

LECTURE III – Oliver Cromwell, John Winthrop, and Increase Mather

England was the source of American fundamentalism in so many ways, but as with most everything America changed it to suit itself. But we can hardly understand the phenomena without looking fairly closely at some major figures and what they represented. Cromwell who we know well around here both as Lord Protector and Chancellor of Oxford University [his portrait is above the central fireplace in Mansfield College SCR in the university's only Puritan college – that was the founding though it is pretty hard to find any there now], John Owen of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford to name two from here were crucial for American Congregationalists and Independents. Cambridge was of course the center of English Puritanism, and Oxford was royalist until Cromwell's armies camped in my village of Wheatley [where his daughter married and her name is in the church register there] finally routed the royalists and captured Charles I not far from Oxford as he was trying to escape. But it was East Anglia and some of the central shires that bred most of the Puritans. Cromwell was Lord of a manor in Huntington as was John Winthrop at Groton. Winthrop among others was the founder of Boston. Increase Mather, born in the USA when his father Richard was of the first clergy to live in Boston, spend many years in England for education as well as a mediator dealing with James II and William of Orange for the political rights of the colony. He was considered the leading New England divine in his time. His son Cotton became America's first major theologian. In my office in college there is a large portrait of Increase given to the college at its founding. I liked the Puritan name [with Accepted, Preserved, etc] if not the gaze. I had to work hard there.

What is Puritanism? Perry Miller said it is more easily described than defined.

According to Charles Lloyd Cohen in 'God's Caress' it is a 'hotter sort of Protestant.'

There is a white hot moralism, uncompromising biblical faith, a Reformed theology of grace – no 'works' – often predestinarian, strong on the Sabbath, opposed to 'papists, hierachists, ambidexters and neuters in religion ... court flatters, time-serving projectors and the raucorous caterpillars of the realm' according to Henry Parker in 1641. They didn't like oaths either. They liked 'new birth' or now as we say 'born again' which includes an experience of desperation, then relief. Public avowals of faith are usually required. There can be a certain seriousness. Bishop Jeremy Taylor claimed that Christ never laughed. Bishop Curle said Puritans were 'one as loves God with all his soul but hates his neighbour with all his heart.' There were and are many economic and political ramifications – which I will look at later.

CROMWELL. If not a loyal churchman, Cromwell was an impressive Biblicist struggling to conform to the word of God for his life and the nation's. His letters are full of biblical quotes. In one short letter to Mrs. St John, he cites 8 psalms and five epistles. In his speech opening the first Protectoral Parliament in 1654, he uses Timothy, Jude, Psalm 40, and heavy emphasis on the Book of Exodus which he said was 'the only parallel of God's dealing with us that I know in the world.' The story of Moses and his freeing the oppressed was central to his thought and action, and the analogy was as complete as it was for the Puritans who crossed the water especially after Charles II took power. Dissolving the same Parliament he quoted scripture no less than 9 times and to his second Parliament he read out Psalm 85 in its entirety. Opening the Nominating

Assembly in 1653, he expounded Psalm 68 with its message that God would bring His people again from the depths of the sea, as once he led Israel through the Red Sea.

Reflecting on kingship, there is good evidence that he based his beheading of Charles I on the Bible – which as you may know Samuel is against kingships, though the Jews gave in later. God was a god of freedom and deliverance, but also a god of strong rules including the Ten Commandments. He constantly intervened in human affairs, and tested, encouraged, warned, and chastised his people. He was a warrior god who stormed the mountains and entered the plains and expected his chosen to work and pray constantly. He drew lines and distinctions, and did not suffer sinners gladly – but was willing to forgive when there was repentance, both to the individual and to the nation.

Britain was the new chosen people, not replacing the Jews necessarily [Cromwell was the first to allow the Jews back to England since the 12th century], but running in parallel. They were to bring the rule and reformation of God to the Europe and ultimately the world, as later to be seen here in the 19th century combination of mission and might. John Milton, the greatest poet and willing political pamphleteer of the English Revolution [whose statute dominates the Mansfield Quad, with John Bunyan who takes up a much lesser role] wrote: England was chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Zion should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of reformation to all Europe.

So we have a strong sense of national mission based on biblical interpretation which fortifies the boundaries of Protestantism and a warrior cult based on Moses and David.

He had nothing to do with Catholics or Muslims but was a strong backer of the Jews.

Cromwell supported strong church and state links, was patriarchal, and pre-

Enlightenment so that faith trumped reason. There was no thought of secularity for him.

He would not have liked David Hume, or Samuel Johnson, or theatre, or frivolities. Life

was serious; prayer was used for guidance and for confession; life was action for God and England. *Old Ironsides* is America's oldest commissioned warship.

When suffering one of his rare defeats in the Caribbean, undertaken at his personal initiative, the God of Battles seemed to have deserted him and the when the news of the defeat reached him in July 1655, he experienced a deep crisis of self-doubt. He shut himself in his room for the whole day and inaugurated a series of exercises in national humiliation and self scrutiny which went on for 2 months. But more success followed and God appeared to be again on the side of the Parliamentarians. He died in 1658 but had no clear plans for succession.

When Charles II came back to England and the Restoration began in earnest, life was hard for the Roundheads. Persecutions took place. Many of them went to New England. The Atlantic became the new 'Red Sea' and the 'wilderness' would be experienced. The Massachusetts synod of 1679 declared that:

the ways of God towards this His people are in many respects like unto his dealings with Israel of old. It was a great and high undertaking of our fathers when they ventured themselves and their little ones upon the rude ways of the vast ocean, that so they might follow the Lord into this land.

Some who remained in England thought the same even before the English Revolution.

George Herbert wrote:

Religion stands on tiptoe in our land
 Readie to pass to the American strand.

 But the Sunne still goes both west and east;
 So also did the Church by going west
 Still eastward go; because it drew more near
 to time and place, where judgement shall apeare.

There was also a strong millennial element in the 17th century in England. Richard Baxter's *A Holy Commonwealth*, appearing after Cromwell's death, was pre-millennial in its hopes for a good state. Later he changed his mind after 30 years of persecution and claimed that only through God's work will this happen. He dedicated *The Glorious Kingdom of Christ* to Increase Mather.

It was **John Winthrop**, Lord of the Manor of Groton, and his rich friends and many poor who settled Boston in 1630 before the Cromwell's Republic. He called England 'Sodom' and New England the 'new Israel', but there was a strong belief that when the true Reformation was seen in New England by the English, true believers would once again submit to the Protestant way and throw off their bishops, vestments, royalty, and their frivolous ways. A new start must be made. 'Is not the way to Canaan through the wilderness' said Rev Richard Mather, father of Increase, and grandfather of Cotton – the three most famous and revered clerics of New England along with John Cotton. There were other reasons for going to America, and Perry Miller lists them as so:

1. Conversion of the Indians
2. A rendezvous for Protestants from other parts of Europe
3. To hasten reformation in England and Scotland
4. A hiding place from the Civil War in England
5. to train soldiers and seamen against Rome
6. Prosperity for the poor
7. To prove to English episcopacy that true polity and good government might stand together.

Winthrop was known as 'Moses' to some, as Washington was later called 'our Joshua.' They built up covenant models, based on OT concepts, where the people would take God's word of freedom then to follow the law. Based on Exodus 20 where the first part deals with the coming out of Egypt, then Israel agrees to follow God's laws. He also said

They would be a city set on a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our god in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world; we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of god and all professors for God's sake; we shall shame the faces of many of god's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us until we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going ... We will be bound together with ligaments of love ... the good of the whole overpasses any person's individual need.

These words especially 'city on a hill' was used by Ronald Reagan as his chief text. He only got it wrong a little, as a 'shining city on a hill'. It helped win him an election.

The earlier settlement by 10 years was at Plymouth by what are called the Pilgrims. Mainly from Scrooby in Nottinghamshire [?] they were exiled in Leyden, Holland for 12 or so years, and when the Dutch began to tire of them too, over they came to New England. The story goes they thought they were going to Virginia, but lost their way. Plymouth was the last port in England. They named Plymouth Rock after that. Boston of

course had its namesake in East Anglia, and even the geography of Cap Cod looks like the coast of Lincolnshire in that area.

The use of the Bible as text for the national undertaking was prominent. The famous passage, still read out at some New England Thanksgiving Day services, is [OHP]:

May not and ought not ...

Biblical analogies were used all the time. After a hard winter, some threatened to go back to England. Cotton Mather, who took to wearing a skull cap and calling himself a rabbi, said 'Would ye go back to *Egypt*? There you must worship the beast of the image of the beast' [i.e. Charles II and his papist leanings]. The 'errand into the wilderness' was of crucial importance to the national understanding of what America was all about.

Church membership in Boston and elsewhere in NE was based on giving testimony. It wasn't enough to be a nice guy or financial supporter or even the governor, without naming Christ as one's 'personal savior.'

Use of the Bible

The Puritan use of the Scriptures was complex. They often looked for personal identifications with major Biblical figures for themselves and for their leaders. They also used important biblical stories as a way of understanding the nations. Metaphors, typologies, similes, analogies, and figurations all played a part. John Bunyan wrote:

Would's't read thyself? O then come hither
And lay my book, thy head and heart together¹

In his sermon to the Winthrop fleet, John Cotton had compared Israel's deliverance from Egypt to the Puritans' deliverance from English tyranny. They were going to a new land of promise. Thomas Hooker also made the parallels between Israel's salvation and applied it to the Puritan migration to New England:

There must be Contrition and Humiliation before the Lord comes to take possession ... This was typified in the passage of the Children of Israel towards the Promised Land. They must come into and go through a vast and roaring Wilderness, where they must be bruised with many pressures, humbled under many overbearing difficulties, before they could possess that good land which abounded with all prosperity, flowed with Milk and Honey.²

The word 'typified' is important. The Puritans read Christ both backward into history and forward into the future so that he could be seen in Abraham and Moses as well as John Winthrop and William Bradford. They all were 'types' of Christ. Typological thinking was fundamental to the Puritans, as it was for many early church theologians. Cotton Mather's *Life of John Winthrop* is an example. Mather wrote of Winthrop as *Nehemias Americanus* and paralleled their lives. He also used Moses and Lycurgus, a reformer of the Spartan Constitution in the 7th century BC as figures for understanding the role of Winthrop. The deliverance from Egypt, the founding of Jerusalem, and coming back from the Babylon captivity are all figures for understanding the migration to America. The parallels were not precise, but the overall comparisons helped to put the mission to America in a sacred context. Moses was often called the 'Noble Patriot' and the first generation of American leaders was raised in 'our New-England Israel.'

¹ Bunyan, John, 'The Author's Apology for his Book' in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. James B Wharey, 2d ed., Oxford 1960 pp. 5-7

² Hooker, Thomas, *Application of Redemption*, IX, p 5; quoted from Bercovitch op cit. p 37

Ezra Stiles and others were quick to see that education of the colony's children was crucial for this understanding of civil and religious liberty. "Let our children be often taught to read the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth verses of the twenty-sixth chapter of Deuteronomy with parallel application to the history of our ancestors. Let the great errand into American never be forgotten."³

Of course not all came for religious reasons or to identify with the 'errand in the wild.' Some came 'to fish'. Others came to escape jail. Others came just for the adventure. Others left what they thought was a class society. That would be linked to religion, in that era few if any made the separation that we now make between sacred and secular, church and state. A hierarchical society was anathema to the Congregationalists but not to Presbyterians or Increase Mather.

INCREASE MATHER [1639-1722] was by common consent New England's greatest divine, with the possible exception of his son Cotton, named after John Cotton, who along with Increase's father Richard Mather, were the first clerics with Winthrop & Co. But he fought his father on **half-way covenant** that allowed children of church members who had not been 'born again' to be baptized. It goes without saying that he was a Biblicist with a good knowledge of their languages, along with classical learning. He was minister of the 2d most important church in Boston, now called Old North. He became President of Harvard, the only college in the New World at the time, and primarily for the training of Congregational ministers though a classical as well as a biblical education was used. Boston was a city of only 2,500 and Harvard had only a

³ Stiles, Ezra, *Discourse on Christian Union*, 96

handful of students, a President, and two tutors. He also was an ‘ambassador’ to the Court of St James – James II and later William and Mary. He stayed in England 1688-91⁴ in order to get rid of Governor Andros and have a proper charter for the colony and Harvard so that true churchmanship, i.e. Congregational, could still be forced. Quakers, Presbyterians, and Anglicans were bared under pain of death. The boundaries were firm. When Boston found out that Cromwell included Presbyterians in the New Model Army, they cut off their contributions for the Grand Old Cause. And Presbys didn’t need to give **personal testimony of faith** to join.

How did these revered gentlemen arrange the foundation for American Fundamentalism?

In all the ways listed above. Perhaps they didn’t put so much emphasis on the things taken for granted, such as anti-feminism, abortion, homosexuality, Muslims, etc which have become more 20th century features of interest. Further there would be items such as hard work, manliness, warfare etc that would be only assumed a new society must have. And they would not have worried about secularity at first, but within a generation of the landings the big issue was the Half-Way Covenant, where Mather father and son and grandson would disagree. Originally only born-again believers - ‘visible saints’ - could get their children baptized. Later the bars were lowered, and this caused Increase no end of grief. Perhaps you could say that this was the beginnings of secularity in the sense that the fairly rigid notion of church membership was slipping away. Fast Days were proclaimed for this and the need for other repentances when the very strict morals of New England were violated. Comets and disasters were God’s way of noting trouble ahead. There were many sins. It was noted that there was ‘an insatiable desire after Land, and

⁴ His brother Samuel was Chaplain at Magdalen, Oxford, Fellow of Trinity Dublin et al; his younger son was Dissenting Minister in Witney, Oxon from 1700 and died there 1732

world Accommodations, yea so as to forsake Churches and Ordinances and to live like Heathen ... farms and merchandising have been preferred before the things of God.’

Clothes and hair were set. ‘That God hath a Controversy with his New England People is undeniable.’ They pointed to the wars, the fire in Boston, the smallpox epidemic, + Indian troubles which were seen as **judgment**. ‘Would the Lord have whetted his glittering Sword? ... Would he have said, Sword! Get through the Land, and cut off man and Beast? Or would he have kindled such devouring Fires ... if he had not been angry?’⁵

But if people would repent, God would stay his hand. No tolerations allowed. This is much like OT notions, and Fast Days stayed in America through the 19th cent. *Lincoln The Christian Commonwealth.* Central to Cromwell, Winthrop, and Mather was the concept of the Christian Commonwealth. Roughly speaking, this is the rule of saints for the sake of the purity of the people. Arthur Miller has given a picture in his famous play *The Crucible*. Good as this is, and Paul Scofield is brilliant as the Judge in the film version that has had wide viewing in the schools, it is not the whole story of course. But there is enough truth in it to visualize something of Puritan society in Salem, Boston, New Haven, and other places – small as they were. The story is about witchcraft, and the false accusations by a bevy of schoolgirls made against many. A number of so-called witches were executed. Miller himself was accused of being a Communist by the McCarthy hearings, and wrote the play partly at least as an analysis and defense of those like himself who were the objects of that particular witch-hunt.

But witches and witch-hunts should not blind us to what was going on in both cases. There was an attempt to impose a religious view of law and society as fundamental

⁵ Preaching to children, Mather said that disobedience to parents means death. Proverbs 30.17

as the theocracy of the Old Testament in Moses' and David's times. The witch hunts were part of the purifying fires. Though they never thought that the state had jurisdiction of the individual conscience (not did the Catholics in the Middle Ages, which for some might be a surprise – but Aquinas is clear on that), they did expect the state to regulate morals outwardly.

Idolatry, Blasphemy, Heresy, venting corrupt & pernicious opinions, that destroy the foundation, open contempt of the word preached, profanation of the Lords day, disturbing the peaceable administration & exercise of the worship & holy things of God, and the like, are to be restrained, & punished by civil authority ⁶ ... We have lived in a state that presents a democratic exterior, but which actually practices all the arts of an organized aristocracy under the management of the old firm of Moses & Aaron.⁷

There is something like this going on today which may well strike soon:

How [Pat] Robertson views the US can be seen in his 1991 book *The New World Order* in which he presents a rather distorted view of American history to prove that the country is a Christian nation that must be governed in a Christian manner. His model is colonial Massachusetts, in which the clergy controlled society and government. Robertson's efforts to gain control of the Republican Party, primarily through control of local organizations, is designed to provide him with a vehicle by which this Christian view of America can be imposed upon the nation.⁸

With the recent election, he may not be far off his hopes. We shall see.

⁶ The Last American Puritan, p 18

⁷ No reference to author; p 110; *Puritans in Early America*, 1950

⁸ Melvin I Urofsky and Martha May, *The New Christian Right*, NY & London, 1996, p xv

Another important idea was that America was becoming the ‘**end of history**’ not necessarily apolyptic but possibly progressing over time [cf Frances Fukyama in lectures in Schools a few years ago]. This was more often said by Englishmen here than Americans there, at least at first. No so now! Bishop Berkeley:

Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day,
Time’s noblest offspring is the last.

There were two kinds of expectations – a New Rome or the new Promised Land of a chosen people. Mather said ‘Our fore-Fathers pious Errand into this Wilderness’ was REFORMATION according to Scripture patterns. America is OUR ISRAEL. John Robinson agreed that ‘God had more truth to break forth from his Holy Word.’ Millennialism could be called the doctrine of Overturning.

This leads to the doctrine of the **End Times**. As this idea is now so powerful now in America⁹, it is good to trace its roots which are of course in the Bible but have been transmitted through a certain brand of Protestantism. Increase Mather was one of the most important transmitters. For most of the church, the End Times were to be found in heaven, not on earth. St Augustine understood the City of God and the City of Man to be separate and not linked. On the other hand, post-millennialists believed that God’s rule would come on earth – the Kingdom of God would be here as well as there. Mather took up the theme in 1693-4 and while in England discussed the idea with Richard Baxter and

⁹ As I came out of Nautilus, I was interested in a souped up black car with all the trimmings as it had on the back window *Revelations 21.5* [sic], which reads: “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” If you read on, which is tempting, the paragraph ends with the rejection of the ‘cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.’

his most recent writing *Glorious Kingdom of Christ* in which Baxter argued that a gradual perfection of life on earth was the correct interpretation of scriptural prophecy of the millennium. Mather expected the millennium to be dramatic, swift, with the physical return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints. God, he said, would work his redemption through a transformation of human nature. Mather wrote,

If Men allow themselves this Liberty of Allegorizing, we may at last Allegorize Religion into nothing but Fancy, and say that the Resurrection is past already.

How much safer it is to keep to the Letter of Scripture, when for us to do so is so consistent with the Analogy of Faith?

There is a double Jerusalem he said – the literal and the spiritual. The ancient literal city is the prefiguration or type of the future spiritual city, ‘the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven from my god.’ When the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, it will be a glorious day, but only for the believers. Outside are dogs and whoremongers and liars. No profane person, no hypocrite shall have admission into that city. In the course of time Jonathan Edwards would advance ideas similar to Baxter’s, and they would enter the mainstream of American millennial thought. Mather’s expectations would become a minority view and be taken up by the Millerites of the 19th cent – now known as Seventh Day Adventists. Well, they were a minority in America. Not now!

Grace Halsell, in *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (published in 1986), quotes TV evangelist James Robison: “There’ll against the word of God; it’s Anti-Christ.” Ronald Reagan invited Robison to deliver the opening prayer at the 1984 Republican National Convention. Reagan believed, as early as 1971,

that “everything is in place for the battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Armageddonist Hal Lindsey met with Pentagon strategists to discuss nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Tim LaHaye sells 60,000,000 books, and are read by many more.

Many Bushies if not Bush himself believe this too, so it seems. But I am saving Tom DeLay until almost the end. Not the End Times, but the penultimate lecture.

Bibliography

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Balmer, Randall | <i>Blessed Assurance – A History of Evangelicalism in America</i> , Beacon Press, Boston |
| Davis, J C | <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> , Arnold, 2001 |
| Hill, Christopher | <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> |
| Cherry, Conrad [ed] | <i>God’s New Israel – Religious Interpretations of American Destiny</i> , U of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1992 |
| Hall, Michael G | <i>The Last American Puritan – Life of Increase Mather</i> ; 1988 |
| Niebuhr, H R | <i>The Social Sources of Denominationalism</i> , NY, 1929 |
| Moseley, James G | <i>John Winthrop’s World</i> , Wisconsin UP, 1992 |
| Winthrop, John | <i>Letters and Papers</i> |

Addendum

The Federal Covenants

The English Puritans were at most times an introspective people and previous to and during the English Revolution (or *Civil War* depending on one’s views about the 17th century) but they asked fundamental questions about their society as well. The distinction was made between a church theology and a civil theology and it was William Perkins of Cambridge, England, who first put forward the covenant conception. Churches went charging off in a number of interesting directions, but most believed that a nation needed a fixed set of purposes for its continued existence, especially after the monarch and court were overthrown. Oliver Cromwell, John Milton, and the revolutionaries made the Calvinist distinction between natural and special grace. In the former people understand God’s rule by the light of nature. The latter is reserved for those within the Christian churches. It is the former that

helped form the nation. William Penn called it 'general religion' by which he meant principles, including the Ten Commandments as the epitome of natural law, that were common to Christian and Jew.

Covenant theology was central to New England. The belief was that God entered into covenants with nations (called 'federal covenants' from the Latin *feodus* which itself means *covenant*) as well as with individuals and promised to keep and uphold them if they would observe his terms. Richard Mather defined covenant theology as:

A solemne and publick promise before the Lord, whereby a company of Christians, called by the power and mercy of God to fellowship with Christ, and by his providence to live together, and by his grace to cleave together in the unitie of faith, and brotherly love, and desirous to partake together in all the holy Ordinances of God, doe in confidence of his gracious acceptance in Christ, binde themselves to the Lord, and one to another, to walke together by the assistance of his Spirit, in all such wayes of holy worship in him, and of edification one towards another, as the Gospel of Christ requireth of every Christian Church, and the members thereof.

The Founders followed the structure of the Mosaic covenant rather than the way of the covenant with Abraham. Regarding the use of the Mosaic covenant, Lutz writes:

A covenant had two distinct though related meanings. As a legal term in England, it referred to a formal agreement that had legal validity under the seal of the Crown, which denoted a serious agreement witnessed by the highest authority. The counterpart to the secular covenant was any agreement secured by God. For example, the formal agreement, made and subscribed to by members of a congregational church in order to constitute themselves as a distinct religious community, with God as witness and securer. A religious covenant thus was essentially an oath, and if it established a political community, political obligation did not rest only upon consent but was secured by the oath.¹⁰

This would include keeping the laws of the old covenant including the Ten Commandments as well as the new. Though the New Covenant in Christ was the fulfillment of the biblical witness, the old was not abrogated.

When the Lord enters into Covenant with any people, this Covenant of his is a Covenant with Conditions ... Hence there are the *Laws*, as well as the *Promises* of the Covenant. As the Lord *obligeth* himself *to us* so he *requires* something *from us*, and thus the *Commandments* and *Statutes* of God are frequently called his Covenant.¹¹

Also many Puritans believed England was not living up to its promise so the need to plant a godly colony was crucial.¹² They would be the true 'remnant' of Protestantism

¹⁰ Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*; La. State University Press; 1988; p 17

¹¹ William Stoughton, *N-Englands True Interest Not to Lie*, 10,11,16

¹² Edmund S Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, Little, Brown; 1958; p 37-43

as the Diaspora Jews believed they were the true remnant of Israel. To do this they needed to keep their side of the bargain with God:

The Lords people take a corporall oath, and a Curse upon themselves, if they doe not keepe Covenant with the Lord. This belongs to us at this day, for we entered into a Curse, and desired that all the plagues and curses written in the Booke of God, might light upon us if we keepe not the Commandments.¹³

Founding documents such as the *Mayflower Compact* and many of the individual state's constitutions follow this pattern. It is worth putting it on record to see the contractual, covenant language and the general conception:

In the Name of God, Amen. We, whose names are under-written, the Loyal Subject of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King Defender of the Faith, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid: And by the Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due

¹³ Miller, Perry, *The New England Mind – The Seventeenth Century*; Harvard; 1967; p 476

Submission and Obedience. In WITNESS whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape-Cod, the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland, the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini, 1620.

The covenant language is all there. God is a witness. The settlers wish to be a people who glorify God, advance the faith, give due to honor king and country, value justice, equality, and the common good.¹⁴ For these colonists religion and political order are tied in together rather than separated out. It should be noted that ‘due honor to king and country’ did not include the state church of England but they formed their own congregational association in the belief that was the original church of the apostles.

They had a hard time for the first few years. But they were keen to continue, and to relate to the natives around them. An account from *Winslow’s Second Journey to Packnanokick, to visit Massasoit in his sickness*.

Further, observing us to crave a blessing on our meat before we did eat, and after to give thanks for the same, he asked us, what was the meaning of that ordinary custom. Hereupon I took occasion to tell them of God’s works of creation and preservation, of his laws and ordinances, especially of the ten commandments; all which they hearkened unto with great attention, and liked well of; only the seventh commandment they excepted against, thinking there were many inconveniences in it, that a man should be tied to one woman; about which we reasoned a good time.¹⁵

For **John Winthrop**, “It is of the nature and essence of every society to be knit together by some Covenant, either expressed or implied.” “When God gives a special commission he looks to have it strictly observed in every article.” In his important Arbella Address (the ship that transported the first Boston settlers) he said “we are entered into Covenant with him for this work. We have taken out a commission...For

¹⁴ Lutz, *ibid.*, p 26

¹⁵ *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth 1602-1625* ed. by Alexander Young, Da Capo Press, NY, 1971; unabridged reproduction Boston 1841, p 325 [my underline]

we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.” But the spirit and not just the letter of the covenant must be followed and there can be dire consequences if the bond is broken. “The only way to avoid this shipwreck and to provide for our posterity is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God, for this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man.”¹⁶ Winthrop quoted Deuteronomy 30 adding his own words (in parenthesis) when Moses exclaims:

Beloved there is now set before us life and good, death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his Ordinance and his Laws (and the articles of our Covenant with him), that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it.¹⁷

The Commandments are part of God's ways with his New Israel as well as the Old. Consent by the people was part of the principle where governments derive their just powers but ultimately validity of the state comes from God. It wasn't a democracy as such but a theocracy. Winthrop stood for a society organized by religious truth.

In 1634 there had been an attempt to codify laws ‘in resemblance to a Magna Charta.’ Winthrop, though on the committee, was against the whole idea. John Cotton managed to produce a code, but not pleasing to the deputies. Winthrop thought that laws should arise out of judicial decisions rather than out of whole legislative enactment. Though the terms of the covenant were set down clearly in the Bible, they could not be applied exactly as they had been in Israel. They ought not to agree in advance on applications that force rigidity. This is similar to rule by common law rather than statues enacted by Parliament in England. But the *Body of Liberties* by Nathaniel Ward won the deputies over.

Winthrop often used the term ‘covenant’, but increasingly understood it not so much as a bargain between two parties but as a mark of an ongoing relationship with God.¹⁸ But it is clear that breaking the covenant would result in God's judgment even though mankind was not up to keeping it completely. It is an old problem in Pauline, Augustinian, and Reformation theology. It has been noted that:

¹⁶ *John Winthrop's World – History as a Story - the Story as History*; James G. Moseley; University of Wisconsin Press; 1992; p 14 & 42

¹⁷ *Life & Letters of John Winthrop*, Robert C Winthrop[ed] 1649, Da Capo Press, NY, 1971, Vol II, p 19

¹⁸ *John Winthrop's World*; James G. Moseley; University of Wisconsin Press; 1992; p 25

Covenant was a theological formulation with the deepest roots in Western culture. In resorting to it, Winthrop posed voluntarism and discipline in dialectical tension.¹⁹

There was a relationship between federal and church covenants. One of the first church covenants, Charlestown-Boston Church on July 30, 1630, is typical:

In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, & in Obedience to His holy will & Divine Ordinance. We whose names are hereunder written, being by his most wise, and good Providence brought together into this part of America in the Bay of Massachusetts, & desirous to unite ourselves into one Congregation, or Church, under the Lord Jesus Christ our Head, in such sort as becometh all those whom He hath Redeemed & Sanctified to Himself, do hereby solemnly and religiously, as in His most holy Presence, Promise, & bind ourselves, to walke in all our ways according to the Rule of the Gospel, & in all sincere Conformity to His holy Ordinances, & in mutual love, & respect each other, so near as God hall give us grace.²⁰

There were other types of covenants in America that came into use, some not including God as a witness, but the other parts were very close to the characteristics of the above:

¹⁹ John Peacock, *Covenant, Body Politic, and the Great Migration in The Covenant Connection – from Federal Theology to Modern Federalism*, ed. Elazar and Kincaid, Lexington Books, 2000, p 218

²⁰ Lutz, *ibid.*, p 25. Text taken from Arthur B. Ellis, *History of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1880* (Boston, 1881), 3

What did these covenants involve? There is no one formula one can turn to and concepts of the covenant changed over time. There were two covenants – personal and ‘federal’ or public. They were branches of the same covenant based on the Old Testament covenant with Moses and the Israelites. It was, as Perry Miller puts it, the ‘master idea of the age.’ Regarding the federal covenant, it is possible to work backwards and find out from the lists of sins what was involved. There are uses of the 10 Commandments in early New England sermons and writings. There is no perfect correspondence, but a list might help. These are derived from the Massachusetts.