



The Puritan Vision for New England

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The Puritan Party in the Church of England: formed in opposition to the “Elizabethan Solution” to the church conflicts following the accession of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) as Queen of England. Kings James I (1603-1625) and Charles I (1625-1641) continue the policy, with persecution of non-conformity especially under Charles I.

The Mayflower and Plymouth Colony 1620

The Migration of 1630 and the Massachusetts Bay Colony



John Winthrop

1588-1649

“A Model of Christian Charity”

John Winthrop, Aboard the ship Arabella, 1630

[Winthrop begins with the providential diversity of material wealth or lack of it among human beings to the end that all may work together, and with the biblical reminder that all wealth belongs to God.]

There are two rules whereby we are to walk towards another: Justice and Mercy. ...There is likewise a double Law by which we are regulated in our conversation towards another. ... By the first of these laws, one...is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Upon this ground stands all the precepts of the moral laws, which concern our dealings with others.

To apply this to the works of mercy: this law requires two things. First that every person afford his help to another in every want or distress. Secondly, that he perform this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own goods, according to that of our Savior (Math. 7:12), whatsoever ye would that men should do to you. ...

Thirdly, the Gospel commands love to an enemy... Lastly, when there is no other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved of his distress, we must help him beyond our ability... This duty of mercy is exercised in the kinds [of] giving, lending and forgiving of a debt.

What rule shall one follow in giving in respect of measure? If the time and occasion be ordinary he is to give out of abundance. Let him lay aside as God hath blessed him. If the time and occasion be extraordinary, he must be ruled by them; taking this withal, that then a man cannot likely do too much, especially if he may leave [keep] himself and his family under probable means of comfortable subsistence.

What rule must we observe in lending? Thou must observe whether thy brother hath present or probable or possible means of repaying thee, if there be none of those, thou must give him according to his necessity, rather than lend him as he requires. If he hath present means of repaying thee, thou art to look at him not as an act of mercy, but by way of commerce, where thou art to walk by the rule of justice; but if his means of repaying thee be only probable or possible, then is he an object of thy mercy.

If he hath nothing to pay thee, thou must forgive. ... In all these and like cases, Christ gives a general rule (Math. 7:22), “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye the same to them.” ... The affection from which this mercy arise is, as the Apostle tells us, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

Ye are the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). ... all the parts of this body are made so contiguous...as they must partake of each other's strength and infirmity, joy and sorrow, weal and woe. ... This sensitivity and sympathy of each other's conditions will necessarily infuse into each part a desire and endeavor to strengthen, defend, preserve and comfort the other.

The end of our undertaking is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord; the comfort and increase of the body of Christ, whereof we are the members; that ourselves and posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world, to serve the Lord and work out our salvation under the power and purity of his holy ordinances.

We must love one another with pure heart. We must bear one another's burdens. ... Neither must we think that the Lord will bear with such failings at our hands as the doth from those among whom we have lived [previously, in England].

Thus stands the cause between God and us. We are entered into a covenant with Him for this work. ... The Lord hath given us leave to draw our own articles. We have hereupon besought Him of favor and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath he ratified this covenant...

But if we shall neglect the observation of these articles...and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will sure break out in wrath against us...and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the council of Micah [6:8], to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end...we must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of other's necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality.

We must delight in each other; make other's conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together... So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways. ...

He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding endeavors, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.”

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.

[The sermon closes with reference to Deuteronomy 30, the last exhortation of Moses: the people now have the choice for life, meaning obedience that God will bless; or the choice for death, which means disobedience and the consequence of worshiping other gods.]

Therefore let us choose life that we, and our seed, may live by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity.

