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**COTTON MATHER:
THEOLOGICAL CONVICTION AND CHANGE**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ministry and work of eminent puritan Cotton Mather as it adapts, adjusts and reasserts itself during the times of upheaval, declension and transition in which he lived. As the puritan ideal changed going into the eighteenth century, I ask the question “how did Mather’s work and ministry morph, change and adapt to this shift?” By analyzing many of his relevant writings and sermons in depth I attempt to grasp the nature and direction in which his work morphed. I identify six overlapping areas of mutation that help to answer this question. His refined and ultimately innovative version of New England puritanism reflected changes in his views of ecclesiology, ecumenicism, piety, covenant theology, political philosophy (what Mather called “eleutherianism”) and Christian cosmopolitanism. When taken together, these areas become a lens by which to view the changing mosaic of Mather’s beliefs.

Mather is recast as a puritan minister whose thought broadened and took energetic turns in unexpected ways at the same time that puritanism itself was contracting. This thesis brings a congruence to Mather’s changes and will provide a new coherence for his theology and ministry as a whole. I find that Mather moved away from his early commitment to New England exceptionalism and closer towards a new expression of a continuing protestant reformation in pursuit of Christ’s return to earth. This expression of hopeful change is where we find a Matherian worldview previously unexamined. We will see Cotton Mather incorporate many of the changes in his own life and ministry into an innovative theology of covenantal hope and assurance that becomes a forward-thinking and influential vision for the Christian church in New England and worldwide.

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1. Introduction

*You must have a Name reviled on Earth,
'tis so you may be the fitter to find a Name written in Heaven.¹
-Cotton Mather*

This thesis examines the ministry and work of Cotton Mather as it adapts and reasserts itself during his life. Much of New England's social and intellectual history can be illuminated through Mather as one of the most prominent and prodigious individuals in early American history. He has been called "the most salient, representative, interesting, controversial, provocative figure" in colonial New England.² The rapid transformation of New England during his lifetime was accompanied by crucial strains of puritan thought as demonstrated through his ministry and work. His refined and innovative version of New England puritanism reflected changes in his views of ecclesiology, ecumenicism, piety, theology, political philosophy (what Mather called "eleutherianism") and Christian cosmopolitanism. The loss of puritan ascendancy³ in New England spurred Mather to adopt a revitalized vision of piety, an ecumenical broadening and a recast covenantal understanding that emboldened him

¹ Cotton Mather, *The Right Way to Shake Off a Viper* (1720), p. 12.

² Thomas Holmes, *Bibliography of Cotton Mather* (Newton: Crofton Publishing Corporation, 1974), vol. 1, p. vii.

³ Note that the lowercase capitalization of "puritan" throughout is a deliberate choice made in light of Francis J. Bremer's work which communicates that puritanism cannot be categorized into a single form. For more on the topic of capitalization see Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Heather Miyano Kopelson, *Faithful Bodies: Performing Religion and Race in the Puritan Atlantic* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics, Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

and the church towards the eschaton. This was not a transmogrification; rather it was a pivot of priorities situated within the changes of colonial Massachusetts. This thesis evaluates Mather's conception of the changing role of the New England puritan Congregational church in light of the events both he and it experienced during the late seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century.

Mather practiced and preached a New England Calvinism which acted as a cultural, confessional and theological marker that distinctively identified him within a historic protestant tradition.⁴ This thesis recasts Mather in a new way in accordance with the strategic direction of his work in specific areas. These areas were chosen because they reflect core puritan doctrines and foci that represent logical corollaries where his work would take root and expand. There is currently a diverse historiography of Mather but it has not shown the interconnectivity of these issues through his life. This thesis will bring a congruence to the ways in which Mather's thought developed and changed and will provide a new coherence for his theology and ministry as a whole. The areas in which we trace his oscillations are each illustrative of Mather in their own way. These areas are interlocking with and interrelated to both Mather's output and the tumultuous times in which he was writing and pastoring. Simply put, these areas were prioritized in my work because Mather prioritized them in his. They are found at the nexus of what Mather felt the the puritan community needed and what he was best equipped to offer. The change in Mather's work in these areas was predicated on the changes occurring in New England at this time.

⁴ For more on historical Calvinism as a mark of protestant identity see Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), preface, xv.

The covenant theology of Cotton Mather is solidly situated within each of the areas discussed. It is created by connecting his scriptural, covenantal and eschatological commitments into a cohesive whole. There were covenantal implications of this changing theology. In re-charting Mather's thinking on the covenant, including the people God has covenanted with, Mather's changing theological priorities are revealed.

Ecclesiology was selected as an area of analysis as it allows for appraising Mather as churchman and public figure within the Congregational church and New England society. The puritan church being the center of civil society — especially during the earlier and middle years of Cotton Mather's ministry — creates a prism through which to see Mather's ministerial machinations as they relate to the purpose, role and ultimate ends of the church itself.

Piety is crucial to understanding what drove Cotton Mather. For him it was both the ends and the means to the extension and fulfillment of worldwide reformation. It was the lynchpin of both personal and corporate holiness and the embodiment of the puritan ethic of scriptural dedication, purity in conduct, vibrancy in prayer and more.

Ecumenicism is important to analyze because it is through an extension of the question "who is considered Christian and why?" that we see Mather take passionate turns towards ecumenical inclusion which informs his thought on the nature of the church, fellowship and the broadening of protestant Christianity.

Eleutherianism helps to illuminate the interconnectivity between the ephemeral themes of puritan life contrasted with the risky and dangerous pursuit of individual freedom as part of a protestant liberty situated within the colonial political context at

this time. Understanding the growth of Mather the eleutherian sheds light on his perceptions of authority, loyalty, identity, citizenship, sin, rebellion, government, eschatology and more.

Cosmopolitanism in the life and work of Mather allows for a crystallization of his understanding of transatlantic Christianity, regionalism, myopia, internationalism, the millennium and other related topics, as his views of place, space, people groups and the eschaton get refined and tested in an effort for him to solidify America's and his own place in the pantheon of Christian history. The provincial became international. In the concluding section I will analyze Mather's view on the eschaton in light of the changes in his thinking over the course of his ministry.

Taken together, these subject areas become a lens by which to view the changing mosaic of Mather's beliefs during his life and ministry. These selected areas of analysis create a prism for viewing Mather as an eminent puritan thinker whose thought broadened and took energetic turns in unexpected ways at the same time puritanism itself was contracting. Declension in the New England context was the perceived tendency of the following generation to participate less meaningfully in the covenant commitments of their puritan parents. In this phenomenon we see Mather grow as a minister and thinker through a personal declension of sorts — a drifting away from the earlier puritan ideal — that leads to detachment from the old puritan way. This change helped to create the New England, Congregational church and America of today that ironically considers Mather an anathema.

Michael Winship wrote that Mather may be considered a “barometer of cultural change” during his period of American history.⁵ This thesis does this by analyzing Mather’s original works in context with the aim of identifying trends of change that led to more distance in between him and his own puritan identity than his predecessors. He is a crucial agent for change and a compelling study in these areas of flux. Mather never turned away from orthodox protestantism, but he changed the puritan errand into the wilderness into something more broad in scope relative to that of his puritan predecessors.

Mather never lost any zeal or passion for representing apodictic protestant orthodoxy in the New England churches. He remained the leader of the puritans in service to the God of his spiritual and literal forefathers in England and New England. He negotiated mutations in the expression of this faith as he struggled to cope with events in New England and the world in novel ways that extended his theology into new expressions rooted in tradition but creative in their execution. Many of his works were prepared and delivered for specific occasions but in a very real sense his entire ministry was occasional, with each event bringing an energized, engaged and emphatic Mather to the forefront of the battle for the New England Way. I intend to map his thought as an adaptable but resilient orthodox New England protestantism within the tradition of his forebearers while also paving the way for the innovative theologies of future generations of New England protestants. My work is an attempt to see the catalysts and pillars of transatlantic protestant ecclesiological orthodoxy as imagined through the worldview and works of Mather’s particularly vibrant puritan Calvinism and

⁵ Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 5.

distinctly American Congregationalism. This work aims to foster new understandings of what Mather actually taught during some of the most tumultuous years of America's young history. In doing so we will see parts of the real Mather, which may appear to some a new Mather entirely. As David Levin says in the final words of his book *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, "[...] after 1702 the Mather whose personal and spiritual life were united with the life of New England lived nowhere else but in his *Magnalia*."⁶ Mather knew this to be true as he dealt with his own reified disenchantment from puritan Congregationalism. Mather's personal revisions embodied a continual effort to ensure New England covenantal fidelity towards the ultimate end of finalizing the protestant reformation worldwide.

Perry Miller said that Mather had a "monstrous lust for publication."⁷ Mather left behind more writings than any other nonconformist pastor of his generation.⁸ The sheer volume of works produced by Mather present a challenge to the researcher. It is often hard to keep up. Thomas J. Holmes' authoritative bibliography shows that Cotton Mather published 468 separate items including sermons, essays, books, articles and other works. The majority of these are sermons. This number does not include items such as correspondence, diaries, sermon notes, notebooks,

⁶ David Levin, *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663-1703* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 312.

⁷ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 74.

⁸ Michael Winship, "Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy: The Example of Cotton Mather," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 51 (1994), p. 93.

miscellaneous papers and the 6-volume manuscript *Biblia Americana*.⁹ Mather had apparently at one time sought to publish one work each month of his life and to alphabetize each title.¹⁰ Mather called this mass of his work “The catalogue of books that I have been the father of.”¹¹ I will be analyzing how Mather proceeds from his early writings and the *Magnalia* (called a “farewell to an already defunct social ideal”¹²) until his final writings that express hope in a redefined theology of change. Mather’s massive Bible commentary the *Biblia Americana* is only referenced in this present discussion judiciously as the contours of this thesis go beyond Mather the Biblicist and will not require an exegetical or hermeneutical appraisal. The *Biblia* remains only partially published today.

Cotton Mather’s interest in international correspondence began early in his ministry with a letter to him from Thomas Bailey of Limerick, Ireland, dated June 1683. The earliest extant document is a letter to the Bodleian Library in November 1683. In time he would write around the world, and his letters swarm with the names including Daniel Defoe, Isaac Newton, Isaac Watts, Joseph Addison, Captain William Kidd, Dr. John Edwards, Sir Richard Blackmore, ministers in Holland, Hungary, France, the West Indies, and Scotland, other Mathers in England and Ireland, merchants, printers and

⁹ For a more detailed breakdown see George Element, “Publication and the Puritan Minister,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 37 (April, 1980), pp. 219-241.

¹⁰ Edward J. Gallagher, reviews of both *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* by Kenneth Silverman and *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* by Mitchell Breitwieser, *Religion & Literature*, vol. 18 (1986), p. 89.

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 157 (1716).

¹² Sacvan Bercovitch, “‘Nehemias Americanus’: Cotton Mather and the Concept of the Representative American,” *Early American Literature*, vol. 8 (1974), p. 220.

heads of state.¹³ Mather's Scottish interest seems to have begun with a letter dated June 1690, sent by Mather to minister James Brown in Glasgow and ended with a letter dated November 1726, "from the land of the dying" to Principal of the University of Glasgow John Stirling asking him to distribute Mather's works at the four Scottish universities.¹⁴

As many relevant works by Mather as could be found and analyzed within the time and space constraints are included in this thesis. These texts were chosen because they are representative of Mather's writing on the issues in focus during the trajectory of his life and work. Given the space constraints of analyzing such a prolific writer, these selected texts are an essential summation of where he was and where he was going as his career progressed. In addition, some works such as the *Magnalia* and *Wonders of the Invisible World* were selected because of their continued relevance to and impact on puritan studies, and others such as *Eleutheria*, *The Everlasting Gospel* and *Terra Beata* were selected because no detailed treatments are currently found in the literature and scholarship on Mather. This approach will not impinge on the arguments developed in the thesis as all available tools including secondary sources and detailed bibliographies have been used to unearth any potential conflicting or inconsistent views. The texts selected and presented are the best evidence of what Mather was about including the changes that occurred over his lifetime.

The contours of this thesis proceed along the lines of historical events and areas of thought. Mather tended to think of his own life in this way. For example, in 1694

¹³ Kenneth Silverman, "Cotton Mather's Foreign Correspondence," *Early American Literature*, vol. 3 (1968), pp. 172-174.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 178.

Mather stated that he was ready “to conclude my own youth.”¹⁵ It is helpful to imagine the life of Mather being separated into these phases, “lustres” of his life as he said in his work *Paterna*, that represent periods in the evolution and mutation of Mather’s thought. These eras are not hard and fast; they are simply chronological indicators of his life designed to make the analysis of his work more clear. History moves fast for him, and the Mathers in each of these phases are never that far away from each other. The Mather we ultimately find is an expression of both the historical moment and the man; a double helix of reaction and innovation. It is useful to concatenate the events of his life and New England in connection to his changing theology. They are not perfectly precise, and Mather’s rapid-fire work rate during these tumultuous times in New England history cause much of Mather to melt into the margins between them.

Some background information on this hectic era of American history is in order. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded by royal charter in 1629. This charter was revoked in 1684, ending the requirement of church membership for voting, and the colony continued without a legal basis until the Dominion of New England was established in 1686. Royal Governor Sir Edmund Andros governed from 1684 until 1689. In 1686 Andros limited the number of meetings in New England to one per year, placed the militia under his direct control, and forced puritans and Anglicans to worship together in the Old South Church. In 1689 the Dominion was dissolved and former Royal Governor Simon Bradstreet was reappointed. The colony existed without a charter while operating under the terms of the vacated charter until the new charter

¹⁵ Cotton Mather, *Early Religion Urged* (1694) p. 2; Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 171.

(negotiated by Increase Mather) was issued in 1691 by King William III with religious liberty being granted to all except Roman Catholics and voting rights extended to non-puritans. This new provincial charter eventually arrived in Boston in 1692 and Bradstreet served as Royal Governor until 1692. In 1693 Sir William Phips was appointed as Royal Governor. The Salem witch trials occurred between February 1692 and May 1693 at which point we find Cotton Mather at the peak of his influence in New England.

An overview of Cotton Mather's career with key dates is helpful in tracking his trajectory and growth. He was born in 1663 and graduated from Harvard in 1678. He was ordained in 1685 and worked as his father's assistant at Boston's original North Church until 1723. In 1691 he became a fellow at Harvard. In 1701 Cotton Mather helped persuade the wealthy Anglican Elihu Yale to found what would become Yale University. In 1710 he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow and in 1712 he was elected to the Royal Society of London. In 1715 Cotton Mather began communicating with local physicians in order to promote the practice of inoculation. From 1718 until 1721 Cotton Mather set up and payed for an evening school where slaves and Indians learned the Bible and catechisms. Later in 1721 the smallpox epidemic struck Boston with Cotton Mather remaining in favor of inoculation. Later that year he would survive an assassination attempt by an anti-inoculation fanatic. In 1723 Cotton Mather assumed full duties at the original North Church after the death of his father. Cotton Mather became seriously ill in 1727, recovering only to die on February 13, 1728, one day after his 65th birthday.

Mather is an exciting and romantic character to consider. Reiner Smolinski writes that:

No other American Puritan has fueled both the popular and the academic imagination as has Cotton Mather, whose highly complex character and cornucopia of published and unpublished works have yielded all things to all people.¹⁶

Mather has been called “the personification of crystallized puritanism.”¹⁷ Perry Miller gives Mather the most backhanded of compliments in saying:

In a hundred respects, Mather is the most intransigent and impervious mind of his period, not to say the most nauseous human being, yet in others he is the most sensitive and perceptive, the clearest and most resolute.¹⁸

In time Mather moved significantly away from his commitment to New England exceptionalism and closer to a new expression of the continuing protestant reformation in pursuit of Christ’s return. This expression of hopeful change is where we find a Matherian worldview previously unexamined.

It is an elucidative process to read Mather in light of his trend towards a personal declension and away from the typical Congregational thought structures of his era. This is due largely to the fact that Mather did not try to divorce his ideas from his own lived experience.¹⁹ Mather’s turn towards individual piety, holiness and

¹⁶ Reiner Smolinski, *Trip paradisu Commentary* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 1.

¹⁷ Louis Weeks III, “Cotton Mather And The Quakers,” *Quaker History*, vol. 59 (1970), p. 1.

¹⁸ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 476.

¹⁹ Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals 1596 - 1728* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 208.

internationalism informed and nurtured many of the hallmarks of the modern protestant and evangelical church after him including the great awakening, the personal “quiet time” Bible study, youth groups (of which his is the first on record in American history),²⁰ missions, experimental Calvinism and even the moniker "evangelical" itself.²¹ Contrary to his near constant portrayal as a narrow-minded reactionary, Mather was a puritan visionary.²² He was a pivotal figure in American history and ahead of his time in many ways as issues like inoculations, the Great Awakening and the American Revolution represent Mather’s nascent passions coming to fruition after his death. This different Mather stands outside his legacy in the popular imagination.

This thesis is in part an argument against the great many inaccurate assumptions made about Cotton Mather. It will work thematically through the areas in which Mather was most energetic while remaining the most misunderstood. Overcoming the problematic stereotypes of Mather is one of the first ways to properly nuance the Mather we find when looking at him through his own work. In short, popular cultural conceptions about him are wrong and what has passed for historiography in the past is often wrong about him as well. These two areas intersect and have in the past fed off of each other in cementing the Mather caricature into the modern collective imagination. It has been very convenient to keep him in this place,

²⁰ David Setran, “Declension Comes Home: Cotton Mather, Male Youth Rebellion, and the Hope of Providential Affliction in Puritan New England,” *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 26, (2016), p. 38 and note 56.

²¹ See Rick Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), for more on each of these topics.

²² Efforts at rehabilitating his reputation in the public eye have proven mostly fruitless though such works as James P. Wood, *The Admirable Cotton Mather* (New York: Seabury Press, 1971), written for young readers is a fascinating attempt.

as unearthing a more accurate portrayal requires a closer analysis of very large amounts of his writing. It is a complicated but worthwhile task. Some have concluded that Mather's harsh reputation rests on a general dislike of what many believe New England society was in that era, and in truth Mather's stigma "is not supported by any contemporary records."²³ What is usually found is a dangerously inaccurate oversimplification of the era and place that Mather labored in rather than a fair appraisal of his work, heart and impact.

Just as he was in his own lifetime, Cotton Mather has been a contentious figure in the historical imagination.²⁴ His exaggerated tendencies often made him into "a caricaturist's dream."²⁵ To read Mather in the register of an urbane cosmopolitan individualist or peace-making ecumenicist as presented in this thesis is to walk straight into a buzzsaw of historical and cultural baggage. Cotton Mather (or rather, a mostly inaccurate version of him) lives on through a number of pop culture villains designed to represent bigotry, prejudice against women, anti-free thought, malevolence and other assorted cultural derogations rightfully repugnant to modern sensibilities. For many people, Cotton Mather is perceptual Salem, Massachusetts: he particularly embodies the many maladies of that place, space and time. He is represented as villainous hypocrite in the CW television series *Salem* and as the self-righteous evil pastor

²³ John S. Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990), p. 225; George Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Atheneum 1958), p. 372.

²⁴ Pershing Vartanian, "Cotton Mather and the Puritan Transition into the Enlightenment," *Early American Literature*, vol. 7 (1973), p. 214.

²⁵ Gallagher, reviews of both *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* by Kenneth Silverman and *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* by Mitchell Breitwieser, p. 90.

Reverend Gregory Trask in the long-running New England vampire television soap opera *Dark Shadows* (brought back to television in a new series in 2021). In the Spider-Man comic books Mather is known as super villain “The Witchslayer” who sought to exterminate the religiously impure. The popular *To Hang A Witch* young adult book series by scion Adriana Mather uses the Mather name to scare up interest in a murderous story about the modern relatives of the Salem witches exacting vengeance on Mather’s granddaughter in the here and now. The dreadful imagery that the name Cotton Mather evokes has been used in the works of Herman Melville, John Irvine, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Arthur Miller, the writer of *The Crucible*, who once called Mather “absolute evil.”²⁶ This misfortunate abuse of a man who often stood as the opposite of most of these charges in his lifetime sadly deprived historians, pop culture consumers as well as those those who identify as Congregationalist Christians today of an honest appreciation of a flawed, fantastic and unique person.

What follows is a thorough review of the existing literature on Cotton Mather. Interest in Cotton Mather was largely antiquarian until Perry Miller attempted to quantify the motivations and ambitions of the puritans in regards to the errand into the wilderness,²⁷ *The New England Way*²⁸ and associated sociocultural phenomenon which would come to define the ostensible goals of these peculiar people. Miller emphasized historicist readings of the puritans but often missed the crucial theology of

²⁶ Arthur Miller, *The Theatre Essays* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 156.

²⁷ The term errand into the wilderness was popularized in the field of puritan studies by Perry Miller in his 1956 work of the same name. Taken from the title of a 1670 Massachusetts election sermon by Samuel Danforth, it signifies the puritan’s mission in pursuing the dream of a model society to be built by the elect in America.

²⁸ The term means the puritan commitment made to church and community through obedience to covenants which helped ensure social cohesion.

the puritans particularly as it relates to the intimate religious dispositions of New England heart Calvinism.²⁹ The puritans, including Mather, were as concerned about the life of faith as they were about doctrinal orthodoxy and societal organization, which Miller mostly passes over. The turn in the 1980s towards a more contextualized, more accurate but also critical view of Mather still left large parts of his theology unaddressed, including the topics addressed in each of the following chapters.

Though admirable research has proven beneficial to understanding him better, Mather is a person who has in a sense “defied rehabilitation”³⁰ and much of the esteem given him and his work has been begrudging. Research thus far has lacked a nuanced understanding of the dynamic changes that occurred in his work and ministry. Since the work of Kenneth Silverman and David Levin research on Mather has noticeably increased through the work of Reiner Smolinski and others. While several recent studies such as the work of Nan Goodman and Rick Kennedy have advanced the state of research on Cotton Mather, the field is still less developed when compared to the literature available on figures such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. As research on Mather continues to develop, gaps are beginning to be filled and hopefully this thesis is a contribution that significantly helps in this endeavor.

First published in 1891, *Cotton Mather: Puritan Priest* by Barrett Wendell was considered the standard Mather biography for many years. Nothing rivaled this work in

²⁹ See John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954) and David Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence in the Modern World* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008) for more on this concept.

³⁰ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 216.

the interim until the renewed Mather scholarship set in motion by David Levin. In the introduction Wendell says that his object is to tell:

[...] what manner of man he was, what manner of world he lived in, why -- with all the oddities and failings that are to us so grotesque -- he seems well worth remembering.³¹

The book provides a good biographical sketch and does not descend into the stereotypes that plague so much of the other work surrounding Mather. It presents him as an earnest man and one responsible for much of what people associate with New England at the time of Wendell's writing. It does not directly confront the issues that I am looking at more closely but it does speak to how Mather was interpreted for a very long time.

Kenneth Murdock is widely considered an authority on early American literature and was influential in helping to revive puritan studies as an area of academic research. He contributed some important early works including *Selections from Cotton Mather*,³² which he edited in 1926, and *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England*, in 1949.³³ His work is considered seminal for the time and influenced a later generation of scholars who shared his belief that the puritans were worth studying rather than shunning. In Murdock we also see glimpses of the cosmopolitan Mather, as he fought

³¹ Barrett Wendell, *Cotton Mather: Puritan Priest* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1891), Introduction, p. 1.

³² Kenneth Murdock, *Selections from Cotton Mather* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926).

³³ Kenneth Murdock, *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

off provincial sterility by bringing to New England advanced ideas of the outside world as he sought to interact with the same.³⁴

The Pulitzer-prize winning *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* by Kenneth Silverman was groundbreaking in that it was able to give Mather the most balanced of treatments in the most diverse areas for the very first time. It portrayed him as important and different as he truly was, without unfair cultural baggage. It helped to establish Mather as “the first unmistakably American figure in the nation’s history.”³⁵ While it did not explain the interconnected shifts themselves, it was especially useful to me in helping to understand the events, people and ideas that drove Mather towards those perdurable changes in the areas of his work and thought that I will be analyzing.

Cotton Mather’s Foreign Correspondence, compiled and introduced by Kenneth Silverman and published in 1968, provided an insight into the mind and mission of Mather the internationalist. As Silverman says, this is Mather “fighting to overcome the well-known cultural lag of the colonies.”³⁶ This is a theme I develop to find a portrait of a pious, disenchanting provincial striving for a cosmopolitanism that he feels reflects God’s mission of covenant redemption more faithfully. This correspondence includes letters to the University of Glasgow on the occasion of his honorary doctorate in 1710, which absolutely thrilled Mather.

³⁴ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 223; Murdock, *Selections from Cotton Mather*, p. xxv.

³⁵ Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 426.

³⁶ Kenneth Silverman, “Cotton Mather’s Foreign Correspondence,” p. 175.

Published in 1978, the *Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer* by David Levin was an important work in giving Mather respect as a clergyman and an influential figure in the development of American life. It took a closer look at the various roles of Mather in New England society without assigning to him the mental and moral maladies that had come to be connected with him through the more popular scholarship. Levin also ties the ideas of Mather to those of Jefferson in the American Revolution. While this study does a very thorough job of honestly looking at Mather the man, it does not provide the deeper theological connections that I will be attempting to provide. It does an admirable job of showing Mather's state of mind during his life and ministry which is something that I will be building on.

Sacvan Bercovitch contributed much to the field of puritan studies, nothing perhaps more valuable than his *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*³⁷ first published in 1975. This work went a long way in describing the exemplary "city on a hill" nature of New England as something that bled into the ideas of American exceptionalism. Bercovitch discusses lasting puritan conceptions of community and individuality in ways that informed my understanding of these same issues. He also emphasizes Mather's role as a historian placing puritan heroes (in this case, John Winthrop) as typological biblical figures in the unfolding saga of God's people in New England. He helps to show how Mather saw New England as special and sacred in its founding, and how Mather helped make the puritans become the early American people. Bercovitch asked questions such as "how much of the Puritan's vision of

³⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

history is America's vision of itself?"³⁸ Bercovitch also wrote *The American Jeremiad*³⁹ which argued that puritans utilized lamentations over sin as a way to affirm the ultimate purpose of their errand into the wilderness. Their affliction here was seen as God-given correction keeping them on the right path during their New England mission.⁴⁰

Dwight Bozeman's *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*⁴¹ reevaluated the world-shifting emphasis that many assumed the puritans had put onto their mission. Bozeman argues that much of the romanticizing of their grand mission was the product of subsequent scholarship on the issue and not representative of the original puritan impulse. For Bozeman, the puritans were more concerned with restoring some version of their past — "the primitive church" — than they were for paving a new way forward in the wilderness. This work helped to temper some of the assumptions made by scholars (including Bercovich) regarding the end that puritans including Mather thought that the errand into the wilderness was directed.

As noted previously, in *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728*, Robert Middlekauff contributed to the revival in Mather studies by a serious appraisal of Mather's sources, traditions, mindset and inherited ideas. This book concerns itself with Mather as thinker rather than as historian or minister, including his thought situated in puritan society coming after the work of his father and grandfather. It also convincingly argues that the "Errand Into the Wilderness" or "New

³⁸ As discussed in Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 11.

³⁹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

⁴⁰ See Setran, "Declension Comes Home: Cotton Mather, Male Youth Rebellion, and the Hope of Providential Affliction in Puritan New England," p. 45.

⁴¹ Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Jerusalem” thought and typology was something wished for by the first generation of puritans rather than something seriously believed by Mather’s generation. Overall the correctives offered by Middlekauff in this and other areas are a significant contribution. I hope to extend Middlekauff’s analysis into the practical issues of ministry, theology and historical occurrences that affected both New England and Mather.

*Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality*⁴² by Mitchell Breitwieser was published in 2009. This work provided a fascinating comparison of two large personalities that served much of the same purpose in the American intellectual and social imagination. The comparisons of the two as influencers and leaders showed Mather’s appeal even to someone as irreligious as Benjamin Franklin. His depiction of Franklin as enamored of Mather the legendary eminent New Englander is illustrative as to how the personality of Mather loomed large in the imagination of those who drove American culture forward in the public eye after him. This work proves useful in outlining the intellectual history of Mather in relation to the immediate impact he had as a cultural influence leading towards the upheavals in the eighteenth century including his limitations, and in assessing the shadow he cast as an archetype of a pre-revolutionary American cultural steward.

Published in 2015, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather* by Rick Kennedy helps to tie the impact of Mather to movements that would later help to define evangelicalism in America. By looking at his dedication to pious experiential practices such as prayer, personal devotionals and diary writing we see Mather

⁴² Mitchell Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

embracing intimate individual relational practices with God that would be part of revival movements to follow. The populist tendency of Mather is also examined here and is a theme that I extend and develop especially in relation to the area of eleutherianism. Kennedy also took steps to show the heart of Mather the pastor including his love of ministry and the people in his community. Scholarship that gives Mather some humanity still feels groundbreaking, and the argument that Mather was the first evangelical is the type of claim that welcomes meaningful debate and the applying of a new lens.

Reiner Smolinski has contributed significantly to the modern Mather revival by editing and publishing *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Triparadisus"* in 2009, including commentary.⁴³ This was important in helping to understand Mather in the later part of his life especially as it concerns the eschaton and biblical prophecy. Smolinski's work provides valuable analysis on Mather's theologizing of history and identity in New England. I am particularly interested in extending these areas of research by parsing out the particulars between the corporate and personal understandings of identity and purpose regarding piety, covenant and related concerns prioritized by Mather.

In his work *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* Richard Lovelace describes Mather as an admirable figure who was "the greatest single intellectual influence on his generation in America."⁴⁴ Lovelace believes that the pietism of Mather was a ministry

⁴³ Reiner Smolinski, *Triparadisus Commentary* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Richard Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), p. 289.

in-line with August Hermann Francke's international pietism rather than a reflection of rigid puritanism. Mather is best understood in terms of lived theology, and my thesis extends this type of thinking in Mather's active and changing theology. Lovelace contributes much to the link between Mather and worldwide piety movements which have helped inform my discussions of his piety, ecumenicism and cosmopolitanism. Where my research attempts to build on this is by demonstrating that the piety of Mather represented an attempt to stave off declension by recreating the errand into the wilderness as an errand beyond the wilderness that in Mather's opinion should serve as the puritan's contribution to the completion of the reformation.

*The Puritan Cosmopolis: The Law of Nations and the Early American Imagination*⁴⁵ by Nan Goodman advances the idea that internationalism was closer to the heart of the puritans than had been previously thought and that Cotton Mather himself was especially part of this cosmopolitan impulse. I extend this by discussing Mather's personal and ecclesiastical impulses that helped to push him to reinvent his mission and redefine his influence as an ecumenical cosmopolitan participant in a burgeoning global Christianity.

Published in 2019 as part of the Oxford Political Philosophy series, *Governing Least: A New England Libertarianism*⁴⁶ by Dan Moller defines the classical liberal thought and political libertarian theory in early New England as a rugged, individualistic libertarian school that contributed to the American Revolution and influenced such

⁴⁵ Nan Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis: The Law of Nations and the Early American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴⁶ Dan Moller, *Governing Least: A New England Libertarianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

radical thinkers as Henry David Thoreau and others. I attempt to capitalize on this identification of “New England Libertarianism” by showing how Cotton Mather was crucial to this liberty-loving element of the New England Way in providing the first complete analysis of Mather’s anti-state work *Eleuthera*. I define Mather not as a libertarian but rather as he defined himself - a “freeman”⁴⁷ and “freedom-lover”⁴⁸ - and examine the personal and corporate implications of such a political philosophy in the hands of someone like Mather in New England at this time.

Published in 1990, *Wordly Saints*⁴⁹ by Leland Ryken does not focus on Mather particularly but instead is offered as a thorough corrective to the mosaic of misinterpretations that people hold about the puritans in general. Ryken focuses on using source material in discussing puritan stereotypes of all kinds such as sexuality, joy, fashion, worship, and family. This helped to show that if the puritans as a whole suffer from unfair stigma inside and outside the academy, then Cotton Mather, whom the scholar Edmund S. Morgan called “the puritan we love to hate,”⁵⁰ requires even more attention and care in unearthing the true person beneath.

Michael Winship has proven to be an invaluable source when studying the puritans and protestant church history in general. His *Godly Republicanism: Puritans,*

⁴⁷ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria* (1696), p. 60.

⁴⁸ See Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Leland Ryken, *Wordly Saints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

⁵⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritan You Love to Hate,” Book review of *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663-1703* by David Levin, *The New York Review of Books*, January 25 (1979).

*Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill*⁵¹ lays out what he calls the “applied sacred political theory” of the puritans (not only the New England puritans, in this case) in attempting to quantify the impact puritanism had on republicanism in Massachusetts and elsewhere. His work lays out the trends and threads of anti-authoritarian movements in branches of puritanism in a way designed to show the connection between church government and political history. Winship’s *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment*⁵² discusses the response of the New England puritans to the enlightenment including issues such as reason and politics. It does much to show the European foundations of American thought during the seventeenth century and illuminates Cotton Mather's place in these relationships.

There are other shorter but important pieces of research that informed my approach to Mather. Thomas Holmes emerged in 1940 with the three-volume *Cotton Mather Bibliography*⁵³ which helped to show the immense popularity of Mather during his lifetime.⁵⁴ While not necessarily discussing Cotton Mather specifically, influential puritan scholars such as Perry Miller, Harry Stout, Kenneth Minkema, John Demos, Francis Bremer and Stephen Nissenbaum have each contributed to the discussion of covenant, declension, puritan culture and related issues in valuable ways. Perry Miller occasionally takes issue with Mather (though he rarely engages with Mather directly)

⁵¹ Michael Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁵² Michael Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1996).

⁵³ Thomas Holmes, *Cotton Mather, A Bibliography of His Works* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940).

⁵⁴ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 224.

and I attempt to confront his assumptions and conclusions when appropriate.

Understanding Cotton Mather as Miller does - as an "inductive investigator"⁵⁵ - helped me to better appreciate Mather's personality and his curious nature as a scientist, witchcraft chronicler and more.

This thesis incorporates these approaches to Cotton Mather while also attempting to serve as a palate cleanser to the simple "Mather as villain" narrative that still pervades his legacy. Even after the helpful scholarship listed above, many academics and nearly all laypeople still believe that Cotton Mather burned witches in Salem or some variation of this inaccurate idea. I intend to show the unvarnished Mather as reflected in his own writing. What is most important for our purposes in analyzing the work of Mather is to see how themes such as piety, covenant, individualism, liberty, cosmopolitanism and the eschaton are bound up in his changing ecclesiological and theological blueprint.

Mather has more often been studied for his perceived faults and eccentricities than for his virtues and more positive contributions.⁵⁶ His famous work *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, which is still a malignant part of his legacy in popular New England lore, will be analyzed in order to situate it within his theological trajectory regarding covenant. Interesting as the witch trials are to laypeople, I agree with John Demos that popular interest in the subject is badly out of proportion to its actual historical

⁵⁵ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 143.

⁵⁶ Williston Walker, "The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development," *Papers of the American Society of Church History* (1917), p. 79.

significance.⁵⁷ Chadwick Hansen wrote that there is no reason to think that the trials were engineered by clergy such as Cotton Mather in a desire to resuscitate their waning prestige.⁵⁸ The issue of the witch trials is addressed again in the concluding chapter in an effort to bring this legacy more accurately into alignment with Mather's thought in the other categories discussed.

Tracing Mather's thought throughout the phases of his life is especially fitting as he was dedicated to apprising ideas through historical dispensations⁵⁹ and his biblical interpretation itself has been said to be in the "epoch making" tradition.⁶⁰ When apprising Mather it is inaccurate to say that he simply changed his mind or opinions during his life. Mather's theological beliefs were not tentative assumptions. It is also not enough to say that the events of his time forced him in certain directions. Rather, he persistently believed in the periodicity of God's providence, not least in his own life, and he followed innovation and reinvention in living and teaching the old faith in new ways. Mather was "dialectically complex,"⁶¹ and his intensity burned and cooled for multiple reasons at different points in his life towards his most completed end as a minister: the pious, ecumenical, cosmopolitan and hopeful chiliast.

⁵⁷ John Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of the Seventeenth-Century New England," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 75 (1970), p. 1311.

⁵⁸ Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1985), p. 252.

⁵⁹ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 230; Mason I. Lowlance, *The Language of Canaan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 159.

⁶⁰ Jan Stievermann, *Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity: Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures in Cotton Mather's 'Biblia Americana'* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), p. 49.

⁶¹ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 5, and footnote 4.

Ingenuity would become one of his distinctive values. Devoting one's life to God involved for him a play of imagination that made life akin to art.⁶² Mather operated from beginning to end with a "Christian connoisseurship"⁶³ that still flavors New England today. These elements of his personality, ministry and legacy deserve highlighting. The authentic Mather as genuinely portrayed in his work and ministry is the Mather I am ultimately interested in engaging with. Mather took great pains to be the man that he said others should be. Above all he wanted to use his position and supernumerary gifts to minister to others for God's glory as an act of service despite the challenges he faced. He reckoned seriously with his sense of exceptionalism and it helped to drive him through the travails he faced in his life. In describing how one ought to live we see him engaging in what might be seen as self-description:

In short then; The serviceable man may be brought into sore straits; and indeed, whoever plunges himself into the Interests of mankind, must find himself enough perplexed and entangled with them. But yet he may refresh his own Soul with such a Thought as that, in Psal. 40.17 I am poor and needy [...].⁶⁴

Despite persistent stereotypes to the contrary, he was very likely in real life much like the exemplary characters he described in his writings.⁶⁵

⁶² Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 31.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 410.

⁶⁴ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man* (1690), p. 23.

⁶⁵ Josephine K. Percy, in Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), v.

Mather seems to have never entered a room without praying that he might not leave it until the people there had received a spiritual benefit from him.⁶⁶ It is in this vein of influential piety and concern for all people that we will discuss Mather's changing ministry. Mather sought a revolution and reformation unto piety and personal accountability to the God of the covenant. He believed:

That there is a REVOLUTION and a REFORMATION at the very Door, which will be vastly more Wonderful, than any of the Deliverances, yet seen by the Church of God, from the Beginning of the World.⁶⁷

This was the desired end of all of Mather's work from the start of his ministry until his death, and he went about it in ways that often ran contrary to his popular characterization.

Declension in New England was a looming specter for Mather. Declension is not a simple concept to define, as it is a quantifying of complex motivations that require close observation.⁶⁸ Mather fought against declension but would eventually repurpose this trend towards novel ends of Christian internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Mather initially saw at least three sources of declension in New England: the nature of "youth," parental failures, and the inscrutable sovereignty of God.⁶⁹ In 1694 he proclaimed:

⁶⁶ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 206.

⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *Things For a Distress'd People to Think Upon* (1696), p. 34.

⁶⁸ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 98.

⁶⁹ Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 32.

But among all the deadly Symptoms which threaten us with a speedy Ruine, there is none more ghastly, than the ignorance, the wildness, the lewdness found in so great a part of the Rising Generation.⁷⁰

As a pastor and teacher he would attempt to redress this “ignorance” with writings and sermons that might instill piety that would become a durable change in the lives of New Englanders.

Mather was a proud American and New Englander. Due to his personality, influence and output he represented the consummation of Americana in that era. One should recognize the exact and impressive nature of his “influence,” and just how impactful a person of Cotton Mather’s stature was in American history and New England culture. Yale church historian Williston Walker puts it this way:

Though the New Englanders were a well educated people [...] books in the ordinary New England household were few. The first newspaper in the Puritan colonies did not begin its feeble existence until 1704; the whole range of periodical literature was yet to be. Into households, therefore, whose sole literary store was drawn from the commentaries of the Puritan divines, and whose only specimen of what might be called current literature was the almanac, the sermons and exhortations of the New England ministers came with a welcome now inconceivable.⁷¹

When one remembers Mather as the most published author of his time and place, his importance becomes even more striking.

Though he would have enjoyed a visit to Britain, Mather would only leave New England in death. As he proclaimed boldly:

⁷⁰ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men, Young Men, and Little Children* (1694), p. 90.

⁷¹ Walker, “The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development,” p. 83.

Indeed New England is not Heaven: That we are sure of. But for my part, I do not ask to Remove out of New England, except for a Removal into Heaven.⁷²

The things that Mather valued in New England Congregationalism were the same things he desired in individual Christians, including piety, charity, accountability to God and each other, holiness, scriptural commitment and trust in God's providence. He did not hold to any specific "New Jerusalem" prophecies for New England though he was eager to learn biblical lessons from any parallels that existed. One can hear the beaming joy in his voice when he describes the reputation for piety that existed in New England when he was writing *A Pillar Of Gratitude* in 1700:

Yea, I have heard unprejudiced strangers own, That there is yet left proportionably more of Piety in this Land, and the Common people are for the most part, better instructed, than in any that they know of under Heaven. And I hope they will have cause to say, that they see more Honesty too; or Else the Piety is worth nothing at all.⁷³

Mather sees the piety of the common people of New England as best indicator of society overall which is a theme that he will discuss in changing contexts.

For Mather the church's ultimate role in the last days was to finalize the reformation by defeating the enemies of God including the devil and his Roman Catholic agents. Along the way to this victorious eschaton are visible victories on this side of heaven. This would include the Glorious Revolution which the New England puritans saw as helping to wrap them in a more complete blanket of protestantism

⁷² Cotton Mather, *A Pillar of Gratitude* (1700), p. 11.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 22.

when needed most including new partnerships and opportunities for notoriety.⁷⁴ For the New England puritans, the ascension of King William III signified “a giant step in the progress of world-reformation”⁷⁵ the culmination of which was Mather’s ultimate goal. This required a development in his theology and a new self-evaluation in light of the new charter as the rules for worship and toleration cancelled out the puritan’s initial reason for leaving for America in the first instance. Mather was active throughout these eventful times with a new mission. Quoting a puritan divine in *Eleutheria* of 1698, Mather declared that “In the first reformation we were cleansed from idolatry; in the next, I hope we shall go a step further.”⁷⁶ He believed that it was important to “not fight against God; all dividing Terms of Communion [...] are the things to be removed in order to a more perfect Reformation of the Church.”⁷⁷ To finish the reformation in order to help usher in the eschaton was the consistent motivation for Mather in each of his mutations through his ministry.

The final reformation that would help to usher in the eschaton was always of concern for Cotton Mather. Mather’s eschatological views underwent considerable revision throughout his ministry, especially during his later years. Beginning with *Things to be Look'd for* published in 1691 and ending with *Tripadisius* finished in

⁷⁴ Mark Peterson, “*Theopolis Americana: The City-State of Boston, the Republic of Letters, and the Protestant International, 1689-1739*,” *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1825*, ed. Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 331.

⁷⁵ Peter H. Smith, “Politics and Sainthood: Biography by Cotton Mather,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 20 (April, 1963), p. 188.

⁷⁶ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 100.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

1726, Mather published over forty sermons on the millennium and the events leading up to the end of days. Imminence of the second coming of Christ is in the background of nearly everything that he wrote. He openly disagreed with his father Increase regarding eschatological issues including the conversion of the Jews, the parousia, the new Jerusalem and final judgement. Cotton Mather developed something distinctive in that his views were somewhat historicist with pre-millennialist inclinations while evolving to deemphasize New England's specific role in these prophecies. He developed a belief that the elect would be taken to heaven to escape destruction, abandoning his previous belief in a coming mass conversion of the Jewish people.

By 1710 Cotton Mather had grown accustomed to a changed eschatology that was more mystical than earlier puritan hope. Here New England "may hope for a share" of the glory to be shone forth during the end of days. In *Theopolis Americana* he declared:

Inasmuch as we are now doubtless arrived unto that point of Time in which we may be under a daily Expectation, that the Seventh Trumpet of the Revolutions foretold in the most sure word of Prophecy will begin to sound, and the Great Trumpet shall be blown, in the joyful sound whereof America may hope for a share; it may prove an agreeable entertainment unto some good men, to have a vacant page or two here filled with a brief Recapitulation of the Things that are shortly to come to pass.⁷⁸

After Cotton Mather's death his son Samuel summarized his eschatological views as teaching that "The second coming of the Lord will be at hand for the destruction of the man of Sin and the extinction of the Roman monarchy under the papal form of it," writing:

⁷⁸ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana* (Boston 1710), p. 51.

By all just and fair computations, the twelve hundred and sixty years allowed for the Papal Empire must be nearly, if not quite expired. By consequence the one thousand and three hundred and thirty- five years, which will bring the time of the end, when Daniel, with every other good man, is to rise and stand in his lot, are not likely to extend beyond the present century.⁷⁹

Mather's redefinition of his eschatology was a response to perceived external defeats in part due to disenchantment with events in his life and ministry discussed in this thesis such as the Salem witch trials, Harvard College episode, the inception of Brattle Street Church, the rise of the half-way covenant theology of Solomon Stoddard, the inoculation controversy, the declension of New England's young people, and an expectation of a more imminent parousia, as evidenced in his later publications.

The loss of puritan ascendancy in New England in his lifetime spurred Mather through a type of revitalized personal declension that ultimately emboldened him and his changing idea of the church towards a further reformation. After being confined to his bed in December 1725 he said "Returning to this Evil World, I seem to be upon a new Song."⁸⁰ He began questioning the spiritual competency of the heirs to *Magnalia* while never losing faith in their God or the covenantal promises to the church which resulted in a new enthusiastic commitment to ecumenism, individualism, personal cosmopolitanism and theological openness towards all protestant Christians willing to confess his simple maxims of piety.

⁷⁹ Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather* (Boston, 1729), p. 140, 56.

⁸⁰ Cotton Mather, *Diary of 1709-1728*, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Seventh Series, p. 778; Weeks, "Cotton Mather And The Quakers," p. 31.

It is important to define what is meant by “personal declension.” It was not an abandonment of traditional protestant confessional theology, as his dedicated words in *Ratio Disciplinae, Faith Of Our Fathers* and other works make clear. It also was not a slow descent into lost cause romanticism. Rather, it was instinct to preserve his faith and identity by re-constituting himself and his views. This is what can be called a hopeful declension: a turn from what he began to perceive as a rigid, stale system unsuited to the moments and movements he was called to faithfully address. The interplay and overlap of the subject areas examined over his life and ministry allow for a recasting of Mather that sheds new light on his morphing views. He never reprioritized his opinions on the church and theology, instead he recalibrated them towards what he felt was the most biblical expression of these areas within the quickly changing contexts of his life. He never discarded what he felt were sound biblical teachings but he reappraised New England over his life and in doing so he reappraised himself, the errand into the wilderness, the New England Way and even the concept of America itself. He also did not simply mellow with age. In fact, he became more radical towards the end of his ministry.

Cotton Mather’s broadening of the covenant and allowing for greater variances of conviction and conscience within his framework for a streamlined piety would in time accommodate both American evangelism and progressivism. In 1717 he would declare that “Our church state is not right if it will not admit all that have a true PIETY visible upon them.”⁸¹ As he has been called the first evangelical he might just as easily be called the first liberal. It was his insistence on a new Christian piety of charity, a

⁸¹ Cotton Mather, *Malachi* (Boston, 1717), p. 57

love for Christ and dedication to the Biblical tenets to do good that would allow for a newer, modified New England Way. This piety would become a crucial part of The Great Awakening, the social gospel and modern progressive mainline denominations that currently claim the energy and vision of the puritans — if not their Reformed confessionalism and attendant views of scriptural interpretation — as a crucial part of their lineage.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said that the lives of leaders are so often mixed with the annals of their country that there is scarcely any distinction between biography and history.⁸² For Cotton Mather this appears to be true. Indeed, he had some very high expectations to meet. As said by Harvard President Uriah Oaks at Cotton Mather's graduation in 1656, Mather was a student who promised "the Piety, the Erudition, the Elegant Ability, the Sound Sense, the Prudence, and the dignity of his Grandfathers."⁸³ As Perry Miller has commented, Cotton Mather "was born in clerical purple."⁸⁴ Cognizant of his prominent ancestry, he had every reason to expect that he would play a large role in the history of America.⁸⁵ In his diary he wrote:

Lord I know Thou will signalize me, as thou hast my Father, my Grandfathers, and my Uncles before me. Hallelujah.⁸⁶

⁸² Nathaniel Hawthorne, "John C. Calhoun," *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, vol. 2 (May 1, 1836), p. 359.

⁸³ Luis Boas and Ralph Boas, *Cotton Mather: The Keeper of the Puritan Conscience* (New York and London: Harper and Rowe, 1928), p. 1.

⁸⁴ Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 162.

⁸⁵ Chadwick Hansen, review of *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663-1703* by David Levin, *Early American Literature*, vol. 14 (1979), p. 343.

⁸⁶ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 34; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 24.

History has shown that Cotton Mather more than satisfied these hopes. Whereas Increase Mather never made the transition into the Enlightenment mindset, Cotton Mather represents the best of early Enlightenment thinking in colonial America.⁸⁷ He was also a true polymath and icon of puritan New England.⁸⁸ When Cotton Mather died in 1728, country minister Ebenezer Parkman came to Boston for the funeral which was attended by huge crowds. He would say in his diary, “It looked very sad — almost as if it were the funeral of the country.”⁸⁹

The country that did die with Cotton Mather was the New England of the *Magnalia* which was written as an attempt to combat lackluster covenant remembrance and participation. Puritans would continue to exert a lasting influence in American culture disproportionate to their numbers,⁹⁰ and nobody influenced the puritans more than Cotton Mather near the end of the seventeenth century and immediately into the eighteenth. It is my hope that digging deeper into his work will advance the scholarship forward on this complicated and passionate minister. This is important work because as Cotton Mather is understood, so also is the meaning of the place and the period.

⁸⁷ Reiner Smolinski, in Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, introduction (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Electronic Texts in American Studies, 1998), ii.

⁸⁸ Kenneth P. Minkema, “Reforming Harvard: Cotton Mather on Education at Cambridge,” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 87 (2014), p. 319.

⁸⁹ Bill Youngs, “Cotton Mather,” *American Realities: Historical Episodes from the First Settlements to the Present* <<http://www.americanrealities.com/mather-cotton.html>> [accessed 14 December 2018].

⁹⁰ Harry Stout, “The Puritans Behind the Myths,” *Christian History Magazine*, Issue #41 (1994) <<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/puritans-behind-the-myths/>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

2. The Covenant Theology of Cotton Mather

“Two or three gathered in the name of Christ by a covenant and made to walk in all the ways of God known unto them is a church.”¹
-Pilgrim Father John Robinson

In 1692, Cotton Mather began a new journal volume in which he hoped for a new reformation in the churches and an easing of the membership requirements in his own congregation.² This chapter is a doctrinal reconnaissance of Cotton Mather’s covenantal theology throughout his ministry and the changes that occur. Covenant is the first area examined because it is an important theme that forks off distinctly into the other subject areas to follow. Mather was never too proud to change his opinion on important matters including that of the covenant. He believed that prior error was God’s tool used to point the faithful puritans towards better knowledge. Regarding the puritan thinkers before him, Mather said that “The mistakes which they fell into may rather Advantage us, than Discourage us; and prove so many Sea-marks to prevent our Ship-wreck.”³ Within the reformed faith, the doctrine of the covenant is uniquely important.⁴ It is a sovereignly administered union between God and his people through mutual promises of faithfulness.

¹ John Robinson, *Works of John Robinson* (London: John Snow, 1851), vol. 2, p. 132.

² Cotton Mather, *Diary 1681-1724*, pp. 144-145; Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publications, 2004), p. 15.

³ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look’d For* (1691), p. 23; Rainer Smolinski, *Trip paradisus Commentary*, p. 62.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology* (Grayslake: Reformed Forum Books, 2018), p.1.

2.1 The Centrality of the Puritan Covenant

The particular nature of the covenant in puritan Massachusetts existed with a double-edged intensity in that it was both the hope of the elect for heaven and the visible inclusion of sons and daughters in the continued New England earthly church covenant (along with the exclusion of the ungodly). This covenant was the blessed hope of the faithful children of church members following in the New England Way. It was a hope based on process. From land covenants, ecclesiological documents and theological premises (the penal theory of justification and atonement, for example), the puritans were invested in the process of how contracts were practically instituted and implemented. The covenant of God in New England was no different as there were particular steps and formal conditions involved in making it actualized.

As covenants involve heirs, assumption of duties and promised blessings, covenantal theology particularly lent itself to being utilized in puritan New England as they were a people of a charter — itself a form of covenant — from their inception as Massachusetts citizens. While a covenant is not necessarily a will and testament, the puritans considered themselves stewards of the church membership rolls, which created a covenanted spiritual aristocracy or new Christian landed-gentry that would pass down the salvific rights and titles on to children of believers.⁵ Mather would go on to disrupt this process by widening the scope of admission by considering the practical needs and effectual evidence of the puritan church in declension.

In puritanism there was an intertwining of both individual and corporate covenants. Salvation is an individual process as people are not saved by the faith of

⁵ Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 113.

others unless that other person is Jesus Christ himself. This individual salvation bred corporate fellowship towards a Christianized community and each of these postures had covenantal duties with promised blessings or curses. The covenant between the individual Christian and God was closely related to the covenant among members of the congregation as church membership and attendance (neither of which guaranteed salvation) were core requirements of full participation in puritan society. There was a covenant that bound the puritans as a social and political collective to God and each other as they faced life in the wilderness.⁶ The intricate inner workings of the covenant theology of the puritan fathers might have been somewhat complicated, but gauging the state of covenantal commitment in New England was not. This was done by observing the perceived piety and religious commitment of the people. Decline was an opportunity for change in interpretation and application of covenantal duties and expectations.⁷ An analysis of Mather's work on the subject — while observing his growth in many tangential issues — will more clearly illuminate his contributions to the volatile discussions of covenant during the time of his ministry.

Mather had a tendency to codify the individual nature of the believer's relationship with God and his church.⁸ The covenant of personal salvation and the visible covenant of corporate community as expressed in church membership were intertwined in an intimate relationship that blurred the lines of each. This was a unique challenge and blessing for New England. Mather writes that:

⁶ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, pp. 58-59.

⁷ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 212.

⁸ David Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 333.

The two Covenants, that of Works, and that of Grace, are not here so confounded, as in many other places. The Everlasting Gospel, is here Preach'd with Purity, more universally, than in any Nation. God hath not so dealt with any Nation; Praise ye the Lord!⁹

For the Christian to be an obedient covenant member in both instances is for them to be cognizant of the expectations of God. The opposite of declension was attachment, and this came about through faithful obedience. In 1717 Mather wrote “It must be our course to Avoid what God has Forbidden; practice what God has Commanded; and acknowledge God in all of our ways.”¹⁰ In describing the covenantal instructions with such simplicity in 1717 he is making a theological and ministerial change by choosing to make the covenant as accessible as possible. However, as in Ephesians 2:8-9,¹¹ the faith required here was not of themselves but would be a gracious covenant gift from God.

Mather’s innovation within puritan covenantal theology can be considered anti-legalistic in its broadmindedness towards new members.¹² Part of this was relaxing the requirement on personal conversion narratives. In his ecclesiological work *Ratio Disciplinae* Mather notes that it was only in the former days that founding members of a new church gave their conversion stories. He wrote:

⁹ Cotton Mather, *A Pillar of Gratitude* (1700), p. 23.

¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Iconoclasts* (1717), p. 6.

¹¹ The King James Version reads “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

¹² Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 38.

In the former times, the Brethren on this Occasion also exhibited, either Orally or in Writing, some account of each Mans Conversion from his unregenerate State unto serious Piety; or, The Reason of the Hope which is in him, that a Saving Work of Regeneration has passed upon him.¹³

Mather nowhere calls for this to be the current standard for covenantal inclusion. To do so would leave a growing number of New Englanders without assurance of salvation or the opportunity to interact with the covenant community in society. A step-by-step account of the well-documented contentious halfway covenant debate of the seventeenth century is not required in analyzing Mather's changing attitude on the issue. What is worth recognizing is that Mather had a biblically honest pragmatism that was utilized with a pastor's heart during the covenant controversy. David L. Weddle comments on Mather the theologian and pastor:

True to Reformed Orthodoxy, Mather insisted on the paradox of divine grace and human responsibility; but true to his calling as a pastor, he shifted his doctrinal emphasis to meet the needs of different segments of his congregation [...] The result was not an airtight system of theology, but an adaptable set of beliefs designed to bring as many as possible into the company of visible saints.¹⁴

His commitment to the broadening of the covenant was not a stand-alone issue for Mather. It represented an intimate reflection on issues of communal and individual identity in puritan New England at this time. Mather wanted the covenant as powerfully inclusive as it could be within New England society so as to pluck as many "brands out

¹³ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae* (1726), p. 4.

¹⁴ David L. Weddle, review of *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* by Richard F. Lovelace, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 49 (1981), pp. 704-705.

of the burning”¹⁵ as possible and then have this salvation be made manifest through the pious life of the individual believer so as to make them “fitter to adorn the Heavenly Temple” in the end.¹⁶

2.2 The Heart Calvinism Of The Covenant

Though it had implications in all areas of life for the New England people, the covenant was first and foremost a theological issue. Mather was most concerned with what God had revealed about the nature of the covenant and he would then take and use this truth to inform related theological commitments. For Mather the spiritual covenant of New England was dependent on the faithful loyalty of the current and future generations of New England Christians to see it through, even as this faith itself was a gift from the sovereign God. As it was rooted only in promises of predestination and election to a holy remnant of as-yet unknown souls, the destiny of New England was not necessarily a puritan birthright. Election alone would govern the covenant as God was no respecter of national identity. Mather says:

But we are very stupid if we do not read an Admonition to our selves, in this Ancient and Famous Providence. Indeed I am not without my lively and grounded Hopes, that our Good God will not ever (or at least, as yet) Remove the People which is now enriching this part of the New World, for Another Nation to succeed in the room thereof.¹⁷

Within Mather’s reappraising of the nature of the covenant, the Calvinist predestinarian concept of election was a component theological conviction that he would never

¹⁵ Cotton Mather, *A Brand Pluck’d out of the Burning*, in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648–1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1914).

¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. A3.

abandon. This is in part because he saw Arminianism as foreshadowing a radical descent into theological heresies associated with parties opposed to him in and around Boston.¹⁸ Regarding the eternal decree of predestination that governs the covenant of men and God, Mather states:

The Arminian Universal Redemption we reject with just abhorrence. The Satisfaction of our Lord Redeemer, was not intended by Him, for the Redemption of all mankind; nor was it intended any further than His intercession is, which reaches only to the elect of God.¹⁹

Election governs the covenant for no other reason than God's good pleasure. Two years later Mather would continue to preach:

That the most high God, hath from all Eternity Elected certain persons from among the Children of Men, to be brought unto Eternal Happiness, in and by the Lord Jesus Christ: and this decree was not founded in the Foresight of any Merit or Goodness in the chosen, but in the meer good pleasure of God who makes choice of them: That the Elected of God are in His Everlasting Covenant of Redemption [...]²⁰

Even six years later he has the same opinion of the eternal electing decrees of God.

Mather says:

The Most High God, from all eternity does most Exactly foreknow and his infallible knowledge does imply His eternal decree to determine it; who shall and who shall not, be brought unto the enjoyment of Him in Everlasting Blessedness.²¹

¹⁸ James W. Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 78.

¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Resolved Christian* (1700), p. 9; Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 79.

²⁰ Cotton Mather, *A Seasonable Testimony to the Glorious Doctrines* (1702), p. 2

²¹ Cotton Mather, *Way of Truth Laid Out* (1708), p. 51; Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 78.

Mather had a notable penchant for using orthodoxy to innovate. These statements on election made in 1700, 1702 and 1708, show a firm theological commitment that both strengthened his position for expanding the covenant and attempted to ensure that the puritan doctrine of election governing the covenant stood firm against the challenges of the Arminians and their allies (who would in time win this debate in New England). To stop preaching the puritan doctrine of the sovereignty of God would be to give up on “the very Vitals of Christianity” completely.²²

Mather believed that God predestined men according to his will and nothing that they could do affected this choice.²³ Christ’s sacrifice supplied the righteousness required to be accepted by God.²⁴ Mather wrote that “A man cannot be Righteous before God, and Accepted and Entitled unto Life, without the Righteousness of God Imputed unto him.”²⁵ He believed that sinners must possess “A Justifying Faith” that is “Receiving of, and [...] Relying on, the Gift of Righteousness from God, by our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁶ To extrapolate Mather’s reformed theology here into an argument is to say that if election rules the covenant, which allows access to benefits including baptism, admission to the table for the Lord’s supper and the attendant ecclesiological

²² Cotton Mather, *A Seasonable Testimony to the Glorious Doctrines*, p. 3.

²³ Ibid, p. 7.

²⁴ Middlekauff, p. 254; Nate Pickowicz, “Who Was Cotton Mather?,” *Tabletalk Magazine*, online edition (October 2019) <<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/who-was-cotton-mather-2019-10/>> [accessed 20 November 2018].

²⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Gospel of Justification by the Righteousness of God* (1700), p. 4; Pickowicz, ‘Who Was Cotton Mather?’

²⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, p. 4.

rights and civil privileges, then it would be unfair to not include young, spiritually immature and growing Christians in full membership as Christ had already supplied their necessary requirements in his electing grace. Mather desired to see admission constraints broadened due to a pastoral compassion towards individuals and to increase the number of puritan congregants in a time of perceived declension while competing churches were making inroads into a changing New England landscape.

The covenant was dependent only on the obedience graciously endowed on the puritan people as a gift from God. The puritan people also had the faithful duty of laying hold of God's promises as found in the scriptures while making these promises visible and tangible in this world. In his *Ratio Disciplinae* of 1726, very near the end of his ministry, he wrote:

We now thankfully lay hold on His Covenant; and would chuse the Things that Please Him. We declare our serious Belief of the Christian Religion, as contained in the Sacred Scriptures, and with such a View thereof as the Confession of Faith in our Churches has exhibited; heartily resolving to conform our Lives unto the Rules of that Holy Religion as long as we live in the World.²⁷

Mather reminds the reader that the human component of obedience is an essential part of the covenant. Mather discussed this internalizing and personalizing of the covenant through individual spiritual commitment as graciously applied by God. This was not the people laying hold of the covenant; it was allowing the covenant to “recover us.” In 1696 he was preaching that:

Let us Request for, and Rely on, the Aids of Grace for a Self-Reformation [...] it is the Covenant that must Recover us, the Covenant of

²⁷ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 7.

Grace, which is Brought unto us all as have been Admitted unto any Ecclesiastical Privileges among us.²⁸

He is also quick to say that this gift of obedience is the result of “free and rich Grace of His which triumphs over so great Unworthiness.”²⁹ This theological dichotomy undergirded all discussions of covenant fidelity that Mather would address head-on in his 1699 work *The Everlasting Gospel: The Gospel of Justification by the Righteousness of God* analyzed below.

Calvin said that human hearts are above all things idol factories,³⁰ Mather might have said that human hearts are wellsprings of idolatrous disloyalty. He writes that “There is an Idolatry in our Apostasy [...] Be sure, all such Idolatry in us, will be a perfidious breach of our Covenant. It will be a Spiritual Adultery.”³¹ At this time Mather continued to see the puritan people as part of a covenant not completely unlike that of the Old Testament in Exodus 19, as the New England covenant also involved obedience, law, deliverance and duty, amongst other responsibilities. There was a biblical model in the covenantal arraignments that Mather would seek to apply throughout his ministry to New England in areas including church membership and covenantal participation. In the *Problema Theologicum*, published fourteen years before *Iconoclasts* quoted above, Mather fully concedes that puritan New England is

²⁸ Cotton Mather, *Things For A Distres'd People To Think Upon*, pp. 59-60; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 117.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion* (1559), I.11.8.

³¹ Cotton Mather, *Iconoclasts*, p. 1, 5, 11; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 91.

not the New Jerusalem and neither are the puritan people the Israelites in any significantly transumptive manner. The covenantal promises made to Old Testament Israel were not the same blessings in the same manner he expected New England to receive. In contrast to the future reception of the promised land to the Israelites in the Old Testament, for example, the puritans had already received their land in New England. The challenge and duty was to keep God's face shining upon it. The covenant in New England was a unique covenant to a distinct people and as such it would appear different than the Old Testament model though it seemingly shared many component parts. The covenant with God was no longer one of works as in the Old Testament, but the New England covenant by necessity contained a works component that fueled the puritan to strive towards graciously assured goals. Andrew Reck says:

Whereas no Puritan could waver in his conviction of the primacy of grace over works for salvation, he could not disregard the necessity of works for the success of the colony in its providential mission.³²

The necessary cultural memory of hard work in the wilderness helped to fuel the idea that covenant membership ought to include an inward assurance along with outward proofs of readiness.³³

Mather would not endorse any theology that added man's agency as a substitute for the predestinarian workings of God in the hearts, homes, families, communities and churches of the people of New England. As faith, repentance and

³² Andrew J. Reck, 'Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning,' *University of Toronto Press Journal*, vol. 24 (2001), p. 282.

³³ For more on these lines of integration in covenant theology see Robert Wainwright, "Covenant and Reformed Identity in England 1525-1555," DPhil Thesis, Oxford University (2011).

salvation are graciously unconditional so are the Christian benefits of this salvation within the covenant, and they should never be withheld short of credible unrepentant scandal or excommunication. Mather would go so far as to invert the thinking of those puritans who had obsessed over morbid introspection as part of the conversion process. In 1708 Mather wrote that since no man can know the mind of God towards a person they should consider themselves saved covenant members, and that it is in fact sinful to consider yourself reprobate when you are not.³⁴ In 1716 Mather said that to put too much emphasis on the work of inward conversion “Was to bring the Covenant of Grace into the Covenant of Works.”³⁵

By 1726 in the *Ratio Disciplinae*, Mather was declaring the availability of covenant membership by saying that essentially anyone not marred by serious besotting sin is welcome to be baptized:

It may be added, There having been some Insinuations made unto the World, as if the Streets here were crouded with Unbaptized People, because the Churches have not such Terms of Initiation here, as are practised in other Protestant Churches, 'tis to be now declared, that this is a most unaccountable Calumny; for 'tis well known there is not one Person in all the Country free from a scandalous and notorious disqualifying Ignorance and Impiety, but what may repair to some Hundred Ministers in these Colonies and be Baptised.³⁶

This approach to the covenant was radically anti-legalistic and has led James W. Jones to say that Mather was “a Calvinist in the study and a universalist in the pulpit.”³⁷ It

³⁴ Cotton Mather, *Way of Truth Laid Out* (1708), pp. 34-35, p. 41, pp. 66-70; Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 81.

³⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Christian Cynick* (1716), p. 33.

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 80.

³⁷ Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 81.

was this spirit of acceptance (which itself was an act of obedient duty in letting God decide who is saved) that influenced all of Mather's ministry after the turn of the eighteenth century. Christ was graciously at work to keep the covenant in place and as heirs to Christ, covenant members were expected to hold fast to these promises.

Mather writes:

My Brethren, here is very much our Decus ac Tutamen; Our Beauty and our Defence. The voice of the Lord unto us, is that: Rev. III. ii Hold that fast, which thou hast, that no man take thy Crown.³⁸

He believed that it was ultimately the lasting grace of God that kept individuals from stumbling and covenant communities from breaking. Assurance itself was covenantal empowerment.

For Mather the stipulations and foundations of the covenant of New England were analogous to the personal covenant of election unto salvation in the traditional Calvinistic model. Total depravity was a bedrock belief of covenant theology in New England as the regeneration of believers into the saving covenant of grace was a strictly monergistic act. Each of the foundational puritan confessions and documents teach the Calvinistic version of the issue of total depravity.³⁹ This is the belief that Adam's sin was superinduced to all human posterity, rendering their wills and nature

³⁸ Cotton Mather, *Iconoclasts*, p. 14.

³⁹ For more on John Calvin's theological influence on the New England puritans see David Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence in the Modern World* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008) and J.T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1967) and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 1989).

corrupt and sinful from generation to generation. The Westminster Confession of Faith says it as:

Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment thereof: Descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.⁴⁰

This depravity stains mankind's attempts at good works. Mather would put it this way:

First. Despise, and denounce, all your own Despicable Righteousness. The Best Things that ever you did, What are they? There's Badness enough in them, to make you Ashamed of them. Said they of old, in Isa. 64.6. All our Righteousnesses are as Filthy Rugs; Even like the Nasty Plaisters, that are laid upon lothsome ulcers.⁴¹

Mather held to a strong belief in the total depravity of man throughout his ministry.⁴²

As there was no good in the human soul to merit them individually to covenant membership, there was also no intrinsic worth of the puritan people together or in their corporate errand into the wilderness apart from the free sovereign grace of God being bestowed on them. It was free grace from start until the promised end.

Mather would make clear his opinion on those who would stipulate any conditions on admission to the eternal covenant. He writes that:

⁴⁰ The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6.

⁴¹ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Gospel of Justification by the Righteousness of God* (1700), p. 48,

⁴² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 69.

Our Election is indeed Absolute. No Decree of God is conditional, tho God may decree a Condition. It were to the Perfection of God, for his decree to depend on any Condition.⁴³

And:

It is not left unto the meer Will of Man, to determine who shall by Repenting and Believing, arrive to the benefits purchased by our Lord Redeemer [...] it follows that Salvation itself runs parallel with election.⁴⁴

Mather's desire for inclusion was of the same impulse we see at work on the issues of ecumenicism, cosmopolitanism, piety and the other related issues addressed in this thesis. It represented a stark change from the more narrow and insular old ways of those puritan founders romanticized in the *Magnalia*.

By acknowledging the catechisms that Cotton Mather wrote — along with giving weight to the catechisms and confessions written by others that he subscribes to — we can glean insights into his theological priorities concerning the nature of the covenant. Mather openly endorsed the New England catechisms that came before him. There were two Dorchester catechisms, both written by Cotton Mather's grandfather Richard Mather who was a teacher at the Congregational church at Dorchester from 1636 until his death in 1669. Cotton Mather refers to them in the *Magnalia*:

⁴³ Cotton Mather, *The Resolved Christian* (1700), p. 12,16; Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Cotton Mather, *Way of Truth Laid Out*, p. 52; Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 80.

He published catechisms, a lesser and a larger, so well formed that a Luther himself would not have been ashamed of being a learner from them.⁴⁵

Mather was also committed to Thomas Watson's *A Body of Practical Divinity*⁴⁶ which had catechetical portions. Mather describes it as:

This Rich Treasure has often been Transcribed by the vast Pains of our Candidates for the Ministry; and it has made some of our most considerable Divines.⁴⁷

Mather naturally subscribed to the Westminster Assembly's Catechism, "that Golden Composure" as he called it.⁴⁸

2.3 The Everlasting Gospel (1700)

Mather's work *The Everlasting Gospel: The Gospel of Justification by the Righteousness of God*, written in 1700, was a passionate attempt to reiterate to the New England churches the reformed doctrine of justification through Christ's imputed righteousness. A thorough study of this work is beneficial in understanding the theology of Mather as it related to the perfect righteousness that the covenant of grace both requires of sinners and grants in Christ. For Mather this was more accurately justification achieved by the gift of Christ's righteousness as both the requirements and fulfillment of the covenant would be from Christ alone. In this book he discusses his view on whether the justification of the sinner should result in covenant assurance for

⁴⁵ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), III, p. 128.

⁴⁶ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London, 1692).

⁴⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), III, p. 118.

⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *A Plea for Catechising* (1708) introduction, as found in Paul Leicester Ford, *The New-England Primer* (New York; Dodd, Mead and Co., 1897) p. 262.

those “who have been distinguished by the Name of Congregational.”⁴⁹ Here Mather is attempting to privilege both doctrinal purity and ecumenicism at the same time. He writes that any disputes on this issue between the Congregationalists and others on this issue are simply the “Varieties of Expression among you”⁵⁰ rather than any substantive difference. In an attempt to rally all sides into agreement with him, Mather quotes John Owen (a puritan but not a New Englander) in favor of his view. As Mather puts it, Owen’s opinion on the subject is “worthy to be written in Letters of Gold.”⁵¹ Mather is likely referring to Owen’s 1672 work *A Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love, Peace and Unity*. Owen argued that God alone is the Lord of the conscience, and that there could certainly be Christian unity with differences in practice and tradition.

Declension was a fading of faithfulness by the rising generation in regards to the puritan conception of the unique covenant God made with their ancestors.⁵² Covenantal declension was thought by Mather to be a theological problem rather than simply a social trend. It was the fruit of a weakening theology growing impure. Poor theology was creating (or could create) enfeebled churches and this would disgrace the signs and sacraments as practiced within the Congregational churches. Referencing his grandfather, Mather proclaimed:

⁴⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Miller, *The New England Mind* for more on declension as a concept.

It was foretold by our famous Old Mr. Cotton, That the Truth of the Gospel professed in these Churches, being a Pure sort of Thing, would not be kept but in Pure Vessels; and that therefore when the Professors of the Gospel degenerated into Impurity of Conversation, the Pure Evangelical Truth, would soon be given up. 'Tis therefore but a Godly Jealousy, That in the growing Degeneracy of our Churches, there is danger lest the Evangelical Truth, especially, in the Grand Point of, Justification, come to be depraved, with the manners of the Rising Generation To do something for the prevention of such a fatal Apostasy, and for the Directing and Confirming of our Flocks in the Faith which is our Life.⁵³

Degeneracy was to be rebuffed by attempting to reinstitute pure theology rather than tightening the grip on moral codes or civic laws in New England.

Mather believed that sound reformed theology was paramount in the ecclesiological concerns of New England and that this is lived out in part by engaging with and learning from “Churches in other parts of the world.”⁵⁴ This is some of Mather’s proto-cosmopolitanism showing which will come to fruition later in his ministry. This work is “containing no other Doctrine of Justification, then what hath been Preached and Received in New-England from the beginning.”⁵⁵ It was hoped that *The Everlasting Gospel* would be well-received “not only to our selves in New England, but also to our Brethren in our Mother England, from whence we came.”⁵⁶ In the second part of the introduction Samuel Willard, pastor of Boston’s Third Church and president of Harvard from 1701 until 1707, writes that mankind is a habitually covenant-making creature:

⁵³ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction, n.p.

⁵⁴ John Higgins, in Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction, n.p.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

[...] instead of being directed by it to the Grace of God, on which alone their Salvation depends, they seek to turn it into a New Covenant of Works.⁵⁷

Mather would go on to argue that there is only one way the covenant is fulfilled and that is through the righteousness of Christ himself “according to the tenour of the New-Covenant.”⁵⁸ This “tenour,” the new voice, was Christ himself at the center of the covenant, operating as the power hold it together by his command. Christ was the final inheritance of the Christian as in Ephesians 1:11-14⁵⁹ which was something of far higher worth than an earthly promised land. The covenant was then both mediated and consummated in the shared righteousness of Christ which was given as a blessing to those whom God predestined as heirs as in Romans 8:17.⁶⁰

Regarding the original covenant in the Old Testament, this was one of law and works that reflected God’s character in requiring perfection from his servants at their end of the bargain. This perfection was ultimately an alien righteousness found in the perfect performance of Christ, who in keeping the law of God made the imperfect works of the elect to be covered by the finished work of Christ. This righteousness would be imputed to the elect with Christ standing as their surety thus fulfilling what

⁵⁷ Samuel Willard, writing in Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction, part 2.

⁵⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁹ The King James Version reads “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

⁶⁰ The King James Version reads “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

they lacked as sinners. God required uninterrupted blamelessness in obediently performing the duties of the law. Mather exhorted that:

We are to know, That God gave unto man, His Commandment in the way of a Covenant. The Commandment thus given by God unto man, is contained in the Moral Law God by His Commandment required man to perform all the Duties of Piety, of Equity, and of Charity, without the least Failure in any circumstance [...] And so we read, in Gal. 3.10. Cursed is Every One that continueth not in all Things. We are to know, That the Commandment given by God unto man, in that Covenant, is the Rule of Righteousness.⁶¹

The blessed assurance of Christ fulfilling what is lacking in the work of the elect sinner does not abrogate their duty to pursue obedience as a covenantal requirement. As early as 1700 Mather is listing piety as a crucial duty of the covenant. This interplay of the requirement of personal piety and God's monergistic justification of the sinner will remain an important theme throughout Mather's theology for the duration of his life and ministry.

For Mather it is always predestination that grafts sinners into covenant with God and this was something to be celebrated. He taught:

Wherefore, That the Elect of God may be saved from their Sins, and that the Justice as well as the Mercy, the Wisdom, as well as the Justice of God, may be glorified in our Salvation; Behold, what a Wonderful Thing is come to pass!⁶²

Covenant people constituting the church are a gift from God to Christ. Mather preached "You are to Remember, That the Foundation, upon which our Lord Jesus

⁶¹ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, pp. 4-5.

⁶² Ibid, p. 6.

Christ brings in a Righteousness for His Chosen People, is the Eternal Covenant of Redemption, made between God and Him.”⁶³ Poor theology in regards to “that Eternal Covenant,” is considered by Mather to be a display of “impiety.” He says:

Albeit some with Impiety enough, put the Name of A Fiction, on that Eternal Covenant of Redemption, which God the Father made with our Lord Messiah; yet we cannot read the Eighty Ninth Psalm, or the Forty Ninth and Fifty Third Chapters of Isaiah, or a considerable part of the New Testament, without Believing it. Yea, that Covenant, is the Foundation of our whole Salvation, and most particularly of our Lords Coming to answer the Law of God, for our Justification In that Eternal Covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ is by God Constituted a Surety for us.⁶⁴

This sensitivity to piety would permeate every other area of his ministry from this time in 1699 until the end of his life. Predestination dictates whom the imputed righteousness of Christ will initiate and seal into covenant inclusion. Mather affirms:

The Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is Apprehended by Faith, in order to our being made Righteous by it. Such a Grace as Faith, is produced in the Heart of every Elect person, when God Effectually Calls that person home unto Himself.⁶⁵

Entering the covenant of grace is an ordered process. Predestination of the Christian is the first step in the system that has been ordained from the foundations of the world, as in Ephesians 1:4.⁶⁶ It is still a stepping stone towards the justification required to enter into the covenant:

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶⁶ The King James Version reads “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Now, as the Covenant of Grace is Ordered in all things, there is an Order of things here fixed by God. If we are Justified by Faith, sure we are not Justified Before it, or, Without it.⁶⁷

It is the righteousness of Christ gifted to sinners and not the efforts of man that ultimately enables covenant membership. Mather remarked:

A man will not come unto the Lord Jesus Christ; It were as easy to break the Rocks in pieces, and pull down the very Stars from Heaven, as to make a man come unto the Lord Jesus Christ, without being brought off from his own Righteousness. Nor if a man could come, would he be welcome unto the Lord Jesus Christ, without it.⁶⁸

All of this is an exercise in God's sovereignty drawing whom he wills into the covenant of grace. On the underlying predestination required to initiate conversion, Mather states:

Seeing then, That no man can Come unto the Son of God, Except the Father Draw him, Let your Eye, and your Cry be to God, with that Petition, Draw me, O Lord, that I may Run unto thy Righteousness.⁶⁹

Here Mather is quoting John 6:44 "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." This petition is that of a contrite heart already regenerated before being made faithful by God's illumination of the sinner's soul through the awakening work of the Holy Spirit. The elect sinner is in a posture of prayer not unlike the tax collector in Luke 18:13 in saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." For Mather it is not simply that men and women are predestined to heaven; rather they are

⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 45.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

predestined to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ which justifies them in performing their covenant duties on earth before entering heaven. Christ's flawless record of law keeping imputed to the elect sinner is ultimately the good work required in the covenant of grace. This invisible act ought to be reflected in visible outward piety. The predestined Christian is to be about the Lord's business, and for Mather this means piety in living before the face of God in covenant. He teaches this simply enough:

The Righteousness of God is now set before you; Take that, and Live.
Oh, let this wonderful Grace of God, have a due, and a deep Impression
upon our Minds!⁷⁰

Mather ends *The Everlasting Gospel* with an example of a "sinner's prayer" that can be seen as a precursor the altar call of the revivals of the Great Awakening and remains a central part of evangelicalism today. This is not a sacrament or liturgical exercise, but rather a theological statement of doctrine that is both preparing the heart and at the same time the evidence of a ready heart. It is a fusion of two prior clashing puritan doctrines: an obedient contrite heart prepared for salvation and the fruits of having already been gifted the regeneration that precedes faith. Though election always governs the covenant, it is through the newly-regenerate heart petitioning God for more and continued mercy that the fruits of true conversion are shown and nurtured. Mather says that for a Christian to acknowledge the justifying righteousness of Christ active in securing for them a place in covenant, they should pray in this manner:

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 47.

And yet after all this, Lord, By the Help of thy Grace, I Believe, that my precious Lord Jesus Christ, our Immanuel, hath fully obeyed and suffered thy will, as a Surety, in the room of Elect Sinners. I Believe that the Righteousness of this our Surety, is tendered unto me for me to Depend upon it, that for the sake thereof, I may become Accepted with God. I Believe that whenever thou dost enable me to Depend upon this Righteousness, thou dost immediately Absolve me from all my Guiltiness, and pronounce me a dear Son, a pleasant Child, whom thou wilt surely have mercy upon. Yea, I Believe that the horrible and prodigious Greatness of my Sins, does nothing to render me incapable of this Great, and Free, and Rich Grace of Heaven. Oh my God, in this Belief, I cast myself at the Feet of the Lord Jesus Christ; There will I now Waiting, Looking, yea, Assured, There to Receive thy Favours. Now I know, That my Debts to the Dreadful Justice of God are all paid. All that my God will now demand of me, is to Love Him, and Praise Him, and Glorifie my Glorious Redeemer for ever-more.⁷¹

This is grace manifested in the form of God condescending towards them by welcoming them into a covenant in which God's love and this alone secured his favor to them as people. The puritans were like "a people" mentioned in Hosea 2:23 and 1 Peter 2:10 that reads "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." In *A Pillar of Gratitude* also of 1700 Mather discusses in vivid detail who their ancestors were before God consecrated them to himself:

We are more vile than every other Nation, if we don't own our selves as vile, as any Nation [...] The Lord Loved you, meerly because He Loved you! Even so; 'Tis the meer Sovereign Grace of the God, who does all things according to the Counsel of his own Will, that hath so Dealt with the English Nation as not with any Nation. Our Ancestors were as forlorn, wretched, cruel Pagans, as our Indians; and there are now the same in our Nation.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 54.

⁷² Cotton Mather, *A Pillar of Gratitude* (1700), pp. 8-9.

As regeneration precedes faith in the Calvinistic (and puritan) conversion process, so it was in the forming of New England. The land given to the puritans from God via England was not taken by conquest or as spoils or reward. It was a gift from God which required their fidelity to maintain. This is God's glory being attached to a peculiar people by a covenant which included land. Mather says:

O New England, Thou didst not get the Land in possession, by thy own Sword, neither did thine own Arm Save thee. At length it was proposed, That a Colony of Irish might be sent over, to check the growth of this Country: An Happy Revolution spoil'd that Plot: and many an one of more general consequence than That!⁷³

Here Mather is referencing the fruits of the Glorious Revolution as covenantal arm of protection whereby God continues to ensure the “possession” of the land in New England. More will be said of Cotton Mather and the Glorious Revolution to follow.

In spite of the efforts of Mather and other ministers, declension was beginning to infect New England. In Mather's ambit he had an intimate case study of wayward youth, his own son Increase, who as a young man struggled with vice being suspected of fathering a child out of wedlock when he was sixteen years old.⁷⁴ Mather had a preoccupation with this disparity between the theoretical “ought” of inheritance and the “is” of actual experience.⁷⁵ Dynasty was vulnerable due to sin. He had seen the mighty fall and was aware of the frailties of claiming bloodlines and tradition as capable

⁷³ Ibid, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 268.

⁷⁵ Breiweisser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 94.

of salvation.⁷⁶ However, Mather did not believe that declension was something that was unavoidable. He pointed to three generations of Shepard family ministers as evidence that descent does not invariably bring declension.⁷⁷ Covenant loyalty in its best form might grow from generation to generation throughout history but only by the sovereign will of God. These Calvinistic theological underpinnings remained unchanged even as his covenantal applications broadened.

2.4 The Covenant of The Puritan Family

The nature of the promises of the covenant of salvation in New England were not simply for each living believer in their own place and time. The promises were for them and their children after them as written in Genesis 17. Even after witnessing so much declension, in 1726 Mather still believed in the promises to puritan children and their parents:

At the same time, we do also present our Offspring with us unto the Lord; purposing with His Help, to do our Part in the Methods of a Religious Education, that they may be the Lord's. And all this we do, flying to the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant, for the Pardon of our many Errors, and praying that the Glorious Lord who is the Great Shepherd, would prepare and Strengthen us for every good Work, to do His Will, working in us that which will be well pleasing to Him; To whom be Glory forever and ever.⁷⁸

In this way the children themselves become a sort of consecration in pursuit of covenant fulfillment.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 96.

⁷⁷ Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritans in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 247.

⁷⁸ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, pp. 8-9.

Family interaction was considered even more important in New England than it had been in England because of the lack of nearby schools and churches.⁷⁹ This created a heightened sense of family covenant in regards to the evangelistic duties of puritan parents towards their children. In 1699 Mather taught:

If Parents did their Duties as they ought, the Word publicly preached would not be the ordinary means of Regeneration in the Church, but only without the Church, among Infidels.⁸⁰

In Calvinist fashion, Mather said that “the Eternal Election of God, most generally falls upon the Children of Godly Parents.”⁸¹ Youth, particularly young adulthood, was the time for people to “lay hold on the Covenant of Grace”⁸² rather than relying on the faith of their parents. Speaking to young people in the church in 1708, Mather explained that:

Religion will thus, by your means, be Propagated unto the Next Generation [...] the Eternal COVENANT of REDEMPTION wherein God the Father, has given His Chosen People unto our Lord-Redeemer.⁸³

For Mather the family was a keeper of the covenant in that it was their expectation to ensure that each generation was grafted in but also provided it with a hedge against

⁷⁹ Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 135; Maris Vinovskis, “Family and Schooling in Colonial and Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of Family History*, vol. 12 (1987), p. 22.

⁸⁰ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered* (1699), p. 6; Setran, ‘Declension Comes Home,’ p. 33.

⁸¹ Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents* (1695), pp. 20-21; Setran, ‘Declension Comes Home,’ p. 45.

⁸² Cotton Mather, *Cares About Nurseries* (1702), p. 57; Setran, ‘Declension Comes Home,’ p. 38 and footnote 53.

⁸³ Cotton Mather, *The Man of God Furnished* (1708), p. 20; Kathy J. Cooke, ‘Generations and Regeneration: “Sexceptionalism” and Group Identity among Puritans in Colonial New England,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 23 (2014), p. 355.

declension away from it. This duty arose from the fact that the sin nature of which they are struggling was inherited from the previous generation:

Don't you know, That your Children, are the Children of Death, and the Children of Hell, and the Children of Wrath by Nature: And that from you, this Nature is derived and conveyed unto them! [...] Your Children are born with deadly wounds of Sin upon their Souls; and they may Thank you for those wounds: Unjust men, will you now do nothing for their Healing? Man, thy Children are dying of an horrid poison, in their Bowels; and it was thou that poison'd 'em. What! wilt thou do nothing for their Succour!⁸⁴

This is a hint of Tertullian's influence on Mather in this area.⁸⁵ Even if the parents were pious in conduct they were complicit in passing along to their children the degradable essence of their humanity: original sin.⁸⁶ The need for the covenant itself came from the result of Adam and Eve's transgression, so parental behavior should now act as a tool of covenantal evangelism within the family.

Mather was quick to warn the next generation about complacency in resting in the regeneration and covenantal membership status of their parents:

Think not within yourselves, That because you are the Children of Godly Parents, you are not the Children of Wrath, even as others You need a New Nature, my Children, besides and beyond what you have derived from your Parents Winnowed Corn brings forth Corn with Husk and Chaff upon it. You that are Born of Godly Parents, are under as much necessity

⁸⁴ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, pp. 10-11; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 44. On this theme, see Peter Gregg Slater, *Children in the New England Mind: In Death and in Life* (Hamden: Shoe String Press, 1977), p. 41.

⁸⁵ Cotton Mather discusses Tertullian's Traducianism — the belief that the soul is transmitted through the natural act of procreation — briefly in *Trip paradisus* (1726), p. 123.

⁸⁶ While Augustine certainly developed the highest theology of original sin, he cites Tertullian for his justification of the doctrine. Tertullian writes in *The Testimony of the Soul* 3:2 (198 A.D) "On account of his transgression Man was given over to death; and the whole human race, which was infected by his seed, was made the transmitter of condemnation."

to be New born, as any whatsoever. When you come to an Age capable of making your choice, you must your selves Express a Disposition to choose the God of your Parents [...] Thus, O Child grown up to act for thy self, Tho' Noah, David, or Job were thy Father, yet if thou dost not thy self look after a Saving Righteousness for thy self, thou shalt never be Saved by Theirs.⁸⁷

Because of his covenantal view of reality, Mather believed that young children belonged to Christ through the faith of their Christian parents. Infant baptism was for him a sign and seal of the covenant and an indication that the child belonged to the God of their puritan parents.⁸⁸ In 1690 Mather stipulated:

Indeed, those few little Children that are descended of Believing Parents, have the same God that their Parents have chosen both for themselves & theirs, until they are old enough to revoke or to renew the choice; the Children are included in what their Parents do, and have, until they can stand upon their own two Legs.⁸⁹

However, Mather still firmly believed that piety was to be valued over parentage in making one's calling and election sure. While piety could never earn a person's salvation or alter God's eternal decree regarding election in any way, piety was the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work within as a proof of conversion and obedience. Later in 1715 he preached "Child, If thou has not thy self the Piety of an Isaac, it will avail thee nothing to have an Abraham for thy Father."⁹⁰ There was a theological overlap here as

⁸⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Duty of Children Whose Parents Have Prayed for Them* (1703), p. 32; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 42.

⁸⁸ Cotton Mather, *Cares About The Nurseries*, pp. 55-56; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 42.

⁸⁹ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men and Young Men, and Little Children* (1690), p. 111; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 42.

⁹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Parentalia* (1715), p. 12; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 42.

earlier in his ministry he taught that it is at least partly through the piety of the parents that departed children find heaven. Mather preached “The biggest part of those Humane Spirits that are now beholding the Face of God in Glory, are such as dwelt in the Children of Pious people, departed in their Infancy.”⁹¹ Mather believed that a majority of the people in heaven are those children of “Pious people.” His heart was often nudged in theological directions based on the needs of his flock. This a message in particular was delivered at a child’s funeral in 1689.

Assuring puritan parents that the covenantal blessings promised to their children were to be hoped for even in the face of perceived delays, Mather pastorally counseled parents that these “Delays are no Denials.”⁹² However, Mather was never slack in preaching that covenant breakers would face stiff discipline, as otherwise decline would overtake the church.

2.5 Covenantal Elasticity and Declension

As covenantal blessings were a reward for pious obedience, generational declension would be a result of bad theology. The puritan conception of the covenant was held in a tension in that it required a personal holiness component (including holding to sound theology) that was only God’s to give, while at the same time maintaining an exacting requirement for church membership as entrance to public life in the colony. Mather was not the only puritan theologian to hold a nearly-inconsistent version of what Augustine called and Luther later expanded on “God’s crowning his

⁹¹ Cotton Mather, *Right Thoughts in Sad Hours* (1689), p. 51.

⁹² Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents* (1695), p. 3; Setran, “Declension Comes Homes,” p. 54.

own gifts.”⁹³ Declension was the rot that came from the trend of poor theological premises tied to an unserious Christianity. Mather notes the state of souls in New England as being at risk of becoming “unclean” and “dead” along with the land due to the declension from the faithful holiness which was the human obligation of the covenant. As early as 1696 he writes:

There is not one of all the Ten Commandments, in the Law, which our God has given us, but people are notoriously violating of it, from one end of the Land unto the other. While our Land is full of Unconverted, Unrenewed, Unsanctified Sinners, how should it be any other than full of all Ungodliness! And yet such is the vast multitude of Dead Souls among us, or of Souls which do not Live unto God, by vertue of Union with the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may with Horror say, There is hardly an House, in which there is not one Dead: Nor may we wonder at it, if the Holy God in His Dispensations, treat our Land, as Unclean, when the Dead in all Societies are so very many.⁹⁴

At this early date we find Mather discontented at the complacency and unbelief that was witnessed around New England. Covenants in the Bible had “an integrating of rupture and repair into the structure of the covenant”⁹⁵ which is something that would not have been lost on Mather. There is a prophetic witnessing of the covenant declension in the way that he did, not just in the warnings given by the biblical prophets of old but also in the admonitions of the puritan forefathers of prior generations. Mather writes:

⁹³ Augustine wrote “If, then, your good merits are God’s gifts, God does not crown your merits as your merits, but as His own gifts” as found in Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. by Philip Schaff, vol. 5 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), p. 450.

⁹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distress'd People to Think Upon*, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁵ Goodman, *Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 77.

No Tears are enough to Bewayl the visible Degeneracy, which is to be Instanced, let me plainly, and humbly say so! in all Orders of men throughout the Land. When there was a Second Edition of the Temple, among the People of God, it is noted, in Neh. 3.12. The Ancient men, who had seen the first House, when the Foundation of this House was laid before their Eyes, they wept with a loud voice. Truly, the few Ancient men that are left among us, do weep with a loud voice, when they see how miserably Temple-work is now circumstanced, in the Second and Third Generation of the Countrey [...] Our Lord Jesus Christ from Heaven seems to bestow that Rebuke upon us, in Jer. 2.21. I planted thee a Noble Vine How then art thou Turned into the Degenerate Plant of a strange vine unto me! New England once had a famous Governour, namely, Hopkins of Connecticut, whose words were, I fear, the Sins of New-England will ever long be read in its punishments. Blessed hast thou been, O Land, in thy Rulers; but alas, for the generality, they have not considered, how they were to Honour the Rules of God, in Honouring of those whom God made Rulers over them; and I fear they will come to smart by having them set over them, that it will be an hard work to Honour, and that will hardly be capable to manage their Affairs. Now can we without many Tears, look upon the Tendencies, with the words of that Excellent man have towards an Accomplishment!⁹⁶

Painting the covenantal declension as breaking the hearts of past puritan saints, Mather is further securing himself as puritan covenantal historian even as he ministers to the people of New England at this time of change.

The years from 1680 to the end of the century are considered a period of disappointment for the puritans as they began to lose their lifeline for the political autonomy they craved. These times brought changes that puritan leaders such as Mather could not necessarily control such as the requirement of puritan church membership in order to vote which was a directive of the Crown. These outside elements influenced the puritan debate on the nature of covenant inclusion in New England. Mather's appraisal of the situation through his ministry broadened the bounds of the covenant in order to accommodate these changes in New England. This

⁹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distress'd People to Think Upon*, pp. 13-14.

was a coterminously orthodox change, as in Mather's estimation nothing essential would be lost in applying the same covenantal promises as before to a larger segment of new potential members.

Mather had predicted the slowing down of the puritan errand at some point when considering the original purpose for the writing of the *Magnalia*. The *Magnalia* was to be:

An history of some feeble attempts made in the American hemisphere to anticipate the state of the New-Jerusalem, as far as the unavoidable vanity of human affairs and influence of Satan upon them would allow.⁹⁷

Elsewhere in the *Magnalia* Mather makes it clear that a declension of some type is natural in religious movements and that only God himself had kept the puritan project on track for so long. Martin Luther attested to this phenomena. Mather wrote:

What changes have we seen in point of religion? It was noted by Luther, he could never see good order in the church last more than fifteen years together in the purity of it. Blessed be God, religion hath here flourished in the purity of it more than fifteen years together. But certainly the power of Godliness is now grievously decayed among us.⁹⁸

As Mitchell Breitwieser puts it, Mather understood that in the puritan tradition, given the lurking promiscuity of the medium in which faith must work, periodic failures are to be expected and they do not reveal the insufficiency of the worker.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, I:46; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 135.

⁹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, I:103; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 95.

⁹⁹ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 95.

Even in the *Magnalia*, the hope of the puritan errand into the wilderness that provided a near-mythical foundation to the covenant narrative feels to Mather a thing of the past. He says “Shall I tell you where Utopia was? ’Twas NEW-ENGLAND! But they that go hence must now tell another story.”¹⁰⁰ This “new story to tell” involves looking back at the early covenant of New England while looking forward to the fulfillment of its promises in unconventional ways. This is not unlike John Calvin’s doctrine of believers in the covenant of the Old Testament saved by the faith of the future covenantal fulfillment of Christ the Messiah.¹⁰¹ The puritan churches had started out well. In the *Magnalia* Mather says that “New-England having been in some sort an ecclesiastical country above any in this world.”¹⁰² Later in 1696 he believed that the covenant had held but was at risk of rupture and changed his definition of New England to a “Province, now Labouring under the Deadly Tokens of His Displeasure.”¹⁰³

What also changed rapidly during these early years was the covenantal appreciation by the people of New England. Mather saw the declension as being due to a number of factors, not simply the disobedience discussed in his *Things For A Distress’d People To Think Upon*. Even in the perceived declension of the young people of New England, Mather is not suggesting that the goodness of the earlier puritans had earned the covenant and that bad acts are now losing the covenant.

¹⁰⁰ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, I:103; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 95.

¹⁰¹ See John Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-32 and Institutes*, II.6.2.

¹⁰² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, I:235, pp. 136-137.

¹⁰³ Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distress’d People to Think Upon*, p. 1.

Rather, it was the fundamental nature of a correct covenant understanding on the part of the people that was slipping away. This itself was an issue of piety and character.

There was the spiritual caliber of individual covenant members to consider. This had to do with the character of the puritan people being found lacking when compared to even average New England puritans of the prior generation:

Among the First Planters of New England, there was a vast variety of Generous Notable, Brave Spirited men; yea, some of those very men, that were afterwards found able to conquer and manage mighty Kingdoms, would have been but New England Farmers, if their silly Persecutors had not hindered them: choice grain from three sifted Nations filled this Wilderness. But, the Posterity do for the most part strangely Loose that Brave Spirit, which Inspired their Ancestors [...] There seems to be a shameful Shrink, in all sorts of men among us, from that Greatness, and Goodness, which adorned our Ancestors: We grow Little every way; Little in our Civil Matters, Little in our Military Matters, Little in our Ecclesiastical Matters; we dwindle away, to Nothing: I do not mean, for our Numbers, but for our Actions. Those things, which have been our Glory, they are gradually Removing from us. Oh! with Tears, do our Ancient, men cry out, Where is the Glory of the Ancient Things!¹⁰⁴

Far from the New England experience completing the reformation as Mather had wished, it was apparently moving backwards in a way that threatened to upend the puritan historical narrative. To mitigate this development he would continue a ministry dedicated to restoring purity to the New England churches through his work preaching, teaching and writing but also by adjusting his own attitude towards covenantal boundaries, threats and requirements.

Additionally, in 1696 we find Mather being pushed to the limits of his patience with the people of New England as their international reputation as covenant people seemed to be waning. He says:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

There was a Time, when one Returning from hence to England, could in a Sermon to a very Honourable Auditory, give this Report concerning us, I have been Seven years in a Country, where I never beheld one common Beggar, I never saw one man Drunk; I never heard one Profane Oath, for all the Time of my being there. But is it not a Wonderful & an Horrible Thing, that the Vices of Drinking & Swearing, are now every Day, the objects of our Observation; I pray, let it be a Sorrowful Observation? And is it not a Wonderful & and Horrible Thing that it should be a Complaint made about New England, Righteousness once Lodged in it, but now Murderers? I do speak it, with a Great concern of Soul; The Tears of a bitter Detestation, are necessary to cleanse this Land, from the Guilt & Shame, of the Murderous Things, that have been with too much credibility Reported, as done by some New-Englanders! God forbid, That I should Reproach my Country.¹⁰⁵

As the name of Mather was indelibly associated with New England, he appears personally vexed at being let down.

A few years later in *A Midnight Cry* Mather is preaching against the continued signs of declension shown by the young people of Boston. The difference between the call for covenant renewal rather than the call to become saved in the first instance is a massive change in how the covenant operates after the fact in a godly society in perceived decline. He says:

In the Prosecution of this REFORMATION, I have but ONE THING at this Time, further to lay before you [...] no longer to Delay the Taking of some hitherto untaken Steps, towards the Reformation of our Provoking Evils, and the Recovery of Practical Religion in our Hearts and Lives.¹⁰⁶

Mather sees it as a “recovery.” It was a matter of the people of New England prioritizing religion and living for God right away before it was too late. At this point in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ Cotton Mather, *A Midnight Cry* (1692), pp. 64-65.

New England's history neither declension or earthly fulfillment had been assured, and only righteous conduct towards a more complete reformation could facilitate a recovery of the puritan's former, more hopeful blessedness.

2.6 Covenantal Threats, Protection and Contested Space

Mather saw himself as defender of the covenant and was astute at identifying (perceived) enemies to it. Apparent acceptance by New England society of former Yale Rector Timothy Cutler after his dramatic turn from Congregationalism to Anglicanism was seen as a blow against traditional Congregationalism and a further step in losing the puritan universities.¹⁰⁷ Cutler's high profile conversion to Anglicanism represented a real threat to the Congregational order in New England.¹⁰⁸ Timothy Cutler had been ordained in 1710 and later sought admission to the Church of England. He was removed from his post at Yale in October of the same year. Though Cutler was promptly removed from his duties as rector of Yale — an important puritan institution very near to Mather's heart — the damage had been done. An even larger threat to the covenant appeared when witchcraft came to Salem. Mather's treatment of witchcraft was entirely consistent with his understanding of covenant theology.

The witch trials at the end of the seventeenth century had influenced the puritan church's understanding of the covenant.¹⁰⁹ Through the witchcraft fervor of Salem the covenantal designations had become contested and clouded. Mather's theological priority in the Salem trials was presenting an organized response to the perceived high

¹⁰⁷ Silverman, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 367.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 376.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

stakes situation in the breakdown of the puritan covenant community. Those puritans caught in the non-full church membership 'half' of the halfway covenant were a vulnerable, at-risk population. They existed in covenantal limbo as they were still waiting on full acceptance into church membership and the assurance of covenantal protections that waited for them there. There was no direct overlap in Mather's writings concerning the halfway covenant and the Salem witch trials, but even before the trials began Mather was teaching that the strengthening of the covenant was as an important protective act. In 1690 Mather says:

A Prince in Germany hearing that a Neighbour Prince intended a War upon him immediately set himself upon the Reforming of the people under his Government; but this Adversary of his within a while after enquired, What Preparation his Neighbour was making to oppose him, and being informed, That his chief Preparation was Reformation, He Reply'd, Nay, then, let the Devil fight him for all me, if he be at that, he'll be too hard for me to meddle with him.¹¹⁰

Mather believed that the only hope for the covenant was God's favor against both the devil and the slackness of man. This favor was reflected as piety in the life of the Christian and the church. Piety was a tool of covenantal defense and revenge against the devil. Mather says:

Finally; revenge yourself on your Grand Adversary, in being awakened by Every mischief you suffer from him, to So some significant thing for GOD and for His People which else you had not thought upon. This will be a lawful, a Noble, a Glorious Revenge; and oh! how will you be Comforted, in the Reflection, when your warfare is accomplished.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Iconoclasts*, preface.

To do something against the devil is to do it for God, and to do it for God is to do something for God's people. Living piously was the best revenge against the devil and the best way to protect the covenant, according to Mather.

Extending prior research that has mostly focused on persecution, the supernatural and social issues, my thesis renders the Salem moment with an emphasis on its covenantally-connected context and a distinctively Matherian theological legacy of covenant cohesion. Mather's now famous concern with witches and witchcraft was not one of witch hunting but of covenantal preservation. His attempts at peacemaking during the trials at Salem can be viewed as a function of pastoral church discipline serving as a covenant restorative even for the accused and not about retribution on the part of God or the church. Knowing that so many have gotten so much wrong in regarding "Cotton Mather the witch hunter," it is worth properly framing his impact on witchcraft, diabolism and demonology in the early American psyche especially as it relates to the theme of the puritan covenant in New England.

Like Martin Luther throwing things at the devil in the dark,¹¹² Mather also claimed to have been visited by the supernatural while laboring for the Lord. Mather claims to have been visited by a scripture-quoting angel glowing white and wearing a tiara (though scholars disagree whether this occurred in 1685 or 1693).¹¹³ This sort of thaumaturgical interference in the personal life of the Christian was an idea that pervaded nearly all of Mather's thought and work. These views represent an

¹¹² Peter Costello, "Discovering where he stood: Martin Luther and his biographers," *The Irish Catholic*, 26 October, 2017 <<https://www.irishcatholic.com/discovering-stood-martin-luther-biographers/>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

¹¹³ David Levin, "When Did Cotton Mather See the Angel?," *Early American Literature*, vol. 15 (1980), pp. 271-275.

interpretation of the visible New England covenant of believers whereby the devil is a formidable threat to this covenant membership. Taken together, these beliefs present a view of a third pillar church membership of the demonically possessed (or at least deceived) public church members or, as was more common in the earlier phase of the witch trials, the possession of those not yet fully a part of visible church covenant membership.

The witchcraft accusations showed a covenantal vulnerability: the church was not the safe place for puritans that earlier rhetoric had declared it to be. In the end, even covenantal privileges such as the taking of the Lord's supper did not prevent church members from being accused of witchcraft. In the case of George Burroughs, even being a minister was not enough to ensure safety. Those who were not full members of the church covenant existed in a contested space that in the earlier days of the witchcraft accusations resulted in them living between the faltering visible covenant community and the persecution associated with being assumed to be in compact — or, covenant — with the devil. There was no longer any refuge for those in the middle. Within the covenantal narrative of New England the witch trials tested the assumption that church members would be afforded extra protection after the arduous process of attaining church membership. While the earliest accused were people on the margins, mostly considered insignificant to the larger social structure of the social life in Massachusetts, interest in the trials peaked and then subsided when prominent people such as Mary Spencer Hull, the wife of Massachusetts governor Sir William Phips, were implicated.

There was a wider social requirement of covenant membership in New England and witchcraft represented in a way an inversion of this concept. There were interplaying covenants at work during these times. For example, before the execution of Goody Glover, Mather recalled:

I Sett before her the Necessity and Equity of her breaking her Covenant with Hell, and giving her self to the Lord Jesus Christ, by an everlasting Covenant; To which her Answer was, that I spoke a very Reasonable thing, but she could not do it.¹¹⁴

Mather believed that the covenant with evil was not necessarily an eternal covenant and that Christ himself offered them a way out or a “pardon.” He said:

So Horrid and Hellish is the Crime of Witchcraft, that were Gods Thoughts as our thoughts, or Gods Wayes as our wayes, it could be no other but unpardonable. But that the Grace of God may be admired, and that the worst of Sinners may be encouraged, Behold, Witchcraft also has found a Pardon. Let no man Despair of his own Forgiveness, but let no man also Delay about his own Repentance, how aggravated soever his Transgressions are. From the Hell of Witchcraft our merciful Jesus can fetch a guilty Creature to the Glory of Heaven. Our LORD hath sometimes Recovered those who have in the most horrid manner given themselves away to the Destroyer of their souls.¹¹⁵

And:

With a Great Zeal, we should lay hold on the Covenant of God, that we may Secure Us and Ours, from the Great Wrath, with which the Devil Rages. Let us come into the Covenant of Grace, and then we shall not be hook'd into a Covenant with the Devil, nor be altogether unfurnished with armour, against the Wretches that are in that Covenant. The way to come under the Saving Influences of the New Covenant, is, to close with

¹¹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (1689) in *Narratives of Witchcraft Cases*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 106.

¹¹⁵ Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences*, p. 135; Richard H. Werking, “Reformation Is Our Only Preservation: Cotton Mather and Salem Witchcraft,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 29 (1972), p. 287.

the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the All sufficient Mediator of it: Let us therefore do that, by Resigning up ourselves unto the Saving, Teaching, and Ruling, Hands of this Blessed Mediator.¹¹⁶

Only sticking close to the God of the covenant would prevent the hemorrhaging. On surviving the threat of witchcraft in New England, Cotton Mather would say “Reformation is our only preservation.”¹¹⁷

To be in covenant with the devil was to be out of covenant with both God and the church. Here the importance of covenant membership is being expressed grotesquely: Satan can present a rival covenant on this earth that leads into the next. Covenant membership requires fidelity and an arraignment with the devil represents the most dramatic of all declensions: a removal from the covenant of God through an ultimate loss of faith. Those not yet in the covenant were taken farther away from potential covenant membership as the devil had claimed these people as his. There were pains taken to avoid this crisscrossing into the dark covenant of the devil especially as it pertained to raising children. As early as 1695 Cotton Mather declared that:

Though I am not of the Age to Feel it yet I See daily, and very dismal Cause to Think it, That a more Abasing Trouble, cannot befall a Godly Parent, than to behold their own Children, by the Courses of Ungodliness, making Themselves a Sacrifice unto the Devil.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World* (1693), p. 73; Werking, “Reformation Is Our Only Preservation,” p. 290.

¹¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, p. 95; Werking, “Reformation Is Our Only Preservation,” p. 290.

¹¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents*, p. 4.

Earlier in 1690 Mather addressed those who had slid backwards into the covenanting clutches of Satan. He prescribed only biblical faithfulness as the remedy:

Wherefore Tear and Break your Covenant with Satan, for he has made you his own, by Covenant as well as Conquest. Had you written and signed such a Covenant in your Blood, as the monstrous Witches use to do, there were yet room for the annulling of it; how such then may that which is less Explicit, be Lamented, Repented, Nullify'd? Well then, repair to that Rightful and Righteous Lord, unto whom you owe all manner of Service; Repair to God in Christ, and say as in Isa. 26. 13. O Lord our God, other Lords besides thee, have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy Name.¹¹⁹

The root of this thinking comes in part from giving Satan an elevated place in the life of the Christian that cuts across historic doctrine in reformed theology on the issue of the actual power of the devil. Martin Luther said that “one little word (Jesus) shall fell”¹²⁰ the devil, but Mather (and certainly the judicial elite at Salem) seem to not have had a similar demonology. Mather saw in Salem what he had seen in his visions and prayers and proceeded accordingly. Mather’s obsession with the ghostly required him to balance his theology with his desire and curiosity concerning what was happening in Salem, and here this meant making the devil too powerful to contain. If Mather believed in the omnipresence of the devil, what did that mean for his understanding of the omnipresence of God? Smolinski says that:

We need only read over the pages of Mather's *Memorable Providences and his Wonders of the Invisible World* to discover how the Devil was omnipresent in New England.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children*, p. 68.

¹²⁰ Martin Luther, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (St. Louis: Morningstar Music Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 498.

¹²¹ Smolinski, *Trip paradisus Commentary*, p. 68.

Where John Calvin asserted that the devil exists at the will of God and as a servant of God because there could be no dualism,¹²² Mather seems to believe in a devil that runs amok without the oversight of God that Calvin says is necessary as per the biblical story of Job and the devil. Mather had read Luther extensively, and for Luther God's people are very much caught up in a struggle between God and the devil. Luther's Small Catechism taught that there was redemption from the power of the devil:

When God curbs and destroys every evil counsel and purpose of the devil, of the world, and of our flesh which would hinder us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his reign, and when he strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his Word and in faith even to the end. This is his good and gracious will.¹²³

Mather seems to have abandoned Luther when confronting the devil in Salem and in his overall demonology. Mather's version of the devil represented a grave, ungoverned covenantal threat.

In similar fashion, Mather gave great place to the persistent threat of the Roman Catholic church as signified by the pope whom Mather and the framers of the Westminster Confession of Faith before him had seen as antichrist and the whore of Babylon. Mather surmises that the reign of the antichrist began in 451 when the papal primacy was conferred to the See of Rome at the Council of Chalcedon, establishing the pope as "Caput Ecclesiarum."¹²⁴ Now with the French, Spanish and other Catholic

¹²² Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.17-18.

¹²³ Martin Luther, Small Catechism, "The Third Petition: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (1529).

¹²⁴ Smolinski, *Trip paradisus Commentary*, p. 73.

forces representing an immediate physical threat to the puritans we see Mather emphasize the ephemeral portions of the threats to the covenant community as he faced the need to situate prophecy, events and mission with a geographic immediacy.

One of the ways in which he acted to protect the covenant was by publishing *Wonders Of The Invisible World* in 1693 at the behest of “his Excellency, the Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay.”¹²⁵ It appeared as a piece of political “damage control” designed to spin those few cases of witchcraft that the governor believed to have been true after the Supreme Court had found only three of the last group of accusations to be credible. Cotton Mather was enlisted due to his stature in New England and, as Harvard historian Kenneth Murdock said, at only 30 years old he would have been hesitant to turn down the request made by such esteemed and important people.¹²⁶ Writing this book was never something that Mather seemed eager or pleased to do. Perry Miller wrote that it was “a false book, produced by a man whose heart was not in it.”¹²⁷ In his lifetime Mather lost neither standing nor influence due to its publication but today he bears the burden as falsely being the antagonist or cheerleader for the Salem witch trials. Kenneth Murdock wrote:

Cotton Mather as the chief originator of the witchcraft hysteria, a villain who egged on the judges in their bloody work and gloated over the executions – a myth unhappily still cherished by some writers of fiction and drama and a few hasty historians.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World* (1693), title page postscript.

¹²⁶ Kenneth B. Murdock, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Books I and II by Cotton Mather*, eds. Kenneth B. Murdock and Elizabeth W. Miller (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977) p. 11.

¹²⁷ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 201.

¹²⁸ Kenneth B. Murdock, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Books I and II by Cotton Mather*, p. 18.

Mather was essentially a very minor character in the Salem affair.¹²⁹ He had no judicial, pastoral or legal authority and was not involved in the trials or executions aside from writing about them. In context his work on the issue was measured and cautious, and as he states in the introduction of the manuscript of the *Wonders of the Invisible World* “I live by Neighbours that force me to produce these undeserved lines.”¹³⁰ The implication of this is that Mather was pressured to observe and comment on the Salem affair seemingly knowing that his audience would interpret and apply his findings in ways that he did not intend. Mather attempted to utilize the phenomenon of Salem to ultimately build a stronger covenant, while the judicial and political elite harnessed his work to form an in-group and out-group apparatus to further marginalize elements within New England puritanism. Unfortunately, popular opinion on Cotton Mather still has him trapped in Salem and this has effectively served to nullify his influence and stifle discussions relating to his true character and actual work.¹³¹

Mather makes it clear from the start of *Wonders Of The Invisible World* that this work is being done to protect the church and the church’s members from Satan, indeed not only in the New England church but the saints scattered around the world. He declares that:

I have indeed set my self to Countermine the whole PLOT of the Devil, against New-England, in every Branch of it, as far as one of my Darkness, can comprehend such a Work of Darkness. I may add, that I have herein also aimed at the Information and Satisfaction of Good men in another

¹²⁹ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 237; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissanbaum, *Salem Possessed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 10.

¹³⁰ Rachel Walker, “Cotton Mather: Salem Witch Trials in History and Literature,” University of Virginia Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project (2001).

¹³¹ Pickowicz, “Who Was Cotton Mather?,” paragraph 2.

Country, a Thousand Leagues off, where I have, it may be, More, or however, more Considerable, Friends, than My Own; And I do what I can to have that Country, now, as well as always, in the best Terms with, My Own.¹³²

It is illustrative that he says he will be doing what he can “now, as well as always.” His writing here shows his constant desire to protect the people of God. The witchcraft phenomenon in New England was of great interest to Mather but he had always been concerned with appraising potential threats to the covenant. It was never about shame or punishment, as Mather even kept the names of accused witches private when he could.¹³³ It has been said that Mather showed himself to be taking a step towards a more tolerant Christianity during the trials and worked in advanced ideas under the adversarial scrutiny of conservative laymen.¹³⁴ Regarding *Wonders Of The Invisible World* Mather entreated that “others Read it, with the same Spirit wherewith I write it.”¹³⁵ Unfortunately, this has rarely been done.

Mather early in the book describes the presence of witches to be a type of an ecclesiological and covenantal onslaught. In framing just exactly who it was that the devil is targeting, he describes the Congregational churches in an admiring checklist of ecclesiological trustworthiness. He believes that the congregations here:

[...] have had their Meetings wherent Ecclesiastical matters of Common Concernment are Considered: Churches, whose Communicants have

¹³² Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, iv.

¹³³ Michael Winship, *Hot Protestants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 259.

¹³⁴ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, pp. 225-226; Clifford Kenyon Shipton, “The New England Clergy of the Glacial Age,” *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 32 (1933), pp. 45-48.

¹³⁵ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, vii.

been seriously Examined about their Experiences of Regeneration, as well as about their Knowledge, and Beleef and Blameless Conversation, before their Admission to the Sacred Communion; although others of less but Hopeful Attainments in Christianity are not ordinarily deny'd Baptism for themselves and theirs; Churches, which are Shy of using any thing in the Worship of God, for which they cannot see a Warrant of God, but with whom yet the Names of Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or, Antipaedobaptist, are swallowed up in that of, Christian, Persons of all those Perswasions being actually taken into our Fellowship, when Visible Godliness has Recommended them:[...] ¹³⁶

Even when supposedly under a deluge of witches Mather describes the ideal ecclesiological model as an inclusive one, taking in people regardless of their original denominational allegiance provided they have “Visible Godliness” in their worship. Within this description are his opinions of ecclesiology, covenant, piety and ecumenicism he held in 1692 and 1693. His point is twofold: the congregations assaulted were properly instituted real churches which make for worthy adversaries for the devil in the same way that God’s servant Job was blameless when Satan afflicted him, and that it was not simply due to lack of piety and obedience that Satan has taken a foothold. Rather, there was an offensive attack made against faithful saints that were not necessarily instigated by any personal or ecclesiological shortcomings. At street-level, however, the accusations did not reflect this mindset as accusations of unfaithfulness, dark arts and immorality fueled a great many of the cases within the community.

Whereas Satan seeks to bring division, Mather reminded his readers that the early puritan founders were people who sought peace at all costs:

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

The first Planters of these Colonies were a Chosen Generation of men, who were first so Pure, as to disrelish many things which they thought wanted Reformation else where; and yet withal so Peaceable, that they Embraced a Voluntary exile in a Squalid, horrid, American Desart, rather that to Live in Contentions with their Brethren.¹³⁷

And:

The New Englanders, are a People of God settled in those, which were once the Devils Territories; and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was Exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a people here accomplishing the Promise of old made to our Blessed Jesus That He should have the Utmost parts of the Earth for His Possession.¹³⁸

Mather considers this attack by the devil to be “surprising” but not unmanageable.¹³⁹

Rather than give in to the panic, Mather approaches the larger phenomena in a theologically clinical manner as in the one-on-one cases and consultations with the young girls accused of witchcraft. He sees the problem of demonic activity in New England, and as a man of medicine prepares an antidote which is faithful resistance by the grace of God. There is victory in this prescription. Mather states “if we get well through, we shall soon Enjoy Halcyon Days with all the Vultures of Hell, Trodden under our Feet.”¹⁴⁰

Mather’s use of such terms as “unsettling” in describing what the devil had attempted to do in Salem¹⁴¹ points to the posture of puritan Congregationalism before

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. x.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. xi.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. xii.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

this covenantal threat. These were a body of properly-situated believers in the Congregational system who were worshiping the God of the covenant as Mather had championed. He reminds his readers to be on guard against false confessions which he believes that the devil easily accomplished. He also writes that voluntary confessions which independently share similar components reflecting how the devil may be working should be believed in an attempt to understand how the devil operates:

We know not, at least I know not, how far the Delusions of Satan may be Interwoven into some Circumstances of the Confessions [...] if after so many most Voluntary Harmonious Confessions, made by Intelligent persons of all Ages, in sundry Towns, at several Times, we must not Believe the main strokes wherein those Confessions all agree: especially when we have a thousand preternatural Things every day before our eyes, wherein the Confessors do acknowledge their Concernment, and give Demonstration of their being so Concerned.¹⁴²

Mather is clear that the purpose of the witches was not simply personal defilement or the enjoyment of the dark arts. Rather, their work was actively anti-covenant in its design. He states that the work of the witches is “Rooting out the Christian Religion from the Country, and setting up instead of it, perhaps a more gross Diabolism, than ever the world saw before.”¹⁴³ As in the Old Testament stories of occult practices leading to the loss of land and a break of communion with God,¹⁴⁴ witchcraft in New England was seen by Mather as having the potential to unravel all of the victories documented in his *Magnalia*. As a historian greatly interested in

¹⁴² Ibid, p. xiii.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. xiv.

¹⁴⁴ See the story of God’s displeasure with the occult practices of the Israelites and the attendant punishments as found in the book of Ezekiel.

dispensations, he was quick to note that it was not any unique deficiency in New England that invited witchcraft, but rather something that swept through many Christian countries:

Accordingly, The Kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, yea, and England it self, as well as the Province of New-England, have had their Storms of Witchcraft breaking upon them, which have made most Lamentable Devastations: which also I wish, may be, The Last.¹⁴⁵

It was perhaps a case of God saving the best for last, as New England was as Christian of a society as Mather could envisage and was the last one to be afflicted with witchcraft.

In Mather's understanding of the ecclesiological and covenantal concerns of witchcraft we see how he envisaged the attack, trickery, renunciation, confession and declension of people into witchcraft as practically symbolic of what could happen to entire congregations and indeed to all of the puritan experiment in the wilderness if left unchecked. Mather continued to preach caution, reiterating the point that the devil is capable of producing false confessions in people.¹⁴⁶ This type of caution can itself be seen as an exercise of in-group covenantal cohesion. Reminding New Englanders that the devil was real and active was a strategy to stave off declension.¹⁴⁷ It clearly provided stakes and risks for the wayward soul.

¹⁴⁵ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, p. xiv.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. xvii.

¹⁴⁷ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, p. 260.

Mather continues to say that if someone has been taken into the devil's possession "unwittingly," this does not make the person involved culpable.¹⁴⁸ As unremarkable as this may sound to modern ears, there is the unmistakable charity of a minister's heart in principles such as this. In many other instances of supposed demon possession in and around the witchcraft trials of this era, "possession" itself was often all the proof needed to presuppose that the person possessed was either cavorting with demons or had moral deficiencies so serious that the devil was made welcome. If Mather had as much influence over the witchcraft trials as many suppose, he would have done much to tamp down the persecution that followed. He concedes that there very well may be witches loose in New England and the accusations may bring some of them to light, but he doubts that New England is "Stock'd with Rattle Snakes" as imagined.¹⁴⁹

Witchcraft represented a covenantal threat and Mather saw himself as the protector of this covenant. In 1692 a great many others saw him this way as well. He makes it quite clear what his major concern is: the preservation and perpetuation of puritan covenant. He was not about to give up the covenant of New England to the devil who sought to upend everything that the Massachusetts Bay Colony was. He says that:

[...] The design of the Devil is to sink that Happy settlement of Govern ment, wherewith almighty, God, has graciously enclined their Majesties to favour us. We are blessed with a GOVERNOUR, than whom no man can be more willing to serve Their Majesties, or this their Province: He is

¹⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of The Invisible World*, p. xvi.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. xvii.

continually venturing his All to do it: and were not the Interests of his Prince dearer to him than his own, he could not but soon be weary of the Helm, whereat he sits. We are under the Influence of a LIEUTENANT GOVERNOUR, who not only by being admirably accomplished both with Natural and Acquired Endowments, is fitted for the Service of Their Majesties, but also with an unspotted Fidelity applies himself to that Service. Our COUNCELLOURS are some of our most Eminent Persons, and as Loyal Subjects to the Crown, as hearty lovers of their Country. Our Constitution also is attended with singular Priviledges; All which Things are by the Devil exceedingly Envy'd unto us; And the Devil will doubtless take this occasion for the raising of such complaints and clamours, as may be of pernicious consequence unto some part of our present Settlement, if he can so far Impose. But that which most of all Threatens us, in our present Circumstances, is the Misunderstanding, and so the Animosity, whereinto the Witchcraft now Raging, has Enchanted us.¹⁵⁰

It was in properly quantifying this enchantment, using science, evidence, argumentation and ministerial care, that he proceeded in *The Wonders Of The Invisible World*. What he sought was a Congregational church that was pure from the devil's infection and fit to be inhabited by a new generation of puritans. This is a matter of Christian service towards one another in helping to make the church body pure and the covenant strong. It was all an act of anti-declension. He exclaims:

On every Side then, Why should not we Endeavor with Amicable Correspondencies, to help one another out of the Snares, wherein the Devil would Involve us? To Wrangle the Devil, out of the Country, will be truly a New Experiment!¹⁵¹

This becomes a work of ecclesiological protection and a covenantal hegemonic exercise, what he calls "a new experiment." It was about delivering the afflicted away from the devil and back to covenant community restoration. He admonishes:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. xviii.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. xxii.

Union must carry us along together. We are to Unite in our Endeavors to Deliver our Distressed neighbors, from the horrible Annoyances and Molestations with which a dreadful Witchcraft is now persecuting them.¹⁵²

There is a confessional and theological logic that pervades Mather's understanding of who witches are and how they operate. Besides the many florid and fantastical descriptions of how the devil operates towards Christians, one of the pinnacles of demonic activity is the disputing of biblical authority which would undercut the covenant foundation itself. Believing that the work of the devil as a prelude to possession is to first remove the believer's understanding of scriptural authority, Mather cautions:

But he will whisper into our Ears, what he did unto our Mother Eve of old, It is not the Lord, that hath spoken, what you call his Word [...] and he would fain have secret and cursed Misgivings in our Hears, That things are not altogether so as the Scripture has represented them. The Devil would with all his Heart, make one huge Bonfire of all the Bible in the World, and he has got millions of Persecutors to assist him with the Suppression of that Miraculous Book.¹⁵³

And "Of nothing, is the Devil more desirous, than this; That we should not count, Christ so precious, Heaven so Glorious, Hell so Dreadful, and Sin so odious, as the Scripture has declared it."¹⁵⁴ Mather laments not simply that the devil is at work in the wilderness or the hearts of the people, but specifically that it is the worship of Congregational churches that have become corrupted:

¹⁵² Ibid, p. xxiii.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

The Meeting-House wherein we Assemble for the Worship of God, is filled with many Holy People, and many Holy Concerns continually; but if our Eyes were so refined as the Servant of the Prophet had his of old, I suppose we should now see a Throng of Devils in this very place. The Apostle has intimated, that Angels come in among us; there are Angels it seems, that hark, how I Preach, and how you Hear, at this Hour. And our own sad Experience is enough to intimate, That the Devils are likewise Rendezvousing here.¹⁵⁵

As Mather labored to move the puritan churches closer to the security of God during what was believed to be a demonic onslaught, we see that his priorities in *The Wonders Of The Invisible World* were not to persecute those accused of witchcraft but to protect the puritan covenant from perceived demonic threats.

Witchcraft fervor eventually subsided but the old covenantal narrative had been rattled. In the aftermath of the witch trials new attitudes demanded a way of looking at the covenant that did not leave it open to the devil through abuse or neglect. The covenantal hedge that allowed for protection in the wilderness was shown to have major cracks. It bred a distrust of public testimonies as witches might speak truth through Satan or that blameless people could still be pursued out of the covenant in error. Mather's subsequent theological refining of the covenant was a labor in this direction.

2.7 Covenant Conceptualizations Compared

Mather's approach to the conception of covenant in New England can be briefly contrasted with that of Solomon Stoddard. In 1677 Stoddard started admitting all children and adults to the Lord's supper, and his congregation had previously

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 10-11.

expressed desire to grant covenantal privileges to “settled inhabitants” of their local area.¹⁵⁶ Like Mather, Stoddard believed that the covenant was governed only by God’s election which only God knows¹⁵⁷ but “uncertainty of Election is no discouragement”¹⁵⁸ to membership. Stoddard was partially drawing on the Church of Scotland model of an inclusive, comprehensive church and this was influencing him away from his earlier Congregational practice.

Mather would also look outside New England towards Scotland for covenantal motivations and insights. Mather had a well known affinity for the Scottish Presbyterians including an admiration for the way the framework for their national and church covenants were negotiated and maintained as discussed in his letter to the leaders of the University of Glasgow in 1710. Oliver Cromwell is believed to have said that “Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman,”¹⁵⁹ but Mather thought that they were the sons of Zion “comparable to fine gold.”¹⁶⁰ Mather introduces himself in his first letter with a transparent attempt at modesty as he “that wears the Name of

¹⁵⁶ Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 148, quoting Northampton Church Records pps. 1-8; also see Everett Emerson and Mason I. Lowance, “Increase Mather’s Confutation of Solomon Stoddard’s Observations Respecting the Lord’s Supper, 1680,” *American Antiquarian Society* (1973), pp. 29-65.

¹⁵⁷ Perry Miller, “Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 34 (1941), p. 305.

¹⁵⁸ Solomon Stoddard, *Three Sermons Lately Preach’d at Boston* (1717), p. 17; Miller, “Solomon Stoddard, 1643 - 1729,” p. 317.

¹⁵⁹ Edmund Clarke, *Lectures on the Public Life and Character of Oliver Cromwell* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1847), p. 222.

¹⁶⁰ Cotton Mather, *To the Truly Honourable, & Venerable, John Maxwell Rector. John Stirling Vice-Chancellor, and Principal. James Brown Dean of the Faculty. James Simpson Professor of Divinity. And the Rest of the Learned & Worthy Professors, of the Renowned University of Glasgow*, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, electronic reproduction, Evans 1465, English Short Title Catalog W19560 (1710), p. 2.

BONIFACIUS,” his work that includes an acknowledgment to that “Sett of Excellent Men in that Reformed and Renowned Church of Scotland.”¹⁶¹ Of all the things that Mather could have said in identifying himself as a fellow church leader in the reformed tradition, he chose being the author of *Bonifacius*. It is in his work *Bonifacius* of 1710 that we find a more open, uncomplicated and progressive approach to standards of covenantal inclusion. It is through the simple precepts of *Bonifacius* that Mather feels best able to reach out to the Scottish Presbyterian church as represented by the leadership at the University of Glasgow at this time. In doing so Mather seeks to enjoy the Christian fellowship found in this shared “Bundle of Life.”¹⁶²

Mather praises the “Excellent Rutherford”¹⁶³ in the letter. Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford wrote directly on the covenant of God in works such as *The Covenant of Life Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* that Mather would certainly have been familiar with. Rutherford had stated previously that John Cotton was “sound in our way” and considered him an ally in the faith. In 1695 Mather mentions this with pride:

[...] the Eminent Mr. Rutherford himself, in his Treatise, Entitled, A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist, has these Words, 'Mr. COTTON, in his Treatise of the Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven, is Well Sound in our way; if he had given some more Power to Assemblies, and in some lesser Points.'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cotton Mather, *Cottonus Redivivus, or The Life of Mr. John Cotton* (1695), p. 35; Peter H. Smith, “Politics and Sainthood: Biography by Cotton Mather,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 20 (1963), p. 198.

For Rutherford the election of God governs covenant membership¹⁶⁵ and it is the sovereign power of God that keeps the Christian securely situated in the covenant:

They shall sit so and so by Covenant blessed in Christ. And so the stability and certainty of the decree and oath is not to make the children of David secure, but watchful in their duty: But this is not a condition without the which the Messiah should not reign, but without this he should not reign to their comfort and everlasting good.¹⁶⁶

Rutherford is writing about the covenant of salvation that God graciously makes with believers that is constituted as a visible covenant nation on earth. Mather would seem to be influenced by Rutherford on how God graciously makes and keeps the covenant with Christian people but with geography or entrusted lands playing a lesser part in the agreement. Echoing Rutherford, Mather declares that insight and access into the covenant is purely a gracious gift of Jesus alone as he says in 1690. He states:

The God of Heaven does gradually give unto Christians, a more large and clear insight into the Covenant of Grace, and so they have a growing Acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of that Covenant.¹⁶⁷

Mather goes on to say that institutions like the University of Glasgow can be of international service to covenanted Christian communities worldwide. He felt that:

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1655), p. 293.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 301.

¹⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children*, p. 13.

It must now be known, That your University not only can Conferr its Dignities, but also can Instruct and Employ its Instruments, to Serve the best Interest in other Countries.¹⁶⁸

Using covenantal language, Mather is saying that the faithful witness of the University of Glasgow will ensure the continual blessings of God. Utilizing some local flavor to make his point, he says that:

The Clyde will be sooner drained of all its Fishes, than your University be empty of Students; or Glasgow cease to be on the Account thereof.¹⁶⁹

Mather concludes the letter by highlighting his connection (and by association, the New England puritans) to the Scottish Presbyterian church:

There may be this [...] Candid Reception of my offering; The Fruits grew on the Western side of the Wide atlantic; they come from a Shrub of your own, that stands on the American strand.¹⁷⁰

For Mather each party was part of a covenant of worldwide corporate Christianity even as they ministered thousands of miles apart. There were historically entrenched differences regarding the origins and sources of covenantal privileges between both of these locations - their “national” covenants differed here - but Mather still seems to feel himself the “American strand” of the international reformed community.

¹⁶⁸ Cotton Mather, *To the Truly Honourable, & Venerable, John Maxwell Rector. John Stirling Vice-Chancellor, and Principal. James Brown Dean of the Faculty. James Simpson Professor of Divinity. And the Rest of the Learned & Worthy Professors, of the Renowned University of Glasgow*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.

2.8 Covenant Imperatives

Regarding the rising generation in New England, it was not simply loose moral behavior or lack of religious fervor that signaled the approach of covenant declension. For Mather, properly instituted liturgy was an important component part of the visible covenantal duties. The puritan practice of unadorned worship had been an indicator of their proper ecclesiology and was their founding hallmark as a worshipping people. He writes:

Yea, our people, have for many years been going on in a course of long Apostasy. I will not Enquire, Whether the Principles of Church-Reformation, upon which we were at first Established, begin to be Deserted among us? I won't so much as Enquire, Whether we are Loosing that Principle, That no party of men whatsoever, have any just Authority to appoint any parts or means of Divine Worship, which the Lord Jesus Christ has not in the Scriptures Instituted? [...] Nevertheless, the Principles of a Scriptural Purity in our Whole Worship, were so much our First Principles, that the Lord Jesus Christ, I am verily perswaded, will abhor us, and forsake us, upon our Abandoning thereof.¹⁷¹

When Mather felt that the rising generation's liturgical purity was slipping it indicated something fundamentally serious for him: a shifting view of God himself.

Mather makes a novel point in saying that the lack of obedience in the churches was, in addition to a violation of God's law, an abrogation of ecclesiological guidelines. This brought the discussion into a legal and procedural analysis that Mather was adept at pursuing. He wrote "We could in a Synod of our Churches near Seventeen years

¹⁷¹ Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distress'd People to Think Upon*, p. 17.

ago, charge our selves with Epidemical Breaches of all the rules.”¹⁷² In referencing the Results of the General Court Synod of 1679 (itself a referendum on earlier concerns declension) Mather is tying together all such endeavors to refine his covenantal understanding in a way that strengthens the bonds while relatively enlarging the membership at that time. Mather was eager to see that the "Designs of Reformation" were being served by covenantal practice in the puritan churches:

Now, In the doing of this Thing, Why should not our Churches, most Explicitly Apply, the Covenant of Grace, unto all the Designs of Reformation, as well as they Apply it unto the particular Designs, of a Particular Church-state before the Lord? Our Covenant will to the most Edification, and the most Satisfaction, be Renewed, when we most of all Express the Spirit of the New Covenant in all that we do.¹⁷³

Both the covenant of grace towards the elect and the covenant of New England as a place for a covenanted people (this “particular church-state” that he mentions) had attendant duties attached on both sides of the equation. One of the duties of all people (and specifically to be observed by the puritans) was the duty to honor the fourth of the ten commandments by obediently observing the sabbath day. Mather states that:

God will wonderfully Break the Peace of those, who do not carefully Celebrate the Sabbaths which are the Figures of the Kingdom wherein we shall have Peace.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 60.

¹⁷⁴ Cotton Mather, *Things to be Look'd For* (1691), p. 61.

Keeping the sabbath in New England was tied to a hopeful expectation of the permanent peace to come which is the lasting reward of the covenant.

Mather calls those who do not subscribe to puritanism in New England “dissenters,” the same term once applied to the puritans within Mather’s own tradition and history. These dissenters are to be loved and treated well. Mather says:

This is thy crown New England. And yet a Crown miserably tarnished, if it want the Jewels, of Real and Vital Piety, or if it be destitute of a Catholick Love to all that have such Piety, under very different persuasions, in the Circumstantial of Religion: a Good, Kind, Sweet behaviours towards Dissenters.¹⁷⁵

It is true piety that is the surest way to eschew the idol of particularism and broaden the covenant to include these dissenters in.

Mather was also enthusiastic about grafting Native Americans into the covenant as fellow adopted heirs. The failure to displace Catholicism among the Native Americans remained a sore spot with Mather.¹⁷⁶ Mather would seek to reach them in their own languages. In his work of 1707 written specifically for the Iroquois Indians "*Another Tongue brought in, to Confess the Great SAVIOUR of the World*" Mather writes that:

As some Nations which have not anciently been owned for the Children of God, are since become his Adopted Children, So we doubt not, but there are People in the Remotest parts of the World, who have not seen the Glorious Dawnings of a Saviour, and yet shall hereafter in Gods Good

¹⁷⁵ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, III, p. 153.

¹⁷⁶ Evan Haefeli and Owen Stanwood, “Jesuits, Huguenots, and the Apocalypse: The Origins of America’s First French Book,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 116 (2006), p. 63, note 7.

Pleasure and Season, be called to hear the News, and Enjoy the blessings of Salvation.¹⁷⁷

This covenant is the overarching mandate for the puritans and could graciously include all people that they were brought into contact with. It requires only a believing faith without any other religious particular:

Q: Whom will the Lord Lead up to Heaven?

A: He will lead thither, BELIEVERS; even those who hearken to the Voice of GOD.¹⁷⁸

Participation in and interaction with the covenant was done not only through liturgy and catechisms, but also through the related administering of the sacraments both the eucharist and baptism. Regarding the eucharist Mather makes it clear in *The Faith of The Fathers*, a theological work published in 1699, that this is a covenanting activity:

Q: Is there any Intimation, That a Sacred pouring of Water, and a Sacred using of Bread & of Wine, are to be the Rites which the Messiah would make the Sacraments of His Covenant?

A: Yes. It is written, Isa 44 3. I will pour water upon him that is Thirsty, I will pour my Spirit upon thy Seed, and my Blessing upon thy Offspring. It is also written, Gen. 14 18. Melchizedek, the King of Salem, brought forth Bread, and Wine; and he was the Priest of the most High God.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Cotton Mather, *Another Tongue Brought in to Confess* (1707), p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Faith of The Fathers* (1699), p. 21.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith had said before him, such activities both pointed to and were the covenant itself; both the thing and the thing signified.¹⁸⁰ Using the example of the ingredients of the eucharistic elements as an analogy for the broad reach of covenant inclusion, in *A Companion For Communicants* in 1690 Mather wrote:

Many Grains make but one Loaf, (and many Drops make one Cup of Wine) even so, many Saints make but one Church, which is the mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.¹⁸¹

Mather trusted in baptism to go out ahead of Christians in the war against declension. Much like John Calvin instructed young Christians struggling with assurance to look to their baptism,¹⁸² and as the Westminster Confession of Faith would reiterate,¹⁸³ Mather taught that baptized believers were sealed unto the day of redemption.¹⁸⁴ This created a sacramental hedge in the fight to save the covenant from declension.

There was another permutation of covenant membership available in the expectation for each individual congregation — composed of individual Christian covenant members — to faithfully covenant themselves corporately to God. Mather instructed:

The CHURCH-COVENANT thus used in the Churches of New-England, is by Intelligent and Considerate Persons, looked upon as no other than the

¹⁸⁰ See the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 27.

¹⁸¹ Cotton Mather, *A Companion for Communicants* (1690), p. 25.

¹⁸² See John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.14.6 and IV.15.2.

¹⁸³ Westminster Larger Catechism, § 167.

¹⁸⁴ Cotton Mather, *Way of Truth Laid Out* (1721), pp. 83-84.

Covenant of Grace more particularly applied unto the Duties and
Concerns of particular Churches.¹⁸⁵

Mather finds that the covenant of grace is applied with distinction towards a designated institution: the Congregational Church in New England. For Mather to remind the New England churches of this is an attempt to institute an anti-declension hedge around the congregations themselves. There is a leap here from the particular to the comprehensive. This change occurs as Mather is seeing the errand into the wilderness lose its regulative role as the dominant mission of the New England church.

Near the end of his ministry he was advocating an internationally inclusive covenant. Mather wrote *Terra Beata* near the end of his life and ministry in 1726. He states that it is a book concerning:

THE BLESSING of Abraham; Even the Grand BLESSING Of a Glorious
REDEEMER, Which, ALL the Nations of the Earth are to Ask for, and
Hope for.¹⁸⁶

For Mather, the covenant God made with Abraham would ultimately be transferable to the puritans - and all Christians everywhere - in its fulfillment in heaven, but not before. The covenant promises would not be fulfilled on this earth for the Jews in Jerusalem or the puritans in what had once been thought of as New Jerusalem. Early in Cotton Mather's ministry he believed that the Jews would ultimately be called back to God before the final eschaton.¹⁸⁷ Mather would change his mind on the requirement of

¹⁸⁵ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata* (1726), introduction.

¹⁸⁷ Cotton Mather, manuscript notes on Romans 2:16, Newberry Library, Case manuscript C 9911.557 (1700); Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England After Puritanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 136.

Jewish conversion for the millennium after his father's death in 1724, believing that there would likely be no more Jewish converts until the end of the age.¹⁸⁸ This became a covenant designed to give the promised new earth to the Christian church, which for Mather was Israel now. These blessings would be implemented after the final resurrection. Mather taught:

The Covenant of Life, which the Everliving GOD gave unto Abraham, was not a Covenant of meer Temporal Blessings. No, the main Things, even the sure Mercies of that Covenant, were the Blessings of Another Life; Even The Spiritual Blessings of the Heavenly Places, to be received after a Resurrection from the Dead. It is a Covenant of Blessings to be enjoy'd, in the New World which is to take place, after the Coming of the Lord, and the Burning of a Land full of Bloody Crimes, which Vengeance is impending upon: Blessings to be enjoy'd by them, who shall Inherit the Earth, at the Time when the Kingdom of Heaven is Theirs, and they shall see GOD.¹⁸⁹

Over and again in this work he refers to the land promised to Abraham as that "heavenly country."¹⁹⁰ He is clear that this means heaven itself. We see Mather not only pivot on Massachusetts as a New Jerusalem but we see him attempt to change Abraham's promise from an earthly city to the afterlife. Mather writes "The Earthly Canaan was nothing but a Shadow & Earnest of that Heavenly Country unto the People of GOD."¹⁹¹ As a result of his changing ecumenical and cosmopolitan concerns around the world, he is redefining the prime accoutrement of the covenant: the promised land.

¹⁸⁸ Cotton Mather, *Trip paradisus*, xi; Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ Cotton Mather, *Trip paradisus*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*.

This land is not Massachusetts or Jerusalem, but it will be a spiritual land shared by all Christians in the eschaton. It represents a covenantal benefit of union to the spiritual covenant in Christ. Mather says:

And here we find promised, first, an Offspring to be multiplied as the stars of Heaven, and as the sand upon the Seashore. Was this to be fulfilled, only in the Israelites lineally descended from him, or in an issue of the Flesh? No; The Intent and Spirit of the Gospel, and the Religion of the New-Testament, has taught us, That they who tread in the steps of the Faithful Abraham, and follow him in his Faith, in all Nations, are the Genuine Children of Abraham [...] in these, he becomes a Father of many Nations, And there are they who after the Resurrection of the Dead, shall together with their Father, have made Good unto them the Promise, of being Heirs to the World.¹⁹²

The promised blessings attached to the covenant are not of this world. History had shown Mather this much:

It is plain, The Blessings of This World, were not what the Covenant mainly consisted of. Ishmael had Blessings as well as Isaac. But, The Offspring in whom all the Nations of the Earth are to be Blessed: this is the Covenant of GOD.¹⁹³

This can be contrasted with his *Problema Theologicum* written over a decade earlier. Here he had decided that the obstacles to the millennium had been removed and that Christ's return might be at any time. The controversies and renewed debates about covenantal inclusion and declension in general would not have any effect on the coming of Christ in glory, as his triumphal return would occur whether New England

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 19.

was in decline or not.¹⁹⁴ As the individual covenant of Christian salvation was not dependent on the works or acts of mankind, neither would the consummation of the earthly side of the corporate covenant as it leads into the eschaton.

In a relatively rare discussion of hermeneutics, Mather encourages the reader to not take the story of the fall in the garden of Eden — and by implication, the promises made to Abraham after this — as purely literal or earthly. He feels that doing so would cause the reader to miss the extension of the ethics behind it. Rather, Mather asks his readers to understand this scripture progressively in “A more mystical sense” and that if they do not then they will “commit a very Wicked Absurdity.”¹⁹⁵ It is the power of Christ that centers and regulates the covenant which is the ultimate covenant cohesion. By this Mather means that the covenant itself is something Christians attach themselves to first through the righteousness of Christ but then as a church underneath the representative headship of Christ. He wrote:

For, first; ALL the Promises of the Blessings in the Covenant of GOD, are first of all made unto our SAVIOUR. He is the Head of His People in the Covenant of God. The Covenant is made with Him for us, and with us in Him [...] Our SAVIOUR is a common person, representing those whom the FATHER has given unto Him.¹⁹⁶

Mather makes Christ not just the mediator of the covenant but also the surety and seal, as the head of the elect:

¹⁹⁴ Jeffrey Scott Mares, *Cotton Mather's "Problema Theologicum": An Authoritative Edition* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1994), p. 358.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 23-24.

The New Covenant, that has all Blessings in it, is indeed a Testament. Our SAVIOUR becomes the Testator of the Testament [...] By the Death of our Lord, we have our claim to all the Blessings of the Covenant.¹⁹⁷

This Christ-centric definition of the covenant would later be echoed by Jonathan Edwards.¹⁹⁸ For Mather, the conception of covenantal blessings means accessing the merit of Christ (and not the puritan church) through covenantal inclusion. He says, “As all the Stores of Egypt were put into the Hand of Joseph, so all the stores of the Covenant, are put into the Hand of our JESUS.¹⁹⁹

Those who are predestined are saved from all corners of the world. Mather says that:

The Elect of GOD who must be found out, and brought home, and made meat for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light, are scattered in many Nations.²⁰⁰

In Matherian fashion, he describes the covenant as having an unavoidable complex transcendence. In his work *The Converted Sinner* written in 1724 he exhorts believers going through trials (the “we,” here) that there are covenant promises of comfort available to them. He says:

When we find our Affairs Plunged unto Difficulties we wish for an Happy Turn upon them. Our whole Condition is at the Disposal of the Glorious GOD. If GOD please to Turn it, we shall have our Sickness turned into Health, our Straits and Wants turned into Plenty, our Unsettlements turned into more Settled Circumstances; and such a Turn as that on the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁹⁸ See Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1739).

¹⁹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 26.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

Psalmist; Lord, Thou hast turned for me my Mourning into Delight; thou has taken off my Sackcloth and girded me with Gladness. Recourse to GOD for it, O all you that be wishing for such a Turn.²⁰¹

The promised assurances of covenantal membership minister to both the individual and the whole.

Mather's idea of the God of the covenant displayed through scripture morphed through his ministry from pure reason to a mysterious reason. First in his work *Reasonable Religion of 1700*, he declared "The more of Gospel there is in our Preaching, the more of reason there is in it. Scripture is Reason, in its highest elevation."²⁰² In *The Christian Philosopher* published in 1721 Mather would write that the idea of the Trinity operating in creation and being reasonably comprehended differently: "Thus from what occurs throughout the whole Creation, Reason forms an imperfect Idea of this incomprehensible Mystery."²⁰³ As the context of New England life continued to change, so would Mather's views on covenantal theology. Mather's changing views in these areas would become part of that "new story to tell" in New England he foretold in the *Magnalia*.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner* (1724), p. 3.

²⁰² Cotton Mather, *Reasonable Religion* (1713), p. 40; Reck, "Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning," p. 285.

²⁰³ Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), p. 304; Reck, "Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning," p. 290.

²⁰⁴ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1., p. 103

3. The Ecclesiology of Cotton Mather

“No doubt, the Authors of those Ecclesiastical Impositions and Severities, which drove the English Christians into the Dark Regions of America, esteemed those Christians to be a very unprofitable sort of Creature.”¹
 -Cotton Mather

Central to Mather’s understanding of the puritan errand into the wilderness and his own place amongst the pioneers of protestant Christianity in the new world was his conception and implementation of the church. Mather did much to advance “the development, maintenance and memory of the peculiar ecclesiological system of New England.”² Mather acknowledged the fractured reality of how the times in which he lived impacted the Congregational church by making changes in his thinking and ministry. Previous research specifically emphasizing Mather’s ecclesiology is sparse. My thesis proceeds by discovering how and why Mather changes from a regional to an international churchman, and his conception of the puritan church from a closed-community of frontier elect into an open and expanding institution readjusting to a rapidly changing New England cultural landscape.

His sense of mission and calling would never allow him to comfortably recede into a permanent position of lesser influence within the ongoing story of New England Congregationalism. However, he did not pridefully guard his former esteem. He would experience not a mourning but a rebranding, responding to the redirection of the puritan church with a dynamic resiliency rooted in both orthodoxy and change. Mather

¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction, p. 3.

² Walker, “The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development,” p. 62.

would readdress his position by the changes he would make in his increasing ecumenicism, his turn toward an outward expression of cosmopolitanism, theological adjustments to his understandings of the covenant, eschatology and the nature of the errand into the wilderness in the face of trials, upheaval and declension.

Ecclesiology in this context means the puritan church as Mather interpreted it including issues of organization, function, authority, membership (and exclusion), governance, worship, mission and the discipline within it. The shift from Congregationalism to a wider protestant community happens because of a broadening that occurs due to protestant Christianity in New England undergoing a transition. It moves from a nearly exclusive enterprise of puritan Congregationalists into a shared protestantism that included the rising generation of New Englanders, minority groups in New England such as Native Americans and African slaves, sundry international protestants and Orthodox Christian believers worldwide.

The puritan ethic of active ecclesiology in the lives of Christians can be observed in personal conversion narratives, striving towards sanctification, individual accountability, discipline for errant members and more. Mather would extrapolate and apply these ideas as he personally progressed towards a position of bold eleutherian liberty as discussed. From a young age Mather was taught to think and reason in ways that would uplift and benefit the Congregational life of the church, being reminded that he belonged to a long tradition of great thinkers and scholars.³ While puritan ecclesiology in the seventeenth century tended to mean limited membership of the godly, puritan theology was still an all-encompassing worldview in which all of faith and

³ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 21.

life was to be subordinated to and used in the furtherance of God's glory in all things. Bradford Smith describes the puritan ecclesiology that Mather inherited as itself an innovation towards personal and corporate Biblicism in addition to his reformed confessional commitments. He says:

Its innovating principle was in the idea that the Bible, rather than any established religious hierarchy, was the final authority. Therefore every man, every individual, had direct access to the word of God. It was the Puritan's aim to reconstruct and purify not only the church, but individual conduct and all the institutions men live by.⁴

Mather was both Biblicist and confessional, in that it was his interpretation and application of scripture that led him to confess the truths of the Bible as found in the reformed confessions that he appealed to throughout his ministry.

There was an "unorganized unity"⁵ to the local Congregational church structure in New England. Ironically, Mather inherited one of the self-governing Congregational churches loosely bound to their neighboring congregations by fellowship and advice, but rejecting any governing ecclesiastical body that could bind any action of even the smallest local congregation.⁶ Mather's early ministry amongst these churches furthered him on his journey to becoming the most well-known person in America.⁷

⁴ Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth* (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1905), p. 47; Richard Howland Maxwell, "Pilgrim and Puritan: A Delicate Distinction," *Pilgrim Society Notes*, series 2 (2003), p. 2.

⁵ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 6.

⁶ Reiner Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way: The Lord's Remembrancers and Their New England Histories," *Massachusetts Historical Review*, vol. 18 (2016), p. 41.

⁷ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 198.

3.1 Proudly Primitive Foundations

To Mather, the foundation of church history was the ongoing story of the fellowship of free Christian people.⁸ As John Owen wrote years earlier about returning Christianity to its “primitive liberty,”⁹ so Mather relished in presenting the puritan church in its most pure form. Mather was a great admirer of Owen and his ideas, going so far as to say that “The Church of God was wrong’d, in that the life of the great John Owen was not written.”¹⁰ Puritan ecclesiology did not originate with Owen or Mather, of course. Congregational ecclesiology was something that he inherited as his ministry started but would never be considered sacrosanct in and of itself. Mather believed that the church was the vehicle best suited for the ordering of the New England covenant and the more he grasped the reality of the coming declension the more we find his theology broaden to accommodate it.

Matherian ecclesiology was composed of near equal parts authority, theology and eschatology and each of these held a lived, experiential and personal element. Mather’s personal and religious life was bound up in the political history of Massachusetts.¹¹ He viewed the events happening around him as part of a providential historical drama that the church was called to embrace in making its election sure through diligence as in 2 Peter 1:10.¹² Mather kept the history of the New

⁸ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 57.

⁹ John Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 14 (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 373; Leland Ryken, *Wordly Saints*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 216.

¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 3, p. 168.

¹¹ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 91.

¹² The King James Version reads “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

England church a priority in his writing such as in his romanticizing of the church's founding in the *Magnalia*. Early in his ministry, in 1690, Mather defines the purpose of the church as:

The Great God is greatly Glorify'd by the prosperity of His People; They Know Him, They Love Him, They Praise Him, while Prosperity gives them Opportunity so to do.¹³

He then clarifies what is holding the church back from fulfilling its mission. He says:

What is it that brings Distress or Danger upon the People of God? It is, Our Sin. We, by our Sins have had an Hand in all the Inconveniencies, which put the People of God upon calling for our Help? How shall we then repair this Wrong, but by profering our All, to bring them out of their Distressed Plight?¹⁴

The church has a duty to glorify God by its very formation but sin can shortchange this mission. The interplay between the personal and corporate ramifications of sin provide insights into Mather's thinking about the blessings of God towards the church in New England and the people that comprise it.

Congregationalism in Mather's time was more than polity or lack of polity - it was an identity marker notating the puritan's place in the ongoing redemptive history of America and the world. Uniquely puritan distinctives such as the covenant, the mission of Harvard (and later Yale), the role of the church in relation to the state and public society and the nature of an all-encompassing ethic of deeply religious intellectualism

¹³ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New-England* (1690), p. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

encouraged the puritans to “go on, mount up, fly higher.”¹⁵ This also helped them to better understand their position as a unique people on the margins of the British world.¹⁶ In appraising the personal-within-the-whole covenantal ecclesiology of the Congregational church in Boston, strong roots of an underlying individualism can be seen in practical experience where only the active individual Christian finds peace.¹⁷ The church is also however a place of mutual protection whereby individuals commit themselves to the mission of serving and protecting each other. Appealing to the primitive church, Mather says:

There is this Detestable Neutrality in multitudes of men; that Let the People of God sink, or swim, 'tis all one to them, *Modo hic sit bene*, (as he said) if their own Earthly Pleasures be not thereby Abated.¹⁸

And:

A private Spirit, is very far from a Christian Spirit. It was the great Rule of the Primitive Christianity in 1 Cor. 10 24. Let no man seek his own, but every man Another's Wealth.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher*, p. 674.

¹⁶ Edward Simon, “Cotton Mather, Heterodox Puritanism, and the Construction of America,” in *Puritans and Catholics in the Trans-Atlantic World 1600-1800*, eds. Scott Spurlock and Crawford Gribben (London; Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 164.

¹⁷ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 240.

¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 26.

Mather sees this “detestable neutrality” as an ungodly exercise in personal hedonism that is not part of the the church’s true witness. Here it is in the individual Christian’s best interest to serve the whole church in obedience to scripture.

More than simply a church leader, he was the historian of the puritan tradition that he ministered in. In his lifetime Mather’s most substantial publications were historical rather than political or theological.²⁰ When writing as historian his ultimate goal was to revive the saintly practices of earlier generation.²¹ He says that he wanted to show the puritans “the Graves of their Dead Fathers [...] for the Stop, the Turn, of this Degeneracy.”²² Mather would record the events around him with “an American pen” as his accounts of providential history in New England would be written not only to Americans but to the world beyond it.²³ In 1723 he writes:

I know not how the Pen of an Historian can be better Employ'd, than in Reporting the Vertuous Tempers and Actions of the Men that have therein shown forth the Vertues of our Blessed REDEEMER, and been the Epistles of CHRIST unto the rest of Mankind. Nor indeed has Mankind generally found any sort of History more Useful and more Grateful, than what has been given in the Lives of Men that have been distinguished by an Excellent Spirit. The Best of Books does very much Consist of such an History!²⁴

²⁰ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 45.

²¹ Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 206.

²² Cotton Mather, *Cottonus Redivivus, or The Life of Mr. John Cotton* (1695), pp. 17-18; Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 188.

²³ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 42.

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *Parentator* (1724), introduction, p. ii.

Mather's opinion of what the role of the historian should be reveals the motivations, impulses and direction throughout all phases of his ministry.

3.2 The *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) as History and Mission

Mather's prolix *Magnalia Christi Americana* of 1702 was an "elephantine miscellany" of biography and history.²⁵ This massive tome was an episodic history of New England replete with theological sentiments rooted in the puritan experience. Mather's history and vision for the church in New England is laid out boldly in this seminal work which has been called the "American Old Testament."²⁶ In it he declares that the New England churches were established after God's "own heart."²⁷ For Mather, the inception of the Christian church on New England soil was nothing less than a God-directed act of the Holy Spirit towards the westward movement of the Lord's empire from England to America.²⁸ It was, as the introduction to the *Magnalia* declares, no less than the irrigation of the Indian wilderness.²⁹

The *Magnalia* served many purposes for the Congregational church, one being a mission statement and declaration that New England was claimed for Christ and that the church was established here for a reason: the continuation of the reformation unto a new pure church resembling (but not necessarily literally representing) a New

²⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Life of Sir William Phips*, ed. Mark van Doren (New York: Covici-Friede, 1929), p. vii.

²⁶ Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 53.

²⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, III, p. 62; Smith, "Politics and Sainthood," p. 203.

²⁸ Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 38.

²⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction; Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 38.

Jerusalem. In 1710 Cotton Mather still believed in the making of a “holy city in AMERICA” while fearing and fighting the apparent declension that threatened the puritan project he chronicled in the *Magnalia*.³⁰ Puritan pastor John Higginson commented on the *Magnalia* by asserting that it had set the stage for the:

[...] approaching Days of a better Reformation [...] when the Lord shall make Jerusalem (or, the true Church of God, and the true Christian Religion) a Praise in the Earth, and the Joy of many Generations the world over.³¹

Like the chosen Israelites of the Old Testament, the puritans were in a type of exile in the wilderness.³² Earlier, in 1690, Mather was optimistic of the church being delivered from persecutions and dangers into the peace of a “A Golden Age.” He predicts:

But if our God will wrest America out of the Hands of its old Land-Lord, Satan, and give these utmost ends of the Earth to our Lord Jesus, than our present conflicts will shortly be blown over, and something better than, A Golden Age, will arrive to this place, and this perhaps before all of our First Planters are fallen a sleep.³³

He was hopeful about this early era and what is especially notable was the desire for the “First Planters” (which would include his father and the other founding generation of New England puritans written about in the *Magnalia*) to live to see Christ deliver the puritan church into a new state of covenantal blessing.

³⁰ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana* (1710), p. 42; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, p. 5.

³¹ John Higginson, “Attestation to This Church-History of New-England,” in Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction, vol. 1, p. 12; Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 40.

³² Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 42.

³³ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 35.

The concept of covenant promise would help to provide the early glue needed to instill a new ecclesiological tradition within a culture sorely suspect of claims of succession. Such biographies of puritan saints as the ones included in the *Magnalia* acted to sustain the the civil polity on which the early covenant was based.³⁴ Mather would preach that "the Christian Religion" is "in reality, but, The Faith of the Fathers, and, The Religion of the Old Testament, from whence the modern Jews are fallen."³⁵ In this way the *Magnalia* serves as a founding document and a pseudo-constitution with its collection of historical, theological and ecclesiological content sorted into sections designed to both remind and instruct present and future puritans in the ways of the sovereignly guided New England puritans before them. Mather writing in this way would provide a link from the nation's past to the present patterns of sacred history.³⁶

Mather believed that the *Magnalia* was a precious piece of an important scholarly tradition, that of church history. He declares that "[...] of all History [...] the Palm is to be given unto Church History; wherein the Dignity, the Suavity, and the Utility of the Subject is transcendent."³⁷ In memorializing the history of the New England church he was attempting to preserve a puritan culture sympathetic to a community

³⁴ Smith, "Politics and Sainthood," p. 186.

³⁵ Cotton Mather, "A Relation of the Conversion of a Jew named Shalom Ben Shalomoh," preface to the appendix of *American Tears upon the Ruines of the Greek Churches* (1701); Lee Max Friedman, "Cotton Mather and the Jews," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 26 (1918), p. 204.

³⁶ Kenneth Alan Hovey and Gregory S. Jackson, 'Cotton Mather (1663-1728),' *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Paul Lauter, online supplemental chapter <https://college.cengage.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/students/author_pages/colonial/mather_co.html> [accessed 11 January 2019].

³⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction, vol. 1, p. 26; Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 44.

gospel. Mather thought about early New England in the same way that he thought about the early church,³⁸ which was that they were a covenantal people ordained for faith but prone to stumble.

Mather's attempt to theologize the story of New England's ecclesiological roots was for him an appraisal of the history and identity of the puritan individual. He says "The First Age was the Golden Age: To return unto That, will make a Man a Protestant, and I may add, a Puritan."³⁹ For Mather, life in the wilderness bred independence for the church which helped provide the freedom to return to primitive purity. However, it is important to note that as a history the *Magnalia* did not exist to simply praise the past and the dead. Rather, it had a spark of the personal and the present. It reminded the reader that they are a participant in the ongoing redemptive history in the world, of which New England had a unique role. In the *Magnalia* Mather presents varying themes within an essential puritan unity each as memorable and motivational within the proscribed allegorical forms.⁴⁰ Themes such as the uniqueness of the individual New England Christian's life within the essential uniformity of the saintly experience⁴¹ remind the reader that the past is not so distant and that there is still much work to be done.

The reformed definition of a church as described by John Calvin was an assembly of the elect active in the "doctrine of the gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper -

³⁸ Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 84.

³⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction, vol. 1, p. 25; Smolinski, *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Triparadisus,"* p. 55.

⁴⁰ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 261.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 85.

tokens by which a Church ought to be judged of.”⁴² For the puritans, the church and the covenant that made up the members and participants consisted of individuals submitting themselves to the missional activities of the church. “Primitive” in the puritan context meant a return to the plain principles and practices of the early ancient church. Mather ties primitivism to puritan ecclesiology in the *Magnalia*:

I shall count my country lost, in the loss of the primitive principles, and the primitive practices, upon which it was at first established: but certainly one good way to save that loss, would be to do something that the memory of the great things done for us by our God, may not be lost.⁴³

This ancient lineage from the primitive church through the reformation is for Mather a spiritual bond rather than an attempt to claim apostolic authority through succession. Mather openly ridiculed such a concept as “that vile, wretched, whimsey of an uninterrupted succession.”⁴⁴ The puritan settlers never renounced their interest in the affairs of England nor did they consider their ultimate aim and purpose to be separate from that of those of similar faith whom they had left there.⁴⁵

The puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay colony knew the church origin story of the separatists, dissenters, martyrs and now Congregationalists in the same way that they had memorized scripture,⁴⁶ which would be by reading it and

⁴² John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 1:2.

⁴³ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, eds. Thomas Robbins and Samuel Gardner Drake (Hartford: Silas Andrus and Son, 1853), p. 41.

⁴⁴ Cotton Mather, *Some Original Papers Respecting the Episcopal Controversy in Connecticut*, (1723) pp. 133-136; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 368.

⁴⁵ Walker, “The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development,” p. 63.

⁴⁶ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 41.

binding it to their hearts. For Mather to elucidate and romanticize the puritan founding fathers in this way was connecting God's redemptive history to their own history. As church historian, Mather was embracing and taking to its logical end the puritan custom of appraising Christ's church and its role in history. Robert Middlekauff believed that:

There is an unyielding quality in the history written by the separatists. They did not shrink at dismissing others as agents of the Devil. They did not draw back at the smell of the pit, nor was it difficult for them to imagine generations of Englishmen drowning in floods of smoking brimstone.⁴⁷

In discussing the puritan commitment to the predestined founding and destiny of the church including the churches of England and New England, he says:

They did so out of one of the oldest beliefs about church history: the church of Christ would survive until the end of the world. It would struggle and suffer; indeed, since its inception it had always engaged the forces of evil, led for most of its history by the Antichrist. Though it had hidden itself, the true church had found life for centuries in the midst of the English establishment. And now in the freedom of the New World, far away from the prying eyes of the bishops, it could declare the truth openly and follow the faith to the glory of Christ.⁴⁸

Mather viewing the puritan church as an active participant in this epic ongoing tale with eternal consequences and eschatological implications would inform his changes in ecclesiology throughout his ministry.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

The *Magnalia* has been called “the last great document in the orthodox providential tradition.”⁴⁹ By this we understand that it was meant as a history designed to convey a consciousness of what God has promised the puritans in their current labors toward future glory. As such it provided a contextualized ecclesiology within a relatively new tradition in a New England not yet resigned to simple nostalgia. Mather believed in the New England he perceived it to have once been, and as it might very well become again in the future.⁵⁰ In time the *Magnalia* would transcend itself as a book of puritan foundational history to operate as a cited authority on Congregational polity issues many years later by none other than Jonathan Edwards himself.⁵¹ Another example of its ecclesiological authority is seen in Ebenezer Parkman’s dispute with his congregation on the eve of the American Revolution. The problem involved the question of church membership requirements and the power of ministers and elders to refuse admission to communion of certain applicants. Feeling justified in his objections, Parkman “shewd them Dr. Cotton Mathers Magnalia” to prove just how correct he was.⁵² In the cases concerning the use of the *Magnalia* in this way, Reiner

⁴⁹ Winship, *Seers of God*, p. 74; Megan Mulder, “*Magnalia Christi Americana* by Cotton Mather (1702),” *Wake Forrest University Z. Smith Reynolds Library Rare Book of the Month Discussion* (2011) <<https://zsr.wfu.edu/2011/magnalia-christi-americana-by-cotton-mather-1702/>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

⁵⁰ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord’s Remembrancer*, p. 254.

⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called An Answer to the Hampshire Narrative* (Boston, 1737), p. 21; Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 43.

⁵² Ebenezer Parkman, diary entry (Dec. 1774) in Keith W. F. Staveley, *Puritan Legacies: Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition, 1630-1890* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 194; Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 44.

Smolinski writes that the “*Magnalia* was accorded the function of an orthodox codex for New England’s Congregationalist churches.”⁵³

Mather had an almost mystical faith in the power of writing to supply meaning and direction.⁵⁴ In writing the *Magnalia* he was commemorating New England puritan history and in doing so memorializing the journey to establish a puritan society in America. Mather mentions in the *Magnalia* that its purpose was “the keeping alive [...] the interest of dying religion in our churches.”⁵⁵ Mather had little interest in the tribal myth of the New England people,⁵⁶ as he instead saw the Congregational churches as a vital example of a separate but faithful component of the worldwide Church. The puritan movement would extend the mission of the reformation by executing the duties required of it and in doing so bear the marks of the bride of Christ in New England. The magisterial protestant reformers established that the marks of a true church were the preaching of God’s word, the faithful administration of sacraments and the implementation of discipline. The activities of the New England Congregational churches were expanded to also include social influence, evangelism to the indigenous populations, ordination of ministers and confirmation of new members. As political and civil rights such as voting were tied not to property ownership or any sociocultural

⁵³ Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 27.

⁵⁴ Stout, *The New England Soul*, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 2, p. 279; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 160.

⁵⁶ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 3, p. 13; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 159.

achievement other than church membership,⁵⁷ the influence of the Congregational churches being at the nexus of civil legitimacy and societal acceptance meant that the polity of the puritan church drew up the rules of public initiation into society. As a result of the continued declension during the eighteenth century, the church's power in these areas would fade. However, during Cotton Mather's ministry covenant membership through a local puritan church meant social legitimization for the New England citizen.

Being of the historic reformed tradition, Mather stood with his forefathers in adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith in matters "Of the Church" as discussed in its 25th chapter. Three New England heroes of the *Magnalia*, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker and John Davenport were invited to the convention as divines but were unable to attend.⁵⁸ In Mather's insistence on the proper pursuits of the church in controversies, arguments, admonishments and discipline, he would have had the warnings of the Westminster Confession of Faith plainly in view where it says:

The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to His will.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ For more on these concepts see Edward Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Francis Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Library of New England, 1995).

⁵⁸ William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Rosshire: Christian Focus, 1970), p. 259; Angus Stewart, 'The Westminster Confession and Church Unity,' *The Standard Bearer*, vol. 87 (2010), p. 43

⁵⁹ Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), chapter 25, note 5.

On the critical use of the *Magnalia* in helping to immortalize this “faithfulness in delineation of spirit,” Walker said that:

When all deductions from the merits of his historical writings have been made, they remain a priceless picture of the men of early New England, and even more a truthful reflection of the Puritan spirit [...] It is this faithfulness in delineation of the spirit of Puritan New England that must ever give the *Magnalia* its highest value.⁶⁰

The implementation of the duties of the church found in the *Magnalia* changed in light of the events that the church traveled through. As the puritan movement faced trials, Mather was not concerned with any power found in earthly traditions or claims of apostolic succession. Within Mather’s Calvinist theological framework which proclaimed the spiritual lineage of elect covenant people as being “from before the foundation of the world,” this would be a logical position for him to hold.⁶¹ He is concerned instead with an extension of the biblical and spiritual truths of the protestant reformation deep into the wilderness of New England. Puritan continuity was dependent on each generation’s commitment to the church’s reasons for being established in the wilderness in the first place.⁶² The trials that the puritan faces — both individually and as part of the covenant community — are in the hands of the living God. This comfort served the purposes of pastoral consolation and maintaining the political rudder as the colony suffered the loss of their charter. In 1689 Mather says:

⁶⁰ Walker, “The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development,” pp. 81-82.

⁶¹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, III:2-5 and III:24.14. See also Ephesians 1:3-6, 1 Peter 1:19-20 and Revelation 13:8.

⁶² Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord’s Remembrancer*, p. 72.

Those fierce Natives of this dark Climate will be often as Thorns in the sides of the Pilgrims, that are Travelling to a better Country. But still these Rods are all in the Hand of God: We are told in Amos 3. 7. there is no such Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it. O that every Man would always remember this, the Grievings of thy Heart are all ordered by that God by whom the Hairs of thy Head are all numbred. Not so much as the Tongue of a Dog will ever stir against thee, unless managed by the Hand of the Lord. The King of Assyria himself, by whom a vast part of mankind may be Afflicted, is but a staff of Indignation in that all disposing Hand.⁶³

God had promised his elect great things, and the church militant comprised of the covenanted people of puritan New England remained poised to face all challenges set before it.

This mission included puritans of all ages and abilities. Cotton Mather was a lifelong adherent to the sacramental practice of baptizing infants into the visible covenant in the Calvinist tradition. In the *Magnalia* he discusses this issue as understood and practiced by the puritan forefathers and holds it up as an ordinance to be kept in place. Mather stood in strong agreement with the seven propositions by the Synod of Boston in 1662 that affirmed infant baptism, as God prepares a remnant in each generation who will take the mantle of the faith forward on even better terms:

There is in every Generation a Remnant a little Flock of Men, who are effectually called from the Vanities which the biggest part of perishing Mankind is woefully drowned in, unto the service of the Living God; who have chosen God as their Best good, and their Last end; chosen Christ as their Lord Redeemer, and resolved to be for him and not for another. These renewed Children of Adam are the Mystical Children of Israel; they may with an Eye to a Spiritual relation, point at Jacob, and say, A Syrian ready to perish was my Father.⁶⁴

⁶³ Cotton Mather, *Right Thoughts in Sad Hours*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6.

These mystical children of Israel transcend New England geography — and also New England blood, it seems — as a covenantal remnant ready to proceed towards the eschaton. Mather is hopeful and positive here, even as this work was originally delivered as a sermon at the funeral of a small child as noted prior.

The church in New England would remain resilient but not unchanged through Mather's life. Events such as the loss of the Massachusetts Bay charter (a very important warrant of church authority and legitimization of church power within New England society),⁶⁵ stresses of the Glorious Revolution, trauma of the witchcraft trials, constant pressures of wilderness life including Native American attacks and more are especially illuminating when we see Mather's lifelong habit of making political and religious conflicts into deeply personal battles.⁶⁶

3.3 Mather As Pastor

Cotton Mather closely identified the course and meaning of his own life with the history and prospects of New England.⁶⁷ In 1685 at the age of twenty two and after formally assisting his father Increase Mather for the prior four years, Cotton Mather would be formally ordained into the ministry at the Second Church of Boston. This was eight years before he would start working on the *Magnalia* and at this point the Mathers were enjoying immense influence in what was the golden age of New England puritanism. During this time before political tumult and personal tragedies, we find

⁶⁵ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 203.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 254.

Mather ministering to his congregation as well as writing in his diary. His pace of publications would not pick up steam until 1689 but until then we find a pastor very hard at work, whose energies were directed towards a Boston audience that was mostly interested in and sympathetic to the puritan cause as it was then understood.

There was a compelling historical context that pressurized Mather's ordination. It had been sought by parties within the Second Church for a number of years prior to it happening in 1685. The reasons for the delay are unclear but the news of Catholic James II as king was made in Boston only three weeks before Mather's ordination. With Increase Mather's safety (and that of the puritan church in Boston) a concern while he was attempting to re-secure the colony's charter, it was perhaps not an accident that Mather's ordination was finalized with him assuming a leadership role on the front line at a perilous time for protestantism in both England and America. Even at his young age his performance in these crucial times helped to propel him to the center of the colonial drama. With James II assumed to be a servant of the antichrist in Rome, the New England church was mustering saints for a struggle foretold in scripture and Mather's ordination further enhanced his influence and stature in a community unsettled by the drumbeats of sectarian war.⁶⁸

The most esteemed place in the church was the pulpit which served amongst other things as a forum for commenting on the life of the town.⁶⁹ In these earliest days of Mather's public ministry the pulpit message of repentance and reform that he inherited from his father would strike a tone through Boston. For the puritan, church

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 105.

⁶⁹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 195.

was not simply a place to meet and worship but rather an encompassing of “all things.”⁷⁰ Puritans such as Mather did not think they were simply building a church; they believed that they were building up a Christian society through the establishment of a Congregational church framework.⁷¹ The church itself was a place where the object lessons of scripture became a tangible experience.⁷² Mather led the church as a covenanted institution designed to bring the people closer to God in obedience to his commands as an act of covenant duty. Achieving such a goal would take hard work. Mather believed in the service of the church above the “Love of Ease” which was a “declining” away from the work of God. In 1690 he preaches:

We should engage in the Service of our Generation, tho' there should be two Hankerchiefs, which we are thereby necessitated unto the continual wearing of; One to wipe off the Sweat of Labour and another to wipe off the Dirt of Reproach. We may not, for the Love of Ease, decline the doing of what is to be done for the Interest of God, and of His People.⁷³

He would later go on to face much reproach in Boston but his commitment to the church remained strong even as it changed.

As a pastor Mather would make a name for himself in a way that would lend trust and authority to his role in the events to come. It has been said that during this time the parishioners at his father's church even preferred the sermons of Cotton to

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 52.

⁷² Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 47.

⁷³ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 12.

those of Increase himself.⁷⁴ With Mather's local eminence on the rise he was well-suited to represent the voice of the New England people in addressing and encouraging the Glorious Revolution that was about to commence.⁷⁵ The preaching ministry of Mather in the last five years of the seventeenth century was by all accounts booming, as he attracted crowds of thousands and was invited to preach at the most important events in the region during this time.⁷⁶

As Massachusetts did not have anything like the Congregationalist Saybrook Platform in Connecticut,⁷⁷ the autonomous strategies of local ministers were more of a factor in establishing and implementing ecclesiology in Boston. As a pastor near the height of his influence, Mather was so popular and influential amongst the people and churches of Boston that his detractors derisively and ironically referred to him as "the young pope."⁷⁸ Mather believed in the role of minister as ecclesiological arbiter as he had argued for in the *Magnalia* when looking at the ministry of Thomas Hooker. Hooker would often settle issues of polity personally,⁷⁹ and in referencing this Mather was reiterating a local church structure whereby godly individuals with responsibilities were capable of leading partly by personal influence. In understanding these types of connections and traditions, some of his later ecclesiological choices make more sense.

⁷⁴ Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 142.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 274.

⁷⁷ The Saybrook Platform was a new constitution for the Congregational church in Connecticut, built largely on the presbyterian model with the local independence of the churches was diminished. See Heimert and Delblanco, *The Puritans in America*, p. 360.

⁷⁸ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 73.

⁷⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, I, p. 336; Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*, p. 57.

As the closed puritan community gave way to a more diverse church landscape — and as Boston itself advanced from a wilderness settlement to a capital city — Mather faced a decision on how to redefine Congregational ecclesiology in order to best adapt while remaining loyal to the original mission of the heroes in the *Magnalia*. Rather than behave as a reactionary, he sought to open up in a broader way which unearthed a latent cosmopolitanism that found an opportunity to grow. Mather innovated within existing attitudes and commitments of those puritans who had gone before him. He channeled this underlying inherited impulse of mission and transatlantic lineage towards an ecumenical, more cosmopolitan New England church in the wake of the puritan reorganization that he would help lead after the Glorious Revolution.

3.4 Experiential Ecclesiology in Transition

Opportunities to participate in the Glorious Revolution were limited for Americans, even for those of Mather's status. Increase Mather went to London to advocate for the New England colonies, leaving Cotton Mather in Boston to inherit the duty of church spokesman.⁸⁰ It was through his writing that Cotton Mather would continue to encapsulate the historical place and role of the Congregational church during this time.⁸¹ Not shirking any responsibilities, Mather would implement a new political theology by participating in a mini-Glorious Revolution of his own, in securing

⁸⁰ Kennedy, *The First Evangelical*, p. 162.

⁸¹ Ibid.

the removal of the hated Royal Governor Sir Edmund Andros in the same year that King William supplanted James II.⁸²

Not concerned only with the historical precedent of a secured protestantism for England, Mather would continue in his open support for the cause of the protestant interest after the Glorious Revolution.⁸³ These events during the tail-end of the charter drama and political rebellion served as the making of Mather the mobilizer of the church in New England. Here is when he fought against the church's political and spiritual enemies without the assistance of his father.⁸⁴ Mather saw the Glorious Revolution as more than a political struggle, and he did not see the protestant victory as an opportunity to rest. Rather, he viewed the blessing of victory as a divine call to the New England church to be reordered aright. It was a dispensation of time to "re-own" the covenant of God and to extend the mission of the reformation further and farther than it had ever been done before, making it even "more heavenly than the first."⁸⁵ The coronation of William III signified to Mather the progress of worldwide protestant reformation which was a task already taken up by the puritan saints of New England.⁸⁶ Mather wrote that the puritan forefathers had:

[...] come into these dark Corners of the Earth, and that here might be seen a Specimen of the New Heavens and a New-Earth wherein Dwells

⁸² Ibid, p. 170.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 60.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 172.

⁸⁵ Cotton Mather, *A Midnight Cry*, p. 62 and extended sermon subtitle; Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 193.

⁸⁶ Smith, 'Politics and Sainthood,' p. 188.

Righteousness, which shall e're long be seen all the World over, and which, According to His Promise we Look for.⁸⁷

For Mather, the New England puritans had been participants in this struggle as shown by their efforts against Andros and the enemies of protestant Britain around New England. Mather entreats the new king to note the efforts of the puritans in securing America against Catholic forces. In 1724 he would ask that William continue to remember:

[...] the Great Service, which Your Subjects in New-England, have done for Your Majesty, and for this Nation, and for the Protestant Interest, in Securing that Territory for King WILLIAM.⁸⁸

Though Mather remained skeptical about claims of earthly authority due to tradition and lineage, he would never downplay the governing role of the church over the individuals under its care. Mather believed that the individual Christian had a moral duty of care to restrain the self.⁸⁹ The puritan church, as administrator of sacraments, discipline and church membership was made an arbiter of self-governmental standards. The church was to be a vibrantly strong institution and corporate blessings were a benefit of covenant fidelity. Mather states that “There are many Promises of a Flourishing State for the Church upon Earth.”⁹⁰ As God had made a corporate covenant with individual people grafted into the Christian church through the

⁸⁷ Cotton Mather, *Cottonus Redivivus, or The Life of Mr. John Cotton*, p. 12; Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 188.

⁸⁸ Cotton Mather, *Parentator*, p. 122; Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 187.

⁸⁹ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 13.

redemptive work of Christ, Mather would never lose sight of the Congregational distinction of the individual inward conversion experience creating a corporate covenantal bond of faithfulness connecting each individual to the whole. In the same way, the puritan Congregational church existed as an “individual” church within broader pan-Christian protestantism with each church tradition attempting to faithfully show themselves approved unto God. The charter was at the good pleasure of the king, but the church itself was ultimately subject only to Christ the head of the church, as written in Ephesians 1:20-22:

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.

For Mather, a mark of a true Christian can also be defined as a negative. He taught that a true Christian could not be a member of “the church of Rome [...] which is resolved upon the Extermination of all Christians upon the Earth.”⁹¹ Competing institutions such as Rome presented their own pitfalls to the covenant and this understanding compelled Mather to never waiver in regards to Roman Catholicism, which would always stand outside even his most broad ecumenical bounds.

Mather welcomed opportunities to cooperate with those interested in finding a new way to organize protestant churches, and by 1705 he was working together with

⁹¹ Cotton Mather, *Suspira Vincitorum* (1726) pp. 12-15; John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America 1725-1775* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. 229.

one of his rivals Benjamin Coleman on proposals to implement a more Presbyterian form for New England's clerical synods.⁹² A delicate balance between a tight sense of order within the local congregation while displaying a hearty friendship to the synods seems to have been the ideal for Mather.⁹³ Consociations such as the United Brethren formed by Presbyterians and Congregationalists were of crucial importance to Mather during these years and helped to solidify New England's — and thus his own — connection to a worldwide reformation rather than being an isolated group far across the Atlantic.⁹⁴ Mather believed that God had providentially situated the puritans in New England which while remote was not so far away that they were not part of the struggle of international protestant interest:

The Distance of a Thousand Leagues from You, whereat the Providence of our Lord Jesus Christ hath placed the Churches of New-England, hath not rendred them unconcerned in Your Interests. The same Holy Spirit which, from our Common Head, animates both You and Them, with the Influences of His Grace, hath Taught them, to feel with Joy, the Smiles of Heaven upon your Interests [...]⁹⁵

Mather would continue to define what the church was, what it should be and where it is headed in terms of the changing times and last days. Mather had a framework with which to address the nature of these changes in the church. Analyzing the works *A Midnight Cry*, *A Pillar of Gratitude*, *Things for a Distress'd People to Think Upon* and then a more extended analysis of *A Faithful Account of the Discipline (Ratio*

⁹² Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 35.

⁹³ Smith, "Politics and Sainthood," p. 195.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 197.

⁹⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction.

Disciplinae) highlights Mather's response and reaction to changes occurring to puritan Congregational ecclesiology in New England. These four works can be considered representative of Mather's labors towards the urgent need of reformation and restoration of a pious puritan community of New England Christians recommitted to the mission of the church.⁹⁶

3.5 A *Midnight Cry* (1692)

In his *A Midnight Cry* of 1692 Mather is preaching on the cusp of a change in Boston, having heard the whispers declension concerning the young people. Indian attacks in Massachusetts had also been increasing in frequency since 1689. In this sermon Mather was addressing the very real fears induced by a string of these violent attacks that had occurred in Schenectady, New York and elsewhere, leaving 30 colonists dead and even more injured in New Hampshire and as many as 100 colonists dead in York, Maine. Mather would later write Indian captivity narratives highlighting the harrowing experiences of those kidnapped in order to motivate the continued reformation he wanted to see in New England. Achieving this reformation would require alertness and awareness by the puritans during challenging times. *A Midnight Cry* has been called a "tirade" designed to arouse "the people of Boston from their ecclesiological slumber."⁹⁷ This is Mather the cockerel announcing the need for a renewed spirit in the new day. Here it is not his job to serve as the antidote or judge but rather as the town crier to deliver "the warnings of a watchman."⁹⁸ Mather dives

⁹⁶ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 144.

⁹⁷ Weeks, "Cotton Mather And The Quakers," p. 25.

⁹⁸ Cotton Mather, *A Midnight Cry*, p. 6.

into an exposition of Romans 13:11 where the Apostle Paul is admonishing the church in Rome to awaken from slumber and rise into the light. Mather connects sleeping with sinning, and that to wake up from slumber is analogous to turning away from sin. *A Midnight Cry* was designed to elicit a turn from this slumbering sin towards a waking piety in obedience to the unique continuing covenant in which the puritans existed.⁹⁹ His emphasis on having an awakening to the light reflects an effective analogy that existed in the puritan and Congregational tradition of conversion and sanctification. It was spiritual light that helped distinguish the visible from the invisible saints in the dark.¹⁰⁰ Mather also references the idea of spiritually-significant sleeping and waking in the *Biblia Americana* when he states that “Adam was Asleep when Eve was formed out of him; and our Lord was cast into a Deep, a Dead Sleep, for Three Dayes, by which means he procured a Church unto himself (Titus 2.14).”¹⁰¹

Amongst the tools available to show and convict them of their sleep-inducing sin is the law of God itself. Mather approaches the law in a similar manner that John Calvin did before him¹⁰² and in a way that would be used by ministers and writers after him.¹⁰³ In *A Midnight Cry* Mather declares that:

⁹⁹ Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ For more on preparation, morphology and change in the puritan conversion narrative see Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 34-35.

¹⁰¹ Cotton Mather, *The Biblia Americana: America's First Bible Commentary, A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments. vol. 1: Genesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski (Ada: Baker Academic Press, 2010), p. 1019; Breitwieser, “All on an American Table: Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana*,” *American Literary History*, vol. 25 (2013), p. 387.

¹⁰² See John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.1.22-24 on obedience to the law of God being a result of fear, duty and love.

¹⁰³ See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), p. 342 for one example of this.

[...] delivered from the Condemning Power of the Law, does not Release him from, but unspeakably and everlastingly Oblige him to, the Commanding Power of it; [...] Liberty from Sin, and not Liberty for sin, is the only Liberty in the account of such a man.¹⁰⁴

Mather reminds his listeners and readers that having received good things from God in New England they are to now eschew “wantiness” and wake up to a “lively performance” of faith in pursuit of a “universal sanctification.”¹⁰⁵ Against this backdrop of law and duty Mather will draw attention to the sins of the people.

Mather continues with rhetoric that would find itself very much at home in The Great Awakening years later. He says, “It is the Interest of all Men, at all Times, shake off all Sinful Sleep, especially at Times, as carry more peculiar Awakenings in them.”¹⁰⁶ In this case Mather is not concerned only with the saved state of the Christian soul but with the entire community of souls tempted to slide farther away from the hope of their fathers due to the violence, tribulation and despair wrought on the puritans by the Roman Catholics, Indians and others.¹⁰⁷ He then reminds his readers what sleeping is not, railing against psychopannychists who would believe that the soul sleeps in wait of judgement when the body dies.¹⁰⁸ Like Calvin before him, Mather deems this as blasphemy while emphasizing that what is possible is a sleeping soul in this life not awake to God and what God requires of them. He says, “That our Souls do often fall

¹⁰⁴ Cotton Mather, *A Midnight Cry*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.14.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

into the Sleep of a Secure Condition, while we Live is a thing whereof we have, alas, too pernicious, too lamentable Evidences.”¹⁰⁹

Mather differentiates what type of sleep he is concerned with here, which is that of the Christian saved by grace who is neglectful of their duties. He states that: “We are to Distinguish, between the Dead Sleep of Damning unregeneracy: and the Deep Sleep of Living Christianity.”¹¹⁰ Mather is saying that New England is not apostate just yet, but that these living Christians are sliding into slumber when they ought to be obediently awake.¹¹¹ Mather continues to remind the reader that to be asleep rather than working towards the Lord is to be in a sinfully poisonous state, saying, “A Sin Sleep, is indeed, a Deadly Sleep; it is a stupifying, and a venomous Bed of Night-Shade, whereupon men lay when they Sleep in Sin.”¹¹² Mather writes that sleeping people are vulnerable to enemies,¹¹³ which would have struck a chord with an audience concerned with the continuing Indian attacks and threat posed by the nearby French army.

Mather implements a creative rhetorical tool by repurposing and rephrasing terms including Glorious Revolution, New Jerusalem, and Holy City which had previously been essential to the puritan conception of themselves and New England:

We should always be expecting that Glorious Revolution, wherein our Lord Jesus Christ, will both dispossess the Divels of our Air, making of it a

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 22, 24.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 25.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 26.

New Heaven, filled with the New Jerusalem of his Raised Saints; and also by a terrible Conflagration make a New Earth, whereon the Escaped Nations are to walk in the Light of that Holy City.¹¹⁴

Using such homages to older rhetoric in new ways to wake up New Englanders was an attempt by Mather to encourage the people to be alert unto Christ and his return.

Christ is at the center of everything as this is all done to be awakened unto “the Brightness of his Coming.”¹¹⁵

Mather creates a new distinction, that of needing to be especially awake when besieged by calamities, thieves and fires of this present age.¹¹⁶ He details the way in which Indians had taken and burned some of the puritans and that the “Exquisite Groans and Shrieks of those our Dying Bretheren should Awaken us.”¹¹⁷ In this way Mather was continuing to situate himself and his message within these intense times in a way designed to bring the church closer together.

Mather then focuses on the younger generation of puritans in Boston and their covenant commitments.

But above all, Young Folks, Let them Awake: inasmuch as the Lord our God, seems to have a peculiar Controversy with the Rising Generation of New-England. Many of our young people do not first Secretly, and then Publicly Enter into Covenant with God in Christ; the Dainties of the New-Covenant Exhibited, first in the Gospel, & then on the Table, of the Lord, are not by many of “our young people, most affectionately Embraced [...] I may say, O that my Head were Waters, and mine Eyes a Fountain of Tears, to weep for the rueful Estate of my own Generation, among whom

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 46.

there are so few Instances of Early Piety; in comparison of what Instances there are of, Early Sin, and Early Death! But I rather turn my Lamentation into this Obtestation, O that you were wise, that you understood these Awakenings, that you would consider what will be your Latter End, if you Awake not out of your Impenitencies. this Rate, has the God of Thunder been Awakening of us. Now God forbid, That as it was of old said, He would have Healed Babylon, and she would not be Healed, it should be now said, We would have Awakened New-England, and she would not be Awakened!¹¹⁸

He argues that covenant membership will provide protection from sickness and cause them to grow in strength.¹¹⁹ He criticizes other churches in the area that have relaxed their theology and ecclesiology away from “the main Principles of Protestantism” and left their members unprotected. He writes:

Let not the Tare of Will-Worship, of Arminianism, of Serpentine Quakerism, be nourished in our Churches but stick we close to the main Principles of Protestantism, and of Puritanism, which we have declared for.¹²⁰

The purpose for this sermon is summed up when he crystalizes what exactly the awakening is for. He cites the historical struggles leading toward an eschatological hope for New England after this final reformation:

Behold then, we are got into the very Dawn of the Day when God will vouchsafe a marvellous Effusion of [...] Spirit upon many Nations, and REFORMATION, with all Piety, and Charity, shall gain the Ascendent, over those Men and Things, that for many Ages have been the Oppressors of it. And I affirm, That all the Peace of New England lies in being, A Wise Virgin, that shall go forth to meet this Blessed Reformation.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 65-66.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 77-78.

¹²⁰ Ibid, pp. 79-80.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 83.

A Midnight's Cry served to reaffirm the duty of the puritan to God in maintaining the covenant. It was an admonishment to trust in him in the face of adversity, and never to put off looking for the new heaven and new earth which everything is directed toward.

3.6 *Things For A Distressed People To Think Upon* (1696)

In *Things For A Distressed People To Think Upon* from 1696 Mather again focused on covenant but with other ecclesiological commitments firmly embedded throughout. Early in the sermon he attempts to head off the signs of an approaching declension by referring to it as a sort of breach of church law which itself is a reflection of God's law and the great commandment of Jesus in Luke 10:27 to love both God and neighbor:

Shall we not Mourn when we see the Disorder which confounds all Societies, and the Selfishness which depraves the most in all Societies? Our Hating & Vexing of one another? Our Unchastity in all sorts of Pollution? Our Injustice in our Dealings? Our manifold Falshood in our Affayrs? Our Discontent in every station? We could, in a Synod of our Churches, near Seventeen years ago, charge our selves with Epidemical Breaches of all the Rules of Love, to God, and Man.¹²²

Mather believes that the lack of obedience in the churches was, in addition to a violation of God's law, an abrogation of ecclesiological guidelines, thus bringing things into a legal and procedural discussion that Mather was extremely comfortable pursuing.

¹²² Cotton Mather, *Things For A Distressed People To Think Upon*, pp. 10-11. He is referencing The New England Reforming Synod of 1680. This portion of the sermon is also referenced in chapter two of this thesis.

Amongst the other important ways that Mather expected the puritans to progress in the vein of the scriptural reminder of Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given much is required, was in the ways of “ecclesiastical matters.”¹²³ In language dripping with frustration towards a flock who did not take to heart the inspirational and exemplary lessons from the *Magnalia*, he admonishes:

There seems to be a shameful Shrink, in all sorts of men among us, from that Greatness, and Goodness, which adorned our Ancestors: We grow Little every way; Little in our Civil Matters, Little in our Military Matters, Little in our Ecclesiastical Matters; we dwindle away, to Nothing: I do not mean, for our Numbers, but for our Actions. Those things, which have been our Glory, they are gradually Removing from us. Oh! with Tears, do our Ancient men cry out, Where is the Glory of the Ancient Things!¹²⁴

Mather equates lack of righteous advancement in church matters with a lack of righteous growth in civil and military matters, and this causing the glory of ancient things to be hidden.

In this sermon Mather feels that the question of whether the puritans had deserted the reformation principles on which they had been founded was so obvious as to not even need to be investigated any further:

I will not Enquire, Whether the Principles of Church-Reformation, upon which we were at first Established, begin to be Deserted among us? I won't so much as Enquire, Whether we are Loosing that Principle, That no party of men whatsoever, have any just Authority to appoint any parts or means of Divine Worship, which the Lord Jesus Christ has not in the Scriptures Instituted?¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 17.

By appealing to the regulative principle of worship and romantic notions of the first principles of puritanism as a blessed extension of the protestant reformation Mather is exhorting the people back to the old ways before it is too late. Mather will not entertain the thought of a corporate or personal declension happening on his watch: “For us to Loose those Principles, already, would be too quick a Degeneracy, to be imagined.”¹²⁶ He is preemptively fighting towards a “Piety, and Charity”¹²⁷ that is the only hope for the church and the individual. These are themes that he would richly develop as his ministry progressed.

3.7 A Pillar of Gratitude (1700)

Another theme found in the ecclesiology of Mather during this time was his contention that the establishment of the puritan church was a deliverance from Roman Catholicism. In his 1700 work *A Pillar of Gratitude*, which was considered to be his tour de force on the puritan great society,¹²⁸ he says “But you, O dear People of New England, have your Share in this amazing Deliverance.”¹²⁹ He continues on to say that the Congregational experience is a “matchless favour” from the Lord.¹³⁰ To be delivered from the oppression of the Pope and into the loving discipline of the puritan ecclesiological apparatus is for Mather the loveliest of things. He says:

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 18.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ A.W. Plumstead, *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), introduction.

¹²⁹ Cotton Mather, *A Pillar of Gratitude*, p. 20.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

Moreover, Is it not a Matchless Favour to Sit under the Wings of Churches, wherein the Primitive Discipline is Restored: Even the Discipline, that Cranmer, and Hooper, and other Great Lights of the Church of England, wish'd for, and wrote for, & would gladly have Dy'd for? A Discipline wherein all Things are Conformed, as well as we can understand, unto the Word of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, & wherein the Elders have their Authority upheld, the Brethren have not their Liberties over laid, and all things Conspire to Represent the Holiness of the Kingdom of Heaven unto the World; it is a Matchless Favour of Heaven, to the Nation that is Illuminated with it.¹³¹

Mather traces the ecclesiological purity and success to those heroes past — in this case English protestant martyrs of the reformation Thomas Cranmer and John Hooper — similar to his strategy in the *Magnalia* where Mather connects the lineage to the faithful primitive church to the ongoing Christian mission in New England. In 1711 Mather wrote that it was the dissenting faction within the overarching English church structure that had by their very presence prevented the entire church from kneeling to the Pope:

If there had been none of that Party, the Church of England had long since been ruin'd; for if the High Churchmen had had no Check, they would have brought in Popery before this Time, by a Side-wind of Arminianisms, and by their over-valuing of Ceremony and Pomp in Divine Worship.¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Cotton Mather, citing John Edwards in *The Old Pathes Restored* (1711), p. 24; Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 123.

Mather would say elsewhere that Anglicans such as John Checkley and turncoat puritans such as Timothy Cutler were more like Roman Catholics than protestants, being “such highflyers as these who deserve their ordination from Rome [...]”¹³³

In 1710 Mather was still very much convinced of the worthy distinctions of the New England church, writing that their faith and fruits of this faith were providential blessings received from God. In his *Theopolis Americana: An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City* he exhorts, “Sirs, NEW-ENGLAND is a Countrey, that has made a more than ordinary Profession of Religion. Our Profession is Weigh’d in the Balances of GOD [...]”¹³⁴ and “But, O NEW-ENGLAND; There are a Thousand Reasons, why thou shouldest be Better than Other Places; A more Glorious Land of Uprightness!”¹³⁵ Mather is able to continue to situate the New England church as a people uniquely called and blessed within Christendom even as their mission was not yet finished. He states “When this fearful Dispensation is over, then, then comes on that State of the Church on Earth, which will answer the Description, that is here given us, of a New Jerusalem.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Cotton Mather (attributed), *A Faithful Relation of a Late Occurrence*, printed in Francis Hawks and William Perry, eds., *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Connecticut, 1704-1789* (1959), pp. 73-74. On authorship see Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 460; Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 128. John Checkley was a prominent puritan who attended Oxford and returned to New England an Anglican.

¹³⁴ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3.

3.8 *Ratio Disciplinae* (1726)

While many early puritans saw America as the New Jerusalem,¹³⁷ Mather saw the New England church as reformed and ever reforming into something different.¹³⁸ One of Mather's contributions to this cause was the *Ratio Disciplinae* of 1726, designed to cast New England puritanism in the most English light possible. 87 years before this, his grandfather Richard Mather had sent to England a manuscript of his New England ecclesiastical formations entitled the *Answer to the XXXII Questions*. It was in similar service to the New England church that Cotton Mather now wrote.¹³⁹ The *Ratio Disciplinae* can be considered Mather's attempt at revitalizing interest in church polity and ecclesiology, as by 1726 the issues presented here were considered by many New Englanders to be the concerns of an older era, one where Mather was the "representative of an epoch which had passed away."¹⁴⁰ It was written very late in Mather's ministry as an attempt to associate the prior formation, present church planting and continued mission of the Congregational church with the larger and more influential protestant churches. In doing so he hoped to secure the right to hold another Congregational synod on local church issues (a request that would be denied by the Crown in 1725).

¹³⁷ For more on this concept see Cecelia Tichi, "The Puritan Historians and Their New Jerusalem," *Early American Literature* vol. 6 (1971), pp. 143-155.

¹³⁸ Such was the motto given to the protestant reformation, "Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda."

¹³⁹ Walker, "The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development," p. 82.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 82-83.

This work was published at a time of great dissension between the Anglicans of New England, the Mathers and others.¹⁴¹ The Congregational losses here ultimately resulted in another setback in Congregational dominance in and around Boston. The *Ratio Disciplinae* emphasizes the primitive biblical approach to all things ecclesiastical including church discipline and organization. What is most important for our purposes is to see how themes such as piety, covenant, individualism and the coming eschaton are bound up in this ecclesiological blueprint. In the Congregational inception piety was prized as both a requirement and goal of the ecclesiastical endeavor. Mather states that the first rule of forming a congregation is to have:

A People resolving to adhere unto the Maxims of the Everlasting Gospel, and live unto GOD according to all the Rules of Incontestible PIETY, and appearing in a competent and a convenient Number, to form an Assembly for the Worship of GOD [...].¹⁴²

In the formulation of a corporate body, as in the goal of sanctification in the individual fleshly body, piety is primary.

Regarding procedure, Mather again connects the New England church planters with the Jews of old. Whereby the Jews held that ten men may found a synagogue, and Christ saying that two or three are a church, the puritans held that at least seven founding members are required for feasibility's sake, though it was usually more.¹⁴³

Pastors are called and confirmed by the local congregation, each having to give “[...] some account of each Mans Conversion from his unregenerate State unto serious

¹⁴¹ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 475.

¹⁴² Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, introduction, p. 8.

¹⁴³ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

Piety; or, The Reason of the Hope which is in him, that a Saving Work of Regeneration has passed upon him.”¹⁴⁴ It is this serious piety which Mather keeps in constant view during his exposition of puritan ecclesiology. The minister acts as the federal head of the covenantal flock who are themselves called to piety. Mather says:

That you administer the Sacraments of the New Covenant, as a Wise and Good Steward of those heavenly Mysteries; That you impartially dispense the Discipline, with which the House of the Lord is to be ordered, and His Kingdom expressed and maintained, making a Difference between the holy and profane: And, That you be an Example of the Believers, in your whole Conversation, with all Piety and Charity [...] We declare unto you, that if you do this, when the Lord JESUS CHRIST shall appear, you shall appear with Him in Glory; He who is the Chief Shepherd, will then give you a Crown of Glory, that shall never fade away.¹⁴⁵

Both the administering of sacraments and the practice of piety are mentioned in the same breath by Mather as being foundational pieces of the puritan pastor’s work.

The covenant of Christians as gathered in the New England puritan churches was not made up only of one demographic, even within the relatively homogenous nature of New England society at this time.¹⁴⁶ The New England churches included the young and old alike, and the young are initiated into the church by the sacrament of baptism. In 1690 Mather says:

Gracious little Children are united unto Him that is the Saviour of the World. As young as they are, the Almighty Lord of Lords, and King of Kings counts them old enough to be married unto Himself. In the Ancient, Eternal, Well-ordered Covenant of Redemption, the Lord Jesus Christ was made a publick person, representing of all his chosen Ones; he was thus constituted by an Eternal Agreement between God and Him;

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 30-31.

¹⁴⁶ African slaves within the puritan church will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

and gracious little Children say their Amen, to that Agreement; those little put themselves under the wing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and cry unto him, O be our Surety for good. Now Christ and they are one; the Reck'ning of God from all Eternity, and the Spirit of God in fulness of Time, hath made them so; and thus these little Children become the Children of the great God.¹⁴⁷

The church itself serves as the ultimate confine for the Christian experience as it is the covenanted place where the baptized infant Christian starts their life and ideally where they end it. Mather says:

I beseech you, that before you go out of the world, you get into the Church, when you are at the Sacrament in the Temple, you may like old Simeon, take up the Lord Jesus in your Arms, and sing, Lord, now lettest thou thy Servant depart in peace; for mine Eyes have seen Jesus here.¹⁴⁸

The puritan commitment to living a chaste and unadorned existence free of idols is prefigured in the initial commitments of the Congregationalists in labeling their churches “meeting houses.” Here in the language of polity and ecclesiology Mather makes a theological argument against the holiness of place. Mather said that he “found no just ground in Scripture to apply such a trope as church to a house for public assembly.”¹⁴⁹ For Mather, all of New England was intended to be God’s new church: it was the “House” of God. He exhorted:

The Psalmist could say, in Psal. 122.9. Because of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek thy Good. Why, There is among us, The House of the Lord our God. And this is indeed the Real Cause, of our having been so

¹⁴⁷ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children*, p. 98.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁹ Cotton Mather as quoted by James De Normandie, “John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 5 (1912), p. 351.

maligned, hated, vexed, as we have been. The Devils are stark mad, that the House of the Lord our God is come into these Remote corners of the World; and they fume, they fret prodigiously, That some of their old Vassals and Bondslaves here, begin to pray unto the Almighty God.¹⁵⁰

It was God who brought his spiritual house to New England, and God would most certainly take it away if the people broke covenant. He says:

It being likewise at this day, such a Probation time with all New-England as this Countrey has never before seen from the first foundation of it, and the judgments of that Holy God, who hath beheld how incorrigible we have hitherto been under all His Dispensations, now arriving to such an extremity, That the Ax is laid to the Root of the Trees, and we are in imminent danger of perishing, if a speedy REFORMATION of our Provoking Evils prevent it not.¹⁵¹

For Mather, it is a continued reformation that is required in maintaining the covenant and purifying the church that started with the reformers and continued on in New England for the cause of Christ. The ultimate and eternal dwelling place for the puritan church was to be found in Christ himself. In the *Biblia Americana* Mather reaches into the Book of Ezra to make this point, saying that God was “withdrawing His presence from the House of Stone, to dwell in the Temple of the Body of our Jesus.”¹⁵²

In considering the leaving of England by the church fathers as delineated within the minutia of the *Magnalia*, and the frequent comparisons drawn in relating the New England puritans to the Israelites in the wilderness, a theology set against holiness of

¹⁵⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 38.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁵² Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana*, 6 Volume manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, vol. 2, pp. 647-648; Harry Clark Maddux, “God's Responsibility: Narrative Choice and Providential History in Mather's *Biblia Americana* Commentary on Ezra,” *Early American Literature*, vol. 42 (2007), p. 313.

place seems to have been in preparation for the *Ratio Disciplinae* years later. Mather puts it this way:

A MEETING HOUSE is the Term that is most commonly used by the New English Christians; Tho' as long ago as Eusebius, yea, and as Tertullian, the Term of A Church was used for it. And every Town for the most part, can say with Tertullian, Nostrae Columbae Domus Simpiex; They have modest and handsome Houses for the Worship of GOD; not set off with Gaudy, Pompous, Theatrical Fineries, but suited unto the Simplicity of Christian Worship. Holiness of Places is however no more believed among them, than it was in the Days of Clemens Alexandrinus, who says, ΠΑΣ ΤΟΠΟΣ ΙΕΡΟΣ — Every Place is in truth holy, where we receive the Knowledge of GOD; or in the yet earlier Days of Justin Martyr, who says, ΕΝ ΠΑΝΤΙ ΤΟΠΩ ΤΗΣ ΙΗΣ — In every part of the Earth, GOD has promised that He will accept our Sacrifices.¹⁵³

Mather's embrace of an anti-holiness of place in the later part of his life further highlights his enhanced commitment to ecumenicism and his turn towards individualism and piety in light of the coming eschaton.

These changes in Mather's ecclesiology came about not on a whim or for preference, but in an attempt to refine and restore the best and oldest practices of the Church of England whence the founders came. In the *Magnalia* Mather wrote that:

It is the History of these New England protestants, that is here attempted: protestants that highly honoured and affected The Church of england, and humbly Petition to be a Part of it.¹⁵⁴

Mather believed that the puritan movement did not desire complete separation and would seek unity with the Church of England if possible.

¹⁵³ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, article 1, § 7.

¹⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 24; Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 42-43.

In the *Ratio* Mather felt that the Congregational churches were formed in an attempt to correct the “deformities” of the Church of England while retaining “some of the Soundest Parts of the True Church of England, according to the Intention of the First Reformers.”¹⁵⁵ Using one of his favorite rhetorical tools, that of the testimony from a reputable source, Mather cites the Earl of Bellomont as saying that the New England churches are where:

[...] the Pure Doctrine in the Famous Articles of the Church of England, is owned and preached in all possible purity, and the Primitive Discipline, which even the Liturgy of the Church of England wishes to see restored, is practiced.¹⁵⁶

In this way Mather is saying that though the Church of England was and is home, puritan ecclesiology is an attempt to further reform and reclaim the best parts of this family lineage in a new place for the enduring purpose of proper worship.

Mather highlights the covenantal importance of the formation of local church bodies by marking them as the visible participation of the covenant in the vein of Tertullian:¹⁵⁷

Antiquity is no Stranger to this Notion. 'Tis Tertullian's Description of a Church, Corpus sumus, de Conscientia Religionis, et Disciplinae Unitate, et Spei Foedere: Which is as much as to say, A Body United for the Conscientious Observation of the Duties of Religion, by an Agreement in Discipline, and a COVENANT of Hope for Eternal Blessedness. The same Tertullian, in his Apology, says, that the Christians then Assembled, Ad

¹⁵⁵ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 10.

Confoederandam Disciplinam; which intimates, that they had a Discipline, and a COVENANT for the Discipline.¹⁵⁸

Mather proceeds to argue from history, going as far back as Justyn Martyr and then to the Scottish Presbyterians in making his case for the Congregationalists being part of the historic and current church family.¹⁵⁹ Mather would continue to attach himself and his works to the Scottish Presbyterians during his life and ministry as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Mather at this time is still a proponent of taxing even the Quakers for the salary of the puritan pastor in the area.¹⁶⁰ Here he cites Luther on the appropriateness of this and rationalizes that Congregationalists themselves sometimes have to pay tax for the Episcopalian priests in their areas.¹⁶¹ These comments are notable regarding the local politics of Massachusetts, as here the Quakers were in the process of fighting the legal requirement to pay such a tax and the Anglicans were preparing to remove themselves from this payment scheme as well.¹⁶²

The Congregational distinctive of local congregations calling their own pastor is used as an example of autonomy that serves as a fundamental right of liberty for Christian people that existed in the primitive church, was stolen by the medieval church and still has not been properly regained by most of the reformed world.¹⁶³ Mather cites

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 22..

¹⁶¹ Ibid. It is unclear which of Luther's works Mather is citing when he writes "In some Churches, the Salary of the Minister is raised by a Voluntary Contribution; especially in populous Places, and where many Strangers resort; But in others, a Tax is levied for it; there being too much Truth in Luther's Words."

¹⁶² Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 474.

¹⁶³ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 16.

Calvin here in saying that refusing the right of the local church to select their own minister “spoils” the process.¹⁶⁴ Mather works his way back and forth through church history showing that this is the ideal way to secure a minister. The fact that the New England puritans were pursuing the choosing of ministers in this way is for Mather yet another point of ecclesiology that shows obedience in returning to the old ways. As Mather says, this is a fundamental and nonnegotiable right:

The Churches which have recovered the Exercise of this RIGHT from the Oppression of Man, under which many Churches of the Reformation are to this Day groaning, ought to keep the Precepts, and the Favours of the Lord, and not easily part with what He has given them.¹⁶⁵

Ordination was seen as an ecclesiological duty to ensure corporate covenantal authenticity which highlights the importance of the disputes in this area.¹⁶⁶ For Mather the right of a local congregation to choose their own minister is one of the bundle of rights which free Christian persons can attempt to re-instill the primitive ways of ecclesiology.

The theme of being free from imposition runs through the *Ratio Disciplinae* in much the same way that we see it in his eleutherianism. In discussing the ordination liturgy of the Congregational churches Mather states that “They have no LITURGY composed for them; and much less have they any imposed on them.”¹⁶⁷ Mather

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 16

¹⁶⁶ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 45.

believed that Christ himself and the testimony of the primitive church provided the regulative model of proper liturgy:

That the Ministers of the Gospel who submit their Capacities and Abilities to a due Trial, should enjoy the Liberty, which was confessedly left us by our Saviour, and His Apostles; who never provided any Prayer Book but the Bible for us. They believe, that our Saviour and His Apostles knew the Necessities of His Churches; and they are afraid of any Inventions, that may carry in them the least Reproach upon His Infinite Wisdom. They believe, That our Enthroned JESUS, has promised unto ordinary Officers in His Churches, until the End of the World, a Continuance of sufficient Gifts, to discharge their Offices.¹⁶⁸

Mather's disdain for the binding of practice and conscience when it was scripture that should dictate proper ecclesiology is a current of thought that bleeds over into his pursuit of ecumenicism in allowing different communities to worship differently.

By recounting the old puritan way in such detail throughout American history, Mather in the *Ratio* almost can not help himself in admitting that the original errand into the wilderness seemed to be all but over.¹⁶⁹ Perry Miller notes that though the *Ratio* was in a way attempting to do the same things that the founders did, Mather was doing it differently:

The importance of the *Ratio* becomes evident when it is compared with the monumental rationalizations of the founders - to whom his allegiance was groveling. Where those were vast logical structures projected into the empyrean, his is descriptive; where those were prophecies, his is history; where those were compacted of dichotomies, contradictions, and syllogisms, his is a straight assertion that whether or not Whitehall

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 352.

permits these people to hold their own synod, to their polity they will cling because — if for no other reason — it is their own.¹⁷⁰

In his handling of ecclesiology, liturgy and polity in *Ratio Disciplinae* Mather was continuing a more technical version of the argument he romantically put forth in the *Magnalia*: that New England puritanism is the reinstatement of the pure primitive Christian church, pre-blemish of Rome, towards the fulfillment of the reformation unto the coming eschaton. As Mather states, “This is the New English Puritanism! And as far as they can learn, they have the Practice of the Primitive Churches to countenance them in it.”¹⁷¹ There is victory promised for the church but this is not the same as the great rest promised in the new heavens and new earth which are the ultimate destiny for the Christian. Every earthly battle was a temporary skirmish towards the consummation of the victorious covenant promises of God in the last days.¹⁷² For Mather the puritan church being the center of civil society in New England implied that the worldwide Christian church represented the coming consummation of all things in Christ from shore to shore. However, the church was still in need of a completed reformation. This understanding enhanced the purpose and role of the church as Mather sought to maintain and extend its purity and fidelity locally in order to better participate in the worldwide eschaton. For Mather, this was the ultimate mission of the church on earth and it would take more than nonconformity to make it happen. The puritan movement required further changes in piety, ecumenism, eleutherianism and cosmopolitanism in order to bring this about.

¹⁷⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 477.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² This is the main theme of his 1726 work *Terra Beata* which is analyzed below.

4. The Piety of Cotton Mather

“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness.”¹
-1 Timothy 4:7

“What is Christianity but a law of goodness?”²
-Cotton Mather

Mather wrote approximately five hundred works and as Josephine Piercy says, they were "all calculated to influence the reader for good."³ He wrote pieces for friends and family after their death under the title “Early Piety.” Mather’s quest for piety has been interpreted in different ways. Robert Middlekauff wrote in “Piety and Intellect in Puritanism” that Mather’s piety was primarily concerned with the assurance of salvation.⁴ However, properly understood this is not Mather’s definition of piety at all; this is simply the Christian (or certainly, puritan) belief in the practice of making one’s calling and election sure as in 2 Peter 1:10. Mather treats the issue of eternal security elsewhere throughout his ministry without mentioning the pursuit of piety as attending it.⁵ This conventional approach views the issue primarily as a morbidly introspective moral crusade towards purity which is a shortcut that does not properly appreciate the larger more inclusive mission of how he viewed the uses of piety over his lifetime.

¹ King James Version.

² Cotton Mather as quoted in Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis*, p. 84.

³ Josephine Piercy, introduction to *Bonifacius*, v.

⁴ Robert Middlekauff, “Piety and Intellect in Puritanism,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 22 (1965), pp 455-456.

⁵ For examples of this see Cotton Mather, *Another Tongue brought in, to Confess* (1707), *The Sum of the Matter: Abridgment of the Assemblies Catechism* (1709) and the *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726).

Differing terminology for piety in the reformed tradition covers areas ranging from an individual's inner spirituality to communal religious behavior.⁶ Though a guardian of tradition, Mather's obsession with evangelical piety helps to mark him as a religious progressive.⁷ Piety for Mather was a quest for holiness as shown in service and sensitivity to the expectations and requirements of covenant members towards the coming eschaton. This was practically manifested as doing good towards others in the name of Christ. Piety is a crucially significant idea that Mather wields through his life in ways calculated to serve his ministerial, theological and rhetorical ends. It is important to analyze not just the adjustments that Mather underwent in regards to piety but also the changes to his intended audience over time.

His thoughts on piety are interwoven throughout his voluminous writings as Mather finds strategic usage for piety being able to unite New England puritans with broader international protestantism. The assurance found in personal piety in these contexts is not the same type of assurance found in the prior New England covenantal models. The broad expressions of piety Mather found acceptable in the middle and later parts of his ministry would have never withstood the cross-examination of a morbidly introspective personal conversion narrative in the Congregational churches prior to the eighteenth century. One could not have rested on a basic belief in Trinitarianism and an overall striving towards good acts if one were attempting to gain church membership and all of the attendant societal privileges that came along with it.

⁶ Carter Lindberg, "Piety, Prayer, and Worship in Luther's View of Daily Life," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 2.

⁷ Kenneth Alan Hovey and Joseph Fichtelberg, "Cotton Mather (1663-1728)," Georgetown University Faculty Classroom Guide <<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/bassr/heath/syllabuild/iguide/mather.html>> [accessed 20 September 2019].

When Mather attempts to broaden church membership he also greatly expands his definition of piety to include acts of Christian toleration. Piety remains the lynchpin of his thinking and is the ultimate way of striving towards eschatological satisfaction in the cumulation of the reformation. In the end, piety is everything for Mather.

4.1 Foundations and Uses of Piety

Pietism in the puritan tradition from Baxter, Perkins, Stoddard and Willard to Cotton Mather has been called “continuity with a vengeance.”⁸ In relation to the reformed tradition, Mather’s interpretation, prioritization and application of piety is essentially in-line with the teachings of John Calvin who believed that personal piety consisted of living wholly in response to God’s unmerited favor.⁹ Calvin wrote:

True piety consists in a sincere feeling which loves God as Father as much as it fears and reverences him as Lord, embraces his righteousness, and dreads offending him worse than death.¹⁰

Calvin also calls piety “that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces.”¹¹ Subtitle to the first edition of his *Institutes For The Christian Religion* defines piety for Calvin as the truest manifestation of zeal for God: “Embracing almost the whole sum of piety and whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of

⁸ David D. Hall, book review of *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* by Richard F. Lovelace, *Early American Literature*, vol. 17 (1982), p. 91.

⁹ Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdans, 2011), p. 127; Gordon, *John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 41.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *First Catechism* (1537), p. 2.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1

salvation: A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety.” Calvin later in the *Institutes* writes:

God has prescribed for us a way in which he will be glorified by us, namely, piety – which consists in the obedience of his Word. He that exceeds these bounds does not go about to honour God, but rather to dishonour him.¹²

Though the strong turn towards practical, inclusive piety would be a change in direction for Mather, it was still deeply rooted in this Calvinist orthodoxy of piety as obedience. This obedience is a gift from God that results in good works as proof of justification in Christ. In *Bonifacius* Mather wrote:

Indeed, no Good Works can be done by any man until he be Justified. Until a Man be United unto the Glorious Christ, who is our Life, he is a Dead Man. And, I Pray, what Good Works are to be Expected from Such a Man? They will all be Dead Works!¹³

Calvin and Mather have similar priorities in emphasizing piety for Christians everywhere. Mather would extend these teachings by highlighting them in his works throughout his ministry.

Mather brings a distinctly innovative flavor to the puritan discussion of piety. Its climatic expression would become the distinctive mark of Mather’s ministry.¹⁴ Puritan pietism sought to create a "live orthodoxy" balancing conformity to reformed doctrine

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.1.

¹³ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 34; Reck, “Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” p. 286.

¹⁴ Reck, “Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” p. 285.

with spiritual experience and holy living.¹⁵ Piety for Mather was something to be sought both individually and corporately: individually as proof of election and corporately as a sign of community covenant fidelity. Richard Lovelace believed that the key components of Mather's "American pietism" were "[...] spiritual renewal, cultural transformation through voluntary societies, ecumenical union among the churches, and concern for world missions."¹⁶ This is essentially true, though the purposes of using piety in such ways would evolve and define it further as a ministerial tool designed to enlarge his role in New England as ecumenicist, ecclesiastical innovator and cosmopolitan leader during changing times. Mather considered piety an idea by which he might assemble the peoples of the world in pursuit of the consummation of the reformation in light of the coming eschaton.

As he would find out in Boston after the turn of the eighteenth century, the practical pietist is to expect adversity while doing good. He proclaimed that "you must be above all discouragements. Look for them, and with a magnanimous Courage overlook them."¹⁷ Perry Miller felt that it was impossible to imagine a disillusioned puritan,¹⁸ but Cotton Mather in this period of his ministry comes very close. With the pain and frustration of his loss of esteem within the puritan community, along with the attacks both literal and figurative, one feels the anguish in his line "Men will sooner

¹⁵ Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, p. 37.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, preface, pp. ix-x.

¹⁸ Perry Miller, "The Puritan Way of Life," *Puritanism in Early America*, ed. George M. Waller (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1965), p. 19.

Forgive Great Injuries, than Great Services.”¹⁹ Still, Mather felt that piety could be a healing medicine to such divisions in the world. Nan Goodman explains:

The legacy of Mather’s expressions of Pietism from *Bonifacius* to *Nuncia bona* to his correspondence and diary entries is the human voice that in his imagination had the power to bridge the gap from the individual to the community and from the community to the world as a cosmopolitan whole.²⁰

The “community” here is something that morphs from the isolated puritan community in New England, to the mixed religious community of the Boston metropolis and then to the transatlantic Christian world.

From the start Mather would attempt to connect people and places through piety by categorizing it as something of a New England distinctive. Mather would emphasize the generational continuity of piety in New England.²¹ The New Englander is to be the example of worldwide piety. Mather preaches:

Let us all Repent, and Reform, and set up on the Lively Doing of the Good Thing which the Lord our God Requires. The Apostle speaks pathetically, I beseech you, Brethren, by the Mercies of God. It is This, I conclude withal; I beseech you Brethren, by the Mercies of God, that New England may be as a Noble Person sometimes call'd The best people in the world; and that no scandalous Things may be done here, to offen the God that has done Excellent Things for us. I beseech you by the Mercies of God, that as we profess the Protestant Religion with the most exalted Purity, so we may practise it, in such an Exemplary manner, that, A New-England man, may be a Term of Honour in the world.²²

¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, preface, p. x.

²⁰ Goodman, *Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 160.

²¹ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 63.

²² Cotton Mather, *Wonders Of God Commemorated* (1690), p. 50.

In this way the Matherian themes of piety, covenant and cosmopolitanism would continue to intertwine. This was made possible by the changing ecclesiological landscape of New England and Mather's desire to continue to progress from the provincial to the international. Mather took a cosmopolitan approach to the mandate of piety. His message to do good things was shown in ways such as "to love the public," "to study an universal good," and "to promote the interest of the whole world."²³ Mather's desire for piety to grow on a global scale connects with the themes of ecumenicism and cosmopolitanism. He wrote that "It will be an Addition unto the pleasure, to see the Harmony which True, Right, Genuine PIETY will produce [...] in Persons that are in many Sentiments as well as Regions, distant from one another."²⁴ The important point about pietism here is that a certain aspect of its content which revolved around the gospel of good works was able to be easily presented to different audiences in different places.²⁵

4.2 Grasping Piety

Mather certainly attempted to lead by example with his personal and private life devoted to the practice of cultivating piety in ways large and small. Practical piety for Mather was first of all to die to self daily.²⁶ Mather stimulated his personal piety by what he called "Daily spiritualizing" as referenced many times in his diary. He wrote

²³ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 83; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 159.

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *India Christiana* (1721), 57; Nan Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 141.

²⁵ Nan Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 141.

²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol 2, p. 264.

that the best he could attempt to do during trying times was to “imitate and represent the Gentleness of my savior.”²⁷

Mather believed that piety produces good thoughts from the Lord to the Christian and that this would have an improving quality to others.²⁸ He spells out exactly what those godly thoughts look like:

His Thoughts are, Here are one of those good men that are upright in Heart. It is not only a just man, but also a good man, that shall always be seeking to make many others the better for him.²⁹

Peace is also a fruit of obedient piety. In 1690 Mather said that “When a mans Ways please the Lord, He makes even his Enemies to be at peace with Him.”³⁰ This type of comfort would be coveted by Mather through the travails of his life. In contrast, later in 1710 Mather would say that piety will attract unwanted attention and criticism, as “A man of Good Merit is a Kind of Public Enemy.”³¹ In such statements we see piety as an identifying trait that Mather takes on more as his prominence in New England begins to wane. This theme of Christian peace through piety will appear in his cosmopolitanism later in his ministry.

As a pastor, Mather labored in presenting piety as essential to the people of New England and all to the glory of God. Mather insists that Christ alone is worth preaching

²⁷ Ibid, p. 172; Robert Middlekauff, “Piety in Intellect and Puritanism,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1965), p. 462.

²⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. 7.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 48.

³¹ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, preface, p. xi.

to instill piety for believers.³² This piety is then an act of praise, something beside and beyond sacrifice:

There is also a special Return of well-doing which we should now and then praise God withal. As when David had seen many mighty things done by God, he became inquisitive, in 2 Sam. 7.2 What shall I now do for the House of God? so some signal act of Piety, or of Charity should be done by us, that God may not be without his praise. We praise God when we are labouring.³³

To not live piously is to withhold from God his due. For Mather, piety is a beautiful adornment of the Christian faith. He says, “Piety hath been hid in Corners, remove Stumbling-Blocks and it will come forth and appear in public with all its Beauty and Glory.”³⁴ Piety is often manifested as humility and thankfulness. Good works and a right attitude are a grateful posture for the Christian. Mather writes that good works are “a Thank-Offering, being Set apart for Pious Uses.”³⁵

The idea of piety practiced within ecclesiology is also at the forefront of Mather’s thinking. For example in *Problema Theologica* Mather believes that the piety resulting from sanctifying purity will be the means that the glorious “Happy” character of the church “shall be reformed.”³⁶ Mather believes that the church is born for piety. In 1689 he preaches that:

³² Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, pp. 93-94, p. 80, p. 16.

³³ Cotton Mather, *Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, p. 17.

³⁴ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 99

³⁵ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 47.

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Problem Theologica*, p. 372.

We have received our Being for this End; and our Grand, our Chief Errand into the World, is, That our God may have a Number of Rational Beholders to be sensible of His Excellencies. When Mankind came first out of His Glorious Hand, He then said, as in Isa. 43.21. This people have I formed for my self, they shall shew forth my praise. In our Lower Little World, no Creatures can be found capable of Conceiving and Expressing those Acknowledgments of God, which are, The Glory due unto his Name, besides MAN; who is therefore not unfitly called, The High-priest of the Creation. The devout Psalmist once called upon all Creatures, with a Repeated Invitation, Praise ye the Lord; but they all reply that Man is to do it for them, and they all therefore conspire to offer the Notices of the Almighty God unto Mans affectionate Contemplation.³⁷

For Mather the ultimate calling of piety is to have all humanity praise God as one, distinct from the rest of creation. There is something here of the theological tenet of Christians reflecting the face of God as being made in his image. The striving of humanity towards piety is an attempt to do something good for God that the rest of the created order can not.

Piety — like salvation itself — was both a blessing and requirement that existed within the double helix of individual and community. Firstly, the individual person must learn to become pious. Striving toward piety through sanctification was the mark of a covenant member from the start of their Christian journey. As Mather says:

An Everlasting Life in the Fruition of all good, is intended for the Elect; But none shall see that Life, who do not with a Conversion here begin to Live unto GOD Heb. XI 14. Without Holiness no man shall see the Lord. Oh! That this Ponderous Truth, might be felt in the vast Weight of it, on every one of your Minds.³⁸

³⁷ Cotton Mather, *Wonderful Works Of God Commemorated*, p. 7.

³⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, pp. 9-10.

Like salvation, piety is a gift from the hand of God. That which is pious within us is not our own. Mather makes it clear that good works are “utterly excluded in any share in the Justification of Sinners.”³⁹ It belongs to the sovereign God who dispenses it as he sees fit as a gift to the elect. Here we see the continued dichotomy of striving after something that is only ever obtained through gracious favor. Mather firmly gives God the credit in the final regard as the arbiter of piety. He says:

But Oh! Accept me among thy Righteous Ones, because my JESUS has fulfilled all Righteousness, and, I hope in Him, that He will do the part of an Advocate, and show His Righteousness forme, that I may be delivered from going down unto the Pit. Now you shall have the Benefit of this Righteousness, and be received among the Righteous upon it.⁴⁰

Mather believes that piety is an act of God and represents a turn toward the ultimate individual Christian good required of all believers at all times:

Acts of Compliance formed in the Soul, when Acts of Piety are called for, will suddenly surprize you into a Turn unto GOD. In such a way of Hearing the Word of GOD, and of Trying to comply with it, a Turn to GOD is to be looked for.⁴¹

For Mather, God waters the seed of piety so that it grows from the totally depraved soil of the human heart:

Our Heart is this fallow Ground. It is an Heart that is destitute of good Principles; and good Ends, and good Frames, and good Thoughts, are not now the natural Growth of the Soyl. Our Nature being woefully corrupted by our fall from GOD, our complaint must be That; Rom. VII.

³⁹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, p. 43.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 26.

18. I know, that in me, (that is, in my Flesh,) there dwelleth no good thing [...] Piety will be an effort of energy, where evil comes to the heart without trying.⁴²

Here Mather is squarely within the orthodox beliefs of humankind's sin nature within historic Calvinism. Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith reads:

They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.⁴³

John Calvin also wrote:

For our nature is not only destitute of all good, but is so fertile in all evils that it cannot remain inactive [...] that everything in man, the understanding and will, the soul and body, is polluted and engrossed by this concupiscence; or, to express it more briefly, that man is of himself nothing else but concupiscence.⁴⁴

It is in grounding his own novel turn towards “exorbitant” piety in such historic confessional language that makes Mather’s arguments so effective for his audience and its implementation so compelling.

For Mather, piety had the potential to serve as a sort of corrective to human nature itself. Calvin believed that flesh bears the bruise of original sin,⁴⁵ and Mather

⁴² Cotton Mather, *Agricola* (1727), p. 4.

⁴³ Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter VI.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1.

⁴⁵ See John Calvin, *Complete Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3: *Jeremiah to Lamentations* at Jeremiah 30:12, note 9.

believed that piety might be medicine to be applied on that wound, promoting good growth with the same energy that men formerly used to fly to evil:

There is nowhere to be found among men, that Vivacity of Sprit in Lawful Actions, which there is to be found in Unlawful Ones [...] Why may not we proceed in our Usefulness, even with Both Hands, and Greedily Watching for Opportunities?⁴⁶

For Mather piety was more than the mark of an obedient Christian; it was a necessary qualifier for those who sought more responsibility within New England society at this time, including those who would deem to govern the affairs of other Christians through political office. Piety was a requirement for public service. In 1710 he states:

A man of Bright Piety is a man of Good Metal: He will study to be a Blessing to his People; Tis very much to be hoped, that God will make him a Blessing: Especially when he is called forth into any Publick Station.⁴⁷

As Mather taught that total depravity rendered man unable to choose piety he also believed that a regenerate person with God's leading might redirect his nature towards doing good. For Mather piety emphasized good works as a sign of election. The salvation act itself that led to piety was also rooted firmly in this traditional confessional Calvinistic doctrine. In *The Converted Sinner* Mather teaches that:

NO man will Turn unto GOD, until GOD shall please to Turn him. We may well say, Turn thou me, and I shall be Turned; For we must say, Except thou Turn me, O Lord, I never shall be Turned. In the Grand concern of our Conversion unto GOD, we are told, Phil. II.13. GOD works in us, both to will and to do, of His own good Pleasure. Tis very true,

⁴⁶ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, pp. 8-9.

That GOD Commands us to Turn unto Himself; And there is an unspotted justice, a marvellous Wisdom in His Commanding of it.⁴⁸

As conversion is initiated and secured by God alone, piety is also a free gift from above and the Christian is in a simple posture of reception. As Mather says, “A Soul cannot go into Heaven, till Heaven be first come into the Soul.”⁴⁹ Even at a pirate’s execution, piety — and scriptural authority and supremacy — were exulted to the prisoner and those witnessing the execution. Mather says to him:

You are furnished, I know, with proper Books of PIETY. But above all, your BIBLE your BIBLE! — Read that Holy Book, most Attentively, most Affectuously! — make a Pause upon every Verse. Think with yourselves, What is it that the Glorious GOD here speaks unto me? And thereupon, with an Echo of Devotion do you send up some suitable Request unto GOD.⁵⁰

Even at this crucial final hour for the criminals soon to be executed, it is saving piety that is to be inculcated. It is piety of a different stripe in that its inward immediate application would be without visible good works, but Mather is still admonishing the pirate to act in Christian goodness even when being hung to die. This is one of changes we find in tracing Mather’s thoughts and applications of piety through his ministry. For the Christian with his life ahead of them, piety is to be striven for through peacefulness, ecumenicism, right theology and broad-minded enthusiasm toward the end goal of welcoming in the eschaton. For those set to leave this earth, piety is of a different sort as it is the person going to God in goodness rather than preparing for

⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 33.

God to return triumphantly to them. In both instances piety is never a secondary concern. It is foundational for the Christian life.

4.3 Matherian Appreciations of Piety

Mather's use of piety as a ministerial emphasis served multiple compatible purposes throughout his life. This included expanding the international Christian covenant, an aggrandizement of place within what he hoped to be a pietical movement in New England as well as a genuine theological belief including pietical training for children and ministers. In the works of Mather one can see at least two uses of piety that shift along with his ministry strategies throughout his ministry. During the first half of his ministry from 1689, including *Early Piety* dedicated to his deceased brother Nathaniel Mather, until approximately 1705, piety was taught as an obedient way of life that would solidify God's blessings towards the puritans as a required distinctive of the holy tribe. It meant corporate covenantal fidelity expressed by individual holiness consistent with the expected codes of Christian conduct. This piety would reflect the narrative of inward conversion of those officially joined by church membership to the covenant in the ecclesiological system which had a restricted communion table. It was something that would engender God's continued blessings. Piety was a corporate responsibility. This is an appraisal of Mather's piety that is built up from the scholarship of Lovelace and Middlekauff but distinct from their scholarship in its covenantal application and broader scope. We will see this reflected in the analysis of Mather's writings.

In 1690 we still see Mather viewing piety as a formational work of puritan identity rooted partly in the continuing separation of New England from false churches:

“Deliver thy self, O New-England, from every thing that may make thee look like a Daughter of Babylon.”⁵¹ Mather is striving to make piety a hallmark of New England in a way that looks inward at this point. “Without the imitation of Christ,” he wrote in 1702, “all thy Christianity is a meer nonentity.”⁵² One of Mather’s applications of piety in New England is that he uses it to encourage revival towards covenant renewal.⁵³ Piety served as an indicative barrier of the covenant helping to keep Christian people inside of it through adherence to the right ways of God. Mather says:

If you won't Learn of Good Men, for shame Learn of the Devil ! He is never Idle. He goes about, seeking what Hurt he may do! [...] O Thou Child of God, and Lover of all Righteousness; How can't thou find in thy Heart at any time to Cease from doing all the Good, that can be done, in the Right Wayes of the Lord?⁵⁴

Elsewhere he reiterates his call for genuine good works that make one’s covenant calling visible, exclaiming “A Justifying Faith is a Jewel, which may be Counterfeited. But now the Merits of a Faith, which is no Counterfeit, are to be found in the Good Works — whereto a Servant of God is inclined and assisted by his Faith.”⁵⁵ Here the pious fruits of justification are put where they should be which is on display as a covenantal adornment for Christ. Matherian piety was a covenantal practice that was an echo of the legal covenant God made with Adam that required Adam’s obedience, now superseded by the new covenant in Christ and based on Christ’s obedience

⁵¹ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. 53.

⁵² Cotton Mather, *Christianity To The Life* (1702), p. 17.

⁵³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, p. 180 and see Cotton Mather, *Menachem* (1716), pp. 39-42.

⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 36.

before God. In *Bonifacius* Mather taught “[...] in the Covenant of Grace, we shall make it our Study, to Do those Good Works which once were the Terms of our Entering in Life.”⁵⁶

Impiety is a precursor to covenantal exile. In the *Biblia Americana* Mather states that long banishment awaits those who lack a proper “Pious Regard” for the will of God.⁵⁷ An example of a lack of piety leading to God withdrawing the blessings of the covenant is discussed in *Things For A Distress'd People To Think Upon* from 1696. This was written partially as an account of deliverances and blessings to protestant peoples across other parts of the world. Regarding New England, Mather says:

We are Trembling, at the Controversy, which we see the Great God managing against you, O our Young Folks, in Fiery, Deadly Rebukes. You do not Keep the Covenant of God; and now, the Almighty God seems to say over New-England, I will take no pleasure in your young men. Some of our Young men are given up to the furthest sallies of Extravagant and Exorbitant Impiety: And others of our Young men perish either by the Wars at Home, or by the Seas abroad, until we almost become, as Bede reports once England was, *Omni milite, et floridae Juventutis Alacritate Spoliata*. Miserable Young men; your Conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ, would certainly prevent all of this misery. Now, to procure such a Conversion, it would be a course of admirable Efficacy, for our Churches to keep now and then, whole Dayes of Prayer unto the Lord, on the behalf of their poor Posterity.⁵⁸

Here he is saying that avoiding “Extravagant and Exorbitant Impiety” is a key to generational covenant renewal which is itself an essential outworking of the original

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana*, 6 Volume manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, vol. 2, pp. 664-669; Maddux, “God's Responsibility,” p. 318.

⁵⁸ Cotton Mather, *Things For A Distress'd People To Think Upon*, p. 31.

New England covenant — as pious young people commit themselves to lives of obedience and service to God.

Mather believed that a pious person needs to possess a very real righteousness. In 1724, after having seen the New England church try and fail to achieve goodness through strictness including guarding the covenant membership rolls, condemning other Christian groups and persecuting witches, Mather makes it clear that what is required is a gracious endowment of godly righteousness — an alien piety — that is pleasing to God:

But I must make it yet a little Plainer. — It is not enough, that you be Forgiven, but you must be Righteous too. You can't have a Claim to Blessedness, if you be not Owners of a Righteousness wherein the Law of GOD shall be fully answered; a Compleat, Exact, Perfect Righteousness. But, how will you come at such a Righteousness? If you could now spend the Last Week of your Lives, in Spotless Performances that would that Signify for the past Years of Lives spent in Wickedness? A Furthing paid, where Talents were ow'd? But even This is what you won't, you can't come unto. Your Best Work will have their Blemishes. The very Tears of your most Savoury Devotions will want washing. Your Holy Things will not be without their Inequities.⁵⁹

For Mather, piety shifts from a tribal affair between a peculiar people and their God into a shared protestantism centered around a simplified commitment to do Trinitarian good. Piety during his years of ecumenicism and cosmopolitanism meant something akin to the opposite: simple, scaled back biblical essentials as he describes in

Bonifacius, something of a condensed scriptural platitude such as:

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8)

⁵⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, p. 42.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. (Luke 10:27)

Piety in the international cosmopolitan Christian context for Mather would mean simple tenets such as these which were easily translatable amongst a disparate coterie of Christian churches each with their own unique traditions, liturgy and ecclesiology. Piety in the broadening of the covenant meant a commitment to obedience in the striving towards “doing good” as the mark and goal of the New England Christian. There was something revolutionary in this type of extension of simple, open puritan piety at this time. What was taught in *Bonifacius* has been seen by some as a precursor to the social gospel⁶⁰ and in New England’s later turn towards Unitarianism.⁶¹

4.4 *Bonifacius* (1710)

During the latter half of his ministry piety became corporate in a different way. It was used as an ecumenical tool to implement a shared common protestantism with other Christian groups committed to living virtuously in accordance with Mather's simple axioms of piety. After having lived through the Glorious Revolution, a perceived crisis of New England’s declension and multiple personal tragedies, piety is now being

⁶⁰ Reck, “Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) on Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” p. 286.

⁶¹ Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 181.

changed by Mather into a device of shared transatlantic protestantism. More than this, for him it is foundational for every expression of Christianity. In his petical work *Bonifacius* of 1710 Mather says "A Foundation of Piety must be first laid, An Inviolable Respect unto the Holy and Just and Good Laws of the Infinite GOD."⁶² *Bonifacius* can be considered a handbook for piety in that Mather believed that practical acts of Christian goodness were both the fruits of a pious life and a redemptive "rescuing" part of human action. He writes "That the Evil Manners of the World, by which men are drowned in Perdition, may be Reformed, and mankind rescued from the Epidemical Corruption and Slavery which has overwhelmed it."⁶³ Here Mather is elevating works of outward piety into something of both the thing and the thing signified in a Calvinist sacramental mode of thinking. *Bonifacius* itself was written "In pursuance of this Piety."⁶⁴

Mather, the author of the *Magnalia* who at one time said that writing should be adorned with as many jewels as a Russian ambassadors gown,⁶⁵ now joyously resorts to minimalistic, simple language as the most effective and God-glorifying way to reach the most people. This is a profound strategic shift that helps to symbolize just how much Mather changed into the Mather of the *Bonifacius* who writes for anyone and everyone who can easily receive his message of universal piety. This simplification of piety represents for Mather a near seismic shift in rhetorical style and strategy.

⁶² Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 158.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, p. 44.

Knowing that his efforts would still likely be poorly received by many in Boston, he calls out to Scotland. He says in the preface that he is writing for that “Set of Excellent Men, in that Reformed and Renowned Church of Scotland, with whom, the most Refined and Extensive Efforts to Do Good will become so Natural [...].” In doing this he positions his ministry of piety to face across the Atlantic so “that the whole World will fare the Better for them.”⁶⁶ *Bonifacius* was a powerful book that left an impression on a young Benjamin Franklin who would credit this work with inspiring him to do good for the rest of his life. It was a forward-looking book in many ways including its progressive message that doing good is most important in both the life of the Christian and the church. This will be echoed in different manifestations later on in history in ways Mather might not have foreseen or appreciated such as the social gospel, liberation theology movements or the politically progressive Congregational churches of New England today. As Mather scholar Josephine Piercy puts it, “*Bonifacius* shows a development of broad social and humanitarian vision far beyond his time,”⁶⁷ and “the mind of one man who was often far ahead of his time in his sense of social progress and who was moved all his life to do good.”⁶⁸

For Mather the piety expressed in *Bonifacius* was a joyous outgrowth of a renewed nature. It was a natural fruit of salvation. Mather says that:

Thus ought we to be Glad, when any Opportunity to Do Good, is offered unto us. We should need no Arguments, to make us Entertain the Offer;

⁶⁶ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, preface, p. xviii.

⁶⁷ Josephine Piercy in Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius* introduction, p. ix.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. x.

but we would Naturally fly into the Matter, as most agreeable to the Divine Nature whereof we are made Partakers.⁶⁹

Bonifacius served as a way for Mather to attempt to consolidate Christian people in New England towards what he hoped would become a worldwide movement of piety. While not naming himself, he longs for a pious leader to bring this message to the world: “O Imperial Piety! To behold such a Prince at the Head of it, one would think, were enough to Convert a World!”⁷⁰

On the theme of reforming the social order through piety Mather is very concerned about the piety of schoolmasters and their pupils. John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* had been published in England some seventeen years before *Bonifacius* and there can be little doubt of its influence on Cotton Mather regarding virtue via pedagogy and personal experience.⁷¹ When addressing schoolmasters in *Bonifacius*, Mather urges an unusual form of teaching that privileges the equation of reading piety with doing it. “Sirs,” Mather writes, “let it be a great intention with you, to instill documents of piety into the children,” signaling that the instillation itself would help to accomplish the goal of making them pious.⁷² As important as the schoolhouse teaching piety were the families themselves. Mather

⁶⁹ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 120.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, “Cotton Mather and His Children,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1953), p. 186.

⁷² Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 83; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 157.

counseled parents to ask themselves whether they had fulfilled the puritan mandate for homes to be "schools of piety" each day.⁷³

Mather's belief that an internal piety shown to the glory Christ before a watching world reflected Locke's influence in that there was no compulsion of conscience towards this end apart from the simple Biblical teaching on the issue. Piety was under the jurisdiction of Christ alone and not the church. It was something to be shared in concentric circles from the individual, to the church, to the immediate society and to the entire world. Just as Locke believed that those in authority can not compel the conscience in religious matters, then neither can puritan exclusivism and the attendant congregational power structure (loosely composed as it may be) force one strict interpretation of piety on those within its ambit.⁷⁴

No one was left out of Mather's plan for international Christian piety. While unfortunately falling far short of what ought to have been required of a Christian leader even when *Bonifacius* was written, piety here is serving as a precursory idea later developed further by New England abolitionists in their efforts to end slavery in America. Slaves were considered part of the covenanted household in which they served and were deeply integrated into the rhythms of colonial life, though severely alienated from the benefits of this life.⁷⁵ African slaves could be considered a members of a congregational church if they were baptized and followed the other required steps

⁷³ Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents* (1695), p. 2; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 44.

⁷⁴ See John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (London, 1689)

⁷⁵ Kathryn S. Koo, "Strangers in the House of God: Cotton Mather, Onesimus, and an Experiment in Christian Slaveholding," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 117 (2007), p. 149.

for membership.⁷⁶ Mather teaches that piety will inform how the people of New England interact with their slaves and that the ultimate goal is for their salvation. He refreshingly grounds this in piety in a reflection of their own humanity as people worthy of salvation:

How if they should be the Elect of God, fetch'd from Africa, or the Indies, and brought into your Families, on purpose, that by the means of their being There, they may be brought home unto the more than a little Good unto the Shepard of Souls? Oh! That the Souls of our Slaves, were of more Account with us! [...] That the poor Slaves and Blacks, which live with us, may by our means be made the Candidates of the Heavenly Life! How can we pretend unto Christianity, when we do no more to Christianize our Slaves! Verily, you must give an Account unto God, concerning them.⁷⁷

He emphasized the seriousness of the issue of slavery in his diary, saying that “[...] there can be nothing more seasonable and reasonable than for us, to consider whether our conduct with relation to our African Slaves be not one thing for which our God may have a controversy with us.”⁷⁸ This is a change in his outlook from 1681, when Cotton Mather is said to have bought a Spanish Indian servant for his father⁷⁹ and 1696 when he wrote that slavery was biblically permissible in his work *A Good Master Well Served*.⁸⁰ Being very uneasy with slavery by 1710 — in *Bonifacius* he also calls the

⁷⁶ See Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1660-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

⁷⁷ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁸ Cotton Mather, *Diary* vol. 2, p. 663, I, p. 598; Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Henry W. Haynes, “Cotton Mather and His Slaves,” *American Antiquarian Proceedings*, vol. 6 (1890), p. 192.

⁸⁰ Cotton Mather, *A Good Master Well Served* (1696).

slave trade “a Spectacle that Shocks Humanity”⁸¹ — he taught that providence could be at work within the institution to win the hearts of the slaves for Christ. While being an ethically unacceptable application of piety, as slavery was a moral evil then and now, it does reveal that Mather was concerned with the souls of the slaves of New England in a way that validated them as potential members of the visible covenant. He taught that piety was found “by doing what we can for the Souls of our Slaves, and not using them as if they had no Souls!”⁸²

Mather believed that those puritans who had slaves in their households (including Mather himself, as he was gifted a slave in 1706 whom he named Onesimus after the slave in the New Testament book of Philemon) must behave towards them as the “law of Christ” demands. This would be a far different treatment than the Old Testament laws on slavery. Biblically, the law of Christ was one of freedom and friendship as in Romans 8:2⁸³ and Galatians 6:2.⁸⁴ Mather taught that “In our treating of them, there must be nothing but what the Law of CHRIST will Justify. Above all, we are to do all we can to Christianize them.”⁸⁵ Quoting Richard Baxter in this same passage, Mather reiterates his feelings on the slave trade in very clear terms:

To go as Pirates, and Catch up poor Negroes, or People of another Land, that have never forfeited Life, or Liberty, and to make them Slaves, and Sell them, is One of the worst kinds of Thievery in the World; and such

⁸¹ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 68.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 67.

⁸³ The King James Version reads “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

⁸⁴ The King James Version reads “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

⁸⁵ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, pp. 15-16.

Persons are to be taken for the common Enemies of Mankind; and they that buy them, and use them as Beasts, for their meer Commodity, and betray, or destroy, or neglect their Souls, are fitter to be called, Incarnate Devils, than Christians, tho' they be no Christians whom they so Abuse.⁸⁶

Mather attempted to use his regional influence to implement his plan of Christianizing all New England citizens including slaves. He was open about his goals here, writing:

I not only write Letters, unto the most eminent Persons, in all the islands, to promote the Design of Christianizing the Negros; but I also apply myself unto Sir William Ashurts, and by him unto the Parliament, to procure an Act of Parliament for that Intention.⁸⁷

Consolatory piety was extended by Mather to Onesimus on the deaths of two of Onesimus' children. Early in 1714 Mather wrote: "My Servant burying his Son, it gives me an Opportunity, to inculcate agreeable Admonitions of Piety upon him."⁸⁸ And two years later, "My Servant has newly buried his Son; Onesimus his Onesimulus. Lett me make this an Occasion of inculcating the Admonitions of Piety upon him."⁸⁹ Piety was a balm of affection that Mather offered to all of those whom he felt God had placed in his life and in his household.

In *Bonifacius* we see the end result of piety. It is the same result that Mather's public ministry and private struggles were dedicated to: the giving of God all glory in

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, pp. 570-571; Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 283.

⁸⁹ Ibid, vol. 1, p. 342.

his testimony before others. Mather declares "By Serious and Shining piety in your own Example, you will bear a glorious Testimony to the Cause of God and Religion."⁹⁰ Piety was to be a large part of the New England cause of completing the reformation. Mather states that this would also bring many enemies to one's doorstep. Piety and reformation would bring about the censures of those who have lost sight of this mission or were never really committed to it in the first place. He writes "You will unavoidably be put upon for the doing of many good things, which other people will see but at a distance [...] and this will expose you to their censures."⁹¹ To keep up piety in the face of such trials is a daunting task especially for Mather who lived under the watchful eye of his congregation and community. "Scarcely any person on earth had gone through so many trials," it was said about Mather in his final year.⁹² During these challenging times piety became his overwhelming focus. In 1718 Mather writes that:

It has been a year, wherein I have made more Advances in Piety, than in many former Years. Perhaps, my Journey thro' the Wilderness just expiring, I must rid more way in one year now, thank forty before.⁹³

It was not only his loss of esteem and influence at this point in life that upset him. This was less important to him than the shrinking opportunities to "do good" through acts of practical piety. After being ridiculed and persecuted for his

⁹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 126.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 83; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 158.

⁹² Cotton Mather in a private letter to Thomas Prince (1726) quoted in Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 425.

⁹³ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, pp. 584-586; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 89.

commitment to smallpox inoculations in Boston which included an assassination attempt in addition to public disgrace at the hands of his enemies, Mather's main concern was his shrinking forum to perform pious acts. He writes:

My Opportunities to do good, which have been the Apple of My Eye, have been strongly struck at [...] I am at length reduced into this Condition, that my Opportunities to do good, (except among a few of my own little Remnant of a Flock,) appear to me almost entirely extinguished, as to this Countrey.⁹⁴

Mather prioritized piety everywhere that he could and he did this even more as his ministry progressed. *Bonifacius* is a lasting testament to this conviction.

4.5 *The Young Man Spoken To* (1712)

Mather's *The Young Man Spoken To* of 1712 is another of his works designed to instill piety in New Englanders from a young age, in this instance instructing them in their private lives, "Especially the Religion of the Closet."⁹⁵ Mather starts out by admitting that he is writing frequently on the subject of piety but that it is important to continue to do so. He writes:

[...] after so many that have gone before it, needs no Apology; for it is not Possible to make too many. The Subject is Copious; the Object is Numerous; the Occasions are Infinite.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 185.

⁹⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Young Man Spoken To* (1712), p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

For him this was a heavenly opportunity “To bring the Messages of Heaven to Young Men, is an Angelical Service.”⁹⁷ Mather did not believe that the young people of New England should receive a modified doctrine of piety. He taught that young people, “very particularly O Young People,”⁹⁸ were to be taught true piety and instructed in its application.

When addressing the young people of New England in this sermon Mather chooses not to lecture them directly on lack of faith, poor moral conduct or anything else related to their perceived declension. Rather, he attempts to make them pious, which in Mather’s theology and worldview is the most important aspect of the Christian life. He says:

Young Persons must not look on themselves unconcerned in the Maxims of Piety; Those Things are of as much Importance unto Young Persons, as unto any in the World; The Voice of God which utters those Things, is as much Directed unto Young Persons as unto any in the World.⁹⁹

With impiety comes punishments and the withholding of blessings, something that the puritan young person should carefully avoid:

The Thundring Voice of God unto you, in such Spectacles, is, O take heed of all Impiety. O don't by work of Darkness, pull down upon yourselves the Strange Punishments reserved in outer Darkness, for the Workers of Iniquity!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

Here Mather equates a lack of piety with punishments reserved for those outside the covenant of salvation. In this emphasis we see that for Mather piety is not simply a fruit of regeneration. Rather, it is the heart of the Christian faith and a fundamental mark of covenant membership.

In the context of the physical hardships and death that surrounded the puritan experience, especially as this experience affected young people, Mather reminds them that possible death at any time is a fact of their lives:

They Dy in Youth. Children, You see all Ages liable to the stroke of Death. You see Children Dy as well as Old Men; Ten times more Dy before Twenty than After Sixty. You see Children carried from the Cradle to the Sepulchre; and Graves in the Burying-place, that are shorter than the Youngest of you. You see Children Dy as well as they that are an Hundred years old; Infants Lock'd up in Coffins; and as they use to say, Skulls of all Sizes in Golgotha. You see, Some with whom the Sun goes down at Noon, and some with whom the Morning is turn'd into the Shadow of Death. The Great God speaks to you, in what you see. The Lively Voice of God unto you in such Spectacles, is; O don't vainly Promise a long Life unto your selves. O do not upon a vain Presumption of a long Life, put off your Preparations for Death, and your laying hold on Eternal Life!¹⁰¹

Piety for the young people is a means by which to enjoy the life that they have been given as long as they have it, in preparation for the eternal afterlife ahead. Piety highlighted the transience of earthly life in a society that saw much of death.

Mather then describes a personalization of the individual covenant towards the puritan young people that comes about through piety. He says:

The Voice of the Great God unto you in your Bible is that; Psal. XXXIV. 11. Come ye Children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the Fear of the Lord. The Bible is a Letter from Heaven as much unto you, as if your very

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Name, were in the Superscription of it. And that you may be the more sensible of God speaking unto you here, you are here yet more distinguishingly call'd upon. So you are, Eccl XII. 1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. So you are, Psal. CXLVIII. 12, 13. Both young Men and Maidens, old Men & Children. Let them Praise the Name of the Lord. So you are, in all the Scriptural Examples of Early Piety.¹⁰²

For Mather, scripture communicates to the young people the direct and personal call to piety. He goes on to say “That the Great GOD will deal with you, as you deal with His Word.”¹⁰³ The work required for the building up of the covenant is a commitment to piety that supersedes age in gaining credibility to serve God. Mather says:

And making this their main Business in the World. Yea, sometimes a Young Jeremiah, is used by the God of Heaven, to speak for Him unto Multitudes; A Young Josiah, to make whole Provinces and Nations the better for him.¹⁰⁴

In passages such as these we see that Mather sets up piety as a practical, necessary and tangible tool of ministry and corporate edification for all ages. Though it is sought as a “Secret Prayer, and be much in the Religion of the Closet,”¹⁰⁵ it manifests itself in the life of the young puritan in ways that make the covenant community “better,” as noted above.

Piety is an extension of covenantal duty and a manifestation of the promise received in baptism, which is the sacrament of covenant membership. In a similar vein

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 38.

to John Calvin writing that it is “pious” that Christians should look to their baptism as a sign of hope,¹⁰⁶ Mather writes that:

Your Baptism was the Seal of your Indentures, wherein you were Bound unto the Service of your Incomparable Saviour. The Thing required of you, is, That you now Renew the Consent of your Souls, unto your Baptismal Covenant [...] Once has it been said over you, at your Baptism, in the arms of the Handmaid of God; This is a Servant of the Lord. Now, do you say it over again; O Lord, Truly I am thy Servant. And never, never seek to be Loos'd from these Bonds.¹⁰⁷

Covenant duties imply lifetime service and for Mather personal piety represents the most pure way to serve. Personal piety results in a public benefit to the covenant community at large by strengthening the church and emboldening holiness. He believed in teaching this to both boys and girls at a time when girls were usually neglected.¹⁰⁸ Mather called for the young people including the young women, a noteworthy act of pietical sensitivity and inclusion especially given the title of the work, to first commit themselves privately to the cause of piety:

Young People of both Sexes, you are all Concerned. We read concerning the Chariot of Solomon; Cant. III. 10. It was Paved with Love by the Daughters of Jerusalem. The Carpet laid under his Feet in his Chariot, was it seems, wrought with Lovely Figures, by the Ingenuity of these Young Gentlewomen. Oh! that ours would by Weeping Supplications to their Saviour, Kneeling on the Floor of their Secret Chambers, as it were lay a Well-wrought Carpet of their Love unto Him!¹⁰⁹

Mather ends this work with an emphatic final call to action:

¹⁰⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.16.2.

¹⁰⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Young Man Spoken To*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ Schlesinger, “Cotton Mather and His Children,” p. 186.

¹⁰⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Young Man Spoken To*, p. 40.

Children, I Demand your Immediate Compliance. Your Duty has been set before you: The Demand is, That you Run into it [...] Because they are Things to be done To Day; they must not be put off till, To morrow. And indeed it was a common saying among the Jews, a Saying of the Fathers among them, relating to the Resolutions of Piety; Si non Nunc, Quando? That is, If not Now, When? Alas, If you will not Now, it may be fear'd, it may be fear'd, you Never will.¹¹⁰

We see in this work the emphasis that Mather places on piety in the life of the rising generation in New England towards the ultimate ends of personal and corporate covenant fidelity.

4.6 Piety For All

According to Mather the duty of everyone including children, ministers, slaves, pirates and others was to turn to Christ and be forgiven. Obedience is pinnacle and salvation is necessary before anything pious might grow. Mather says:

Repent, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out. This is indeed the Voice of the Glorious GOD in all His Edicts; Tis the sum of all that is enjoined upon us; Tis the whole Duty of Man.¹¹¹

As the sum of the law in the Bible was to love God completely as instructed in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37, the sum of every expected duty in New England was to repent unto salvation and then exhibit a piety that would confirm and display the love of God. This piety would act as a confirmation that one was elect and fit for church membership and its attendant duties.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 8.

These were the requirements for both the corporate puritan church and its individual members. There was no elitism relevant to the goals of piety. Mather believed that the spiritual state of the average New England citizen was the best indicator of the goodness of their society. He writes:

For indeed, how many MINISTERS are still to be seen in our Churches! Yea, Young Ministers; Who [...] set themselves to Encourage Piety among their People, especially Early Piety, and such Societies as use to be the Incentives and Preservatives of it [...].¹¹²

In praising and admonishing New England in this manner Mather was addressing the building blocks of New England: the puritan church and the pious individuals who comprised that church. This is the matter that God used to compose the earthly element of the New England covenant. Writing like this was a way for Mather to publicly acknowledge that the covenant was faithfully working out at this time. This type of covenantal piety requires a lived element of individual and shared morality as he goes on to say to puritan ministers:

And I hope they will have cause to say, that they see more Honesty too; or Else the Piety is worth nothing at all. He that is but a Publican at the Second Table, is but a Pharisee, as to the First.¹¹³

Piety can even become a spiritual status symbol achievable for all classes of people laboring within the covenant:

Persons of a very Ordinary Character, may in a way of bright Piety, prove Persons of Extraordinary Usefulness. A Poor John Urich may make a

¹¹² Cotton Mather, *Pillars of Gratitude*, p. 27.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Grotius the Better for him. I have read of a Pious Weaver, of whom some Eminent Persons would say, Christ walked as if were alive upon the Earth in that man. And a world of Good was done by that man. A mean Mechanick, who can tell what an Engine of Good, he may be, if humbly and wisely applied unto it.¹¹⁴

Piety becomes a ministerial tool of charity to be imitated. Mather writes that ministers have the obligation to lead by example in exercising piety, including by providing for the poor:

These Alms you will, with as much contrivance as may be, make the Vehicles, to Convey the Admonitions of Piety unto them; yea, the Methods and Machines of obtaining from them, some Engagements to perform certain Exercises of Piety All Ministers are not alike furnished for Alms; they mould all be disposed for them. They that have Small Families, or Large Interests, ought to be Shining Examples of Liberality to the Poor, and power down their Alms like the Showers of Heaven upon them.¹¹⁵

The ministerial class was not absolved from having to tangibly show piety to the poor by reflecting heaven outwardly in this way. Mather instead calls for them to be even more disposed toward pious service.

As Mather believed it crucial for Christian individuals, churches and societies to be instructed to grow in piety, this was also to be an absolute priority in the Christian home including in the duty of child rearing. In his diary he discusses how he proceeds to instruct the youngest children under his care:

I will early entertain the children with delightful stories out of the Bible. In the talk of the table, I will go through the Bible, when the olive-plants about my table are capable of being so watered. But I will always

¹¹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 101.

conclude the stories with some lessons of piety to be inferred from them.¹¹⁶

Mather is saying that though the children might be too young to understand certain complex theological truths, they are never too young to learn piety through biblical instruction. Personal piety in parents served as a tool for family instruction. In 1690 Mather says to “Let your Children see by your Piety and Charity and Zeal, how they may please God.”¹¹⁷ Piety was to be taught and encouraged within the family unit as a hedge against evil. Mather writes “Truly, young people are but Novices; whatever good they have or do, they are but newly come to it; it will be a wonder if the devil does not break them.”¹¹⁸ This was an important work that required proactive energy. Four years later Mather was still preaching the message of early piety, saying “Be any of you never so Young and Tender yet I am to tell you, that you have a Great Work [...] incumbent on you; Oh! Be up, and be Doing.”¹¹⁹ Piety in this instance is of the utmost importance for Mather in both the most intimate of settings (here being the family) as well as the most broad, such as international Christianity as discussed in the relevant section of this thesis.

Just as his dedication to piety is shown as blessed common ground in his correspondence with August Hermann Francke (as discussed in the ecumenicism

¹¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 249; cf. *Diary*, vol. 3, p. 23; E. Jennifer Monaghan, “Family Literacy in Early 18th-Century Boston: Cotton Mather and His Children,” *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 26 (1991), pp. 342-370.

¹¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children*, p. 119.

¹¹⁸ Cotton Mather, “The Young Man’s Glory” in *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children* (1690), p. 76; Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 37.

¹¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Early Religion Urged* (1694), p. 42; Wallach, *Obedient Sons*, p. 18.

section) and other international Christian aid societies, Mather places a pietical emphasis on outward observable acts of personal charity and virtue:

I will do what I can very early to beget a temper of kindness in my children, both toward one another and toward all other people. I will instruct them how ready they should be to share with others a part of what they have; and they shall see my encouragements when they discover a loving, a courteous, an helpful disposition. I will give them now and then a piece of money, so that with their own little hands they may dispense unto the poor. Yea, if any one has hurt them, or vexed them, I will not only forbid them all revenge, but also oblige them to do a kindness as soon as may be to the vexatious person. All coarseness of language or carriage in them, I will discountenance.¹²⁰

Indeed the aim of Christian education here is to “set before them the delights of that Heaven that is prepared for pious children.”¹²¹

Even money itself for Mather was best spent on “Pious Uses” by the Christians blessed with such resources.¹²² New England businesspeople who finished profitable ventures could expect a visit from the Mather who would arrive with a dozen different suggestions for “pious expenditure.”¹²³ It was from here that he directed his discourse on piety overseas in the ecumenical, international and cosmopolitan manner.

Mather came to see persecution and suppression of other Christians as an impious vestige of Roman Catholicism. Mather wanted to further the cause of the reformation to completion and this would require severing from Rome completely. In

¹²⁰ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 249; cf. *Diary*, vol. 3, p. 23.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹²² Cotton Mather, *Concio ad Populum* (Boston, 1719), pp. 13-14; Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 7, p. 45; Christine Leigh Heyrman, “The Fashion Among More Superior People: Charity and Social Change in Provincial New England, 1700-1740,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 34 (1982), p. 119.

¹²³ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 7, p. 54; viii, p. 92, 99, 116, 240; Mannierre, ed., Cotton Mather, *Diary of 1712*, p. 79; Heyrman, “The Fashion Among More Superior People,” p. 111.

his estimation the reformation was not finished as it did not get far enough away from Roman Catholic intolerance and persecution to which the only acceptable answer was universal Christian piety. Mather declares:

The Truth is, the Reformation that came on, when the Romish Antichrist had pass'd thro' his Time, and his Two Times, and was entering into his Half-Time, was little better than an Half-Reformation. The reforming churches, flying from Rome, carried, some of them more, some of them less, all of them something, of Rome with them, especially in that spirit of imposition and persecution, which too much cleaved to them all. The Period hastens for a New Reformation; wherein 'tis likely that our holy Lord will, in some Degree, reject ALL the Parties of Christians at this Day in the World; and form a NEW PEOPLE of the good Men in the several Parties, who shall unite in the Articles of their Goodness, and sweetly bear with one another in their lesser Differences; leaving each other to the Divine Illuminations. PIETY will anon be the only Basis of Union, in the Churches of the revived, refined, reformed Reformation; and pious Men, in several Forms, will come to Love, and live, as Brethren; and the purged Floor of our Saviour will be visited with Tokens of his Presence, that shall be very comfortable.¹²⁴

Here we see piety serving as the lynchpin for his ecumenicism. Writing in his diary in 1725 he commits to "Improvements in the Sentiments and Practices of Piety."¹²⁵

During this later part of his life, even the memorializing of his beloved father Increase was an exercise in piety. In *Parentor* he states that he would not have even written the book except:

¹²⁴ Cotton Mather, Personal letter to Mr. Francis De La Pilloniere as found in Samuel Mather, *Apology for the Churches in New England* (1738), p. 149; Isaac Backus, *History of The Baptists in New England* (1777), p. 63; John Nevins Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* (Ft. Oglethorpe: TEACH Services, Inc., 1998), p. 478. Mather says that the pope had enjoyed full control of the church before the reformation took place, leaving the pope at what Mather perceives as half-strength as many of the reformed churches took much of the pope with them into their own traditions. For Mather, exercising greater piety will finally make the reformation complete.

¹²⁵ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 7, p. 713; Weeks, "Cotton Mather And The Quakers," p. 31.

That it would be a Thing Acceptable to the Glorious GOD, and Serviceable very many ways unto the cause of PIETY, to Exhibit the Conduct of His Providence in the Life of a Good Man, and the Exemplary Methods taken by such a Man, to do Good in the World.¹²⁶

This commitment represented a new dedication to piety that elevated it to a necessary theological truth used to test and accept different Christian traditions in New England and abroad. In the middle of his ministry he began working towards the idea of one having a baseline faith (as exhibited in the simple biblical piety of *Bonifacius*) as proof enough of Christian conversion. He goes so far as to call for puritans to imitate Muslims in their practice of receiving new converts without burdensome proofs:

Syrs, a Mahometan will do as much as this comes to, for anyone that will embrace his Alcoran. Oh, Christians, will not you do more for your Generation, than the Children of this World for theirs.¹²⁷

Mather the pietist would go on to highlight piety as the best gauge of sincerity and authenticity for the both the Christian individual and church worldwide. This inevitably opened wider the doors of covenant and fellowship in New England. Richard Lovelace recognized the piety of Mather as being an impulse towards becoming part of a worldwide Christianity, but in fact it was more than this. Mather's piety was an attempt to recreate the errand into the wilderness as something beyond New England that would serve as the puritan's exemplary contribution to the extension and completion of the reformation.

¹²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Parentor*, p. i.

¹²⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized* (1706), pp. 30, 6; Mukhtar Ali Isani, "Cotton Mather and the Orient," *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 43 (1970), p. 56.

Later in his life Mather would state that to evangelize all people in all nations is an act of piety required by God.¹²⁸ As Lovelace notes this legacy makes him the leading synthesist of the puritan past in America and the most representative pre-Revivalist during his lifetime.¹²⁹ The piety of Cotton Mather serves as a historical bridge to the new voice and revival preaching of Jonathan Edwards and others like him. Mather's pietical legacy is more remarkable and important than many give him credit for. Though still often seen as a misanthropic ogre, perhaps nowhere is this unfortunate stereotype more challenged than in the area of Cotton Mather's change towards a pious service to all, even (and perhaps especially) when used for different purposes than the prior puritan ideal.

¹²⁸ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 44.

¹²⁹ Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, p. 5.

5. The Ecumenicism of Cotton Mather

“Every Particular Church is to consider it self as a part of the Catholic, and owes a Duty to the whole Visible Church of our Lord in the World.”¹
-Cotton Mather

“And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”²
-Matthew 3:9

In tracing the evolution of the role of the New England church in Mather’s ecclesiology and theology throughout his life and ministry, one of the areas most crucial to investigate is his ecumenicism and the witness of the puritan church both to the increasingly diverse landscape of protestant churches, as well as worldwide. Mather managed to adjust to the rapid changes in his circumstances and those of New England in a way that retained the continuity of mission and theological standards, while reinvigorating the millennial hope and reiterating the predestined duty of the puritan church. At this time Congregationalism in general was in transition towards something broader and here we find that Mather is making changes of his own. Scholars have proposed few theories about Mather’s ecumenicism, with the popular perception still being that he remained mostly resistant towards Christian inclusivity. My theory is distinctive in recognizing that Mather’s impulses in this area are missional changes designed to ecumenically engage with other protestant churches in a way that

¹ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 174; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 405.

² King James Version. This is the scriptural account of John the Baptist rebuking the Pharisees and Sadducees for their presumption in relying on religious lineage and tradition in light of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

extended the covenantal possibilities beyond the limits of puritan provincialism. The name Cotton Mather is overlaid today with stereotypical connotations often bordering on the cartoonish, and Mather enjoyed defying these caricatures even in his own time. Regarding ecumenicism he is the mirror opposite of the closed-off curmudgeon that many have attempted to portray him as. Analyzing his work and actions towards the consociations of protestant groups that would begin to labor alongside the puritans in Massachusetts into the eighteenth century, we can evaluate Mather's changing position on New England's place in Christendom.

Mather's magnanimous change in attitude towards ecumenicism in the middle to latter part of his ministry was due to his personal conviction that puritan exclusivism had often proven a sinful vanity, and that events such as losing the Massachusetts charter and the gaining a new one signaled an opportunity for an ecumenical pietistic revival that God would use to advance both the New England churches and protestant "fair confessors" wherever they might be found. Mather saw such challenges to New England as both God's judgement and a warning to renew their godly commitments.³ In 1703 he said "[...] Yea, we Degenerate so fast that it is fear'd Occasions for that complaint will be Epidemical."⁴ Visibly repenting of corporate sins such as persecuting the Quakers and engaging in esoteric divisive disputes in and around Boston would help give Mather a platform to ecumenically engage with other protestant churches in a way that indulged a part of him that had grown increasingly discontent with the old puritan flavor of myopic regionalism. Whether dealing with issues of the individual soul

³ Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 31.

⁴ Cotton Mather, *The Duty of Children Whose Parents Have Prayed for Them* (1703), preface.

or corporate Congregational church body, Mather believed that with the presence of sin must come repentance and action. This turn towards unification with other protestant churches represented an obedient step in the direction of the final work that Christ was completing before the eschaton.

This desire for the eschaton — occurring after the final extension and worldwide consummation of the reformation — casts a new light on Mather's evolving ecumenicism. In connecting the antecedents and destinations of the ecumenical actions and maneuvers of Mather we can see certain ideas arrange themselves across the years of his ministry and his life in New England. In analyzing the impact of Mather's ecumenicism we are also observing and categorizing his ability to guide his church, minister to individuals and recruit as many different Christians into his mission as his theological commitments would allow.

5.1 Matherian Ecumenicism in Context

Mather desired to implement an ecumenicism that can be practically defined as the purposeful unity of serving the cause of Christ both locally and globally while being undivided by the exclusivism that had reigned in New England until that point. All of this was to help usher in the conclusion of the reformation in the last days. His change towards appreciating ecumenicism is an extension of his understanding of who the church includes and how this visible form could and would take different shapes in New England and across the world. The Apostles' Creed says that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic church and Mather would not have disagreed. Puritanism from the outset never had clearly defined lines as it was not a formal denomination. Mather would embody this as a selective fluidity and strive for what has been called the puritan

leaning towards “demarcation over division.”⁵ Conscious of his own dissenting heritage, John Locke had pleaded for a similar mutual acceptance on common ground in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* published just over two decades earlier. Cotton Mather’s change towards ecumenicism also reflected an impulse to grow as an international thinker.

Speaking in 1689 to the Committee on Safety, which was designed to preserve the security and identity of the Congregational churches in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution when the particulars of the new charter were not yet known, Mather categorized the former division in the Boston churches as a theological and practical problem to rectify. Taking the opportunity to bring attention to the issue at this time of flux in the Commonwealth he preached on lessons learned through church fractures and persecutions, teaching that “the worst of our errors were the contentions that we are too prone to break out into.”⁶ Mather believed that the former persecutions under the old Congregational regime were “unjustifiable;”⁷ a sin not to be repeated. In 1720 Mather said that “persecution for conscientious differences” was the “Mother of Abominations” and hoped “that Protestants of all persuasions would unite in asserting the righteous cause of liberty.”⁸

⁵ Gerald Bray, “Puritan Spirituality,” Beeson Divinity School Podcast with host Timothy George, episode 118 (January 29, 2013).

⁶ Cotton Mather, Sermon to the Colonial Convention, May 23, 1689 as found in *Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, pp. 29-30.

⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 244; Levin, *Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 278.

⁸ T. J. Holmes, *Cotton Mather, A Bibliography of His Works*, III (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 1099; Kennerly M. Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘Manuductio ad Theologiam’: The ‘More Quiet and Hopeful Way,’” *Early American Literature*, vol. 4 (1969), p. 45.

In understanding Mather's view of sin as treason against God and rebellion against Christ, for him to claim that the prior anti-ecumenicism was the worst error in New England's ecclesiological history represented a major change in the hamartiological consciousness and Christian mission of the New England puritan churches. In light of the past dissensions and persecutions — and in realizing the current bleak state of protestant unity in New England at that time — Mather would produce works brimming with ecumenical understanding. He would go so far as to say that some church practices, such as requiring a conversion experience narrative for church membership, are what is best for Congregationalists in New England, while other worship practices and liturgies might be acceptable elsewhere in Christendom.⁹

In his work *Blessed Unions* of 1692 he says:

I say then if Saints that see not all with the same Eyes, can do the same things, though not on the same grounds, there is no Thing to be a Ground for Quarrelling [...] Our Churches do Ordinarily Expect from those whom they Admit unto Constant and Compleat Communion with them, some few savoury Expressions [Written, if not, Oral] of what Regenerating Influences the Ordinances, or the Providences of God, have had upon their Souls. There are some, who demand This, as a Thing required by the Word of God, When, A Confession with the Mouth, and, A Profession of Repentance as well as Faith, and, A Giving a Reason of the Hope that is in us, is required; And they look upon this as a Justifying Circumstance, which a Reasonable Charity is to seek, before it pronounce upon the Credibility of that Confession and Profession, whereupon men lay Claim to Priviledges. Others can't see through this; they rather decry it as, An Humane Invention. Behold then, a Temper, wherein we may, as hitherto we do, in this thing Unite I have been Concern'd with some Godly People of the Scotch Nation, who have at first shown much and hot Antipathy against This Way of our Church, and yet seek'd Admittance to the Table of the Lord.¹⁰

⁹ Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 217.

¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Blessed Unions* (1692), pp. 57-62.

Mather wrote this early in his career with a sort of open humility that enabled his ecumenical ministry to take shape. Regarding the approach of those “Folio-writers” in England who defame and condemn anyone not of their own religious background Cotton Mather wrote “I thank Heaven I Hate it with all my Heart.”¹¹ Mather became passionately anti-sectarian (Roman Catholics aside) moving into the eighteenth century.

What brought him to now support a fresh ecumenical movement in New England was an analysis of how the sins of dissension, partisanship and pride — amongst other shortcomings — had stood in the way of receiving spiritual blessings which resulted in a fractured puritan church less able to withstand the whirlwind of challenges endured since the colony’s founding. In living and ministering through these times Mather developed an ethic of ecumenical change that reflected his dedication to the success of the colony as it related to a broadening Christendom on the American shores. Mather’s passionate near-hagiographic and pseudo-protomartyric view of the puritan past as laid out in the *Magnalia* combined with his covenantal and predestinarian outlook for future glory gave him a theological platform from which to proceed in correcting present Congregational errors.

One of the reasons that *Magnalia* was written was to promote unity among Congregationalists, independents, and Presbyterians in Old and New England; and to help usher in what Mather saw as the:

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction, vol. 1, p. 28; Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 45.

[...] approaching Days of a better Reformation [...] when the Lord shall make Jerusalem (or, the true Church of God, and the true Christian Religion) a Praise in the Earth, and the Joy of many Generations.¹²

Writing on Mather's ecumenicism found in the *Magnalia*, Reiner Smolinski describes it this way:

[...] its purpose was to put to rights the ancient division among Protestant churches on an international plane. Mather's irenicism in the 1690s was thus bound up on the one hand with his endeavor to move beyond narrow sectarian hairsplitting and to promote ecumenical union on the basis of doctrinal harmony, and on the other with rewriting the history of New England's foundation, when King William's Act of Toleration (1689) and the New Charter (1691) permanently decreed toleration of all Protestant denominations.¹³

This need for fundamental change in ecumenicism was connected to the history of protestantism in that it reflected a bold step towards the consummation and completion of the reformation as began by the puritan heroes of ages past and recorded by Mather in the *Magnalia*.

Ecclesiology itself was not for Mather a matter of specific church polity, but of a broader Christian mission that should eventually lead to ecumenicism. There were liturgical purification standards which Mather insisted on such as unadorned public worship and an emphasis on the preached word, for example. But the puritans' lack of prioritization on issues of church organization meant that other protestant groups who held to sufficient theological commitments in the larger issues could cooperate with the puritans when their differences were primarily ones of polity. This group included the

¹² John Higginson, "Attestation" to Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 12; Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 40.

¹³ Reiner Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 43.

Presbyterians who shared a great deal in common theologically with the puritans. Mather and the Presbyterians were in near complete agreement on important theological matters though Mather rejected completely any “ecclesiastical body, self-constituted or representative of the churches as a whole, whose behests could bind the action of the smallest local congregation.”¹⁴ From here he worked outward in seeking unity with other protestant groups. The ecumenical interests of a united worldwide church (again, barring Roman Catholics) became one of Mather’s deepest convictions.¹⁵ These ambitions would include Orthodox Christians as well. These inclusionary impulses can be seen as both a movement of the heart and reactionary measure when viewed in light of the needs of the puritan church at the time.

The ecumenical desires of Mather sprang from a genuine love for all of the elect in America, Britain, Europe and the world. He was here, as in other areas of his life and ministry, sincere nearly to a fault,¹⁶ but he was also too shrewd to not capitalize on the societal changes happening around him. Bound up in his changing ecclesiology is by necessity the important element of ecumenicism. His opinions on exactly who the Congregationalists should start welcoming into communion and partnership were influenced by personal conviction, community needs and ministry opportunities. There was also a strategy to be pursued after the sobering realization that New England was outgrowing the early New Jerusalem ideal. Ecumenicism proved an especially useful concept during these times of political upheaval. Mather would publish *The Political*

¹⁴ Williston Walker, *Creeeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Scribner, 1893), p. 441; Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 41.

¹⁵ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 274.

¹⁶ Wendell, *Cotton Mather*, pp. 300-307.

Fables in 1692 which were tracts designed to discourage New Englanders from infighting when the real dangers existed outside in the form of Royal Governor Andros and the loss of the charter. These were stories told in the manner of Aesop with the relevant characters portrayed as animals and ancient gods.¹⁷

Beginning in 1693 Mather embraced a vision of what Kenneth Silverman called “transatlantic and inter sectarian harmony” that he would set about popularizing.¹⁸ The pressures and realities of the writing on the wall of declension in New England spurred him to a deeper investigation of ecumenicism as his ministry progressed. However, his devotion to scriptural truth and what role he felt New England played in redemptive history is what caused him to take a hardline against those unfaithful (or at the least lukewarm) puritans who would extend the olive branch too far to Anglicans, Quakers, Baptists and others. His attitudes towards Quakers and Baptists would change significantly during his ministry. In 1690 Mather had believed that puritan conversion to Quakerism was usually accompanied with demon possession.¹⁹ In 1695 he explained:

I cannot make my self a Vindicator of all the Severities, with which the Zeal of some Eminent men hath sometimes Enraged, and Increased, rather than Reclaimed, those Miserable Hereticks: but wish to Convince them with Argument, rather than Suppress them with Violence.²⁰

¹⁷ James D. Hart, and Phillip W. Leininger, “Political Fables,” *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, online edition (1995) <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195065480.001.0001/acref-9780195065480-e-3830>> [accessed 20 August 2019].

¹⁸ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 148.

¹⁹ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, p. 281, citing Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 2, p. 620 and Cotton Mather, *Little Flocks Guarded against Grievous Wolves* (1691), “To the Reader,” p. 103 and Cotton Mather, *Principles of the Protestant Religion Maintained* (1690), sig, *r.

²⁰ Cotton Mather, *Nortonus Honoratus, The Life of Mr. John Cotton*, pp. 28-29; Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 191.

Early in his ministry Mather publicly despised Quaker doctrine, calling it an abominable blasphemy.²¹ In the *Magnalia* he called Quakerism “the Sink of all Heresies.”²² As Louis Weeks discusses,²³ Mather’s change to appreciate some of Quaker theology was instigated by Christian Lodowick, himself a former Quaker, who explained the distinctions in Quaker theology to Mather.²⁴ As discussed below, in later years he would condemn the persecution of the Quakers as wrong which represented another part of his shift towards ecumenicism as his ministry progressed. Though in his ministry he would never approve of a puritan converting to Quakerism, he appears to have changed his view on demonic involvement concerning those who did. Going into the eighteenth century, Mather gained increased appreciation in the Quaker community with notable and influential Quaker pastor Thomas Chalkley who called Mather “one of the greatest preachers among the people of New-England.”²⁵

Mather developed a practical and theoretical ministry of ecumenicism that was brazen enough to even critique the ecclesiological exclusivism of the New England puritan fathers. Given Mather’s high view of those puritans who came before him and their mission of establishing God’s church on the Massachusetts shores — and the way he normally carefully curated the legacy of these men in the *Magnalia* and

²¹ Cotton Mather, *Little Flocks Guarded Against Grievous Wolves* (Boston, 1691).

²² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 2, pp. 4, 1; Weeks, “Cotton Mather and The Quakers,” p. 26.

²³ Weeks, “Cotton Mather and The Quakers,” p. 28.

²⁴ Christian Lodowick, *A Letter from the most ingenious Christian Lodowick* (Rhode Island, 1692), pp. 2-3.

²⁵ Thomas Chalkley, “A Letter to Cotton Mather in New England,” in *A Collection of the Works of Thomas Chalkley* (Philadelphia, 1790), p. 565; Weeks, “Cotton Mather And The Quakers,” p. 29.

elsewhere — this was no minor thing. He preached sermons and wrote tracts on ecumenicism both as an edifying service to his flock and as a clear statement of intent to the New England establishment and his Christian counterparts worldwide. Mather again appeals to the puritan ancestral allegiance to the “Primitive Church” in recasting his commitment to ecumenicism. Quoting Bishop Stillingfleet in Mather’s *Eleutheria* of 1698, Mather says that:

There is nothing the Primitive Church deserves greater Imitation by us in, than that admirable Temper, Moderation, and Condescension, which was used in it towards all the Members of it.²⁶

Elsewhere in the *Eleutheria* he writes that “We are one in Faith, it is no matter if we are one in rite.”²⁷ In painting ecumenicism as a primitive doctrine he is appearing less radical in his attempt to revive it by providing a historical precedent within the Christian tradition.

As we trace the ecumenical changes of Mather from his early career until his death we find the excited development of an existing interest. What started as an intuition became a clear ministerial dedication. To extend the reach of his own works on piety we find him reaching out to the German pietists with great exuberance. To solidify the theological bulwarks against Rome he was willing to graft in the Presbyterians of Scotland in all areas except polity (a reflection of the Cambridge Platform of 1648 which was a statement of church government in the Congregational churches of New England at that time). To provide protection against physical attacks

²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 93.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 105.

from French, Spanish and Indian forces he would solidify ties with Anglicans. In order to bear witness to the shared sufferings of persecuted saints he would write on the plights of oppressed Christian communities as far away as the Ottoman Empire in his 1701 work *American Tears upon the Ruines of the Greek Churches*. Mather led the puritan ecumenical movement of his time on many fronts for reasons both personal and ecclesiological. In 1690 Mather taught that all Christians should act in the protection of those being persecuted by the Roman Catholic French and those attacked by the Native Americans. There was no partisanship in this endeavor. He wrote:

However, we must venture hard, and Venture far, yea, and Venture All, to serve the People of God, in their Distress and Danger. If at THIS TIME thou altogether forbear, and refrain, the doing of what may be serviceable to the Distressed [...].²⁸

Ecumenicism and united service in the face of persecution was a Christian venture, a “Venture for the People of God.”²⁹

In deciphering Mather's ecumenical stance there are multiple twists and turns with which to contend. These ideas ebb and flow as he labored to build unity amongst protestant believers in New England and abroad. In addition to puritan theological distinctions, there were philosophical beliefs that assisted Mather in interpreting his understandings of the church, puritans and Christians in society and in God's plan. This would include Mather's interest in the natural philosophy of Ibn Tufail and Robert Boyle which encouraged him to look for the work of the Holy Spirit outside the puritan

²⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

tradition. Mather's growing disdain for both sectarian denominationalism and pride of tradition helped to motivate and inform his changing ideas of ecumenicism.

5.2 Ecumenical Standards

For Mather it was not through subscribing to a myriad of protestant particulars that made a Christian co-laborer. Rather, the standard was to simply love Jesus and commit yourself to him as shown in his stripped-down "maxims," namely the Trinity, the work of Christ and the authority of the Bible. It was ultimately in the love of God as revealed in the scriptures that provided ecumenical momentum to his work, especially as it related to a potential worldwide ministry of unified piety. Where John Calvin would say that tradition is a good guide but a poor master,³⁰ for Mather sola scriptura was both guide and master enough. Larger covenant issues and corporate worship being discussed elsewhere in this thesis, it was the sanctified worth of the individual human temple of God that concerned Mather most. In describing Cotton Mather's life as a churchman, his son Samuel Mather said that "A godly man is a Temple of God; a living temple; dearer to him than any temple of mere matter, though the most splendid and costly in the world."³¹ Mather himself would say:

Tis the Religion that brings in Faithful Subjects and Souldiers for the Lord of Hosts, and builds up Living Tempels for GOD, which are far more precious than any that are but Artificial and Inanimate.³²

³⁰ See Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.10.30.

³¹ Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather* (1729), p. 92.

³² Cotton Mather, *India Christiana*, p. 84.

It was these sorts of temples that he wanted to unite first. Mather assumed that a consensus on secondary issues like church polity would be achieved sometime after they experienced revival and until then Christians should unite in commonly-held convictions for the good of Christ's kingdom.³³

Ecumenical change follows Mather as he becomes more aware of his lessening personal influence as his ministry moved into the eighteenth century.³⁴ While the political and ecclesiological realities of the times such as the loss of the charter and declension among the youth demanded for him to reckon with these occurrences in practical ways, there were regulative theological standards that governed his ecumenicism just as the parameters of the original Congregational covenant were defined and prioritized in ways thought most biblical. Mather moved towards using a common authority — a simple faith as laid out in *Bonifacius* and his *Maxims* — to introduce a more inclusive Christian ethic in Boston he hoped would serve as an example during the loss of Congregational supremacy in Massachusetts.³⁵

We see Mather's theological tendencies — including the idea of God in his providence rapidly working towards covenantal completion — mixing and melding with his personality, ambition and circumstance. It was not that he grew ashamed of being a son of New England. Rather, Mather viewed himself as he viewed New England: capable of so much more than is expected by the outside Christian world. Regarding Mather's new brand of ecumenicism, Silverman explains:

³³ William P. Hyland, "American Tears: Cotton Mather and the Plight of Eastern Orthodox Christians," *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 77 (2004), p. 283.

³⁴ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 194.

³⁵ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 274.

His policy on admission to communion was more liberal than his father's, and he may have been genuinely attracted to ecumenicism and church union but maintained a show of greater orthodoxy than he felt out of respect for his father's ideals. However that may be, he undoubtedly in many ways enjoyed the more various and cosmopolitan world in part created by the new charter. While he deeply respected the Wilderness Zion of his fathers, his yearnings for bigness and fame, his lively sympathy with new fashions and ideas, and his identification with the more aristocratic and urbane sections of society did not relish the sense of living in some isolated city on a hill.³⁶

By participating in the worldwide Christian struggle in this new way he hoped to transcend the Congregational regionalism with which he had become disenchanted. His suppressed urbanity was poised to break through.³⁷ This meant that he could show more of the world what God was doing in New England through his many publications and ecumenical labors.

Mather continued to understand Massachusetts as a city on the hill and an instrument of God to influence those observing it. Mather believed that the covenant God made with the elect who had settled in New England was in part an outward-facing, external covenant designed to bear witness to God's embrace of all elect Christian people destined for future glory.³⁸ Middlekauff writes:

In thinking about New England's purposes, Cotton Mather did not prove to be a conservative, yearning only for the good old days of unchallenged Congregationalism. He recognized that the political circumstances created by the revolutionary settlement voided the policy of intolerance by his father, which following the lead of the founders, espoused. In time, as he came to believe that the unity in the essentials of religion did not lie

³⁶ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 145.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 165.

³⁸ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 212.

in the forms of church organization, he exploited the toleration that the Crown had forced on his country in 1691 to work out a fresh understanding of the meaning of New England.³⁹

This reflected the reformed tendency to see every event in history as a sovereign God providentially communicating parts of his plan to the saints on earth. Such feelings were amplified in New England where their sense of calling was intrinsic to their covenantal identity. Cotton Mather saw fit to extend this calling by enlarging both the scope of the visible covenant and the mission of the puritan in the world.

For Mather, ecumenicism would be turned from a prickly challenge to bold assumption of the work of God in the wilderness. However, traction would not always be easy. Mather would not ease up on puritan theological convictions even when it placed them in politically vulnerable situations such as their refusal to take oaths in the Anglican fashion which kept them off of juries where puritans were sitting as defendants. The burgeoning ecumenicism that Mather helped to usher in did not erode this fervor and dedication. This ecumenicism was not a selling out but a branching out based on a theological belief that the church was by definition a worldwide institution, even while Massachusetts was uniquely situated by God to be the crown jewel in America. Mather's new brand of ecumenicism was based on a simple love of Christ as laid out in his maxims and nothing else. As Mather would require nothing additional from his Christian co-workers, likewise he would not ultimately give up any puritan distinctives of his own to others in this ecumenical mission.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 213.

5.3 Ecumenicism as Necessity

The Glorious Revolution provided an assurance that the immediate threat of Roman Catholic rule had been defeated, and this emboldened Mather towards an untrammelled ecumenicism amongst protestants in America. With the pressure off, the Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Anglicans were free to mutually enjoy the victory that the Lord (through King William) had secured for them. With King William's Toleration Act of 1689 their reason for running the errand into the wilderness was removed and essentially made New England puritanism unnecessary as freedom of worship was enshrined by law.⁴⁰ Becoming unnecessary or irrelevant was something Mather would not abide, and his using the Toleration Act as one of his jumping in points tells us something about his motivations. The Glorious Revolution was not the coming of Christ's kingdom on earth, but it was the triumphing over Roman Catholics that represented a step towards the eschaton. The time for spending precious energies on internecine disputes and insisting on puritan particulars for all in New England was over and the time for laying hands on the final hope for the cause of worldwide Christendom had arrived:

I conclude, That whatever some particular Persons may be guilty of, there is no real Difference between the Presbyterians and Independents, in the Point of Church-Covenant — GOD forbid [...].⁴¹

Additionally, cooperation among the dissenting denominations was expedient at a time when the English Parliament enacted freedom of worship in the Act of Toleration as a

⁴⁰ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 140.

⁴¹ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 13.

means to garner support for William and Mary after their accession to the throne. Mather's efforts to unite American Congregationalists with their Presbyterian and independent counterparts was done at an opportune time to show New England's loyalty to the Crown.⁴²

Foundational to ecumenicism are the identity markers of the component groups. Long before the ministry of Cotton Mather, puritans considered themselves Englishmen separated unto the gospel. They viewed themselves as an English tribe sent to tame the American wilderness for the cause of Christ in a second dominion mandate as romantically encapsulated in the jeremiads of the time. This unique collection of Christian people were insular in that there were specific ties binding members to each other as participants in the covenant, and that admission to the full covenant took effort and permission. The concept of covenant would remain fundamental to the fabric of the puritan church even after the restoration of the charter. The puritan also faced outward in seeking to engage with other protestant Christians in New England and beyond. Some of these unions such as the United Brethren that Mather embraced after its founding by his father had the happy by-product of a strengthened buttress against the Church of England.⁴³

Though Mather would never prioritize it in such a way (he considered claims of apostolic authority "popish superstition" and the "vanity of tradition" a Roman Catholic obsession), he did consider the warrant of the puritan churches to be at least as valid as that of the Episcopal Church. Mather saw the New England puritans as Englishmen

⁴² Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," pp. 41-42.

⁴³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 217.

with the natural rights endowed to them as a birthright including the right to be a part of the visible English church participating in the Christian witness of the age. What the puritans demanded in theological and liturgical purity by way of a scripturally-informed clear conscience they would use to engage with other Christian faiths in different ways. Indeed, Mather believed that puritans enjoyed the twofold identity of being both Englishmen and New Englanders, which came with additional privileges based on their uniquely situated position on “Puritan soil.”⁴⁴ In this way the Act of Toleration and other machinations of London did not erode the rights of the puritan congregations. Mather used the position of the puritan church under the act as an enshrined and recognizable position from which to direct the work of the puritan church in America.

Mather assured English nonconformists that the puritans were part of the true Church of England. He would even double-down by making such loud statements as preaching to his fellow puritans that “you are the true sons of the truest church of England.”⁴⁵ He believed that through the Toleration Act they had become “legal Parts” of it and that they need pay no attention, therefore, to “that Faction, whose Religion lyes in Sainiting their Martry Charles I.”⁴⁶ In the Episcopal Church Mather saw potential Christian co-laborers but no apostolic authority or divine right of governance. Mather and other puritans, even generations after the original splits of the separatists and

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 221.

⁴⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Letter of Advice to the Churches of the Non-conformists in the English Nation* (1700); Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 264.

nonconformists, would retain their anti-Episcopalian bias even as they boldly claimed their rights as Englishmen.⁴⁷

It is from the perceived position of an assumed legitimacy of New England Congregationalism that Mather proceeded with a vigorous ministry of ecumenicism. This included the work of raising awareness and sharing in the pains of the persecuted saints around the world.⁴⁸ Mather saw standing against the persecution of the visible protestant and Orthodox saints worldwide as being the business of New England. To Mather, sharing in their sufferings was an interactive part of New England being involved in a worldwide Christendom working towards the ultimate ends appointed in scripture. As Mather had only just within recent history publicly renounced the past persecution of other Christian groups in Massachusetts by the puritans, he was exceptionally motivated to stand against religious persecution as a way of signaling his ecumenical bonafides.

Mather was so opposed to this former New England practice of persecuting other protestant groups that he would even criticize the early support of his father.⁴⁹ Mather discusses his father “Mr. Mather” on the issue in his 1723 work *Parentator*. On the former intolerance of New England and his father’s place in it he says:

A Perfect Reverse hereof, the Second Thoughts of Mr. Mather. New-England being a Country Planted by a People, whose Design it was to maintain, The Faith and Order of the Gospel, in Evangelical Churches, and therewithal transmit the same with all possible Purity down to their Posterity; And their Common Wealth being look'd upon, as an Institution

⁴⁷ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁸ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 216.

of GOD for the Preservation of their Churches, and the Civil Rulers look'd upon as both Members and Fathers of them; there were Laws made which inflicted Punishments on the Broachers of Pernicious Errors, and on such as made Invasions and Infractions upon the Ecclesiastical Constitution, which was esteemed the grand Glory & Interest of the Country. The Zeal of the Good Men mightily urged for the Civil Magistrates using his Power, in Coercive Ways, to restrain all Attempts of Evil minded Men to Introduce any Apostasies or Deviations from the Religion, which was the Professed End of the Plantation. Toleration was decried, as a Trojan Horse profanely and perilously brought into the City of GOD. Plausible Outcries were made about, Antichrist coming in at the Backdoor of Toleration. It was a Maxim often Cited (but by none more, than them whose Resolution it was, to Tolerate next to nothing,) To Tolerate all things and Tolerate nothing, are both alike Intolerable. Now, though Mr. Mather never went unto the Extremity that some carried the matter to, but greatly Disliked the Bitter Spirit he saw in some that carried all before them; and little Approved some Unadvised and Sanguinary Things that were done by them who did all; particularly, the Rash Things done unto the Quakers, And indeed, it is a Thousand pitties, that the Unhappy Laws made in the Colony in those Days, ever should stand upon Record any where, when Some of them were never Executed, and All of them, were Disclaimed, and Renounced, and Repeated more than Thirty Years ago!⁵⁰

For Mather to address such a controversial subject on the occasion of his father's death speaks to how important this issue was for him especially during this latter part of his life. Though he railed against the Quakers at certain points in his ministry, Mather appreciated certain strands of Quakerism which he called "the finer sort"⁵¹ that he felt only deviated from the orthodox Christian faith in acceptable ways. In 1716 Cotton Mather boasted that Boston's Congregational churches lived "in all decent agreement" with Anglicans and Quakers.⁵² In *Vital Christianity* during the late era of

⁵⁰ Cotton Mather, *Parentator*, pp. 57-58.

⁵¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 7, pp. 3-4 and II; Weeks, "Cotton Mather And The Quakers," p. 28.

⁵² Cotton Mather to Henry Walrond, 31 October, 1716, in *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather*, ed. Kenneth Silverman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 221.

1726, Mather goes so far as to include the Quakers in the dedication of the book to those who:

[...] desire to worship God in the Spirit [...] more particularly to our beloved Friends, who desire that a Christ within may have due Regard.⁵³

The Quakers can serve as a useful barometer of the tolerance that Mather was prepared to share to fringe protestant groups at this time. His change in attitude towards them helps to show that Mather had come far in his ecumenical understandings and practices by the end of his life and ministry.

In addition to doctrinal standards there was also an uncomplicated visible lived-theology and public piety requirement that Mather would use to assess potential brethren organizations. It was not dissimilar to the way that outward lives of puritan individuals were judged in relation to professions of faith that they gave. It was through a cursory appraisal of the character of other traditions using the standard of “probable” salvation that Mather used as litmus test of other protestant groups. In the *Magnalia* he wrote that in an effort to avoid the former “Unhappy narrowness of soul” New Englanders should:

[...] dare make no Difference between a Presbyterian, a Congregational, And an Anti-PaedoBaptist, where their Visible Piety, makes it probable, that the Lord Jesus Christ has received them.⁵⁴

⁵³ Cotton Mather, *Vital Christianity* (1741) p. 3; Weeks, “Cotton Mather And The Quakers,” pp. 28-29.

⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia* vol. 3, p. 12 and introduction; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 161.

Piety is Mather's measuring stick for probable salvation. He sought to transcend all factions and denominational limitations by committing his ecumenical ministry to only the essential Christian ethic expressed in three rules set out in his work *Maxims of Piety*. These maxims also appear in his *Manuductio ad Ministerium* of 1726. Mather's goal is ecumenical renewal towards personal and corporate piety in an effort to usher in the final kingdom of God as a result of the reformation coming to a state of full completion. We see this in the *Maxims of Piety* which Reiner Smolinski says is:

[...] his chiliastic credo that leads him to champion Pietist ecumenism, his effort to unite all Christian denominations in New England, nay all Christians, Jews, and Moslems in the Orient and Occident, under the umbrella of his "3 Maxims of Piety" to hasten the Second Coming of Christ.⁵⁵

As Kenneth Silverman put it, after the dissolution of the United Brethren, Mather's enthusiasm was "[...] revived as an articulated vision of pan-Christian union that would disregard variations of polity worship and rest on a few distilled Gospel principles of vital piety."⁵⁶ Mather believed that this ecumenical book was one of the most important things that he had ever composed, and, though only thirteen pages long, that it might have an impact similar to Martin Luther's shorter tracts at the start of the reformation.⁵⁷ Mather distilled the principles of "Universal Religion" into belief in the

⁵⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, introduction by ed. Reiner Smolinski, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 299.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Trinity, utter reliance on Christ for salvation and love of neighbor out of respect for Christ. Other matters were considered “Lower and lesser points of religion.”⁵⁸

Later in his 1712 work *The Young Man Spoken to*, Mather elaborates on the compassion of God that allows him to graft in the worship of Christian traditions based on their sincerity rather than strict biblical accuracy. He teaches:

It is true; Such is the Compassion of GOD, that He has had Respect unto the Sincere Designs of some Good Men, when they used Indirect Wayes and Means for Communion with Him. He has regarded their Sincerity, and overlook'd their Superstition, and Visited their Souls, in the use of Liturgies, and of Holidays, which yet He has not approved. But men have no ground for any such Expectation, That God should Own them, when they go to put upon Him their own Wayes and Means of Communion with Him; That God should Own and Bless Humane Inventions; That God should come to us in the Modes wherewith we go to Prescribe unto the Holy One of Israel. The Second Commandment binds us up, to such Ways and Means of Communion with Him, as He Himself hath appointed.⁵⁹

This represented a dynamic shift away from puritan exclusivity in worship and liturgy previously sought in puritan New England. In such activity from Mather there is a puritan-flavored version of the well-known plea of Marco Antonio de Dominis “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.” As Mather’s view of who would be the faithful workers in the last days evolved, so did his view of the meaning of New England in the promised redemption for the saints scattered far and wide.⁶⁰ The farther away the Christian party in question was, the more relaxed he seemed to be regarding their standards. He would go so far as to include the Eastern

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 300.

⁵⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Young Man Spoken To*, p. 34-35.

⁶⁰ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 216.

Orthodox church into his ecumenical considerations, appearing to be the first American theologian to do so.⁶¹

In his work *American Tears Upon the Ruins of the Greek Churches*, Mather would fly to the side of the Greek Orthodox Church in defending them against the persecutions of their oppressors. Mather believed that prayers from the American wilderness would help to lead the Greek churches out of their own darkness as both Christian communities would then be brought closer to the coming age of Christ.⁶² Regarding protestant Christians worshiping in Roman Catholic countries, Mather felt that prayer was owed from those Christians currently outside the grip of Rome. Mather stated that in 1726 that prayer was the “MARK and WORK of all Sincere CHRISTIANS that are not actually under the Rome.”⁶³

Mather attempted to unite Congregationalists and Presbyterians in what Reiner Smolinski calls Mather’s “irenecist endeavor” under the umbrella of the United Brethren.⁶⁴ In 1691 Mather took the step of giving up the name of “Congregationalist” as part of implementing the Heads of Agreement document which was focused on theological unity between themselves and the Presbyterians in England and America. Mather was attempting to show his earnest desire to achieve the ecumenical goals in New England that he had been preaching by setting aside incentives such as

⁶¹ Ernst Benz, “Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism: Cotton Mather and August Hermann Francke,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 54 (1961), p. 175.

⁶² Cotton Mather, *American Tears on the Ruines of the Greek Churches* (1701), p. 41; Hyland, “American Tears,” p. 282.

⁶³ Cotton Mather, *Suspiria Victorum*, p. 1-3, 12-15, 20-21; Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst’: World News, Anti-Catholicism, and International Protestantism in Early Eighteenth Century Boston,” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 76 (2003), p. 286.

⁶⁴ Smolinski, “Seeing Things Their Way,” p. 21.

denominational recognition. In this era Mather desired to be categorized “in that more Christian name of United Brethren” and called the distinction between Presbyterians and Congregationalists as “needless.”⁶⁵ In 1700 Mather introduced a distinctive ecumenical awareness into the theological debate amongst the United Brethren that amounts to a plea for tolerance. He says that:

[...] no Animosities are so fierce and strong as those that are produced by Differences in Religion; Thundrings and Lightnings, and Earthquakes arise with most of Tempest, from the Fire of the Altar; because, in Controversies, of Divinity men are easily perswaded that they are Engaged in the cause of the Deity, wherein 'tis a Good-Thing for a man to be zealously affected But we in these Ends of the Earth have been taught by an experience more than Fifty Years Old, That the Minds of men are never more prone unto unjustifiable Alienations, than when their Differences in Religion turn upon the point of, A Sinners Justification before God: Strange! Nothing raises more sinful Variance, and Prejudice, in men, towards one another, than their Opinions about the Doctrines of a Sinners Reconciliation unto God; and the Controversies, about the Methods of our coming to a Peace with Heaven, cause most of Strife upon Earth.⁶⁶

Mather goes so far as to say that religious discord is the “cause most of Strife upon Earth” and is committed to unity with those cobelligerents he calls “confederate Reformers”⁶⁷ in the broader international Christian struggle, those who “Contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered unto the Saints, in this Great matter...”⁶⁸ Even when discussing such core issues of the protestant faith such as the nature of

⁶⁵ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 140.

⁶⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, dedication.

⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel*, introduction.

justification, we find Mather pleading for unity and peace. Again in *The Everlasting Gospel* of 1700 he exhorts:

My Reverend Fathers and Brethren, to Sollicit your Second Thoughts upon your Controversies, and your laying aside all Strife but that of Love, May the Souls of your American Brethren, that ardently Pray and Long for it, be Refreshed, with the Melody of your Concord; and may all the Symptoms of Displeasure in you against one another, be forever so extinguished, that there may therein be no Tokens of Heavens being Displeased at both. May there be so little of any varring like that between Chrysostom and Epiphanius, or like that between Peter and Meletius, among any of you, that no man may Set at nought his Brother, but all may follow after the Things that make for Peace, and add unto their Godliness, Brotherly-kindness. May you, Walk together in those Greater Things, wherein you are all Agreed, and in the Lesser ones, wherein you are not so, yet Value one another, as we afar off do all of you, and not count the Vertues and the Talents of the most Worthy men, to be Little worth, Except they violently Espouse a Party. Amen; My most Honoured; and, May the God of Love and Peace hereunto say, Amen. The God of Patience and Comfort, grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus.⁶⁹

Mather is seen here pleading for unity and understanding even when discussing issues of such crucial theological importance as the role of faith in the justification of sinners. Such ecumenical moves served to make the New England puritans appear less schismatic and radical to the new king and queen in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, as it was essential that the puritans receive a new treaty and maintain a positive relationship with the Crown. In 1695 Mather writes:

If any Faction of men, will Require the Assent and Consent of other men, to a vast Number of Disputable, and Uninstituted Things, and, it may be, a Mathematical Falshood, among the first of them, and utterly Renounce all Christian Communion with all that shall not give that Assent and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Consent, We Look upon those to be SEPARATISTS; We dare not be so Narrow Spirited.⁷⁰

This is not to say that his ecumenicism — even at this time — was strictly a pragmatic move. Later in *Eleutheria* Mather favorably cites William Fulke as saying that:

A mutual agreement in bearing with one another's Differences in the Nonfundamentals of Religion, is really a greater Ornament, than the most exact Uniformity imaginable.⁷¹

Mather is quoting Fulke to say that it is better to manifest the Christian faith outwardly when cooperating ecumenically than it is to rigidly hold to denominational particulars looking inward.

5.4 Ecumenical Taxonomy

However, it was this necessity for charity that Mather would occasionally struggle with in regards to his belief of which groups were deserving of such consideration as brethren. With acceptance and toleration came vigilance and skepticism, particularly of high church Anglicans. Mather never let his guard down on this issue when broadening New England Christianity, lest the growing Anglican presence in Massachusetts be an attempt to convert Congregationalists rather than Indians to the gospel.⁷² In the spirit of Mather's habit of categorization and typology, it can be said that there were categories of Christians as far as Mather was concerned:

⁷⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Life of Mr. John Cotton*, pp. 19-21; Smith, "Politics and Sainthood," p. 189.

⁷¹ William Fulke, *A Defense of the Sincere and True Translations of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue* (London, 1583); Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 62.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 242.

brethren (puritans, Presbyterians, Baptists, low church Anglicans), colleagues (Quakers, other protestant sects that held to the theological essentials of the Christian faith), international contacts (Scottish Presbyterians, Orthodox, Lutherans and English sympathizers) and foes (Roman Catholics, high church Church of England, overtly liberal Christian sects in New England and Muslims). These groups would from time to time get reshuffled in his taxonomy with the Jewish people receiving various treatments that changed along with his eschatology during his life.

Mather shows nuance in his ecumenicism by softening towards certain ministers and giving his blessing to certain congregations while sometimes keeping his inclusiveness in abeyance due to local internecine conflicts. On the issue of being ordained, George Burroughs — no friend to Mather — was not an ordained minister which Mather used as a slight and even appears in discussions of Burroughs' impending execution for witchcraft in 1692. Elsewhere Mather did not think so highly of ordination, perhaps in response to new Anglican ordinations that were becoming more commonplace for heterodox former Congregational candidates for ministry.⁷³ We find that Mather is in a sense more scrupulous in examining the bonafides of local and regional ministers than groups abroad as can be seen, for example, in his ecumenical limitations regarding Reverends Peter Thatcher⁷⁴ and Timothy Cutler. There are more complexities in play in the ecumenical attitudes regarding international movements versus local factions such as the Brattle Street congregation, as some of Mather's

⁷³ Congregational candidates for ministry receiving ordination as Anglican priests was a concern for Mather and other puritan leaders who saw this as a distinct declension within the pulpit ministry of New England.

⁷⁴ Pastor of the Brattle Street Church in Boston. Mather considered him to not be grounded in puritan theology enough to bear the name Congregational.

ecumenical turns were gracious and enthusiastic while others were born from necessity. Mather was personally more charitable in reaching out to support foreign churches than he was in supporting the desires of local churches to grow and split. When the Boston's New North Church was formed in 1712 by breaking away from Mather's own congregation, he wrote in his diary that these were "Uncivil, Uncourteous, Unthankful, Unhelpful, Disobliging People."⁷⁵

Mather eventually accepted the implications of inter-denominationalism in Boston (including local one-time rivals) and his once-conflicted approach now flowered into a full-fledged sympathy.⁷⁶ The founding of the Brattle Street Church at the end of the seventeenth century represented a line of cooperation that Mather was reluctant to cross because of the bad blood that had settled in over time due to Brattle Street's perceived liberalism and affinity towards the Church of England. Mather's ecumenicism close to home around this time can be seen in part as a tactical maneuver against Solomon Stoddard and Brattle Street.⁷⁷ By keeping these protestant groups close he might have been able to exert influence against what he believed was a dangerous theology that they represented. At this point the Congregationalists promised continued fidelity to the Crown in spite of the influx of new denominations as

⁷⁵ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 3, p. 44, 32; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 225

⁷⁶ Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 35.

⁷⁷ Williston Walker, "The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development," pp. 78-79.

long as it did not contradict their reasons for colonizing Massachusetts in the first place.⁷⁸

Mather would attempt to keep his finger on the pulse of local churches by offering his advice even (or perhaps especially) when it was not asked for. In his *A Warning To The Flocks* delivered as a lecture in 1700 he criticized the churches in Boston for not vetting their ministerial candidates strongly enough as scandal had erupted when an impostor had recently taken office. He admits that wolves in sheep's clothing had tricked the Congregationalists in the past as well. Regarding who should be admitted to preach in New England, Mather wrote that:

We do also Solemnly Advise, all our People, to beware of Running after New Preachers, of whose Endowments and Principles, they have not had a Reasonable Attestation; lest they unawares run themselves into shameful and woful Reflections. The Apostolical Injunctions, To prove all Things, does not invite Unstable people, to Run after all Preachers, (as they too often pervert the sence of it,) but it only directs people to Examine by the Word of God, the Doctrine, which they hear, from those that in an orderly way are to be heard as their Teachers [...] And the Glorious Ordinances of God will be likely to fall into a loathsome Contempt among the people, if Contemptible Fellows can Easily prostitute them unto their pernicious purposes.⁷⁹

Here we see Mather attempting to exert pastoral, brotherly oversight towards denominations not his own hoping to preserve the veneer of an organized Christian environment in and around Massachusetts during this time of flux. Later in 1717 we see Mather's desire to have Scottish Presbyterian ministers sent to "the plantations

⁷⁸ Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer*, p. 71.

⁷⁹ Cotton Mather, *A Warning To The Flocks* (1700), pp. 6-7.

south-ward of us” to minister to the Scotch-Irish immigrant population found there.⁸⁰ Mather had an impulse to be involved with other Christian groups which sprang from a heart eager for gospel promulgation but also the compulsion to do good (these were acts of piety, as he saw it) in exerting his influence in 1700 and what was left of his influence in 1717. Mather might have seen something of the puritan experience in the Scotch-Irish story playing out in the southern plantations of America, and as such desired them to be ministered to and ruled over by their own people in their own protestant tradition. In 1711 he had copies of his work *The Old Pathes Restored* sent to the southern Presbyterian church in South Carolina in order to encourage their ministry there.⁸¹

Mather would at times attempt a liturgical interface with other traditions in New England and took it as a teaching opportunity to his own congregation and readers. He would preach at ordination services for Baptists such as Thomas Callender and contribute his time and talents to maintaining the visible presence of the Congregationalists (with him at the head) on the landscape of a changing New England. His view of Christ in the sacraments and his rigid commitment to doctrinal standards did not prevent inter-denominational public worship or communion with groups he considered pious and committed. Mather took great joy in saying that:

[...] we have with delight seen godly Congregationalists and Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, and Antipaedobaptists, all members in the same

⁸⁰ Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly: The Reformation of Manners in Orthodox New England, 1679-1749* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), p. 151.

⁸¹ Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), p. 87, note 39.

churches; and sitting together without offense about their Lesser Differences, as the same Holy Table.⁸²

These ecumenical actions were not without difficulty or strife especially when reformed orthodoxy appeared to be a casualty of the new way of tolerance. An example of this is his response to the Salter's Hall meeting in London in 1719 which was convened to address accusations of Arianism spreading within Reformed ranks. When Mather heard the report that the attendees could not agree with the Westminster Standards in defining Christ as equal with God the Father, he was astounded and wrote furiously against this doctrinal schism. For Mather there was a very clear difference between toleration of people who worshipped the same God differently and those who accepted heresy. Unity in this case requires not only an acquiescence to the truths of piety but to theological commitments also, in this case a repudiation of Arianism.⁸³

In the same way that Mather praised Governor Samuel Shute for showing no "Partiality for Little Parties in Religion,"⁸⁴ he sought not to distance himself completely from the legacy of Congregationalism but rather to show himself as more cosmopolitan version of it in the latter part of his ministry. Mather was able to both shrewdly and genuinely turn his waning personal influence into an opportunity to consolidate an amplified voice situated around the principles he held most dear. There is nothing to show that Mather was ever meaningfully theologically cross-pollinated by the groups

⁸² Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, p. 4.

⁸³ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, pp. 330-331.

⁸⁴ Cotton Mather, *A Speech Made unto His Excellency, Samuel Shute, Esq.* (1717) p. 2; Kenneth Silverman, *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather*, p. 244.

that he was ecumenically engaging with. It is true that he would voluntarily adjust some of his positions as part of the softening process required to adapt to the broader Christian vision he was attempting to usher in. One example of this ecumenical softening was in his approach to Christmas. Where in previous days he would have taken the old-school, puritan approach of condemning its observance, in 1712 Mather would preach that:

Good Men may love one another, and may treat one another with a most Candid Charity, while he that Regardeth a Day, Regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that Regardeth not the Day, also shows his Regard unto the Lord, in his not Regarding of it [...] ⁸⁵

It was these new turns toward unity in the essentials visibly displayed in his ministry that would help to give him credibility in his role as an ecumenist. In discussing such matters as Christmas, Mather was taking this ecumenical calling seriously. As Richard Lovelace notes, “There is no area in which Mather approached greatness so nearly – and offered so assuredly a lead toward the future – as in his ecumenism.”⁸⁶

5.5 International Ecumenicism

Mather considered himself not only a New Englander or an Englishman but also a citizen of the world. Mather would adopt the mantle of what Richard Lovelace called the “spiritual statesman” of New England as he sought to make his ideas of unity attractive to people not necessarily poised to receive them.⁸⁷ As an example of

⁸⁵ Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Knopf, 1996), p. 26; Doug Ward, “Cotton Mather’s Dilemma: Christmas in Puritan New England,” (2015) <<http://www.unity-inchrist.com/history/print/cotton.htm>> [accessed 5 December 2018].

⁸⁶ Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, p. 251.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 276.

Mather's eagerness and dedication to pan-Christian ecumenicism, a look at his interactions with the German pietist August Hermann Francke from 1709 to 1724 is particularly illustrative. Here we find a previously unseen ecumenical enthusiasm in what has been called one of the most happy and valued experiences in his entire life.⁸⁸ Mather would take advantage of a unique set of historical circumstances in order to find a bridge to connect with Francke. At this time the Prince Consort of Queen Anne was the Lutheran Prince George of Denmark. George was given the German pietist Anton Wilhelm Boehm as Lutheran court preacher who would later become the center of the ecumenical movement in London.⁸⁹ It was Boehm who would handle translation and correspondence for Francke back in Germany including the Mather letters.

Mather's reaching out to Francke could be considered "the earliest expression of sustained interest, on the part of Americans, in German affairs."⁹⁰ Mather was extremely impressed with the mission of Francke, including his orphanage in the East Indies and his encouragement of Christian charity within lower Saxony and worldwide. Mather's overtures towards Francke, which included laudatory letters and gifts of money for his charity work, were well-received by Francke, as shown in one of his replies to Mather in 1714:

The Consequence whereof will be, that at so vast a Distance of Places, our Hearts will be, nevertheless, more and more united into one; till we

⁸⁸ Kuno Francke, "The Beginning of Cotton Mather's Correspondence with August Hermann Francke," *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 5 (1926), p. 193.

⁸⁹ Ernst Benz, "Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism," p.160.

⁹⁰ Kuno Francke, "Cotton Mather and August Hermann Francke," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, vol. 5 (1897), p. 58.

shall see one another in these celestial Mansions, Which, that God would grant us, for the Sake of our common Saviour, JESUS CHRIST [...]⁹¹

Mather appears to see in Francke what he hopes might be found in his own ecumenical mission of piety back in New England. In the way that Mather in the *Magnalia* would esteem the saints of New England's past, Mather here gives Francke a similar treatment as a living Christian visionary worthy of emulation:

Dr. Franckius is a Person truly Wonderful for his vast Erudition; but much more so for his most shining Piety ; and yet more so for his most peerless Industry; and most of all so, for the Astonishing Blessing of God upon his Undertakings to advance His Kingdom in the World [...] Of this Great Man, who yet lies for ever in the Lowest Humility, and will know nothing but Self-abasements, a Gentleman writes me this brief and just Account : 'Professor Franck is the Wonder of Europe for the vast Projects he has laid for Religion and Learning, and his Success in Executing of them. Whoever considers what he has done in the Compass of about Thirty Years past, would compute it to be the Labour of One hundred and Fifty Years, under a Succession of as able Men as himself. He has such an art in recommending his Great Designs, that there is scarce a Protestant Prince in Europe that is not, as it were Tributary to him; and some even of the Romish Princes have been allured by his Charitable Charms.⁹²

In expressing his enthusiastic admiration for Francke, Mather would continue to attempt to create a pietistic space of his own within which to minister. As Mather previously identified with the New England saints of the past, he would now seek to share an identity and affinity with a man he felt was helping to presently usher in an age of pietistic ecumenicism. Mather portrayed the ecumenical ambitions and pietical implications as being the same for both men. This would make Mather's labors such

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 60.

⁹² Cotton Mather, undated letter to Anton Wilhelm Boehme, at Ibid, p. 61.

as Christian societies and the publication of *Maxims of Piety* more credible and palatable during this time of ecumenical change.

Mather would work hard in pursuing a connection with Francke, lavishing praise on his pietistic treatise *Pietas Hallensis* while sending him a copy of the *Magnalia* in an act of self-promotion which was not unusual for Mather. Mather writes:

Reverend Sr. Your Letters, dated about Ten Weeks ago, accompanied with our dear Ziegenbalg's and a most obliging present of Books, have arrived unto me, and are as cool waters to a Thirsty soul [...] I rejoice to find the Magnalia Christi Americana fallen into your hands ; And I verily believe, ye American puritanism to be so much of a piece with ye Frederician pietism, that if it were possible for ye Book to be transferred unto our Friends in ye Lower Saxony, it would be [...] a little serviceable to their glorious Intentions.⁹³

Mather turned the role of spiritual statesman into that of spiritual entrepreneur, a skill that he learned from studying Francke.⁹⁴ Mather saw German pietism as a school of holiness and service that had proven itself to be a viable movement. Mather appears to enmesh their causes in an attempt to identify as co-laborers in this new pietism thus lending further credibility to Mather's new self-styled role of Boston's chief ecumenicist. Mather was convinced that the ecumenical spirit shared between himself and the German pietists would help to bridge the divisions within protestantism, saying "I verily believe the American Puritanism to be of a piece with Frederician Pietism."⁹⁵ Mather

⁹³ Ibid, p. 63.

⁹⁴ Silverman, *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather*, pp. 231-232; Wolfgang Splitter, "The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather's Correspondence with German Pietist August Herman Francke," *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 83 (2010), p. 102.

⁹⁵ Cotton Mather, letter to Anton Wilhelm Boehme, in Silverman, *Cotton Mather's Foreign Correspondence*, p. 172.

meant that his own message of American pietism in time might become a global ecumenical protestant movement like that of Francke.

There is no reason to doubt Mather's sincerity in pursuing ecumenicism with Francke and the German pietists. However, in understanding Mather's frame of mind in relation to the events swirling around him in Boston at this time, including the split that had formed the New North Church and recent hits that his influence had taken, Mather obviously enjoyed being at what he thought was the center of something transatlantic and relevant. He enjoyed corresponding with someone so esteemed as Francke at the same time that he was feeling distanced from many of the New England elite.

He saw in the pietists' mission a new potential international outlet to apply the *Maxims of Piety* and pietical works such as his *Malachi* at a time in New England when congregations were splitting, Anglicans were gaining prominence and the saints of *Magnalia* were beginning to feel more distant than ever before. Mather was interested in having Francke understand that American puritanism and German pietism were congruous and could strengthen the good works of Christ across the world.⁹⁶ Mather would further discuss the issue of protestant denominations by using the imagery of bees within beehives interacting with each other.⁹⁷ He said that an observer from the outside would not understand why bees that look so alike and seem to be about the same mission would fight in such a manner. The reason is that they smell different

⁹⁶ Benz, "Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism," p. 167.

⁹⁷ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), p. 296; Ibid.

though they are not actually different.⁹⁸ Mather was pushing for a common “scent” to share amongst all of the Christian bees, an image not without theological connotations as the bees produce sweetness, work and labor for the good of the royal bee on the throne for the benefit of the hive as a whole.

Even going beyond lending understanding to inter-Christian acrimony, Ernst Benz makes the point that Mather’s embracing and utilizing German pietism helped to create a theological environment that would energize the protestant missionary movement for years to come.⁹⁹ Inherent to Mather’s theology of missions was the concept of ecumenical openness. When making converts of the Native Americans it was not important that they become Congregationalists, only that they become Christians.¹⁰⁰ Mather makes this clear when discussing conversion in *India Christiana*:

The Work is Glorious: But a Principal Glory of it, has been the Purity of the CHRISTIANITY, which has been brought unto these Indians, in our Attempts to Christianize them. The RELIGION wherein they have been instructed, has not been the Religion of a Party; but the Pure Religion and Undeiled, which is evidently contained in the Sacred Scriptures. The Main Things, which the instructions given to them have insisted on, have not been, either the Things which Good Men may be and have been Divided in, or the Observations wherein the Wickedest Men may act their Part as fairly as the Holiest, and with which the Kingdom of God cometh.¹⁰¹

The further fruits of Mather’s ecumenical interests in the correspondence with Francke would be letters to other individuals such as his letter to Francke’s pupil Bartholomew

⁹⁸ Benz, “Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism,” p. 174.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 180.

¹⁰¹ Mather, *India Christiana*, p. 87.

Ziegenbalg, considered by Benz to be the first work of American ecumenical theology.¹⁰² In this letter Mather speaks to what matters most in the mission of pan-Christian ecumenicism:

And in the First Place, this is the very First born of my Wishes; nor is there any thing that I more wish, or have more Earnest desires for, than this: That all the Servants of GOD, who Do and Endure many Things for the Evangelizing of the World may Exhibit unto the whole World the Pure Maxims of the Everlasting Gospel, and would Preach unto the Nations, the Weightier Matters of the Gospel, and the Wheat well cleansed from the Chaff, and from those Lesser Matters, whereabout Good Men, may and often do, carry on their Disputations.¹⁰³

Mather would continue until the end of his life to be excited by the idea of a global protestant Christianity guided by the straightforward schema of his maxims, even as his influence in Boston would continue to lessen. Mather equated ecumenicism to an extension of the original New England Christian mandate and even that of the reformation itself. Mather did not see cooperation with Francke as a compromise or blending of traditions; rather Mather saw it as an overseas extension of the same spiritual mission in which he had already been laboring. Mather was overjoyed when he discovered Francke's ministry because he had been under the impression that the puritans were the only Christian community moving the reformation forward after the time of Luther.¹⁰⁴ Finding an ally of pure religion in Francke has been described as

¹⁰² Benz, "Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism," p. 179.

¹⁰³ Mather, *India Christiana*, p. 87; Benz, "Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism," p. 185.

¹⁰⁴ Brijraj Singh, "'One Soul, tho' not one Soyl'?: International Protestantism and Ecumenism at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 31 (2002), p. 68.

something “electric” for Mather.¹⁰⁵ It is hard not to realize that those Mather worked closest with — and of whom he spoke in the most glowing terms — were those groups that he saw the most of himself in.¹⁰⁶ Criticism of the unbalanced nature of the correspondence between Mather and Francke essentially misses the point.¹⁰⁷ Even if much of the correspondence is lopsided in volume and enthusiasm, what is most valuable here is Mather’s energetic admiration for Francke’s pietism and the desire to be a part of this shared ecumenical vision while the intolerances of early New England were not yet a distant memory. For our purposes, Francke’s reception of Mather’s writings is less important than seeing Mather’s ecumenical changes exemplified in their correspondence.

Ecumenicism was often a tricky concept for the puritans to embrace because of the individualist nature of the puritan conversion experience: God predestinating the sinner into a covenantal relationship, that same individual sinner then discussing the marks of conversion and then striving within the local congregation to show themselves approved unto the visible church covenant, and then to make their personal calling and election sure, as in 2 Peter 1:10-11.¹⁰⁸ Mather was attempting to introduce ecumenicism as one of the final concentric circles of a complete theology by believing that the elect could and would be found in other expressions of Christianity.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 64.

¹⁰⁷ Splitter, “The Fact and Fiction of Cotton Mather’s Correspondence with German Pietist August Herman Francke,” p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ The King James Version reads “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

As importantly, he was introducing a crucial step in eschatology. The rugged individualism of the New England wilderness — that self-sustaining ethic that drove the puritans to take on the errand itself — presented distinct challenges to the psyche of a people who were constantly used to turning inward to evaluate themselves and the events around them. Mather harnessed this pietical tradition and directed it outward in order to graft in co-laborers to move his ecumenical vision forward.

5.6 Ecumenical Community

In 1699 when the Brattle Street congregation published their *Manifesto*, Mather was not impressed. For Mather it was one thing to extend olive branches to other traditions in and around Boston, but to tinker with foundational Congregational doctrine and polity in the name of tolerance was not part of his vision. He made sure that everyone knew his opinion by responding with a lengthy letter stating his position.¹⁰⁹ In instances like this we get a reaffirmation of the theological priorities of Mather: doctrinal purity for the purest of churches closest to home and doctrinal charity for those farther away. Falling victim to a conundrum of ideas-transfusion and cooption, Mather unwittingly enabled an attack on his own legacy in that it was his ecumenical changes that would help fundamentally alter New England Christianity after his death. This reshaping has since been motivated in large part by things other than Mather's own innovative vision for Christian New England. In Mather's preaching for a new toleration and laboring to include others besides the puritans in his mission he unwittingly "conspired in creating what he condemned"¹¹⁰ in helping New England to

¹⁰⁹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, pp. 148-149.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 156.

become what is now considered the most atheistic region of the United States.¹¹¹ It is worth noting that in the United States there are now far more people who identify as witches than Congregationalists and members of other puritan faith traditions combined.¹¹²

This ecumenicism was progressive for its time in its approach to ministry and inclusion. Mather looked for Christ in people first before all other things. Mather believed “That for every man to worship God according to his Conviction, is an Essential Right of Humane Nature.”¹¹³ Naturally, true worship for him can only be defined as protestant Christianity, as is expected within the context, but beyond that we find him never a sectarian. The pastor’s heart in Mather was hesitant to marginalize Christian people who were outside New England Congregationalism. For example, converted Indians (or “Praying Indians”) were considered as valuable as puritans in the eyes of God. While remaining a vociferous critic of Islam overall (he referred to Turkish sultan as “the Grand Segniour of Hell”),¹¹⁴ Mather did not see Islam as devoid of all virtue. Muslim abhorrence of idolatry received his approval and he believed that this was a wrathful indication from God what true Christians must pursue. He preaches:

¹¹¹ See David Lauter, “New England and the Northwest are the least Christian parts of U.S.,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2015 and Percentage Of Atheists In America By State, *World Atlas* <<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/states-with-the-most-atheism-in-america.html>> [accessed 9 October 2019].

¹¹² Benjamin Fearnow, “Number Of Witches Rises Dramatically Across U.S. As Millennials Reject Christianity” (2018) <<https://www.newsweek.com/witchcraft-wiccans-mysticism-astrology-witches-millennials-pagans-religion-1221019>> [accessed 20 October 2020].

¹¹³ Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of God Commemorated*, p. 93.

¹¹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. xiii; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 58.

Sometimes the sovereign God chuses a nation remarkably laudable for some good thing, to punish his own people for want of that thing. Thus, when the Christian churches fell into idolatry, God sent the Mahometans upon them, to torment them with one woe after another horribly; and the Mahometans are very remarkable for this, that they are great haters of idolatry, and where-ever they come, they destroy those “idols and works of men’s hands,” which are adored in the anti-Christian apostacy.¹¹⁵

In the *Magnalia* he favored the publishing of Bibles, catechisms and practical treatises in their native tongues which should be distributed among the Eastern sects of the Christian church that would hopefully influence the entire region. He stated, “Who knows what convulsions might be hastened upon the whole Mahometan world by such an extensive charity!”¹¹⁶ Ecumenicism was a mark of the true Christian even in far flung corners of the world, and to be a city on a hill was to exhibit a commitment towards ecumenicism as a testimony before God and an example for all watching.

Mather’s Christianity was not for men only nor did he esteem men any higher than women in his writings. In fact, women were crucial to Mather’s obsession with completing the reformation, especially through their prayerful piety. As early as 1690 he said:

We find Esther and her Maidens at it. The Devout Women may this way obtain the Favour of the Almighty for us. Melancthon hoped the Reformation would be carried on, Because godly Women would meet and pray for that Mercy. Our preservation may in like manner be promoted, and Serious Children too, may make us all beholden to them.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Cotton Mather, *A Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa* (1698), pp. 4-5; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 53.

¹¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 582; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 56.

¹¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 46

In the same year Mather wrote that “There are far more godly Women in the world, than there are godly Men.”¹¹⁸ There is also a certain morbid and off-kilter element of inclusion in Mather’s believing the women who self-identified as witches and then working energetically to bring them back into the fold of the church during the Salem witch trials. Mather produced a large amount of material designed to graft in inhabitants of New England outside the immediate communion of saints even as societal distinctions in New England remained. We can see the changes in Mather as he stretches the cultural limitations of the time and place in which he lived by looking past potential barriers to communion and Christian covenantal inclusion - whether ethnicity, ancestry, gender or protestant tradition.

The Christ presented by Mather at the end of his ministry is an ecumenical savior and a global messiah. God is working not only in different Christian traditions but also in varied ethnic groups around America and the world. In 1726 Mather writes that Christ is “the promised REDEEMER, in whom it is, that all the Families of the Earth are to be Blessed[...].”¹¹⁹ There are no boundaries or racial limitations on the hope of Christ found here. Mather quotes Revelation 5:9, saying “Thou has Redeemed us to God by thy Blood, out of every Kindred & Language and People & Nation.”¹²⁰ Additionally, the original ethnic Israelites from biblical times are not considered by

¹¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments of the Daughters of Zion* (1692), p. 44; Setran, “Declension Comes Home,” p. 39. See also Richard D. Shiels, “The Feminization of American Congregationalism,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 33 (1981) pp. 46-61.

¹¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 13.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 36

Mather to be God's chosen people anymore since they abandoned the covenant.¹²¹

Instead, for Mather the new Israelites are the redeemed people from all nations.¹²² In the same work he also writes that:

The doctrine of God our SAVIOUR, which I am coming to give you, is This; IN a Glorious CHRIST we have the Blessing for all Nations which our Father Abraham had the Promise of.¹²³

Here his covenant theology, ecumenicism and cosmopolitanism dovetail into the idea that the covenant promise is for all nations and all types of people far and wide.

Mather was not alone in looking beyond New England for meaning and mission. The transition toward international pan-protestantism at this time was led primarily by puritan elites like Mather who had existing transatlantic connections of various kinds.¹²⁴ The emergence of Mather's ecumenicism was a deliberate and sincere choice in light of the events around him being interpreted by what has been called the "riot of mystical emotion" that constantly raged inside him.¹²⁵ This unifying powerful ecumenicism was thought by Mather to be providentially orchestrated by God in the peculiar and remarkable ordering of world events that indicated an ascendant piety and charity "over those men and things that for many ages have been the oppressors over

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 13.

¹²⁵ Wendell, *Cotton Mather*, p. 304.

it.”¹²⁶ In this way Mather would recast his ministry and the puritan mission with an ecumenical flavor absent in prior times in order to better prepare the church of Christ for the final days to come. Mather had become far less concerned about *who* is the true church versus *what* is a true church. He would put actions to his words in preaching to the General Assembly in 1692 in favor of toleration of religious dissent which would make him in his estimation “the only Minister Living in the Land that have testified against the Suppression of Heresy, by persecution.”¹²⁷ He became convinced that what was most important for the cause of Christ was not organizational distinctions but saving faith rooted in election that held every believer and protestant tradition together.¹²⁸

Mather never faced a crisis of doubt regarding the orthodox understandings of the claims made in scripture. Though he would no doubt have believed with Thomas Shepard to “suspect thyself much,”¹²⁹ scripture and orthodox theology itself was never in regression in the ministry of Cotton Mather. It is from this position of reformed protestant orthodoxy that Mather would have interpreted the words of John 17:11: “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they

¹²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Midnight Cry*, p. 62, 64; Levin, *The Young Life of the Lord’s Remembrancer*, p. 193.

¹²⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 149; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 140.

¹²⁸ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, p. 232.

¹²⁹ David Levin, “Edwards, Franklin, and Cotton Mather: A Mediation on Character and Reputation,” in Nathan O. Hatch, Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 42.

may be one, as we are.”¹³⁰ As a covenantal promise worthy of including all Christians inside and outside of New England. This was all to be done while striving to respect the unity of Christ during a time of fragmentation, schism and very high stakes in New England and abroad. Here Mather was working towards what he had said might happen in the *Magnalia* when he envisioned the scenario of the New Jerusalem, after serving as example and motivator, might no longer be needed in the future world it might inspire.¹³¹

Mather took bold strides for the cause of ecumenicism right up until the end of his ministry. Barrett Wendell noted that it is not just anyone who can rise to such heights of idealism as Mather did.¹³² To Mather it was not that the errand into the wilderness had failed; rather, it needed recasting. As Mather felt the heat turned up all around him — with the events outside New England thundering ominously and the Church of England scheming and plotting to assert its dominance — it became clear that something bigger than the New England Way was required to make the kingdom of God more tangible. Mather’s vision of New England would change from an errand into the wilderness, to a city on a hill and then into something much more.¹³³ Its ultimate goal was to complete the reformation and receive the eschaton. Mather embraced New England as a mixed protestant community set to prepare the way for Christ’s return.

¹³⁰ King James Version. One covets Mather’s commentary on this verse that was to be included in the *Biblia Americana*.

¹³¹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 162.

¹³² Wendell, *Cotton Mather*, p. 303.

¹³³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, pp. 229-230.

Ethnicity and geography was no encumbrance to Mather's vision of global gospel ecumenicism. Mather came to believe that individual Christians from all over the world rather than just the saints from New England form the nucleus of Christ's kingdom.¹³⁴ In *Terra Beata*, written in 1726, he writes:

Will our Glorious Lord fetch His People, from one Circumcised Nation only! No, No; This Blessed People shall be fetched out of Many Nations. Even the Indians and the Negro's.¹³⁵

In *Trip paradisus*, also written during these later years, he says that:

[...] One found in the Sultry Regions of Africa, or, among the Tranquebarians in the Eastern India, or the Massachusettsians in the Western [...] is as much valued by GOD, as ever any Simeon or Levi, that could show their Descent from Jacob.¹³⁶

New England was only one part of the geographic and cultural puzzle in Mather's awaiting the return of Christ.

This was a unified battle for history. Mather would see the New England puritans as spokespeople and warriors for that most ancient of truths that God was making to the common protestant cause more clearly in the rapidly approaching last days. Mather saw himself as the steward of this truth standing on the precipice of change to extend the protestant reformation through this robust ecumenicism. This

¹³⁴ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 5, 2; Robert Brunkow, "An Analysis of Cotton Mather's Understanding of the Relationship of the Supernatural to Man As Seen in History," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, vol. 42 (1973), pp. 321-322.

¹³⁵ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 35; Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Owne Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 132.

¹³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Trip paradisus*, p. 525.

was about Christian solidarity in approaching the eschaton. In light of this, his view of ecumenicism became one of a victorious claiming of the promises of God in New England and worldwide, and this would take the most pious efforts of all available saints on earth to bring it to pass. Mather the ecumenicist stood ready to receive Christ at the consummation of the final reformation which was the biblical promise to all Christians everywhere.

6. The Eleutherianism of Cotton Mather

“By liberty I mean the assurance that every man shall be protected in doing what he believes his duty against the influence of authority and majorities, custom and opinion.”¹ -Lord Acton

“Multitudes of pious, peaceable Protestants were driven by their Severities to leave their Native Country, and seek a Refuge for their Lives and Liberties, with freedom for the worship of God in a Wilderness, in the end of the earth.”²
-John Owen

Recent scholarship such as *Governing Least: A New England Libertarianism* by Professor Dan Moller has observed a distinct flavor of independence and personal autonomy in the libertarian impulses of New England throughout its history.³ Cotton Mather is an understudied part of this history. He fought against encroachments on the rights of Christians and the church, and in doing so memorializing an ideal for the freedom-lover that he called “eleutherianism.” This was a term based on the Greek word for freedom, “eleuthéria” or “eleutherios,” the same Greek word a young Martin Luder used when changing his name to Martin Luther after discovering what he felt

¹ Lord Acton in his speech “The History of Freedom in Antiquity” (February 28, 1877).

² John Owen as quoted by Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, introduction vol. 1, p. 24.

³ Dan Moller, *Governing Least: A New England Libertarianism* (Oxford University Press, 2019). This book builds on such seminal works as Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), Edgar J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process, 1620-1692* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and The American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 24 (1967), pp. 3-43 and Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

was the true freedom of the gospel.⁴ The eleutherianism of Mather can be seen as an extension of the puritan tradition as manifested in earlier ways such as the Massachusetts Body of Liberties which puritan divines including John Winthrop found “agreeable to the word of God.”⁵ Mather would preach Christian liberty in ways that would influence the revolutionary spirit of Boston leading up to the American Revolution. Historian and anarchist Thomas E. Woods has discussed the libertarian tradition within the early American experience.⁶ He writes that it is misleading to date the tradition of American liberty from the American Revolution, as the Constitution of the United States is better seen as the culmination of generations of practical self-government on the part of early Americans including the puritans. At the time of the framing of the Constitution and the formation of an allegedly “more perfect union,” the colonists had precedents for challenging Britain by force as in the case of Mather fighting against royal overreach in New England in 1689. Vigilance in exercising such principles had long animated the American experience during the colonial period,⁷ and Mather’s open turn towards Christian freedom — what he called the love of liberty or eleutherianism — speaks to how his personality and influence manifested itself in a

⁴ See James A. Nestingen, *Martin Luther: A Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009) and Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000) for more on this name change. This issue has been contested in Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (Random House, 2018).

⁵ John Winthrop, *Arbitrary Government Described and the Government of the Massachusetts Vindicated from that Aspersion* (1644); Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 305.

⁶ Tom Woods, “Colonial Origins of American Liberty,” speech (2000) <<https://mises.org/library/colonial-origins-american-liberty>> [accessed 7 September 2019].

⁷ *Ibid.*

distinctly American way, placing him as another hero of puritan liberty such as those he envisioned in the *Magnalia*.

6.1 New England Liberty Defined

One of the implications of connecting Woods' and Moller's interpretation of New England libertarianism with the anti-government rhetoric of Cotton Mather in and around 1689 is to view Mather as a type of puritan libertarian reactionary. Acclaimed fantasy writer Robert E. Howard's famous puritan vigilante superhero Solomon Kane was formed on such a characterization. However, properly analyzing the freedom-loving Mather demands more subtlety than this. What is more beneficial in accurately unearthing Mather's distinctive political philosophy is to see how these libertarian concepts meld with theological themes of biblical freedom and authority into what can be categorized as Christian eleutherianism.

Some background on what has become known as "libertarianism" is in order so that we might see the ways in which Mather was proto-libertarian yet distinctly and separately eleutherian in his works.⁸ Jason Sorens, political science professor at Dartmouth University and founder of the Free State Project which is an anti-state pro-migration movement based in New Hampshire in New England, defines libertarianism as endorsing "strong individual rights against coercion, and as a result, strictly limited government, free exchange in markets, and social toleration."⁹ In understanding this

⁸ Though the term libertarian was not popularized until after Mather's death, his spirit of non-coercion, individualism and rights based in God and nature were ideas that came to be embedded in the anti-state ethic known as libertarianism. In this way Mather was proto-libertarian while distinctively eleutherian.

⁹ Jason Sorens, "Libertarianism," Dartmouth University course document <<https://www.dartmouth.edu/~jsorens/govt60.14.pdf>> [accessed 22 November 2019].

definition we can better appreciate the ways in which eleutherianism overlaps with libertarianism while at the same time being something more deeply theological and profoundly puritan. Mather's pursuit of covenant renewal animated his political eleutherianism. Perry Miller saw the puritan covenant as ultimately being restrictive, saying that "covenant theology, having conceived and cradled the principle of voluntary consent, set the New England mind at work destroying that theology."¹⁰ However, a deeper appraisal of Mather's eleutherianism shows that the puritan covenant provided an incubator for liberty and was a step towards social movements including the American Revolution. Glenn Wallach has argued that Mather's vision of ceaseless generational renewal became a search for freedom from past restrictions,¹¹ which makes the covenant itself an eleutherian pursuit.

The Massachusetts Bay colonists had always considered themselves a free people and in 1634 had even threatened to defend itself by force against English invasion. From 1634 until Cotton Mather's era, both freemen and non-freemen took oaths of loyalty to the Massachusetts Bay Colony itself with no mention of the king.¹² They had a reputation for being political dissenters as well. Colonial Administrator Edward Randolph saw the puritans as politically "disobedient, anarchical, and independently-minded" to a fault.¹³ Influential Anglican John Checkley said that the

¹⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 267.

¹¹ Wallach, *Obedient Sons*, p. 124.

¹² Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, p. 203.

¹³ Philip S. Haffenden, *New England in the English Nation, 1689-1713* (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 68-69; Smolinski, "Seeing Things Their Way," p. 42.

New England puritans were “Carnal Libertines.”¹⁴ In the life and work of Mather we see his own brand of Christian political philosophy exemplified through his preaching to soldiers in *Things To Be Look'd For* as well as being concerned with the use of the court system as in *The Declaration, of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* and in his loud and blunt work on liberty *Eleutheria*, all of which are analyzed below. Mather reflects a practical political awareness rooted in theology that is still practiced, preached and appreciated today within small and very different corners of the Christian church everywhere from anti-government fundamentalist movements to politically active resistance congregations (“the Christian left”) and multiple points in between including both conservative evangelicalism and liberal mainline protestantism. Mather contributed to the formation of America by cultivating a political identity that included self government, individual autonomy, and biblical authority over state decree.

Using modern parlance and current frames of reference including the modern (mis)conceptions of puritanism and Mather’s own stubborn stereotype of a witch-hunter, these aspects of Mather should not properly be considered simply “libertarian” or even less so, “conservative.” Rather, this was a radical Christian political theology he called eleutherianism that depended on an individual’s love of freedom which for him was an essential component of “the evangelical interest.”¹⁵ Even energetic skeptics of puritan political philosophy like Perry Miller have said that puritanism did not authorize such authoritarianism as to expect its adherents to give up their

¹⁴ John Checkley, *A Modest Proof of the Order & Government* (1724), p. 63; Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 127.

¹⁵ Kenneth P. Minkema, book review of *The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather* by Rick Kennedy, *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 102 (2016), pp. 640-642.

rationality. Dogma and authority only existed in conjunction with the exercise of reason and judgement,¹⁶ which Mather often utilized independently from the established church and civil government. When freedom of worship was assured to all except Roman Catholics in 1702 after the Toleration Act, puritans including Mather were disconcerted at the idea of any established state church in New England, Congregational or otherwise.¹⁷ Independence and autonomy were crucial tenants of puritan liberty.

Separatism was in Mather's blood. He came from a family of headstrong separatists, with his grandfather John Cotton being called the "greatest promoter and patron" of puritan separatism that ever was.¹⁸ Mather mixed this tradition with his own innovation. As a traditionalist he carried on the reformation truths of the Bible as interpreted by the puritan separatists. As innovator he broadened these truths to shine light into modern discussions and interpretations of the self, autonomy, authority and rights.¹⁹ Mather possessed a palate of characteristics in his work and life that lend himself to be appraised as a Christian individualist and a progenitor of the New England ethic of such personalities as Henry David Thoreau. In his personal life Mather exemplified a great many of the hallmarks shared with libertarianism including a commitment to the non-aggression principle (meaning that it is never ethically

¹⁶ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 71.

¹⁷ Murray Rothbard, *Conceived in Liberty* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 2011), p. 123.

¹⁸ Robert Baillie, *A Dissvasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1645), p. 17; Raymond Phineas Stearns and David Holmes Brawner, "New England Church 'Relations' and Continuity in Early Congregational History," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (1965), p. 15, note 6.

¹⁹ Edward M. Griffin, "A Singular Man: Cotton Mather Reappraised," *Early American Literature* vol. 50 (2015), p. 478.

justifiable to use force or violence towards others in order to achieve personal or political goals), his refusal to utilize corporal punishment in the home and in schools, and his exhortations to other parents to follow suit.

In typical Matherian fashion, theology was lived and practiced daily as anything less would be seen as disobedient. His commitment to the non-aggression principle by means of faith is declared in his work *Things to be Look'd For*: "It is miracles not swords that do the work of our daily preservation."²⁰ By this he means that change is achieved voluntarily through renewed natures and desires rather than from top-down authoritarianism. Mather would have been familiar with and no doubt agreed with Richard Baxter's admonition that all change — the personal, political and anything in between — starts in the heart of the individual:

See that your chief study be about your heart, that there God's image may be planted, and His interest advanced, and the interest of the world and flesh subdued, and the love of every sin cast out, and the love of holiness succeed.²¹

Personal reformation and political renewal are both primarily concerns of the heart for the Christian. There is no church bureaucracy or state apparatus to enforce this, only the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in making these things so.

Mather would present himself as more unattached to the traditional arrangements that historically adorned Congregationalism the longer the New England experiment went on. The errand was changing rapidly including political realities and

²⁰ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look'd For* (1691), p. 22.

²¹ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1830), p. 531.

attendant political philosophy. The most important of all political ideas for Mather was the eleutherian theme he found running throughout the Bible and early church.²²

6.2 Theology of Acts 5:29²³

Where John Locke's appeal to heaven said that resistance was justified when rulers discounted citizen's natural rights,²⁴ Mather presupposed a Biblical loyalty first to the Lord in recognition of his ultimate authority on earth and in heaven. Mather did not shy away from a theology of rebellion when confronting what he felt was illegitimate authority as seen in works such as *The Declaration the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston and Eleutheria*.²⁵ *The Declaration* was written in 1689 against the political backdrop of Mather being one of the leaders of a successful revolt against King James's Governor of the Consolidated Dominion of New England, Sir Edmund Andros. As a result Andros would be recalled, Simon Bradstreet would be reappointed Governor of Massachusetts and there would be no new charter until 1692. Three years of English control had left the old godly, quasi-independent Massachusetts republic shattered.²⁶ *Eleutheria* was written in 1696 with this new provincial charter firmly in mind which had granted freedom of worship to all but Roman Catholics. However Mather did not endorse every rebellion and was not a supporter of the Fifth Monarchists, for example, as he exhorted the men of the Artillery Company of the

²² Kennedy, *The First Evangelical*, p. 57.

²³ The King James Version reads "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

²⁴ See John Locke, *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, chapter 14 (1690).

²⁵ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 218.

²⁶ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, p. 261.

Massachusetts Bay not “to do like those mad Fifth-Monarchy men, who have thought their Turbulent Insurrections would be Acceptable.”²⁷

Mather approached the issue of authority differently earlier in his ministry when writing about the puritan people submitting to puritan leadership including the civil magistrates in Boston. Here Mather insists on the following of the civil law and the acceptance of the office as long as it is right and just. In the *Magnalia* he quotes John Winthrop, saying:

But there is a Civil, a Moral, a Federal Liberty, which is the proper End and Object of Authority; it is a Liberty for that only which is just and good, for this Liberty you are to stand with the hazard of your very Lives, and whatsoever Crosses it, is not Authority, but a Distempler thereof. This Liberty is maintained in a way of Subjection to Authority set over you, will in all Administrations for your good be quietly submitted unto, by all but such as have a Disposition to shake off the Yoke, and lost their true liberty by their murmuring at the Honour and Power Authority.²⁸

The difference — besides the context and pressures of the occasion — is that the puritan civil magistrate is a valid office of leadership within the hierarchy of New England society. It was assumed to be just and biblically authorized. At this same time Mather believed that a godly magistrate would listen to the public and consider their wishes in acting in a Christian manner. He says that:

[...] the Magistrates, as far as might be, should aforehand ripen their Consultations, to produce that Unanimity in their Public Votes, which would make them liker the Voice of God.²⁹

²⁷ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look'd For*, p. 71.

²⁸ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 127; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 34.

²⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 121; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 126.

For Mather, the liberty of the Christian was the conclusion of the reformation.³⁰ This included submission to God through obedient reverence as exhibited through a piety simple enough for all of God's (and the earthly king's) subjects to follow.³¹ The eleutherian was not a rebel; rather he was a loyalist of the highest order in that he understood through discernment what properly constituted authority looked like. This was never seen more clearly than in the capturing and imprisoning the Royal Governor Andros whom Mather believed had no valid authority. Mather was aware that his work such as *Eleutheria* and *The Declaration, of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* could label him as a seditious traitor to the powers of the Crown yet he still labored for the cause of liberty without hesitation.³²

Populism, piety and cosmopolitanism are themselves components of eleutherianism. There is a strand of pious populism in Mather the Christian freedom-lover and he took pains to reduce this experience and knowledge into accessible practical theology for his flock and readers. For Mather the writing of books encouraging good among the people was in itself an act of piety that reflected the Christian's call to action in society. He attempted to remove the theoretical aspects of potential good and instead emphasized the imperative to do rather than just read or think about what doing good might look like.³³ There is a populism here that is

³⁰ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 40.

³¹ See Cotton Mather, *Malachi* (1699) and the in-depth discussion of the piety of Mather as found in this thesis.

³² Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 312.

³³ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 27; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 156.

essential to eleutherianism: exhorting the people to actions that are achievable to them in their place and station.

Puritans had called the reports of both Edward Randolph and Edmund Andros “one Loud lie” sounding from American to Europe.³⁴ This distrust of the government was partially a result of the Christian eleutherianism that flowed through the works of Mather during this time of New England political upheaval. That this immediately inspired action by the people of Boston was an example of an event during Mather’s ministry that made his eleutherian trajectory visible. When word reached Boston that Andros and other royal magistrates were to resume their work in the colonies, the people of Boston rose up with “machinelike precision” and threw Andros and his associates into prison.³⁵ Though the puritans were indeed wary of his desire to institute Episcopal worship practices in Boston, it was not any abridgment of puritan ecclesiological or liturgical convictions that incited the anger of the puritans against Andros. Rather, it was the violation of cherished personal and property rights that the New Englanders as Britons held sacrosanct that ultimately inspired the rebellion against Andros led by Mather.³⁶ Cotton Mather would say “That no illegal, despotic, and arbitrary government may be imposed upon the brave English Nation: LIBERTY and PROPERTY is their cognizance.”³⁷

³⁴ For the “Loud lie” see Increase Mather, “A Vindication of New-England,” in William H. Whitmore, ed., *The Andros Tracts* (Boston: The Prince Society, 1869, rpt, BiblioLife, 2011), p. 33.

³⁵ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 113.

³⁶ Walker, “The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development,” p. 74.

³⁷ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 59

Mather then wrote his *Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants* and, once adopted, the Dominion was at an end and puritan self-rule was once again in effect in New England.³⁸ Imprisoning Andros so quickly was eleutherianism in action, as was unlawfully sneaking Increase Mather out of America to plead the puritan cause in London as the new charter was being considered. In such actions we see a lived interpretation and application of scripture such as Romans 13 firmly in the protestant tradition of John Knox.³⁹ In these instances, the new government was not biblically authorized and Mather would rather serve God than man as in Acts 5:29. In the Andros affair Mather personally acted to avert disaster in New England which would have cost the entire colony dearly had he not been successful.⁴⁰ In the individual soul and the puritan society of New England, Mather insisted on self-rule by the means of submitting the self and community to Christ's rule first and foremost as the upcoming analysis of the *The Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants* and *Eleutheria* show.

There was a personal cost to his radical actions. Cotton Mather was initially imprisoned along with Increase Mather for speaking out against Andros.⁴¹ This political activism for Cotton Mather served as reminder to the British government at this time that the puritan's covenant with God can and would ultimately be self-governed on the earthly side of it. Mather says that:

³⁸ Woods, "Colonial Origins of American Liberty."

³⁹ See John Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ Walker, "The Services Of The Mathers In New England Religious Development," p. 80; Samuel Mather, *Life of Cotton Mather* (1729), pp. 41-44.

⁴¹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, pp. 64-65.

Is intended by you as no less a part of your Obedience to their Majesties, who upon the Address of our Convention to Them, Declaring, That they accepted Government of this People according to the Rules of the Charter, did in answer thereunto, Order a Continuance in the Administration thereof [...] that the Invasion of our Charters was Illegal and a Grievance and that they ought to be restored unto us.⁴²

Mather imprisoned Andros for ten months and installed Simon Bradstreet as Governor instead. Mather further links this type of political renewal with “Obedience to their Majesties,” because they had previously “accepted [...] the Rules of the Charter.”⁴³ This is a trademark of anti-state political philosophy: that governments are held to the same moral standards as private citizens. Contracts are to be honored. Covenants require enforcement and a free people can serve as the enforcement mechanism when faced with state-actor covenant breaches just as governments would attempt to enforce rules and regulations against the populace. The duty of all parties to uphold the original charter was a legal and moral expectation that could not be broken without consequences.

6.3 A Covenant Liberty

A key component of eleutherianism is that of individual rights and responsibilities. As libertarianism is not a rigid set of cultural precepts or personal boundaries, Mather’s eleutherianism was not a list of prescriptive assumptions or a clearly delineated political manifesto. Instead, it existed in his ecumenism, cosmopolitanism, piety and commitment to broadening the scope of the covenant as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In this way it was not libertarianism, but an

⁴² Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, pp. 1-2.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 2.

individualistic Christian freedom-philosophy bound by one's own conscience as exemplified in 1 Corinthians 10:29 "I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?" All that was required were the same things that Mather required in his petical and ecumenical ministries: to personally love Jesus and commit yourself to him as exemplified in his *Maxims Of Piety*. Regarding this rugged Christian individualism, Mather urged his audience to study the life of John Cotton. Rather than seeking to consolidate political power, John Cotton's main concern according to Cotton Mather was:

[...] his own want of Internal Peace [...] his continual Exercises, from his Internal Temptations and Afflictions, made all people see, that instead of Serving this or that Party, his chief care was about the Salvation of his Own Soul.⁴⁴

To say that Mather would express a distinctive individualism in personality and covenant membership in his life is not to say that Mather was a promoter of the self. In Mather's thought, the philosophical notion of the self was synonymous with rebellious sin.⁴⁵

Mather believed that anything good that might come from the self comes only after the agony of God wrecking and remaking it.⁴⁶ Cotton Mather pursued earnestly that which libertarian fusionist Frank Meyer would later describe as the Christian value of the individual and the individual's freedom to find virtue.⁴⁷ Mather taught this that

⁴⁴ Cotton Mather, "*Cottonus Redivivus*," p. 12; Smith, "Politics and Sainthood," p. 193.

⁴⁵ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

⁴⁷ See Frank Meyer, *In Defense Of Freedom* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962).

piety begins with the freedom for the individual when he stated “First, let every man devise what good may be done [...] IN HIS OWN HEART AND LIFE.”⁴⁸ Power and political office were not to be the priority of the Christian. In the spirit of Proverbs 16:32,⁴⁹ to govern yourself as an individual is of a higher honor than lording over others, and the gift of grace is more valuable than power in this world. At the late date of 1724, having seen so much of New England’s politics play out before his eyes, he writes:

The Grace whereby one so Turns to GOD, as to become a Child of the Lord Almighty, and a Governor of ones self, is better than the highest preferments and Employments in this lower world.⁵⁰

Mather believed that it was not freedom in general but a freedom from the Church of England’s “Episcopal impositions” that caused the founding of the Congregational churches. This freedom was the very reason for their existence.⁵¹ For Mather, this love of freedom was a characterological attitude intrinsic to puritanism that had existed in the past but now required nourishment in the era of Andros. In the *Magnalia* and elsewhere, when Mather is discussing the history of the victories of New Englanders prior, he stops to make special mention of the exceptional individualism of

⁴⁸ Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 83 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹ The King James Version reads “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

⁵⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, p. 22.

⁵¹ Cotton Mather, *Some Seasonable Enquiries* (1723), p. 12; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 368.

Governor William Phips, a truly self-made man who was, as Mather commented "an heir to his own labors."⁵²

Mather believed that political and ecclesiological tyranny works towards fragmenting the churches and making people into "schismatics."⁵³ Issues of authority were of utmost importance to both puritan theology and Mather's eleutherianism. Mather would never call for a general "distemper of authority,"⁵⁴ which he would have seen as a sin. Rather it was the Christian's duty to confirm that legitimate authority is in its proper place in the life of the Christian and the church. A governmental apparatus was only legitimate in as far as it promoted the kingdom of God. There was an element of the royal priesthood of all believers as in 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6 running through Mather's eleutherianism in that the crown of a redeemed Christian is greater than the crown of any earthly king.⁵⁵ Mather also felt that for a government to persecute Christians is for a government to persecute God himself. In 1690 he says:

To seek the Harm of this people, is to make an Impotent Assault and Batt'ry upon the Omnipotent God Himself but, Who did ever harden himself against God and prosper?⁵⁶

Mather believed that governments were the instruments of God set up in accordance to prophetic promises to help usher in the millennium. As he wrote in *Tripavidisus*:

⁵² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 167; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 163.

⁵³ Cotton Mather, *Eluetheria*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, *Duties of Children to Their Parents* (1724), p. 60; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ Heimert and Delblanco, *The Puritans in America*, p. 334.

⁵⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 31.

Doubtless, their present MAJESTIES of Great BRITAIN, have seen cause to Consider on the Praediction of the Incomparable JURIEU [...] before the Late Revolutions in England, which have so Eminently made good that Praediction; God has placed you (say she, speaking of the then Prince and Princess of Orange) for Miracles in Israel, and for Signs, that he ha's intended your Highnesses to be the Principal Instruments of that Grand Deliverance, which He hath prepared for His Church, when the storm shall be over.⁵⁷

Mather was operating within the New England tradition of the expectations of rights as embodied in the Massachusetts Body of Liberties. Mather fleshed out a more specific eleutherian understanding of the nature of God, man, state and the legitimacy (or not) of war in pursuing the orchestrated ends of God in New England and worldwide. Such principles are apparent in his work *The Declaration, of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* which will be analyzed below. Mather eschewed earthly wars fought by earthly rulers for earthly means whether in New England or elsewhere. As far as the eternal significance of using violence for state purposes, Mather believed essentially that war was a corrupt racket that displeased God:

Who are they that breake the Peace of the World more than the bad Rulers of it, they are the Jeroboams of the world, that corrupt and poison their Subjects with such evil manners as bring the vengeance of War upon them.⁵⁸

Mather also eschewed violence within the family unit. One reason for Mather's reticence about corporal punishment was his belief that harshness in physical

⁵⁷ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look'd For*, p. 481; Smolinski, *Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Triparadisus,"* p. 63.

⁵⁸ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look'd For*, p. 22.

punishment would give children a false and repulsive picture of God their heavenly father. He said:

To treat our Children like Slaves, and with such Rigour, that they shall always Tremble and Abhor to come into our presence, This will be very unlike to our Heavenly Father. Our Authority should be Tempered with Kindness, and Meekness, and Loving Tenderness that our children may Fear us with Delight, and see that we Love them with as much Delight.⁵⁹

He admonished parents to use times of discipline as opportunities to further inculcate their children with a proper respect for the ultimate authority in life which was the law of God. He wrote:

When your Children do amiss, call them Aside; set before them the Precepts of God which they have broken, and the Threatenings of God, which they provoked. Demand of them to profess their Sorrow for their Fault, and Resolve that they will be no more so Faulty.⁶⁰

In these teachings Mather was helping to pave the way for the cultural practice of the anti-spanking and peaceful parenting philosophy that is a hallmark of libertarian and anarchist family ethics today.

Beyond larger issues such as violence and war, Mather showed his Christian anti-authoritarian streak in other ways throughout his life. For example, the founding of Yale University without a British charter was a distinctly rebellious act in its refusal to seek the official approval from the Crown to establish a new university. Mather persuaded British merchant Elihu Yale (a practicing Anglican) to endow Yale to be the

⁵⁹ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, p. 22; Setran, "Declension Comes Home," p. 51.

⁶⁰ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, p. 24.

“the new nursery of Puritanism” in New England.⁶¹ If the British government knew what was going on at Yale there would have been serious political and social repercussions for Mather and the colonists as such an act would have been perceived as something far beyond what the colonists were free to do within the empire.⁶² To found an institution as important as a university for the purposes of educating dissenting ministers was a subversive act. Mather and the other founders still proceeded boldly (if quietly) with an authority to train puritan ministers in New England that they thought was theirs to exercise. Mather was so closely associated with Yale University that he was offered and declined the presidency of the university in 1722 after the then-President Reverend Timothy Cutler defected to Episcopalianism in dramatic fashion.⁶³

6.4 Eleutherianism and the Reformation of Christian Manners

It was certainly not a cultural or moral libertinism that Mather believed in. In 1690, six years before writing *Eleutheria*, Mather praises the General Court for reminding the citizens of the legal expectations in this area. For Mather this was an issue not of compliance with the state but of reforming Christian manners. He writes:

The Honourable General Court of this Colony, have newly Published a very Serious and Solemn Proclamation, warning all Offenders against the Lawes of Sobriety, to mend their manners, and all Officers to Prosecute such offenders, as the principal Troublers of their Countrey; and,

⁶¹ Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), ed. Reiner Smolinski, introduction, p. 19.

⁶² For more on Cotton Mather’s involvement with the founding of Yale and its political subtext see Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁶³ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, pp. 33-34.

Advertising us, that if a Reformation be not Endeavoured, the Righteous God will Punish us yet seven Times for our Iniquities.⁶⁴

He says that it is God who would punish not only the drunken offenders, but “us.” He mentions these personal sins as “our iniquities” in that it is the duty of the covenant community to monitor and enforce their expectations on the “Troublers of their Country.” Policing public behavior was a community covenantal exercise that didn’t require the state having a monopoly on violence to enforce it.

In the late 1690s, Mather became the leader — he called himself the only leader — of an alternative party of “Eleutherians” who embraced the fullness of freedom in the gospel life.⁶⁵ Mather felt that bigotry and narrow-mindedness in relation to identifying the evangelical interest (outside of the biblical essentials as delineated in his *Ratio Disciplinae*) would not serve Christianity but harm it. It was only the eleutherian who would comprehend such things fully:

True ELEUTHERIANS will consider, how far any further Agreement may be Necessary: And whether those unreasonable Sons of Procrustes, the Narrow-soul'd and Imperious Bigots for Uniforming, will do Religion any real Service, by the pressing of it.⁶⁶

Mather believed that those who attempt to use the state to push perceived religious purity will only attain less of it. Mather’s distinctive brand of Christian political philosophy defined as that of a “freedom lover” is significant in that it points to an

⁶⁴ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *The First Evangelical*, p. 82.

⁶⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae*, introduction, p. 10.

inclination of the affections that orientates emotion (love) towards a concept one must make tangible (freedom). This is much more than a political leaning; it is a structuring of desire towards the ends most conducive to growing the other concepts so important to Mather such as ecumenicism, piety and covenantal theology.

Such terms casually applied to Mather as “theocrat” or “tyrant” when examined against his writings and personal actions are seen to be largely inaccurate. When distanced from the lasting caricatures devised by Robert Calif and the new wave of New Englanders who found in the make-believe version of Mather a scapegoat to pin their past sins on, and, ironically, a witch to hunt, we find a different person altogether. In analyzing Mather by the cultural standards of his day and not our own, we find him more often than not (and certainly more often than many of his contemporaries) a humane liberty-lover. Mather replaced the ideal of theocracy in New England, in which the law of God is enforced by human government, with a system in which the only means of salvation are the persuasive powers of evangelical clergy armed with the scriptures and not state force. Like Locke, Mather viewed natural law as revelation and believed that empiricism properly pointed to the truths of the Christian faith in all areas of life. This thinking applied to the role of scripture in a free society as well. In the *Biblia Americana* Cotton Mather was engaging in a cultural debate about whether the divine inspiration of scripture might be supported by reason before any other theologian in America.⁶⁷

Mather thought that elevating the view of the government was yet another step towards idolatry even with an ostensibly Christian king. He railed against the “idolatry”

⁶⁷ Maddux, “God's Responsibility,” p. 308.

of calling Charles I “CHRIST the Second.”⁶⁸ To affirm that a king is Christ’s representative on earth for Mather is almost as appalling as saying that the Pope is. This is not the protestant way, as for Mather “Non-Resistance and Passive Obedience” were “Catholic doctrines” that they forced on people whenever and wherever the Roman Catholic Church held power.⁶⁹ The doctrine of eleutherianism was at its core an acknowledgment of Christ’s ultimate kingship over all things and a reformation of Christian manners — the affections, habits and acknowledgements of covenant people — towards a biblical liberty in worship, law and all of life.

6.5 *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston (1689)*

The puritan tradition of dissent was crucial to establishing a distinct New England “revolutionary tradition” that would culminate in the Declaration of Independence in 1776.⁷⁰ *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* published in 1689 is an example of this, as Mather is marshaling the independent spirit of the region and focusing it against the ecclesiological and political structures that posed a threat to the liberty of the puritans. Mather considers such a legacy of freedom worthy of a responsible defense as New England is “the true

⁶⁸ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 71

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 111; Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 70; David Levin, “Cotton Mather’s Declaration of Gentlemen and Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence,” *New England Quarterly*, vol. 50 (1977), pp. 509-514 and Jack M. Sosin, *English America and Imperial Inconstancy: The Rise of Provincial Autonomy, 1696-1715* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 7.

Profession and pure Exercise of the Protestant Religion.”⁷¹ He briefly recounts the protestant history of fighting heresy with Rome, setting the stage for the current struggles with the Church of England.

Mather then characterizes the removing of the charter as a lawless act and an abridgment of their contract with England.⁷² He states that the former benevolence of the Crown was in their own best interest and that the removal of the charter was only an act of consolidating political power, stating “That his Majestys desire was no other than the happy encrease & advance of these Provinces by their more immediate dependance on the Crown of England.”⁷³ Andros, an agent of the Crown, was seen as an occupying force and a menace to the people of New England. Mather calls him and his followers an imposing menace, writing “several Companies of Red Coats were now brought from Europe, to support what was to be Imposed upon us, not without repeated Menaces that some hundreds more were intended for us.”⁷⁴ The rulers sent from Britain were anti-eleutherians. Mather referred to them as “stranglers to and haters of the people.”⁷⁵ He calls them “oppressors” and “Horse-leaches” which is to define state-actors as parasites attached to productive society as later libertarian writers and activists would come to do. This new government was one of “wicked”

⁷¹ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* (1689), p. 1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

and the “vilest”⁷⁶ men as opposed to the good governance of the puritan saints found in the *Magnalia*. Here was a realization not unlike the one that the American revolutionaries of 1776 had: that being ostensibly British in New England is no guarantee that your rights will be respected. Mather says:

It was now plainly affirmed both by some in open Council and by the same in private converse, that the people in New-England were all Slaves and the only difference between them and Slaves is their not being bought and sold; and it was a maxim delivered in open Court unto us by one of the Council, that we must not think the Priviledges of English men would follow us to the end of the world: Accordingly we have been treated with multiplied contradictions to Magna Charta, the rights of which we laid claim unto.⁷⁷

Mather on several occasions defended New England’s liberties as rooted in the Magna Carta.⁷⁸ At the very least, Mather and the puritans of his time would have seen the Magna Carta (which was another charter, after all) as granting them the right to be subject to the British rule of law including the enumerated rights and documented liberties that it contained. The puritans were disavowed of this misconception and left angry and disillusioned.

Mather stated that the anti-puritan laws of William Laud were “contrary to the very Magna Charta of the Nation.”⁷⁹ Mather would exploit this sentiment in his work. He focuses on the biased implementation of law that treated the puritans as less than

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ T.H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630-1730* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1970), pp. 180-183.

⁷⁹ Cotton Mather, “The Introduction,” *The Life of Mr. John Cotton*, p. 19; Smith, “Politics and Sainthood,” p. 189.

British. Within the legal system, puritans were hit hard as they would usually not serve on juries due to their objections to swearing an oath on the Bible. Mather says:

Packt and pickt Juries have been very common things among us, when under a pretended form of Law the trouble of some perhaps honest and worthy Men has been aimed at: but when some of this Gang have been brought upon the Stage, for the most detestable Enormities that ever the Sun beheld, all Men have with Admiration seen what methods have been taken that they might not be treated according to their Crimes. Without a Verdict, yea, without a Jury sometimes have People been fined most unrighteously; and some not of the meanest quality have been kept in long and close Imprisonment without any the least Information appearing against them, or an Habeas Corpus allowed unto them. In short, when our Millstones have been a little out of Money, 'twas but pretending some Offence to be enquired into, and the most innocent of Men were continually put into no small expence to answer the Demands of the Officer, who must have Money of them, or a Prison for them: though none could accuse them of any Misdemeanour.⁸⁰

Equal application of the law is another crucial component of eleutherianism, and Mather highlighting this deficit in justice was something that would have ramifications in his movement and others to follow. Mather further points out that the Crown taking advantage of New England religious conviction was a stacking of the deck against the colonist and an affront to puritan culture:

To plunge the poor People every where into deeper Incapacities, there was one very comprehensive abuse given to us; multitudes of Pious and Sober Men through the Land scrupled the mode of Swearing on the Book, desiring that they might Swear with an uplifted hand, agreeable to the ancient custome of the Colony; and though we think we can prove that the Common Law amongst us (as well as in some other places under the English Crown) not only indulges, but even commands and enjoyns the rite of lifting the hand in Swearing; yet they that had this doubt were still put by from serving on any Juryes; and many of them were most unaccountably Fined and Imprisoned. Thus one grievance is a Trojan

⁸⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston*, p. 3.

Horse, in the Belly of which it is not easy to recount how many unsufferable Vexations have been contained.⁸¹

In what is a common theme of property-based political philosophies such as anarchocapitalism and agorism,⁸² Mather sees the assurance of property rights as a mark and benefit of a free society while the opposite being a sign of tyranny.⁸³

He continues his critique of the British Crown by noting how they have gone back on their word. The reasoning is that without a commitment to rights including property rights and freedom of worship, governments rule based on concerns of power and political expediency. We also see Mather discuss an intriguing concept within the puritan tradition regarding the toil of property as translating to ownership:

[...] that after all their sweat and their cost upon their formerly purchased Lands, thought themselves Free holders of what they had. And the Govern-our caused the Lands pertaining to these and those particular men, to be measured out, for his Creatures to take possession of; and the Right Owners, for pulling up the Stakes, have passed through Molestations enough to tire all the patience in the world. ⁸⁴

In introducing this pseudo-Lockean labor theory of property rights into the debate over the charter he is placing another brick in the wall of a philosophy that would later be expanded by thinkers such as anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard, anarchist Robert

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Hans Herman Hoppe, *The Economics and Ethics of Private Property* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 2006).

⁸³ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

Nozick and Unitarian abolitionist anarchist Lysander Spooner.⁸⁵ Mather continues to critique the abuses of British power by pointing out the democratic deficit that the puritans were forced to reckon with in New England:

[...] but those of them which were true Lovers of their Country, were seldom admitted to, and seldomer consulted at the Debates which Produced these unrighteous things: Care was taken to keep them under disadvantages; and the Governour with five or six more did what they would.⁸⁶

Mather proceeds to set his sights once again on the issue of the government's desire for unnecessary war in the colonies. He says:

And yet that our Calamity, might not be terminated here, we are again Briar'd in the Perplexities of another Indian War; how, or why, is a mystery too deep for us to unfold.⁸⁷

Randolph Bourne asserted that "war is the health of the state" even when there are enormous civilian casualties on both sides,⁸⁸ and Mather is similarly noting years before him that the war itself is part of a "Plot, to bring us low."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ See Murray Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 1982), Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) and Lysander Spooner, *The Collected Works of Lysander Spooner* (Weston, MA: M & S Press, 1971)

⁸⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston*, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Randolph Bourne, *The State* (1918) <<https://fee.org/media/29691/bourne-randolph-the-state.pdf>> [accessed 20 December 2019].

⁸⁹ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston*, p. 5.

In eleutherian fashion, Mather's response is to petition God to help the puritan cause while faithfully reserving his right to act in fulfillment of God's will. Invoking Job 34:28, he says:

We did nothing against these Proceedings, but only cry to our God; they have caused the cry of the Poor to come unto him, and he hears the cry of the Afflicted. We have been quiet hitherto; and so still we should have been, had not the Great God at this time laid us under a double engagement to do something for our security [...].⁹⁰

Mather is not without appreciation for the British government when he feels that they have acted correctly before God. He was pleased with the result of the Glorious Revolution and thankful for the actions of Prince William of Orange though annoyed that the news was kept from the colonists:

Moreover, we have understood, (though the Governour has taken all imaginable care to keep us all ignorant thereof) that the Almighty God hath been pleased to prosper the noble undertaking of the Prince of Orange, to preserve the three Kingdoms from the horrible brinks of Popery and Slavery, and to bring to a Condign punishment those worst of men, by whom English Liberties have been destroy'd; in compliance with which Glorious Action, we ought surely to follow the Patterns which the Nobility, Gentry and Commonalty, in several parts of the Kingdom have set before us, though they therein have chiefly proposed to prevent what we already endure.⁹¹

Mather is glad for the victory of William and Mary but impatient to have the results trickle down in the form of secured political liberties. For Mather, these were due to the people of New England. Jacob Mason Spencer puts it this way:

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

To make New England a full participant in the Glorious Revolution was to demonstrate not only loyalty but entitlement to full constitutional rights. And yet at the same time, Mather made the Glorious Revolution itself seem like an event New England had envisioned, indeed virtually acted out, back in 1630. It was as if Old England, in 1688, finally woke up to what New England had stood for all along [...] Mather also gave New England a typology of resistance, one which would be exploited eighty years later by publicists such as Samuel Adams, who argued that once again, as in 1630 and 1689, New Englanders were standing up for quintessential English liberties against a corrupt English government.⁹²

After the British victory Mather believed that religious liberty would now fully be secured for New England. He writes:

The colony is now made a Province and their General Court, has, with the King's Approbation, as much Power in New England, as the King and Parliament have in England [...] All the Liberties of their Holy Religion are for ever secured.⁹³

Later in his diary he would say “Wee have not our former Charter, but wee have a better in the Room of it.”⁹⁴ In this way, the protestant victory of the Glorious Revolution represented an extension of the vital, lasting transatlantic work he imagined the puritan New England church to have been crucially called to since its inception as romanticized in the *Magnalia*.

Mather closes *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* with a call to eleutherian action. Regarding the imprisoned agents of the

⁹² Jacob Mason Spencer, “Hawthorne’s *Magnalia*: Retelling Cotton Mather in the Provincial Tales,” PhD Thesis, Harvard University (2016), p. 116.

⁹³ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 320-321; Bruce Tucker, “The Reinvention of New England 1691-1770,” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 59 (1986), pp. 318-319.

⁹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 7th ser. 7 and 8 (Boston, 1911), 7:148-189; Bruce Tucker, “The Reinvention of New England,” p. 319.

Crown he states that “We do therefore seize upon the persons of those few ill men which have been (next to our sins) the grand authors of our miseries [...]” and he ends with a freedom-loving dedication to the continued existence and ministry of the New England puritan churches:

In the mean time firmly believing: that we have endeavoured nothing but what meer Duty to God and our Country calls for at our Hands, we commit our Enterprise unto the Blessing of Him, who hears, the cry of the Oppressed; and advise all our Neighbors for whom we have thus ventured our selves to joyn with us in Prayers and all just Actions for the Prosperity of the Land.⁹⁵

For Mather, eleutherianism was a duty befitting a blessing and would serve as a mechanism for piety that would enable the puritans to address “the cry of the oppressed.”

6.6 *Eleutheria* (1696)

Mather had very high hopes for his book *Eleutheria*, with the full title continuing in the vein of historically-rooted revolution, which was:

*An idea of the Reformation in England, and a history of non-conformity in and since that Reformation : with predictions of a more glorious reformation and revolution at hand [...].*⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Declaration Of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston* at p. 6.

⁹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, title page.

Mather believed it might “have some notable effects on the English nation.”⁹⁷ He began writing it in 1698 after the union with the Presbyterians was beyond repair and the limits of the Toleration Act were apparent to dissenters everywhere.⁹⁸ This was right before a convocation was to be held in England in which the Church of England was to “secure a general comprehension of orthodox Protestants in the national church by mutual concessions.”⁹⁹ This time in Mather’s life was fraught with political and ecclesiological tensions, and he wrote this work with “exceeding pains.”¹⁰⁰ *Eleutheria* was an attempt to celebrate the puritan tradition of dissenting liberty including re-legitimizing the role of himself as leader in the tradition of the “friends of the Reformation.”¹⁰¹

As usual, Mather was not shy in defending the puritan church. Mather struck out strongly against the Church of England working against the puritans as he felt it represented the latest episode in the ongoing historical struggle of Christians maintaining their liberties against unwarranted governmental encroachment. He considered himself and other Americans part of the English nation. His appeal to this Englishness was a useful argument in the context of puritans as colonists with rights in the extended British empire. Rights come from the Lord, but the securing of these

⁹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1: 1681-1709; vol. 2: 1709-24, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), 1:212, 2; Steven Pitt, “Cotton Mather and Boston’s ‘Seafaring Tribe,’” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 85 (2012), p. 225.

⁹⁸ Middlekauf, *The Mathers*, p. 220.

⁹⁹ Abijah P. Marvin, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (1892), p. 190.

¹⁰⁰ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, 5d, 3m.

¹⁰¹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 33.

rights was a New England birthright as they remained British citizens under the canopy of the Crown including the relevant legal protections. Mather further identifies his cause with that of English liberty, and the New England puritans as “the truest Friends of English Liberty,” as a source of protection of their rights as indivisible from their English identity. He reminds his readers:

That part of the English Nation which values its true English Liberty (for which, if the Heavens were Parchment, and the Seas were Ink, as the Rabbi says, they would not suffice to write the just Praise of God), I say, that part of the English Nation, will not much longer permit the truest Friends of English Liberty to be suppressed, Abused, and Incapacitated, merely to please the Humors of a Faction, who have always done all they can to betray that English Liberty.¹⁰²

In Mather’s opinion the tyranny and oppression by the pagan authorities in the early days of the church were similar to the current oppression of the puritans.¹⁰³ Papal influence had extended into pagan communities in order to subdue territories to the political might of the Roman Catholic Church, which had created a syncretistic mode of religious rule that “rendered the cup of their Abomination the more inebriating.”¹⁰⁴ The result of these claims of papal authority has historically been apostasy among the people.¹⁰⁵ Not so subtly hinting at what he felt was the biblical ignorance of the Church of England in regards to their own liturgy (certainly in as much as the possibility of it being forced on the puritans would be a tragedy), Mather warns

¹⁰² Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 106.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

that political authorities led by Rome were invested in keeping the Bible out of people's lives as a means to insure their authority. Mather writes that "Doctors of Divinity were created, and pronounced most sufficient, who had never read the Bible."¹⁰⁶ For Mather, ignorance of the Bible was still keeping people from freedom in the same way that it was in pre-reformation times.

Mather traces the political history of the early church as being a time when the true believers were oppressed and the truth hidden through maneuvers such as "[...] a depraved mixture of Jewish and Pagan Rites [...] cursed Charms, and a thousand magical Tricks, were everywhere introduced instead of our Lord's Institutions."¹⁰⁷ For Mather, pre-reformation political life for the faithful Christian was totalitarian religious co-option operating under a huge volume of unjust laws. He writes:

Oaths of absolute Obedience to the Holy See fetter'd the Consciences of Men, Laws above and beyond, and contrary to those of our Lord were imposed upon Men, for many as make huge Volumes of Canons in Folio; Decrees, Decretal and Extravagants made a huge body of Laws for all men to observe [...].¹⁰⁸

Mather pointed out instances of governmental hypocrisy that would be rephrased by libertarian thinkers in later years, namely that anything government rulers can do that common people can not is an illegitimate law.¹⁰⁹ This had serious implications in the history of the Christian church. For example, Mather notes that "the Marriage of Priests

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ See Murray Rothbard, *Anatomy of the State* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 1974).

was made a crime unpardonable by those that were the most profligate Whoremongers.”¹¹⁰ He goes on to note that one of the most notorious brothels in Europe was nicknamed “The House of God” due to its clientele of Roman Catholic bureaucrats and religiously connected politicians.¹¹¹

The result of all of this was that the world was put “under an intolerable Slavery to the powers of darkness.”¹¹² As Mather writes:

[...] our Lord Jesus Christ slept in the Ship with a profound sleep, and the violent Winds overwhelmed it, and he raised up no man to correct these things; yea, which was worst of all, there were no Disciples to awaken our Lord with their cries, but a dead sleep was upon them all.¹¹³

It was from such a slumber that Mather envisioned the puritan church struggling to awaken from in the loss of the charter and being subjected to the rule of the Church of England so as to alienate them from their puritan customs and culture. Mather writes that throughout the struggle in those times “all holy Canons and Customs were extinguished.”¹¹⁴ Mather explains at length the attempts at resistance throughout church history but maintains that this remnant had not finally triumphed because the time had not yet come. The time of the antichrist’s reign had not been completed. For Mather, the biblical directives for Christians to take their freedom could not be total

¹¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 12.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

until the antichrist had risen up as he had been in the Pope of Rome.¹¹⁵ Freedom will not come in full until the antichrist comes and is defeated by Christ.

The puritan relationship between faith and politics is that there are no arenas exempt from the biblical mandate of all earthly institutions to obediently conform to the truths of God's word. This includes all political structures. Verses such as Genesis 1:28,¹¹⁶ Matthew 6:33¹¹⁷ and Matthew 28:19¹¹⁸ were not simply about converting souls but rather they spoke to reclaiming all power centers for the cause of Christ. For Mather, preaching the gospel and personal piety are hallmarks of political witness in this tradition, as he says:

Until the time of the Restitution of all things, 'tis the Gospel purely and plainly preached that must represent the Lord JESUS CHRIST unto the faith and love, and joy of his people.¹¹⁹

Until Christ returns visibly, his people must maintain all institutions in his stead and in his image. For Mather the setting aright of the church in redemptive history through godly rebellion and reclamation of rights is inextricably linked to the purification of its theology and worship. He says:

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ The King James Version reads "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

¹¹⁷ The King James Version reads "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

¹¹⁸ The King James Version reads "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

¹¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 20.

The real Beauty of Divine Worship lies in our devout homage to one God in three Persons, and our distinct respect unto each of those Persons: But the Apostate Church not beholding this Beauty, instead thereof set off their own Worship with an external Pomp, agreeable to carnal minds; meretricious Allurements, under the pretense of Decency, and all the Pageantry of Ceremonies, Vestments, Gestures, Music, Painting, and beggarly Elements, Rites never instituted.¹²⁰

It is through proper worship and recognition of God that governments are recognized as biblically legitimate. Mather states that throughout the history of the Roman Catholic Church and its political domination of Europe it was never concerned with true religion but rather only if someone would bow to their “Romish canons” which would be enough to enter into “the Constitution of that Society.”¹²¹

Faithful eleutherianism is a union with the highest authority, while regarding earthly principalities with deference only if they are also in service to God as laid out in the scriptures. Mather says:

The Churches true Glory lies in its Union to its Lord; his Preference with it, and Spirit in it; and conformity and fidelity to his laws alone [...].¹²²

This is not two kingdoms but one, as God’s will is sought to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The final consummation of the new earth and new heaven become more tangible by striving towards the final eschaton in what has been called “the puritan’s hope.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid, pp. 20-21.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 21.

¹²² Ibid, p. 22.

¹²³ For more on this ideological lineage see Ian Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014).

For Mather, the Roman Catholic Church made “a shambles” of the political order by placing Christians made free in Christ — and the societies that they inhabit — back under unjust regulations and legal burdens:

Tyranny over the Estates, the Liberties, the Lives of Men; a Tyranny managed with Weapons, which are mighty through the Devil, to destroy all that it falls upon; a Tyranny which by Courts, Fines, Mass, Imprisonments and Capital Executions, hath made the Earth a shambles, and been drunk with the Blood of the Martyrs.¹²⁴

The sovereign rule of God is the ultimate binding law, not Church Canons. Mather says:

’Tis a principle of our blessed Religion that God is the Sovereign Lord of all things, is to be obeyed absolutely and universally; His Will is to be the highest reason of our Obedience.¹²⁵

In describing what Mather believes to be the great many ungodly “cheats” of the Roman Catholic Church, he accuses it of being hypocritical in that while taxes are extracted from normal people, they have “cheated the Nations of Riches far beyond the Revenues of Emperors.”¹²⁶

Mather then recounts the political uprisings that came about through the theological struggles of Martin Luther and John Calvin. He sees the puritans as firmly placed within this same historical fight. As for the establishment of the Episcopal Church, Mather believes it was potentially a step towards a more free church in that it

¹²⁴ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 23.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25.

was at one time beginning to “sing songs [...] and heaven echoing the melody.”¹²⁷ The protestant reformation — which Mather defines here as a casting off of the slavery of Rome for the purity of “Sacred Scripture, the only rule of Reformation”¹²⁸ — represented new freedom and a return to the first principles of liberty. He situates the church’s struggle for this liberty as part of the covenant promise foretold in prophecy yet to be fulfilled (as he states that until then it was “nowhere perfect”) but this would also be a “return to Primitive Christianity,” a theme Mather incorporates elsewhere in his writings.¹²⁹

Mather mentions John Knox in the *Eleutheria*, citing him to bolster his freedom rhetoric. Mather quotes Knox as saying:

That by the word of God we must seek our warrant for the establishing of Religion, without which warrant nothing is to be obruded upon Christians; and that in the English Service-Book there were superstitious and impure, and imperfect things; and that the slackness in Reforming Religion when there was an Opportunity, was one of the many things whereby God’s Anger against England had been provoked [...]¹³⁰

Mather then proceeds to conclude his argument by summarizing that the protestant heroes of old, those freedom fighters of the faith, did not help to liberate the church only for Christians to now exchange “one popery for another.”¹³¹ Mather writes that:

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 34.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 35.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 40.

[...] the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect Rule of all that we are to believe or practice in Religion: and that Christian People not being tied up to the blind obedience of their Ecclesiastical Guides are to judge for themselves what they are to practice in Religion.¹³²

Here we have the Matherian notions of piety, rationality, scriptural authority and eleutherianism bound up in one: that the Christian can and should freely judge for themselves what to believe in accordance with the Bible and to act on it accordingly. Freedom of conscience was a covenant liberty.

Eleutherianism flourishes only under the condition of God's free grace. Freedom from the bondage of sin creates the opportunity for a Christian people to pursue unimpeded self-government. Within the the Calvinist tradition, sanctification is seen as a fruit of repentance which leads the Christian towards freedom in Christ. This ensures liberation from the law and instills a faithful obedience to keeping God's commandments.¹³³ Sanctification occurs after regeneration when people are able to think God's thoughts after him, as stated in Psalm 36:9 that "In Thy light shall we see light." It then spills over to protect both the individual and the godly community (including any potential unregenerate citizens residing there, as a function of common grace) resisting what it perceives as tyranny where it is found. Here one finds the government of the covenant. Where total depravity stripped man of his ability to pursue God and the things of God without regeneration of the will, the elected believer was blessed to pursue their Christian liberty with a new nature in accordance with

¹³² Ibid, p. 41.

¹³³ Gordon, *John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 40.

biblical passages such as Ezekiel 36:26¹³⁴ and Romans 12:2.¹³⁵ In context this was a radical statement. Such thinking would find a place in such powerful protestant historical experiences as the Great Awakening, modern American Evangelicalism and left-liberal New England Congregational denominations such as the United Church of Christ who consider themselves heirs to the American puritan tradition.

Mather then addresses the Church of England by engaging with the Book of Common Prayer and the liturgy. He asks them the same question he asks the Roman Catholics: where are the things you believe and practice warranted in scripture? If they are not listed as commands for worship in the Bible then they are only chains slowing down the progress of Christian liberty, which is the continuing and ultimate work of the true reformation. As it stands for Mather at this time, the Church of England was “eerily priest-ridden” and made unacceptable.¹³⁶ The biggest step for ensuring Christian liberty is the casting off of the chains of their unbiblical practices. He writes that the true church’s battles have long been against superstitious regulations and that Christians were burned because of a refusal to worship according to the rules of the Romish mass, “wherein their religion chiefly lay.”¹³⁷ The eleutherian is to follow their own conscience regarding worship. Mather seems to think that everything else will fall

¹³⁴ The King James Version reads “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

¹³⁵ The King James Version reads “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

¹³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 42.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 42-44.

into place after such considerations are secured, as worship is the most visible way of ascertaining the religious priorities of the people within a society.

Mather cites Church of England historians in saying that the biggest liturgical difference between Rome and England is that of the vernacular language, but the form is nearly the same.¹³⁸ In this way Mather is solidifying the reasons he is opposing the worship impositions put forward by the Church of England as more of the same oppression that protestants have been fighting for years. Mather says that “the Faith of Christ, and the Old and New Testaments, without any Additions from Rome”¹³⁹ was enough to govern the people. He goes on to say that the requirements the Church of England has sought to require of the nonconformists are unbiblical and thus unlawful. Quoting William Chillingworth, Mather writes:

I say take away tyranny and restore Christians to their just and all liberty of captivating their Understandings to the scriptures only, that universal liberty thus moderated, may quickly reduce Christendom to Truth and Unity.¹⁴⁰

For Mather, the duties of ensuring biblical Christian liberty can not be outsourced to the Church of England due to their track record of ecclesiastical laws that unfairly harm nonconformists such as regulations on baptism, for example. For Mather these many pages of laws are “well deserving of the Title Draconia.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 46.

¹³⁹ Ibid, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴⁰ William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants: A Safe Way to Salvation* (London, 1638); Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 62.

¹⁴¹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 67.

Mather continues his theme of not trusting earthly institutions including the church, civil government or any commingling of the two that did not reflect the simple scriptural message of God's rule without enshrining any required ecclesiastical scaffolding. Mather notes that through their laws the Church of England has shown that it "is holiness they hate more than nonconformity."¹⁴² Through the many errors, persecutions, overreaches, unfair laws and abdication of scriptural accountability Mather believes that the governmental apparatus has turned away from its biblical warrant for governing and is instead operating for its own partisan purposes. Here he quotes the English philosopher Henry More:

That he (God) will not tolerate nor connive any longer at their childish squabbling about Nutshells, Counters, and Cherry-stones; but menace them even with Destruction, if they leave not off their Animosities and Asperities of mind about Trifles, and hold not full onto the Royal Law of Love?¹⁴³

Mather believes that history has shown that the institutional church gains political power then proceeds to stamp out all forms of dissent, even in the nonessentials, rather than focusing on piety and love. He continues to make this point by noting the nonconformist ministers turned out and deprived of preaching platforms across the country. He says:

[...] they have deposed his Officers; they have destroyed his Offices; they have laid aside his Rule of Government; they have put up New things of their own quite opposite unto His: Yet they lay claim to all the Privileges of

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁴³ Henry More, *A Modest Inquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity* (London, 1664); Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 88.

His: and all this they do in his name; which is an Iniquity extraordinarily aggravated, extraordinarily complicated!¹⁴⁴

One can see the puritan mission into the wilderness as an eleutherian mission to form a society with Christ as king and all others — including government officials and church bureaucrats — as loyal subjects administrating his commands. After all, the motivation of the puritans back in England was not to rule but to be left alone. Mather says:

That a Number of Nonconformist chose to fly into a Wilderness, where they might Peaceably erect Evangelical Churches, and pursue the Designs of a Scriptural Reformation, and enjoy the Spiritual Blessings of a Reformed State, rather than both feel and give the Disturbances where-to the Differences here at home exposed them. An American Wilderness, now known by the Name of NEW-ENGLAND, was on this occasion, between the Years 1620 and 1640, Peoples with Evangelical Churches, by such as were driven out of the Realm of England through the Persecutions of Ceremony-Mongers, that ever were, and ever will be Enemies to all the true Interests of the Nation.¹⁴⁵

The puritans only ever concerned themselves as they did with charters, treaties and rulers because of the potentiality of their peculiar society to be easily upended. English rule was a reality that they dealt with remarkably well, often enjoying their relative obscurity. However, as in the Andros episode, they would only accept a government that was in accord with the puritan conceptualization of what the state should be.

Mather further prioritizes the puritan commitment to scriptural freedom by quoting the Reverend Robert Abbot, the Bishop of Salisbury, as saying:

It is a most wicked thing, that they should impose this Yoke upon you, and you are most foolish to submit your Necks unto it; for God would not

¹⁴⁴ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 76.

have abolished the Ceremonial Law Instituted by himself, that a New One may be invented by men.¹⁴⁶

Mather believes that it is lawful to rebel against rulers and institutions operating unlawfully.¹⁴⁷ The same convictions and logic that made the protestant reformation necessary are the same rules that bound the nonconformists to cast off the shackles of ecclesiological tyranny of the Church of England and attendant state impositions.

Later in 1710 Mather remains consistent on what a legitimate Christian ruler would look like:

The Virtuous Example of such a One is almost enough to Reform whole Nations! It carries irrefutable Charms with it, by which Totus Comfonitur Orbiss. A Prince Exemplary for Piety, Sheds the Rayes of Heaven, as the Sun fining in his Meridian Strength, with a most Penetrating Force into the People, Rejoicing under his Wings. Tis now a Rarity ; but it will not be so, in the Approaching Age, when the Kings of the Earthy shall bring their Glory and Honour into the Holy City! A Little piety in Princes, makes a glaring Show, The Eyes of their Subjects are Dazzled, their Minds Ravished, with it : They Numinize them. What would be done by a Degree of Piety in them, that should bear Proportion to the Degree of their Quality; and if their Piety were as much above that of other men, as their Station? Roll about, O Age, that shall bring on such admirable Spectacles!¹⁴⁸

For Mather this is the pious prince worthy of serving, as doing so is obedience to God himself.

In a theme familiar to Christian anti-state thinkers in later years, Mather criticizes the state apparatus for redefining virtue away from the biblical conceptions and towards a corrupted and backwards definition. The pious Christian is not rewarded in

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 91.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 93.

¹⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 121.

such a society, but rather those who maintain the state's status quo in regards to power and influence are. Mather writes:

No man can show any good that they have done except it be good to maintain a Corrupt Party in Church and State, to the excluding a pious, Sober, Peaceable, Diligent, Powerful interest.¹⁴⁹

Mather was not the only churchman to complain about what was called the “half reformation.”¹⁵⁰ For Mather to foment eleutherianism in New England would help to complete the reformation and remove obstacles to Christian fellowship, something he longed for:

In the first Reformation we were cleansed of idolatry; in the next I hope that we shall go a step further - Let us not fight against God; all dividing Terms of Communion or the exercise of ministry are the things to be removed in order to a more perfect Reformation of the Church [...].¹⁵¹

Mather states that true liberty towards this end is bowing at the name of Jesus.¹⁵²

Eleutheria reflected Mather's millenarianism in this time of political turmoil and he considered this work to be “the Seventh Apocalyptical Trumphet” announcing that “the kingdom of God is at hand.”¹⁵³ Mather ends his work with a clarion call for an even stronger thirst for liberty as a completion of the work of the reformation:

¹⁴⁹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 98, quoting Graves.

¹⁵⁰ Carter Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p. 112.

¹⁵¹ Cotton Mather, *Eleutheria*, p. 100.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 102, quoting Snowden.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 111.

If Luther, with the other Heroes of his Time, had been apprehensive that the Time appointed for making better and hotter Batteries than those which Huss and others had an Hundred Years before made upon the Romish Babylon, was come on, what Security would have been added unto their Magnanimity?¹⁵⁴

6.7 *Theopolis Americana* (1710)

Later in 1710 in his work *Theopolis Americana* Mather makes it clear that he is against the Crown as the monopoly of authority. His comments on the financial marketplace in Boston show his views on the market as an enabling Christian force in a society independent from government regulation. He writes:

Sometimes the Government of a Place, is Assembled in the Market-Place of the City. Oh! Most Privileged People, whose Affairs are managed, by Religious men, whom a Work of Grace has Ennobled, and made Partakers of the Divine Nature! Nothing so Desirable ! I say unto you, Nothing, Nothing so Necessary! If I were in a Church full of Kings, I would say what I do!¹⁵⁵

This delineation of space and authority can be seen as a precursor to sphere sovereignty concept within the reformed tradition, where God — the only true authority — has designated select earthly people and institutions with limited and specific authority to govern within set spheres of life with scripture as the ultimate guide.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Mather believed that Christian charity could be understood as an investment that God would favor. He exhorts:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 114.

¹⁵⁵ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ For more on this concept and its connection to Calvinism see Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” Speech at the Inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam (1880) and Gordon Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition” in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976).

But indeed, after the Stupendous Transactions of the Great Day, throughout all the Days of Eternity, still all our present Acts of Liberality, will be lying by us, like so many Good Bills of Exchange; which our merciful God will be forever Owing and Paying [...] yea, after more than millions of Ages, we shall make a greater Gain of the poor than Joseph did of a Famine in the Days of Old.¹⁵⁷

In using language and imagery that would resonate with his audience he is lending religious heft to the terms and interactions of the voluntary marketplace which would help to Christianize an arena where he held very little official influence. In such a marketplace at this time there was little place for kings, princes, regulatory agencies or even direct church intervention.

Mather makes no appeal to a forceful puritan theocratic power to govern state agencies, markets, civil laws or legislation in directing commerce in Boston. Rather, he appeals to the religion of New England to act as its own market regulator as a voluntary ascension to a common set of values. It was “the religion of New England” in the hearts of the business people that governed their affairs. He writes:

RELIGION shall wash her Fair Hands, and Abhor your Doings. Be it Proclaimed unto All the World. Ill-Dealings are not at all Countenanced; no, they are vehemently Disallowed, by the Religion of NEW-ENGLAND. We do PROTEST against them, with a transporting Vehemency, and behold with Agony the Blood, and the Grace, of our Great SAVIOUR, abused in them, with most aggravated Violations.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Cotton Mather, *The True Way of Thriving* (1695), pp. 26-27; Heyrman, “The Fashion Among More Superior People,” p. 113.

¹⁵⁸ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 11.

Here it is the Christian faith appealing to God, without threat of violence or coercion that Mather hoped would be sufficient to protect fair play in the marketplace.

As there is no state-funded welfare safety net in eleutherianism, Mather admonishes those in leadership to look after the least among them in acts of pious charity:

But, My FATHERS, while we Bless God for His Grace to You, in that thing, We will make it our Prayer, That a marvellous Prudence, and Patience, and zeal for nothing but a God-like Justice and Goodness, and a particular Tenderness for the Widow and the Orphan, and for them that have no Helper, may always be interwoven, into all your Administrations [...].¹⁵⁹

Such appeals to personal conscience and piety instead of coercive state action is a foundational ethic of Mather's eleutherianism. In regards to moral issues such as drunkenness, Mather did not want any new laws passed, rather he pastorally warns that drunk people will be less fit for kingdom work in New England society. He states:

I don't move, to have the Use of it Banished; but the Abuse and Excess of it. And I most importunately move, That all Sober People throughout the Land, would set themselves to think, What may be done, to have Rum used with more of Moderation? [...] Instead of Propounding Laws, to retrench a Mischief, not easy to come at. My proposal is; That this One Observation may be Spred thro' the Country, and awfully considered of. Tho' this Liquor may be Useful, at some time, & in some things, yet no Man that uses it constantly will ever be Good for very much.¹⁶⁰

Drunkenness is a convenient issue to use in examining Mather's eleutherianism. The ultimate punishments for not taking personal responsibility for drunkenness will not

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 19-20.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

necessarily be prison but instead personal ignominy in reputation and threat of the loss of protestant identity to Roman Catholicism. He writes:

Tis with a trembling Soul, that I must Speak, what is now to be Spoken; If once this become a Country of Drunken Protestants, we can have little to plead with the Holy Son of God, why it should not be so; little to plead, why we should not fall before Popish Idolaters; little to plead, why the Laodicean Fate should not come upon us.¹⁶¹

Even the lurking fear of a final declension due to wanton sinfulness leading to victory for the Roman Catholics was not enough for Mather to call for state intervention. For Mather, these matters of the heart and their physical manifestations such as drunkenness called for a personal and covenantal remedy that was best supported by his brand of liberty and personal accountability before God and the community.

Mather believed eleutherianism to be the best way to pursue piety as a means to bring about the consummation of a worldwide protestant reformation of which he hoped America to play an important part. This goal was not ultimately a political one but a spiritual one as Christ's kingdom was not of this earth as in John 18:36.¹⁶²

Mather's eleutherianism represented the way of the freedom-lover which was obedience to the King of Kings while continuing to not conform to any edict, ruler, liturgy or mandate that was not biblical in origin. Eleutherianism was about an individual freedom that would enable a godly community to pursue Christian liberty unimpeded by the traditions of men and the burden of improperly instituted rules.

There was a rugged New England elegance to this concept that lived on through each

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁶² The King James Version reads "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

charter. This eleutherian perspective would reverberate loudly through American history for years to come and should serve to place Cotton Mather in the pantheon of great Americans who though bound by God strove tirelessly to be free before all others.

7. The Cosmopolitanism of Cotton Mather

*“One must not live as if his neighbourhood were all the Land,
or his Country, or his Party were all the Church, or all the World.”¹*
-Richard Baxter, *How to Do Good to Many*.

In the work of Cotton Mather there are constellations of doctrines and themes clustered around the most important events of his life. Inevitably, he saw his local congregation and the puritan tradition as an extension of himself. Between the vision that he had for himself and the eventful times in which he lived, we find him become somewhat estranged from Congregationalism and returning to the idea of “church” in different ways. He becomes increasingly disengaged from local ecclesiological issues in correlation with the waning of his influence in Boston. In these years he would turn to writing the *Magnalia*, looking back on the puritan church as a collagist putting select historical narrative fragments together before looking forward in a new way in such works as *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, *Things Look'd For*, his University of Glasgow correspondence and more. These pivots occur as he earnestly attempts to recreate himself as an international personality in reaction to both internal impetuses and events happening all around him. His identity was set adrift after his disenchantment with the changing shape of New England and this helped him to bring a new transatlantic cosmopolitanism into focus. Through his American isolation came Mather's attempt at international ministry.²

¹ Richard Baxter, *How to Do Good to Many: Or, the Public Good is the Christian's Life* (1682), p. 11.

² Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 426.

Mather never visited Britain, and in sending his books to the Scottish Presbyterian churches he said “Alas, That he who sends it, can't go with it!”³ In this American isolation he becomes more broadminded, looking beyond Boston. He embraces the cosmopolitan which for him would have meant concepts of extended obligations and ideas about a society consisting of all Christians, not just those living within his own country, on certain trade routes or within certain foreign communities.⁴ His interest in areas such as the Orient, for example, would go well beyond the ordinary American awareness of the East as a region of riches and the unusual, and for Mather would include a commitment to missionary work.⁵

The idea of the cosmopolitan as holy, the new Christian man being an international protestant even when never leaving New England is something that Mather promoted through his ecclesiology and theology in the latter part of his ministry. His being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow in 1710 defined him as an international man (at least in his own mind). As his reputation was in decline in Boston and Congregationalism continued toward something approaching a declension, Mather was not content to be one of its victims. CS Lewis called the puritans fierce and fashionable,⁶ and in evaluating his work and attitude we see that this is true about Mather in particular. Mather took great pride in his list of international

³ Cotton Mather, *Parentator*, introduction, p. 5.

⁴ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 46.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 121-122.

correspondents, which at during the height of his popularity was probably the most extensive international correspondence of any contemporary American puritan.⁷

It is not an easy thing to step outside of the collective religious, familial and community tradition when one's grandfathers were John Cotton and Richard Mather, with Increase Mather as father and mentor.⁸ As a thinker and minister Mather blended both tradition and innovation.⁹ He did this by recognizing the individual's place within a corporate covenant in a way that enabled him to engage with places outside Boston at the same time that his patience with Boston was at its most thin. The individual's personal identity in Christ superseded any similar connections to just the puritan church, as Edmund S. Morgan puts it:

But those who had caught the fever knew that Puritanism demanded more of the individual than it did the church. Once it took possession of a man, it was seldom shaken off and would shape — some would say warp — his whole life.¹⁰

Mather represented this individual commitment to God by saying that “To Turn to God, and be Acquainted with our own Heart, is a more Glorious Thing than to Discern Spirits, or have the Visions of Angels.”¹¹ For Mather, to know God intimately is to become acquainted with yourself in Christ. This self-awareness (including the

⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, pp. 549-551; Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘Manuductio ad Theologiam,’” p. 4 and note 3.

⁸ Breitweiser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 27.

⁹ Griffin, *A Singular Man*, p. 478.

¹⁰ Edward Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1958), p. 1.

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *The Converted Sinner*, p. 22.

attendant theological concerns such as sin, depravity and the Christian's reliance on constant grace) was essential to his pious service of the worldwide church.

7.1 Cosmopolitanism As Ideal

Scholars such as Nan Goodman and Kenneth Silverman have recognized Cotton Mather's desire to become part of the international Christian dialogue. I expand on this concept to show that Mather's international impulses were rooted in his Christian cosmopolitanism which was an anti-myopic expansion of broad-minded (that is to say, ecumenical and newly-tolerant) New England puritanism into the mainstream of transatlantic Christianity during this era. My thesis investigates and extends the idea that throughout the body of Mather's work is a distinctive strand of Christian individualism committed to piety towards a cosmopolitan identity in the world at large. Mather's journey towards this personal autonomy within the decline of Congregationalism is all the more profound in light of early puritanism's skepticism towards the renaissance ideals of personal freedom and "self-fashioning."¹²

In the later parts of his ministry Mather was working to enlarge the scope of his own puritan worldview in a way that transcended the limitations of Massachusetts at this time. He faced issues in ways different from that of his father which itself is significant as an indicator of growth and individual awareness. Increase Mather felt slighted by the people of New England in 1690 when they were unhappy with the new charter provisions he secured. He threatened to remain in England as a result. Cotton Mather would also become disenchanted by the Bostonians, but his passionate fervor

¹² Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, pp. 22-25.

for the pious service of New England in the transatlantic protestant movement remained strong even as it evolved. He served the God of New England as being beholden to nothing but the comprehensive worldwide interests of the faith. As he put it “I am very much a Stranger to the clashing of particular interests, and I have none of them to serve.”¹³ The renewal of the covenant (while making it less rigid) required for Mather to re-emphasize his commitments to cosmopolitanism.¹⁴

The puritan experience overall was inextricably linked between wilderness and city, and the lure of cosmopolitanism was never too distant.¹⁵ It was partially due to Mather’s deep study and intense admiration of New England puritans past that he found historical grounding in the vision of an international and cosmopolitan ministry. Mather believed that the ideal man was one of whom could be said what he said about John Cotton, and what Erasmus said of Jerome, that “in him were all the excellencies which we admire separately and singularly in other men.”¹⁶ In Mather’s own life we see his striving to reach this ideal in the volume of influential work done on such a variety of timely and timeless subjects at such important points in New England’s history. Additionally, one of Mather’s heroes, William Ames, had declared himself an “intentionally New England man”¹⁷ and this influenced Mather along the way towards understanding himself as an American international. It has been said that Mather

¹³ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 419; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 57.

¹⁴ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 67.

¹⁵ See Jonathan Beecher Field, *Errands into the Metropolis: New England Dissidents in Revolutionary London* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2009).

¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 2: p. 253; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 52.

¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 236.

dressed in “fashionable raiment” including a “modish periwig,” and that for Mather sackcloth and ashes were hardly the apparel for a young man's daily life.¹⁸ He dressed the cosmopolitan part while his ministry trended in the international direction as described below.

There is no disconnect between individualism, covenant engagement and cosmopolitanism for Mather. He was not a captious loner. Rather, as the entire world belongs to God, he strove to be a more committed global citizen. Mather believed that anything good that might come from the self comes only after the agony of God wrecking and remaking the self,¹⁹ with the annihilation of the self being a prerequisite for piety.²⁰ The self would always remain, hopefully in a more pious form. He wrote that “Christianity never instructed men to lay down that Natural Principle of Self.”²¹ When Mather pursued cosmopolitanism he was not turning his back on all of the puritan identity markers he had worked so hard to help forge for himself and his community. Cosmopolitanism is compatible with the idea of belonging to more than one sphere and managing more than one identity at the same time.²² Mather's trending towards individual cosmopolitanism in his work represented a breakaway from

¹⁸ Boas and Boas, *Cotton Mather*, p. 72.

¹⁹ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 45.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 63.

²¹ Cotton Mather, *Things To Be Look'd For*, p. 75.

²² Nan Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 15.

the “closed orthodoxy”²³ of New England. This also motivated his ecumenicism as discussed earlier and helped to set the tone for his further personal declension away from the insular model of what has been called the “persistent localism” of puritanism.²⁴

From the eve of the charter revocation until the death of King William III in 1702 was the time that the most influential puritan elites wrestled most visibly with the twin poles of polis and cosmopolis that made up Seneca’s two commonwealths.²⁵ Cotton Mather was at the forefront of this struggle. Puritans like Mather were not simply learning about others but also cultivating an awareness of themselves in cosmopolitan fashion as “standing in an ethically significant relation” to other Christians around the world.²⁶ This was especially true in Boston which was growing into a uniquely cosmopolitan American city.²⁷ As Massachusetts itself was less concerned with independence from England or incipient nationhood than with a welcome dependence

²³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, p. 150. For more on the idea of closed orthodoxy see Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 111 and John William Theodore Youngs, *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700-1750* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 29

²⁴ T. H. Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 3-28.

²⁵ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 15. See also Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁶ Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 115; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 3.

²⁷ See Peterson, “Theopolis Americana: The City-State of Boston, the Republic of Letters, and the Protestant International,” pp. 329-371.

on the world,²⁸ in Mather's life he sought cosmopolitanism as his works became a more connected part of the transatlantic Christian world.

Mather's regional influence had been noticeable for some time, as ministers outside Boston worked in his more experimental notions into their own sermons.²⁹ In addition to what has been said above in this thesis regarding the ecumenical and ecclesiological tendencies of Mather as his ministry progressed, here we note that the rhetoric employed and purposes sought were of a distinctly cosmopolitan nature that reflected his point of view on Boston, himself and the world. Nan Goodman puts it this way:

Although he started out his career in the guise of Increase Mather's dutiful son, he soon grew to be one of the most prolific, broad-minded, and independent thinkers of the seventeenth century [...] Mather's interest in the language of cosmopolitanism dovetails with his interest in softening the requirements for church membership, a movement that began in the middle of the seventeenth century (when Mather was born), but gained real momentum in the 1690s in Mather's full-throated endorsement of the Heads of Agreement.³⁰

In this way we see a strand of cosmopolitanism in the life and ministry of Mather that becomes less restrained when he is confronted with certain issues such as covenant, ecclesiology, ecumenicism, piety, and liberty during this part of his life.

Mather was a man of contrasts and transitions. He was passionately tied to the past but obsessively aware of his place in the present and ever mindful of the future.

²⁸ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 81.

²⁹ Meredith Marie Neuman, *Jeremiah's Scribes: Creating Sermon Literature in Puritan New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 85.

³⁰ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 136.

He was a forward-thinker who wrote far more on present and future concerns than he did jeremiads. The evolving tension between the proud primitive and rural sophisticate was resolved by a reimagined transatlantic ecclesiology that embraced new uses for piety and a new sense of self being detached from Boston. The works discussed in this section serve as the literary links between Mather the hagiographer and historian of the early champions of New England, and Mather the sophisticated cosmopolitan leader of what is a new way to think about the future of the church in America and beyond. This mutation took full effect near the middle of his ministry as by 1708 the ministry of Cotton Mather had adopted a full fledged sympathy towards transatlantic international Christian concerns.³¹

He reached this place through personal development that involved his becoming a more individualistic American cosmopolitan. This was both a deeply held character trait and ministry tool. As a rural sophisticate Mather tried to negotiate a way of cultural accommodation, intellectual fermentation and personal holiness that was biblically authorized.³² He would unleash his “suppressed urbanity” as Kenneth Silverman called it.³³ Mather refused to be limited by his geographic place in the Christian world and constantly strove for a larger stage.³⁴ In *Bonifacius* he was clear that his aim as a writer was to “to promote the interest of the whole world” and this mindset would pervade his work through changing and challenging times.³⁵

³¹ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 35.

³² Kennedy, *The First Evangelical*, p. 80.

³³ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 165.

³⁴ Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘Manuductio ad Theologiam,’”p. 3.

³⁵ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 22; Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, p. 53.

7.2 Cosmopolitanism as a Covenantal Function

A functional definition of cosmopolitanism is essential for this discussion as it is a term often overladen with elements that are not always accurate or helpful. While the contours of cosmopolitanism are not always well-defined, the definitions usually have shared commitments towards overcoming local, regional and national presuppositions and reconstructing core concepts that are employed to evaluate ideas and movements.³⁶ It was a term first used by the Greek Cynics and later the Stoics meaning “a citizen of the world,” who used it to identify people as belonging to two distinct communities: the local and the “common.”³⁷ Rather than concerning themselves in one place, the cosmopolitan seeks the “cosmic city” situated above one’s own geographic regions.³⁸ In appraising Mather as a cosmopolitan it is significant to note that cosmopolitanism speaks to an ideal about relationships of variegated localities and the environments that compose them.³⁹ Cosmopolitanism can comprise ontological, ethical, legal, historical, ecological, aesthetic, economic, emotional and cognitive aspects that denaturalize previously established views.⁴⁰ Mather defines his version of cosmopolitanism clearly in *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated* of 1689:

³⁶ Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

³⁷ Gerard Delanty and Špela Močnik, “Cosmopolitanism,” *Oxford Bibliographies Series* online edition (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0133>> [accessed 15 June 2019].

³⁸ See Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

³⁹ Marianna Papastephanou, *Cosmopolitanism: Educational, Philosophical and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2016), p. 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Methinks the Children of Men too much imitate the Spider, when they Look after nothing but building a little House for themselves, and concern themselves with nothing but the petty Affairs thereof. We should remember that we are Citizens of the WORLD, and as far as we can, we should visit every Corner of it, with our Praises to Him, of whom and for whom is all! I make no question, but that we do in a blessed manner under Heaven, by doing so. The Praises of God are Exhibited in every part of the World, and we forfeit the privilege of Reason, if we do not put as many of them as we can, into our Acknowledgments.⁴¹

Mather is persuading his listeners to reach out farther than New England and view themselves as Christian citizens in the world. In his cosmopolitan impulse we see a proto-Christian tourism that mirrors that of internationalist Chevalier Ramsey.⁴²

Properly situating New England as a temporary location for an earthly Christian ministry rather than a literal New Jerusalem allowed for Cotton Mather to theologize the future geography of all Christians as a place of anticipation for the renewal to come in Christ as in Philippians 3:20 which reads “Our citizenship, however, is in heaven, and it is from there that we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.”

Cosmopolitanism was to Mather a streak of optimism in his frustration with the declining fervor of the Christian youth of New England. In works such as *The Christian Philosopher* Mather is generally positive about the nature of international Christian progress as shown in innovations in both science and medicine at that time.⁴³ This optimism in modernity as expressed through new technology comes during the trying times of the smallpox inoculation controversy which took a personal toll on Mather and

⁴¹ Cotton Mather, *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, p. 24.

⁴² See Andrew Michael Ramsay, *Les voyages de Cyrus* (Paris, 1727; London, 1728) and *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Fenelon* (The Hague, 1723).

⁴³ Vartanian, “Cotton Mather and the Puritan Transition into the Enlightenment,” p. 221.

contributed to his loss of esteem in some circles during these years. It is also important to note that Mather did not overcompensate for his local frustrations by idealizing foreign lands or their people. Though largely built on unfortunate stereotypes, Mather suggested that certain countries were inclined to certain vices, for example the “Levity” of France, the “Haughtiness” of Spain, the “Revengefulness” of Italy, and the “Drunkenness” of Germany.⁴⁴

Applied to Mather in his context, cosmopolitanism can be defined as a composite of the internationalism, ecumenicism, individualism, sense of accomplishments, self and place which came to define him in his later years. This is important to the discussion of his ecclesiological commitments because it represents a shift in the understandings and uses of history, place and principles from his earlier work. This cosmopolitanism was useful to his ministry as his long-existing eclecticism found a new outlet towards the completion of worldwide reformation.

The concept of covenant was a comfortable and useful device in achieving these goals. In Christianity prior to this time it generally was unacceptable to make agreements, charters, treaties or contracts with “infidels.” Increase Mather adopted the Massachusetts Body of Liberties which provided for outsiders and allowed for a covenantal inclusion in a way that tended toward the cosmopolitan.⁴⁵ Cotton Mather would take such thinking to the next level through works such as *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, *Theopolis Americana*, *The Serviceable Man*, *Problema Theologicum*, *Things To Be Look'd For* and *Manuductio ad Ministerium*. These works

⁴⁴ Cotton Mather, *Addresses to Old Men*, pp. 69-70; Setran, “Declension Comes Home,” p. 39.

⁴⁵ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 63.

act as a representative swath of his efforts towards a strong personal puritan cosmopolitanism during this part of his life which included him helping to see Boston, his family and himself through times of political upheaval, covenant change, grumblings of declension and more. He entered into the new century remarried, nearing forty and poised to replace his father as the most prominent minister in America,⁴⁶ and he did so with a heart readied to embrace a worldwide Christianity as exemplified in the works discussed below.

In keeping with the New Jerusalem typological modality, there was a reinforced singularity of the particular covenant with the puritans as God had made with the Jews.⁴⁷ Mather was innovating within part of the puritan tradition that had always had an element of subtle cosmopolitanism built into it. It was the puritan concept of covenant that opened the door to a more robust understanding of the individual. It was only through personal election to the family of God — and this outside of bloodline, tradition or lineage — and individual sanctification graciously granted by Christ alone and not any liturgical act or religious ceremony that secured the atomistic (person) into the whole (corporate elect). A religious community did not mean a tribal or group identity. Rather, the puritan visible covenant, the church, was a covenant composed of individuals who brought their personal sanctification into the collective. The Old Testament covenant created the neighbor just as it created the self, and adherence to the covenant brings into being a community of individual moral agents

⁴⁶ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 193.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 65.

interacting with God and one another.⁴⁸ This way of looking at the covenant invokes a subtle cosmopolitan meaning by creating awareness of needs and duties outside one's self.⁴⁹

Where English puritans in the early sixteenth century sought to reform the mother church towards something that looked more like a full protestantism,⁵⁰ Mather now sought a worldwide ecumenical consummation of the reformation apart from any lingering tradition. Contrary to the beliefs of some of his forebearers,⁵¹ Mather believed in no sanctity of place and did not hold New England soil out as holy. In his cosmopolitan spirit he sought "Harmony in Persons that are in many Sentiments as well as Regions, distant from one another."⁵² Here he was echoing William Ames who said "The church instituted by God is not rightly national, provincial, or diocesan."⁵³

In the years shortly following 1700 Mather would introduce new ecclesiological ideas that would distance himself from Congregationalism into what has been called "crypto-Presbyterianism."⁵⁴ Though this type of Presbyterianism was still fairly local in

⁴⁸ Bernard M. Levinson, "The Covenant at Mount Sinai: The Argument of Revelation: Authority," eds. Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum and Noam J Zohar, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 27; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) for more on the aims of the English puritans.

⁵¹ See Cecelia Tichi, "The Puritan Historians and Their New Jerusalem," *Early American Literature*, vol. 6 (1971), pp. 143-155 and Todd Gitlin and Leil Leibovitz, *The Chosen People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) for more on this concept.

⁵² Cotton Mather, *India Christiana* (1721), p. 56; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 21.

⁵³ William Ames, *The Administration of the Covenant from the Coming of Christ to the End of the World* (1639), § 22.

⁵⁴ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 143.

the New England context, it represented a step outside of the traditional Congregational ecclesiology that he was bound to earlier in his life. This embracing of polity outside of his own tradition reflected a trend of discontentment that would eventually plague his provincial existence.⁵⁵ It has been argued that though Mather flirted with stronger Presbyterian-like powers regarding polity in order to solidify his standing within the local church, he went his own way seeking social value and esteem in the growth of piety and Christian liberty.⁵⁶ With his disappointment in New England came a newly registered excitement for interacting with other peoples and places through novel avenues including enterprises as grand as international law.⁵⁷ He was feeling a Christian spirit beyond Boston and it was showing more and more clearly in his work.

7.3 Americana and Cosmo-Polity

The New England colonies were the place of his birth and life, and his Americanism was a crucial part of his cosmopolitan ministry. Any embellishment of America in developing an aesthetic of “Americana” can be seen as a sophisticating device towards the ends of cosmopolitan participation. Mather was invested in making this young country seem not at all so innocent, and in a sense even more horrific and threatening than the old country which they fled. This can be seen in his discussions of nature, medicine and witchcraft. The American wilderness was considered by many at that time to be Gog and Magog: a primitive, abandoned, desolate, depressing outpost

⁵⁵ Heimert and Delblanco, *The Puritans in America*, p. 330.

⁵⁶ Stout, *The New England Soul*, p. 159.

⁵⁷ Nan Goodman, “What About Peace?: Cotton Mather’s Millennium and the Rise of International Law,” in *Law and the Utopian Imagination*, eds. Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Merrill Umphrey (University Press Scholarship Online, 2014), p. 106

that even God himself had passed over by refusing to send the call of the gospel.⁵⁸ This was a stigma that Mather was motivated to correct because of what it implied about himself and his church. Such motivations were likely just below the surface in his commendable scientific works, medical breakthroughs, philosophies and the other cutting-edge ideas for which Mather insisted that he (and in turn, America) become known. His embracing of the cosmopolitanism was a way of grounding himself in the larger works of God in the transatlantic world as instability became more widespread in Boston.⁵⁹

New England was a piece of the international whole but Mather was also committed to retaining its character even in the midst of changes. In 1690 Mather would be quick to remind people that America would remain a distinctly puritan country regardless of the political upheavals in Britain, saying “we that are a Countrey of Nonconformists, may it not pass by unmentioned.”⁶⁰ By 1714 Cotton Mather had taken to referring to the “European and American World” as both one entity and constituent parts of a united Christendom.⁶¹ In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, Mather saw the ascension of Prince William to the British throne as an act that would help to internationalize the Americans as Britons, and all European and American Christians as joyful protestants. He exclaims:

⁵⁸ Reiner Smolinski, *The Kingdom, the Power & The Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature* (University of Nebraska: Electronic Texts in American Studies, 1998), p. x.

⁵⁹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, pp. 110-111.

⁶⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, pp. 38-41; Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, pp. 207-208.

⁶¹ Cotton Mather, *The Glorious Throne* (1714), p. 29, 35; Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 23.

We see ascending to the British Throne, A king whose Way to it is Prepared in the Hearts of His Joyful Subjects [...] A king, in whose Dominions Lutherans and Calvinists Live Easily with One Another [...] A king, of whom we have all Possible Reason to hope, that He will Discern and Pursue the True Interest of the Nations; and give the Best Friends of His House and of the Nations, cause to Rejoyce [...] Among, whom it is incredible, that the dissenters, who have been so Universally true to That, and His Interest, should not be regarded as a Body of People, too true Britons, and Christians, to be Excluded from a Share in the Common Joy of their Fellow Subjects.⁶²

Mather was adamant that the new king see the New England puritans as full and loyal members of transatlantic British protestantism. In surveying the blessings and movements of God, Mather extends his gaze beyond New England. He says:

Secondly, We ought with many praises to observe the Excellent Things which God has done for Others as well as for our selves. Our praises must not be confined unto those mercies of God, which we our selves have been the Subjects of. But all His Dispensations abroad in the world, are to be the Occasion of our Hallelujahs to Him [...] Whatever our God is Doing, we should upon the sight thereof be praising; and we should Acknowledge Him, in all those Excellent Things, which we see done in any part of the Universe.⁶³

These “dispensations” are the pouring out of God’s spirit on disparate protestant peoples and movements. For the cosmopolitan person, the blessings of the church abroad equals blessings at home, and the reverse holds true as well. These attitudes were inextricably linked to the events transpiring around him at that time. The loss of the original charter and the securing of the new one in 1692 were significant events

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cotton Mather, *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated*, p. 10.

that enable us to view the sparks of the puritan cosmopolis in Mather. Nan Goodman comments that:

To renew the covenant was not only to commemorate but also to celebrate one's journey from one point in time to another. It was also to acknowledge the contingencies of one's role in a collective history; a history to which the Puritans clearly belonged that was unfolding alongside others in a cosmopolitan context.⁶⁴

The gaining, losing, reattaching, reappraising and adjusting the covenant is a function of cosmopolitanism because central to a vision of cosmopolitanism is the idea of flexible attachment at a distance.⁶⁵ What is distant is not actually yours though by affinity, prayers and support one might join in a common struggle.

This is further complicated by a great commission mandate to bring the gospel into the entire world and a dominion mandate to subdue the whole world. Being an American cosmopolitan opened up opportunities to polish and reinvent international and community commitments. Goodman continues:

With each covenant renewal that acknowledged the temporariness of the covenantal bond, the Puritans were able not only to reaffirm the virtues of their old, distant relationship with the mother country but also to reimagine themselves and announce a new legal and political identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world.⁶⁶

For Mather, as distinguished from some of the other New England puritan church fathers, this covenant was not a regional agreement based on any sort of holiness of

⁶⁴ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 78.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 73.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

place, which is not to say that the city of Boston was unimportant to him. In 1698 Mather was teaching that Boston can and should be an admirable Christian city without necessarily being New Jerusalem or a promised land in and of itself. This city was a memorial to the gifts of God towards the puritans of time past and the pride of those blessed enough to live there in the present. Like the characters in the *Magnalia*, Boston itself was a memorial to the God who had brought them thus far, as in 1 Samuel 12:12. Mather recounts:

Yea, within a Few years, after the first-Settlement, it grew to be, The Metropolis of the whole English America. Little was This Expected, by them that First-Settled the Town, when, for a while, Boston, was proverbially called, Lost Town, for the mean and sad Circumstances of it. But, O Boston, it is because thou hast Obtained Help from God; even from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, for the sake of His Gospel, Preached and once prized here, undertook thy Patronage.⁶⁷

It is these same “teachers” of Boston as memorialized in the *Magnalia* that by God’s grace created the model puritan city that Mather is portraying. He says:

But yet, all this while, Our Eyes have seen our Teachers. Here are several Golden Candlesticks in the Town. Shining and Burning Lights, have Illuminated them. There are gone to Shine in an Higher Orb, Seven Divines that were once the Stars of this Town, in the Pastoral Charge of it [...] The Dispensations of the Gospel were never Enjoy'd by any Town, with more Liberty and for so long a while together. Our Opportunities to Draw near unto the Lord Jesus Christ, in His Ordinances, cannot be parallel'd. Boston, Thou hast been Lifted up to Heaven; There is not a Town upon Earth, which on some Accounts has more to answer for. Such, O Such, has been our Help from our God, Because His Mercy Endureth for ever.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Bostonian Ebenezer* (1698), p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.

Mather never proclaimed America as the new Zion, and even calling it New Jerusalem only made it akin to a holy city within a larger whole. Mather did however counter those who thought America would have no share in the millennium at all because of its newness and isolation. He asserted that:

They that are of the [millennial] City shall have something to do here for Him. O NEW-ENGLAND, There is Room to hope, That thou also shalt belong to the CITY.⁶⁹

Peace was expected between rival town governments in the same way that Christian peace was sought between different individuals and international states. In 1690 Mather stipulated:

Furthermore it is Expected that the several Towns within this Jurisdiction do speedily furnish themselves with all fit means for the good Education of Youth, and take special care to avoid Factions & Quarrels in their other Town Affairs.⁷⁰

Mather's embracing and exemplifying an American cosmopolitanism can be viewed as a coping mechanism for dealing with local disenchantment. In the minds of many Bostonians, near the end of his ministry Mather had become to some in Boston "a biddyish seriocomic martyr eternally vaunting his tiresome benevolence and meekness."⁷¹ He was even mocked in the newspapers in the form of caricatures such as Silence Dogood, the puritan killjoy. Against this painful backdrop of loss of stature

⁶⁹ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 29; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 51.

⁷¹ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 360.

which included his works no longer welcomed by the ruling political class,⁷² his cosmopolitan turn towards internationalism became all the more attractive to him.

Mather's cosmopolitanism enabled him to see the role of all people, including all members of each social strata, as participants in a global Christianity. Mather believed that broadminded piety exemplified through open arms would heighten worldwide respect for New England. Specifically he believed that accepting religious refugees would help New England gain international esteem as a show of zealousness to the rest of the world.⁷³ He even went so far as to collaborate on a sermon publication *The Charitable Samaritan* with the theological leader of the French Huguenots in New England, Ezekiel Carre, which was designed to fight anti-French bigotry in New England. In the sermon Mather noted that it was intended to "manifest the uniformity of Doctrine of the Protestants from the most distant places in the World."⁷⁴

This reformation of Christian manners, as discussed in the section on Mather's eleutherianism, was also a cosmopolitan goal in the way that Kevin Vanhoozer has said that Christianity "is a finishing school for Holy Nations."⁷⁵ Mather exhorts that "O that all ranks and kind of people among us, were in earnest about the universal Reformation of our Manners."⁷⁶ This embrace of universal Christian manners represented a step

⁷² Ibid, p. 365.

⁷³ Owen Stanwood and Evan Haefeli, "Jesuits, Huguenots, and the Apocalypse: The Origins of America's First French Book," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 116 (2006), p. 68.

⁷⁴ Ezechiel Carre, *The Charitable Samaritan* (1689) translated by Nehemiah Walter.

⁷⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Travail of Reformational Protestantism: Authority and the Conflict of Interpretive Communities," Beeson Divinity School Reformation Heritage Lecture Series transcription <<https://www.beesondivinity.com/podcast/2019/transcripts/beeson-podcast-episode-427-vanhoozer-lecture.txt>> [accessed June 19 2019].

⁷⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. 47.

towards the eschaton and a fulfillment of prophecy as the culmination of the reformation. The millennium is the ideological principle behind his burgeoning cosmopolitanism, and his changing attitude towards New England provincialism undergirded the same mutation. For Mather the millennium itself is cosmopolitan.⁷⁷ Mather describes the millennium as a place no longer divided by ethnic or religious borders. He expressed the hope that:

There shall no longer be such an unhappy Division of Mankind, as we see at present when Mahometism is extended farther than Christendome, and paganism farther than either of them, and Christendom itself, is in many parts of it, little better than a revived paganism, and the very Empire of Antichrist.⁷⁸

Of more importance than the singularity of New England as New Jerusalem was the cosmopolitan cohesion of what Mather called “the Saved Nations.”⁷⁹ Their prosperity was tied to the promise that no declension would be final and that the errand into the wilderness would have a glorious reward in being part of a victorious global Christianity after the eschaton.⁸⁰ Mather believed that “Paradise is what we have under cultivation.”⁸¹ As he wrote in the *Biblia Americana*, Mather believed that the feast of fat things full of marrow with well-refined wine as described in Isaiah 25:6

⁷⁷ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 88, 103.

⁷⁸ Cotton Mather, *Problema Theologicum* (1703), pp. 371-372; Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 95.

⁷⁹ Cotton Mather, *Problema Theologicum*, introductory note by Jeffrey Scott Mares, p. 347.

⁸⁰ See Cotton Mather, *The Trifold Paradesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski for more on this topic.

⁸¹ *Ibid* at p. 153.

will be served to the church at history's glorious end.⁸² Perry Miller pursued the rephrasing of the errand into the wilderness into something different and more specific. In this case, for Mather it might have been called "the errand for history."⁸³ Mather believed that the destiny of the church on earth was that it would become an international Christian superstructure. In 1703 he said:

All the nations will again be received into the church [...] We are certain, That the Ends of the Earth shall Turn unto the Lord. We are certain, That all Nations whom the Lord hath made, shall come and worship before him. We are certain, that the Church will become a great Mountain, that shall fill the whole Earth.⁸⁴

This geopolitical embrace of non-Christian lands in Mather's millennium paralleled the shift from a territorially defined to cosmopolitan identity.⁸⁵

The ultimate concern for Mather is not the exporting of each nonconformist principle around the world, but rather an attachment to the foundational principles of Christian worship. Mather reminds his readers:

Could I speak with the voice as loud as the Last Trumpet, I should not fear to tell you, The God of our Fathers will blast that Wordly Wisdom which counts it a conveniency for us to Dissemble our Non Conformity to

⁸² Breitwieser, "All on an American Table: Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana*," p. 381.

⁸³ Milton Sernett, "Portent and Providence: An Investigation of the Puritan Habit of Deciphering the Will of God in the Natural and the Preternatural with Special Reference to *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne," MDiv Thesis, Concordia Seminary (1967), p. 11; Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, p. 28.

⁸⁴ Cotton Mather, *Problem Theologica*, p. 371.

⁸⁵ Goodman, *The Puritan Cosmopolis*, p. 88.

whatever vain Worship, has nothing but the Traditions of men, to be a Warrant for it.⁸⁶

For Mather it is enough to pursue Congregational worship while also tolerating the different approaches of other Christian communities. Not only his foreign correspondence but also his international publications gave him hope to one day be better appreciated overseas.⁸⁷ In his diary he writes:

His favouring mee, with Liberty of the press and publishing more of my Composures than any Man's, that ever was in America, while I am yett a young Man: and making my studies, to bee readd, and priz'd, and serviceable, not only all over these American Colonies, but in Europe also.⁸⁸

Mather believed his overseas publishing to have been part of the promise previously delivered to him in the vision of an angel. He recalled that it had been said of him:

Thus was hee fair in his Greatness in the length of his Branches for his Root was by the great Waters Now was any Tree in Garden of God like unto him in his beauty [...] in particular this Angel spoke of the influence his branches should have, and of the books this Youth should write, not only in America, but also in Europe, publishing.⁸⁹

Mather felt called to be an international cosmopolitan for the cause of Christ and the reputation of God's new work in America. Mather was not hesitant to seek knowledge outside of the Christian faith especially as it related to science and medicine. When he

⁸⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. 54.

⁸⁷ D.N. Deluana, "Cotton Mather Published Abroad," *Early American Literature*, vol. 26 (1991), p. 145.

⁸⁸ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 228; Deluana, "Cotton Mather Published Abroad," p. 146.

⁸⁹ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 87; Deluana, "Cotton Mather Published Abroad," p. 146.

had his orthodoxy questioned after his comments on inoculation, Mather is believed to have written pseudo-anonymously:

It is Cavilled (for to say, Objected, would be too easy a word for such impertinence) that this New Way comes to us from the Heathen, and we Christians must not Learn the Way of the Heathen. I Enquire, whether our Hippocrates were not an Heathen? And whether our Galen were not an Heathen?[...] ⁹⁰

He would say that to call foreign practices of inoculation used in Boston “a Work of the Devil, and a going to the Devil” is a “shocking Blasphemy”⁹¹ for Christians. He stood by his decision in favor of inoculation, declaring:

I enjoy an unspeakable Consolation. I have instructed our Physicians in the new Method used by the Africans and Asiaticks, to prevent and abate the Dangers of the Small-Pox, and infallibly to save the Lives of those that have wisely managed upon them.⁹²

7.4 Things Look'd For (1691)

In his 1691 work *Things Look'd For*, we see Mather as a learned and forward-looking minister given to contemplating world affairs.⁹³ In this work Mather begins by quoting Isaiah 2:4 which is both a promise and admonition to the people of God:

⁹⁰ Zabdiel Boylston, *Some Account of What is said of Inoculating or Transplanting the Small Pox by the Learned Dr. Emanuel Timonius and Jacobus Pylarius* (1721), p. 21; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 50.

⁹¹ Increase Mather and Cotton Mather, *Several Reasons Proving that Inoculating or Transplanting the Small Pox, is a Lawful Practice by Increase Mather [and] Sentiments on Small Pox Inoculated* (1721), p. 79; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 51.

⁹² Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, pp. 631-633; Ali Isani, “Cotton Mather and the Orient,” p. 51.

⁹³ Goodman, *What About Peace?*, p. 120.

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning books; nation shall not lift up their sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.”

This is especially interesting in that this sermon was delivered to the artillery company of Massachusetts who were the men tasked to defend the people through use of military strength if necessary. For Mather even when preaching to the warrior class of his specific community, the goal of the gospel is a peaceful existence for the glory of the Lord. Mather believed that this international peace was both an inheritance and goal of cosmopolitan Christianity. He affirms:

And this Peace is Elegantly Expressed unto us, by the Notion of mens Altering and Employing their Weapons of War, to such Uses, as Peace affords at once Opportunities and exploitations. Men shall then have no Occasion for Swords and Spears have been such mischievous things [...] But now He comes to Paint out that State of Peace, tis from the tools of husbandry even ploughing and praying books, that he Fetches the Colours of it.⁹⁴

In this cosmopolitan way, peace takes work. It is the promised fruit of diligent Christian labor. For Mather it is the personal faith of the individual that becomes the catalyst of a cosmopolitan promise:

Being Justify'd by Faith, we have Peace with God. Hence tis, that our Spirits have a Disposition to Love and Serve, those that are our Brethern in the World.⁹⁵

It is through this justification by way of personal faith that a kingdom of cosmopolitan Christians grows. Mather continues:

⁹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Things Look'd For*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid at 7.

Well then, the peace promised unto us, is that External as well as lateral Harmony, Amnity, Be Unity, which the Children of men shall have in from the future Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ [...] the Lord Jesus Christ shall one day enjoy a Kingdom over and among the children of men in the world; and this, after a more Visible and Glorious manner than ha's hitherto Appeared. Our Lord Jesus is a Blessed King; that is One of the High Offices to which our Messiah is Anointed by his Eternal Father; and there is a threefold kingdom, which he already ha's possession of. He ha's a Spiritual Kingdom, wherein he do's by His Word and Grace Rule over the Consciences of men; thus tis said in Rom. 14:17 The Kingdom of God, is Righteousness, and Peace and Joy. He ha's also a Providential Kingdom wherein He Governs all Affaires and Motions of the World, being entrusted with all the Wheels which they turn upon; thus we find in Ezek. 1:27 He is, The man upon the throne.⁹⁶

For Mather the providential kingdom of Christ — both in the redemptive story of history and the eschaton to come — requires that his subjects acknowledge the universal, anti-provincial nature of the continued consummation of revealed events and the appearing of his throne at the end of the age.

Sovereign nations consequentially appear insignificant to the power and implementation of Christ's coming international kingdom.

He shall one Day have a Crown as Conspicuous to the World, is that Cross which here He once hung upon. The Lord Jesus Christ shall then have such a Kingdom, that the Generality of Man-kind, shall yield an Entire and Sincere Subjection to His Blessed Laws; and men shall every where Adore Him, as Their King, their Lord, their Law giver.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

The coming kingdom is one that transcends regional boundaries in a fully visible way. With no boundaries to protect or be distracted by, Christ is realized as the one king of all and armies become converted into churches:

It is a Sabbath, a Long, & a great Sabbath, which the World shall then Arrive unto; and as of old, no Fire was to be on the Sabbath, small Fire, that is, all is to be now Extinguished. There shall then be no Armies, but Churches [...].⁹⁸

It is here that we see the Christian soldiers enlisted in a cosmopolitan supra-national Christian order. The ministry of Mather during this time was a mission to make this peaceable cosmopolitanism more tangible. For Mather this is the cosmopolitan kingdom of peace, with peace being defined in part as the nations laying down literal and symbolic arms against each other. As in Mather's opening verse from Isaiah, this is something that the redemptive history of God has been proceeding towards since the earliest of days. He writes "The Peaceable Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, ha's ever now and then begun a little to show it self; it begun to Open a little in several Instances during the Primitive Times; especially at the Abolition of Pagans!"⁹⁹ For Mather, sin is the root of war and division that helps to separate the international kingdom of God. He states that "Lusts is the unhappy Original of Every War; But in the Last Dayes, every such Lust, will be Restrained with more powerful than these Our Dayes afford."¹⁰⁰ Holy cosmopolitanism can be a force to help eradicate disunity.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

Mather writes “We find, in Act. 2.6 They coexisted Daily with Accord in the Temple, and they did Eat their Meat with Singleness of Heart.”¹⁰¹

For Mather, one of the reasons that Rome is so evil is because it works against such peace in this world:

Again, The Divels Eldest Son, that is, The Man of Sin, is the Grand Buffoon of the Universe. Tis the See of Rome that hath shed more than a Sea of Blood, by the Wars which it hath more than an Hundred times Push'd the Nations of the World upon. We see an horrible Beast pountray'd in Rev. 13 7 And (it is added) it was given unto him to make War with the Saints, and to overcome them. The Blessed Wolderses of old, made that Scripture their Support, when the Popish, horrid, infamous Cruisades were published against them [...] The most of the Swords and Spears in the World, have been hammered out of those Hellish Keyes, which the Pope carries in his Hands.¹⁰²

Mather views Rome as one who represents an old, outmoded and false way that promulgates strife and violence when the church of Christ is called to work toward a unified peace instead.¹⁰³ Mather thought that Rome would fall beginning in 1716 and that it would be a united Christian piety that would bring it about. In a letter to Robert Wodrow he writes:

The Strong Tendencies which there are in several Nations, so heavy Millstones about the Neck of popery by the principles of the Reformation appearing [...] to unite good men upon the Basis of True, Real, and Vital Piete; give me hopes that 1716 will yet be found a Term of Ruine unto the Romish Babylon.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Cotton Mather in a letter to Robert Wodrow, October 4, 1717, *Wodrow Papers* (National Library of Scotland, 1937), p. 20; Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 146.

The concept of time is an earthly restriction but cosmic plaything in Mather's eschatology. Mather believes that cosmopolitanism means that God works more quickly to undo the ravages that time has wrought against the church. He says:

That Rome was not built in a Day; but I am verily perswaded, A great part of this Assembly may live to see those Blowes given to the men of Sin, that shall be more Mortal more direful Blows, then any that have yet been given him. Tis not unlikely, that after the next fatal Blowes upon Antichrist the Perfect Peace of the Church may Require some Time for the settling of it. But yet, be of Good Cheer, It comes on apace.¹⁰⁵

Mather is paraphrasing and modifying a popular idiom here: Rome wasn't built in a day but it will fall much quicker than that. Shortly before his death Mather said that he felt that the destruction of Rome would happen after the second coming.¹⁰⁶

Mather sees international cosmopolitanism as more than a preference; it is inevitable in God's plan for his kingdom. It is important to note that nowhere in Mather's work do we find him teaching universal salvation. Countries and borders also still exist, as do local customs and identities, but it is the shared spiritual identity that crushes small-minded provinciality and supersedes those that seek to impair the gospel by appealing to custom and tradition not authorized by the Bible. Countries will still exist, but peace and tolerance based in piety will reign over each individual nation. For Mather this vision is the consumption of his cosmopolitanism and theology, as he states that "We find those two things conjoynd, in Rev. 1. 9. The Kingdom and Patience of Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Cotton Mather, *Things Look'd For*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Mather to Robert Wodrow, May 18 (1727), NLS, Adv. Mss. 27.6.7 ff. 39-40.

¹⁰⁷ Cotton Mather, *Things Look'd For*, p. 52.

Mather displays a skepticism about the formation and promulgation of empires and what it takes to sustain them. He explains how nations can be usurped and used together as tools of evil as in the case of Rome:

It is Enough, to note, That Antichrist must have an Empire, and yet an Empire founded in the False Religion; it must here withal be an Empire obtain'd more by Craft than Force [...] but the Superstition of is own to maintain it.¹⁰⁸

Mather's international cosmopolitanism can be a safeguard against Christians being used as pawns in these temporal schemes of national empires.

Cosmopolitanism is a journey and its peace is a blessed reward. Swords are indeed turned to ploughshares as in Isaiah 2:4, but swords still come first in this. Mather states "Our Plough Shares and Praning books would not be able to seed us, if your Swords and Spears, were not a Guard unto them."¹⁰⁹ Swords here are noted as a defensive last resort but still crucial to survival and victory. Mather is telling the soldiers that the peaceful Christian proceeds along God's timeline. One thing becomes another, as night follows day, peace follows cosmopolitan piety spread into the world.

7.5 The Glasgow Connection (1715)

Mather's blooming cosmopolitanism found an outlet in his continued relationship with Scottish Presbyterians at the University of Glasgow. (His additional correspondence with the leadership of the University of Glasgow on other topics is analyzed elsewhere in this thesis). Beginning in 1715 Cotton Mather began a

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 80-81.

correspondence with noted Scottish historian Robert Wodrow, himself a Glaswegian educated at the University of Glasgow and a chronicler of the Scottish Covenanters. Mather would praise him in *Parentor* as the “Meritorious Wodrow.”¹¹⁰ Mather begins this correspondence by introducing Wodrow to the New England churches by stating:

To which I will add, that the Churches of New England at this time enjoy much tranquillity, and are continually, but very peaceably, multiplying into new societies. We have now near two hundred congregations.¹¹¹

Here Mather is emphasizing the state of ecumenicism reached by 1715 that allowed “new societies” to flourish alongside each other in the spirit of Christian unity that he had labored so hard to instill into the thought and practice of the New England churches.

Critical of establishmentarianism as ever, Mather in 1711 would draw attention to their common annoyance which was the Church of England. The high churchmen in each of their respective countries continued to serve as a “disturbance.” Mather said that “Our High-Church here, in imitation of their Brethren in Scotland, seek all advantage to disturb us.”¹¹² In 1715 Mather is still complaining about them, writing to Wodrow that the Church of England is sending missionaries over to New England but revels in the fact that they are finding instead:

¹¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Parentor*, introduction, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Correspondence with Robert Wodrow* (1715), vol. 2, The Wodrow Society, (1863), p. 148.

¹¹² Cotton Mather, citing John Edwards in *The Old Pathes Restored* (1711), p. 24; Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest*, p. 123.

[...] flourishing Churches, in which the meanest Christians understand religion, and practice it better than the ministers whom they send over to us [...] their hearers have soon grown weary of them, and the Church of England has been, in a country of religious people, rendered (and how could it be otherwise?) to the last degree contemptible.¹¹³

Mather is clear with Wodrow that the work of the Scottish Presbyterian ministers is valued by the New England puritans and has influenced him personally. He writes that “It is impossible for me to express how dear the Church of Scotland is unto their brethren here, though it be only expressed in the civilities which its ministers, happening to come hither, do commonly meet withal.”¹¹⁴ He also notes that he has been accused of “Presbyterianising too much in our care to repair some deficiencies in our Churches“ in New England which has upset some of those around him.¹¹⁵

Mather then discusses his *Maxims of Piety* in the transatlantic context as it relates to the Scottish Presbyterians in ways that can be extrapolated to all pious churches abroad. Mather says:

I join with you in expecting that the kingdom of God will quickly be seen in some appearances and advances of it, beyond what have been in the former ages. But very much of my expectation is, that God will rise up some instruments, who, from the mines of the Sacred Scriptures, will dig and run the maxims of the everlasting Gospel; the glorious maxims, wherein all the children of God really are united, and where into all that come, as they ought to do, are to be esteemed and embraced as the children of God. The children of God and of his kingdom, under various professions, will arrive to a declared and explicit union on these maxims, and lesser points will be depressed unto their due subordination. Disputations on these lesser points may be continued, but managed with

¹¹³ Cotton Mather, *Correspondence with Robert Wodrow* (1715), vol. 2, The Wodrow Society, (1863), p. 148.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 150.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 147.

that justice, and candour, and meekness, which become the children of God. The brethren, thus becoming sensible that they are so, will associate for the kingdom of God in such methods, that the things to be consumed by the stone cut out of the mountain shall be all broken to pieces before them. Glory to God in the highest, with peace on earth, from good will among men, will be the grand character and intentions of the kingdom. And the tokens and effects of the Divine presence among the people of our Immanuel will be very wonderful.¹¹⁶

Here we see Mather's spirit of cosmopolitanism and ecumenicism in 1715 reach the point of being a polished, refined and focused piece of unifying eschatological rhetoric directed towards Glasgow, the place that Mather esteems so highly, calling it "the most illustrious University in the world."¹¹⁷ In 1719 he would also call the Scottish Presbyterian Church "the most illustrious — the most beautiful in the world!"¹¹⁸ Mather's words here represent his passion towards protestant unity that esteems his Scottish cohorts but is also a clear statement of his full-bloomed cosmopolitanism which places him in the bloodstream of transatlantic Christianity.

Mather sees commonality with the Scottish Presbyterians in their history of persecution and steadfast commitment to the reformed faith. In 1717 he calls the Scottish Presbyterians "a people of God whose condition the churches of New England bear more at heart than any upon earth."¹¹⁹ In the Matherian spirit of ecumenical piety, in a letter from 1716 to Wodrow he praises "my brethren at the Frederician University" and their efforts of worldwide piety, hoping that it spreads to those countries that still

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 150-151.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 151.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 459.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 151.

have “millstones about the neck of Popery,” and that on “the basis of true, real, vital piety” will be a “ruin unto the Romish Babylon.”¹²⁰ Mather desired unity with the Irish Presbyterian immigrants coming into New England, and heartily welcomed them into fellowship. He said:

We are comforted with great numbers of our oppressed brethren coming over from the North of Ireland unto us. But that which adds very much to our comfort is, that they find so very little difference in the management of our Churches from theirs and yours, as to count it next unto none at all. They sit down with us, and we embrace them as our most united brethren, and we are likely to be very happy in one another.¹²¹

Mather says one of their best qualities is how similar they are to Scottish Presbyterians, and here we see a practical extension of the ecumenicism that Mather had been passionately instilling in the New England churches. Mather emphasizes this in the highest of terms in stating that Scottish ministers have even taken the pulpit of New England churches as pastors:

Not a few ministers of the Scotch nation coming over hither have heretofore been invited unto settlements with our Churches, and the Churches have joyfully flourished under their holy ministry.¹²²

In appraising what it is that makes a church faithful and beautiful, Mather mentions to Wodrow that he esteems the Scottish Presbyterians above all others primarily for their commitment to unity and ecumenicism in challenging times. He says:

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 279.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 359.

¹²² Ibid, p. 423.

But I have observed a singular wisdom in the Church of Scotland above any living; that, notwithstanding the animosities happening, through the device of the great adversary, to arise among you, on various occasions, yet, when a critical time comes for you to unite against the common enemy, you bury these animosities ; and your union in the cause of truth against the Babylonian prelacy and tyranny is truly admirable.¹²³

Here Mather is reemphasizing the benefits of transatlantic ecumenism. It provides strength for victory against tyranny.

Mather says in 1718 that he previously wrote for Principal Stirling at the University of Glasgow a book called *Testimonium Glascuense* which he says:

[...] the design whereof is to smite that giant who has thus defied the armies of the living God.¹²⁴

Specifically Mather is speaking to the Arian controversy and Glasgow's stand against it in the case of John Simson. However, this book faced difficulties in publication and Mather asked Wodrow to help if possible:

The treatise was in the press at London, with a preface of the famous Dr Edwards unto it; but the death of the printer first, and then of the Doctor, and I suspect, a piece of monkery among some Whistonians, proved the death of the impression. If no more significant composition be prepared, methinks I might almost venture to propose it unto you, whether the publication of this may not be, by your instigation,(if you think fit,) accomplished. But I would by no means have any thing of mine supersede the better works of abler pens.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 424.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Mather was striving for unity while seeking publication of a volume designed to praise the University of Glasgow and Scottish Presbyterians as a significant center of doctrinal purity. In the final recorded correspondence of 1719 we find Mather praising Scotland in grandiose terms: “Happy Scotland, that has left in it so little matter for the stone to strike upon!”¹²⁶ Mather states that the purpose of communicating with Wodrow and sending him his books was always “to serve the cause of piety,”¹²⁷ as was Mather’s ultimate aim in all areas of his ministry from the middle until the very end of his life. In a parting word of edification for the Scottish Presbyterian church, he gives them the highest of compliments in stating:

The Church of Scotland is most certainly the best thing that our poor earth has to show; nothing on earth has, indeed, so much of heaven in it.¹²⁸

This would include being even more heavenly than the churches of New England. Mather esteemed the Presbyterians in this way because it reflected his own prioritization of ecumenicism and piety as practiced by the Scottish church even through the most harrowing of times.

The Scots esteemed him highly in return and this provided a salve to some of Mather’s American wounds. By the time of his final letters to Scotland, Mather was “the crucified Mather, a Puritan King Lear, poor as a beggar, married to a lunatic, beset

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 425.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 458.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 501.

by enemies [...] in the midst of a despairing weariness.”¹²⁹ In Glasgow he found an artificial respite from these concerns. He was able to exist via the written word in a place where his real or perceived faults, foibles and fading esteem were essentially unknown to them. As Silverman wrote, it is probably better that Mather never actually met the Glaswegians and kept their mutual admiration carefully buttressed by the ocean in between them.¹³⁰ To those Scots (at least in Mather’s perception of their relationship), he would always remain the author of the *Magnalia*, theological leader of the colonies and honorary Doctor of Divinity.

7.6 Parentor (1723)

In Mather’s book *Parentor* of 1723 he again spends considerable space dedicating this most precious work of his — a remembrance of his beloved father Increase Mather — to the “Honourable, Venerable, and much Esteemed” University of Glasgow, “that Ancient and Famous University, whose Favours have so Cherished me.”¹³¹ He praises Glasgow for their theological commitments, such as in assigning John Owen as required reading:

[...] how much the Truth which is according to Godliness is acknowledged in the Exemplary Church of SCOTLAND, That the Name and Worth of an OWEN is considered in it as it is, and his Writings are so much Recommended unto your Students.¹³²

¹²⁹ Silverman, “Cotton Mather’s Foreign Correspondence,” p. 174

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 179.

¹³¹ Cotton Mather, *Parentator*, introduction, p. 1.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 2.

The “Renowned Church of SCOTLAND” is singled out for special praise because of their ecumenical commitment to the protestant cause. He identifies that the Scottish Presbyterians are:

A CHURCH, wherein the Excellent Wisdom found in the Servants of GOD, which upon just occasions knows how to Bury in Oblivion the lesser Differences arising on Various Temptations, and coalesce in the Common Cause of all True Protestants, has in it something that is Great and Just and Generous, and not every where to be met withal, Where is the place of such understanding, which is hid, from the Eyes of almost all the Living.¹³³

Mather was excited by the Scottish church because it seemed committed to his cause of an interwoven ecumenical piety and was seeing the results that Mather envisions for the New England church and all churches worldwide:

A CHURCH, which that so nothing that would add unto the Perfection of its Beauty may be wanting, improves continually in a Spirit of kind Forbearance, and sweet Charity, and Brotherly Affection towards Dissenters in smaller matters, while Genuine PIETY is Conspicuous in them: and goes further than some others who boast they have need of nothing, in Conforming to that Golden Rule, To Receive all that CHRIST receives to the Glory of GOD. Indeed, what can be more Unexceptionable than a Sanctuary measured by the Golden Reed, which knows no other Measures for Admission, but only that PIETY, which Qualifies for the Kingdom of GOD, and wherein all the Children of GOD are United Brethren!¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

Mather was pleased that the Scottish Presbyterians sent missionaries such as the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge not bound by any denomination. They are missionaries for Christ and have “not of a party in them.”¹³⁵

Extravagant praise is especially given to the University of Glasgow, Mather’s most cherished university. He says:

The Glascuan University shall be a River, the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of GOD, as long as the Cluyde shall Comfort and Adorn the Beloved City of Glasco.¹³⁶

And:

The Glascuan University will also be (as the Glauchian) a Pattern to the rest of the World in which the Recovery and Regulation of Schools to Answer their Chief End in Living to GOD, & Knowing of CHRIST, & being made Wise unto Salvation, is one of the most Important Things that can be Wished for.¹³⁷

Mather again reiterates that this book had been written for the sake of piety with hopes that Glasgow might continue to be a hub of piety in the world:

The BOOK being Written with a Variety of Projection and Contrivance, to serve that Real, Vital, Solid PIETY, which seems now almost wholly to have left the Earth, [O Glaucha, Do thou yet retain it!]¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. vii.

In seeing such an intimate work as his father's memorial being directed towards cosmopolitan piety, Mather's priorities on these issues continue to crystalize at this late stage of his ministry.

Mather had a passionate dedication to connecting himself with thinkers outside of America. About this international correspondence, his son Samuel writes:

He had very numerous and extensive Correspondence; so that I have known him at one Time to have above fifty beyond sea to whom he was obliged to spend considerable Time in writing.¹³⁹

Seeing the lengths to which Mather went in order to reach out to international Christian figures and his schemes for international piety, it appears that international cosmopolitanism was to Mather an imagined ever-present option to advance the kingdom of God.

Cosmopolitanism was for him both a ministry practice and an international destination for the church of God. Using the analogy of the Christian world as a holy city in semi-Augustinian fashion, he writes that:

There will be a Time, when that Holy City, will be nearer to this Earth, than it is at this Day; and the Saved Nations of the Earth shall after a wonderful manner Walk in the Light thereof.¹⁴⁰

Mather believed in a big, broad Christian world that was not to concede an inch in the struggle against Roman Catholicism and paganism. America was playing a part in this.

Mather says:

¹³⁹ Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather*, p. 80; Ali Isani, "Cotton Mather and the Orient," p. 46.

¹⁴⁰ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 2.

Yea, the Day is at hand, when that Voice will be heard concerning thee, Put on thy beautiful Garments, O America, the Holy City ! Certainly, It was never intended, that the Church of our Lord, should be confined always within the Dimensions of Strabo's Cloak; and that, All the World, should always be no more, than it was, when Augustus taxed it.¹⁴¹

And:

Whether it shall be so, or no; we are sure, there is a Day at hand, When the Lord of Hosts will Reign among His Ancient People Gloriously. In that Day, it will be impossible, for the Holy People, and the Teachers and Rulers of the Reformed World in the other Hemisphere, to leave America unvisited [...] O wide Atlantick, Thou shalt not stand in the way as any Hindrance of those Communications!¹⁴²

Mather viewed America as a new Christian frontier now ready to send something of value back across the Atlantic.

Ultimately, Mather believes that peace and unity are the final desire of disparate Christian nations. He says this much in his work *Terra Betta* written in 1726 towards the very end of his ministry:

All Nations do Desire a Reconciliation to GOD, or Good Terms with Heaven: 'Tis the Aim of all the religions the several Forms used among the Nations [...] All Nations do desire, to come at Knowledge, or have Truth discovered unto them. They are continually seeking for Illuminations.¹⁴³

The covenant itself is an international one. Mather writes:

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁴² Ibid, pp. 34-35.

¹⁴³ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 20.

AND This is the DOCTRINE which we find ourselves now led unto. IN the Enjoyment of a Glorious CHRIST, as a most Powerful and Merciful REDEEMER, there is the Grand Blessing which the Gracious GOD has promised for the Children of Men; A Blessing which all Nations may and shall be made Partakers of.¹⁴⁴

The covenant is also a song of cosmopolitan joy for Mather. He wrote:

But I now appear on the Mountains, to bring the Good Tidings [...] This Grand Blessing, even a Glorious CHRIST, and a Raiser of the Dead, is, what All Nations may and shall be made Partakers of [...] All Nations shall call Him Blessed. And Then All Nations shall find themselves Blessed in Him.¹⁴⁵

Mather does not equivocate. He does not stop to parse any of the differences in receiving the promised covenantal salvation between puritan or Anglican, Congregationalist or Quaker. It is an international covenant applied to selected individual members of this earth. He says that “[...] All Nations have the offer of the blessing [...] He is a savior to all nations.”¹⁴⁶ This is a cosmopolitan offer of covenantal inclusion. He continues by saying “[...] as All Nations descended from Adam, are to look for the Blessing Promised in, The Offspring of the Woman. All the Children of the First Adam are to look unto the Second Adam as their SAVIOUR.”¹⁴⁷ This is not universalism but something that appears close to it. Later it would become part of an even more inclusive soteriology in New England after Mather’s death in the form of the Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists who would produce a syncretic liberal faith

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

system that builds on themes as found in this era of Cotton Mather's ministry. For example:

ALL Nations at last shall come to a share in the Blessing of a Glorious CHRIST; Yea, All Nations Actually have come into it. IT is indeed a very Sorrowful Truth; They are not All Persons in All Nations that are made partakers of a CHRIST, and of the Blessing which He brings unto His People. Many there are, who Despise the Blessing, and Forfeit it.¹⁴⁸

For Mather the covenant began to include all nations the moment that Christ preached to the first gentile,¹⁴⁹ and the doors were now wide open. Finally he says:

O Sinners, of whatever Nations you are, The Bosom of Abraham is now open for you. Come, and lay hold on the Promise of the SAVIOUR, in whom All Nations are to be Blessed.¹⁵⁰

This final lasting peace will not be achieved until the return of Christ in the coming eschaton, but international ecumenicism for Mather was a tool to minister towards this end.

7.7 *Manuductio Ad Ministerium* (1726)

Mather implemented his cosmopolitanism partly by instructing and influencing a new rising generation of divinity students bound for the pulpit. The *Manuductio Ad Ministerium* was an attempt by Mather to continue to insert himself into the center of the discussion regarding the Congregational church in Massachusetts. In the *Manuductio* we find not just an emerging rural sophisticate but we see this changed Mather presented as exemplary in this instruction manual for new and better

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 33.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 42.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 48.

Congregational ministers. This work was considered so remarkable that it was given as an award for exceptional Harvard students. It has been called “the first official American word on preaching.”¹⁵¹ It has been described as Mather’s “bridge to the future; a hidden persuader to help recoup the influence of Cotton Mather.”¹⁵² It would function as a sophisticating work as it sought to broaden the vision for the puritan tradition which was in flux at this time.

Mather had contemplated this work for about a decade.¹⁵³ It was informed by the many events that transpired during this time including the deaths of his daughter Katharin, his son Increase and his father Increase, the smallpox epidemic that struck Boston, an assassination attempt in retaliation for his pro-inoculation views, the departure of Governor Shute, and, perhaps most relevant to an ecclesiological training manual, the separation of the New North Church, the controversial ordination of the Reverend Peter Thatcher, Increase Mather passed over as president of Harvard and Cotton Mather assuming the full pastoral leadership duties at the original North Church after the passing of his father. Like some of Mather’s other works of theological innovation it has been considered as a heralding of a new puritanism that would continue a trajectory towards an unwitting modern secularism.¹⁵⁴ Richard Hofstadter said that Cotton Mather at this time was “cosmopolitan in outlook, relatively liberal in

¹⁵¹ Bob McKelvey, “Puritan Preaching: Cotton Mather” <<http://www.meetthepuritans.com/blog/puritan-preaching-cotton-mather>> [accessed 8 July 2019].

¹⁵² Eugene White, “Cotton Mather’s *Manuductio ad Ministerium*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 49 (1963), p. 309.

¹⁵³ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 339, 570; Gustaff Van Cromphout, “*Manuductio ad Ministerium*: Cotton Mather as Neoclassicist,” *Journal of American Literature*, vol. 53 (1981), p. 363.

¹⁵⁴ George W. Harper, “‘*Manuductio ad Ministerium*’: Cotton Mather as Pastoral Innovator,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 54 (1992), p. 79.

religious tendency, and conversant with the latest intellectual influences from Europe.”¹⁵⁵

Modern as it might have been, the *Manuductio* was an influential work by a man whose influence was waning. They were to be the last full generation of these puritan candidates for ministry that Mather would ever reach in this way. It was an attempt to regain some of his former influence in New England especially as it concerned the training of scholars and ministers.¹⁵⁶ He said as much in his diary and was hopeful that the book would “do more good, than twenty presidents of Colledges.”¹⁵⁷ This was an especially personal motive for writing this book as his father had just lost out on his bid for the Harvard presidency days earlier.¹⁵⁸ Cotton Mather continued to grow disappointed with Boston and even England where he found that the dissenters overseas had not responded to his work as he had hoped.¹⁵⁹

The *Manuductio* served as a cosmopolitan work of encouragement for the training of New England candidates for ministry to stretch themselves beyond local limitations, to seek that good which may be “lying out of reach.”¹⁶⁰ Mather discusses Christian leaders (and also such historical figures as Cicero) as “gentlemen”¹⁶¹ implying

¹⁵⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), pp. 62-63.

¹⁵⁶ Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘*Manuductio ad Theologiam*,’” p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 749 and 774; Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘*Manuductio ad Theologiam*,’” p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Woody, “Cotton Mather's ‘*Manuductio ad Theologiam*,’” p. 9.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, pp. 21-22; Cromphout, “*Manuductio ad Ministerium*: Cotton Mather as Neoclassicist,” p. 369.

¹⁶¹ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* p. 67 and 138; Cromphout, “*Manuductio ad Ministerium*: Cotton Mather as Neoclassicist,” p. 378.

that the American puritan is a cosmopolitan colleague in the international Christian ministry, extending shared manners, customs and expectation across the group. The urbanity of the *Manuductio* is shown in Mather's emphasis on manners over strict ethics. For a young person to live correctly they simply need to read the Bible and imitate the manners of their Christian betters, the "politer people," of which one can imagine that Mather no doubt saw himself as an example of.¹⁶² It can be seen as an attempt to show a shared moderation and common goal amongst Christian leaders who would certainly have been expected to be treated as gentlemen in New England society at this time.

The *Manuductio* attempts to instruct the candidate on which knowledge is worth bringing with them into the ministry. There is a casting off or downplaying of various subject areas such as poetry, metaphysics and the perfection of ancient languages such as Greek.¹⁶³ The *Manuductio* represented a step away from the more medieval, impractical "cobweb" of mental exercises as Mather called them.¹⁶⁴ Instead there is encouragement for Christian gentlemen to reject minutiae and own a more middle way as students and ministers. This urbanity — a dedication of manners distinguishing himself from other rural Americans — was part of the pursuit of being a Christian gentleman. In *Bonifacius* he discusses Christian manners in detail:

When Gentlemen occasionally come together, why should not their Conversation be agreeable to their Quality? Me thinks they should

¹⁶² Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, pp. 37-38; Woody, "Cotton Mather's 'Manuductio ad Theologiam,'" p. 12.

¹⁶³ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶⁴ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio Ad Ministerium*, p. 37; Woody, "Cotton Mather's 'Manuductio ad Theologiam,'" p. 11.

reckon it beneath People of their Quality to Employ their Conversation with one another on Trifling Impertinencies [...] Sirs, it becomes a Gentleman to Entertain his Company, with the Finest Thoughts on the finest Themes! But certainly, there cannot be any Subject so worthy of a Gentleman as this; What good is there to be done in the World?¹⁶⁵

Proper urbanity is bathed in piety as Mather says that “Gentile-deeds maketh the Gentle-man [...] the true Lady is one who feeds the poor.”¹⁶⁶ For Mather there was a spiritual nobility to be found in such a piety. It was good Christian manners to openly discuss the best way to do good in world, in this case meaning all of Christendom as he was attempting to make ministerial inroads in the name of international piety.

The dedication of *Manuductio* was to “the studious youth of the universities of Glasgow and New England.”¹⁶⁷ This represented a transatlantic cosmopolitan marriage of these two centers of Christian learning, comprised of young people who would most likely never have found a connection to each other in any other sphere of ordinary life at that time. Mather was attempting to establish an international bond between two academic groups that he assumes views him with as much interest as he does them. As cosmopolitanism in practice often requires alliances and careful navigation, Mather had reasons beyond shared theological commitments to cultivate favor with Glasgow. With his legacy in New England waning but still intact, and his honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow recently bestowed, this connection

¹⁶⁵ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 150; Heyrman, “The Fashion Among More Superior People,” p. 118.

¹⁶⁶ Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius*, p. 137, 144-145; Cotton Mather, *The Serviceable Man*, p. 17 and Cotton Mather, *Pourtraiture of a Good Man* (1702), pp. 13-14; Heyrman, “The Fashion Among More Superior People,” p. 120; Robert A. Gross, “Giving in America: From Charity to Philanthropy,” in *Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence J. Friedman, Mark D. McGarvie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 36

¹⁶⁷ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio Ad Ministerium*, p. 1.

appears to be not too audacious of a stretch. In the introduction and throughout the book the reader gets the feeling that the urbane cosmopolitanism of this work is indeed something for international Christianity and not just New England (or Glasgow). If such a gesture would be well-received and his ministerial instructions followed then this dedication could serve as a buttress against the declension of puritanism in the youth in New England while at the same time strengthening the students in Glasgow. He also praises and addresses Halle's mission of international piety in Germany. Mather's embracing of Glasgow and Halle was a visible effort to place New England in a triangle of international Christian education,¹⁶⁸ which is something that succeeded at least partially as Harvard and then Yale soon increased in relevance as well.

There is no sectarianism or puritan particularism in this book. Mather remains principled but the *Manuductio* was written with a spirit to "maintain a brotherly relationship with all men" which was an edit added to the work later in the writing process.¹⁶⁹ Eugene White succinctly sums up the new-look puritanism that Mather was attempting to embody in the *Manuductio*. White writes:

From his pen emerged the concept of a humane religion of love and social service as well as the sharply etched image of Mather's ideal preacher: a learned, pious, zealous, and - for that era - tolerant man.¹⁷⁰

This adapted identity was the result of a cosmopolitan broadening of the mind in connection with his loss of influence within Boston. As Congregationalism declined he

¹⁶⁸ Woody, "Cotton Mather's 'Manuductio ad Theologiam,'" p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 21 and note 95.

¹⁷⁰ White, "Cotton Mather's 'Manuductio ad Ministerium,'" p. 319.

personally changed enough to reinvent portions of his role as minister into a Christian cosmopolitan internationalist which allowed his ministry to ultimately wind down on an exciting, progressively international note.

8. Conclusion

Our clock strikes when there is a change from hour to hour; but no hammer in the Horologe of Time peals through the universe when there is a change from Era to Era.¹

-Thomas Carlyle

But it were folly to lay any stress on stories of this kind, which are sure to spring up around such an event as that now related, and which, as in the present case, sometimes prolong themselves for ages afterwards, like the toadstools that indicate where the fallen and buried trunk of a tree has long since mouldered into the earth.²

-Nathaniel Hawthorne

The attitude that directed Cotton Mather throughout his life was that he intimately identified himself with the history and prospects of New England, his native land.³ In understanding this it becomes apparent how seriously he took personal and corporate changes, challenges, hopes and declensions. Mather's evolving opinions on and approaches to the issues of ecclesiology, ecumenicism, cosmopolitanism, covenant, piety and political theology stemmed from his desire to see New England as an important part of the continuing protestant reformation with himself firmly in line as a hero of the faith. This entire endeavor represented an attempt to extend and complete the protestant reformation by empowering the international protestant church to receive the eschaton. Throughout this thesis I have identified these six overlapping areas of theological development that help indicate and explain the personal recasting of Cotton Mather. He believed in a consuming fire at the coming of Christ with his final

¹ Thomas Carlyle, "On History," *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays 1838-1839* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1888).

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), chapter 1.

³ Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, pp. 253-254.

judgement.⁴ Within this consummation the Christian would finally be brought to Christ.⁵ More than simply a spiritual endeavor, Mather's pursuit of this eschaton was fundamental to his understanding of God, man and the puritan experience in America.⁶ Mather's conception of the end times evolved over his life from the premillennial focus *Problema Theologicum* written in 1703 until the *Trip paradisus* written from 1712 to the very end of his life in 1727.⁷ He predicted the parousia to happen in 1697, then 1736 and finally again in 1716.⁸ From 1720 to 1726 Mather's perspective underwent a radical shift from a futurist interpretation to a partial-preterist interpretation, arguing that there were many more signs to be fulfilled to saying that they had already been fulfilled in good measure.⁹ This change in appraisal of the eschaton was due to him witnessing the events of history and America's place in it. As George Alexander Chadwick observed, "History is the sieve of God."¹⁰ For Mather, the time of the eschaton was coming closer.

⁴ Smolinski, *Trip paradisus Commentary*, p. 43.

⁵ "Ibid, 49.

⁶ Mares, "Cotton Mather's 'Problema Theologicum,'" p. 335.

⁷ See James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 63, 262, 281; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 12 for more on this topic.

⁸ Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again: A History of the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) pp. 78-79; John M. Brenner, "American Lutheran Views on Eschatology and How They Related to the American Protestants," lecture delivered at the 32nd Annual Bethany Reformation Lectures, Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN (October 28-29, 1999), p. 1.

⁹ Smolinski, *Cotton Mather's Wonders Of The Invisible World*, introduction, viii.

¹⁰ George Alexander Chadwick, *The Book of Exodus* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1889), p. 173.

Mather was focused on what he called “the doctrine of the millennium.”¹¹ He wrote more about the millennium than any other colonial American.¹² When attempting to interpret the millennialism of Mather throughout his ministry ending ultimately in the *Trip paradisus*, it is tough to precisely pin him down for too long. This is due to the frequency of Mather’s changing views but also to the fact that colonial assumptions of eschatological terms and timeframes were not as rigid then as now.¹³ Mather’s preoccupation with guessing dates for the end of the world and the coming of Christ was not unique to him,¹⁴ and it would overwhelm our present exercise to track and trace Mather’s every opinion on the millennium. John. S. Erwin believed that for Mather:

[...] no contemporary event or personal experience was too small to be passed through his eschatological lens and viewed as a millennial happening.¹⁵

In writing *Trip paradisus* Mather was attempting to address the issue of how a puritan society thought to be predestined for greatness endure challenge, tragedy and declension while remaining faithful in their hope of eschatological victory.¹⁶

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Parentator*, p. 64; Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 1.

¹² Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 1.

¹³ Ibid; Stephen Stein, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 5, note 6.

¹⁴ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 16 and see Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, pp. 37-80.

¹⁵ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 12.

¹⁶ See Murray, *The Puritan Hope*.

Towards that end, Mather said in 1727 that “[...] it becomes us to look upon every Earthquake, as a Praemonition”¹⁷ of this.

Mather believed that the promised New Jerusalem was in heaven above and not to be found only in New England.¹⁸ Mather's form of literalism here followed somewhat the model of Tertullian rather than any puritan theological innovation. In the third century Tertullian wrote:

But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, “let down from heaven,” which the apostle also calls “our mother from above;” and, while declaring that our politeuma, or citizenship, is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven.¹⁹

After the establishment of the new heavens and new earth, Mather believed that the New Jerusalem would likely then be recreated and geographically placed in New England,²⁰ though not before this and only because the rest of the world had defaulted as options in his analysis.²¹ Mather began to see the future eschaton not so dependent on a romanticized puritan past but on the hope of a bright ecumenical,

¹⁷ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 22; Cotton Mather, *The Terror of the Lord* (1727), p. 27.

¹⁸ Smolinski, *Trip paradisus Commentary*, p. 53.

¹⁹ See Tertullian, “Five Books Against Marcion,” 3.24, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

²⁰ Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again*, pp. 78-79; Brenner, “American Lutheran Views on Eschatology and How They Related to the American Protestants,” p. 1

²¹ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 57, 93; Ryan S. Gardner, “A History of the Concepts of Zion and New Jerusalem in America From Early Colonialism to 1835 With A Comparison to the Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” MA Thesis, Brigham Young University (2002), p. 68.

cosmopolitan Christian future. This future would come into focus by continually “learning war” which included making new allies, determining who the enemies of the church are and the best way to subdue them into spiritual peace.²² This was a mission of piety and covenant renewal towards reformational and eschatological ends.

By 1724 Mather believed that all final signs showing that the end was near had all been accomplished in days past.²³ For Mather, victory was now at hand. Towards the end of his life Mather believed that God’s victorious work in America helped to prove the truth of biblical prophecies. This was the victory promised in Christ but achieving it on earth required change. For Mather, change was an outgrowth of God’s love wrought by afflictions in this life. As early as 1689 he said:

It is affirmed in Psal. 94. 12. That those Whom God chastens, he also teaches out of his Law. The Almighty is now but putting of you to School, and [Schola Crucis est Schola Lucis;] you are in a School where the Lord will have you to learn many very notable and surprizing Lessons: God will have Afflictions to be the Clay and Spittle that shall open those Eyes which Sin hath blinded [...] We are indeed all of us a sort of Creatures which can see best in the Dark.²⁴

It is through what Mather calls these “surprises” that change is motivated in the darkness.

Near the end of his ministry he addressed the puritan church in a message that could just as easily have been applied to himself looking back over the changes in his life and work. In 1724 Cotton Mather published *Tela Praevisa*, a book brimming with

²² Goodman, *What About Peace?*, p. 117.

²³ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 733; Smolinski, *Trip paradisu Commentary*, p. 44.

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *Right Thoughts in Sad Hours*, pp. 25-26.

commentary, acceptance, peace and hope for the changes that the church of New England was going through. *Tela Praevisa* is a pastoral “leaning in” to a puritan society rife with change, and as history bore out in the coming years, sadly for the puritans of Mather’s generation, eventual declension. He writes on the individual concerns of Christians adjusting to change using principles easily extrapolated to the corporate covenant of New England. In the *Biblia Americana* Mather he refers to such transitions as “the American Change.”²⁵ As a changed pastor, *Tela Praevisa* will be one of the last things he ever writes. Change was to be Cotton Mather’s ministerial peroration.

Mather views adapting to the changes afoot in New England as part of the duty of all covenant members. He states that “A Great part of our Duty, and Prudence in this World, is to be always ready for the Changes which may come upon us.”²⁶ The prospect of change was not an occasion for paranoia. As Proverbs 28:1 says, “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.” Mather says it as:

To live always in such a Disquieting Fear of losing what we enjoy, as to lose all comfortable Enjoyment of it, while we have it: this were no vertue in any Man; it were a sore Judgment of GOD upon a Man.”²⁷

²⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Biblia Americana*, vol. 1, p. 27; Breitwieser, “All on an American Table: Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana*,” p. 400.

²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Tela Praevisa* (1724), p. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

Mather was poised as a leader to walk the people of New England through the trials of declension and any other change they might face. He had taught them piety in preparation for times such as these. He preached that:

THE Lesson of Piety to be now recommended unto us, is this; WE have Reason to Live in a continual Expectation of Troublesome Changes; and make such a Religious Preparation for them, that we may be able suitably to bear all the Troubles of our Changes.²⁸

Mather is pastorally attempting to take the edge off of the changes in puritan society by saying not only that they are part of God's will but that they are to be expected, prepared for and appreciated. He puts it like this:

An Expectation of Changes, and a Preparation for Changes. But these, as our Duty & Interest themselves, are sweetly Incorporated. They are very near to each other; They always go together; They are one and the same: Tho' they may be distinctly considered.²⁹

In Mather's cosmopolitanism of his final era, the promise of change is not one limited to any specific region. Rather, it is a worldwide phenomena that impacts Christians everywhere. He says that:

The Experience of all the Men in the World, cries aloud unto us: Behold, Changes! Changes upon all the World! In this universal Experience, we may see Reason enough to Expect Changes upon us. Man, Why shouldst thou Expect an Exemption from the Common Lot of the World!³⁰

²⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

Changes perceived as declension are not necessarily punishment for individual or national sins. They are however the result of a fallen sinful nature that can not retain its original composition. Mather explains that:

Since our Fall into Sin, we are now obnoxious to all kinds of Troublesome Changes. Our Changes are part of the Death, which is the Wages of Sin [...] We Forsake the Unchangeable GOD.³¹

Mather provides pastoral assurance in reminding the people of New England — and perhaps speaking to himself, as well — that things will not necessarily be that bad, saying “Tho’ the World usually proves worse than we hope, yet it usually proves also Better than we fear.”³² The promises of God abide through all changes and this is where the hope of covenantal blessings come from. He states that “OUR Fear of Changes, must not be a Torturing Fear, that shall Kill or Spoil our Blessings.”³³ The changes in New England society are to be expected by the hand of God. Regardless of any former glory, mighty men and honorable nations stand on “Slippery Places” according to Mather:

Whatever our Honours may be, Let us not imagine, our Mountain to be so strong, that we never can be Degraded, never Disgraced; we read, Psal. XLIX 12. Man in Honour abideth not. Let them that stand on High Places, remember they stand on Slippery Places. How many Monarchs have been dethron'd in our Time! And Mighty Men without Number have been broken in pieces; and others been set in their head. If the cry be, Hosanna, to day, Expect, It may be, Crucify, to Morrow!³⁴

³¹ Ibid, p. 6.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 9.

It is by being grounded in the assurances of scripture — in this case the Psalms and book of Job — that Christians are prepared for the changes when they come. Mather says that “By being Fore-warn'd of our Changes, we are Fore-arm'd for them.”³⁵

Mather then delivers a type of joyous eulogy for the fading memory of New England, praising her as a “desirable relative” in the familial sense. The formerly-idealized New England Congregationalism of the *Magnalia* is being prepared for burial as the “dearest friend” who should never have been thought of as “immortal.” He says:

WE have our Desireable Relatives Don't think, 'Tis impossible for them to Dy. I hope, the Relatives are not such, that you hope for their Death. Per they what they will, GOD forbid, you should indulge that Hope. Yet such a Fear of their Death, you should have, that if it arrive before your own, you may truly say. The thing which I greatly feared is come unto me. Consorts, Expect a Parting-Time. Children, your Parents will be gone; you Father and your Mother will forsake you. Parents, your Children may be soon taken from you: The Flowers may be cropt in their Minority. If the Dearest Friend in the World should be taken from you, Let there not be cause for you to say, I never thought of this! I always though, this Friend had been an Immortal one.³⁶

Though the errand into the wilderness and the resulting New England Way provided joy and a sense of obedience amongst the earlier puritans, all joy changes and grows in time. He admonishes that the people should:

Write upon all our Enjoyments, Uncertain Things! Vanishing Things!
Departing Things! And let this Lower the price of them. Of those

³⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

Enjoyments for which we have most of Tenderness, let us Remember,
They will not stay with us!³⁷

In 1724 we see Cotton Mather incorporate many of the changes in his own life and ministry into a theology of covenantal hope and assurance that becomes a forward-thinking vision for the Christian church:

Oh! Beneficial Changes, the Fear whereof shall drive us into such a condition. Let us heartily consent unto the Covenant of GOD, and of Grace, in all the proposals of it. Let us Accept of our Lord JESUS CHRIST as our Saviour, and Leader, and Ruler, and of GOD in Him, as our Portion. Let us with Souls Renouncing all the ways of Sin, and Repairing to the CHRIST of GOD, cry out, Lord, I am Thine, Save me! Then we need Fear no Changes. For, whatever Changes now come upon us, we need not be afraid of any Damage from them. The Voice of the Good GOD unto us, now is that; Jer. XXV. 6. I will do you no Hurt. All the Changes that now pass over us, will be Serviceable to us; They will only bring us nearer to GOD, only make us Fitter for Heaven. That Promise will be fulfill'd unto us; Rom. VIII. 28. All things shall work together for Good. And whatever be taken from us in any of our Changes, yet now we have Lest unto us, what will make up the want of all that is taken from us; what is infinitely better than all that is taken from us. GOD is ours, CHRIST is ours, Heaven is ours. Oh!³⁸

This is Mather addressing the changes in himself and puritan society with a tender pastor's heart still as soft as in his earliest sermons. For Mather all changes are infinitely better than the past because they are examples of God's continuing goodness towards his people. The promised destination for covenant members remains unchanged and waiting, as Mather says "Heaven is ours."

³⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

God, though immutable in Mather's understanding, is the God over what human perception and language classifies as "change" on earth as part of God's sovereign will. He explains that:

WE Expect Changes, we know not what Changes; Let us commit all our concerns into the Hands of a Faithful GOD, that He may order all our Changes in very Faithfulness [...] Humbly put over all into the Hands of a Glorious CHRIST, who is the Governour of the World, who disposes all the Affairs of Providence with His Almighty Hands [...] We may be greatly assured, that not the least of those Changes can befall us, without the will of GOD.³⁹

Changing the life of the Christian is the prerogative of God himself. Elsewhere in *Tela Praevista* he says:

Changes are coming upon me; but they are such as the All-wise GOD sees Fit for me. It is fit, It is fit, that I should leave all to His Determination. Lord, Thy Understanding is infinite!⁴⁰

Mather appears confident in the testimony of the New England puritan church at this point. The change coming is not anything to lament over or seek repentance for. He says:

If we should certainly Know aforehand, what particular Changes are appointed for us; how uneasy should we be! Our Troublesome Changes, would give us as much Trouble before they come, as when they come. Every Trouble would be a Thousand. It was most Excellent Advice; Matth. VI. 34 Take no Thought for to Morrow. — Sufficient for the Day is the Evil thereof. Thus, Be not solicitous to know, what changes may befall you to Morrow. The Changes will bring Troubles enough with them, when they come to Morrow. Sufficient for the Day are the Troubles

³⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 14.

thereof. Wherefore, Oh! Do not Sin against that Favour of GOD, which we Enjoy in this our Ignorance. Do not Sin against it by seeking after a Forbidden Knowledge. Do not Sin against it by a Criminal Curiosity, Enquiring after a Knowledge that is not convenient for us. Here, 'tis no Fault, to be willing to be Ignorant; It were a crime to be otherwise. Let us mind, what is Revealed unto us; It is Revealed unto us, that we ought to prepare for Changes. But, the Changes themselves are Secret Things; The Secret Things let us cheerfully leave unto the LORD.⁴¹

Changes in the New England church are part of such a supernatural work that even knowing the particulars would not have altered earthly perceptions of them. It is sinful “criminal curiosity” to seek to know them or God’s reasons for them.

Mather held to the theological principle of eternal security and lasting assurance until the end of his ministry, even after having witnessed the beginning of declension in New England and such heartbreaking personal events such as the death of thirteen of his children along with two wives and his third wife going insane. He states that “A Rejection from thy SAVIOUR, is a Thing that cannot come upon thee.”⁴² He continues:

Souls that have the Evident Tokens of Salvation upon them, it is a Thing that is Greatly Feared, I shall Miscarry after all, and my Portion will be that of the Hypocrites. But, be not Afraid, O Soul always doing & showing the Things that accompany Salvation; This is a Thing that will never come upon thee.⁴³

Mather concludes *Tela Praevista* by discussing the individual covenant of salvation that God seeks with Christians, and this is a telling move. In choosing which covenant to highlight in his final admonition he is very clear, it is the “sinners in Zion,” those who die

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴² Ibid, p. 18.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 19.

in their own personal sins that he wants to reach more than addressing any corporate issues of generational declension. He says:

LET all that have not their Vocation and Election yet made sure to them, look upon this as a Thing that is Greatly to be feared; That they Dy in their Sins, and fall into those Hands, which, it is a fearful Thing to fall into. O you, that have never yet made thorough work of Turning to GOD, Is it not a dreadful Thing, — How greatly to be feared, such a Thing; — To Perish & Languish under the Wrath of an Infinite GOD! Let the Sinners in Zion be Afraid, when they think, and Oh! that they would oftner, and more seriously and affectuously Think on, the Devouring Fire, and Everlasting Burnings which they are Expos'd unto. Fear, Fear, O Souls in Darkness, lest you come short of Entering into the Rest, which is Promised in the Gospel.⁴⁴

Amongst Mather's final words on the hope of the covenant of salvation was a message to repent and cling to Christ as personal savior in New England and wherever his word was preached.

Such changes had been churning in Mather's heart for some time. In 1710, during the middle of his ministry, Mather made an unambiguous restatement of his crystallized convictions on the issues of persecution and witchcraft. In his *Theopolis Americana* he writes:

That no man may be Persecuted, because he is Conscientiously not of the same Religious Opinions, with those that are uppermost. And; That Persons are not to be judg'd Confederates with Evil Spirits, meerly because the Evil Spirits do make Possessed People cry out upon them.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, p. 21.

It is this full picture of the complicated, changing Mather that is most interesting to consider. Even earlier in 1707 Mather had taught that God alone could save a “backsliding” people which would represent God’s glory in New England:

The Work of Reformation thus endeavoured, is now recommended unto the blessing of the Almighty, with whom alone it is, to Recover a Backsliding people; perswading our selves that the Event thereof would be Salvation nigh unto us, and Glory dwelling in our land.⁴⁶

During the last years of his ministry it had long been made clear to all watching that grace was not hereditary.⁴⁷ In 1726 Mather believes that visible Christian victory is not to be found on this earth and certainly not only in New England. He teaches:

They indulge themselves in a vain dream, not to say insane, who think, pray and hope, contrary to the whole sacred Scriptures and sound reason, that the promised happiness of the church on earth will be before the Lord Jesus shall appear in his kingdom. They who expect the rest promised for the church of God, to be found anywhere but in the new earth, and they who expect any happy times for the church in a world that hath death and sin in it—these do err not knowing the Scriptures nor the kingdom of God.⁴⁸

At the end of his ministry he conceded that his vision for the final consummation and completion of worldwide reformation was something beyond the church’s grasp and remained firmly in the future. It would take the return of Christ himself to actualize the world that Mather had been working towards. In 1726 he wrote:

⁴⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Present State of New England*, p. 52.

⁴⁷ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: HarperCollins, 1966), p. 185.

⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, p. 11; Merritt Cornell, *Facts for the Times* (1858) § 8.7

This World to come, does not come, till the Resurrection of the Dead.
 The Motto of That World, is, No Death, No Curse; And no Sin to cause it!
 In That World there will be the full accomplishment of This Word, In thy
 Offspring shall all the Nations of the Earth be Blessed.⁴⁹

This concession of victory being something that awaits the church in the next earth is an admission and adjustment away from a former theonomic interpretation of a church triumphant on this side of heaven right now. It is Mather coming to terms with New England beginning to go through declension. Mather remained passionate about the millennium and promised that he had more innovations in this area to share. In a letter to the Royal Society from 1712 Mather claimed that within his massive commentary on the Bible, the *Biblia Americana*, there would be more of “the Truth of Christianity” and “the true Doctrine of the Chiliad” inside.⁵⁰ Unfortunately this work has still not yet been published in its entirety.

Few would argue against the substantial impact that Cotton Mather had in Boston as well as in communities across New England as his thought and influence was instrumental to the burgeoning, restless Americana of his age. The life of Cotton Mather and his writings are both historically significant and pertinent to Christianity today. Without a proper understanding of the real Mather we miss out on the many insights that come from understanding not only his actual place in puritan society but how he saw his position metamorphosing into something modern while keeping his traditional reformed heart. After recasting Mather in light of his changes we find a

⁴⁹ Cotton Mather, *Terra Beata*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Cotton Mather, First Letter to the Royal Society of London, Nov. 17, 1712; David Levin, “Giants in the Earth: Science and the Occult in Cotton Mather's Letters to the Royal Society,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 45 (1988), pp. 754-755.

pastor who loves his people but is disenchanted with rigid paradigms of the old ways that have not correctly fused with the now-apparent necessary ways of pursuing victory for New England and all Christians. As his views morphed, his vision of what the ultimate aim of the Christian did as well. He is not simply adapting to the circumstances around him. Rather, he is redefining orthodox protestant themes that expand the puritan's errand to the continual reformation of the church and ultimately into the blessed New Jerusalem found only in the recreated Earth in the eschaton. The works analyzed in this thesis and others were his gift to the church and its posterity in these efforts.

This thesis has elucidated the remarkable way in which Mather changed from rural provincial into a modern American thinker while also seeing himself firmly in line with the traditional puritan saints of old as praised and romanticized in the *Magnalia*. Mather's journey was an intensely personal, authentically American and enthusiastically international one. England was intractable where America was elastic and untamed, and the consummation of the reformation was going to require something new of the protestant church. Mather was aware of the same when writing the *Magnalia*. In it he said:

The sum of the matter is that from the beginning of the Reformation in the English Nation, there had always been a generation of Godly Men, desirous to pursue the Reformation of Religion, according to the Word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches; and answering the character of Good Men [...] 'Tis very certain, that the first Reformers never intended that what they did should be the absolute boundary of Reformation, so that it should be a sin to proceed any further; as, by their own going beyond Wickliff, and changing and growing in their own

Models also, and the confessions of Cranmer, with the Scripta Anglicana of Bucer, and a thousand other things, was abundantly demonstrated.⁵¹

It is fitting to now end where this thesis started with a final passage from the *Magnalia*. Mather's purpose in writing it was nothing less than to complete the reformation. In pursuing this he openly proceeded through the same "changing and growing" that he compliments the protestants before him for doing. Mather was living proof of what has been called the adaptability of Calvinism.⁵² This is particularly relevant when one considers the progress of New England thought from the colonial era until the present day. The current cultural and religious landscape of New England is a testament to how values can overlay the patina of orthodoxy even in unforeseen expressions when entrusted to visionaries such as Mather and those who would come after him. When taken together it is apparent that a clear understanding of Mather including who he was and what type of outward-facing ministry he was attempting to have is vital to understanding the era, place, movements, personalities and events that grew out of New England puritanism such as The Great Awakening, the American Revolution, the abolition movement and more. American writers after him such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would each acknowledge their literary debt to Mather.⁵³ It has also been claimed that Mather ended his days as something of

⁵¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 1, p. 24.

⁵² Smolinski, *Cotton Mather's Wonders Of The Invisible World*, introduction, vi.

⁵³ Encyclopedia of World Biography, entry for Cotton Mather <<https://www.notablebiographies.com/Ma-Mo/Mather-Cotton.html>> [accessed 24 October 2019].

a John the Baptist to Jonathan Edwards who would come shortly after.⁵⁴ He will now as always still have his critics, as Mather has historically been forced to pay the penalty always attached to singularity.⁵⁵ It was Emerson himself that said “Every hero becomes a bore at last,”⁵⁶ however unfair this may seem.

The analysis of the works covered in this thesis function for Mather as a prism reflecting and refracting the times and events that he ministered in. The changing of Mather’s thought throughout his ministry showed a consistent pursuit of truth in the reformed tradition through these fast-paced periods of early American history. Mather was content to move away from the earliest moorings of his father’s puritanism for the cause of ultimately attaining the surety that he believed was promised in the covenant. Indeed, Mather never gave up on this. He was never a backslider. Rather, he was always positive about the promises of God even as his own attitudes oscillated in light of the events he faced in his life and ministry.

He did not see America or New England as an experiment with set parameters and a method to follow; he saw it as a process of covenantal duty which was constantly renewed through change while remaining theologically orthodox in the protestant - though not necessarily always puritan - tradition. He did not believe in one rigid view of providence. Instead he maintained a bold but morphing confidence in the lasting surety of God. He believed that the entire world labored under the “labyrinth of

⁵⁴ Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, p. 302.

⁵⁵ Erwin, *The Millenarianism of Cotton Mather*, p. 222; Chandler Robbins, *A History of the Second Church, or Old North, in Boston* (1852), p. 68.

⁵⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Boston, 1850).

providence.”⁵⁷ This was not theological inconsistency, but rather it was a consistent commitment to a theological interpretation of the times in which he lived in defending “the Mysteries of a Well-ordered Covenant.”⁵⁸ He remained faithful to a Calvinist theology that acted as a fixed point of covenantal interpretation which included a millennialism that promised victory even in dangerous and hectic times.

Cotton Mather still looms large in the political imagination of America today in unfortunate ways. He is still appealed to in derogatory fashion by those on all sides of issues where one perceives a bias or over-enthusiasm in the prosecution of a perceived slight. His name has been on the lips of important political commentators as recently as December 2019 when the Wall Street Journal ran a opinion piece using a large picture of the only known portrait of Mather to bolster their headline on witch hunts in American political history.⁵⁹ Though such esteemed people as Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle also believed in witches, it is Mather that still lives in the public political imagination as the gargoyle who encouraged the injustices performed in ridding New England society of them. Untrue assumptions about Mather should be unsettled in order for him to occupy a more honest spot in the pantheon of influential American thinkers. Until then, his image will continue to be abused. For example, right-tilting organizations skeptical of the motivations behind such important modern historical events as the impeachment of the 45th President of the United States of America Donald J. Trump appealed to the imagery associated with Mather and Salem

⁵⁷ Cotton Mather, *Right Thoughts in Sad Hours*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ Lance Morrow, “Witch Hunts, Then and Now,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 17th 2019 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/witch-hunts-then-and-now-11576626443>> [accessed 18 December 2019].

in conjuring up sympathy in what they would like the public to perceive as a persecution based on little more than bias and misinformation. Hopefully this thesis goes some distance in removing the sting of associating Mather's name with attempts to solve the real and persistent problems inside and outside the organized church, of which an application of some of Mather's best principles (emulating his ecumenicism or piety, for example) might do some good for all types of people.

For Mather there was an intertwined theological connection between the promises of God in the election of sinners, and the apparent fragility and atrophy of this promise regarding puritan society as a whole. Mather theologically embraced this chasm between the intimate mystical heart religion of puritan Calvinism and the early public mission of New Jerusalem as a city on a hill. He never came to doubt the inerrancy, infallibility and authority of the Bible in all areas of life though some of his philosophical, epistemological and exegetical approaches changed to accommodate his morphing views. Cotton Mather remains, as Perry Miller once said of him, the clearest and most resolute puritan mind of his period.⁶⁰ As the award-winning American indie pop-punk band from Austin, Texas irreverently named *Cotton Mather* sings, "I suppose that what we have could stand the test of time, now the moon falls on another world, it is not mine."⁶¹ Mather's ministry would end near to where it began: focusing on the intimate relationship God has forged between himself and covenanted believers. In the *Biblia Americana* Mather says that this is "the Design of the Work we

⁶⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 476.

⁶¹ Robert Harrison, "Cotton Mather" (band), *Queen of Swords* (Austin: The Star Apple Kingdom Records, 2016).

are upon.”¹ For Mather it was ultimately the lives of New England Christians that would live on as the visible marks of God’s chosen people through generations, epochs and covenants in America. In 1715 he would reference Ecclesiastes 1:4, writing that:

One Generation passeth away, and another Generation cometh: but the Earth abideth forever. The Text is very plain. It needs no Commentary. We our selves are the commentary.²

As people continue to look back at this era and place in American religious history, Cotton Mather — for better or worse — stands as the commentary on the New England puritans. He is the commentary. The academy, church and laypeople would be well served by additional study of Mather’s contributions to and impact on the American experiment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the present. Mather was, amongst so many other things, a forerunner to having the New England Way become quintessentially American in the periods that followed. Indeed, the issues that Mather passionately ministered to have not gone away. They have simply changed form. Getting Mather right is a strong step in the direction of getting the attendant issues surrounding the mythos of the puritans right. I have provided a more holistic portrait. Towards this end, more can be said and done to encourage and support the continual worldwide reformation that Cotton Mather believed in towards its ultimate end of universal piety and peace.

¹ Cotton Mather, *The Biblia Americana*, vol. 1, p. 965; Breitwieser, ‘All on an American Table: Cotton Mather’s *Biblia Americana*,’ p. 401.

² Cotton Mather, *Successive Generations* (1715), p. 10.

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