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Christ and Culture (Second Part)

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IV. Cotton Mather

Cotton Mather, perhaps the most well-known Puritan preacher of the third generation, retained a view of scripture which was uncompromisingly literal. His diaries explain, for instance, that when he read that David's playing the harp chased an evil spirit from Saul, Mather questioned "whether a sermon . . . should with an agreeable Artifice employ the Harp of *David* . . . to chase away such evil Spirits."¹ In Mather, this literal view of the Bible's record prompts an internal struggle between the sweet assurances of salvation and the odious fear of damnation. In his diaries at least, Mather's internal battles illustrate that the

struggle for the assurance of grace is a uniquely personal conflict. Unlike Winthrop, Mather seems unconcerned about the application of Biblical authority to cultural institutions; instead the battle lines stretch only so far as the perimeter of his own soul. Mather's diary shows him to be a *dualist*, a man concerned primarily with powers of the Lord and of the Devil as they conflict within him.

Piety, reverential devotion to God, is the central doctrine in Mather's canon. Mather himself defines *piety* in a circuitous way in a sermon note:

With what Revived and opened and sharpened Eyes, and how filled with

Tears of Joy, may we read the Gospel of our Jesus *obtaining eternal redemption* for us. To think all along, *I was in my Jesus, when he did these glorious Things!* This is a Flight of PIETY. (II, 717)

Piety, to Mather, is the contemplation of heavenly things and the practice of a sanctified holiness in one's life. In Mather, rarely does the practice of piety move out from the individual soul and into the world.

The diary is full of Mather's accounts of his frequent face-in-the-dust agonizing. Already a veteran preacher in 1718, he writes this meditation concerning one Saturday night's ritual:

Things appear'd unto me, as if the holy God, were coming forth, to take a terrible Vengeance on me, for the Sins which my life has been filled withal; yea, and as if my Death being at hand, I am to dy in ill terms with Heaven, and have the dreadful Portion of the Hypocrites assign'd unto me.

Oh! the inexpressible Agony, wherewith I now cried unto the Lord. (II, 534-35)

This meditation goes on to point at a reconciliation with God, but the fervor which Mather reaches in expressing the agonies of his doubt shows the reality of his struggle. The intensity in these frequent confessions illustrates how deeply Mather concerned himself with the state of his own soul.

Nowhere in the diary does Mather stop his personal meditations at a point where he is left unconvinced of his own salvation. Each time he opens himself and his alleged sin to the Creator (and the reader), he notes the act of justification reoccurring within him. But it is this pattern of guilt, doubt, and final reassurance that is the central theme of the pages of the diary, and it is Mather's near obsession with the state of his own soul, as well as the souls of his friends, servants, and family, which appears to dominate Mather's

life.

His own children, for instance, manage mention only insofar as they are objects of his evangelization. Mather resolves to inculcate personal piety in his children:

Praefatory to the evening Sacrifices in my Family, I would have two of the younger Children alternately to read a Paragraph, in a poetical History of the Bible, until the Book be gone through, and I would make some agreeable Remarks upon it, for their instruction. (II, 193)

Just a month later, Mather resolves to work even harder:

But I would also in the Conclusion of the Exercise, in a catechetical Way single out great Points of practical Piety, and go thro' the same. . . such as, the Improvement of the Baptismal Covenant, the way of entering into a Covenant with God, the Nature of true conversion. A thorough Preparation for Death. And the like. (II, 201)

The point is not to ridicule Mather for his parental skills, but to view the emphasis he placed on his children's salvation and the lack of concern for any other parts of their lives. Especially in his later years Mather seems to be possessed by a fear of his children's turning from what he would consider true discipleship. But the concern is a direct result of his own *dualist* vision of things: the conflict is central to his existence—his personal salvation. The world and its concerns—cultural, governmental, all else—is neglected in the diaries. Piety—here the piety of his children—is all important. His children become the objects of his own salvation shell game, exclusively regarded as the saved and the damned, never simply children.

A secondary motivation for his concern for his children's salvation is the potential

for harm to the image that he himself carries in Boston. It is this placement of self at the center of cosmic action that is the most clear indication of Mather's *dualist* thinking. Everything which occurs in his world reflects in some way on Mather's assessment of his own spiritual condition. Thus, the world becomes one vast parable in his own spiritual quest. It is this characteristic which allows him to say that his daughter's death will be good for him, because he feels it will teach him and his flock something about their own lives (I, 174). This self-centeredness

World; merely because while Men
Make something of me, the glorious
God will be forgotten. (II, 542)

It must be reiterated that none of these associations is altogether unique. Certainly Mather and all his believing contemporaries felt that the Christian must seek to live like Christ, that atonement meant Christ dwelling in the heart of the believer, and that suffering was an essential part of the Christian's daily life, veritable proof of one's favor in the sight of God. My point here is to

Nowhere in the diary does Mather stop his personal meditations at a point where he is left unconvinced of his own salvation.

draws spiritual lessons from everyday occurrences. When a daughter is burned, it is a result of his own sin. Furthermore, the fire itself becomes a symbol of eternal damnation, and the burn an object lesson for each member of the family, a reminder for each of them to note their own proximity to eternal fire (I, 283).

Everything fits into clear spiritual analogies in the diaries. Mather, nearly destitute from his benevolence, reasons that poverty is Christ-like, and conversely, that wealth is a manifestation of worldliness. Even popularity and favor in the sight of men is to be disdained:

Instead of courting a great Honour and Esteem in the World; a great name among Men, I have rather some Horror of it; and have a great Aversion for the Sacrilege commonly committed by them who see no further than the Creatures; who terminate in Man; who do not carry up their Acknowledgements unto the Glorious God. I decline many things that might get me a great Name in the

illustrate how Mather used the world and its activities to enlighten and clarify his own inner drive to rid himself of doubt. Mather seems an obvious *dualist*.

The ability or desire to see one's own life as allegory demands a self-imposed omnipotence over day-to-day behavior, an ability to project oneself outside of the delirium of daily living, really the establishment of a kind of alter-ego. Instead of living only in the here and now, a man like Mather, committed to discovering spiritual truth in a fall in a pond (II, 366), must establish a translator outside of himself to force such actions into spiritual lessons. Mather's behavior in this particular case may illustrate this kind of projection of self: Mather falls from a canoe and slips into the cold water of a pond. Not far from shore, he is able, without undue strain, to gain land. His experience, like every experience, prompts him to consider what the Lord is telling him through the incident:

I returned well in the Evening;
sollicitous to make all the Reflections
of Piety, on my Disaster, and on my

Deliverance. But not yett able to penetrate into the meaning of the Occurrence. Am I quickly to go under the Earth, as I have been under the Water! (II, 366)

Two characters co-exist in Mather's mind: first, the participant in life; and second, the translator of events into parable. This kind of double existence produced some of the more unusual manifestations of Mather's mind, for in his desire to gain spiritual truth out of daily events, he often became prophetic, thinking himself able to foresee events in his life. In September of 1700, Mather claims that in prayer he received supernatural assurances that "the Lord is going to do an amazing thing for the preservation of [the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ]." Miraculously, the next day news from England arrived; the Duke of Gloucester, "the last branch of the Stuarts, and the great Hope, that the enemies of the Reformation had their dependence upon," had died. Immediately following such an obvious fulfillment of personal premonition, Mather goes on to prophecy: "Heaven having dealt most familiarly and favourable with me, I must expect some notable Buf-feting from Satan, either in Reproach, or in Sickness, or in Darkness" (I, 365).

A characteristic he takes on, related to this kind of spiritual schizophrenia, can be illustrated by an incident which Mather records concerning his meditations and spiritual humiliations. Beset by personal difficulties, Mather claims his distresses "cause me to fall down before the Lord, with prayers and Tears continually." At the same time, however, at the very moment of his tears, Mather claims consolation for these same tears: "It was a Consolation to me to think that when my people were all asleep in their Beds, their poor Pastor should be watching, and praying and weeping for them" (I, 468). Here, Mather's alter-ego (the spiritual translator) and his actual self in the world merge in time, so that Mather's allegorizing can at least reinforce, if not

prompt specific behavior: in his grief he weeps, his weeping consoles his grief, he weeps for more consolation. The motivations become entangled here, so that one wonders whether Mather himself is able to sort out for himself the impulses that ignite his emotional reactions. It seems clear that Mather's desire to allegorize—and even to prophesy on the basis of that allegorizing—is accomplished with the intent of enlightening his own spiritual concerns.

Niebuhr's definition of the *dualist* mentality includes the observation that *dualists* tend to cultural conservatism. Here, the *dualist* view sometimes overlaps with the vision of the *radical*: both pronounce culture to be godless and sick. Already in 1686, when Mather was only 23 years old, he espoused his father's view of his own Puritan generation: "I would procure and assist the Publication of a Discourse written by my Father, that shall enlighten the *rising* generation, in the *Unlawfulness* of that worship, and antidote them against Apostasy from the Principles of our First Settlement" (I, 134).

Later, Mather expresses his pessimistic view of the world in even more vehement terms: "The town is become almost a Hell upon Earth, a city full of Lies, and Murders, and Blasphemies, as far as wishes and speeches can render it so" (II, 639). Very late in his life, Mather's growing disillusionment becomes clearly apocalyptic: "And I am now satisfied, that there is nothing to hinder the immediate coming to our Saviour, in these Flames, that shall bring an horrible Destruction on this present and wicked world" (II, 733). Mather's belief in the "old ways" and his distrust of the new illustrate his cultural conservatism.

Finally, on the basis of the diaries, Mather can be seen clearly as a *dualist* when we locate his central concern in the institutions of his time. Niebuhr uses Luther and Paul as examples of the *dualist* mind and its views of the institutions of culture. He claims both "seemed to be content to let state and economic life—with slavery in the one case

[Paul] and social stratification in the other [Luther]—continue.” Both look past what might be called “institutional sin” and prod followers to bring their souls to God. Here again Cotton Mather, dealing with cultural problems within his own society, usually overlooks institutional sin, concentrating more exclusively on saving souls. Mather’s attitude toward Indians, for example, clearly illustrates that his fundamental interest in Indians is saving their souls. Early in his life he resolves “that I would shortly write a little Book, which my Kinsman shall Translate in the *Indian Tongue*, to make the knowledge of Christ, and Christianity, more effectually apprehended among the *Indians*, and their Children” (I, 304). The diary is full of such resolutions, Mather confronting the Puritan difficulties with Indians by writing tracts to convert them to Christianity. In 1713, he resolves to “earnestly prosecute the Affair of having Indians funds out on such Leases. . . .” Here, he seems more concerned at an institutional level; however, the remainder of the sentence illustrates that his exclusive objective remains: “. . . as may bring in Revenues for support of the evangelical Interests among the Indian” (II, 192).

Likewise, Mather’s frequent references to the black servants within his home bear no indication that he ever considered the institution of slavery as anything but legitimate. His concern for his servant Onesimus is a constant supplication in the diaries, but the concern is spiritual only (II, 446). Such statements do not carry any disregard for Onesimus’ physical needs. That Mather would not have treated his own servants with anything less than compassion and humility is simply beyond question. However, whatever love Mather had for his servants obviously stopped at the point where the institution began. Although we clearly benefit from the passage of time in this tacit criticism of Mather and his generation, the point we are attempting to establish is that Mather’s *dualist* mentality may have prevented him from considering the institution of slavery as sinful. To

Mather, sin was nearly exclusively personal.

It is interesting to note that the one action for which Mather is universally admired is his stance on the necessity of inoculation during the severe smallpox epidemic of 1721, a position which was decidedly unpopular with the people of Boston and even brought him death threats. Apparently, Mather favored inoculation on the basis of scientific research. What is of interest here is the fact that for some reason Mather based his position on science, apparently disregarding his normal practice of reading the Bible literally. In fact, those who opposed Mather’s position used the Bible to underpin their refusal to inoculate. What seems ironic is the fact that the one time in his life when he abandons his own usual foundation, he accomplishes something which commends him most dearly to American history.

That decision departs also from the *dualist* vision which otherwise characterized his approach to culture. He seemed to favor inoculation on the basis of what he visualized as results, not because the stance would reflect in some way on his own, or others’, personal salvation. The criticism given him for his position tended to reinforce his *dualism*, however, for he was sure that he was most Christ-like when he found himself “despised and rejected.”

But at least in the diaries it is Mather’s *dualist* vision which most concerns us at this point. To Mather, the world’s struggles were but reflections on the internal agony man endures in his quest for the assurance of salvation. Everything in his life was finally subordinate to his own satisfaction of doubt concerning salvation. God spoke personally in everything around him, reminding him of his sins and prompting him to a closer, more intimate walk with his Savior.

But what of the remainder of the long Mather shelf? No one in American letters is so prolific as Cotton Mather, and it may appear short-sighted to base our perceptions totally on his personal writing. In fact, the bulk of the corpus is itself a testament to his high regard for the culture around him.

Magnalia Christi Americana, already referred to in the section on William Bradford, is a self-proclaimed history of the New England Church, and Mather's purpose (already quoted in part) is obviously evangelical. Mather's General Introduction illustrates the sentiment Perry Miller calls "the errand":

Tis not possible for me to do a greater Service to the Churches on the *best Island* of the Universe, than to give a distinct relation of those great examples which have been occurring among churches of *exiles*, that were driven out of that island, into an horrible wilderness, merely for being well-willers unto the Reformation.²

Unlike Bradford, Mather has a focused moral purpose in his history, an end to which the historical record will be shaped.

Likewise, *The Christian Philosopher* has higher motives than simply to collect scientific facts. The goal of science is not only a deeper knowledge of God, but a sense of awe at his wonder and power. In the book, matter is observed, data analyzed, or experimentation reviewed, and then the facts are channeled into religious truth. The essay on stars is used to combat astrology. The essay on heat shows how Indian sun-worship is wrong. The essay on the rainbow moves directly to the Old Testament promise. Hail is the judgment of God. Air is God's favor. Everything has its spiritual dimension; and always the goal is what the Old Testament calls the "fear" of the Lord—a sense of awe in his presence.

Bonifacius is equally enlightening. Again, Mather's interest in culture is manifest. The essays here are not aimed simply at people, but at people in specific occupations. In the book, Mather recommends specific courses of action for lawyers, doctors, teachers, and preachers—how to do good. "Our opportunities to do good," Mather says, "are our TALENTS."³ Talent, or so it seems, is to Mather, one's opportunity to do good. His

definition would appear to rob the concept of talent (even in its New Testament sense) of any cultural implications—our "calling" is to do good, he might have said. This is not Winthrop on calling. To Mather, occupation is but a means to an end—work itself is a kind of sad comment on the nature of human experience after Adam. Vocation is something one uses to keep bread on the table, and bread is what one eats in order to be strong enough to do good works.

This kind of sentiment is true of the entire exposition. When he lectures schoolteachers, for instance, he offers them confessional concerns: put documents of piety in the hands of students; make catechism a weekly function; when tutoring, try to discover the state of the soul. The Christian teacher, in such a view, is little but an adjunct preacher, his initial obligations being to bring the unrepentant to grace.

The center of Mather's vision of things is his soul's salvation. Institutions of culture exist primarily to help bring individual souls to a sense of sin and repentance. In his approach to history, Mather is not Bradford; in his understanding of calling, he is not Winthrop. Cotton Mather appears to fit rather well into *dualist* category.

V. Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, like Mather a preacher by vocation, must be understood in context of the profound change which had occurred in the New England theology since Bradford. A gradual but obvious shift in theology had occurred, a shift that tended to underplay the sovereignty of God and pass the honor and power once given to the Creator onto man himself. Arminianism, the theology Mather himself called "the grand choke-week of history," asserted that God's complete control over man created the false notion of God as the creator of sin.

The shift, of course, was no radical turn-about. Perry Miller, in his essay "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," claims that "federal" or covenant theology (which he

finds as early as Winthrop) changed Puritan theology considerably by infusing reason.⁴ God acts reasonably in covenant theology, in a manner comprehensible to his people. Arminianism is but a further step toward a more complete belief in the power of reason, towards a working understanding of the ways of God. Arminianism is early Enlightenment faith.

Young Jonathan Edwards, taking over the Northampton charge from his own grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, decided very quickly that the philosophical tenets of strict Calvinism were the right ones. In doctrinal combat his entire life, Edwards worked at the elaborate structure of doctrinal and philosophical integrity under the old Calvinist scheme. In his pursuit, however

was, in his age, theological.

But what is missing in Edwards is some kind of application of the grand design of doctrine, a use of the system within the world of business or politics. From this cultural world, Edwards retreats to the fair haven of sweet spiritual experience or the lofty strategies of philosophy and doctrine.

Edwards' sermons and philosophical treatises can fill several volumes, but his personal literature is limited to a famous essay now titled "Personal Narrative," a kind of recitation of Edwards' own spiritual maturation. In it, he tries to locate the growing sense of holiness he experienced in his own spiritual quest. The person narrative recounts the experience of grace in vivid and emotional detail:

To place Edwards correctly, we must observe his motivation for release from the temporal. The *radical* Christian sees clearly the black/white distinction between culture and Christ.

comprehensive and compelling, we can visualize a character whose portrait is remarkably different from his three predecessors.

In Edwards' writing and sermons there seems to be an obvious lack of interest in the institutions of the world in which he lived. His great sermons are expositions on the nature of the regenerative experience ("A Divine and Supernatural Light") or the threat of imminent death and damnation ("Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"). Edwards' primary concern seems to lie with the exposition of Calvinist doctrine, a systematic theology, and when one considers that he was fighting the prevailing notions of his time, it may be reasonable to assume that Edwards felt "the great fight"

The whole book of Canticles used to be pleasant to me, and I used to be much in reading it, about that time; and found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that would carry me away, in my contemplations. This I know not how to express otherwise, than by a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of this world; and sometimes a kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and rapt and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my

heart; an ardor of soul that I know not how to express. (30)⁵

The narrative is full of this kind of description—vivid recollections of moments out of time. Such glory turned the world into God's own canvas:

The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, and moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the Water, and all nature. (31)

The word choice illustrates a significant point about Edwards. The use of particularly effusive adjectives reveals Edwards' difficulty in explaining the phenomenon he has experienced. They present a kind of stuttering image of a man perplexed by how to say and explain an experience that moves beyond words: "Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature" (34).

Edwards undertakes even the tenability of philosophical doctrine with the same vision. Analysis of Christian doctrine was to him the source of ecstatic joy: "The doctrines of the gospel have been like green pastures to my soul" (35). It is this kind of rhapsodic, emotional intensity which characterizes the whole "Personal Narrative," an intensity which grows as Edwards remembers those times in life when he drew nearest to God, and wanes when his mind becomes the stage for what he calls "earthly matters."

That Edwards' mystical experiences take place within his daily life (and not in some kind of cloistered situation) may not be so significant as the fact that those experiences regularly carry him out from that life. Two passages already cited illustrate Edwards' feeling of seclusion or retreat from the

pressures of the world. No matter where he is, the effect of the experience is to take him from the world and vault him into the eternal. However, he does find it advantageous to find that kind of release in order to gain the spiritual satisfaction he craves:

I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayers, wherever I was. (32)

Edwards' ecstatic experiences draw him close to two of Niebuhr's classifications: the *synthesist* and the *radical*. Both of these minds see exclusion from the world as the highest end of man, the *synthesist* using learning and reason to achieve the divine, the *radical* separating himself because of his fear of contamination by the world of blackness around him.

To place Edwards correctly, we must observe his motivation for release from the temporal. The *radical* Christian sees clearly the black/white distinction between culture and Christ. Occasionally Edwards speaks of being in the world around him; when he was younger, for instance, he says he would often think about what it meant to live a Christian life: "Pure and humble, holy and heavenly Christianity, appeared exceedingly amiable to me. I felt a burning desire to be in everything a complete Christian; and conformed to the blessed image of Christ; and that I may live, in all things, according to the pure, sweet, and blessed rules of the gospel" (33).

However, soon after reciting this interest, Edwards ridicules his earlier striving self for a personal pride: "My experiences had not then taught me, as it has done since, my extreme feebleness and impotence, . . . I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness, and conformity to Christ" (33).

Here, Edwards appears to take human depravity beyond the reasonable limits of covenant theology and back deeply into mystical Calvinism, claiming that such pursuits as he designed were beyond his own capability to achieve. Such an attitude allows him to make the separation from the world much less difficult; if he can really do nothing at all to achieve holiness on earth, then he may find mystic ecstasy with his God the only possible way.

Later in the narrative, Edwards speaks of the distraction of worldly events, like an irritant, keeping his eye from a clear vision of God. Outside events are spoken of as if distractions: "I was again greatly diverted in my mind with some temporal concerns that exceedingly took up my thoughts, greatly to the wounding of my soul" (38). The world has become a troublesome diversion from the real calling of atonement with God. Edwards' concern with the spiritual at the expense of the natural points at Niebuhr's classification of *synthesist*.

Edwards does not seem to hate the natural world; it is not necessarily of the Devil. It is, however, a kind of nuisance, a distraction, an obstruction between man and spiritual fulfillment. Because the world merely stands in Edwards' way, naming him as a *synthesist* seems remarkably easy.

Finally, Edwards' attitude toward reason itself shows a clearly *synthesist* view. In his sermon "The Peace Which Christ Gives His True Followers," Edwards speaks clearly about reason and its place in the mind of a Christian. Here Edwards' view is clearly stated:

The faculty of reason, if at liberty, proves a mortal enemy to [the Christian's sense of] peace, to contrive all ways that may be, to stupify his mind and deceive himself, and to imagine things to be otherwise than they be. But with respect to the peace which Christ gives, reason is its great friend. The more this faculty is exercised, the more it is established.

The more they consider and view things with truth and exactness, the firmer is their comfort and the higher their joy. (128)

Edwards, armed with the new Lockean view of things, sees reason as a means of reaching God, a means of reaching greater holiness. According to Niebuhr, Edwards' view of reason makes him appear as a *synthesist*.

Because Edwards spends his most fulfilling moments away from the world, because Edwards' world of nature is not intrinsically evil, and because the man sees reason as "the great friend" of the Christian, we can see him clearly as *synthesist*.

Edwards concludes the narrative with a telling passage:

I had, at the time, a very affecting sense, how meet and suitable it was that God should govern the world, and order all things according to his pleasure; and I rejoiced in it, that God reigned, and that his will was well done. (44)

There is a sense of resignation in the comment, a sense of withdrawal which is sustained by a strict belief in Calvinist doctrine—that God is in control of things. Edwards reasons from this that the individual Christian need not be concerned about the world, the institutions of society, because God reigns. This withdrawal contrasts sharply with Winthrop's use of his faith to shape economics, and Mather's vision of the apocalypse in his society. Edwards seems clearly of the *synthesist* mind.

VI. Conclusion

Even though *Of Plymouth Plantation* has the evangelical earmarks of Puritan historiography, William Bradford, unlike other historians of his age, was able to separate his history from preaching. Furthermore, his references to "special

Providences" and his reluctance to mark any event with God's own stamp of approval illustrate the measured and reasoned response to culture of a *conversionist* or a *cultural Protestant*.

John Winthrop uses his faith to shape his vision of a Christian society. According to Winthrop, free enterprise was akin to profiteering and exploitation, therefore a sin, not simply a felony. Winthrop, a *conversionist*, saw "calling" as a means of defining his Christian life—work made holy to glorify his God.

Cotton Mather, the third generation divine of the strong Boston church, seems a *dualist*, seeing the world around him as a focus for his own spiritual concerns. Furthermore, he became a cultural conservative, sure that the generations to come would depart from the blessedness of the "old ways."

Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the most convincingly doctrinaire Calvinist of them all, was a *synthesist*, his own ecstatic spiritual experiences establishing, for him, the highest possible achievement of living a Godly existence.

The shift in emphasis visible in the four men contributed, I believe, to the fall of "the city on the hill." The opportunity to create a society in a new world demanded a vision that was based, as clearly as possible, on the foundations of faith. A society was created out of catechism, a culture from creeds. The first generations combined belief with philosophy, their faith working in the establishment of institutions and practices they felt most consistent with their confession. This faith had visible ramifications, even if those ramifications were riddled with the limitations their own minds were incapable of perceiving.

Mather's generation, conscious of the enormous debt which they owed to Winthrop's, revered the institutions and traditions created earlier and carried on into the years. Becoming protective of those institutions, they sought only to keep them, not change them when situations dictated

adjustment. Their lives focused instead on piety, a life of holiness and restraint, and restraint became the dominant force. The caricature of dour, lifeless manikins in black comes from what Adams calls the "glacial period" of the theocracy.⁶

Edwards' generation, tiring of the life of comfortable piety, rediscovered religious experience. In the throes of emotional ecstasy, New England was born again on the breath of enthusiasm. Doctrine became reasonable truth, the subject of drawing room debate. Faith withdrew from culture and became a matter of "spiritual vision." Two worlds existed: one, a kind of tattered obstacle to heavenly discourse; the other, the chief aim of every man—the sweet emotional ecstasy of atonement. Belief became a personal, fulfilling feeling.

What happened? Belief turned inward, its culture-shaping dynamic withdrawn into personal, emotional satisfaction. The power of the original faith retreated from the society into the individual. Culture itself was forsaken for personal, mystical fulfillment. The "city on the hill" became a ravishing temple, the cultural implications of Christianity forgotten by a minority group of believers interested almost exclusively in personal salvation.

Endnotes

¹*Diary of Cotton Mather*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1951), II, 733. Subsequent references to this volume will be noted by abbreviation within the text.

²Mather, *Magnalia*, p. 92.

³Mather, *Bonifacius: An Essay To Do Good* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 31.

⁴Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956), pp. 44-98.

⁵"Personal Narrative" in *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, Harold P. Simonson, ed. (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1970), p. 30. Subsequent references to this volume will be made by page number within the text.

⁶Charles Francis Adams, "Massachusetts: Its Historians and Its History," in *Puritanism in Early America*, George M. Waller, ed., in *Problems in American Civilization* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company), p. 55.