow Him into a desert?

If these be they, how is it that I find
 In stead of holiness Carnality,
 In stead of heavenly frames an Earthly mind,
 For burning zeal luke-warm Indifferency,
 For flaming love, key-cold Dead-heartedness,

For temperance (in meat, and drinke, and
cloaths) excess?²⁵

"Our fruitful seasons have been turned/Of late to barren-
ness," Wigglesworth declared, and he gave New England a
stiff warning of the dangers of continued backsliding:

Beware, O sinful Land, beware;
And do not think it strange
That sorer judgements are at hand,
Unless thou quickly change.
Or God, or thou, must quickly change;
Or else thou art undon:
Wrath cannot cease, if sin remain,
Where judgement is begun.²⁶

The jeremiads reflected a profound change in the
attitude of clergymen toward New England's accomplishments:
their fathers had come to New England in covenant with God,
but now wherever the ministers turned they saw men violating
the covenant. Along with this change came a corresponding
shift in the emphasis of Puritan apocalyptic literature.
For the first two decades of its history, New England's
ministers remained unshaken in their conviction that the
Kingdom was about to settle there. Satisfied that their
church was the model for the millennium, Puritan ministers
exerted most of their efforts in a holding action, main-
taining a sturdy defense of the New England Way. But the
trouble was that Satan would not leave New England alone.

²⁵Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New
England," in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puri-
tans: A Sourcebook of their Writings (New York: Harper
and Row, Publishers, 1963), Vol. II, p. 613.

²⁶Ibid., p. 616.

He continually lured here children into the snare of material wealth and comfort, to the neglect of their spiritual duties. To lead them back into the right path, the ministers began to take up the theme of the Judgement Day.

"Nothing hath a greater tendency to awaken unto Repentance than serious Thoughts about the great DAY of JUDGEMENT," cried Increase Mather.²⁷ After 1660, the standard warning to sinful New England was to repent, for the Judgement was at hand.

One of the first and most vivid of works in this long line of "Judgement literature" was another of Wigglesworth's poems, The Day of Doom. Wigglesworth described a secure and slumbering world, "Wallowing in all kind of sin" before the appearance of Christ as the Judge. In a wholly traditional manner, Christ brought the apocalypse down upon both wise and unwise, letting none escape His judgement:

His winged Hosts flie through all Coasts
together gathering
Both good and bad, both quick and dead,
and to all Judgement bring.
Out of their holes those creeping Moles,
that hid themselves for fear,
By force they take, and quickly make
before the Judge appear.²⁸

When Christ judged the damned, he served a sentence from

²⁷Increase Mather, The Greatest Sinners (Boston, 1686), "Preface."

²⁸Michael Wigglesworth, The Day of Doom (1662), ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), stanza 20, p. 14.

which there was no appeal. "Sad is their state," Wigglesworth warned, "for Advocate to plead their Cause there's none."²⁹ In stanza after stanza Wigglesworth described the horrible punishment meted out to sinners at Judgement,

For day and night, in their despight,
 their torments smoack and ascendeth.
 Their pain and grief have no relief,
 their anguish never endeth.
 There must they ly, and never dy,
 though dying every day:
 There must they dying ever ly,
 and not consume away.³⁰

Other ministers took up Wigglesworth's theme with equal enthusiasm, and for more than three decades pulpits thundered with the warning to repent or burn in Hell. The most reserved warning came from John Whiting, who wrote tersely that "the Sentence of Christ in Condemning the wicked to Punishment and in Rewarding his Elect Saints with Happiness, shall be duely put in execution at the last day."³¹ Increase Mather was decidedly less restrained in his sermons on the Day of Judgement. "The terrour of this day no heart is able to conceive, nor tongue able to express," he exclaimed, "it will be a Fiery day."³² "The world will be utterly consumed by fire, the noise of which will be terrible

²⁹Ibid., stanza 188, p. 56.

³⁰Ibid., stanza 210, p. 61.

³¹Samuel Whiting, A Discourse of the Last Judgement (Cambridge, Mass., 1664), p. 151.

³²Increase Mather, The Greatest Sinners, p. 72.

to hear." Sinners may be certain of their fate, that they "must be burnt to death for ever, that they must be thrown alive into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone."³³

In spite of their warnings to New England of the danger of breaking its covenant with God, and to individual saints of the danger of being caught slumbering on Judgement Day, the ministers saw only continued "declension" and further obstinacy to reform. Chief among New England's sins was what the clergy thought of as the decline of visible piety. "Where is the old New England Spirit, that once was amongst us?" asked Increase Mather in 1674. "Where is our first love: Where is our Zeal for God . . . ?"³⁴ The clergy's sense of alarm about the state of New England was greatly intensified after the outbreak of King Philip's war in 1675. The cost of this Indian war was enormous: New England lost five to six hundred men, and countless women and children perished by the tomahawk in brutal massacres on the frontier. So ghastly an experience seemed to the ministry a special outpouring of God's wrath. In 1677, Samuel Hooker saw no hope for the land except the return of Christ:

Truly we have had time wherein to experience the naughtiness of our own hearts, how bent we are to backslide and go off from God, as also our weakness and utter insufficiency of all means in themselves considered

³³Ibid., p. 76.

³⁴Increase Mather, The Day of Trouble is Near (Cambridge, Mass., 1674), p. 27.

to keep us with God or reduce us to him when turned away: But it may be Christ will shortly come down, and then all will be mended . . . Let us seek him therefore till he comes, for he loveth Righteousness, and hath not forsaken them that seek him.³⁵

New England had fallen so deep into corruption, said its ministers, that God had apparently put the land "under judgement." If such was truly the case, then only God could redeem the colonies:

If God hath once so far taken a people in hand as to set them under a dispensation of Judgement, there is no grounded hope of their deliverance and release in mercy, till God do in a gracious manner pour out his Spirit upon them, or wonderfully work a saving change in them and among them by the effectual operation of his holy Spirit: Till abundance of grace be given forth for the procuring and effecting of their sound conversion.³⁶

Thus the clergy, finding no solution to New England's apostasy in mere reform, turned desperately to the apocalyptic. As in the 1630's and 1640's, the ministers again in the 1670's prayed for the pouring out of the Spirit prophesied for the last days. Only this time it was not to extend the New England Way to the rest of the world, but to redeem the New England Way that was now lost.

New England had long since accepted the fact that there would be tribulations for God's people as long as they lived in this world. "In the world to come," Increase Mather affirmed, "the Church shall be freed from trouble."

³⁵Quoted in Gilsdorf, "The Puritan Apocalypse," pp. 156-57.

³⁶William Adams, The Necessity of the Pouring Out of the Spirit (Boston, 1679), p. 12.

But until then Satan was free to tempt the saints, "so that Christians must look for evils, they must look for troubles, as long as the present world shall endure."³⁷ Still, it was clear to the ministers by 1679 that New England had undergone more than her share of troubles. The clergy, in fact, concluded that the people had brought down the Lord's judgment upon themselves by their apostasy. In 1679, therefore, the ministers met at a "Reforming Synod" at Boston in order to consider "What are the Evils that have provoked the Lord to bring his Judgements on New England," and "What is to be done that so those Evils may be Reformed?"³⁸ The Synod's result, known as The Necessity of REFORMATION, was written by Increase Mather, by then Massachusetts' most prominent minister. It took the form of a lengthy jeremiad, claiming, as did practically every jeremiad since 1660, that "God hath a Controversy with his New-England People."³⁹ The Synod concluded that the chief evil afflicting New England was the "great and visible decay of the power of Godliness amongst many Professors in these Churches."⁴⁰ In the standardized fashion of the jeremiad the rest of the evils were

³⁷Increase Mather, The Day of Trouble is Near, pp. 3-4.

³⁸[Increase Mather], The Necessity of REFORMATION (Result of the Synod of 1679), Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 423.

³⁹Ibid., p. 426.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 427.

then listed in order of importance: the root of it all was the sin of pride; then came heresy, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, angry passions, and "Inordinate affection unto the world."⁴¹

The Synod's solutions to these evils were not unlike those suggested in the scores of jeremiads that preceded it. In essence, it called for a restoration of the ways of the founding fathers. "Solemn and explicit Renewal of the Covenant is a Scripture Expedient for Reformation," the Synod declared.⁴² Yet these pleas had been made for nearly two decades without success in reviving the old New England Way. This time the ministers conceded that reformation could not be accomplished through their efforts alone. Only if God poured out his Spirit upon New England would the apostatical land be restored. The ministers, then, turned to the apocalypse for New England's last hope:

Inasmuch as a thorough and heart Reformation is necessary, in order to obtaining peace with God . . . and all outward means will be ineffectual unto that end, except the Lord pour down his Spirit from on High, it doth therefore concern us to cry mightily unto God, both in ordinary and extraordinary manner, that he would be pleased to rain down Righteousness upon us. . . . Amen!⁴³

In spite of the jeremiads, the doomsday sermons, and the reforming synod, God continued to pass judgement on

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 427-32.

⁴²Ibid., p. 435.

⁴³Ibid., p. 437.

New England. The General Court responded characteristically by proclaiming day after day of humiliation. But in the years after the Reforming Synod the Holy Commonwealth faced its most serious threat ever. Even as Increase Mather threw himself passionately into conducting the Synod, proceedings were underway in England against Massachusetts for her policy of independence from the Crown. The very foundations of colonial society were placed in jeopardy when, in 1683, legal action was taken by the British colonial administration to nullify the Massachusetts charter.

During the Interregnum, the English government had allowed the colonies to progress undisturbed. Since they had taken their charter with them to New England, the Puritans were able to secure a large measure of autonomy, so that by 1660 the colonies were virtually self-governing. The restored Stuarts, however, proved less willing to allow the colonies to pursue their accustomed course of independency. There was little the clergy or the magistrates could do when, to their shock and dismay, the government of Charles II abrogated the charter in October, 1684. For nearly two years, while the British Administration made up its mind about what to do with New England, the governments of the colonies continued to function. The death of Charles in 1685 delayed the inception of the planned "Dominion of New England," but his Catholic brother, now James II, gave royal assent to the plan. In May, 1686, Edward Randolph

landed in New England with a commission that established a provisional government with Joseph Dudley as its president. In December, Sir Edmund Andros came to replace Dudley and to institute a permanent Dominion of New England.

In the eyes of New England's ecclesiastical leaders, the Andros government was a hideous abomination. It proved inimical to the interests of the settled orthodoxy in practically everything it stood for. New England was founded upon a Holy Covenant; this had nothing to do with a covenant. New England would have fulfilled the hopes of the Reformation; now she was given over to "the great Scarlet Whore." In the Connecticut election sermon delivered the year Andros came to power, John Whiting summarized the mood of orthodox New England with, "It looks to me like the Approaches of a GENERAL DELUGE."⁴⁴

The only redeeming feature of the Andros "tyranny" was its briefness. On April 4, 1689, news was smuggled into Boston of the proclamation of William of Orange as King of England. Two weeks later, rebellion broke out in Boston. Andros and his associates were taken prisoner and packed off to England to face charges of oppression. With the Dominion torn down by a unique and temporary union of magistrates, ministers, and moderate non-freemen, New England lay once again in the hands of the Puritans.

⁴⁴Quoted in Miller, Colony to Province, p. 146.

The Glorious Revolution had a profound effect on New England's sense of its historical destiny. Characteristically, the events since the Restoration were viewed within the larger context of the history of the Reformation. From this perspective, the Puritans looked upon the Andros regime as the inspiration of a Catholic plot, while the "Noble Undertaking" of the Prince of Orange was "to rescue the English Nation from imminent POPYRY and SLAVERY."⁴⁵ Recent history, then, could again be made intelligible: the humiliation of New England under Andros was a covenant affliction, while the victory of William and Mary was a providential deliverance, according to the promise.⁴⁶ The Glorious Revolution, fulfilling God's secret design for the universe, once more enabled New England to take up a special role in history.

In a sense, of course, the optimism generated by the events of 1689 reinforced the eschatological assumptions of the jeremiads preached after 1660. While they bewailed New England's declension, even the earliest jeremiads incorporated the theme that the trouble came from both within and from without. New England's sins, in other words,

⁴⁵"An Account of the Late Revolutions in New England by A. B.," in Michael Hall, Lawrence Leder, and Michael Kammen (eds.) The Glorious Revolution in America: Documents on the Colonial Crisis of 1689 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 49.

⁴⁶Miller, Colony to Province, p. 138.

were not entirely New England's fault, for

Without, there is Satan to raise storms of affliction. Indeed, if the Devil were cast into the bottomlesse pit, and shut up there, we might think that there would be less trouble in the world: But we know, that as yet though he be a Prisoner, yet he is a Prisoner at large, he hath a long chain given him, and goeth with his ranging, and raging to raise Persecutions against the Church.⁴⁷

Thus until the advent of the millennium, when Satan would be fully bound, New England could expect some troublous times. An ironic sense of hope filters through many of these indictments of society. By taking up the scriptural prophecy that the Lord's people would be inflicted with great miseries before experiencing the outpouring of the Spirit forecast for the last times, the ministers could still maintain that God had not yet forsaken New England. Viewed within the larger context of God's design for the universe, the "day of trouble" which followed the Restoration was merely a temporary setback before more glorious times ahead.

It was not surprising, under these circumstances, that New England after 1689 experienced a resurgence of millennial thinking comparable to that of the late 1640's. This came not just as a consequence of New England's release from the "Andros tyranny," however. It came also as part of a long and bewildering process whereby Puritans attempted to find a meaning apart from the world-historical movement they had originally led. Encouraged by the events of 1689,

⁴⁷Increase Mather, The Day of Trouble is Near, p. 5.

the ministers attempted to salvage what they could of the city on a hill by reviving the eschatological hopes of early New England. The jeremiad still survived as the predominant mode of expression, but in place of the overwhelming emphasis on Judgement Day, characteristic of the apocalyptic literature of the period 1660-1689, the clergy now increasingly felt that New England again had a place in the future Kingdom of Christ. The present dark state of the churches, said Samuel Willard, "may be a symptom of the hastening of this blessed time."⁴⁸ just as the darkest part of night immediately precedes the dawn:

It will not be long before these days Commence. Although we cannot tell the day, or month, or year when that time shall be, yet we are fully assured that it is hastening. . . . and we may expect that God will make a short work of it, when it draws nigh its accomplishment. Nor need the present face of things, though dismal, affright us; or make us think it afar off, for how often is the darkest part of the night just before the day breake.⁴⁹

This conception of New England's place in history drew much from the Christian tradition of the wilderness condition. The motif of the wilderness as a place of the covenant, recurrent in Christian thought, was inherited by Puritans and used to buttress their federal theology.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Samuel Willard, The Checkered State of the Gospel Church (Boston, 1701), p. 63.

⁴⁹Samuel Willard, The Fountain Opened (Boston, 1700), p. 120.

⁵⁰See George H. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought (New York, 1961), especially pp. 98-113. See also Alan Heimert, "Puritanism, the Wilderness,

Just as Israel was led out of Egypt and bound in a covenant with God in the Sinai desert, the Puritans were led out of England to erect a covenanted community in the New World. In his preface to Cotton Mather's Magnalia Christi Americana, the aging John Higginson articulated the Puritan concept of the American wilderness:

. . . a farther practical reformation than that which began at the first coming out of the darkness of Popery, was aimed at [by the Puritan migration], and endeavored by a great number of voluntary exiles, that came into a wilderness for that very end, that hence they might be free from humane additions and inventions in the worship of God, and might practice the positive part of divine institutions, according to the word of God.⁵¹

In assuming that they were the heirs of God's covenant with Israel, of course, the Puritans could also assume that God had led them into the "howling dessert" in order to discipline His Chosen. After a season of purgation, God would lead them to Paradise, just as He led Israel to the land of Canaan. The Book of Revelation, moreover, treats the Church of Christ as a woman who, having fled into the wilderness to escape the clutches of the red dragon, must remain there 1260 days.⁵² Willard drew upon both traditions when he

and the Frontier," New England Quarterly, XXVI (1953), 361-382; and Kenneth B. Murdock, "Clio in the Wilderness: History and Biography in Puritan New England," Church History, XXIV (1955), 221-238.

⁵¹John Higginson, "An Attestation to this Church-History of New England," in Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, p. 16.

⁵²Williams, Wilderness and Paradise, p. 25.

commented on the Puritans' wilderness condition:

There are happy Times predicted for the Church, after her wilderness estate shall be over. As there was a time, when after God had brought his People out of Egypt, they went through the wilderness in order to their glorious Settlement in Canaan, so we are told of the Gospel Church, that soon after its being called it should go into the wilderness, and be there perplexed for a time, . . . But God hath promised to it in this world, a more glorious Conspicuous state after these days are ended.⁵³

After the Glorious Revolution, the Puritan clergy felt New England had indeed emerged from its wilderness estate. "Though we know not the time just when," said Nicholas Noyes, "there are signals given whereby the Church of God may know that their Redemption draws nigh."⁵⁴ Hopefully New England had a share in the redemption, and Noyes asked if America might after all be "the New Jerusalem, or a part of it, and this New World that is under the Eastern Earth, be the New Heaven and New Earth."⁵⁵ Noyes could not answer his own question with certainty, but he did know that, while Antichrist had once tried to take possession of the New World,

the Son of GOD followed him at the heels, and took possession of America for Himself . . . And I am not without Hope, but that He will hold his Possession:

⁵³Willard, The Fountain Opened, p. 114. Two years earlier, in 1698, Nicholas Noyes had written, "The Church must get out of the Wilderness, as well as out of Egypt, Before the Glorious Reformation of it can take place." New England's Duty and Interest (Boston, 1698), p. 66.

⁵⁴Nicholas Noyes, New England's Duty, p. 65.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 74.

not only to the end of this World, but to the end of the World.⁵⁶

Judge Samuel Sewall was more convinced of New England's special place in these final events of history. While Satan's power was much diminished by the work of previous saints in other nations, the final encounter would occur in America. "Neither can I believe," he wrote, "that the Captain of our Salvation hath landed his Forces here, to disturb and vex Satan only; but to fight him in good Earnest and break his Head."⁵⁷ Already five angels had poured out their vials of God's wrath, Sewall concluded,

And the Sixth Angel seems now to stand ready with his Vial, waiting only for the Word to be given for the pouring of it out. The pouring out of this Vial will dry up the Antichristian Interests in the New World: and thereby prepare the way for the Kings of the East.⁵⁸

If many Puritan ministers found occasion to rejoice in the success of the Glorious Revolution, the tone of the literature coming out of the post-revolutionary period was not always optimistic. "Glorious '88" did not signal the death of the jeremiad. Indeed, by confirming the theology of the covenant as the basis of New England society, the revolution tended to reinstate the relevance of the jeremiad with more force than ever. The Andros tyranny, was, as we

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁷Samuel Sewall, Phaenomena Quaedam Apocalyptica (Boston, 1697), p. 33.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 24.

have seen, a punishment for a breach of the covenant. It was the visible sign of God's anger with New England because of her declension. After 1689, the clergy at once seized upon the moral of the Dominion as the subject of their jeremiads: God's judgements now included not only famines, droughts, plagues, and Indian wars, but also political oppression. The people of New England were subjected to the tyranny of Andros because they had failed to heed the advice of the Reforming Synod of 1679.⁵⁹

Yet ironically, precisely because the jeremiad focused on New England's declension, it threatened to become a sterile form. It could contemplate nothing but continued declension. Obviously, the society could not remain viable as long as its future held in store only further degeneration. Whether Increase Mather and his son Cotton recognized this peril instinctively will never be known. But in any case, the Mathers threw themselves into speculation about the millennium with more enthusiasm than any other members of the Puritan clergy. "Nothing is more clearly expressed in the Scriptures," Increase declared in 1686, "than that the Saints of God shall one day possess a glorious Kingdom they shall not have in heaven only, but in this lower visible world."⁶⁰ By 1710, he was regretting

⁵⁹See Miller, Colony to Province, ch. XII.

⁶⁰Increase Mather, Greatest Sinners, pp. 78-79.

that "this Doctrine is no more inculcated by the present Ministry."⁶¹ As Miller writes, "possessed by the true apocalyptic spirit, [the Mathers] marched into the Age of Reason loudly crying that the end of the world was at hand."⁶²

In his first book, published in 1669, Increase Mather investigated the conversion of the Jews, a subject of special interest to him because of its proximity to the last days. "The news of the Jews conversion will put life into all the Churches upon the earth," he wrote. "Upon the salvation of all Israel there will follow a reformation of all things, there will be a glorious renewall of the whole Universe."⁶³ Increase refrained, in this early investigation, from determining precisely when all this would take place, for "An infallible demonstration of the exact time when Israel shall be saved, cannot be given."⁶⁴ Yet he was certain that it could not be far off. From the signs of the times--New England's apostacy, and the "great and general expectation" of God's people--Increase had "reason to hope that the salvation of the Tribes of Israel

⁶¹Increase Mather, A Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer (Boston, 1710), "Preface."

⁶²Miller, Colony to Province, p. 185.

⁶³Increase Mather, The Mystery of Israel's Salvation (London, 1669), p. 64.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 18.

is near to be revealed . . . Only in general, that the time is near, we may safely conclude."⁶⁵ He also exercised caution in his discussion of Christ's earthly Kingdom, disavowing any notion that Christ would reign personally on earth. In a preface to the work, the venerable John Davenport exposed himself as a more radical chiliast, denying that the millennium was to be merely spiritual in the hearts of the elect. "There is another, a Political Kingdom of Christ to be set up in the last times." This work, he wrote, would not be done by man,

but by Christ himself, sitting upon his white horse, who will in righteousness judge, and make war, who hath eyes as a flame of fire, and a Name written that no man knew but himself, and will be clothed with a Vesture dipt in blood.⁶⁶

Young Increase Mather would not allow himself to go this far, just yet. But as he was drawn into what his son described as "the Delectable Study of the Prophecies," he grew bolder. In 1710, he wrote another work dealing more extensively with the millennium itself. By this time he had changed his mind about the "Glorious State of Christs Kingdom":

That World to come shall not be put into Subjection to Angels, whether Good or Evil ones (as this world is), but unto Christ: It is a world made on purpose for Him to Reign in . . . He will then remove his Throne from Heaven to this Visible world. Then will His Visible Kingdom appear in the greatest Glory. When also there

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁶John Davenport, "Preface," in Ibid.

will be a Personal Reign and Residence of Christ in this lower world, throughout the Glorious transactions of that Great & Long Lasting Day: But I am speaking of a Kingdom to be over all the Earth before the Universal Resurrection and Judgment.⁶⁷

Increase could hardly let the opportunity pass of chastising New England for its decline from the purity of the fathers. One of the few survivors of even the second generation, he called for a reformation upon the model of "primitive" New England. To heighten the tragedy of the land's declension, Increase made his millennium like early New England:

There will then be nothing practised in Religion, or received in the Churches but what the Lord Himself had commanded. Human Inventions and Additions to Divine Worship corrupt the Purity of it . . . The Church doors will not be found open for any but Righteous ones . . . None will in these Times be esteemed fit matter for the Church but such as have experienced a work of Conversion and Regeneration in their own Souls.⁶⁸

Cotton Mather was as taken up with the apocalypse as his father. He, too, worked the millennium into the jeremiad, lamenting that "the World is a little while hence to have a New Face upon it; and in that New World, the Lord Jesus Christ shall have as much influence in the Hearts and Lives of men, as now the Devil has."⁶⁹ In 1691, Cotton

⁶⁷Increase Mather, Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 47-50.

⁶⁹Cotton Mather, Things to be Look'd For (Cambridge, Mass., 1691), p. 10.

attempted to quicken the hearts of his fellow countrymen by proclaiming that history was much farther advanced toward its last stages than men had heretofore supposed. According to Cotton, the sixth vial of God's wrath, poured out in the Apocalypse on the River Euphrates, was already emptied as long ago as 1529-1532. During that time the vial

ran out, while the Turks got over, the Bosphorus which was the Second Euphrates . . . and push'd on their Victories, till Charles the Fifth made them Raise the Siege which they had invested Vienna with. It was in this period, that the Canon Law, . . . was Completed. Here the unclean Spirits Compile the Laws, Order, Oracles of the Popedom, and every Canon ends with an Armageddon, or an Anathema and Excommunication, (for that is the English of it), by the Fright whereof, the Subjects of the Popedom, have been kept in the greatest Awe imaginable.⁷⁰

Obviously, the time of the seventh vial was at hand. Cotton applied a mathematical computation to his evidence, and announced that Antichrist would finally be crushed sometime around 1700.⁷¹

While Cotton acknowledged that "The Peaceable Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, has ever now and then begun a little to show itself," such as during the times of the apostolic church and in early New England, he constantly hammered home the theme of New England's present declension.⁷² Seizing upon the epidemic of witchcraft that swept Salem in

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 43.

⁷¹Cotton Mather, A Midnight Cry (Boston, 1692), p. 63.

⁷²Cotton Mather, Things to be Look't For, p. 27.

1692 as the latest sign of God's displeasure with the colonies, Cotton warned that "the time is short" for repentance. In his commentary on the affair of the witches, entitled The Wonders of the Invisible World, Cotton speculated that New England was one of Satan's chief targets in his war against the saints:

It was a rousing alarm to the Devil, when a great Company of English Protestants and Puritans, came to erect Evangelical Churches, in a corner of the World, where he had reign'd without any controul for many Ages; and it is a vexing Eye-sore to the Devil, that our Lord Christ should be known, and own'd, and preached in this howling Wilderness. Wherefor he has left no Stone unturned, that so he might undermine his Plantation, and force us out of our Country.⁷³

Thus New England needed to be especially watchful lest Satan consume the land. "But what will become of this poor New-England after all?" Cotton asked. "Shall we sink, expire, perish, before the short time of the Devil shall be finished?"⁷⁴ Cotton could not bring himself to admit that the errand into the wilderness had failed. Surely God had not intended to bring a company of his most valiant warriors to the ends of the earth merely to have America fall and become "the Devils propriety":

But if God have a purpose to make here a seat for any of those glorious things which are spoken of thee, O City of God; then even thou, O New England, art within a very little while of better days than ever yet have

⁷³Cotton Mather, The Wonders of the Invisible World (Boston, 1692; repr. Mount Vernon, N.Y.: The Peter Pauper Press, 1950), p. 62.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 63.

dawn'd upon thee.⁷⁵

In 1709, Cotton Mather composed his first (and only) treatise dealing exclusively with the millennium. This work, entitled Theopolis Americana, was a sermon preached before the General Assembly, describing a city with golden streets, "A CITY, where God shall dwell with men." Since 1692, Cotton had almost daily expected the fulfillment of the apocalyptic promises, and now in 1709 he was still anticipating that "The Seven last Plagues, of the VIALS, are to be Poured out, upon the Papal Empire, These are the very Next Things to be look'd for."⁷⁶ But his chief concern was not with determining the time of the millennium, but with showing why "AMERICA is Legible in these Promises." To be sure, Cotton could not preach an entire sermon without chastising New England for her sins, and in this case intemperance seemed to be the most obnoxious of them: he implored his listeners not to let America become "a Country of Drunken Protestants." Yet while New England may not have lived up to all her promises, Cotton still believed that she would have a share in the coming Kingdom. "There are many Arguments to perswade us," he speculated, "That our Glorious LORD, will have a Holy City in AMERICA; a City, the Street whereof will be Pure Gold."⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁷⁶Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana (Boston, 1710), p. 51.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 43.

New England underwent an immense transition between the time of its settlement and the publication of Cotton Mather's Theopolis Americana. With its original mission as the fulfillment of the reformation having lost much of its meaning, society committed itself more and more to business interests, the accumulation of riches, and the life of comfort. Such a transition may have been perfectly normal, but to the watchmen of the Holy Commonwealth nothing could have been more insidious. New England's ministers, clinging desperately to the concept of a city on a hill, reiterated the theme that the wilderness plantation had degenerated into sin and corruption, that the people had defaulted on the articles of their covenant with God. But New England was no longer a wilderness plantation, a holy city set upon a hill. It was by the end of the century a bustling commercial colony whose standards were not the Bible but the life of London society. The jeremiads, however, judged society by the ideal of the founding father, and by this standard they found it failing. Thus they exhorted New England to a reformation that never came.⁷⁸

Yet in all this literature of self-condemnation there was an authentic urge to re-assign America a mission. Through it all, New England's pursuit of the millennium

⁷⁸Miller, Nature's Nation, p. 43. For the transition to a commercial colony, see also Bernard Bailyn, The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), especially chapter V.

had not really waned; if America was not the place of Christ's Kingdom, it was nonetheless "legible" in the promise of world-redemption. Cotton Mather had grown accustomed to this change by 1710. Without question, Theopolis Americana was in every sense a jeremiad. Yet Cotton in his own way contemporized his jeremiad, and attempted to judge society on the more secular standards of the eighteenth century. How far New England had come by 1710 was evident in Cotton's acknowledgement that "the Business of the CITY shall be managed by the Golden Rule," a rule which, he thought, was by nature "Engraven on the Mind of man."⁷⁹ If New England was not what it was in 1630, it still deserved its share in the glory of the Kingdom: "O NEW ENGLAND, There is Room to hope, That thou also shalt belong to the CITY . . . Thy Name shall then be, Jehovan Shamah, THE LORD IS THERE."⁸⁰

⁷⁹Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana, pp. 5, 16.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 50.

CHAPTER IV

REASONABLE REBELLION

For a large segment of the populace the notion of a Holy Commonwealth had lost its meaning. But many ministers, refusing to surrender the vision of America's chosen destiny, carried their vision well into the eighteenth century with the logic of federal theology. New England, they insisted, still had a covenant with God, even if its terms were not the same as they were in 1630. But the logic of the covenant responded neither to the necessities of the American experience nor to the intellectual climate of the eighteenth century. While the covenant described reality for John Winthrop, the anxious, bustling society of the eighteenth century demanded new descriptions. If the church was to be relevant to the lives of men, it had to respond not just to a select body of saints, but to the larger community. If theology itself was to be meaningful in the Age of Enlightenment, it had to get below the surface of doctrinal and sectarian dissension which had obscured the divine simplicity and rationality of religion. Somehow, in other words, religion had to come up with a new definition of the end and purpose of living.

In a sense the Half-Way Covenant marked a turning-point in the history of New England Congregationalism. It ended a phase during which church members, dazzled by the purity of their institution, could ignore their obligation to the rest of New England. While it did not expand the church's responsibility to the larger populace, it at least turned attention toward the problem of propagating the churches.¹ By deciding that the children of church members could be admitted to the churches, even though they had no marked experience of grace, the Half-Way Covenant at least temporarily insured the growth of the churches. Though these "half-way members" could make no profession of faith, they could "own the covenant" of baptism and in turn present their own children, and thus further generations could be kept under the watch and care of the churches.

Yet instead of solving the long-range problem of church membership, the Half-Way Covenant merely brought into the open the dilemmas inherent in federal theology. It gave the "lukewarm" children legal church membership, but it could not make them regenerate, and federal theology still held that a covenanted church was a body of regenerate saints. The clergy, there, had somehow to encourage or force the baptized to "improve" their obligation: "they had to drive them to the Supper of the Lord, or else the churches

¹Morgan, Visible Saints, pp. 137-38.

would perish."² They exhorted and prayed, they exerted pressure and warned that mere half-way status was not enough. But as long as they remained faithful to the federal standards of the fathers, they could admit none but those who made a voluntary profession of faith and repentance. As the number of communicants decreased, the ministers became desperate in their efforts to bring half-way members to the Lord's Supper. But there were limits to what they could do. They could beg the children to come to the Supper and they could explain that conversions were necessary for the continuation of the churches; and they could warn that God would withdraw His grace from New England if more did not approach the table. But the ministers could not allow them to commune unless they did it willingly, and that willingness came only with the infusion of God's grace. Thus by the end of the century, half-way members faced a profound dilemma: "It is a sin to come unworthily to, but it is also a sin to stay unworthily from, that Blessed Ordinance," but the distinction between holiness and depravity was so blurred that they were unable to discover their own worth or lack of it.³

²Perry Miller, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," Harvard Theological Review, XXXIV (1941), 295.

³Cotton Mather (1690), quoted in Ibid., p. 297. On the dilemma of the sacraments, see also Miller, Colony to Province, Chapter XIV.

In the decades following the Half-Way Covenant, many of New England's ministers, including the Mathers, attempted to gain converts by making baptism available to all Christians of good behavior and to their children, not just to descendants of church members. While this "silent revolution" brought a change more drastic than had the synod of 1662, those who took part in it continued to restrict the Lord's Supper to the regenerate.⁴ This practice did not solve the dilemma of the sacrament, but it pointed out to some ministers that a solution could be found only in offering full communion on the same liberal terms. The man who saw this most clearly, and who consequently brought a revolution of his own to the Connecticut Valley, was Solomon Stoddard of Northampton. Stoddard, who graduated from Harvard the year the Half-Way Covenant was adopted, went to Northampton, Connecticut, in 1669, to take the pulpit vacated by the death of Eleazar Mather, Increase's brother.⁵ Although a bitter pamphlet war broke out between Stoddard and the Mathers over his innovations, Stoddard shared the Mathers' concern for the decline of the churches. At the Reforming Synod of 1679, he, too, lamented over the decline in piety and the lack of conversion. Yet Stoddard, recognizing that the Half-Way Covenant had in practice separated

⁴Morgan, Visible Saints, pp. 143-45.

⁵For biographical details on Stoddard, see Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," 277-320.

the church covenant from the inward covenant of grace, proposed to sunder them completely. The Mathers shrank from doing this since it amounted to a frank confession that the founders had been wrong.⁶ But Stoddard took the logic of the Half-Way Covenant one fatal step further, even though it meant discarding one of the fundamental tenets of the New England Way.

Stoddard's first significant departure from traditional theology came in 1687, with the publication of The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgement. Puritan theology held that God entered into a covenant with man, binding himself with its conditions, and agreeing to terms which were essentially rational. Stoddard disagreed, asserting that "The only reason why God sets his love on one man and not upon another, because he pleases."⁷ All federal theologians, of course, had acknowledged that the covenant rested, ultimately, on the will of God, but they attempted to minimize this awareness by insisting that Christians could deal with God on a rational basis. They minimized it even more by the improvisation of the doctrine of preparation. Stoddard, however, denied all this, entrusting the Christian's hope for salvation on the naked will of God, and asserting that the essential characteristic of God's will was that it

⁶Ibid., p. 306.

⁷Quoted in Ibid., p. 287.

was non-rational:

God in loving of man acts arbitrarily, he acts as the Potter in forming his Vessels to diverse uses out of the same lump: the will of God is sufficient to move him to chuse one and reject another, he can bestow his love upon men where there is nothing to draw it, the will of God can act independently, and indeed it cannot have a dependence upon any other thing: there is nothing out of God that can incline the will of God.⁸

—Even this might have been agreed upon by other ministers. Original federalists, however, held that saints in covenant with God could be distinguished from sinners, and that therefore the churches could be limited to the regenerate. But Stoddard's conclusion was precisely the opposite: he reasoned that if God elected men to salvation only on the basis of His arbitrary will, then no one but God could know who were the saints. Thus the Puritan attempts to limit church membership were based on a misunderstanding of the covenant. Since no objective standards existed enabling man to determine God's will and His choices, Stoddard made church membership open to all. Since faith could not be truly discerned in this life, Stoddard decided that the sacraments were not designed merely to increase faith in those who already had it, but as "converting" ordinances for all men. While Increase Mather contemptuously regarded this as "a Popish Assertion, Condemned and Confuted by our Divines,"⁹ Stoddard did not change his

⁸Solomon Stoddard, The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgement (Boston, 1687), p. 327.

⁹Increase Mather, The Order of the Gospel (Boston, 1700), p. 22.

opinion, reasserting instead that the Lord's Supper should be opened to all "who are not scandalous," for the purpose of bringing them to Christ:

This Ordinance has a proper tendency in its own nature to Convert men. Herein men may learn the necessity & sufficiency of the Death of Christ in order to Pardon . . . All Ordinances are for the Saving good of those that they are administered unto. This Ordinance is according to Institution to be applied to visible Saints, though Unconverted, therefore it is for their Saving good, and consequently for their Conversion.¹⁰

"Visible Saints, though Unconverted," was the crux of Stoddard's position. The churches, he insisted, could act only "upon what is visible."¹¹ True sainthood, known only to God, was not an issue. Contrary to the Mathers, Stoddard conceived visible saints as "Such as make a serious profession of the true Religion, together with those that do descend from them, till rejected of God."¹² A man is a visible saint, and a church member, in other words, if he can say "yes" when the minister recites the creed to him. All professing Christians should approach the communion table, even if they are destitute of saving grace. The same was true for baptism. All children ought to be baptized, and as soon as possible brought to the Lord's Supper in the hope that they would be converted. Stoddard went even further:

¹⁰Quoted in Walker, Creeks and Platforms of Congregationalism, p. 282.

¹¹Quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," p. 306.

¹²Quoted in Walker, Creeks and Platforms, p. 282.

if there were no way of telling who were true saints, and if churches could legitimately admit all professors, then there was obviously no sense to the church covenant. "There is no Syllable in the Word of God, intimating any such thing," Stoddard declared, and he further insisted that "neither is there any need of it."¹³ Thus in one blow Stoddard sundered the outward covenant of the church from the inward covenant of grace, outrightly denying New England's claim to pure churches.

For the Mathers, all of this amounted to stark apostacy. To their charges that he was betraying the ways of the ancestors, Stoddard replied that while the ancestors were indeed holy men, "it may also be a virtue, and an eminent act of Obedience to depart from them in some things."¹⁴ Change, Stoddard insisted, was not always apostacy. Societies--even Holy Commonwealths--needed ideas that corresponded to reality: both he and Increase Mather agreed to that. But Stoddard, unlike Mather, was prepared to act on that principle. Increase Mather would rather have died than admit the ancestors were wrong. Stoddard asked that New England take a critical look at the principles of the fathers, to choose from them those which were relevant to his age, and to reject those which were not. In 1708, when

¹³Quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," pp. 309-310.

¹⁴Solomon Stoddard, The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God (Boston, 1708), "Preface."

the reformation he advocated had already swept Connecticut, Stoddard articulated this attitude, which placed a premium on realistic, critical examination:

Men are wont to make a great noise, that we are bringing in of Innovations and depart from the Old Way: But it is beyond me to find out wherein the iniquity does lye. We may see cause to alter some practices of our Fathers, without despising of them, without priding our selves in our own Wisdom, without Apostacy . . . And there is no reason that it should be turned as a reproach upon us.

Surely it is commendable for us to Examine the practices of our Fathers; we have no sufficient reason to take practices upon trust from them: let them have as high a character as belongs to them, yet we may not look upon their principles as Oracles . . . If the practises of our Fathers in any particulars were mistakes, it is fit they should be rejected, if they be not, they will bear Examination; if we be forbidden to Examine their practices, that will cut off all hopes of Reformation.¹⁵

The inevitable outcome of Stoddard's line of reasoning was thus more than just a denial of the church covenant. It was more, too, than just a critical examination of the ways of the ancestors. Ultimately, by denying the contractual relationship between man and God, Stoddard's logic utterly rejected New England's claim to a special apocalyptic destiny. No people, he held, could presume to build their churches on the model of the Kingdom of Christ since the objective criteria to judge true sainthood did not exist in this world. Moreover, for God to enter into a covenant with an entire nation, for the fulfillment of His design for the world, was absurd and inconsistent with His infinite freedom. If men could not expect God to bind Himself in an

¹⁵Ibid.

explicit covenant with an individual man, there was even less reason to suppose that He would bind Himself with an entire nation. There would therefore be no city on a hill, in New England or anywhere else. Sweeping away the paraphernalia of logic and covenant, Stoddard left New England naked before the Almighty.

Increase Mather very shortly recognized these implications, and in 1708 attempted to counter Stoddard's denial of New England's apocalyptic status. By attaching to one of his attacks on Stoddardeanism a chiliastic appendix confirming the New England mission, he hoped to disprove Stoddard's position. He explained:

Me. S/toddard/ his Sermon is a Melancholy Subject since it tends to the Deformation of these Churches. I was the rather willing to conclude my Dissertation, with a Comfortable Appendix, relating to the Great Reformation of the Churches in Europe, now (I hope) at the Door. It will (I doubt not) shortly appear, whether the design of Providence in Planting churches in New-England, was not . . . to shew unto the World a Specimen, of what shall more Generally obtain in the Glorious Times Approaching.¹⁶

Increase was extremely apprehensive that Stoddard's reforms --or "deforms," as he would have it--would result in the total surrender of the covenant, the utter degeneration of the churches, and the consequent loss of New England's status as the land of the Kingdom:

The Bold Attempts, which have of late been made, to Unhinge and Overset the Congregational Churches in

¹⁶Increase Mather, A Dissertation, wherein The Strange Doctrine . . . is Examined and Confuted (Boston, 1708), "Preface."

New-England in such, by Decrying the Holy Covenant, whereby they are Formed and Distinguished; and by Endeavors to debase the Matter of them, that instead of Golden Candlesticks (as they have been) they should become Brass, and Tin . . . Giveth us just cause of Trembling for the Ark of God; and lest his Glory should depart from us.¹⁷

For Increase Mather, the outlook for New England could not have been more dismal than at the turn of the century. One by one the towns of the Connecticut Valley fell behind Stoddard, despite Increase's rousing denunciations of his practices. Then, in 1701, after a long and bitter fight, Increase lost his Presidency of Harvard College.¹⁸ This portentous series of events, seen through

¹⁷Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁸Increase's loss of his Harvard position was unrelated to Stoddard, for he was forced to resign because of his extended absences from Cambridge. From 1688 to 1692 he was in England pleading for the restoration of the Massachusetts charter, and when he returned to the colonies he could not bear to reside in Cambridge, as the General Court required. The issue, however, was not wholly unrelated to the general question of church polity, for liberals began to gain increasing control of Harvard as early as 1686. In Mather's absence, the college was run by two able tutors, John Leverett and William Brattle, both instrumental in founding the famous Brattle Street Church, both liberals on the question of baptism and communion. When Mather resigned in 1701, the General Court allowed Samuel Willard to assume absentee control of the college under the title of Vice President, an obvious rejection of Mather. Both Increase and Cotton Mather were embittered by their defeat, and their anger was intensified when, upon Willard's death, the Harvard Corporation passed over them both and chose John Leverett President. But as far as any control of the college by the Mathers was concerned the action of 1701 was final. See Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), Part II, Chapters XXIII-XXIV.

Increase's chiliastic eyes, could mean nothing less than the disintegration of the once proudly unified New England society; it could portend nothing less than the total collapse of its eschatological mission. In one of the more extreme of his jeremiads, preached in 1702, Increase proclaimed that "The Glory of the Lord seems to be on the wing. Oh! Tremble, for it is going, it is gradually departing."¹⁹ All the symptoms of this dire prophecy were present: Harvard, once New England's "Fountain," had lately become a "Seminary for Degenerate Plants";²⁰ sundry of New England's ministers "have in print Mock't and Scoff'd at the Holy Covenant and other Holy Practices which have been the Glory of these Churches of the Lord."²¹ Unable to perceive events outside of the framework of the jeremiad, Increase was drawn inevitably, at the sight of such remarkable changes, to the conclusion that New England's errand had failed:

That which some have thought was the special design of Providence in bringing a choice People into this part of the world, seems as if it were now over. It has been by Good and Wise men conjectured, that the Lords more peculiar design in Planting these Heavens and Laying the foundation of this Earth, was, that the world might see a Specimen of what shall be over all the Earth in the Glorious Times which are expected, and will certainly be accomplished in the appointed season of them. In these days what manner of persons will there be in Power as to Civil Government, and what kind of Laws shall there be established? A Prophet has told us, . . . I

¹⁹Increase Mather, Ichabod, or, The Glory Departing from New England (Boston, 1702), p. 66.

²⁰Ibid., p. 75.

²¹Ibid., p. 78.

will make they Officers Peace, and thy Exactors Righteousness. And in those dayes how will Church-Members be qualified? That we see in the same Prophet, . . . Thy People shall all be Righteous. It was very much thus in New-England many years ago. But neither our Civil or our Ecclesiastical state is ever like to be what it once was. All these things considered, we have just cause to fear that a greater Departure of the Glory is hastning upon us.²²

In his less impassioned moments, however, Increase was more hopeful of the future. In 1708, the aging Jeremiah declared that "the Kingdom of Christ is on the rising Hand."²³ The Stoddardean crisis might prove fatal, he wrote, "were it not that the Happy Time draws near, when there will be a Great Reformation of the Churches throughout the World."²⁴ Drawing upon the apocalyptic tests and English millennial treatises, Increase computed mathematically that "Antichrist's Reign will Expire in the Year 1716." Thus there was all the more reason for New England to repudiate Stoddardeanism and to renew its covenant with God, that it might take part in the "Glorious Exaltation of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁵ In 1710, in a lengthy dramatization of his death, Increase wrote, "I Dye in the Faith of the Speedy accomplishment of those glorious Things."²⁶

²²Ibid., pp. 80-81.

²³Increase Mather, "Appendix," Dissertation, wherein The Strange Doctrine, p. 104.

²⁴Ibid., p. 92.

²⁵Ibid., p. 97.

Thirteen years later, in 1723, he died, unreconciled to Stoddard's, and to New England's, rejection of the assumptions of the founders.

Increase Mather, for his enormous intellectual capabilities, went to his death trying to make an outdated and dying system work. His son, Cotton, however, was determined not to do that. To be sure, Cotton Mather diagnosed society with the jeremiad; his greatest effort, the Magnalia Christi Americana, was a colossal jeremiad. Yet he was far more flexible than his father, sensing that New England had taken a new course from which there was no turning back, and his intellect was put severely to the test as he attempted to accommodate himself, and federal theology, to the transition. By 1717, he realized that Stoddard's reforms were the inevitable outcome of the crumbling structure of covenant theology. Writing in that year, instead of turning upon Stoddard for opening the church doors to the unqualified, as he was accustomed to doing, he turned upon those ministers whose membership qualifications were too strict. "Our Church-State is not Right," he claimed, "if it wont admit into it all that have a True PIETY visible upon them."²⁷ In theory this was what he had been saying for years, but there was a noticeable shift in emphasis from the way he had previously stated the position. This time he emphasized that God would

²⁷Cotton Mather, Malachi (Boston, 1717), p. 57.

be provoked at "The Churches which keep up instruments of Separation, that will keep out from their Fellowship, those whom our SAVIOUR will Receive to the Inheritance of the Saints in Light."²⁸ While refusing to surrender the covenant in theory, Cotton recognized its limits in fact. By 1726, he had fully reconciled himself to Stoddard's reforms, which were then widespread. In the Ratio Disciplinae, he wrote of the Stoddardean view held by some, and then described the more conservative theory defended by his father. Resigning himself to the change, he concluded, "Indeed there is a Variety both of Judgement and Practice in the churches of New-England upon this Matter; However it produces no troublesome Variance or Contention among them."²⁹

In accepting Stoddardeanism as a sociological fact Cotton revealed his awareness of a discovery Stoddard had made years earlier: that the rigid framework of federal theology had become a sterile form. Consequently he turned to simplicity itself, and attempted to keep religion alive by shoving aside doctrinal hair-splitting and concentrating upon simple piety.³⁰ As early as 1709, Cotton became acquainted with the work of August Hermann Francke, at Halle. Shortly thereafter he began a correspondence with the Lutheran Pietist, evidently impressed by his efforts toward

²⁸Ibid., p. 57.

²⁹Quoted in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 283.

³⁰Miller, Colony to Province, pp. 406-07.

"a Glorious Revival of the Primitive."³¹ It occurred to Mather that the people of New England, who could no longer see the relevance of the national covenant to their daily grind of farming and of shop-keeping, might be stirred by the "vitals" of Christianity. The Reformation had been delayed because Puritanism was hobbled with scholasticism; only when religion dispensed with "Windy and Empty Speculations" could it find a meaningful place in men's lives. The Pietism of Halle, thought Mather, provided the needed release from formalism:

There has been awakened of late Years, in the Minds of Men, a vehement Inclination to shake off those Religious Formalities, by which they do not find themselves brought nearer to GOD; and to get more into a Real, Vital, Spiritual Religion, and such as will have the Life of God in the Soul of Man, with a more transforming Energy operating in it.³²

By 1717, Cotton was convinced "That the Recovery of the Church, and of Mankind, unto Desirable Circumstances, must be by a lively Propagation of Real and Vital PIETY in the World."³³

"Piety," of course, was the impulse behind the first migration to New England, but among Puritans of Mather's generation it meant something quite different. For John

³¹For the correspondence between Mather and Francke, see Ernst Benz, "Pietist and Puritan Sources of Early Protestant World Missions," Church History, XX (June, 1951), 28-55.

³²Quoted in Miller, Colony to Province, p. 407.

³³Cotton Mather, Malachi, pp. 4-5.

Winthrop and John Cotton, piety flowed from man's desire to transcend his imperfect self; from a deep sense of man's depravity and imperfection these men conceived of a God of flawless perfection, a God to whom man must appeal for deliverance. It was, in short, a sense of man's humility as he stood alone before God. But Cotton Mather attempted to transform piety into a social force, hinting that the sign of faith was a life of doing good unto others. In 1710, he even suggested that a "work of grace" was really "A Work, which disposes a man to carry it well in all Relations; to Do Good unto all, with Alacrity, with Assiduity."³⁴

Such a religion--or way of living--Cotton thought supremely rational. No longer was it necessary to engage in the hair-splitting dialogue about the stages of regeneration, the refinements of the covenant, or the abilities of half-way members: look after your conduct, and your creed will take care of itself. By 1717, Mather had decided that true religion could be distilled down to three universal "maxims of piety," which could be understood by all humans with the power of reason. The first two were essentially vows to make God the main intention of life, and to acknowledge belief in Christ as the divine mediator. The third was that "I must heartily Love my Neighbour, and forever Do unto other Men, as I must own it Reasonable for them to do unto

³⁴Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana, p. 10.

me."³⁵ Here was religion in capsule form, free of sectarian distinctions, and liberated from the cumbersome theology of the covenant. Best of all it was "discovered, inculcated, required, even by the Light of Nature it self."³⁶

This Religion in our Everlasting MAXIMS of PIETY, is a Religion of so Reasonable and Superior and Substantial a character; that no Man can ever have any Reason to be ashamed of it.³⁷

"Here is a Reasonable Religion," the excited Cotton Mather told the readers of Malachi on page after page:

These Morals are but MAXIMS of Reason, as incontestible as that Three and Four make Seven, or, that a Square is double to a Triangle of equal base and Height . . . Had the Grace of GOD bringing Salvation in the Gospel never appeared as it has, yet REASON might have told you, that you must live Godlily, and Soberly, & Righteously; and that a Vengeance of GOD will follow a Life of Wickedness.³⁸

To a large extent, Cotton Mather's redefinition of religion was a response to external defeat. The witchcraft episode, Harvard College, Brattle Street, Stoddard's defection, and countless other events left the "Mather dynasty" shorn of power, prestige, and influence. But Cotton's "discovery" of piety and reasonable religion was more than just an attempt to reassert the leadership of the ministry. It was a response to, or at least a recognition of, a social

³⁵Cotton Mather, Malachi, pp. 34-35.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 38.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 38-39.

change that had gone in the direction of financial concern, freedom of conscience, and religious indifference. Mather was characteristic of a generation of Puritans who felt free to modify the rigid tenets of federal theology, to loosen the vice-grip of the jeremiad. They knew that to raise the banner of a sect, as the founders had done, and expect farmers and merchants to die under it was absurd. That is why in 1726 Mather advised young men preparing for the ministry to dispense entirely with the burdensome study of logic, since "The Power and Process of Reason is Natural to the Soul of Man."³⁹ When Thomas Prince in the same year brought out the late Samuel Willard's Compleat Body of Divinity, he had to apologize because modern taste would find Willard "less exact in his Philosophical Schemes and Principles" than it demanded.⁴⁰ It was an imposing summary of the seventeenth century intellectual experience, but conceived entirely out of the logic of the covenant, it was hardly relevant to the eighteenth century Puritan mind. When John Bulkeley discussed The Necessity of Religion in Societies, he argued that religion was important not in terms of "the particular Form or Manner of Worship in Society's," but in what he termed a "subjective sense": "Subjectively, for the internal

³⁹Cotton Mather, Manuductio ad Ministerium (Boston, 1726), p. 35.

⁴⁰Miller, Colony to Province, p. 434.

Principles and Acts of it."⁴¹ By 1730 he was arguing with Mather that "Reveal'd Religion or Christianity, as we commonly call it, taken in its full Extent or Latitude, is as to the Main, Substantial Parts of it, no other than Natural Religion."⁴²

A similar transition occurred, among many ministers, in Puritan eschatology. The more enthusiastic millennial accounts of the previous century seemed no longer adequate to the mind dominated by Reason. When they did preach about the millennium and about Judgement, many ministers attempted to prove that man's assurance of the fulfillment of the prophecies came from "Natural Light and Reason." Preaching in 1714, Henry Flynt maintained that men know of God's providences through "the Light and Law of Nature":

Now the Natural Notions which we have of God and His Providence instruct us in this Truth, for if God be a Good and Holy, and Just God, and Loves Goodnesse & Holiness, and Hates Iniquity, as Nature teacheth us that He does, He must, as the Supream Ruler and Governour of Mankind, approve and countenance Vertue and Goodness, and Righteousness in them; and disapprove . . . vice & wickedness; He must reward Vertue, and Punish Sin and Sinners, otherwise He don't treat them agreeable to His Own Nature . . . And as the Nature of God and His Providence does thus infer a future Judgement upon Men, so also the consideration of the Nature of Man does likewise prove it: for Man is made a reasonable Creature, capable of moral Actions; God has given him a rule to act and live by, a Law written in his Heart;

⁴¹John Bulkeley, The Necessity of Religion in Societies (Boston, 1713), p. 9.

⁴²John Bulkeley, The Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion (New London, Conn., 1730), p. 9.

and endowed him with free Powers and Abilities of chusing good & refusing evil. . . .⁴³

In Benjamin Colman's treatise on the parable of the ten virgins, a subject which traditionally lent itself to millennial enthusiasm, there was a conspicuous absence of any discussion of the millennium. Colman proclaimed, moreover, that God had put off the Day of Judgement, and that this was one reason for the spiritual laxness of New England:

One great Cause of the Sleepiness of Christians is the Goodness and Forbearance of God in the delay of the Appearance of Christ to Judgement. While the Bridegroom tarried. He spares us through a considerable Time of many Years, and because Judgement is not speedily executed we grow secure and negligent, and harden our selves.⁴⁴

While many ministers of the eighteenth century discarded the doctrine of the millennium, just the opposite was the case with Cotton Mather. The religion of piety, which was for him of such a "reasonable character," rekindled within him a sense of urgency about the millennium. In his correspondence with Francke, Cotton found a concern which he himself held in common with the Pietism of Halle: an intense expectation of the end of time, centered in the expectation of a new pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Writing to Francke, Cotton excitedly asked if finally, "after 1260 years of the Anti-Christ," the Holy Spirit might now "roar

⁴³Henry Flynt, The Doctrine of the Last Judgement (Boston, 1714), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴Benjamin Colman, Practical Discourses on the Parable of the Ten Virgins (2d ed; Boston, 1747), p. 127.

again like the beginning of a mighty rain?"⁴⁵

I do not know whether the time will be soon at hand which is appointed by God for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and whether the kingdom of God will be revealed soon. I believe, however, that it is at hand.⁴⁶

The reformulation of Puritan eschatology in the early eighteenth century was a reflection of the more comprehensive changes in the ways in which Puritans accommodated themselves to the Enlightenment. Cotton Mather was an heir to both the tradition of the founders and to the Age of Enlightenment. He gave the founders their due, but relegated their dream to the status of mere tradition: he could admire it, even venerate it, but he recognized that it was inappropriate to the Age of Reason. The vision of the city on a hill was by that time long outdated. To be sure, America was still "legible in the apocalyptic promise, but not on the basis of its churches becoming the model for the Kingdom. The apologetical defenses of Congregationalism and the sophisticated quibbling of federal theology were replaced, in Mather's theology, by a non-sectarian religion of simple piety. Hence the millennium was now conceived not in terms of the cleansing of the churches, but of the everlasting gospel of the "maxims of piety":

Of the Day wherein the MAXIMS of the Everlasting

⁴⁵Quoted in Benz, "Pietist and Puritan Sources of Early Protestant Missions," p. 48.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 50.

Gospel are to be entertained, & established as the Governing MAXIMS of the World, it is foretold, That a Glorious CHRIST . . . shall stand for the Ensign of the People. The SON OF MAN shall appear as the ENSIGN and the Banner, whereto the Nations are to repair, when they are quickly thereupon, to see Him Coming in the Clouds of Heaven, with Power and Great Glory.⁴⁷

Cotton never abandoned his vision of America's apocalyptic destiny. Even if New England could not be considered a city on a hill, America would still, he hoped, become an important part of the Kingdom on earth. He even suggested that his countrymen might further the spread of piety at home, thus hastening the advance of the Kingdom, by forming religious societies which would have to ignore the sectarian differences among its members:

It may be proposed, that there should be formed SOCIETIES of Good Men, who can own some such Instrument of PIETY, and make it their most inviolated Law, to bear with Differences in one another upon the Lower and Lesser points of Religion, and still at their Meetings have their Prayers for the growth of the People who being Established on the Grand MAXIMS of Christianity are to become a Great Mountain and fill the whole Earth, accompanied with Projections of the most unexceptionable Methods to accomplish it.⁴⁸

Having lost the original dream of the city on a hill, Cotton Mather nevertheless recaptured the vision of the Kingdom in a religion of Pietism, so that in 1710 he could still proclaim, "Yea, the Day is at hand, when that Voice will be heard concerning thee, Put on they beautiful Garments, O

⁴⁷Cotton Mather, Malachi, p. 88.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 92-93.

America, the Holy City!"⁴⁹

The Puritans of New England accommodated themselves to the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century even more readily than they did to the more general ideas of the Enlightenment. The Puritans, in fact, from the beginning had been hospitable to physical science, since they were obliged to interpret God's will from the study of ordinary physical events. While New England was conceived within the framework of scholastic, Aristotelian logic and physics, the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton caused them no visible distress.⁵⁰ Even Increase Mather was versed in contemporary science, and was confident of his ability to determine God's providences within that framework. As they were compelled to assimilate the new science into their theology, the Puritans of the eighteenth century found Newton even more congenial than the science of antiquity.

How thoroughly Increase Mather was a product of his culture was evidenced by the uses he made of the new science. In his Kometographia of 1683, he scoffed at the "Popish Authors" who would "strain their wits to defend their Pagan Master Aristotle his Principles."⁵¹ He quoted liberally and

⁴⁹Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana, p. 44.

⁵⁰Miller, Colony to Province, p. 437.

⁵¹Increase Mather, Kometographia (Boston, 1683), p. 7.

sympathetically from the Royal Society, Bacon, Kepler, and Robert Hooke. But he never seriously considered a completely naturalistic view of the world, and his scientific treatises never got outside a chiliastic view toward nature. His treatises on comets were jeremiads: when God creates some "New thing" in the heavens, "He hath some Strange work to do in the Earth."⁵² Thus comets--and earthquakes and plagues--were the signs of God's anger with a sinful world. "Certain it is that many things which may happen according to the course of nature, are portentous signs of divine anger, and prognosticles of great evils hastening upon the world. . . ."⁵³

Increase's eschatology, however, was influenced in other ways, indirectly, by the rise of the new science. Toward the end of the seventeenth century Puritans became familiar with the work of a number of English theologians and students of the new science who devoted themselves to proving that modern physics confirmed the eschatological predictions.⁵⁴ In 1684, Thomas Burnet, Chaplain-in-Ordinary

⁵²Increase Mather, The Latter Sign (Boston, 1682), p. 7.

⁵³Increase Mather, Kometographia, p. 18. See also Heaven's Alarm to the World (Boston, 1682), p. 7.

⁵⁴For these "physico-theological" theories, which gained prominence in England during the decade of the 1690's, see Ernest Tuveson, "Swift and the World-Makers," Journal of the History of Ideas, XI (January, 1950), 54-74. See also, Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1940), Ch. II.

to William III and a disciple of Descartes and of Boyle, published his Sacred Theory of the Earth. In this work, Burnet attempted to show that the leading events in God's drama--the creation, the deluge, and the final consumption by fire of the present earth--were all explicable, largely in Cartesian terms, by the operation of natural forces. Burnet's naturalistic account of sacred history made a great impression in its day, encouraging others to take up the same theme. The most important new theory of this kind was developed by William Whiston, clergyman, mathematician, and successor to Newton as Lucasian professor at Cambridge.⁵⁵ Where Burnet had been a Cartesian, Whiston was a Newtonian, working out the idea in even greater detail in his New Theory of the Earth, of 1696. For Whiston, as for Burnet, the earth took shape as the result of gravitation, and the deluge occurred as the result of a comet. The millennium was also to be inaugurated by the fire resulting from the collision of a comet with the earth. In these theories, and in subsequent physico-theologies by John Ray and Thomas Derham, the vision of the physical, mathematical universe was dominant. God acted not through divine intervention, but through the immutable laws of the universe.

The physico-theologies coming out of the late seventeenth century marked an important transition in Protestant

⁵⁵Tuveson, "Swift and the World-Makers," p. 56.

eschatology. They give place to miracles, they assert that some special intervention will be necessary to inaugurate the millennium. But they set out to show that the transformation of the earth could be accounted for without recourse to the immediate intervention of Providence. While the outline of history was traditional, the plot was written in the structure of the universe itself. The events of history, including the final conflagration, were analyzed as natural phenomena. Thomas Burnet imagined God as a wonderful clock-maker, whose mechanical universe ran by itself without His intervention:

We think him a better Artist that makes a Clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the Springs and Wheels which he puts in the work, than he that hath so made his Clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike: And if one should contrive a piece of Clock-work so that it should beat all the hours, and make all its motions regularly for such a time, and that time being come, upon a signal given, or a Spring toucht, it should of its own accord fall all to pieces; would not this be look'd upon as a piece of greater Art, than if the workman came at that time prefixt, and with a great Hammer beat it into pieces?⁵⁶

In time, the transference of Providence to Nature was made much more skillfully, so that in the nineteenth century Providence disappeared as a factor operating in history. Even at the opening of the eighteenth century, however, the distinction between Providence and "natural law" was becoming less distinct.

English physico-theologies had a discernible impact

⁵⁶Quoted in Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia, pp. 119-20.

in the American colonies. Increase Mather showed his familiarity with them in his Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer, his classic contribution to New England eschatological literature. On the "Restoration of the Earth," Increase wrote, "They that would have a fuller Satisfaction in that Mysterious Subject, may consult Mr. Burnet's Theory, who has with great Learning handled that controversy." He also referred his readers to the work of John Ray, "in his Treatise of the dissolution of the World."⁵⁷ In 1717, the president of Harvard College, John Leverett, gave a commencement speech in Latin "taking the Whistonian Notion about the Flood."⁵⁸ Even the incomparable Newton, to the great satisfaction of the New England ministers, concluded that modern physical science confirmed the apocalyptic prophecies.

Few New England ministers, however, were as sympathetic to the new science as Cotton Mather, and few expended such tireless effort as he to incorporate it into theology. In 1721, he published The Christian Philosopher, a compilation of Newtonian sources which attempted to demonstrate "that Philosophy is no Enemy, but a mighty and vondrous Incentive to Religion."⁵⁹ He, too, scoffed at the

⁵⁷Increase Mather, Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer (Boston, 1710), "Preface."

⁵⁸Quoted in Miller, Colony to Province, p. 186.

⁵⁹Cotton Mather, The Christian Philosopher (1721), facsimile reproduction, Josephine K. Piercy (ed.) (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), p. 1.

Paripatetics, and hailed Newton as "the Perpetual Dictator of the learned World."⁶⁰ What delighted Cotton most, as he had written earlier, was that Newton proved himself "the most Victorious Assertor of an Infinite GOD, that hath appeared in the bright Army of them that have driven the baffled Herd of Atheists away from the Tents of Humanity."⁶¹

Cotton also cited the English physico-theologies in his scientific treatises. Taking up the current trend of transferring the burden of Providence to nature, he wrote in 1712 that he was not "without Suspensions, That a Comet may be intended by the Vapour of Smoke, which is to bring on the Great and Notable Day of the Lord."⁶² But Cotton seemed unwilling to concede, with his father and with Thomas Burnet, that the end of the world would involve tremendous, cataclysmic changes. The tendency of eighteenth century millennialism was to emphasize less and less the catastrophic aspect of the last time, and more and more to draw it into the stream of history.⁶³ Certainly Cotton Mather was no complete gradualist; nor was he able to completely separate himself from the notion of a final conflagration. But he had, to

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 56.

⁶¹Cotton Mather, Thoughts for the Day of Rain (Boston, 1712), "Preface."

⁶²Ibid., p. 10.

⁶³Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia, Ch. IV.

say the least, reservations about the subject. In 1726, he had this advice to give aspiring clergymen:

I am willing that the Cometomancy which has hitherto so much reigned, even in the most Honest Minds, be laid aside with you; and that you be apprehensive of nothing Portentious in Blazing Stars.⁶⁴

In 1712, he wrote,

It seems that the Descent of our Saviour, at, and for the Destruction of Antichrist, and the Beginning of the Blessed Millennium, will not be without a Conflagration. Then, Our God shall come, and a Fire shall devour before Him, . . . But it looks as if this Conflagration would be Partial & Progressive. The first and Main Effects of it, will be on the Italian Territories. And a Total Consumption of the whole world is not as yet to be accomplished.⁶⁵

This conflagration was to be, it appears, a gradual cleansing of the world to make way for the joyful state of the righteous during the millennium: "A Total Consumption of them, could not be proposed, as that wherin they might be Glad, and be Joyful, and Rejoyce."⁶⁶

In 1728, Cotton Mather died. A year later Solomon Stoddard followed him. At first glance, no two men could appear so dissimilar: Mather the staunch defender of New England orthodoxy, Stoddard the critic of that orthodoxy. Yet in a general sense the two were not so far apart, for they reflect the tension of ideas present through New

⁶⁴Cotton Mather, Manuductio ad Ministerium, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁵Cotton Mather, Thoughts for the Day of Rain, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 27.

England's transition from the seventeenth century into the modern world. The rhetoric of both was the jeremiad, but both saw the dilemma of federal theology, and both attempted to deliver New England from the hold of ideas which had lost their meaning. Stoddard did it by following the logic of the Half-Way Covenant to its conclusion, sundering the inward covenant of grace from the outward covenant of the church. In doing so, however, he deprived New England of the premise upon which its historical destiny was based. Cotton Mather became even less federal than Stoddard when he abandoned the theological hair-splitting of covenant doctrine and turned to the religion of simple piety. Yet he found another premise for New England's "legibility" in the promise of redemption. For Mather, "practical piety," more than a special covenant with God, determined that "legibility." Pietism, natural religion, and the breakdown of federal theology were signs that New England was gradually and stubbornly making its way into the Age of Enlightenment.

CHAPTER V

JONATHAN EDWARDS

While the jeremiads preached since 1660 did not accurately appraise the state of religious life in New England, doubtless the zeal shown by the founders had largely disappeared by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The intense religious concern of early New England, grounded upon the expectation that New England would one day become the New Jerusalem, was set aside by generations who gave themselves entirely to the ethic of a commercial age. Hence, the ministers, finding society in decay, periodically arraigned their people for their "declension" from the virtues of the fathers and called for a "reformation" which alone could recover New England's status as a covenanted community. But that reformation did not come, at least not in the lifetime of second- and third-generation ministers, and certainly not in the form called for by ministers bound to covenant theology. What came instead was a "great and general awakening" that in 1740 swept through practically every element of the populace in New England. It was not merely a reformation, according to its proponents, but a "revival" of the vital Christian spirit, a cultivation of the "religion of the heart."

From the standpoint of religious developments in the late seventeenth century, the "great awakening" was not wholly unexpected. While chastising the people for their "backsliding," the jeremiads also expressed the hope, indeed the certainty, that New England would one day experience a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied for the last days of history. Yet most ministers were only able to talk about the outpouring of the Spirit: there was little room in covenant theology for large-scale conversions, since that theology stressed the intensely individual nature of the covenant of grace. The sinner had to experience the infusion of grace in solitude, give a "relation" of that experience before the congregation, and only then could he claim his right to the covenant. Only when this aspect of federal theology was softened, or openly disavowed, could there in reality be any extraordinary "outpouring of the Spirit." Solomon Stoddard, for one, was determined to do what he could to bring about such "outpourings." The first of New England's great "revivalists," Stoddard extended the covenant to all who would enter in the hope of being converted. During his ministry at Northampton, he brought about five "harvests," in 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712, and in 1718.¹

Other ministers were unwilling to follow the course taken by Stoddard, but saw just as clearly the inadequacy of

¹Miller, Errand into the Wilderness, p. 160.

religion committed to the theology of the covenant. The most notable of these was Cotton Mather, who finally relegated the arguments of federal theology to a secondary, though not wholly unimportant, role, meanwhile urging people to lead a life of simple "piety." Yet he did not close his argument with an appeal to cultivate piety on an individual basis, but attempted instead to transform it into a social force. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the New England clergy led by Mather discouraged doctrinal speculations and sectarian distinctions, urging the people instead to take up "social virtues." In 1710, Mather published one of his most important works, Bonifacius, or as it was most commonly called, Essays to Do Good.² Here he supplied a perfect slogan for a generation of Puritans trying to rekindle the flame of religion that the last of the federal theologians had virtually smothered. Essays to Do Good was fundamentally an appeal for men to center their lives on good works. If it was not outright Arminianism, it verged dangerously close, implying that grace, now identified with the all-inclusive term of piety, was dependent more on the cultivation of morality than on the supreme will of God.³

²Miller calls it "possibly the most important work in the early eighteenth century." It was by far the most popular of Mather's writings, running through eighteen editions well into the nineteenth century. Colony to Province, p. 410.

³Ibid., pp. 410-16.

In 1726, Cotton Mather boasted that there was not a single Arminian in New England; just eight years later, John White preached a jeremiad asserting that Arminianism was one of the greatest sins afflicting the land.⁴ If the latter judgement was typical of the 1730's, as it seems to have been, it reflected not so much a sudden outburst of Arminianism between 1726 and 1734, but a reaction against a trend in religious teachings of which Mather himself was a part.⁵ Had he lived until 1734, perhaps Mather would have come under attack as an Arminian, and taken back some of what he said about "do-good." More likely, though, he would simply have denied the charge, and himself become a partisan of the Great Awakening. In any case, he did not live to hear Arminianism challenged, for he died in 1728, and so did Solomon Stoddard in the following year. In fact, long before the Great Awakening practically all the ministers of Mather's generation were dead. It was left, therefore, up to a new generation of ministers to redefine Puritanism for the decades to follow.

Chief among the ministers of this new generation

⁴Ibid., p. 462; John White, New England's Lamentations (2nd ed.; Boston, 1734).

⁵Jonathan Edwards reported that "About this time began the great noise that was in this part of the country, about Arminianism, which seemed to appear with a very threatening aspect upon the interest of religion here." Narrative of Surprising Conversions, in Jonathan Edwards, The Works of President Edwards (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1854), Vol. III, p. 233.

was Solomon Stoddard's grandson and successor at Northampton, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was born in the remote frontier town of East Windsor, Connecticut, in 1703. He was educated for the ministry at Yale, and accepted his first call at a Presbyterian church in New York. Questions of church organization had been fundamental to the founders of New England, but Edwards' acceptance of the Presbyterian pulpit reveals much concerning the ecclesiastical complexion of Connecticut in 1722. That a child of New England Congregationalism should take his first pulpit in a Presbyterian church indicates how indifferent New Englanders had become since the days of the founders to the forms of church polity.⁶

Edwards returned to Yale to accept the offer of tutor in 1724, remaining there until 1726. That year the church at Northampton sought a colleague pastor for the aging Stoddard, and in November invited Edwards to settle at Northampton. Stoddard's death in February, 1729, made Edwards sole minister of the congregation. Edwards very shortly proved himself an accomplished heir to his grandfather's pulpit, for within five years Northampton enjoyed a spiritual refreshing far exceeding any of Stoddard's earlier "harvests." As Edwards reported a few years later, "Just

⁶Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 38.

after my grandfather's death, it seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion."⁷ Then suddenly, in 1734,

a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion, and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees, and all ages; the noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder; all other talk but about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by . . .

This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town; so that in the spring and summer following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God . . . Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, every one eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth; the assembly in general were, from time to time, in tears while the word was preached; some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.⁸

News of the revival in Northampton quickly spread throughout Connecticut, and soon the "outpouring" was experienced in other towns. Concurrently, revivals in the Middle Colonies occurred, originating in the work of Theodorus Frelinghuysen among the Dutch Reformed, and culminating in the fiery preaching of William Tennent and his sons. These "spiritual refreshings" soon subsided, however, at least long enough to allow Jonathan Edwards to take stock and reflect upon their meaning.

The revivals of 1734-1735 gave Edwards compelling

⁷Edwards, Narrative of Surprising Conversions, in Works, III, p. 232.

⁸Ibid., pp. 234-35.

evidence that God was about to perform a great work of redemption. In 1739, he delivered a series of sermons in which he attempted to show that "all revolutions, from the beginning of the world to the end of it, are but the various parts of the same scheme, all conspiring to bring to pass that great event which the great Creator and Governor of the world has ultimately in view."⁹ For Edwards, the revivals appeared to be "forerunners" of a more extraordinary dispensation of grace.

He did not have to wait long. In the fall of 1740, the anticipated "work of God" came, precipitated by the arrival in the colonies of the English evangelist, George Whitefield. In an extended tour that took him through Massachusetts and Connecticut, Whitefield stirred hundreds of souls to repentance as pulpits in town after town thundered with the force of his mighty voice. No one, it seemed, remained unaffected by Whitefield, who shortly became the most controversial figure of the Great Awakening. Even the tough-minded skeptic, Benjamin Franklin, came under the spell of Whitefield's oratory. When he visited Northampton, Whitefield preached four times from Edwards' pulpit, and reported that even "dear Mr. Edwards wept during almost the whole time of the exercise."¹⁰

⁹Jonathan Edwards, A History of the Work of Redemption, in Works, I, p. 511.

¹⁰Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 146.

The revival spread throughout the Connecticut Valley. Like many ministers, Edwards was often called to preach in other parishes than his own. In July, 1741, he was invited to preach at Enfield, where the revival had as yet made little progress. There he delivered his most famous sermon, later published as Sinners at the Angry Hands of God, which more than any other sermon established his reputation as a ranting revivalist who "devoted his logic to an assiduous stoking of the fires of hell."¹¹ Edwards depicted God holding the sinner over the pit of hell, "much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire." Man, Edwards said, is "ten thousand times so abominable" in God's eyes "as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours."¹² Edwards brought to mind the fire and brimstone of Stoddard in more ways than just in his rhetoric. In the Enfield sermon Edwards took the final step in the direction toward which Stoddard had moved earlier: it was a final rejection of federal theology, discarding the covenant as a hindrance to the arbitrary will of God. Mankind is without refuge, said Edwards, and "all that preserves them every moment is the arbitrary will, and uncovenanted,

¹¹Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. I: The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1927), p. 159. Today, however, historians recognize that the Enfield sermon was not nearly so representative of Edwards as it was of his time.

¹²Quoted in Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 146.

unobliged forbearance of an incensed God."¹³ Stoddard came close to this, but by formulating his argument with the logic of the covenant he centered on a secondary, though less objectionable, proposal concerning church membership. He never rejected the covenant of grace; he only maintained that men could not know who belonged to it, and therefore all men should be admitted into the churches. But Edwards rejected the covenant and severed completely what remained of Puritanism's ties with the legalism of seventeenth century theology.

Contemporaries of the Great Awakening described it as "great and general." Spread throughout New England and the Middle Colonies, it found supporters among both urban and rural groups, from upper as well as lower classes. In Boston, the cultural and political center of New England, the established ministers opposed to the Great Awakening were outnumbered three to one.¹⁴ Yet general or not, the revival subsided almost as suddenly as it began. By 1742, a reaction set in against itinerant preaching, mass conversions, and hysterical exhibitionism. The Great Awakening virtually divided New England into two bitterly warring camps:

¹³Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁴Edwin Scott Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 55. Ch. IV discusses the extent to which the Awakening was "great and general." Gaustad concludes that there is "abundant evidence that this religious turmoil in New England was in fact 'great

revivalists were designated "New Lights," their adversaries, "Old Lights." While the events of the years following the revival continually redefined the issues, the contest between these camps continued throughout most of the century. For more than three decades the intellectual life of American Protestantism was dominated by debates among the spokesmen of rationalism and of evangelical religion.¹⁵

In the years following the Great Awakening, Edwards became the acknowledged leader of evangelical Protestantism. Defending the revival against Old Light criticism, he devoted dozens of sermons to proving that the revival was truly a great work of God. He remained at Northampton to practice the theology of the revival until 1750, when his own "excesses" caused the congregation to publicly reject him and renounce him as their minister. This breach began over a question of church polity. For nearly twenty years Edwards ran his church according to his grandfather's system of admitting anyone to the Lord's Supper who would partake with the hope of conversion. In 1748, however, he denounced the system and demanded that admission into the church be granted only to those who truly believed. Unfortunately, to most of his congregation it

and general,' that it knew no boundaries, social or geographical, that it was both urban and rural, and that it reached both lower and upper classes," p. 43.

¹⁵Alan Heimert, Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 1-8.

seemed that he was reviving a long dead issue.¹⁶ A church council finally called in 1750 decreed the immediate separation of Edwards from the church.¹⁷ The next year Edwards accepted a call to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a frontier settlement about sixty miles from Northampton. There he remained, deeply involved in his writings and in his ministry, until 1758, when he was offered the presidency of the College of New Jersey. Convinced that the call was from God, Edwards accepted the offer and journeyed to Princeton in January. He served as president of the college for less than two months, for in March he died, the victim of a small-pox inoculation.¹⁸

The Great Awakening revived the urgent sense of expectation about the end of history that had characterized early Puritanism. That sense of urgency had largely waned by the opening of the eighteenth century, but from 1740 on, the thought and expression of evangelical Protestantism "was above all characterized by a note of expectation."¹⁹ Deeply encouraged by the revivals of 1740-1742, New Lights discarded

¹⁶In the heat of the controversy, in 1749, Edwards wrote An Humble Inquiry into the . . . Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion, setting forth his attack against Stoddardeanism.

¹⁷For the events surrounding Edwards' dismissal, see Miller, Jonathan Edwards, pp. 209-29.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 230-33.

¹⁹Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 59.

the themes of the jeremiads and ceased lamenting over departed spiritual glories. No longer did the course of history seem to be one of continual declension; the revivals seemed clear signs that the millennium was imminent. It was Edwards above all who led the way in this direction, purging New England theology of the seventeenth century elements which were symptoms of cosmic despair. With Edwards, Puritan eschatology took a new turn. It pointed not toward a day of doom and Judgement, but toward a millennium being realized progressively within history.

Puritan eschatology during the seventeenth century, and in fact well into the eighteenth century, was characteristically pre-millennial in that it envisioned the occurrence of some eschatological crisis before the advent of the millennium.²⁰ A hundred years before the Great Awakening,

²⁰"Pre-millennialism" in this sense is distinguished from "post-millennialism." The former was characteristic of seventeenth century eschatology, and the latter came into prominence in the eighteenth century. The distinction generally made is that pre-millennial eschatology foresees the day of judgement as preceding the millennium, and that post-millennialism foresees the judgement as coming after the millennium. This distinction, however, is not always applicable to New England Puritanism because many seventeenth century chiliasts whose theological dispositions were pre-millennial could not, by this definition, be considered so --Increase Mather being the foremost example. A more adequate distinction is that pre-millennialists foresee some kind of eschatological crisis, bringing about the end of human history, before the advent of the millennium. But it is not always the Judgement, specifically; it may be any apocalyptic event--such as a comet, an earthquake, the personal appearance of Christ, or a general cataclysm; in any case the history of the world is brought to a close. Post-millennial thinkers, on the other hand, foresee a millennium

John Cotton predicted "terrible thunderings, and lightening" upon the destruction of Antichrist. He warned Christians that before the advent of the millennium,

they must look for battells, great battells: There is no hope that Satan will rest, the Dragon cannot rest when his Kingdome is shaken . . . Then look for Warres, and Tumults of Warres, great Warres, mustering up of Popish Princes, and their Armies, and Pagan Princes, and their Armies. . . .²¹

In 1662, Michael Wigglesworth riveted New England's eyes on the Day of Doom, when Christ would come to judge mankind.

In doing so he set the pattern for the eschatology of the jeremiad, which dominated the New England mind for the rest of the century. The pattern persisted well into the eighteenth century, particularly in the cataclysmic eschatology of Increase Mather. But among ministers of Johnathan Edwards' generation such chiliasm seemed outdated. In 1734, John White confessed he was the voice of an old order when he wrote of the final conflagration as occurring "before the happy State of the Church." The contrary opinion, he acknowledged, generally prevailed: the millennium was

achieved through the normal processes of history, with the Judgement and cataclysm coming after the golden age. The important distinction, in other words, is not where the Judgement is placed, but that in one history ends abruptly, and in the other mankind progresses by stages, through history, into the millennium. Jonathan Edwards, as the rest of this chapter will attempt to show, was America's first major post-millennial thinker.

²¹John Cotton, Seven Vialls, "Second Part of the Sixth Vial," p. 41.

foreseen this side of judgement and cataclysm.²²

For Jonathan Edwards, the revivals of 1734 and 1740 established the millennium as coming gradually, before judgement, free of a cataclysm. He conducted his first inquiry into the apocalyptic prophecies a few years after the first Northampton revival in a lengthy series of sermons compiled and published, after his death, as A History of the Work of Redemption. In this initial statement of the subject, the scheme of history Edwards described was the traditional Protestant view. Thus Revelation predicted the apostacy of the Roman Catholic Church, the rise of Anti-christ, and his decline since the Reformation. But Edwards made a significant departure from the traditional view by bringing on the millennium without either a personal appearance of Christ or the end of history as such. Edwards, in other words, foresaw the Kingdom of Christ on earth achieved within history through the normal course of propagating the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.²³

The larger design of history was for Edwards one of constant progress, pulsed at certain intervals by "special seasons," leading all the while to the ultimate goal of redemption. The work of redemption "is a work that God is

²²White, New England's Lamentations, pp. 7-9.

²³C. C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," Church History, XXVIII (1959), 26.

carrying on from the fall of man to the end of the world," and all the events of history "are parts of this scheme."

But the work itself is so long a doing, even from the fall of man to the end of the world, it is all this while a carrying on. It was begun immediately upon the fall, and will continue to the end of the world, and then will be finished. The various dispensations of God that are in this space, do belong to the same work, and to the same design, and have all one issue; and therefore are all to be reckoned but as several parts of one work, as it were several successive motions of one machine, to bring about in the conclusion one great event.²⁴

For Edwards, God was utterly committed to the work of redemption. Whatever troubles may beset Christians, whatever uncertainties they have, they may be sure of one thing: that Scripture, nature, and reason all confirm the promise of redemption.

It was with some difficulty that Edwards reconciled his post-millennialism with the cataclysmic aspects of the Apocalypse. He acknowledged that "There will be some way or other a mighty struggle between Satan's kingdom and the church," but still maintained that "this great work of God will be wrought, though very swiftly, yet gradually."²⁵ Such contradictions were perhaps unavoidable given the circumstances under which he wrote: this was his first exploration into the "work of redemption," and he was compelled to

²⁴Jonathan Edwards, A History of the Work of Redemption, in Works, I, pp. 300-01.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 481-83.

follow many of the traditional accounts. In later works the cataclysmic aspects were entirely absent, and he gave greater and greater precedent to the historical millennium. Even in The Work of Redemption, however, the implications of his thinking were clear:

. . . though there are many things which seem to hold forth as though the work of God would be exceeding swift, and many great and wonderful events should very suddenly be brought to pass, and some great parts of Satan's visible kingdom should have a very sudden fall, yet all will not be accomplished at once, as by some great miracle, . . . but this is a work which will be accomplished by means, by the preaching of the gospel, and the ordinary means of grace, and so shall be gradually brought to pass.²⁶

This interpretation Edwards thought not only more reasonable, but more consistent with God's nature. Certainly God could have set up His Kingdom "at once," but

It is wisely determined of God, to accomplish his great design by a wonderful and long series of events, that the glory of his perfections may be seen, appearing, as it were, by part, and in particular successive manifestations: for if all that glory which appears in all these events had been manifested at once, it would have been too much for us, and more than we at once could take notice of; it would have dazzled our eyes, and overpowered our sight.²⁷

The revival of 1740-1742 gave Edwards even more conclusive evidence of the imminency of the Kingdom. When a reaction set in against the excesses of the Awakening, Edwards attempted to defend it as a "glorious work of God" by

²⁶Ibid., n. 481.

²⁷Ibid., p. 430.

publishing in 1742 Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion. There was now, he thought, "abundant reason to hope that what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day."²⁸

It is not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least, a prelude of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it shall renew the world of mankind. If we consider how long since, the things foretold, as what should precede this great event have been accomplished; and how long this event has been expected by the church of God, and thought to be nigh be the most eminent men of God in the church; and withal consider what the state of things now is, and has for a considerable time been, in the church of God, and world of mankind, we cannot reasonably think otherwise, than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near.²⁹

Moreover, Edwards speculated that "there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America." After all, the revivals of 1740-1742 were, in both "degree and circumstances," "vastly beyond any former outpouring of the Spirit."³⁰ The prophecies themselves, Edwards proclaimed, point out America, as the first fruits of that glorious day":

God has made as it were two worlds here below, the old and the new . . . the latter is but newly discovered, it was formerly wholly unknown, from age to age, and is as it were now but newly created; it has been,

²⁸Edwards, Thoughts on the Revival, in Works, III, p. 316.

²⁹Ibid., p. 313.

³⁰Ibid., p. 309.

until of late, wholly the possession of Satan, the church of God having never been in it, as it has been in the other continent, from the beginning of the world. This new world is probably now discovered, that the new and most glorious state of God's church on earth might commence there; that God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the new heavens and new earth.³¹

Edwards composed his most mature full-length treatment of the millennium in 1747, in answer to the objection of some that the "glorious deliverance" of the church would be ushered in only by a "terrible devastation." The occasion was a "memorial lately sent over into America, from Scotland, by a number of ministers there" proposing a union among Christians "for those great effusions of the Holy Spirit, which shall bring on that advancement of Christ's church and kingdom."³² Edwards endorsed the proposal in A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time. In this work Edwards formulated the theme he had been developing since he first inquired into the work of redemption: that the millennium was the last state in a series of stages developing progressively within history.

This view rested ultimately on Edwards' concept of the nature of history, in many respects far more modern than

³¹Ibid., p. 314.

³²Edwards, A Humble Attempt, in Works, III, p. 434.

anything yet coming out of New England. History was not, for Edwards, the working out of Satan's battles against the Saints. Instead, it was a record of steady progress from creation to millennium:

All the changes that are brought to pass in the world, from age to age, are ordered in infinite wisdom in one respect or other to prepare the way for that glorious issue of things, that shall be when truth and righteousness shall finally prevail, and he, whose right it is, shall take the kingdom. All the creatures, in all their operations and motions, continually tend to this. As in a clock, all the motions of the whole system of wheels and movements, tend to the striking of the hammer at the appointed time. All the revolutions and restless motions of the sun and other heavenly bodies, from day to day, from year to year, and from age to age, are continually tending hither; as all the many turnings of the wheels of a chariot, in a journey, ten to the appointed journey's end. The mighty struggles and conflicts of nations, and shaking of kingdoms, and empires of the world, from one age to another, are as it were travail pangs of the creation, in order to bring forth this glorious event.³³

Edwards often compared God's providence to a long river: its many branches issue from diverse sources, but all "discharge themselves at one mouth into the same ocean."³⁴ Thus history proceeded toward a destined goal, and its great events occurred not by sudden leaps, but gradually and progressively.

Such an attitude toward history predisposed Edwards against a cataclysmic view of the last times. "There is not the least reason to think" that the destruction of Antichrist

³³Ibid., pp. 45-51.

³⁴Work of Redemption, in Works, I, p. 511.

and the inauguration of the millennium "will be brought to pass as it were at one stroke":

This would contradict many things in Scripture, which represent this great event to be brought to pass by a gradual progress of religion; as leaven that gradually spreads, until it has diffused itself through the whole lump; and a plant of mustard, which from very small seed, gradually becomes a great tree.³⁵

Edwards was deeply impressed by the "excellent harmony and consistence" of history.³⁶ The events of this world were brought about by the influence of God working "according to those constant methods that we call the laws of nature," not by miracles or any sudden intervention. God did not need "to disturb or interrupt the course of nature according to its stated laws" to bring on the millennium, for the power of the Holy Spirit, working through "natural causes," was more than sufficient to accomplish this.³⁷ Thus Edwards regarded the creation of a new earth unnecessary to the establishment of the new heaven. The work of redemption was progressive and gradual, the millennial state the pinnacle in man's progress accomplished by the work of the Spirit:

'Tis probable that the world shall be more like Heaven in the millennium in this respect: that contemplation and spiritual employments, and those things that more directly concern the mind and religion, will be more the saint's ordinary business than now. There will be so many contrivances and inventions to facilitate and expedite their necessary secular business that they

³⁵Humble Attempt, in Works, III, p. 493.

³⁶Work of Redemption, in Works, I, p. 511.

³⁷Humble Attempt, in Works, III, p. 450.

shall have more time for noble exercise, and that they will have better contrivances for assisting one another through the whole earth by more expedite, easy, and safe communication between distant regions than now . . . And so the country about the poles need no longer be hid to us, but the whole earth may be as one community, one body in Christ.³⁸

While Edwards considered the work of redemption a work of the Holy Spirit, he maintained that Christians could through their own efforts contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom. Thus he heartily acceded to the proposal of the Scottish divines, for "this union in such prayer is foretold as a becoming and happy thing, and that which would be acceptable to God, and attended with glorious success." The prophecy not only proclaims it the duty of pious men "to be much in prayer for this mercy," but it "also affords them the strongest assurances that their prayers shall be successful."³⁹ Those who held that "before the fulfillment of the promises relating to the church's latter day glory, there must come a most terrible time," not only bespoke a lack of confidence in the Spirit's power, but inhibited such earnest

³⁸Harvey Townsend, ed., The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards From His Private Notebooks (Eugene, Ore.: University of Oregon Press, 1955), pp. 207-08.

³⁹Humble Attempt, in Works, III, pp. 434, 454. The earliest Puritans, of course, also thought it the duty of the saints to advance the Kingdom; this was, for example, the theme of Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence. But in contrast to Johnson, who envisioned great battles and terrible destruction, Edwards thought of the Kingdom as advancing through the normal, progressive course of history. Hence the duty of the saints for Johnson was to don armour, but for Edwards it was to pray earnestly for the outpouring of the Spirit.

prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit.⁴⁰ Now, more than ever, Edwards felt, Christians ought to unite in prayer, for the recent revivals in Europe and in America clearly signal the coming of glorious times:

. . . that the Spirit of God has been of late so wonderfully awakening and striving with such multitudes, in so many different parts of the world, and even to this day, in one place or other, continues to awaken men, is what I should take great encouragement from, that God was about to do something more glorious, . . . and that these unusual commotion are the forerunners of something exceeding glorious approaching. . . .⁴¹

Although Edwards himself may not have been fully conscious of it, his post-millennial eschatology pushed Puritanism well into the eighteenth century. In fact, Edwards was in this respect far ahead of many of the leading liberal clergy. While Edwards' interpretation of the millennium predicted spiritual and material advancement, the Liberals were more pessimistic. While Edwards' eschatology assured the continued progress of the work of redemption, the Liberals regarded the tendency of history as against improvement in the human condition.⁴² Charles Chauncy, considered by many historians one of New England's more "enlightened" ministers, wrote that the earthquake of 1756 gave evidence of drastic changes in the earth prior to the millennium:

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 471-72.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 462.

⁴²Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, pp. 69-74.

The present constitution of nature is incompatible with unmingled happiness. . . . The present heaven & earth must pass away and a new heaven and earth rise up in their room, before any son or daughter of Adam can possess life without passing through a multiplied variety of inconveniences, disappointments, vexation, and sorrows.⁴³

Such a view was incompatible with Edwards' cosmic optimism. His millennium was an earthly paradise, brought on neither by the personal appearance of Christ nor a cataclysm, but as the culminating stage in the progressive march of history.

In de-emphasizing the catastrophic elements of the millennium, and by drawing it into the stream of history, Edwards moved Calvinist thought a considerable distance toward a complete gradualism. Among his successors this tendency was carried even further. Writing in 1758--the year of Edwards' death--Joseph Bellamy virtually put the dissolution and Judgement out of his consideration altogether. According to Bellamy, the duration of the millennium ought to be reckoned on the same basis as that of the dark period of the church, namely by the standard rule of interpreting one day in the prophecy equal to one year in history. By this standard the millennium ought to last about 360,000 years instead of a thousand, Bellamy computed.⁴⁴ Whereas Edwards believed that relatively few would be saved during the millennium, Bellamy thought that during this extended

⁴³Quoted in Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁴Joseph Bellamy, The Millennium (1758), in David Austin (ed.), The Millennium (Elizabethtown, 1794), p. 39.

period of felicity the greater part of the human race would find mercy. "The scripture no where teaches that the greatest part of the whole human race will perish," he wrote; and he proceeded to show mathematically that the ratio of saved to damned during the millennium would be more than seventeen thousand to one.⁴⁵ Other Calvinists concurred, though perhaps with less mathematical precision, for Edwards himself had made it clear that mankind could anticipate progress, not decline. Throughout the eighteenth century Calvinists took pride in the fact that they could maintain the doctrine of the millennium, and by softening the severity of God's wrath, make it respond appropriately to the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 38-42.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Apocalyptic ideas, long a part of the Puritan tradition, became with Jonathan Edwards the guarantee of secular and religious progress. The prophecies no longer foretold of great battles with the hosts of Antichrist, nor catastrophies, nor impending doom, but of a great onward and upward movement toward the golden age. While the idea of progress became explicitly stated among Puritans only with Edwards, it was submerged even in the eschatology of John Cotton. The founders of New England envisioned an earthly Kingdom of Christ unfolding as the reformation of the Church progressed in New England. Yet it was a Kingdom associated with a way of worship, a way of organizing churches; it thought of the Kingdom of Christ as settling upon the Congregational churches only. When sectarian distinctions became less important, later Puritans defined religion, out of necessity, not as a way of worship but as a way of living. While the founders of New England insisted that men must live piously and do good unto others, they denied that that was the true meaning of religion; for them America was a city on a hill only because it had taken up a covenant with God with the purpose of reforming the Protestant

Church.

By the time of Edwards, the vision of the founders had become a distinct anachronism. New England society bore little resemblance to a covenanted community. There remained, of course, a few clergymen for whom federal theology continued to have some meaning; generally the survivors of an older generation than the partisans of the revival, they persisted in defining America's destiny in terms of its covenant with God, and in chastising New England for defaulting on the terms of its covenant. But for most New Englanders, Edwards had effectively demolished the covenant in theory, even though it had already perished in fact.

Puritan ministers began the arduous task of reassigning America a mission long before Edwards, however. When Cotton Mather recognized that the purpose of the original exodus was all but forgotten, he attempted to salvage the city on a hill by basing the Kingdom not on election but on do-good. Even Mather was more concerned with affairs of this world than with the New Jerusalem; he wrote that the motto on the gates of the holy city was: "None but the Lovers of Good Works to enter here."¹ For Edwards the task was far easier, for by that time there was little doubt about America's future. For Edwards, the revival gave compelling

¹Quoted in Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World, American Culture: The Formative Years (1952 repr.; New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 205.

evidence that "The latter-day glory, is probably to begin in America," and he in effect made the Great Awakening America's declaration of independence from Europe. "When God is about to turn the earth into a Paradise," he wrote, "he does not begin his work where there is some good growth already, but in a wilderness." The Old World had had its chance, but wasted it. Therefore God opened up the New World to mankind in order "to make way for the introduction of the church's latter day glory, that is to have its first seat in, and is to take its rise from that new world."²

What made it possible for post-Awakening Protestants to cling so tenaciously to a belief in the coming Kingdom was the tendency of millennialism to guarantee endless progress for America. The eschatology of Winthrop and Cotton gave America a world-historical mission; the eschatology of the Awakening put religion in step with the progressive march of the eighteenth century. In short, the spirit aroused in 1740, even in 1630, was the spirit of American nationalism.

²Edwards, Thoughts on the Revival, in Works, III, p. 315.

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