

The Millennial Quest in the New England Errand into the Wilderness

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For many years a general theme running through Professor Arieli's teaching and studies has been the issue of the relationship between ideology and history, between modes of conviction and modes of action. Hence his deep and long standing interest in the significant role played by religious movements, such as the Protestant Reformation, Calvinism and Puritanism, in the shaping of early modern history in general, and in American history in particular.¹ For the singular contribution Professor Arieli has made to the understanding of these fields he is eminently deserving of the recognition of those who respect him as a colleague, follow him as a mentor, and value him as a friend. Furthermore, innumerable young historians owe much to the energy and skill with which he has encouraged them during a long, dedicated and most distinguished career. It is only natural, therefore, that this essay grow out of Professor Arieli's lasting and inspiring interest in the continuity and transformation of modes of historical thought in early modern history. In this essay I wish to explore the Puritans' sense of their errand into the wilderness, and the millennial visions that were intrinsic to the Puritan migration to America. In such an attempt, however, one immediately encounters the work of Perry Miller, the most prominent historian of the New England mind, who totally rejected the notion that the millennial quest played a significant role in Puritan New England. Thus I begin with a discussion of Miller's writing, aiming to reveal the historical and

¹ Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Penguin Books, 1966); "Martin Luther – His Significance for Modern History," *The Great Man and His Age* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1963; in Hebrew); "The Kingdom of God in America – The Protestant Vision of the American Nation," *Religion and Society in Jewish and World History* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1965; in Hebrew); "Heroes and Martyrs in the Protestant Tradition," *Holy Wars and Martyrology in Jewish and World History* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1968; in Hebrew); *Political Thought in the United States: Readings and Documents*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1967; in Hebrew).

ideological context behind his denial of millennialism, to be followed by an examination of the millennial quest underlying the Puritan migration to America.

Perry Miller concluded his deep and long involvement, spanning more than three decades, with Puritans and Puritanism in America with the publication of the last book of his Puritan trilogy, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), which was preceded by *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (1933), and *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939).² He wrote that his work came to trace the history of "the accommodation to the American landscape of an imported and highly articulated system of ideas." Ultimately, as a cultural historian in the broadest sense, he was interested above all in the "narrative of the movement of European culture to the vacant wilderness of America,"³ and examined the role of Puritanism in the history of both Europe and America: "I assume that Puritanism was one of the major expressions of the Western intellect, that it achieved an organized synthesis of concepts which are fundamental to our culture."⁴ Puritanism thus provided Miller with the means with which to explore and demonstrate the process of the transfer, diffusion, and accommodation of European ideas in the American wilderness. Miller argued that his work should be seen in this context as "an effort to comprehend, in the widest possible terms, the architecture of the intellect brought to America by the founders of New England."⁵

Miller, however, failed to comprehend, and more than once even avoided describing, one of the main features of the Puritan mind – the pursuit of the millennium. Many studies have already revealed the prevalence of millennial expectations and eschatological visions in the seventeenth-century New England mind.⁶ This study, however, is not an examination of Miller's work in the light of recent Puritan studies, but rather a more modest inquiry: to see why

2 Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968; hereafter cited as *NEM II*); *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939). (Hereafter cited as *NEM I*).

3 Miller, *NEM I*, Foreword; *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. vii.

4 Miller, *NEM I*, p. viii.

5 Miller, *NEM II*, Foreword.

6 For recent studies of Puritan millennialism in seventeenth-century New England, see Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1984); David Levin, *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663–1703* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), and my "Exile and Kingdom: Reformation, Separation, and the Millennial Quest in the Formation of Massachusetts and Its Relationship with England, 1628–1660," Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins Univ., 1982.

Miller failed to include the quest of the millennium within the boundaries of the seventeenth-century Puritan mind, to explore to what extent this failure was affected by the context of his time and the objectives set by Miller, and to analyze how it influenced his understanding of the Puritan's "errand into the wilderness."

The rise of millennial expectations and eschatological visions among Puritans is so evident during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries that a failure to acknowledge and understand its nature and meaning would inevitably result in a distortion of the meaning and nature of the Puritan movement in England and the Puritan migration to Massachusetts. It is indeed ironical that the most prominent historian of the seventeenth-century "New England mind," whose aim was "to comprehend, in the widest possible terms, the architecture" of the Puritan intellect and to exhibit in his writing "a map of the intellectual terrain of the seventeenth-century,"⁷ attached so little importance to millennialism in either Old or New England. "In Calvinist circles of 1630," asserted Miller, "speculation about the end of the world – particularly as to whether the second coming of Christ was to precede or follow the millennium, had become highly suspect."⁸ Although Calvin himself was suspicious of any discussion concerning the time and coming of the Kingdom of God or the second coming of Christ on earth, the English Puritans were Calvinists only to a degree, and to identify them entirely with Calvin or Calvinism is to neglect the theological emendations made by Protestants in England on Calvin's theology following his death. By ignoring the overwhelming evidence in English Puritan writings that the pursuit of the millennium was an essential feature of the movement, and that discussion concerning prophecy about the second coming of Christ was widespread, Miller excised from the origins of the Puritan migration the effects of the Book of Revelation, a book which, among others, inspired Puritan millennial expectations and eschatological visions. In doing so he misconstrued not only the ideological origins of this migration but the "New England mind" in the seventeenth century as well.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate Miller's refusal to acknowledge the existence of a real and vivid Puritan interest in speculation concerning the millennium. Confronted, for example, with Increase Mather's claim "that the doctrine of millennium was a teaching of 'the first and famous Pastors in the New English Churches,'" Miller simply labels the statement "one of those half-truths of which he was so prolific." Miller thus depicted millennial expectations in seventeenth-century New England as primarily family affairs, or more precisely, a family affair – the private domain of the Mathers. "There was something in him and his son," writes Miller of Increase and Cotton Mather,

7 Miller, *NEM II*, Foreword; *NEM I*, p. vii.

8 Miller, *NEM II*, p. 185.

"that impelled them along the dangerous road of millennial thought." The two Mathers were, in this respect at least, continued Miller, "peculiar in New England; possessed by the true apocalyptic spirit, they marched into the Age of Reason loudly crying that the end of the world was at hand."⁹

By limiting involvement in millennial prophecy to the peculiar imaginings of one particular New England family, Miller was free to argue that millennialism constituted but a minor aspect of the New England experience. Paradoxically, however, Miller does attribute this pattern of thought to the evolving New England mind, and considers it an important component of the growing American concept of "declension," of the rise of American patriotism, and finally, of the developing American jeremiad. For both Mathers, writes Miller, the "discovering of the doctrine of millennium ... arose out of their experience, and may be called the supreme symbol of their patriotism." Elsewhere he describes the Mathers' "preaching upon special providence" as "a strategic device for arousing the emotions of a sluggish generation."¹⁰

By leaving both millennial thought and the Book of Revelation out of Puritan cosmology and experience in Old and New England, Miller failed to depict a major dimension of the seventeenth-century Puritan outlook and consequently misapprehended the Puritan migration movement. For not only did Puritans believe in the imminence of the millennium; they also deemed themselves actors who would partake in the battle between Christ and Antichrist which would precede the second coming of Christ. "Thus you have a touch of the time when this work began," noted Edward Johnson, who came to Massachusetts Bay in the early 1630s, "when England began to decline in Religion ... in this very time Christ the glorious King of his Churches, raises an Army out of our English Nation ... and creates New England to muster up the first of his Forces in."¹¹ The Puritan migration, then, as the emigrants themselves perceived it, was not simply a utopian search after religious reformation, a flight from corrupt history; it was rather a confrontation within time and history, an earthly stand against the powers of Satan and Antichrist.

Our task here is to elucidate how Miller's mode of historical explanation within the context of his time, and his approach to the unique role of Puritanism in American history, shaped the main arguments of his works. Why, then, did Miller so readily dismiss the primacy of millennial expectations and eschatological visions in the Puritan mind of the seventeenth century? As a great teacher and scholar who has taught us to delve seriously in religious history and to read sermons and theological tracts carefully, Miller surely encountered the

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 188.

¹⁰ Miller, *NEM I*, p. 229; *NEM II*, pp. 187-188.

¹¹ Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sion Saviour in New England, 1628-1651*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 23.

millennial strain of thought so prevalent in the sermons and books printed in seventeenth-century New England. If we cannot doubt that he read them, then Millier's avoidance of a serious consideration of the millennial mode of thought must be, at least to some degree, intentional. This conclusion is less surprising once we understand Miller's ultimate goal of bringing Puritans and Puritanism into the center of American history.

In Miller's view, Puritanism was not merely an historical phenomenon of seventeenth-century New England, but rather a fundamental component underlying the entire American past from its beginning until his own time. Puritanism, according to Miller, became "one of the continuous factors in American life and thought. Any inventory of the elements that have gone into the making of the 'American mind' would have to commence with Puritanism."¹² Puritanism thus provided Miller with the instrument for realizing his "mission" to conduct a comprehensive study which would decipher the meaning of the entire American past. This historical mode of inquiry, in which the American past as a whole was primary and Puritanism secondary, with the latter serving as a means to explain the former, was a clear reaction to the school of Progressive historians so dominant in American historiography during the 1920s and the 1930s. The Progressivists, including J.T. Adams, V.L. Parrington and T.J. Wertenbaker,¹³ depicted the Puritans as opponents of the liberal and democratic tradition in American history and strongly rejected the notion that Puritanism had played a crucial role in American history. Miller's "mission," therefore, was to establish the function of Puritanism as central to the American past by viewing Puritanism as "the innermost propulsion of the United States," capable of revealing the significance of American history.¹⁴

The Progressivists historians' total denial of Puritanism's unique role in American history was only part of the widespread "Anti-Puritan rebellion" of the early 1900s. Even Miller had acted as "an adolescent campaigner" in this anti-Puritan cult. Influential writers of the time, such as H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, ridiculed the Puritans and Puritanism in their books and satires, and identified them with hypocrisy, censorship, narrow-mindedness, and joylessness; they were accused of having withstood everything related to the growth of realism in American life and literature. Miller, years after he had freed

¹² Perry Miller, *The Puritans: A Source Book of Their Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), I, 1.

¹³ J.T. Adams, *The Founding of New England*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1949), p. 227 (1st ed. 1921); V.L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954), pp. 15, vi-vii (1st ed. 1927); Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The First Americans: 1607-1690* (New York, Macmillan, 1927), pp. 90-91.

¹⁴ Miller, *Errand*, p. viii.

himself from this anti-Puritan outlook, referred to the general attitude toward the Puritans in the 1920s:

I had commenced my work with the emotional universe dominated by H.L. Mencken. My contemporaries and I came of age in a time when the word "Puritan" served as a comprehensive sneer against every tendency in American civilization which we held reprehensible – sexual diffidence, censorship, prohibition, theological fundamentalism, political hypocrisy, and all the social antics which Sinclair Lewis, among others, was stridently ridiculing.

Miller, then, faced the task of countering the prevailing "Menckenesque hatred of the kill-joy Puritan."¹⁵

Another mode of historical approach toward the Puritans, which Miller had to confront, emphasized the centrality of social history. Arguing that "the field of intellectual history" should be "considered as legitimate a field for research and speculation as that of economic and political," Miller attempted to demonstrate in his work that early Puritan New England should indeed be discussed within the framework of intellectual history: "The narrative of the Bay colony's early history can be strung upon the thread of an idea." Miller thoroughly rejected the social historians' mode of historical explanation, which, as typified by J.T. Adams, examined "the creed and platform" of the Puritans, yet "always passed judgment" against them "in the name of the enlightened insight of modern social science." In Miller's view, this "anti-intellectualism" among social historians who "slide over" the role of ideas in history "in a shockingly superficial manner simply because they have so little respect for the intellect in general," was incomprehensible. In stark contrast, Miller affirmed his own belief:

I have difficulty imagining that anyone can be a historian without realizing that history itself is part of the life of the mind: hence I have been compelled to insist that the mind of man is the basic factor in human history."¹⁶

In summary, then, when Miller turned to seventeenth-century New England Puritanism as the beginning of his exposition of the American past, he had to contend with two dominant attitudes: anti-Puritan sentiment which characterized the Progressive historians and influential writers such as H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, and the anti-intellectualism among social historians concerning the role of ideas in history. As we will soon demonstrate, many of the important arguments in Miller's writings were indeed strongly influenced by his desire to change these fundamental approaches to research regarding Puritanism. Rather than augment the prevailing bias against the Puritans,

15 Miller, *Orthodoxy*, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. xxv–xxvi, xxix–xxx, xxxiii; *Errand*, p. ix.

Miller more than once avoided describing some of the main features of the Puritan mind, such as millennial expectations and eschatological visions. He thus overlooked – even distorted – some of the essential ingredients of Puritan thought. In his attempt to oppose the social historians' anti-intellectualism, Miller tended to isolate ideas from the social and political setting within which they operated. Consequently, Miller ran the risk of widening the gap between ideas, on the one hand, and social and political processes on the other. Both his reluctance to provide evidence which would heighten anti-Puritan feeling and his overemphasis of the role of ideas removed from their historical context are clearly exhibited in Miller's treatment of the Puritan pursuit of the millennium, and the meaning of the Puritan "errand into the wilderness."

Millennialism was long regarded in the historiography of Puritan England as a phenomenon belonging to the lunatic fringe of religious fanatics, zealots, sects and movements which developed before and during the Puritan Revolution. Only recently, and mainly as a result of William Lamont's excellent study, *Godly Rule*, has millennialism been recognized as an essential feature of the Puritan movement in England.¹⁷ During the decades when Miller was composing his major Puritan trilogy, millennialism was still associated exclusively with the radical sects, such as the Fifth Monarchy Men, which were attacked fiercely by orthodox Puritans. This, of course, may partially explain Miller's neglect of the pursuit of the millennium in Puritanism. Had Miller admitted that the Puritans were millenarians, he would have been acknowledging, in terms of the period in which he wrote, that they belonged to those enthusiastic sects which had cut themselves off from the orthodox Puritan tradition.

Today, however, we know that "centrifugal millenarianism" led Puritans, before and after the Puritan Revolution, to seek the realization of the millennium outside the Church of England. We also know that millennialism was inextricably associated with separation, and that strong centrifugal millennialism motivated the Bay Puritans, as it had the earlier Plymouth group to separate themselves from England and the Church of England. Miller's treatment of the issue of separation in *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* as a basically unchanging problem from the late sixteenth century until the Great Puritan Migration ignores the profound influence exerted by the rise of millennial expectations among English Puritans. Whereas most English Puritans still looked upon England, "The Elect Nation," as the place in which to build the New Jerusalem of Revelation by reforming the Church of England, this "centripetal millenarianism," as Lamont shows so brilliantly in his study, was replaced by

17 William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603–1660* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

"centrifugal millenarianism" in the early seventeenth century.¹⁸ During that period, radical Puritans began to reject mainstream Puritanism on the grounds that the very concept of a national church was antichristian, the work of Satan: they considered it the saints' duty to separate from this false church and establish the Kingdom of God outside the Church of England. Grounded in these assumptions, the Puritan migration to Massachusetts Bay constituted an attempt to build the New Jerusalem in the wilderness, far from the corrupted England upon which God would soon pour his wrath. Congregationalism was thus essentially tied not only to separation but also to millennialism, for both urged the saints to separate from the false church and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Miller apparently thought that in order to prove that the Bay colony settlers were true Puritans who transferred mainstream Puritanism to America, he had to eliminate any suggestion that the New England Puritans were separatists or schismatics existing outside the domain of orthodox Puritanism. He therefore rejected whatever was considered by his age as characteristic of the sects – separation and millennialism. Today, however, both separation and millennialism are regarded as intrinsically associated with congregationalism, whose very polity of church-government required being separate from the established Church of England. On the other hand, since congregationalism is now viewed as being well within the Puritan movement and tradition, Puritanism is no longer incompatible with separation and millennialism. Consequently, Miller's determined attempt to prove that the Bay Puritans had neither separated from the Church of England nor been involved in millennialism was in fact unnecessary. Nonetheless, in light of the entrenched views of his time – and without hindsight – perhaps he had no alternative.

Although he was unable to reconcile separation and millennialism with Puritanism, Miller correctly described the Bay Puritans as Puritans; but they were also true separatists, since separation and Puritanism were not incompatible terms in the early seventeenth century. Failing to acknowledge that congregationalism constituted separation from the Church of England as a national church, Miller preferred to accept the Bay leaders' contentions at face value. Their repeated pronouncements and protestations that they were not separatists resulted from a natural and clear interest of self-preservation: they did not want to arouse the anger of English authorities against their holy experiment in the wilderness. But Miller refused to listen to English Puritans' denunciations of the Bay people as separatists and chose not to examine those actual practices in New England which pointed unmistakably to explicit separation.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 25. See also William Haller's important study, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 1972).

Miller's denial of separation and millennialism as inherently related to the causes and origins of the Puritan migration as well as to its aims and goals in the wilderness seriously affected his concept of "the errand into the wilderness." "The large unspoken assumption in the errand" of the Puritan migration, wrote Miller in his superb essay "Errand into the Wilderness," was that if the Puritan emigrants could realize the true reformation in America, Jehova "would bring back these temporary colonials to govern England." Whereas the first phase of the Puritan errand entailed the fulfillment of the goals of reformation in America, the second involved influencing the reformation in England. The Puritan migration, he argued, "was an organized task force of Christians, executing a flank attack on the corruption of Christendom. These Puritans did not flee to America; they went in order to work out that complete reformation which was not yet accomplished in England and Europe, but which would quickly be accomplished if only the saints back there had a working model to guide them."¹⁹

Did the Puritan emigrants actually assume this second sense of the errand? That is, did they really emigrate with the intention of eventually influencing the reformation in England? Miller's arguments hold only if we overlook both the Bay Puritans' definite separation and their millennial expectations. If we take the latter into account and carefully consider the Puritan emigrants' reading of the Book of Revelation, exhibited especially in Thomas Brightman's exegesis, *Revelation of the Revelation*,²⁰ then the urgent duty to flee "Babylon," avoid imminent destruction, and reach the "Wilderness" becomes evident as a prime motivating force of the migration. But before continuing our discussion of the "errand," we will first briefly explore the special meaning of the term "Wilderness" as it appears in the Book of Revelation.

New Jerusalem in Revelation is that church which will descend from heaven at "the end of time," or in the "last time." But in Brightman's exegesis it is the true church on earth that the Lord, after many apocalyptic events, will seal with his name. From this point of view, Brightman's book offered a description of the emergence of this church out of the labyrinth of time and history and the endless human effort involved in the erection of the true church in purity, according to God's word. In this respect, Brightman's exegesis served, at least in part, to take the locus of millennial expectations away from England and place it in the

19 Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," *Errand*, p. 11.

20 Thomas Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or A Revelation of the Revelation* (Leiden, 1616). For Brightman's crucial influence on the Bay Puritans, see my thesis, "Exile and Kingdom." Lamont was the first to show the importance of the Book of Revelation for the Puritan movement and the first to point out the essential role of Thomas Brightman in raising millennial expectations among the Puritans in the early seventeenth century.

wilderness of Massachusetts Bay. "When you see Jerusalem compassed with armies," preached Francis Higginson in his farewell sermon to his congregation in Leicester in 1629, shortly before he left for Salem in America, "then flee to the mountains." And John Cotton in his farewell sermon before Winthrop's fleet in 1630, declared that

there be evils to be avoyded that may warrant removal. First, when some grievous sinnes overspread Country that threaten desolation ... a wise man forseeth the plague, so in threatening to seeth a commandement, to hide himself from it.

Similarly, in the "General Observations for the Plantation of New England" (1629), the terms "refuge" and "shelter" defined the immediate goal of the migration. These Puritans considered themselves "forced to flye into the wilderness" and there "to seek refuge for saftye." Fortunately, they knew, because God "carried his people into the wilderness," he would provide them a "comfortable refuge." Of New England, they believed:

God hath provided this place to be a refuge for many whom he meanes to save out of the generall callamity, and seeinge the Church hathe no place lefte to flie into but the wilderness, what better worke can there be, than to goe and provide tabernacles and foode for her against she come thether.²¹

The prevalence of the terms "shelter," "refuge" and "hiding place" points to the fact that these Puritans thought of their migration in an apocalyptic context: they were saints in the midst of an apocalyptic scenario. And as saints in the middle of cosmic occurrences, so to speak, they sought out the best place in which to ride out the storm. What they found was the New England wilderness. Their hope was that "New England might be designed by heaven, as a *refuge* and *shelter* for the *non-conformists* against the storms that were coming upon the nation."²²

"The Wilderness," noted Joseph Mede, a famous early seventeenth-century commentator on Revelation, is that place where "God is encamping with Israel" and where "God [is] marching before his people" after taking them out of Egypt. It represents, then, an intermediate zone between the past and future, or between Egypt and the Promised Land. Consequently, the wilderness served as that place in time and history where the saints show they deserve to be God's people; it is that place of trial where faith in the keeping of the covenant is proven. Yet, because the wilderness is in time, it also bears the mark of history. That is, it is still a place within the context of the battle between Christ and

21 Francis Higginson, in Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1820), I, 327; John Cotton, "God's Promise to his Plantation" (1630), *Old South Leaflets*, III, 9; "General Observations for the Plantation of New England" (1629), *Winthrop Papers*, ed. Allyn B. Forbes (Boston, 1929-1947), I, 114, 116, 125, 128, 136, 129, 139.

22 Francis Higginson, cited in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, I, 328.

Antichrist. That is why "God creates a New England to muster up the first of his Forces in," because "assure your selves the time is at hand wherein Antichrist will muster all his forces and make war with the people of God." New England was indeed new, but its dimension of time belonged to history, not to the sacred realm of New Jerusalem. The millennium was nearly at hand, as Edward Johnson believed, but until its actual advent, New England still had to play its part in the apocalyptic events. After all, "the Devil with his Instruments have contrived to swallow up that famous Kingdom," wrote John Wilson from Boston,

and the Church of Christ in it, so now ... all the devils of Hell ... busying themselves to batter down the walls of Zion, and to make breaches at the gates thereof, that so they might execute the utmost Butcheries that can be invented, thereby to overthrow the Kingdom of Christ.²³

Within the apocalyptic visions and prophecies of Revelation, the wilderness held a unique place: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." Being "with a child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered," the woman had to escape from heaven, because "a great red dragon" in heaven aimed "to devour her child as soon as it was born." The woman delivered the child "who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron," and with him she "fled into the wilderness, where she hath place prepared of God" (Rev. 12:1-6). Later a war breaks out in heaven, wherein Satan is banished from the heavenly realm, "and when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

Again, with Satan on earth, the woman is "given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." The latter makes every effort to destroy the woman, but in vain, so "the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make a war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:13-17).

In his exegesis, Brightman radically transformed these passages from Revelation concerning the woman and the wilderness by relating them to a concrete historical context. "The woman which is seen," he argues, "doth very fittly carry the image of the Church," and her son, of course, is Christ. Concerning the wilderness, "*the place is the wilderness, that is, the Temple.*" Thus the wilderness is the place in which "the poore handsome of the Elect

23 Joseph Mede, *The Brief Meaning or Summary Exposition of the Apocalypse. The Work of Joseph Mede*, pp. 917-918; Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp. 23, 33; John Wilson, *A Song of Deliverance* (1604), in *Handkerchiefe from Paul*, ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), p. 43.

lurke," and where "there was a meere solitary wilderness in respect of that place, where that Innumerable company lived, that possessed *the holy city*." The woman fled to the wilderness, in Brightman's explanation, because "God care[d] for her," and there he "provide[d] her an hiding place." In the wilderness, the woman, or the Church, "was fed by the helpe of certain men," who maintained her there. Because "this *wilderness* is that *Temple*," according to Brightman, "the continuance of banishment in the wilderness is that abode that was made in the *Temple*."²⁴

This is "the errand into the wilderness" as understood by Brightman and by the Puritan emigrants as well. The Biblical concept of wilderness, as transformed by Brightman, no longer signified the place of trial or the intermediate zone between the corrupted past and the Promised Land, but rather the place in which the church and temple, the house of God, would become one, a solitary place far away from corruption and sin. The flight of the woman into the wilderness occurred in the time of the seventh trumpet, Brightman noted, when the mystery of time and history would be revealed, and in the time of the "sealing of the Elect," when the Lord would elect the saints. Why has the woman fled in these very times, asked Brightman, in which her son and his father have come to conquer the world? "Certainly it could not be the feare of the enemy but the intollerable irkesomenes" because of the lack of "true piety" and the "yoke of tyranny." For once in the wilderness, "she had the leasure to seek out the Reliques of Saints, to consecrate Temples to the Martyrs, and to make supplication of every shrine." In the wilderness, argued Brightman, "there were no outward troubles that did molest men," those troubles that cause men "to corrupt Religion" and "the simple purity which Christ ordained." Likewise for the Puritans of the "General Observations," when the church was "eclipsed in part, darkened or persecuted, it is juste to seek refuge for safty, especially where safest hope may be found." For them, then, emigration was urgent in 1629 because "nowe the doore is opened, and were a greated forgetfull unthankfullnes to the lorde to refuse employment in so hie an ordinance."²⁵

An essential feature of Brightman's interpretation was to abolish the Augustinian dualism between heaven and earth. In so doing, he projected Augustine's heavenly city into the wilderness. Thus Brightman transformed the wilderness into a "heavenly place" on earth, remote from human corruptions and sins. Consequently, when the woman, or the church, fled to the wilderness, she did so because she "could not endure" the corruption of religion in a nation "where no publike assemblies [were] to be found, wherein the Ordinance of God did not flourish in their integrity." This woman also represented for Brightman the congregation of the faithful, or the company of saints; she "doth not beare

24 Brightman, *Revelation*, pp. 503, 512, 514–515.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 512–516; "General Observations," pp. 128–129.

the person of the faithfull one by one, but of the whole assemblies of the faithfull."²⁶

By this point in his exegesis, Brightman has clearly drawn out the seventeenth-century applications of Revelation. He has presented the dragon's persecution of the woman in a way most suggestive for early seventeenth-century Puritan readers. Though his immediate Biblical context is the saints' persecution by the "bishops" of historical Rome, seventeenth-century readers could not miss the contemporary relevance of the flight of the woman. For according to Brightman's interpretation, the woman is the "whole Church generally," and at the same time "the particular congregation," and the flight into the wilderness signifies, in one respect, the migration of the saints from a corrupted nation.

The Womans flight then is either *the dissolution* or the depraving of *the particular assemblies*, so as God should not be porely worshipped in of them according to his will alone, the which thing when once it commeth to passe, *the Church fleet away* ...

But if the woman is the "Holy assemblies of the faithfull," Brightman continued, then "her *seeds* are *the faithful in particular*," those who "hold the true Religion," and those "who can not come together to worship God in publike assemblies, because [of] the iniquity of the times." For these saints only the prospect of "nourish[ing] piety in private" remained.²⁷

Against the saints in these societies Satan waged a war, "seeing there should be no open assemblies, which should profess the pure and sincere truth according to "godliness." Yet, the Church, now the Militant Church, must fight back against Satan and Antichrist.

Now that is *warre*, when force is beaten backe with force, and this *warre* the woman seed should undertake to the end she might defend her selfe against manifest tyranny.²⁸

The double meaning of the term wilderness in Revelation, as interpreted by Brightman, constituted the essence of the "errand into the wilderness" as understood by those of the Puritan migration. The wilderness was, first, the place to escape from the corrupted religion of England and, second, the only place in which the true church could flourish in the time of the apocalyptic events foreshadowing Christ's second coming. In millennial terms, the true church was cast, by force of circumstances, as the militant church, an active agent in the final battle between Christ and Antichrist. Yet, by virtue of the perilous situation of England at that particular time, these saints of the militant church found themselves in the position of having to flee the corrupt world

26 Brightman, *Revelation*, pp. 517, 526.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 517, 526.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 526, 533.

destined for destruction by God, to flee Babylon for the wilderness. In this vein, the Puritan of the "Observations" argued that "God hath provided this place" — meaning New England — "to be a refuge for many who he means to save out of the generall calamity." In this formulation, the wilderness served as a much needed place of escape, for during that apocalyptic time before Christ's second advent when Antichrist momentarily held the upper hand, the true saints — or Puritans — like the woman or church in Revelation, "hath no place left to flie into but the wilderness." Yet even in flight, the Puritan migration still represented the militant church. For the end of the flight into the wilderness was "to rayse a bullwarke against the kingdom of Antichrist." Thus, in its second meaning, the wilderness was merely another place in which to carry on the apocalyptic struggle against Antichrist. In this meaning, "these poore New England people" indeed represented "the forerunners of Christ[']s Army," whom the Lord has sent "to Preach in this Wildernesse, and to proclaime to all Nations, the neere approach of the most wonderfull workers that ever the Soones of men saw": Christ's second coming and his eternal reign on earth.²⁹

The Puritan migration and its character as an "errand into the wilderness," to conclude, only acquires full meaning when viewed in the context of these millennial terms — when considered, that is, as evidence of the heightened centrifugal millenarian impulses so prevalent in early seventeenth-century England. Similarly, an appreciation of the millennial impulse in the Puritan migration is crucial for an accurate perception of how Massachusetts Puritans construed England — and New England — within the millennial scenario, within providential history. Only in this context does the full meaning of the Bay Puritans' separation become evident. For in describing their emigration in terms of "the Church" which "hath no place to flie into but the wilderness," and in calling Massachusetts the place "God hath provided ... to be a refuge for many whom he meanes to save out of the generall calamity," these Puritans revealed their view not only of the place they were going to, but also, and more importantly, of the place they were planning to leave. The flight of the true church into the wilderness can signify only that the Church of England was anything but a true church, and God's will to provide a shelter and refuge in the wilderness can only mean that England was no longer his Elect Nation. It is not surprising, then, that the Puritan emigrants, following Brightman, identified England with "Laodicea," a sinful church in Revelation which God promised to pour his wrath upon and destroy. Their "errand" was thus the absolute duty of the saints, i.e. the true church, to separate from such a false church, to flee into the wilderness, and there to erect Philadelphia, the only true church in

29 "General Observations," p. 139; Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp., 60–61.

Revelation, on which the Lord promised to write "the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem" (Rev. 3:12).³⁰

In the context of the millennium, the Puritans' providential history, *separation* from Laodicea — that sinful, false church soon to be destroyed by God — was a necessary condition for establishing the true church in the wilderness. Consequently, when Miller rejects the existence of the millennial dimension in the origins of the Puritan migration, he ignores not only the very significant context without which the separation of the Bay Puritans cannot be satisfactorily determined, but also that ideological context which is necessary for an interpretation of the Puritans' "errand into the wilderness."

30 "General Observations," pp. 139, 114. For the description of Massachusetts Bay as the New Jerusalem, see for example, Thomas Welde, "A Letter of Master Thomas Wells from New England to Old England... 1633," *Massachusetts Colonial Society, Transactions* 13 (1910–11), 130–131.