

Three Manuscripts of Increase Mather

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SCHOLARLY INTEREST in Puritan New England has never been greater than today. In general, this interest has developed along a number of different if closely related fronts, of which American literature, intellectual history, and social history stand out most clearly. Increase Mather (1639–1723) played important roles in all three areas and for this reason the authors wish to direct attention to three important manuscripts of his which have not heretofore been described.

The manuscripts we bring forward in this note are all in the library of the American Antiquarian Society. The most important of them is an unpublished book-length essay on the New Jerusalem, that is to say, on the state of the world during the thousand years between the resurrection of the elect and the Last Judgment. Next is a treatise written in 1675 on the redemptive value for mankind of Christ's sacrifice. This treatise was prompted by a doctrinal argument between Mather and an obscure Rhode Island man, Habbakuk Glover. It gives us new evidence about Mather's Christology. The third manuscript to be discussed is Mather's manuscript copy of the results of the Synod of 1679. It adds important new evidence

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about the famous disagreement between Increase Mather and Solomon Stoddard.

Let us start with this last document. The Synod of 1679 was called by the Massachusetts General Court at the request of ministers who were anxious over the rapidly changing manners and morals of their day. New England life-style, perhaps one should say Boston life-style, was showing the influence of Restoration England. The Congregational ministers were tempted to see in the decline from Puritan piety a cause of the disasters of their times, among which were King Philip's War and the declining proportion of the population ready to join in full, communicating membership in the churches. Laying it all to God's displeasure, the divines asked the General Court to call a synod, nicknamed the 'Reforming Synod,' whose instructions were to enquire into the reason for God's displeasure and make recommendations. It was at this gathering of ministers that open disagreement between Mather and Stoddard first broke out.¹

Rev. Peter Thacher left this eyewitness account for September 19:

This day they discoursed the remedies and debated at the End of Each Paragraph; there was much debate about persons being admitted to full Communion and Mr. Stodder the Minister offered to dispute against it and brought one argument. Mr. Mather was Respondent [and] Mr. Oakes Moderator, but after some time the rest of his arguments were deferred and at present It

¹The best general treatment of the argument between Mather and Stoddard remains in Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 231-63. On the early evidence for the dispute, see Everett Emerson and Mason I. Lowance, 'Increase Mather's Confutation of Solomon Stoddard's Observations Respecting the Lord's Supper, 1680,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 83 (1973):29-65; and William L. Joyce, 'Note on Increase Mather's Observations Respecting the Lord's Supper,' *ibid.*, pp. 343-44. For more information on the views of Stoddard, see Thomas M. Davis and Jeff Jeske, 'Solomon Stoddard's "Arguments" Concerning Admission to the Lord's Supper,' in this issue of the *Proceedings*, pp. 75-111. For a solid, recent interpretation, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 169-224 and *passim*.

was Eased. This Evening what was drawn up by the committee and corrected by the Synod in answer to both questions was Unanimously voted, and an answer to the Governor's two questions.²

Thirty years later Solomon Stoddard left his version of this debate between himself and Mather:

Some of the Elders in the Synod had drawn up a Conclusion, that persons should make a Relation of the work of Gods Spirit upon their hearts, in order to coming into full Communion. Some others of the Elders objected against it, and after some discourse it was agreed to have a dispute on that question, . . . Mr. Mather, held the Negative; I laboured to make good the Affirmative; the result was, that they blotted out that clause of Making a Relation of work of Gods Spirit, and put in the room of it, *The Making a Profession of their Faith and Repentance*; and so I Voted with the Rest.³

The debate thus twice witnessed was, if not the start, at least the earliest recorded confrontation in a long argument between Increase Mather and his relative by marriage, Solomon Stoddard. (Stoddard had married the widow of Increase's brother Eleazar.) The contribution of the present manuscript is to give us the full text of the committee report before it was debated and modified in Synod. Mather's document contains the original version, crossed out, and the substitute version inserted in Mather's own handwriting. Originally the paragraph read:

That both Churches and Elders be most watchfully and strictly circumspect in admission unto full communion in the Lord's Supper, [illegible] that none be admitted but upon satisfactory account given unto the Church of their knowledge, faith, and experience as a sufficient ground (in the judgment of charity) to hope that they are sincere converts and are able to examine themselves and to discern the Lord's body according to Direction. i Cor. 11.

²Quoted in Williston Walker, *Creeks and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893; reprinted Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960), p. 419.

³Quoted *ibid.*, p. 280, n. 2.

28, 29. That persons may not come in their unregeneracy and so be hardened, judicially sealed, and shutt up in their Hypocrisy and Apostacy, eating and drinking judgment unto themselves. And that the Table of the Lord be kept pure, and not be polluted and profaned by unworthy communicants.

In the printed report of the synod's action, *The Necessity of Reformation*, the article reads:

It is requisite that persons be not admitted unto Communion in the Lord's Supper without making a personal and public profession of their Faith and Repentance, either orally, or in some other way, so as shall be to the just satisfaction of the Church. And that therefore both Elders and Churches be duly watchful and circumspect in this matter. i Cor. 11. 28, 29. Act 2. 41, 42. Ezek. 44. 7, 8, 9.⁴

Mather's criterion, that the regenerate demonstrate 'upon satisfactory account given unto the Church of their knowledge, faith, and experience as a sufficient ground . . . to hope that they are sincere converts,' was in effect diluted so that those claiming saving faith had only to make 'personal and public profession of their Faith and Repentance, either orally, or in some other way. . . .' The stern Calvinism of Increase Mather encountered the more capacious theology of Solomon Stoddard and the conflict would persist for a generation—and more.

An interesting aspect of Mather's manuscript is his composition of the title page, which became in fact the title page of the published results of the synod, *The Necessity of Reformation*. . . (Boston: John Foster, 1679). Seventeenth-century title pages were themselves far richer than the thin gruel publishers concoct today. Mather's were also rigidly formal and required certain constant elements, including a long, descriptive title, a description of the author, and several quotations from the Old and New Testaments. Increase Mather designed

⁴Ibid., p. 433.

his own title pages and indeed he did so with considerable care and rewriting. AAS also holds other book manuscripts with title pages designed in Mather's hand, e.g., *A Testimony Against Several Prophan and Superstitious Customs . . .* (London, 1687), and *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation . . .* (London: R. Tookey for Nath. Hillier, 1709). These formulistic title pages can have important heuristic value. A case in point is the next manuscript we will describe. Although the title is lengthy, it lacks both author and Biblical texts, so that we can be sure it was not prepared for publication.

A quarto manuscript of seven sheets bears this title on its cover:

The Substance of several sermons tending to vindicate the truth. Against the Heretical exceptions of Mr. H. G. Together with an Answer unto the Arguments contained in a paper written by him opposing and denying the Meritorious obedience of Christ.

A later notation also appears on the cover above the title: 'Mather's Answer to Glover.' Within, there follow on pages 1-35 three sermons, each of which ends with the little closing prayer 'Tibi Domine,' a characteristic not only of Mather, but of many other Puritan preachers as well. The handwriting is not Increase Mather's, although the marginalia may be.

On page 36 begins an essay:

An Answer to a paper called an Essay to Discover the Principal causes of the Anger of God against N. E. etc. In which paper it is pretended that the position *that Christ by his active and passive Obedience hath merited all good for those for whom he dyed*, is a fundamental Lye and the asserting of it, is the Cause of the Lord's anger against New England.

This essay runs to page 44 and the end of the treatise. On the back cover in what appears to be Increase Mather's handwriting is a quotation from Zwingli. The treatise, a sewn quarto of forty-four pages with a blank outside sheet, is other-

wise unidentified. We can now produce evidence that at least the last essay, if not the sermons too, was written by Increase Mather in the middle 1670s.

The confirming evidence consists of an exchange of letters between Increase Mather and Habbakuk Glover. Glover wrote Mather in December 1675, from Rhode Island to ask if he could borrow Mather's 'answer' to a treatise which he, Glover, had circulated earlier and which is now lost. Mather replied in January (writing in rough draft on the back of Glover's letter, so that we have both ends of the correspondence), 'I have received your letter and in confidence of your promise in remitting my MSS to me again with convenient speed, I send an Answer to you.' Glover returned Mather's manuscript on March 18, 1676. The two theologians were unable to reach any kind of agreement, and Glover felt it urgent 'that it is time for you to open and explain your dark doctrine. . . .'⁵

If Glover characterized Mather's position as a 'dark doctrine,' Mather's response to Glover's writing was even stronger. Mather noted that the 'great principle' expressed in Glover's essay was a denial that 'Jesus Christ the son of God, hath merited salvation for his people by his obedience.' Mather deemed this a 'desperate heresy and prodigious blasphemy.' His 'Answer' followed the conventional scholastic organization of theological discourse of the day and systematically replied to each of Glover's eight arguments. The issue was

⁵Habbakuk Glover to Increase Mather, December 20, 1675, and March 18, 1676, Newport, R.I.; Increase Mather to Habbakuk Glover, January 3, 1676, Mather Papers, Boston Public Library, M.S. Am. 1502, vol. 2, pp. 20, 20a, 22. The great majority of the Mather Papers in this large collection were printed in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th ser., 8 (1868). These letters are among the several score of documents omitted from that collection. See the Boston Public Library, *The Prince Library. A Catalogue of the Collection of Books and Manuscripts* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1870), pp. 142-59, especially p. 143. The authors of this essay have not been able to unsnarl the bibliographic puzzle presented by the items listed in Charles Evans, *American Bibliography to 1800* (Chicago: privately printed, 1903), 1:83 (entry 510), and Clifford K. Shipton and James E. Mooney, *National Index of American Imprints through 1800* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1969), 1:312 (entry 468).

one already dividing the early Baptist movement in England between Particular Baptists and General Baptists. Glover was here a particularist. His sixth argument ran thus:

They that hold this proposition [i.e., that Christ merited all good for those for whom he died] either be of [the] opinion that all shall be saved, or else they must deny that Christ dyed for all, and so not all mankind but the elect . . . are the subject of this their Gospell.

Mather replied that Christ did not die for all in the 'Arminian sense,' nor did Mather agree that 'Christ hath bought all mankind even reprobates and damned ones as well as others.'

Mather reaffirmed the traditional Calvinism for which he was noted. He asserted that 'Christ merited grace and glory for the people by His blood, as per the Scriptures.' Mankind, he noted sternly, may not approach God and ask for good as due on its own account (which view Mather labeled as 'Anabaptism or Antinomianism'), but it may be done on Christ's account. And to do so on Christ's account meant that men had to follow the way of Christ and His law as found in the Scriptures. In so doing followers of Christ could expect to attain that good so eloquently described by Mather in his remarkable essay *The New Jerusalem*.

The most important of this group of previously unknown manuscripts is the sixty-nine-page manuscript entitled:

A discourse concerning the glorious state of the church on earth under the New Jerusalem. The coming and Kingdom of Christ. Shewing that the Works of God declare these things to be near, delivered in several sermons, to which is added a dissertation concerning the future conversion of the Jews, Answering the Objections of the Reverend and Learned Mr. Baxter, Dr. Lightfoot and others, with an enquiry into the first Resurrection.

This extended title is followed according to formula with 'By Increase Mather, President of Harvard College in Cambridge, and Preacher of the Gospel at Boston in New Eng-

land.' The title clearly indicated his intention to publish all as one book. Such did not happen, however.

The second part, 'A Dissertation Concerning the future conversion of the Jews . . .,' the manuscript of which is not now with its companion piece in the Mather Family Papers, was printed separately in London in 1709. Internal evidence makes it clear that it was written between 1692 and 1695.⁶ 'New Jerusalem,' however, was never published. Mather remarked in the introductory paragraph that the essay derived from several sermons on Revelation 3, and that some fifteen years earlier he had expanded on the verses preceding that chapter. We know from another source that Mather gave a long series of at least eighteen sermons on Revelation 2 between April and October in 1672.⁷ This suggests a date of 1687 for the first composition of 'New Jerusalem.'

Increase Mather's chiliasm is an important key to the understanding of his complex and often paradoxical character. Mather grew to adulthood in years when revolutionary millennialism in England was at its height.⁸ Brightman, Mede, and John Cotton, the father of Mather's future bride, were all his heroes and all charismatic prophets of the imminent rule of the saints on earth. Increase was himself in the British Isles at the time of the last, fanatic effort by Fifth Monarchy rebels to overthrow Cromwell and anticipate the second coming. Then came the Restoration. For the rest of his life Mather lived in a world of discourse where the literal promise of heaven on earth was steadily blurred over and made harmless. What Albert Schweitzer called the 'true, inner history of Christianity,' namely the steady denial by the church of the expectation

⁶See the dedication dated 1695 and the discussion in Thomas J. Holmes, *Increase Mather: A Bibliography of His Works* (Cleveland, 1931), 1:197.

⁷Increase Mather, *Sermons, 1672*. This is one of the dozen or more notebook calendars Mather kept of his sermons. Mather Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁸See the excellent article by J. F. McClear, 'New England and the Fifth Monarchy: the Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (1975):223-60.

of the actual rule of the saints on earth, was once more in progress after a brief moment of revolutionary brilliance. The generation of Puritans who lived with Mather after the Restoration made their peace with the church in this respect. John Eliot consented to having his blueprint of the radical millennium burned by the censor in Boston. The overthrow of Antichrist and the rule of the saints was no longer preached.

Increase Mather, however, never gave up the vision. As an angry, radical youth-in-exile in Boston in the 1660s he had challenged the established church of his father, when he opposed the Half-Way Covenant. In 1665 he wrote his first book about the millennium. The occasion that impelled him to the topic was the excitement in 1665 caused by Sabbatai Sevi. That strange Levantine Jew came out of Gaza proclaiming himself the Messiah. For a brief moment it seemed to Jews around the world that the Messiah had come. The news—it reached Boston from London in the early winter of 1666—plunged Mather into an intense study of the role of the Jews in the working out of Christian history, particularly their conversion and return to their homeland as a harbinger of the thousand-year reign of the saints and the angels on earth. Out of that study and its attendant series of lectures came the book *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation* (London: John Allen, 1669) and hard on its heels another book, *Diatriba de Signo Filii Hominis et de Secundo Messiae Adventu* (Amsterdam: Mercy Browning, 1682).⁹

In ensuing years, when Puritan scholars like Baxter began to hedge on the literal meaning of the prophecies, Mather clung to his belief in the millennium. *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation*, written be-

⁹Mystery has surrounded the issuance of *Diatriba de Signo Filii Hominis*. See Holmes, *Increase Mather*, p. 154. It is now clear from evidence in Cotton Mather, *Parentator* (Boston: B. Green for Nathaniel Belknap, 1724), p. 64, and in Increase Mather to Samuel Petto, March 28, 1672, Miscellaneous Bound Mss., Massachusetts Historical Society, that the book was composed in Latin in 1668, sent to England in the winter of 1671–72, and published in Holland by Mercy Browning in 1682.

tween 1692 and 1695, is Mather's clearest statement of his millennial beliefs. They included the second coming, the resurrection of the elect, the reign for a thousand years of the elect and the angels on earth, then the second general resurrection. Any attempt to disguise this sequence of events, he thought, could only be supported by distorting the literal meaning of Scripture, by allegorizing. Speaking of Baxter, Mather wrote, 'If men allow themselves the Liberty of Allegorizing we may at last Allegorize Religion into nothing but Fancy. . . .'¹⁰ Mather clung, then, to his literal interpretation of the prophetic parts of the Bible, although he had long since given up the radical political and social stance that had been part and parcel of his youth.

'New Jerusalem' is particularly important because, unlike other Mather writings about the millennium, this book deals not with events preceding the second coming, but with what life itself will be like during the thousand years.

The essay is a fervent, indeed lyrical, statement of faith concerning the characteristics of the millennium. Utilizing a favored method of discourse among Puritans known as 'typological exegesis,' Mather identified Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem as a type or prefiguring of the appearance on earth of the church of God. The earthly Jerusalem anticipated the coming of the spiritual Jerusalem as forecast in the New Testament. Mather's premillennial faith was both powerful and direct:

. . . the day is coming when there will be an externall beutie, a visible glory on the church of God. In the day when New Jerusalem shall come down from heaven . . . The Lord shall be seen upon thee. That day is coming. [p. 12]

The New Jerusalem, Mather wrote, would 'excell the literl Jerusalem' in several ways: first, its maker and builder is God; second, only God's elect, members of the 'mistical church' may inhabit Jerusalem and 'miserable degenerates'

¹⁰Increase Mather, *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* (London: R. Tookey for Nath. Hillier, 1709).

would be excluded; third, unlike the Old Jerusalem which was destroyed, the New Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, 'shall stand forever' as 'an eternall excellence.'

But Mather also reminded his readers that the New Jerusalem was to be understood to concern the church of God on earth and not only in heaven, that it would attain its millennial state at the resurrection of the just, and that there shall be 'no more sorrow nor any more paine nor any more dying.' Moreover, the New Jerusalem would include the glorious presence of God and the lord Jesus Christ:

. . . when Christ appears to judg the world and rayse the dead, believers shall see him as he is, as now he is in his state of glory, shall they then behold him! [p. 38]

While Mather reaffirmed his view that the New Jerusalem would exclude degenerates, he also believed that the church would experience 'glorious enlargement,' at least partly because of the conversion of the Jewish nation. Mather's vision of the New Jerusalem was expansive to the point that the whole earth 'shall owne the true god.'

He turned in conclusion to the question which oppressed his flock: how to know 'if the name of New Jerusalem is written upon us?' Mather asked his faithful to inquire of themselves where were their hearts? on earth or in heaven? Do we desire, he asked, to lead lives on earth such as would be led in the New Jerusalem? Do we delight in communion with God? in prayer? in praise? Would we take any means, Mather queried, to 'attaine unto the Resurrection of the dead?' Do we, he concluded, long for the day when the New Jerusalem shall come down from heaven?

If it be so with thee if thou dost love and long for the appearing of the lord Jesus Christ, then the word of Christ to thee this day, is, that he will give you a crowne of righteousness unto all that love his Appearing. [p. 69]

Such was the vision and the rhetoric that made Increase Mather among the most successful preachers in New England.

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