

JOHN WINTHROP

FROM General Observations AND Model of Christian Charity (1629-30)

The Puritans, like the Pilgrims, felt impelled to emigrate to escape religious persecution. Puritans were dissenters who strove to "purify" the Anglican Church of the vestiges of Catholicism and reform it through a stronger application of Calvinism. Condemned and harassed by crown and church officials, some decided to move to the New World. There they planned to establish, as their governor John Winthrop phrased it, a "city upon a hill" that was to set a shining example of piety and community for the rest of the world. Instead of pursuing property and profit, the Puritans were on a mission—though they certainly prayed that peace and prosperity would attend their piety. In 1629, as Winthrop, the forty-one-year-old Suffolk county squire, prepared to lead the first contingent of Puritans to the Massachusetts Bay colony, he listed some of the reasons why he was emigrating and why others should too. Then in 1630 while aboard the Arbella, as the colonists struggled with homesickness, seasickness, and fear of the unknown, he both chastized and encouraged them by reminding them that they were engaged in a labor of love and that their endeavors would be judged.

From John Winthrop, *Winthrop Papers*, vol. II, 1623-1630 (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931), pp. 114-15, 282, 292-95. [Editorial insertions appear in square brackets—Ed.]

General Observations, 1629

1. It wilbe a service to the Church of great Consequence to carrye the Gospell into those partes of the world, and to rayne a bullwarke against the kingdom of Antichrist which the Jesuites labour to reare vp in all places of the worlde.

2. All other Churches of Europe are brought to desolation, and it cannot be, but the like Judgment is comminge vpon vs: and who knows, but that God hath provided this place, to be a refuge for manye, whom he meanes to save out of the general destruction?

3. This land growes wearye of her Inhabitanes, so as man which is the most pretious of all Creatures, is heere more vile and base, then the earthe they treade vpon: so as children neighbours and freindes (especially] if they be poore) are rated the greatest burdens, which if things were right, would be the cheifest earthly bless[ings].

4. We are growne to that height of Intemperance in all excesse of Ryot, as no mans estate all most will suffice to keepe sayle with his equalls: and he that fayles in it, must Hue in scorn and contempt: hence it comes, that all artes and trades are carried in that deceitful and vnrighteous course, as it is allmost impossible] for a good and vpriight man to maintaine his charge and Hue

comfortably in any of them.

5. The fountains of learninge and Relig[ion] are so corrupted, as (besides the vnsupport[able] chardge of their education] most Children, even the best wittes and of fayrest hopes, are perverted corrupted and vttrly overthrowne by the multitude of evill examples and the licentious government of those seminaries.

6. The whole earthe is the Lordes garden: and he hath given it to the sons of men to be tilled and improved by them: why then should we stand striving heere for places of habitation etc. (many men spending as much labor and cost to recover or keepe sometyme an Acre or 2 of lande, as would procure him many C [hundred] acres as good or better in another place) and in the mene tyme suffere whole countrys as fruitfull and convenient for the vse of man, to lye waste without any improvement?

7. What can be a better worke and more honorable and worthy [a Christian then to helpe] rayse and supporte a particular] Church while it is in the infancye, and to ioine our forces with suche a Companye of faithfull people, as by a tyme-ly assistance maye growe stronge and prosper, and for want of it may be putt to great hazard, if not wholly ruined?

8. If suche as are knowne to be godly and Hue

in wealthe and prosperitye heere, shall forsake all this to ioine themselves to this Church, and to runne the hazard with them of a harde and meane condition, it wilbe an example of great vse, bothe for removinge the schandale of worldly and sinister respectes to give more life to the Faith of Codes people in their prayers for the plantation, and allso to incourage others to ioine the more willingly in it.

Christian Charitie. A Modell Hereof [1630]

God Almightye in his most holy and wise providence hath soe disposed of the Condidion of man-kinde, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subieccion.

It rests now to make some applicacion of this discourse by the present designe which gaue the occasion of writinge of it. Herein are 4 things to be propounded: first the persons, 2ly, the worke, 3ly, the end, 4ly the meanes.

I. For the persons, wee are a Company professing our selues fellow members of Christ, In which respect onely though wee were absent from cache other many miles, and had our employmentes as farre distant, yet wee ought to account our selues knitt together by this bond of loue, and liue in the exercise of it, ...

2ly. For the worke wee haue in hand, it is by a mutuall consent through a speciall overrulinge providence, and a more then an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seeke out a place of Cohabitation and Consorteshipp vnder a due forme of Government both ciuill and ecclesiasticall. In such cases as this the care of the publique must oversway all private respects, by which not onely conscience, but meare Ciuill pollicy doth binde vs; for it is a true rule that particular estates cannott subsist in the ruine of the publique.

3ly. The end is to improue our Hues to doe more seruice to the Lord the comferte and encrease of the body of christe whereof wee are members that our selues and posterity may be the better preserued from the Common corrupcions of this euill world to serue the Lord and worke out our Salvacion vnder the power and purity of his holy Ordinances.

4ly. For the meanes whereby this must be effected, they are 2fold, a Conformity with the worke and end wee aime at, these wee see are extraordinary, therefore wee must not content our selues with vsuall ordinary meanes whatsoever wee did or ought to haue done when wee liued in England, the same must wee doe and more allsoe where we goe: That which the most in their Churches maineteine as a truthe in profession onely, wee must bring into familiar

and constant practise, . . . neither must wee think that the lord will beare with such faileings at our hands as hee dothe from those among whome wee haue liued, and that for 3 Reasons.

I. In regard of the more neare bond of marriage, betweene him and vs, wherein he hath taken vs to be his after a most strickt and peculiar manner which will make him the more Jealous of our loue and obedience soe he tells the people of Israeli, you onely haue I knowne of all the families of the Earthe therefore will I punishe you for your Transgressions.

2ly, because the lord will be sanctified in them that come neare him. Wee know that there were many that corrupted the seruice of the Lord some setting vpp Alters before his owne, others offering both strange fire and strange Sacrifices allsoe; yet lere came noe fire from heaven, or other sudden Fjudgement vpon them as did vpon Nadab and Abihu whoe yet wee may thinke did not sinne presumptuously.

3ly When God giues a speciall Commission he lookes to haue it stricktly obserued in every Article, when hee gaue Saule a Commission to destroy laleck hee indented with him vpon certaine Articles and because hee failed in one of the least, and that vpon a faire pretence, it lost him the kingdome, which should haue bene his reward, if hee had obserued his Commission: Thus stands the cause between God and vs, wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke, wee haue taken out a Commission, the Lord hath giuen vs leaue to drawe our owne Articles, . . . wee haue herevpon besought him of fauour and blessing: Now if the Lord shall please to heare vs, and bring vs in peace to the place wee desire, then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission, and] will expect a strickt performance of the Articles contained in it it, but if we shall neglect the observation of these Articles which are the ends wee haue propounded, and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnall intencions, seekeing great things for our selues and our posterity, the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against vs be reuenged of such a periured people and make vs

iowe the price of the breache of such a Covenant. Now the onely way to avoyde this shipwracke and to provide for our posterity is to followe the Counsell of Micah, to doe Justly, to loue mercy, to walke humbly with our God, for this end, wee must be knitt together in this worke as one man, wee must entertaine each other in brotherly Affection, wee must be willing to abridge our selues of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, we must vphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekenes, gentlenes,

patience and liberallity, wee must delight in cache other, make others Condictions our owne reioyce together, mourne together, labour, and suffer together, all-ways haueing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body, soe shall wee keepe the vnitie of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among vs, as his owne people and will commaund a blessing vpon vs in all our wayes, soe that wee shall see much more of his wisdome power goodnes and truthe then formerly wee haue bene acquainted with, wee shall finde that the God of Israeli is among vs, when tenn of vs shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make vs a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty vpon a Hill, the eies of all people are vpon vs; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee haue vndertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from vs, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world, wee shall open the mouthes of enemies to speake euill of the wayes of god and all professours for Gods sake; wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy seruants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curssees vpon vs til wee be consumed out of the good land whether wee are goeing: And to shutt vpp this discourse with that exhortation of Moses that faithfull ser-uant of the Lord in his last farewell to Israeli Deut. 30. Beloued there is now sett before vs life, and good, deathe and euill in that wee are Com-maunded this day to loue the Lord our God, and to loue one another to walke in his wayes and to keepe his Commaundements and his Ordinance, and his lawes, and the Articles of our Covenant with him that wee may Hue and be multiplyed, and that the Lord our God may blesse vs in the land whether wee goe to possesse it: But if our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worshipp other Gods our pleasures, and proffitts, and serue them; it is propounded vnto vs this day, wee shall surely perishe out of the good Land whether wee passe over this vast Sea to possesse it;

Therefore lett vs choose life,
that wee, and our Seede,
may Hue; by obeying his
voyce, and cleaueing to him,
for hee is our life, and
our prosperity.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did Winthrop focus on what pushed the Puritans out of England or what was pulling them to the New World when promoting emigration in 1629? How does this selection compare with his 1630 address?
2. How did dissent from the English establishment and consensus among themselves affect the movement of Puritans to the New World and the establishment of their city upon a hill?
3. Why did Winthrop think that the Puritans were a special people? And, why did he believe that they had to be especially careful in their new endeavor?
4. How might the Puritans' creation and interpretation of a covenant have affected the relationships between church and state and people?

