American Exceptionalism

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Extract from: Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*. Edinburgh & London: Edinburgh University Press; Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1998. ISBN: 978-1578061082, 9781853312090

CHAPTER ONE

Origins: Exceptionalism and American Cultural Identity

In this chapter, the mythology of the redeemer nation is explained with reference to seventeenth-century Puritan sermons, poetry and prose. Key writers here are William Bradford, John Cotton, John Winthrop, Roger Williams, Samuel Danforth, Michael Wigglesworth, Mary Rowlandson, and the Mathers. Benjamin Franklin's reinterpretation of the nation's exceptional destiny is used to focus a discussion of the role of exceptionalism in the rhetoric of the Revolutionary period.

Immigration

There is a key difference between the Puritan colonies at Boston and at Plymouth in terms of their mission in the New World. Although both colonies were settled by members of the Congregationalist church, John Winthrop and the colonists of the Massachusetts Bay Company were "non-Separating" Congregationalists whilst William Bradford and the settlers at Plymouth were "Separating" Congregationalists. What this meant was that the Separatists intended to make a permanent and lasting colony in the New World rather than a temporary refuge from the difficulties and persecutions they had endured in Europe. Bradford had no intention of developing a perfectly reformed church, to be a model to the imperfectly reformed churches of England. And so, when members of the Plymouth church make reference to Old Testament precedent in describing aspects of their experience in the New World, this reference is quite different in tone to that used by the Massachusetts colonists who represented themselves as necessarily repeating the sacred history of the Israelites. In his history Of Plymouth Plantation, Bradford describes their safe arrival at Cape Cod only to be confronted by an all-encompassing wilderness:

> Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah [the peak from which Moses saw Canaan] to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects".[1]

Bradford certainly believed that God watched over the Plymouth settlers and that God motivated the migration but he did not present the settlement as a necessary stage in salvation history, nor did he extrapolate from scripture a future destiny for the colony. Robert Cushman, one of the founders of Plymouth, gives extensive reasons for the fundamental differences between the removal of the Jews, described in the Bible, and seventeenth-century New World migration. First, he argues, the means by which men are called upon to migrate are very different: in biblical times, God summoned men by dreams, visions, predictions to travel from country to country and town to town according to the divine will but now the ordinary examples of scripture, "reasonable and rightly understood and applied" call and direct the migrants.[2] More significantly from the point of view of exceptionalism, Cushman argues that New England is fundamentally unlike Canaan, the promised land given by God to the Jews. Canaan was

> … legally holy and appropriated unto a holy people, the seed of Abraham, in which they dwelt securely, and had their days prolonged, it being by an immediate voice said, that he (the Lord) gave it them as a land of rest after their weary travels, and a type of eternal rest in heaven.[3]

So Cushman identifies the fulfilment of the biblical promise represented by the Israelites as the spiritual reward of heavenly rest after death, not as the settlement of New England. Where the non-Separatists identified themselves as latter-day Israelites occupying the New Canaan by divine decree, Separatists argued that the biblical promises of the Old and New Testaments can only, at this stage in the world's history, be fulfilled on a purely spiritual plane; the Bible can no longer be used to predict the future of human history. Cushman specifically denies any likeness between New England and Canaan. He claims that their is no longer any country at all that approaches the nature of Canaan: "there is no land of that sanctimony, no land so

appropriated, none typical; much less any that can be said to be given of God to any nation, as was Canaan".[4] The non-Separating Congregationalists of Boston argued that their colony was absolutely typical of Canaan and had been given to them by God, as promised in scripture, for the purpose of constructing a purified church. This purpose is clearly omitted from Cushman's list of reasons that may legitimately lead men to migrate to New England: they may choose to live where they can do good for themselves and others; they may engage in the "conversion of the heathen"; or they may put to profitable use land that is lying unused. He does not set out an exceptional destiny as the beacon of hope in a world of corruption; he does not envision the New World colonies as "a city upon a hill" - the famous phrase used by John Winthrop to describe the glorious mission upon which his company set out in 1630.

It was in "A Modell of Christian Charity", the sermon Winthrop delivered on board the Arbella, the flagship of the Winthrop fleet, that he claimed "wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill" when describing the special destiny awaiting the community of saints as they voyaged to Massachusetts.[5] Winthrop uses the occasion to exhort his fellow-colonists to knit together into a social unity that will reflect and support their spiritual unity. He argues that social relations are regulated by the law of nature and the law of grace; that is, moral law which regulates nature in its innocent state and the law of the gospel or grace which is given only to those in a regenerate state. According to the law of grace, all true Christians are of one body in Christ so if one member suffers, all suffer and if one is honored then all rejoice. The concept of mutual dependence was very important to the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, for the federal covenant would work only so long as all members of the community voluntarily kept their faith and helped others to preserve their faith. The mission, the errand into the wilderness, required a degree of unity that was social as well as spiritual, if the collective salvation of the community was to be achieved.

The seriousness of the mission with which they had been charged by God was the counter-argument used by Puritan leaders like Winthrop when they were accused (as they were) of deserting England at the very time when they were needed most urgently. "Reasons to Be Considered for ... the Intended Plantation in New England" (1629) is Winthrop's consideration, on the very eve of his departure, of the view of the Great Migration as a desertion of the motherland, taking away the best people at a time when they are needed to counter England's severe moral deterioration. Here, Winthrop betrays a sense of guilt which he is carrying to the New World, as

evidenced by the effort he took to clear the collective conscience of the immigrants for the impending voyage. In particular, he takes pains to repudiate the notion that God identifies his church with a specific place or nation: those who go "are likely to do more good there than here, and since Christ's time the church is to be considered as universal, without distinction of countries, so as he who doeth good in any one place, serves the church in all places ...".[6] Further, he suggests that their departure will not cause but in fact foreshadows divine judgement and may prompt others to reform themselves in the effort to prevent such a judgement: "It will be a great wrong to our church to take away the good people and we shall lay it the more open to the judgement feared".[7] But he does not depart from the conviction that the only way forward for the church in England is to await the construction of a model church, a completely reformed church in New England. In his journal Winthrop repeats the original motivation for migration: “to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purity with peace”.[8] However, he does change his views on the importance of geographical location. In May 1640, Winthrop became aware of reports that English migrants were being diverted from New England to the West Indies and so wrote to the responsible minister in Westminster, Lord Say, about the report “and therein showed his lordship, how evident it was, that God had chosen this country to plant his people in, and therefore how displeasing it would be to the Lord, and dangerous to himself, to hinder this work”.[9] The very suggestion that New England might be compared with, or surpassed by, other British colonies as the foremost New World destination contradicted the self-image created by the Boston clergy of the Massachusetts Bay colony as “a special people, an only people - none like thee in all the earth”, as Peter Bulkeley put it in his sermon “The Gospel-Covenant” (circa. 1639-40).[10]

In this sermon, Bulkeley sets out Winthrop’s ambitions for the colony but in more explicit terms and using the vocabulary of exceptionalism:

> And as for ourselves here, the people of New England, we should in a special manner labor to shine forth in holiness above other people; we have that plenty and abundance of ordinances and means of grace, as few people enjoy the like. We are as a city set upon an hill, in the open view of all the earth; the eyes of the world are upon us because we profess ourselves to be a people in covenant with God, and therefore not only the

> Lord our God, with whom we have made covenant, but heaven and earth, angels and men, that are witnesses of our profession, will cry shame upon us, if we walk contrary to the covenant which we have professed and promised to walk in.[11]

Bulkeley expresses here the two sides of the exceptionalist coin: the glory that will be theirs if the community of saints keeps to the terms of the covenant, creates a purified and perfectly reformed church to be the world's model, and establishes the conditions for the realization of millennial hopes. Alternatively, if they should fail then their failure will be as humiliating as their glory would have been, in equal measure. The world's eyes are upon them and if they should betray the covenant then all the world will know and scorn them for their excess of ambition and pride.

The risks then were very great for those early settlers, who faced enormous psychological and emotional challenges as well as the physical challenge of survival and, on top of all this, the challenge to live up to the hopes of the entire Christian world. In his paean to New England and the grand enterprise of the Congregationalist settlers there, "Upon the First Sight of New England" (1638), Thomas Tillam addresses precisely these challenges:

> Hayle holy-land wherin our holy lord
> Hath planted his most true and holy word
> Hayle happye people who have dispossest
> Your selves of friends, and meanes, to find some rest
> For your poor wearied soules, opprest of late
> For Jesus-sake, with Envye, spight, and hate
> To yow that blessed promise truly's given
> Of sure reward, which you'l receive in heaven
> Methinks I heare the Lambe of God thus speake
> Come my deare little flocke, who for my sake
> Have lefte your Country; free from all anoye
> Heare I'le bee with you, heare you shall Injoye
> My sabbaths, sacraments, my ministrye
> And ordinances in their puritye
> But yet beware of Sathans wylye baites

Hee lurkes amongs yow, Cunningly hee waites
To Catch yow from mee; live not then secure
But fight 'gainst sinne, and let your lives be pure
Prepare to heare your sentence thus expressed
Come yee my servants of my father Blessed.[12]

The assurance that Tillam expresses early in the poem, that salvation is assured for these the "visible saints" of New England and the achievement of their model church-society is assured, gives way to a note of foreboding at the conclusion. Precisely the high ideals and enthusiasm of the saints attracts the attentions of Satan who will win a great victory if he is able to disrupt the work of this exceptional community. Both God and Satan watch over the progress of the colony and through the Boston church prepare to engage in battle. This poem was published shortly after the Antinomian Controversy (1636) and so deliberately reminds listeners of the seriousness and precariousness of their mission at a time when the purity of the errand appeared to be under threat from within.

The Antinomian Controversy

In the mid-1630s the Massachusetts Bay clergy faced two powerful threats to their authority and prestige, and to the developing ideology of exceptionalism that lent legitimacy and divine purpose to their leadership. Anne Hutchinson was the leader of a heretical movement that came to be known as the Antinomians; Roger Williams engaged in extensive dispute with the Bay clergy over such issues as religious toleration, the occupation of Indian lands and the exceptionalist mission of the colonists in New England. Both Hutchinson and Williams were exiled for their heretical beliefs but not before they had given expression to a sentiment of dissent that was to characterize the debate over New England's identity and destiny.

The ideology of exceptionalism relied absolutely upon the interpretative authority wielded by the ministers whose job it was to interpret signs of God's favor or wrath. The ministry was charged with measuring the progress made towards establishing the "Citty upon an hill" that Winthrop foresaw as the great achievement of the colonized New World. And if progress was not being made, then the clergy was required to set the community back on course. In this way, exceptionalism lent the ministry a great deal of power to intervene in all areas of colonial life. Mrs

Hutchinson's great error was to challenge the necessity of the ministry as an interpretative power and spiritual guide. She argued that Christ would intervene directly in the life of the redeemed individual, communicating directly all that would be necessary for salvation. Mrs Hutchinson claimed to have been touched directly by the Holy Ghost and argued that the interpretations of biblical, natural and historical signs offered by the ministers were superfluous to one such as herself who received knowledge of spiritual matters directly from God. According to her, God did not need to deal in obscure signs and portents when he could through visitations, prophetic dreams and visions communicate directly with the redeemed soul. Anne Hutchinson was not concerned with the future development of the church in New England, nor was she concerned with the millennial expectations of those engaged in purifying the colonial church. Her interest was in the relationship between the redeemed soul and God, and how one might know whether one was in fact redeemed.

This challenge to the power and prestige of the clergy broadly coincided with the attacks made by Roger Williams upon the activities of the Congregationalist clergy in Boston. Both Williams and Hutchinson, separately, accused the Boston clergy of establishing a "state religion" wherein the ministers had the power to compel belief, to prescribe behaviour and to write the history of the colony in their own terms and to serve their own interests. Both Williams and Hutchinson challenged the connection between the temporal and spiritual orders that was fundamental to exceptionalist ideology and the covenant theology it supported. Both insisted that only Christ, working upon the soul of individuals, not human institutions, had the power to recreate a purified church.

Roger Williams was emphatic in his insistence upon the complete separation of the church and the state, the historical and the eternal realms, the visible church and the invisible church of the elect. Thus, Williams rejected the fundamental tenet of exceptionalist thinking: that God's work of salvation is worked out by, and completely permeates, everyday life. According to Williams, God's will is unknowable; it does not operate through systems of signs and promises and parallelisms. Only through Christ's personal intervention and a second disruption of history could the Kingdom of God be brought to earth. Human efforts through the progressive unfolding of history are not sufficient, though Williams argues strenuously that it is through the salvation of individuals and not through collective or institutional salvation that the work of redemption will be completed. In these

opinions, Williams contradicted the fundamental principles of the Massachusetts Bay mission. Where the Bay ministry believed in collective salvation through the federal covenant, Williams insisted that each individual must be redeemed individually; where the ministry were committed to a view of history as leading inexorably toward their collective salvation, Williams adhered to an apocalyptic view of salvation history; where the Bay clergy insisted that their errand into the wilderness of New England was foretold or promised in scripture, Williams denied that any earthly or historical significance was to be found in the biblical symbolism and argued instead that only spiritual meanings are to found in the Bible. If the Bible refers to any future event, it must be an event that occurs in heaven and is purely of a divine nature. The Old Testament promised events that came to pass in the New Testament; the New Testament does not repeat that same foretelling of future historical events but instead refers to events in the purely spiritual realm of heaven. Williams is especially scornful of the colonists' conception of themselves as engaged upon a divinely ordained mission and of Old and New England as the counterparts to nations described in the Bible. Williams argues that Christianity is basically unlike ancient Judaism because it cannot be identified with a particular geographical location. In his response to a letter published by John Cotton, perhaps the prime architect of New England exceptionalism, Williams asks sarcastically which country Mr Cotton would designate as Babylon or Egypt or Sodom - all corrupt biblical nations in which souls are kept in bondage to sin. "Doth he count the very land of England literally Babel, and so consequently Ægypt and Sodome, Revel. 11.8 and the land of new England, Judea, Canaan?" Williams asks.[13] Williams was banished for his heretical views, not only for his powerful attack on the exceptionalist mythology of the Bay colony but also for his commitment to religious toleration and his insistence that the British monarchy had no authority to grant Indian lands to the Massachusetts Bay Company.

It was John Cotton who engaged extensively with Williams, countering his heretical arguments with what became the orthodox interpretation of New England Congregationalism. In 1630 Cotton had preached "God's Promise to His Plantations", at Southampton, before the Winthrop fleet. He quotes 11 Samuel 7:10, "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more" in order to point out the uniqueness of the Bay colony. God provides a place for all nations, Cotton explains, but to His chosen people he gives the land by promise: "others take the land by his providence, but

God's people take the land by promise: and therefore the land of Canaan is called a land of promise. Which they discern, first, by discerning themselves to be in Christ, in whom all the promises are yea, and amen".[14] In this view, the colonists have identified themselves as a nation within Christ - as the visible sainthood redeemed by Christ - and as a spiritual nation they have been led to found a geographical nation in the New World. Cotton goes on to explain the ways according to which one is to know whether God has appointed one to a particular place and by what right one may remove to that place. Williams's counter-argument was that the Puritan colonists were no more exempt from social constraints and the force of nature than were any other group of people and certainly the divine errand which they claimed did not authorize them to appropriate the lands already occupied by the native inhabitants of New England. For Williams, the Massachusetts claim to an exceptional spiritual destiny was at odds with its claim to a universal purpose: the colonists of the Winthrop fleet could not, in Williams's estimation, pursue a specific typological parallel with the ancient Israelites and also, at the same time, fulfil a universalized purpose of furthering the redemption of all Christianity. According to Williams, the Puritans could not have it both ways. The developing orthodoxy of the Massachusetts Bay colony required that the global significance of the errand be fulfilled even as the colonists struggled towards their divine destiny. What they must achieve had been promised in the typological rhetoric of scripture and, the clergy reminded them, the eyes of the world were upon this exceptional endeavor.

Declension and the Rhetoric of the Jeremiad

Not only the eyes of the world were upon the colonists as they struggled to fulfil their destiny. Much more importantly, God was ever-watchful of His people's successes and failures, which He would reward or punish. This sense of God's watchful presence gave rise to a kind of typological interpretation called "punitive typology" that sought signs of God's favor or, increasingly throughout the seventeenth century, signs of His anger as His people failed to keep to the high purpose of their errand. Robert Middlekauff notes in his history of the Mather family that the first use of the term "errand" to describe the peculiarity of New England history was made by the second generation of colonists and not by the original migrants for whom phrases like "the saving remnant" and "the Kingdom of Light" referred to all godly people rather

than exclusively describing the New England churches.[15] A similar shift is noted above in relation to John Winthrop who, in 1629 argued that the geographical location of the church was irrelevant but in 1640 argued strenuously for the uniqueness of the church that had been established (by God's design) in New England. This is not surprising when one recalls that the high degree of motivation experienced by the generation that left their homes in England to travel to the wilderness of Massachusetts was unlikely to be shared by their offspring who never themselves experienced religious persecution or the trauma of migration. The second and third colonial generations were, then, judged as lacking the conviction and enthusiasm of the founders and correspondingly the rhetoric of exceptionalism grew darker and more threatening.

John Cotton in a sermon of 1641, "Gods Mercie Mixed with his Justice or His Peoples Deliverance in Times of Danger", points to the ways in which God seeks to deliver his people into salvation.[16] He may knock upon the door of the soul (the heart) with "the hammer of his word" (Jer. 23:29), or with the effect of his judgements (Acts 16:26), or with the work of the holy spirit upon the conscience. In each case God will seek to awaken the soul to its peril and renew the faith that leads to salvation. Afflictions, then, can function as God's reminder to renew faith and to renew commitment to the covenant. Cotton argues that fellowship with Christ in suffering is an assurance of ultimate deliverance from affliction. God punished his chosen people because they are so special to him and because they have been entrusted with a unique spiritual destiny. Affliction can then be seen as a sign of God's ultimate favor but also of his immediate wrath; suffering is a sign that changes must be made to renew personal and collective faith in the terms of the covenant. Using the figure of Noah's Ark, Cotton claims: "All those that are wrapt up in the Covenant of Gods grace and peace, all the waters of affliction doe but lift them up higher, farre above the highest mountaines of the Earth."[17] This concept, that God's chosen people are subject to particular suffering by virtue of their exceptional destiny, provided a powerful explanation for the many kinds of affliction that befell the colony: famine, disease, Indian attack, and so on, all could be explained as the signs of God's displeasure as he sought to keep his people to the path of righteousness.

The jeremiad, as this rhetoric of divine threat and warning is known, places the individual soul and the community in a passive relationship with God. The power of God is unimaginable but it is comprehensible through biblical types and

precedents. Thomas Hooker develops this theme in "The Application of Redemption" (1640) where he quotes Hosea 2:14-15, "I will lead her into the wilderness and break her heart with many bruising miseries, and then I will speak kindly to her heart, and will give her the Valley of Achor for a door of hope".[18] Hooker points out that the children of Israel faced many afflictions and humiliations in the wilderness before they could come into the promised land of prosperity and plenty. So the people of New England must be prepared for the spiritual plenty that is their destiny by enduring their afflictions with humility and contrition. The covenant is their assurance that their afflictions are designed by God as part of his purpose for them. Thomas Shepard, in "Salvation by Covenant" (1651) represents the covenant as a means by which man can live with the reality of God's absolute power and the means by which the intentions of an unknowable God can, to some extent, be known.

> God the Fathers eternall purposes are sealed secrets, not immediately seene, and the full and blessed accomplishments of those purposes are not yet experimentally felt; the Covenant is the midst between both Gods purposes and performances, by which and in which we come to see the one, before the world began, and by a blessed Faith (which makes things absent, present) to enjoy the other, which shall be our glory, when this world shall be burnt up, and all things in it shall have an end."[19]

God's intentions can never be known completely and with entire assurance, for the divine mind is so completely beyond the reach of human intellect, and so the danger of assuming knowledge must always be kept in mind, Shepard warns. However, God's chosen people of New England can take some comfort from the knowledge that the trials they are sent to endure signify God's continuing commitment to their exceptional destiny.

This is the theme of Michael Wigglesworth's poem, the classic jeremiad "God's Controversy with New England. Written in the Time of a Great Drought Anno 1662" which threatens an end to the years of divine favor that New England has enjoyed. Backsliding and ingratitude among the colonists places in peril the entire colonial mission. And the wrath that will be unleashed upon them will make the drought they are currently enduring seem as nothing. The faithful remnant will, by then, be too few to save the community; only heroic collective efforts by the entire

colony, and Wigglesworth includes the whole community not just the community of saints, will forestall disaster. Only the effective renewing of the federal covenant will save New England from catastrophe. Similar sentiments are expressed by Thomas Shepard a decade later in the sermon "Eye-Salve. Or a Watch-Word from Our Lord Jesus Christ unto His Churches in New England" (1672). Shepard adds, however, the opinion that the very disobedience of the founders' offspring proves them to be the children of Israel. By threatening divine displeasure, this disobedience demonstrates that the covenant extends to the offspring just like that vouchsafed to Abraham and all of his seed. The partial membership extended to the children of church members through the Half-Way Covenant is unnecessary, from this point of view, and Shepard expresses the sentiments of the clergy who objected to the compromise represented by the Half-Way Covenant in favor of greater use by the magistrates of their coercive powers. Shepard's jeremiad then is directed not only at the community but also at the Boston magistracy.

The jeremiad became the favored style of sermon rhetoric in the later seventeenth century, especially from the time of the restoration of the monarchy when the Puritan errand appeared to have been betrayed. In election day sermons, particularly, the community was reminded of the dangers of neglecting their great mission. John Norton in the election sermon of 1661, "Sion the Outcast Healed of Her Wounds", offers comfort to a people fearful of their isolation in the wilderness by naming them outcasts "sanctified, outcasts healed, outcasts that care for the truth, and then outcasts on which God will bring the blessing of his own people".[20] From this divine blessing there will follow esteem and acceptance from God and fellow men, Norton assures his congregation.

The relationship between the jeremiad and exceptionalist ideology was made explicit in Samuel Danforth's election sermon "A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness" (1670). Danforth reviews the significance of the New England errand and then exhorts the community to reform themselves and recover the fervor of their commitment.

> Such as have sometime left their pleasant cities and habitations to enjoy the pure worship of God in a wilderness are apt in time to abate and cool in their affection thereunto; but then the Lord calls upon them seriously and thoroughly to examine themselves, what it was that drew them into

> the wilderness, and to consider that it was not the expectation of ludicrous levity nor of courtly pomp and delicacy, but the free and clear dispensation of the Gospel and Kingdom of God.[21]

Danforth describes declension as a disease caused by the dimming of the church's glory and the failure of the congregation to believe in God's power and grace. Unbelief is the primary cause of declension but not the only cause: the pursuit of private interests and worldly cares has turned the congregation away from God and away from the spiritual realm. Danforth points out that in the gospels Christ's disciples were most sharply rebuked for expressing worldly concerns. So New England is punished or rebuked with mildew, severe drought, tempests, floods, sweeping rains and God's special mercies and divine favors are withdrawn.

The Half-Way Covenant was blamed by one faction, led by Increase Mather and his son Cotton, for the reduction of the church's power and prestige. Increase Mather argued that the sacraments were the occasion for a gathering of the saving remnant and could only be enjoyed by visible saints. Those, like Solomon Stoddard, who argued against him claimed that the sacraments are a means of salvation available to all. But to Increase Mather, this amounted to equating New England with the other nations of the world. In his view, New England's special destiny required that the church be purified, that it be comprised only of saints, and to allow entry to those who had not been touched by God's grace reduced the New England church to the level of the imperfectly reformed churches of the Old World, with a corresponding plunge in authority. The Mathers produced a very substantial body of jeremiads, many aimed at identifying the decrease in church prestige with the experience of affliction and natural disasters. Flood, drought, famine, pestilence, Indian attack: all were interpreted as signs of God's displeasure with his people who were failing to sustain the high ideals of the first settlers and were fast failing in their mission.

Even the controversy and argument generated by the Half-Way Covenant itself is interpreted as a sign of God's wrath by Increase Mather in his sermon "The Day of Trouble is Near" (1673). Mather argues that the main difference between this world and the next is that in the world to come there will be no troubles, no dissent, no distress:

> When God begins to depart, that's a sign that trouble is near. … Unity, is a sign of the Lord's Presence; live in peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you. Hence breaches and divisions, inasmuch as they are an evidence of the Lords departure from a people, are a sign of miseries at hand.[22]

God's withdrawal is a damning judgement upon his people and a sign that they have been placed upon probation; that they must learn from these afflictions and correct their ways to become a united people, reforming, believing, heavenly and humble. Above all, Mather identifies increasing worldly interest for the backsliding of the community; he laments that the original interest of New England, which was religion ("which did distinguish us from other English Plantations, they were built upon a Worldly design, but we upon a Religious design"), has now been replaced by a new worldly interest and a new God.[23]

Not only sermons but also popular forms such as the captivity narrative were used to disseminate this notion of a punitive typology at work in the lives of the Bay colonists. The signs of divine displeasure were to be interpreted typologically, as the ministers directed, but the intention of the signs was to punish and chastize a backsliding people. Perhaps the most famous captivity narrative in this style is A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson (1682), Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity among the Narrangansett Indians, who attacked her frontier town of Lancaster, Massachusetts, in February 1676.[24] The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, the title of the first Boston edition, establishes a rhetorical model for an interpretation of the experience of captivity which agrees with Puritan ideology and which exemplifies the status of New England as an infant "redeemer nation". Mary Rowlandson is brought to the gradual awareness of her special destiny as, through suffering and pain and the deprivations of Indian captivity, she renounces her earlier selfish and complacent ways and surrenders herself to the knowledge of God's absolute power and sovereignty. Her physical redemption thus comes to mirror her spiritual redemption and her eventual restoration to the community of visible saints in Boston prefigures, in her representation, the future destiny of her soul among the saints in heaven. Further, Mrs Rowlandson claims for her experience an exemplary significance as an indication of the special destiny reserved for God's chosen people of New England. Mary Rowlandson's liberation

from suffering, her rescue from the moral and geographical wilderness prefigures, in her account, the future liberation of the community of saints from the bondage of worldly sin into the freedom of heavenly bliss.

Mary Rowlandson's description of her ordeal is punctuated with lengthy exclamations about the power and mercy of God, demonstrated by his constant renewal of her strength and stamina. When she thinks she must surrender to despair and give up the struggle to survive, God preserves her spirit "that [she] might see more of His power" (p.37). Thus, at an early stage in the narrative her ordeal assumes a double significance as both a physical and a spiritual trial. God sustains her spirit or will to survive just as he sustains her spiritual desire for salvation through grace. Mrs Rowlandson's ordeal tests her commitment to both spiritual and physical redemption. The ordeal also proves her commitment as a representative member of an entire community seeking redemption.

The experience of captivity thus takes on a complex additional significance. Mrs Rowlandson's suffering in the wilderness becomes the image of personal uncertainty regarding the ultimate destiny of the soul. Her eventual redemption from the Indians, achieved through the efforts of the magistrates in Boston, signifies the final redemption through the efforts of God of the visible saint. More than this, however, Mrs Rowlandson's experience assumes a communal significance as a typological repetition of the Biblical story of the Babylonian captivity. In the same way that her suffering repeats that of the captive Israelites, so her eventual release signifies the glorious future destiny of God's newly chosen people in the New World. Like Mary Rowlandson, if the community of the faithful can keep to their faith despite all the uncertainties and difficulties of human history then, like the redeemed captive, they too will be released from bondage to the physical world into the freedom of spiritual salvation. Mrs Rowlandson certainly is not unaware of the communal interpretation invited by her ordeal and this typological significance motivates her use of biblical imagery and especially the image of the Babylonian captivity.

It is during the journey to King Philip's encampment that Mrs Rowlandson describes how she surrenders her unwillingness to weep before her captors and there by the side of the river she gives herself over to uncontrollable weeping. She creates then a parallel between her experience and the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon: "now may I say [she writes] as Psal. 137:1, 'By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion' " (pp.46-47). The victory of the

heathen over the settlers of New England appears to her as a typological repetition of the sufferings of God's chosen people. Through this typological logic, the narrative offers its contemporary readers the opportunity to experience what Annette Kolodny calls "their community's spiritual vulnerability through the biblical type, and then, more dramatically, their own individual vulnerability through identification with an actual woman who exemplifies the type".[25] In other words, Mrs Rowlandson's narrative offers both an example of the parallel between biblical events and contemporary events and also offers a demonstration of the fact that no-one is exempt from the implications (both positive and negative, frightening and reassuring) of this parallel.

Mary Rowlandson develops the parallel between her own destiny and that of the entire Puritan community by creating a pattern of Biblical reference that serves to generalize the significance of her experiences so they become applicable to everyone. When she first catches sight of the Indian town of Wenimesset and sees the large number of Indians gathered there she likens her feelings of dismay to the experience of David: "I had fainted, unless I had believed" (Psalms 27:13). She finds some comfort in the biblical parallel between the taking of her own children by Indians and Jacob's loss of his sons (Genesis 42:36). When she is forbidden to see her daughter in a nearby Indian village, Mrs Rowlandson prays that God will show her some sign of his good will and will give her reason to hope that her trials will end; shortly after this her son Joseph (whose whereabouts had been unknown to her) unexpectedly appears. She exclaims that "indeed quickly the Lord answered in some measure my poor prayers" (p.40). The very next day Mrs Rowlandson acquires a Bible, taken by an Indian in the raid on Medfield, and there she finds a scriptural passage which describes both her experience of despair and the hope of ultimate redemption:

> in that melancholy time [she tells us,] it came into my head to read first the 28 chapter if Deut., which I did, and when I had read it, my dark heart wrought on this manner, that there was no mercy for me, that the blessings were gone and the curses come into their room, and that I had lost my opportunity. But the Lord helped me still to go on reading till I came to chapter 30, the seven first verses, where I found there was mercy promised again if we would return to him by repentance, and, though we

> were scattered from one end of the earth to the other, yet the Lord would gather us together and turn all those curses upon our enemies (p.41).

Mrs Rowlandson concludes: “I do not desire to live to forget this scripture and what comfort it was to me”(p.41). This passage encapsulates the orthodox interpretation of Puritan experience: that in return for genuine repentance and a faithful heart, God will show mercy to His people and redemption will finally be theirs. This dispensation applies equally to individuals and to the community of saints. Despite any backsliding that may have occurred among the visible saints of New England, God remains willing to keep to the terms of the federal covenant. He will show mercy where there is true repentance but where there is no repentance His power will be made manifest instead through His wrath.

God’s power over all aspects of temporal life is made clear to Mrs Rowlandson. The Indians are represented as satanic agents through whom God warns and chastizes His people. It is only when she is prevented by her captivity from observing the Sabbath that she remembers how many Sabbaths she misspent or let pass. This recollection brings with it the guilty awareness that God could justifiably cast her from His sight but Mrs Rowlandson is surprised and impressed by the extent of God’s mercy that He does not. This guilty realization is soon recognized as a crucial step in her chastisement and repentance; only now does Mrs Rowlandson see clearly the error of her earlier ways and resolve to reform her conduct: “as He wounded me with one hand, so He healed me with the other”(p.38). God’s chastisement is not only justified but merciful, she realizes. The physical wounds she has suffered provide the occasion for a spiritual healing, and Mrs Rowlandson continues to interpret her trials in this way: as punishment for her sins and guidance towards God’s true way, from which she has strayed. Captivity presents her with a powerful image of the wilderness condition that is the spiritual condition of her community and her self, in the absence of God’s guidance.

If the community of saints in New England is true to the terms of the federal covenant, Mary Rowlandson suggests, then God would destroy all its enemies among the heathen. As it is, God must use the Indians to chastize His people and to lead them back to the way of righteousness. It is in this connection that Mrs Rowlandson justifies her own text, by means of the communal sub-text she articulates. As Scripture spoke to her at crucial moments in her distress to comfort her with the true

significance of her suffering and with hope of redemption, so her narrative is intended "even as the psalmist says to declare the works of the Lord and His wonderful power in carrying us along, preserving us in the wilderness while under the enemy's hand and returning us in safety again"(p.46). Mrs Rowlandson intends her story to draw attention to the merciful aspect of the chastisement that all of the colonists have experienced in the varying forms of famine, disease, Indian attack, or the extreme trauma of captivity.

Mrs Rowlandson's narrative is often credited with creating the genre of captivity narratives and in the latter part of the seventeenth century this literary form was very popular, combining as it does adventure and exotic elements with orthodox theology, within a rhetorical package that speaks to the New World audience's need for reassurance that all their deprivations will prove worthwhile. In many ways the real mastermind behind this strategy of combining threat with comfort, adventure with instruction, was Cotton Mather, son of Increase Mather and grandson of John Cotton. Cotton Mather's writing took the style of the jeremiad to a new pitch. He identified the native inhabitants of New England as the satanic agents of God's punitive will: the Indians were to be used by God as a scourge and means of affliction for His people. And to this would be added the interventions of Satan himself, "often the Executioner of the Wrath of God upon a sinful World", in Cotton Mather's description in the sermon, "Things for a Distressed People to think upon" (1696).[26] In that same sermon, he warns that "the Spirit of God against whom we had Rebelled, permitted the Devils, from the Depths of Hell, to assault us, with as Prodigious Vexations, as ever befel any People under the whole Cope of Heaven".[27] Only the renewal of the covenant could avert disaster. This warning and this style of rhetoric had a profound influence upon Cotton Mather's thinking as he dealt with the outbreak of witchcraft hysteria in New England.

Increase and Cotton Mather recognized in the declension of the Massachusetts Bay colony, in the neglect of their exceptional destiny, the conditions for a satanic challenge. Satan could hope to win a victory over God's people by taking advantage of their weakened spiritual state. Thus, the reports of witchcraft throughout the latter seventeenth century fitted with their diagnosis of the spiritual malaise which New England was suffering. The Mathers extended Thomas Shepard's claim that the divine will could be approached by means of the signs or providences that record God's interventions in our world by emphasizing what could be known rather than the

imperfection of what knowledge men can obtain about God's will. The Mathers also extended the range of phenomena that could count as divine providences:

> "Divine Judgements, Tempests, Floods, Earth-quakes, Thunders as are unusual, Strange Apparitions, or what ever else shall happen that is Prodigious, Witchcrafts, Diabolical Possessions, Remarkable Judgements upon noted Sinners, eminent Deliverances, and Answers of Prayer, are to be reckoned among Illustrious Providences.[28]

Consequently, witchcraft, seen within the logic of the jeremiad, was another sign that the New England errand was under serious threat, that New England was the pre-eminent battleground between God and Satan, and that the colonists neglected this knowledge at their peril. In his account of the witchcraft trials at Salem, The Wonders of the Invisible World, Being an Account of the Tryals of Several Witches Lately Executed in New England (1692), Cotton Mather makes precisely this argument. From the declension of the young and the neglect or postponement of their fathers' errand a whole variety of calamities have followed; but the colonists have failed to make the correct use of the disasters that have befallen them - they have not yet repented. He reminds the colonists that the settlement of New England was originally made in the Devil's territories; "He has wanted his Incarnate Legions to Persecute us, as the People of God have in the other Hemispheres been Persecuted: he has therefore drawn forth his more Spiritual ones to make an Attacque upon us".[29] Mather is also aware of the approaching millennium, that the incidence of satanic possessions, natural disasters and cases of witchcraft is likely to increase as the Devil recognizes that his time is short if he is to disrupt millennial expectations: "Just before our Lords First Coming, There were most observable Outrages committed by the Devil upon the Children of Men: And I am suspicious, That there will again be an unusual Range of the Devil amongst us, a little before the Second Coming of our Lord".[30]

Where the other ministers involved in the witchcraft hysteria came to see the errors of their judgement, Cotton Mather never retreated from him firm exceptionalist line of reasoning: that the exceptional destiny of New England had been under siege by the Devil, operating through his agents, to destroy God's chosen people and their promised land. Well into the eighteenth century, Cotton Mather preached the providential significance of natural phenomena such as storms, earthquakes and the

like in pieces such as "Boanerges: A Short Essay to preserve and strengthen the Good Impressions produced by Earthquakes" (1727). The closing exhortation reads: "All that the Oracles of GOD have mentioned, as Things to be done before it, are Accomplished: I say, All Accomplished! Certainly the Kingdom of God is at hand: And in the Introducing of it, The Foundations of the Earth shall shake; The Earth shall be utterly broken down; The Earth shall be clean dissolved; The Earth shall be moved exceedingly".[31]

Exceptionalism and the Creation of a Nation

The concept of the errand continued to inform public pronouncements about the society and culture of Massachusetts Bay, its history and its destiny, right up to the time of the Revolution. However, the formulation of the errand changed subtly in the course of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Mayhew's 1754 election sermon attributes the authority of government primarily to God but immediately to the "common consent": "government is spoken of in Scripture as being both the ordinance of God and the ordinance of man - of God, in reference to his original plan and universal providence, and of man, as it is more immediately the result of human prudence, wisdom, and concert".[32] The purpose of government Mayhew finds in scripture as divine favor towards God's chosen people, so that they might be delivered out of bondage, "and that, being brought out of the house of bondage, they might be conducted into a good land, flowing with milk and honey; that they might there possess property, enjoy the blessing of equal laws, and be happy".[33] So, in 1754, the representation of the errand is beginning to echo the terms of the Declaration of Independence: the possession of private property, equality before the law, and the freedom to pursue happiness. On the eve of the Revolution, in 1775, Samuel Langdon's sermon addressed the issue of the direct appointment of councillors by the King to replace those that had been popularly elected. He interprets this development positively, within the context of a renewed errand: America could take this opportunity to cleanse herself of the corruption of the European courts, just as the first settlers freed themselves of European corruption; good government will now be restored; and Langdon ends with a reminder of the catastrophic destruction that God can call down upon the enemies of His chosen people.[34]

Benjamin Franklin also used the vocabulary of exceptionalism to represent his particular vision of the world and the infant American nation within it. In his Autobiography, Franklin uses the concept of providence to describe the principle that guides and shapes the natural world. Of course, within the terms of Puritan theology, "providence" had described God's direct intervention in the human world. Franklin uses the term to describe a rational principle that controls the operation of the world and he is very much of his time in this belief. One of the fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment was the idea that the universe is orderly and understandable through the faculty of reason. Because the world is governed by rational principles it can be improved by maximizing the rational government of people and institutions. America, a new nation unhampered by the complexities of European history and unburdened by a sophisticated class system and structure of inheritance, offered an unrivalled opportunity for the establishment of a democratic society based on rational principles. The guiding principle of reason that required re-engineering to produce an improved or in fact exemplary nation Franklin described as "providence". And as the Autobiography progresses, Franklin's own work is shown to further the rational and utilitarian work of providence and to create of his own life a model citizen and a model American.

What Franklin means by "American" is related to the context of revolutionary unrest in which he wrote. The characteristics that he chooses to highlight coincide with the revolutionary ideals of the new nation. Franklin begins his autobiography with an account of his ancestors who are described as champions of freedom, religious dissenters. From them, Franklin's inheritance is not money or land or title, but a commitment to the ideal of freedom. This theme also arises from Franklin's description of his father - from him he received no inherited privileges but the more valuable virtues of industry, community spirit, practicality and common sense. These, in Franklin's estimation, are the characteristics of the model American. The Autobiography represents Franklin's life as enacting the newly formed American myth of individual self-realization in a land of opportunity. It is in this way that Franklin redefined the mythology exceptionalism, away from its religious origins as an errand into the wilderness where a grand and purified church would be established, peopled by the visible saints chosen by God, and awaiting the glorious end of time. Franklin represents the American errand as the creation of a secular state that is purified of the corruption of European politics and a social structure based on

inherited title. It is the secular America that will be a model of democratic government and the envy of all the nations of the earth. Franklin himself embodies this impulse to create oneself anew, to take opportunities when they arise and then to interpret success as the consequence of being American. To be American and to be exemplary become the same thing, in Franklin's view. His life develops from poverty and obscurity to wealth and international fame; he starts life as a colonist but lives to become a citizen of an independent nation. And one of the most important aims of his autobiography is to teach readers how they too can become model Americans. The tone is didactic and the didactic intention causes Franklin to shape the story of his life in particular ways: he removes or minimizes all elements that are purely personal and not representative of the kind of life he is dramatizing. For example, the death of his son is turned into a recommendation of inoculation; he mentions his father's first wife only when describing his parents' tombstone. When he is finally unable to achieve perfection, Franklin argues that perfection itself is imperfect, because it inspires envy and hatred! His life may not be absolutely perfect but it is exemplary; at the outset of his autobiography Franklin claims that he would repeat his life exactly as it was, but since he cannot relive his life he will recollect it instead. The model characteristics of his life Franklin described as belonging to America in his "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784). Hard work, industry, thrift, common sense, altruism, moral integrity and fair-mindedness - these are the qualities that will guarantee success in America. Franklin warns against immigrating those who seek an easy life, those who are idle or those who expect to be treated according to some inherited rank: these individuals will never make Americans. Franklin powerfully redefined the Puritan mission: recasting the terms of success, where material prosperity assumed a prominence it had not had before, where the conditions of life for Americans were defined less in spiritual terms than earlier, where the collective salvation of the community was transformed into a form of government that would protect the rights of all citizens. What remained was the perception that America would continue to be judged by the other nations of the world to whom America would remain a model, a guide, a measure. And also a guardian of the inalienable rights of man, so recently enshrined in the Constitution: it is in this aspect that America appears in Philip Freneau's poem, "On Mr Paine's Rights of Man" (1795).

So shall our nation, formed on Virtue's plan,

Remain the guardian of the Rights of Man,

A vast republic, famed through every clime,

Without a king, to see the end of time.[35]

Freneau thus represents an important element of the evolving mythology of American exceptionalism: America is to be not only a model nation but also will be the world's guardian, regulating the conduct of other nations, and representing the world's last and best chance at salvation.

[1] **NOTES**

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[16] John Cotton, Gods Mercie Mixed with his Justice or His Peoples Deliverance in Times of Danger, 1641. Facsimile reproduction introduced by Everett H. Emerson (1958, rpt. Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1977).

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[33] ibid., p.293.

[34] Samuel Langdon, "A Sermon" (1775) in The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670-1775, ed. A. W. Plumstead (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), pp.357-73.

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