DISCLAIMER SHEET

The Puritan Mind
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University of Michigan Press

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The events which were taking place in Europe and which led to the founding of the American colonies were of too great a magnitude not to arouse the philosophic imaginations of those who participated in them, provided they had any imagination at all. There were those, of course, who broke loose from all their civilized ties, embarked on a perilous ocean, disembarked in a howling wilderness, established themselves there, experienced a thousand dangers, joys, discoveries, and disappointments without giving the whole process a thought. Many were too excited to think, but more were too busy or too blindly driven. There were some, however, whose imaginations were kindled and for whom all these events fitted neatly into an outline of history. Among these men the clergy were pre-eminent, for in those days it was the clergy who were the professional outliners of history, and the revealers of what in our day is called the grand strategy of evolution, but what in theirs was called the economy of human redemption. History always has been one of the primary playgrounds of the philosophic imagination, and the interest in it has always been primarily pragmatic. Even today, when there is a small class of scientific historians who approach history as other natural scientists approach their subject-matters, and who have succeeded in illuminating historic events by discovering their natural causes, the general interest in their discoveries is still philosophic. We still seek lessons in

1 Captain Edward Johnson: *A History of New England, or Wonde-working Providence of Sions Saviour* (London, 1654). In Albert Bush-
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out of the facts and records of experience in so far as these have been discovered to us. But the so-called facts and records which were available in the seventeenth century were radically different, and the resultant picture of history was also radically different. Its main outlines were derived from Jewish folk-lore and Hellenic mysticism, the former of which was mistaken for history and the latter for science. According to it, history began in the mind of God, and its structure was essentially moral and dramatic, being the familiar story of the revolt of subjects against their sovereign. The final act, or, as the Puritans called it, the last period, was already far spent. Soon history would give place to final judgment and moral perfection; the villains would be eternally damned, and the heroes eternally united to God, their author and end. Thus to all eternity this epic of God's glory would be recited and admired by God and by all rational creatures who could appreciate dramatic beauty and moral justice.

The general course of this process had been described by Saint Augustine in his *City of God*, but much work still remained to be done on details. Saint Augustine had identified the City of God with the whole body of saints, visible and invisible, under Christ, their heavenly king; this body of saints was easily identified with the church of Christ, and this church, in so far as it was embodied on earth, soon came to be identified with the holy catholic church, and the holy catholic church with the Roman Catholic Church. As long as the Roman Church and the Roman Empire were working
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together, and as long as their chief task was one of
subjecting and civilizing barbarians, this interpretation
of history was quite adequate and plausible. Church
and empire were not unnaturally regarded as strug-
gling for the redemption of man against the sundry
heathen whom the Prince of Darkness kept benighted.
But as the struggle changed into a rivalry between the
church and the kings of the newly forming nations,
the church was forced to fight, not heathen hordes, but
powerful princes who called themselves Christian. At
this crisis the Apocalypse of St. John came to the rescue
with its prophecy of the Anti-Christ. At last the Anti-
Christ had appeared! To the subjects of the pope, the
king was Anti-Christ, and naturally to the subjects of
the king, the pope was Anti-Christ. However, though
the Protestant princes were quite willing to accept the
theory that the Anti-Christ resided at Rome, and
though they did not hesitate to claim a direct, divine
right to rule, which from the fall of the Empire the
pope had regarded as his exclusive privilege to bestow
on those princes who recognized the supremacy of
the spiritual kingdom, nevertheless they lacked the
temper to proclaim their own kingdoms to be the
City of God. It is true Hobbes’ Leviathan almost de-
ified the state, but Hobbes’ prime concern was to put
the state on a purely secular basis. Hobbes was, in
effect, undermining the whole scheme of the City of
God, and though he protested against being styled an
atheist, he was naturally feared as such, since neither
Protestants nor Catholics were ready to accept a theory

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of the state which was merely temporal or secular, and
which left out of account the fundamental plot of
human redemption. Few objected to his absolutism
but all to his secularism. Richard Baxter, for example,
 wrote: “That Hobbs his Leviathan, or way of absolute
Impious Monarchy, . . . tendeth not to secure us of a
Righteous Government, is a point that needeth no
proof with any reasonable man; were it but because the
irreligious Author pretendeth not to any such thing as
the securing a succession of the Christian Religion,
without which a Righteous Government is not to be
expected.”

In all this both Papist and Protestant agreed, and
precisely because they agreed in theory and differed
merely in practical application, they were reduced to
such ad hominem arguments as “Anti-Christ,” “whore
of Babylon,” and similar mutual vituperation. Theo-
retically the same is true of the conflict between the
Anglicans and the Puritans. Both believed that the
state should be maintained in the interest of the City
of God, or the church, but in practice they could not
agree on what constituted the true church. However
on the part of the Anglicans this was the merest theory.
An Englishman always has a saving sense of humor
and a practical ability to compromise. He knew and
privately admitted that the English monarchy was not
the City of God and never would be. He knew that
both the British state and the Anglican Church were in
fact secular in origin and aim. He accepted the estab-

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Thechad church so long as it was merely an establishment of the state. He gladly celebrated the religious mysteries, for as such they did not interfere with his secular privileges. In that he was a pious man of the world. Both the Lords Spiritual and the Lords Temporal, though professedly citizens of two distinct cities, were really just English lords and acted accordingly. This balance of worldly wisdom and spiritual hypocrisy, which is largely responsible for the charm of English society and the prosperity of the English nation, was temporarily upset by the Puritans, though they themselves soon recovered it when they became comfortably established in New England. In Old England these aggressive middle-class favorites of God, being both socially and intellectually nouveaux riches, lost their traditional balance and sense of humor, and ventured to hope that England might soon become the City of God.

Richard Baxter, one of the boldest of them all, at last took this final step in Protestant philosophy of history and argued that even the British Commonwealth should be turned into a Holy Commonwealth, and in general that the civil state should be identical with the church, the visible City of God. His treatise, A Holy Commonwealth (1659), is a consistent, clear exposition of the whole theory. He writes:

"Thes. 24. The world is a Kingdom whereof God is the King, ... an absolute Monarchy ... by the Title of Creation. ..."

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Thes. 26. God is the end, as well as the beginning of the divine Monarchy of the world. ... Thes. 28. All men as men are the subjects of God's Kingdom, as to Obligations and Duty, and God will not ask the consent of any man to be so obliged. ... Thes. 46. A Common-wealth properly so-called is ... the Government of a Society of God's Subjects by a Sovereign subordinate to God, for the common good, and the Glory, and pleasing of God. ... Thes. 58. That is the best form of Government to this or that people, that all things considered, doth most powerfully tend to their spiritual and everlasting welfare, and their Holiness, Obedience, and pleasing of God. ... Thes. 74. Of all the three ordinary forms of Government, Democracy is to most people, and usually the worst. ... Thes. 192. The more Theocratical, or truly Divine any Government is, the better it is. ... Thes. 204. In a Divine Common-wealth, Holiness must have the principal honour and encouragement, and a great difference be made between the precious and the vile. ... Thes. 205. By this it appeareth that in a true Theocracy, or Divine Common-wealth, the Matter of the Church and Common-wealth should be altogether or almost the same, though the form of them and administrations are different. ... Thes. 214. The Moral Qualifications of Electors must be this, that no man choose but those that have pub-
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licly owned the Baptismal Covenant, personally, deliberately and seriously, taking the Lord for their only God, even the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and that lyeth not under the guilt of any of those sins for which God would have men put to death or cut off from his people . . . viz., for Blasphemy, Idolatry, persuading to Idolatry, Murder, Manstealing, Incest, Sodomy, Adultery, presumptuous sinning, and obstinate refusing to obey Magistrate, Priest, or Parent, in case of Gluttony, Drunkenness, and the like; and all such as would not seek the Lord: all wizzards, and that turn after wizzards, and more such like, which may easily be collected.

Thes. 206. It is this Theocratical Policy or Divine Common-wealth, which is the unquestionable reign of Christ on earth, which all Christians are agreed may be justly sought; and that temporal dignity of Saints, which undoubtedly would much bless the world."

All this was obviously fantastic in England. The British Commonwealth was after all British, not holy, even under Cromwell, and only a Puritan Roundhead could ever have hoped to turn it into a City of God. Even Baxter discovered his folly before he had finished the book. On April 25, 1659, he wrote: "When I had gone thus far, and was about to proceed a little further, the sudden News of the Armies Representation, and of the dissolving of the Parliament, and of the displeasure against my Book against Popery,

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called, *A Key for Catholicks*, and some other passages, interrupted me, and cast me upon these Meditations and Lamentations following. . . . I see more and more, how impossible it is, that honest, plain, and faithful dealing, in Ministers or others, should ordinarily find acceptance in the world! We must expect to displease God or men. . . . My God! I am satisfied! May I please thee, I have enough. . . . *Not my will, but thy will be done."

Thus ended the Holy Commonwealth in England. But in New England the case was quite different. What was sheer fantasy in England appeared to be a practical and literal reality in New England, for here the clergy were, as a matter of fact, the first citizens and leading spirits; here the social and political life centered about the various settlements and these settlements were organized into congregations. The magistrates were usually little more than sheriffs in the hands of the clergy. There was general agreement, at least in the first few decades, on fundamental religious and moral matters. The Puritan ideal, as Baxter described it above, was in New England more than an ideal; it was the professed rule of practice. Here the Holy Commonwealth seemed actually to have been established, and Baxter's treatise became almost a written constitution.

But even in New England the conception of the Holy Commonwealth was only gradually built up, and became generally accepted only as the course of events

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8 Baxter, pp. 491, 512, 513, 517.
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seemed to favor it. Its foundations are usually attributed to Calvin; and it is true, Calvin was primarily responsible for formulating the fundamental political ideas of the English Puritans, but the theory which is distinctive of New England theocratic thought has little to do immediately with Calvin; in fact, it was developed in opposition to Presbyterian as well as to Anglican theories of church government. The basis for the Congregational theory is to be found in Doctor William Ames, Robert Parker, and the Parisian School. Parker, in his De Politeia Ecclesiastica Christi et Hierarchia opposita libri tres, published in Holland in 1616, maintained that "the visible church instituted by Christ and his Apostles to which the keys are given, is not a Diocesan or Provincial or National Assembly but a particular congregation." 8 John Cotton's The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven popularized this doctrine in New England, and when Rutherford replied by a defense of Presbyterian government, Thomas Hooker of Hartford wrote, in 1645, his famous Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, "wherein the Way of the Congregational Churches of Christ in New England is warranted and all exceptions of weight made against it by sundry learned divines ... are fully answered. Whereby it will appear to the judicious reader, that something more must be said than yet hath been, before their Principles can be shaken,


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or they unsettled in their practice." These treatises, together with the Cambridge Platform adopted by the Synod of 1648, became the authoritative expositions of the theory in New England.

In these writings three covenants are discussed, all three of them in theory quite distinct but in practice closely allied: the Covenant of Grace, the Church Covenant, and the Civil Covenant. The Covenant of Grace is the invisible church of saints by calling, the whole body of God's elect. They are united to Christ, their head, by spiritual ties, by faith, and by the free grace of God, whereby they are justified and sanctified. God only knows infallibly who are saints and who not. The Church Covenant, or visible church, is a visible political union of saints. It is the duty of every saint to join a church, for, as Hooker put it, though the saints constitute the matter of Christ's Kingdom, its form is only by mutual covenant. 6 It was consequently necessary to set up some practical and human basis for segregating saints and sinners. For purposes of Church Covenant, therefore, saints were "such as have not only attained the knowledge of the principles of Religion, and are free from gros and open scandals, but also do together with the profession of their faith and repentance, walk in blameless obedience to the word, so as that in charitable discretion they may be

6 "This Form is the Visible Covenant, agreement, or consent whereby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society, which is usually called the Church-Covenant; For we see not otherwise how members can have Church-power one over another mutually." The Cambridge Platform, Ch. IV, Par. 3.
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accounted Saints by calling (though perhaps some or more of them be unsound, and hypocrites inwardly).”

This, it was thought, was a fairly reliable criterion; accordingly the churches, in order to safeguard themselves against hypocrites and offensive and scandalous persons, made an elaborate and explicit statement of the experience of redeeming grace in their souls a prerequisite for all church members. The following description of this process by Lechford appears to be substantially true:

“When a man or woman commeth to joyne unto the Church so gathered, he or she commeth to the Elders in private. . . . And if they satisfie the Elders, and the private assembly, . . . that they are true beleevers, that they have bee wounded in their hearts for their original sinne, and actall transgressions, and can pitch upon some promise of free grace in the Scripture, for the ground of their faith, and that they finde their hearts drawne to beleve in Christ Jesus, for their justification and salvation, and these in the ministerie of the Word, reading or conference: and that they know competently the summe of Christian faith. And sometimes, though they be not come to a full assurance of their good estate in Christ. Then afterwards, in convenient time, in the publique assembly of the Church, . . . the Elder turneth his speech to the party to be admitted, and requireth him, or sometimes asketh him, if he be willing to make knowne to the congrega
tion the work of grace upon his soule; and biddeth him, as

8 Thomas Lechford: Plain Dealing (1662 edition), pp. 18-33.
9 Concerning these, Cotton Mather comments: “The Jews tell us of . . . a Scare-Crow upon the top of the Temple, which kept off the fowls from defiling of it; and it hath been the Opinion of many that this Custom of Relations, to be made by Candidates for Admission to the Church, of what operations of the regenerating spirit have been upon their souls . . . is as a Scare-crow to keep men out of the Temple; but, it may be, it has been the Opinion of as many, that none but the Defilers of the Temple would be kept out by such a Scare-crow.” Cotton Mather: Magnalia Christi Americana (London, 1702), Bk. V, Ch. XVII, “Historical Remarks,” Sec. 6.

7 The Cambridge Platform, Ch. III, Par. 1.
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Those who remained outside of the Church Covenant, though they attended church regularly, were spoken of as the unregenerate, so that for all practical purposes the invisible and the visible churches came to be identified. Lechford states that "many good people scruple their Church Covenant, so highly tarred by the most of them, a part of the Covenant of grace." 10 And no doubt this was the practical attitude of the churches, though in strict theory the two covenants were held to be separate. Hooker spoke of churches as "little kingdoms or cities of Christ," and Governor Bradford, speaking of the founding of the Plymouth church, said: "The Lords free people, joyned themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in the felowship of the gospell." 11 The text of the Covenant of the church of Salem is also good evidence of the practical unity of the two covenants in the minds of the early settlers:

"We covenant with our Lord, and one with another; and we do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his ways, according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed word of truth; and do explicitly, in the name and fear of God, profess and protest to walk as followeth, through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We avouch the Lord to be our God, and ourselves to be his people, in the truth and simplicity of our spirits. We resolve to approve ourselves to the Lord in our particular callings; shunning idleness as the bane of any state; nor will we deal hardly or oppressingly with any, wherein we are the Lord's stewards. Promising also unto our best ability to teach our children, and servants the knowledge of God, and of His Will, that they may serve Him also; and all this not by any strength of our own, but by the Lord Christ: whose blood we desire may sprinkle this our Covenant made in His name."

Cotton Mather, who cites this covenant in his Magnalia, immediately adds, "By this instrument was the Covenant of Grace explained, received, and recognized, by the first Church in this Colony, and applied unto the evangelical designs of a Church-estate before the Lord." 12 This indicates that he, too, at a much later date, regarded the Church Covenant as a Covenant of Grace.

As to the third covenant, civil government, here again in theory church and state were distinct, but in practice not. Theoretically God set up ministers to declare his will and magistrates to execute it; ministers had authority to counsel, advise and admonish; magistrates to command, judge and punish. But in reality the civil compact was merely the physical enforcement and public advancement of whatever the churches desired. Religion was not a department or phase of social life; it was the end and aim of all life; and to it, consequently, all institutions were subordinated. The Cambridge Platform gives formal expression to this doctrine: "Church-government stands in no oppo-

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10 Lechford, pp. 56-7.
12 Mather: Magnalia, Bk. I, Ch. III, Sec. 6.
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sition to civil government of common wealths, nor any
intrencheth upon the authority of Civil Magistrates in
their jurisdictions; . . . It is not in the power of Mag-
istrates to compel their subjects to become church
members,' . . . As it is unlawful for church officers to
meddle with the sword of the Magistrate, so it is un-
lawful for the Magistrate to meddle with the work
proper to church-officers.”

Having made this distinction, the Platform immedi-
ately proceeds to obscure it as follows: “It is the duty
of the Magistrate, to take care of matters of religion,
and to improve his civil authority for the observing
of the duties commanded in the second table. They are
called God’s. The end of the Magistrate’s office, is not
only the quiet and peaceable life of the subject, in
matters of righteousness and honesty, but also in matters
of godliness, yea of all godliness.”

Thus it is evident that in practice, and to a large
extent even in theory, the three covenants were really
one. The Church Covenant gave form to the Cove-

18 The Cambridge Platform, Ch. XVII, Secs. 2, 4, 5.
14 “The object of the power of the Magistrate, are not things meere in-
ward, and so not subject to his cogniscence and view, as unbeliefe, hard-
ness of heart, erronious opinions not vented; but only such things as are acted
by the outward man; neither is their power to be exercised, in command-
ing such acts of the outward man, and punishing the neglect thereof, as
are but meer inventions, and devices of men; but about such acts, as are
commanded and forbidden in the word; yea such as the word doth clearly
determine, though not alwayes clearly to the judgment of the Magistrate or
others, yet clearly in itselfe. In these he of right ought to putt forth his
authority, though oft-times actually he doth it not. Idolatr...” The Cam-
bridge Platform, Ch. XVII, Secs. 6, 7, 8.

nent of Grace, and the Civil Covenant gave power to
the Church Covenant. Society in New England was
actually organized, as Baxter said it should be, into a
Holy Commonwealth.

In fact, while Baxter was writing his treatise in Eng-
land, the Reverend John Eliot, of Roxbury, Massa-
chusetts, was writing his Christian Commonwealth:
or, The Civil Polity of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus
Christ, which was the most radical treatise of all. He
advocated a system of unified administration, modelled
on the scriptural system of the ancient Israelites, under
God, the supreme king.

The details of Eliot’s scheme of government were
quite impractical, and even had the Restoration not
caused him, at the order of the General Court of
Massachusetts, to suppress his book because he had
said harsh words about all earthly kings, it would
scarcely have become the practical guide that Baxter’s

18 According to him the substance of the covenant by which a people
subject themselves unto the Lord, to be ruled by him in all things, is this:
“That they do humbly confess their corruption by nature, and lost condi-
tion; that they acknowledge the free grace of God, in their redemption by
Christ, and in the promulgation of the Gospel unto them, and making
application thereof effectually unto their souls; and therefore the Lord hath
shewed his everlasting Love unto them, and caused them inwardly by
faith, to give up themselves, unto him, to be forever his, to love, serve,
and obey him, in all his Word and Commandments: so now, they do out-
wardly, and solemnly with the rest of God’s people join together so to do
in their Civil Polity, receiving from the Lord both the platform of their
Civil Government, as it is set down (in the essentials of it) in the holy
Scriptures; and also their Laws, which they resolve through his grace, to
 fetched out of the Word of God making that their only Magna Charta;
and accounting no Law, Statute or Judgement valid, farther than it
appeareth to arise and flow from the Word of God.” John Eliot: The
Christian Commonwealth (London, 1669), Ch. 1, Par. 2. In Massachusetts
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was. Nevertheless his general theory was quite typical and expressed the basic ideas of Puritan thought.

The appeal to Biblical authority was a consequence, rather than a cause, of these ideas. To be sure, the Puritans were in the habit of calling their convictions Biblical just as we call ours scientific, but this was little more than an official sanction or divine rubber-stamp. The Bible, no less than science, is sufficiently flexible to sanction whatever it is supposed to sanction. The Puritans, searching the Scriptures for texts relevant to their own particular needs, soon discovered the general similarity between themselves and the ancient Israelites. The Lord had obviously chosen them, as he had the children of Israel, to carry out his plans for the redemption of the world. They had been driven from their homes into a wilderness, not out of punishment, but for the sake of building a promised land. The chief difference between them and the ancient Hebrews, as they saw it, was that they were called upon to make a promised land out of the very wilderness itself. It would be difficult to understand how a tradition as foreign as the Hebraic account of history could be so firmly implanted in American soil, had it not possessed an initial relevancy and moral vitality. The Puritans' constant preoccupation with the Old Testament and the Mosaic law was not merely a consequence of their belief in the authority of sacred scriptures; it was rather the natural turning for comfort and counsel to a people who seemed to have undergone a similar experience. They turned to Jewish law, as they

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did to their English common law, as a definite working basis and precedent for their own institutions, preference being given usually to the Mosaic code where it was at all workable, since it was constructed on a theocratic basis and adapted to the wilderness. Only the remoteness in time and space of the ancient Israelites, and the consequent cultural difficulties in applying the Mosaic law, prevented Puritan law from becoming more Jewish and less English than it actually turned out to be. But even when their actual laws were quite thoroughly English, the sanction which attached to them was frequently that of the Law of the Lord, together with the confidence and awe which that Law inspired. Not only their laws but all their institutions were thus given a sanctity which only a Biblical commonwealth could command, and there prevailed a general confidence in the success of their adventure which a less historical philosophy could hardly have engendered. The belief in their divine election for a great work soon ceased to be a mere faith and came to be regarded as an empirical fact. Accordingly, when Baxter's treatise was imported into New England, it was immediately recognized as a complete exposition of what New England professed to be, and it merely remained for the clergy to expound and celebrate the grand doctrine.

This idea of the Holy Commonwealth made it easy for the Puritans to bring their philosophy of history up to date. God was evidently merely completing the
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work which he began in the Reformation. Of the three traditional offices of the Savior, Hooker tells us the prophetical office had been established by the early reformers, the priestly office by Luther; it remained for Christ to establish his kingly office, the office which Anti-Christ had most successfully obstructed.

"These are the times drawing on, wherein prophecies are to attain their performances: . . . These are the times, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters the sea; . . . These are the times when people shall be fitted for such privileges, fit I say to obtain them, and fit to use them. . . . Now the Lord will write his laws in their hearts, and put it into their inward parts, and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, for they shall all know me, from the least of them, to the greatest of them. . . . This being the season, when all the kingdoms of the world, are becoming the Lord's and his Christ's; and to this purpose he is taking to himself his great might, which heretofore he seemed to lay aside. . . . This present term of God's patience promiseth some allowance to his people, . . . to take leave, to lay claim to the privileges, which they have conceived to be part of the legacy bequeathed unto them by the Lord Jesus, being estated and entitled members of the visible Kingdom of his Church."

This proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of

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Christ was in effect a declaration of independence of all earthly authority. Theocracy was, humanly speaking, synonymous with the democracy of the elect; and this democracy, if we may take the above passage from Hooker seriously, was expected to lead soon to a holy anarchy, when men will obey the laws of God written in their hearts and "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour." This was the essence of Christian liberty, the liberty to be subject only to Christ. Samuel Mather, in his *Apology for the Liberties of the Churches in New England*, called it the liberty of the laity. The keys of the Kingdom were in the hands of the members of particular congregations. Hitherto the keys of the Kingdom had been passed on, supposedly from Christ to his Apostles, from Apostles to popes, from popes to prelates, and from prelates to priests. Even in the Protestant churches, ministers were ordained *von oben herab*, with much ceremony and under the pomp and display of a hierarchy of authority. Imagine, then, the thrill, or even the shudder, which must have passed through those who took part in the following scene, described by Charles Gott, of Salem, in a letter to Governor Bradford of Plymouth:

"The 26th of July, it pleased the Lord to move the heart of our Governor to set it apart for a solemn day of humiliation, for the choice of a pastor and teacher. . . . (Their choice was after this manner: every fit member wrote, in a note, his name whom the Lord moved him to think was fit for a pastor, and so like-
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wise, whom they would have for teacher; so the most voice was for Mr. Skelton to be Pastor, and Mr. Higginson to be Teacher;) So Mr. Skelton was chosen pastor and Mr. Higginson to be teacher; and they accepting the choice, Mr. Higginson, with three or four of the gravest members of the Church, laid their hands on Mr. Skelton, using prayer therewith. This being done, there was imposition of hands on Mr. Higginson also. (Then there was proceeding in election of elders and deacons, but they were only named, and laying on of hands deferred, to see if it pleased God to send us more able men over.)"18

The sacred office of imposition of hands, which for centuries had been the exclusive privilege of popes and bishops, was here performed by a few pioneer farmers. No wonder some looked upon it as a most monstrous sacrilege, and others as an exhibition of the wondernworking Providence in New England. Literally, vox populi was vox dei. Prometheus himself, when he stole Jove's fire, showed no more daring in the face of God than these simple, grave farmers, when they themselves selected and ordained their ministers, "called of God." In fact, the theocracy was, from the point of view of the elect, both in theory and practice an assertion of liberty and democracy. From the point of view of the unregenerate, of course, this monarchy of God was the most thorough-going tyranny imaginable; but with the unregenerate we are not now concerned,

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for this philosophy was first of all a philosophy of the elect, erected for their own liberty, enlightenment and consolation, and only later became a halo for overawing the unregenerate.

Nothing seemed more evident to the minds of the Puritans than that God was actually taking a hand in establishing his kingdom on earth. "The God of Heaven had carried a nation into a wilderness upon the designs of a glorious reformation." 19

The whole meaning and purpose of these events burst upon their imagination. It was God who had elected them by his sovereign grace and to his own glory; it was God who had sent them into the howling wilderness; and it was God's glory and Christ's kingship that was being manifested in them. 20

And Cotton Mather, whose *Magna Christi Americana* represents the culmination and classic expression

19 Mather: Magnalia, Bk. III, Sec. 1.

20 "It hath been deservedly esteemed one of the great and wonderful works of God in this last age, that the Lord stirred up the spirits of so many thousands of his servants, to leave the pleasant land of England, the land of their nativity, and to transport themselves, and families, over the ocean sea, into a desert land in America, at the distance of a thousand leagues from their own country; and this, merely on the account of pure and undefiled religion, not knowing how they should have their daily bread, but trusting in God for that, in the way of seeking first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof! And that the Lord was pleased to grant such a gracious presence of his with them, and such a blessing upon their undertakings, that within a few years a wilderness was subdued before them... Surely of this work and of this time, it shall be said, what hath God wrought? And, this is the Lord's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes! Even so (O Lord) didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name!... For the Lord our God hath in his infinite wisdom, grace, and holiness, contrived and established his covenant, so as he will be the God of his people, and of their seed with them, and after them, in their generations; and in the ministerial dispensation of the covenant of grace, in, with and to his visible church." John Higginson: Preface to Cotton Mather's *Magna Christi Americana*.

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of this philosophy, ventured to prophesy: "Tis possible, that our Lord Jesus Christ carried some thousands of Reformers into the retirements of an American desert, on purpose, that, with an opportunity granted unto many of his faithful servants, to enjoy the precious liberty of their ministry, though in the midst of many temptations all their days, He might there, to them first, and then by them, give a specimen of many good things, which He would have His Churches elsewhere aspire and arise unto: and this being done, he knows not whether there be not all done, that New England was planted for; and whether the Plantation may not, soon after this, come to nothing." 21

All this seemed to the Puritan thinkers so clear that, as Cotton Mather said, "'tis nothing but Atheism in the hearts of men, that can persuade them otherwise." 22 And they believed in it as a thing of which they were eye-witnesses. In fact, Cotton Mather describes the leaders of New England as actors in a divine drama. God, they imagined, had elected them from all eternity to play just this rôle, and the assurance of their election and of the dignity and importance of their parts led to such acting as has seldom been seen on the stage of history—such exuberance and whole-hearted devotion at the first, and then, as their rôle became apparently more tragic, such heroic intensity and strutting pride—surely none but a supernatural explanation can do it justice!

21 Magnalia, General Introduction, Par. 3.
22 Ibid., Par. 4.

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Nor was this philosophy merely a rhetorical device by which the ministers embellished their sermons; it seems to have pervaded the daily actions of common people. Here, for instance, is a piece of pious exultation on the part of an ordinary sea captain:

"It was God that did draw me by his Providence out of my Father's family, and weaned me from it by degrees; it was God put into my heart to incline to live abroad; and it was God that made my Father willing. God by His Providence brought me near Mr. Warham, and inclined my heart to his Ministry, God by his Providence moved the Heart of my Master Mossiour to ask me whether I would go to New England: It was God by his Providence that made me willing to leave my dear Father, and dear brethren and sisters, my dear friends and Country: It was God that made my Father willing upon the first motion I made in person, to let me go: It was God that sent Mr. Maverick that pious Minister to me, who was unknown to him, to seek me out that I might come hither. So God brought me out of Plymouth the 20th of March in the Year, 1629, 30, and landed me in health at Nantasket, on the 30th of May—1630, I being then about the age of twenty-one years. Blessed be God that brought me here!" 23

Evidently the philosophy of God's sovereignty and of divine predestination afforded no small comfort and stimulus to these early settlers. Many an Ameri-
can colony had started under more favorable auspices than those of New England and had suffered collapse. Even an optimistic sociologist would probably have predicted failure for the pilgrims. With little support from the mother country, and no material resources of their own, they faced a severe climate and a howling wilderness. How much the consciousness that they were not ultimately responsible, that they were being led by a greater power, had to do with their success is difficult to tell. It has no doubt been exaggerated by past historians and is probably underestimated by those of today. Certainly it is little short of a miracle of human discipline and energy that in the face of circumstances that would have baffled and ruined most adventurers, these Puritans not only made themselves physically secure, but in addition began immediately to lay the foundations of government, education, thought and literature which, though provincial, yet far outshone the achievements of any other colony, and made New England the intellectual leader of the nation. New England, of course, as even New Englanders now admit, turned out to be anything but holy; nevertheless, it is quite possible that, but for the idea of the Holy Commonwealth, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would not have been established. However that may be, the case of New England is, at least, a significant proof that the doctrine that man is not a free agent, that he is merely an actor in a cosmic drama, playing a predetermined rôle, may be a more powerful stimulus to extreme effort and a more moral