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AVIHU ZAKAI

## Theocracy in New England: The Nature and Meaning of the Holy Experiment in the Wilderness

Throughout the 1630s thousands of Puritans crossed the Atlantic to reach New England where they intended to dedicate their lives to God and His word. They came with the belief that the millennium, or the time in which Christ would reign on Earth with His saints, as described in the Book of Revelation, was at hand. 'If the servants of Christ be not mistaken' wrote Edward Johnson of his fellow Puritan emigrants' millennial expectations, 'the downfall of Antichrist is at hand, and then the Kingdome[s] of the Earth shall become the Kingdome of our Lord Christ.' The realization of their millennial expectations and the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, the Puritans believed, depended on the saints assuming an active and decisive role in the apocalyptic events preceding the millennium, as vividly portrayed in Revelation. Thus the saints were to gather themselves into fellowships, or congregations, consisting only of 'visible saints'. 'The great design of Jesus Christ in this age', wrote John Higginson from Guilford, Connecticut, to Thomas Thatcher of Weymouth, Massachusetts, 'is to set up his Kingdom in Particular churches.' Therefore, continues Higginson, 'the great duty of such as are in church fellowship is to conform themselves to those primitive patterns'.<sup>1</sup>

1. Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sion Saviour in New England, 1628-1651*, J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), New York 1910, p. 146. (Hereafter cited as Johnson, *Wonder-Working*). John Higginson, 'Part of John Higginson's Letter, of Guilford, dated 25 of the 8th month, 1654, to his Brother the Rev'd Thomas Thatcher of Weymouth' in Connecticut Historical Society, *Collections*, Vol. III (1895), p. 319.

Millennial expectations and apocalyptic visions played a crucial role in the rise of the Puritan movement in England during the 16th and 17th centuries. See: Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660*, Leiden, 1975; Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology*, Cambridge 1970; Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1646*, Oxford 1979; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660*, London 1975; Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War*, Toronto 1978; William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1600*, London 1969; and the important study by J. G. A. Pocock, 'Modes of Action and Their Past in Tudor and Stuart England', in *National Consciousness, History and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Orest Ranum (ed.), Baltimore 1975.

For the association between millennial and utopian thought, see: Ernest L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1949, and J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700*, Cambridge 1981.

There are many studies in millennial thought in America in general and New England in particular. See: Joy B. Gilsdorf, 'The Puritan Apocalypse: New England Eschatology

Accordingly, the Puritans set out to establish congregational churches as specified in the prophecies of Revelation immediately upon their arrival in New England.

One must not assume, however, that the Great Puritan Migration to New England was directed solely toward the establishment of Congregationalism. And indeed, perceiving themselves and their migration as crucial in the great providential drama, the Puritans assigned themselves a larger role than constituting the true Church in the Wilderness. They were 'to raise a bullwarke against the kingdome of Antichrist', that would help to ensure that Christ and not Antichrist would reign in the world. New England was to be the site for the true Christian commonwealth in which Christ would rule over his saints. 'We chose not the place for the land', declared Johnson on the cause and origin of the Puritan migration to America, 'but for the government, that our Lord Christ might raigne over us, both in Churches and Common-wealth'. In the eyes of the Puritans, then, Church and state were but two complementary instruments through which they hoped to defeat Antichristian institutions and governments and realize their pursuit of the millennium. Thus, argued Johnson, 'Godly civil government shall have a great share in the worke' of the upcoming of the millennium, and in Massachusetts he happily noted,

our Magistrates being conscious of ruling for Christ, dare not admit of any bastardy brood to nurst upon their tender knees, neither any Christian of sound judgment vote for any, but such as earnestly contend for the Faith.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the type of political system the Puritans succeeded in creating in the American wilderness would largely determine both their degree of success in effecting the religious and social reformation they had been unable to achieve in England, as well as the fulfilment of their providential mission to defeat Antichristian institutions and usher in the Kingdom of God. Precisely what was the nature of the Puritan commonwealth in New England, however, remains one of the most persistent questions in the historiography of American Puritanism. In the many works dealing with the Puritan colonies in America, whether or not the Puritans actually intended to and succeeded in creating a theocracy in New England, remains one of the essential questions not yet conclusively resolved.<sup>3</sup>

in the Seventeenth Century', PhD diss., Yale Univ., 1964; James W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth Century New England*, New Haven 1977; Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, Chicago 1979; Cecelia Tichi, *New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman*, New Haven 1979; John Seelye, *Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life and Literature*, New York 1977; and Helmut R. Neibuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Hampden 1955. See also the bibliographical essay by Leonard I. Sweet, 'Millennialism in America: Recent Studies', *Theological Studies*, Vol. XL, September 1979. I have attempted to show the important role of millennial expectations in the shaping of social and political life in early Massachusetts in my 'Exile and Kingdom: Reformation, Separation, and the Millennial Quest in the Formation of Massachusetts and Its Relationship with England, 1628-1660', PhD diss., the Johns Hopkins University, 1981.

2. 'General Observations for the Plantation of New England' (1629), in *Winthrop Papers*, Allyn B. Forber (ed.), Boston 1929-47, Vol. II, p. 114; Johnson, *Wonder-Working*, p. 146.

3. Among the many works dealing with the political nature and foundation of the Puritan commonwealths in New England and the special relationship between church and state there,

In an attempt to clarify this troublesome issue concerning the basic character of the Puritan commonwealth in America, the premises of the New England Puritans, or more particularly, those of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Haven, will first be examined. Second, it will be shown how, out of these premises concerning state, Church and the special dimension of time they believed themselves to live in, the Puritans shaped their Christian commonwealth. Finally, the holy experiment in the wilderness will be explored in the context of the transatlantic Puritan movement, in order to verify whether theocracy was a phenomenon peculiar to American Puritanism, or rather an essential feature of English Puritanism, especially during the so-called Puritan Revolution—when Puritans had the opportunity to establish a Christian commonwealth in England. Above all, this study underscores the requirement of the historian to closely examine the ideological context in order to understand men's actions.

In England during the 1620s and 1630s, the Puritans found themselves thwarted from achieving their goal of separating themselves from ungodly people admitted to membership in parish churches. The wilderness offered them a unique opportunity to reconstruct the Church as a spiritual society based on the covenant, and thus realize their longstanding aim. As Edmund Morgan has shown, 'the English emigrants to New England were the first Puritans to restrict membership in the church to visible saints, to persons, that is, who felt the stirrings of grace in their souls, and who could demonstrate this fact to the satisfaction of other saints'. At the same time, the wilderness also provided the possibility of forming a true Christian commonwealth in which the proper relationship between Church and state might be achieved. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, long before the Puritan migration began, efforts had been made as part of the pursuit of reformation to form civil and social covenants among Puritans, in order to strengthen, through mutual edification, individuals' resolve to keep their covenant with God. 'These covenants', wrote Patrick Collinson in this regard, 'were not church covenants but belonged to the Puritan experience of covenant grace, an area quite remote at this time

see: Paul E. Lauer, *Church and State in New England*, Baltimore 1892; Aaron B. Seidman, 'Church and Society in the Early Years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony', *New England Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, 1945; Perry Miller, 'Puritan State and Puritan Society', in *Errand Into the Wilderness*, Cambridge 1976, and 'The Theory of State and Society', in *The Puritans*, Perry Miller and Thomas M. Johnson (eds.), New York 1963; Edmund S. Morgan (ed.), *Puritan Political Ideas*, Indianapolis 1965; T. H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630-1730*, New Haven 1970; T. J. Wertebaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: Authority in Early Massachusetts*, New York 1960; Paul R. Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River*, Hanover 1976; Mary Jeanne Anderson Jones, *Congregational Commonwealth, Connecticut, 1636-1662*, Middletown 1968; Isabel M. Calder, *The New Haven Colony*, New Haven 1934. George L. Mosse put American Puritan political ideas in the context of English Puritanism in a series of studies: *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop*, Oxford 1957; 'Puritan Political Thought and the "Case of Conscience"', *Church History*, Vol. XXIII, June 1954; and 'Puritanism and Reason of State in Old and New England', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. IX, June 1966. For the Protestants' general view of Church and state, see important article by Winthrop S. Hudson, 'Protestant Concept of Church and State', *Church History*, Vol. XXXV, June 1966.

from any overt ecclesiological reference.' Accordingly, as Lockridge shows in his study on Dedham, when the godly reached New England they immediately covenanted among themselves before settling a town or establishing a church.<sup>4</sup>

A social or civil covenant, then, was different from a church covenant; the first related to civil and social affairs, while the second to a spiritual fellowship. Both, however, were religious covenants intended to further the premises of reformation in Church and state alike. Yet while the one regulated the saints in the commonwealth, the other governed them in the church. This distinction is a crucial one, because the question of the relationship between the social or civil covenant and the church covenant constitutes the very crux of the issue of the right foundations of a Christian commonwealth. When the Puritans sought to follow God's word in both Church and state, their intention was to construct both realms on the basis of covenants. Thus, out of the Puritan premises of reformation, in state, as in the Church, the covenant became a device to keep the ungodly from fellowship with the saints. 'Here the churches and commonwealth are complanted together in holy covenant and fellowship with God', wrote John Davenport of New Haven, and therefore 'the people that choose civil rules are God's people in covenant with him, that is members of churches.'<sup>5</sup> This radical linkage between the civil covenant and the church covenant, served to exclude those who were not saints, not only from the church but also from political power in the Puritan commonwealth.

Two of the most prominent New England ministers, John Cotton and John Davenport, asserted that the best form of government for a Christian commonwealth was a theocracy, a form that assumed a special relationship between Church and state, clergy and magistracy, and above all, the social and church covenant. 'Theocracy', wrote John Cotton to Lord Say and Sele, an old friend of the Puritan settlement in New England, is 'the best forme of government in the common-wealth, as well as in the church'. To the same effect, John Davenport had argued that

*theocratic*, or to make the Lord God our Governour, is the best form of Government in a Christian Common-wealth, and which men that are free to chuse (as in new Plantations they are) ought to establish.<sup>6</sup>

4. Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, Ithaca 1975, p. 113; Patrick Collinson, 'Toward a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition', in *The Dissenting Tradition*, C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody (eds.), Athens, Ohio 1975; Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years*, New York 1970. For the theological developments of the covenant theory see Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea*, Philadelphia 1904; Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, Philadelphia 1971; J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, Athens, Ohio 1980; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*; Jens G. Möller, 'The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology', New York 1939; Book IV, 'Sociology', and 'Appendix B, the Federal School of Theology', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. XIV, April 1963; Everett H. Emerson, 'Calvin and Covenant Theology', *Church History*, Vol. XXV, June 1956; Brooks E. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720*, New Haven 1974; and William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts*, Middletown 1978.

5. John Davenport, in *Collection of Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, Thomas Hutchinson (comp.), Boston 1865, Vol. I, p. 184. (Hereafter cited as *Collection*, comp. Hutchinson.)

6. John Cotton, 'Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the Year

Few concepts have changed more radically over time than the concept of theocracy. According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 'the term was coined by Josephus . . . to denote a certain kind of national polity. Any tribe or state that claims to be governed by God or Gods may be called a "theocracy".' Here the implication is that ministers assume no political power at all. According to its more modern definition in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, however, theocracy is 'a system of government by a sacerdotal order, claiming a divine commission', a state in which priests do exercise political power, or, more precisely, it is a state ruled by ministers. When the Puritans in America stated as their aims the establishment of a theocracy, they were using the former and older meaning of the term.

The truth of this assertion can be seen in John Davenport's *Discourse about Civil Government in a New Plantation Whose Design is Religion* (1639). In the past, this work was ascribed to John Cotton, and as Larzer Ziff has argued, it was certainly 'representative of Cotton's opinion on that subject'. Recently, however, Bruce E. Steiner demonstrated authoritatively that it was indeed Davenport who wrote this tract. The importance of Davenport's *Discourse* lies in its unusually full exposition of the precise meaning of theocracy during the early years of the Puritan settlement in New England, and in it serving as firsthand evidence concerning the Puritans' attempts to shape a Christian commonwealth in America.<sup>7</sup>

In the summer of 1638, after leaving the Massachusetts Bay colony, Davenport and his company reached their destination of New Haven, where they set about to establish a new settlement. Upon their arrival, according to the *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven*, 'all the planters assembled together in a ge[n]erall meeting to consult about the settling of civill Government according to God', and also to nominate the people who would lay the foundation of the church there. Concerning the people who would lay the foundation of the church there. Concerning civil government, their aim was to establish 'such civill order as might be most p[leas]ing unto God'. Before taking this step, all the 'freeplanters' assembled to make a solemn covenant, 'called a plantation covenant to distinguish it from [a] church covenant'. In New Haven, as in Massachusetts, a civil or social covenant thus preceded a church covenant. During that meeting, 'Mr. Davenport propounded a divers quaeres' concerning the nature and the right foundation of a Christian commonwealth and exhorted the gathering to 'consider seriously in the presence and fear of God the weight of the business they met about'. What

1636', in Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay*, Lawrence S. Mayo (ed.), Cambridge 1936, Vol. I, p. 415. (Hereafter cited as Hutchinson, *History*.) John Norton, *Abel Being Dead Yet Speaketh, or, the Life & Death of the Most Deservedly Famous Man of God, John Cotton, Late Teacher of the Church of Christ, at Boston, in New England*, London 1658, pp. 35-41; John Davenport, *A Discourse About Civil Government in a New Plantation Whose Design is Religion*, Cambridge, Mass. 1663, p. 14. On Davenport's life, see also Isabel M. Calder, (ed.), *Letters of John Davenport: Puritan Divine*, New Haven 1937.

7. Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, Princeton 1962, p. 97 n. 35; Bruce E. Steiner, 'Dissension at Quinnipiac: the Authorship and Setting of a Discourse about Civil Government in a New Plantation Whose Design is Religion', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, March 1981, pp. 14-32.

Davenport argued in these queries was that 'the civil power' in the new settlement should be 'confined to church members'. Another minister, Rev. Peter Prudden, objected to Davenport's motion. In order to answer Prudden, Davenport composed his *Discourse*, aiming to show the necessity of confining the civil power to church members.<sup>8</sup>

Davenport's aim, in his words, was

to prove the Expediency and Necessity . . . of entrusting free Burgesses which are the members of Churches gathered amongst them according to Christ, with the power of Chusing from among themselves Magistrates, and men to whom the managing of all Public Civil Affairs of Importance is to be committed. And to vindicate the Same from an imputation of underpower upon the Churches of Christ.

As this passage suggests, Davenport argued that limiting the choice of magistrates to church members would not lead to theocracy in the sense of a state ruled by the Church. Rather, he contended, 'the Church so considered' was 'a spiritual Political Body' and would not interfere in any civil affairs. Yet not every church member, he argued, had the right to choose magistrates, but only those who were 'free burgesses' or freemen.<sup>9</sup>

Davenport premised his work upon a basic distinction between civil and ecclesiastical affairs. 'Ecclesiastical Administration', he contended, was 'a Divine Order appointed to believers for holy communion of holy things', while 'Civil Administration' was 'an Human Order appointed by God to men for Civil Fellowship of Human things'. Any attempt to unite both orders—Church and state—could place 'the Spiritual Power, which is proper to the Church, into the hand of the Civil Magistrate'. Or the equally dire possibility existed, as had materialized with the Romish tyranny, that the Church might usurp the civil authority of the state. Davenport was concerned to prevent both these dangers. But he was also fearful of yet another, more important threat, that of separating Church and state so completely as to set 'these two different Orders, Ecclesiastical and Civil . . . in opposition as contraries, that one should destroy the other'. What he wanted was for Church and state to be in a 'co-ordinate state, in the same place reaching forth help mutually each to other for the welfare of both, according to God'.<sup>10</sup> In shaping their Christian commonwealth, Puritans thus aimed neither at unification nor at complete separation of Church and State. Rather, they thought of Church and state as two different means to the same end.

In New Haven in 1638, as in Massachusetts in 1630, the wilderness provided an opportunity for Puritans to create a commonwealth according to their own premises of religious reformation. Two categories of people existed in the colony, 'free burgesses' or freemen, and 'inhabitants'. To exclude the latter from political power was natural because they were 'not Citizens' and were 'never likely to be numbered among . . . Rulers'.

8. Charles J. Hoadly (ed.), *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, from 1638 to 1649*, Hartford, Conn. 1857, pp. 11-12. (Hereafter cited as *New Haven Records*.) Steiner, p. 26.

9. Davenport, *Discourse*, pp. 3-5.

10. Davenport, pp. 6-8.

Confining civil power to church members did not, therefore, deprive these particular people of any civil right they would otherwise have had. 'When we urge, the magistrates be Chosen out of free Burgesses, and by them, and that those free Burgesses be Chosen out of such as are members of these Churches', said Davenport, 'we do not thereby go about to exclude those that are not in Church-Order, from any Civil right or liberty that is due unto them as Inhabitants and planters'.<sup>11</sup> The only group which lost any civil rights, Davenport made clear, were those freemen who were not church members and could not, therefore, in a godly commonwealth be permitted either to choose magistrates or to exercise political power.

Davenport thus advocated disenfranchisement of all freemen who were not church members, for the reason that only godly magistrates could be entrusted with preserving civil and church covenants. It was his belief, and that of other Puritans also, that the covenant was the foundation of state as well as Church, and that by its very nature it belonged only to the 'saints', who 'by virtue of their Covenant' were 'bound' to serve 'God and his ends'. To invest those who were not saints with civil power would therefore necessarily mean breaking the covenant with God. In this manner, Davenport transformed the religious obligations of the covenant into political obligations in the Christian commonwealth. Because the ungodly were not 'consecrated to God and his ends', they could not be given civil power.<sup>12</sup>

It was precisely for this reason that Davenport and other Puritans argued that 'Theocratic, or to make the Lord God our Governour' was 'the best form of Government in a Christian Commonwealth'. Only in this unique political system, according to the Puritans, could there be absolute assurance that the civil covenant in society and the church covenant in the church would be adhered to.

Davenport spelt out precisely what he meant by theocracy. A theocracy, he wrote, was that

Form of Government where 1. the people that have the power of chusing their Governours are in Covenant with God: 2. Wherein the men chosen by them are godly men, and fitted with a spirit of Government: 3. In which the Laws they rule by are the Laws of God: 4. Wherein Laws are executed, Inheritances allotted, and civil differences are composed, according to Gods appointment: 5. In which men of God are consulted with in all hard cases, and in matters of Religion.

This, said Davenport, was 'the Form which was received and established among the people of Israel whil'st the Lord God was their Governour . . . and is the very same that which we plead for'.<sup>13</sup>

Davenport gave here the true and comprehensive meaning of Puritan theocracy, which was clearly not to invest ministers with political power, but rather to 'make the Lord God our Governour'; that is, to appoint civil magistrates who would govern according to God's word and will. Although Puritans did not believe ministers should assume civil power, they strongly stressed the obligation of magistrates to seek to make civil society conform

11. Davenport, pp. 9-11, 14.

12. Davenport, pp. 15-16, 19-20.

13. Davenport, pp. 14-15.

to God's purpose. Religious reformation was necessary not only in the church but in society as a whole. Because civil magistrates were charged with such weighty responsibilities, it was essential that they be saints.

A theocratic government, then, was one which gave 'Christ his due preeminence', and godly people were obliged to make sure that 'all things and all Government in the world, should serve . . . Christ ends . . . for the welfare of the Church whereof he is the Head'. To meet this obligation civil authorities had to be 'wise and learned in matter of Religion'—and therefore church members, or '*Saints by calling*'.<sup>14</sup> With the presence of ungodly magistrates in England having been a crucial factor in the emigration of so many Puritans to New England, it was imperative to take whatever steps were necessary to prevent the church from again being persecuted by ungodly magistrates.

Since political society, no less than the church or holy fellowship, was confined to those capable of preserving the covenant, the exclusiveness of church fellowship led directly to the exclusiveness of the political system. Davenport warned that if political authority were delegated to the ungodly, the entire holy experiment in the wilderness would be jeopardized and the saints' capacity to assist Christ in the apocalyptic battle against Antichrist would be undermined. Those who would commit power into the hands of those 'worldly spirits' who 'hate[d] the Saints and their communion' would provide Satan with an instrument for resisting and fighting against Christ and his Kingdom and Government in the Church.<sup>15</sup>

It was Davenport who addressed these arguments concerning the establishment of theocracy to the new colony of New Haven, and there, according to Bruce E. Steiner, 'the practice championed in Davenport's *Discourse* had [also] triumphed'. A 'generall meeting of all the free planters' in New Haven in 1639 agreed that

church members onely shall be free burgesses, and they onely shall chuse among themselves magistrates and officers to ha[ve] the power of transacting all publique civill affayres of this plantation.<sup>16</sup>

These arguments however, were peculiar neither to Davenport nor to New Haven. In Massachusetts, in fact, they had been embodied in the colony's policy from its very beginnings. In 1631, 'to the end that the body of commons may be preserved of honest and god [sic] men', the Massachusetts General Court ordered 'that for the time to come no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic, but such as are members of some of the churches'.<sup>17</sup>

A similar belief was implicit in the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut that were drawn in 1638/39. As Mary J. A. Jones found: 'The purpose of the Fundamental Orders was to provide a legal guide for the government of the holy and regenerate'. In Connecticut, no less than in Massachusetts and New Haven, a social covenant preceded the establishment of the

14. Davenport, pp. 15-16.

15. Davenport, pp. 20-23.

16. Steiner, p. 32; *New Haven Records*, pp. 14, 17.

17. *The Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, Nathaniel B. Shurtleff (ed.), Boston 1953, Vol. 1, p. 87. (Hereafter cited as *Mass. Records*.)

commonwealth. The Fundamental Orders were indeed a civil covenant in which the godly declared that 'the word of God requires' that 'an orderly and decent Government be established according to God' and pledged themselves to

associate and conjoyne our selves to be as one Publike State or Commonwealth . . . to mayntain and preserve the liberty and purity of the gospel of our Lord Jesus wch we now professe, as also the disciplyne of the Churches, wch according to the truth of the said gospel is now practised amongst us.

As Jones remarks, this was

a covenant between the godly property owners of Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield, not between all the residents on the Connecticut River, just as the church covenants were the agreement between the saints only. Civil rights were indeed the privilege of the few.<sup>18</sup>

If, then, the essence of theocratic government was maintaining the political realm as the sole and exclusive domain of the saints, the system of government in all these Puritan colonies, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Haven may justifiably be defined as theocracy.

The Puritans' rigid insistence upon excluding the ungodly from political power was thus a crucial element in shaping the foundation of their Christian commonwealth in the early years of Puritan New England. With religious reformation going hand in hand with social and political reform, the same drive for reformation that led to the admission into the church of only the 'visible saints', led, in the political realm, to the establishment of theocratic government, a political system which entrusted authority only to those in the Puritan colonies who belonged to the 'gathered churches' or the saints. The revolutionary nature of this theocracy in New England government is well illustrated by a few examples.

An important consequence of the Antinomian controversy in Massachusetts was an order, enacted by the General Court in 1637, 'that no town or person shall receive any stranger resorting hither', nor 'shall allow any lot of habitant to any . . . except such person shall have allowance under the hand of some one of the councile, or two other of the magistrates'. In opposing the menace of the Antinomian heresy, civil authorities intended in this manner to restrict entrance into the Bay colony of those 'profane persons' who held antinomian views. This was the very policy over which 'Young Henry Vane' and John Winthrop clashed sharply in 1637. 'A family is a common wealth', Winthrop wrote in defence of the order of 1637, 'and a common wealth is a great family. Now as a family is not bound to entertaine all comers . . . no more is [a] commonwealth.' But to Henry Vane the Court's order revealed an alarming tendency in the Puritan concept of the refuge and shelter in the wilderness, 'because here is a liberty given by this law to expell and reject those which are most eminent christian, if they suit not with the disposition of the magistrates.'

18. Paul R. Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, p. 33; Frank Shuffleton, *Thomas Thooker, 1586-1647*, Princeton 1977, p. 231; Mary Jeanne Anderson Jones, *Congregational Commonwealth*, p. 77; J. Hammond Trumbull and Charles J. Hoadly (eds.), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, Hartford, Conn. 1850-1890, Vol. 1, p. 21; Jones, p. 79.

The outcome of this policy, argued Vane, would be 'that Christ and his members will find worse entertainment amongst us than the Israelites did among the Egyptians and Babilonians'. Christ, argued Vane, 'is the head of the Church, and the prince of the kings of earth', but the colony's law, by giving the magistrates power to expel whomever they wanted, contradicted 'many lawes of Christ'. Vane declared further that

Christ commands us to do good unto all, but especially to them of the household of faith. Many other lawes there are of Christ, which this law dasheth against, and therefore is most wicked and sinnefull.<sup>19</sup>

Winthrop's answer to Vane's charges clearly reveals the character of the Puritan theocracy, and how tightly interwoven the social and church covenants were in the early years of the colony. Winthrop's response was that the magistrates were 'members of the churches here, and by that covenant' could not act in opposition to but were required and 'regulated to direct all their wayes by the rule of the gospell'. And he continued by stating that this law was not a new policy, but was 'an established order' in Massachusetts from the very beginnings of the colony.<sup>20</sup>

Winthrop's aim in his reply to Vane was more than an attempt to justify the Court's order. His primary concern was to vindicate the establishment of theocratic government in Massachusetts by confirming the Puritans' adherence to their millennial expectations and to their belief that they were living in a special dimension of time. Winthrop maintained that the providential process which was to culminate in the reign of Christ and his church or saints on earth had already begun. 'Whereas the way of God hath always beene to gather his churches out of the world; now', argued Winthrop, 'the world, or the civill state, must be raised out of the churches'.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Winthrop declared that the body politic as such was the outcome of the gathering of churches, or more precisely, that the holy society of the churches in Massachusetts constituted the political body of

19. *Mass. Records*, Vol. 1, p. 196; John Winthrop, 'A Defence of an Order of Court Made in the Year 1637', in *Collection*, comp. Hutchinson, Vol. 1, pp. 79, 81; Henry Vane, 'A Brief Answer to a Certain Declaration . . .' (1637), in *Collection*, comp. Hutchinson, Vol. 1, pp. 81, 85, 95, 88, 96.

Many works have recently appeared which deal with the Antinomians in Massachusetts and a partial list can be found in J. F. Maclear, 'Anne Hutchinson and the Mortalist Heresy', *New England Quarterly*, March 1981. See also: Ronald D. Cohen, 'Church and State in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts: Another Look at the Antinomian Controversy', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. XII, Autumn 1970, and the very interesting study of Amy S. Lang, 'Antinomianism and the "Americanization" of Doctrine', *New England Quarterly*, June 1981. Antinomianism played a significant role in the sweep of Puritan history in England. See, for example, Gertrude Huchns, *Antinomianism in English History*, London 1951; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, London 1972; R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, Oxford 1962; and Michael Heyd's important study, 'The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Toward an Integrative Approach', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 53, June 1981.

20. John Winthrop, 'A Reply to an Answer Made to a Declaration . . .' (1637), in *Collection*, comp. Hutchinson, Vol. 1, pp. 111-12, 100-1. Henry Vane's life and role in Puritan Massachusetts and England are best described in J. H. Adamson and H. F. Holland, *Sir Harry Vane: His Life and Times (1613-1662)*, Boston 1973. For Vane's political ideas see Margaret Judson, *The Political Thought of Sir Henry Vane the Younger*, Philadelphia 1969.

21. Winthrop, pp. 100-1, 111-12.

the colony. With this radical approach, he clearly implied that the boundaries of the church covenant were exactly congruent with those of the civil covenant. This stand did not signify that Church and state were one, but only reaffirmed the principle that church membership, participation in the church covenant, was a prerequisite to participation in the civil covenant and membership in the colony's holy body politic.

It was, undoubtedly, because of the very radicalism of this outlook on the proper relationship between Church and state covenants that many in England were confused by the Puritan theocracy in America. Even staunch Puritans like William Fiennes, Viscount Say and Sele and Robert Ereville, Baron Brook, all long-time friends of the Puritan migration to America and the Puritan settlements there, were puzzled by the holy experiment in the wilderness. Like Henry Vane, who left the Bay colony in the summer of 1637 because he failed to come to terms with some of the more radical premises, not to mention the political and social consequences, of theocracy in Massachusetts, the Puritan lords too found themselves at great odds with their brethren in America when they discovered the true nature of theocracy in New England.

In 1636 Viscount Say and Sele and Baron Brook along with other nobles considered emigration to New England, as did so many other Puritans during the 1630s. Being noblemen, however, they sent 'Certain Proposals . . . as conditions of their moving to New England'.<sup>22</sup> In their answer, the Bay Puritans revealed that they could meet almost all of the legal and constitutional demands of the lords, with the notable exception of the issue of the relationship between Church and state, an exception that finally determined that the lords abandoned their plan to join the Puritan commonwealth in America. The controversy and debates among the Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic concerning the lords' proposals were based on the nature and foundation of the Puritan theocracy in America.

What the Puritan lords had demanded was that they be permitted to continue in New England to exercise the privileges of their noble rank. Thus, their first 'demand' before emigrating to New England was that 'the common wealth should consist of two distinct ranks of men', the one 'gentlemen of the country' and the other 'freeholders'. In their answer, the Bay Puritans declared that they 'willingly acknowledge: the lords' proposal about two distinct ranks'. The second condition was that 'the chief power of the common-wealth shall be placed' in the hands of the 'gentlemen and freeholders', which the colonists acknowledged already characterized the situation in the colony. When, however, the lords demanded that they be admitted as freemen without being church members, Bay Puritans would not assent, for this would destroy the very foundation of their theocracy. Thus they answered the lords that though they would 'receive them with honor and allow them pre-eminence and accommodations according to their condition, yet none are admitted

22. 'Certain Proposals Made by Lord Say, Lord Brooke, and Other Persons of Quality, as Conditions of Their Removing to New England, with the Answers Thereto', in Hutchinson, *History*, Vol. 1, pp. 410-13. Although we have only the Massachusetts Bay Puritans' answers to the lords' proposals, New Haven and Connecticut Puritans no doubt shared with the Bay Puritans their views concerning theocracy.

freemen of this common-wealth, but such as are first admitted members of some church or other in this country', and only out of those were their 'magistrates . . . Chosen'.<sup>23</sup>

A Christian commonwealth, as Winthrop had made clear in 'A Model of Christian Charity', was based upon the law of grace as well as upon the law of nature. 'There is likewise', he preached aboard the *Arbella* in 1630, 'a double lawe by which we are regulated in our conversation one toward another . . . the lawe of nature and the lawe of grace, or the morall lawe or the lawe of the gospel'. The law of nature came to regulate civil society as such, while the law of the gospel, or that of grace, came to regulate Christian society. Thus, when the lords demanded admission to freemanship in the colony according to their noble status, the Bay Puritans replied that 'hereditary authority and power standeth only by the civil law' and not upon the law of grace. Not material property and hereditary privilege, but spiritual saving grace was the prerequisite for admission to freemanship in the Puritan theocracy. The justification for such a custom, explained the Puritans in their response to the lords, was 'a divine ordinance (and moral) that none should be appointed and chosen by the people of God, magistrates over them, but men fearing God . . . chosen out of their brethren . . . saints'. The assumption of authority by such men would result in the 'joy of a commonwealth'; whereas 'calamity' would ensue 'when the wicked bear rule'.<sup>24</sup>

The most striking element in the Puritans' answer to Viscount Say and Sele and Baron Brook is the assertion that the exclusion of the ungodly from political power was 'a divine ordinance'. This approach is well reflected in Winthrop's earlier quoted statement that 'now, the world, or civill state, must be arised out of the churches'.<sup>25</sup> Davenport in his *Discourse* never went so far as to call the premise of theocracy a divine ordinance. It was through reasoning such as Winthrop's that the Christian commonwealth took on the dimensions of the earthly domain in which the saints would exercise their holiness. Although complete identification of the church and civil covenants would occur only in the millennium, when the earthly kingdoms would become the Kingdom of God, Puritan New England would meanwhile seek to link the purity of the church with the holiness of the Christian commonwealth as two means of achieving the New Jerusalem. Only a theocratic political system could give saints exclusive political authority, to the exclusion of the ungodly from all political and ecclesiastical participation in the holy experiment in the wilderness.

Surely, the assertion that neither wealth nor property nor heredity, but faith and godliness were the conditions of citizenship in the Puritan colonies in New England sounded very strange indeed to Lord Say and Sele, Lord Brook, and those other persons of 'quality' who considered emigrating to New England in 1636. The Puritans clarified their position

23. 'Certain Proposals . . .', pp. 410-12.

24. John Winthrop, 'A Model of Christian Charity', *Winthrop Papers*, Vol. II, p. 294; 'Certain Proposals . . .', pp. 412-13.

25. John Winthrop, 'A Reply to an Answer . . .', p. 101; 'Certain Proposals . . .', pp. 412-13.

in their answer to the lords and warned that if magisterial power were given 'to men not according to their godliness, which maketh them fit for church fellowship, but according to their wealth', they would themselves be 'no better than worldly men'. Such an alternative was unthinkable, since 'worldly men' might become 'the major part' of the magistrates, and could possibly 'turn the edge of all authority and laws against the church and the members thereof, the maintenance of whose peace is the chief end which God aimed at in the institution of Magistracy'.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Massachusetts Puritans finally and definitely rejected the noble lords' proposals to join the holy experiment. Yet the controversy between New England Puritans and the Puritan lords was far from over. Apparently surprised by the reaction to his proposals, Lord Say and Sele wrote directly to Rev. John Cotton. Although this letter no longer exists, Cotton's answer makes it clear that Lord Say and Sele had accused American Puritans of having created a 'theocracy' in the sense of a state ruled by the church. Cotton flatly denied that in Massachusetts 'all things [were] under the determination of the church'. The colony's magistrates, Cotton pointed out, were neither 'chosen to office in the church, nor doe governe by direction from the church, but by civill lawes, and those enacted in generall courts, and executed in courts of justice, by the governors and assistants'. Moreover, Cotton insisted, the church had no formal role in the civil realm other than to prepare 'fitt instruments both to rule, and to choose rulers, which is no ambition in the church, nor dishonor to the commonwealth'. Cotton did not, however, deny that the state was subject to religious influence. On the contrary, because 'the word, and scripture of God do conteyne a short . . . platforme, not onely of theocracy, but also of other sacred sciences', including 'ethicks, economicks, politicks, church-government, prophecy, academy', Cotton firmly believed that men should follow god's word in the state as well as the church.<sup>27</sup>

What Cotton argued, in fact, was that God had actually prescribed the proper relationship between church and state:

It is very suitable to Gods all sufficient wisdom . . . not only to prescribe perfect rules for the right ordering of a private mans soule to ever-lasting blessedness with himselfe, but also for the right ordering of a mans family, yea, of the commonwealth too so farre as both of them are subordinate to spiritual ends, and yet avoide both the churches usurpation upon civill jurisdictions, *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and the commonwealth invasion upon ecclesiastical administrations, *in ordine* to civill peace, and conformity to the civill state.

Because all human experience ought to be subordinate to spiritual ends, Cotton contended against Lord Say and Sele, the spiritual and temporal

26. 'Certain Proposals . . .', p. 413. The whole problem of theocratic government and its impact on social and political rights is essentially linked to the controversy that took place among historians concerning the franchise in early Massachusetts. A good summary of this controversy can be found in Katherine Brown, 'The Controversy over the Franchise in Puritan Massachusetts, 1954 to 1974', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, April 1976. On this issue see also the important study by Michael Zuckerman, 'The Social Context of Democracy in Massachusetts', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, October 1968.

27. John Cotton, 'Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal, in the Year 1636', in Hutchinson, *History*, Vol. I, 414-17.

realms could hardly be completely separated. Moreover, a certain degree of overlapping (as opposed to usurping) of authority was inevitable: 'Gods institutions (such as the government of church and of commonwealth be) should 'be close and compact, and coordinate one to another, and yet not confounded'.<sup>28</sup>

God's word, then, according to Cotton, gave full warrant to the constitution of the Puritan commonwealth in Massachusetts, and theocracy was the proper form of the colony's government, for 'it is better that the commonwealth be fashioned to the setting forth of Gods house, which is His church, than to accommodate the church frame to the civill state'.<sup>29</sup> Not only Massachusetts Puritans, but as was seen earlier, those of Connecticut and New Haven as well, had fashioned the state in such a way that it might preserve the church and to ensure that the commonwealth be subordinated to spiritual ends, without attempting to unite Church and state. Theocracy facilitated their purpose by providing an arrangement by which God, the true sovereign in both Church and state, would reign over both.

It is worthwhile examining here the famous passage in Cotton's letter to Lord Say and Sele concerning democracy, monarchy, and aristocracy:

Democracy, I do not conceyve that ever God did ordeyne as a fitt government eyther for church or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy, and aristocracy, they are both of them clearly approved, and directed in scripture, yet so as referreth the soveraigntie to himselfe, and setteth up Theocracy in both, as the best forme of government in the commonwealth, as well in the church.

This passage is especially significant, not for Cotton's consideration of the relative merits of democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, but rather for his treatment of the term 'soveraigntie'. Cotton's prime concern here is clearly the issue of whom to invest with sovereignty, or who should reign and rule over church and commonwealth. He rejects democracy, not only because it had no warrant in scripture, but mainly for its failure to provide God with immediate and direct sovereignty over His saints. Likewise, despite their full warrant in scripture, Cotton rejects aristocracy and monarchy for not providing God with sovereignty over His people. Consequently, Cotton declares 'theocracy', the system in which God is the immediate sovereign of both Church and state, to be the 'best forme of government in the commonwealth, as well as in the church'.<sup>30</sup>

State and Church in the theocracy in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Haven, were thus under the common headship of the Lord. Although separation between Church and state was unthinkable to the Puritans, they constantly reiterated that these were two different instruments in the sweep of providential history. Cotton's letter was largely a refutation of Lord Say and Sele's accusation to the contrary, that Church and state were united in the Puritan theocracy.

At this point it is necessary to examine the momentous social and

28. 'Copy of a Letter . . .', pp. 414-17.

29. 'Copy of a Letter . . .', pp. 414-17.

30. 'Copy of a Letter . . .', pp. 414-17.

political consequences of the ideological premises laid down by the Puritan theocracy in America. Those who advocated a theocratic government which explicitly acknowledged Christ as sole ruler over them, were presenting the revolutionary view that no one, neither bishop nor king, could stand between God and His people. Furthermore, with the political realm considered the exclusive domain of the saints by virtue of their covenanted relationship with God both in Church and state, theocratic government entailed a denial that any rights based on the privilege of property, heredity and wealth could determine eligibility to participate in the political life.

The revolutionary character of theocracy is best seen in the barring of unbelievers from any participation in the system of civil government. Since the covenant, the foundation of both Church and state, belonged strictly to the godly, religious obligations were transformed into political obligations in the Christian commonwealth in New England, and the exclusiveness of the holy fellowship of the church led directly to the exclusiveness of the political system.

As long as England had bishops and kings, the establishment of a theocracy similar to that of New England remained an impossibility. But conditions changed radically in England during the 1640s: the office of bishops was totally abolished and King Charles I was beheaded. When confronted with this new reality, English Puritans also began to consider the idea of erecting a godly civil government in England based on the premises of theocracy. In 1649, for example, shortly after the king's execution, 'Certain Queries' were presented to Thomas Lord Fairfax, Lord General of the Army, and to the General Council of War, 'by many Christian people' from the county of Norfolk and the city of Norwich who wondered if indeed the time had come to establish a theocratic government. These people asked the leaders of the Army to ponder the question of 'the present interest of the Saints and people of God'. If indeed 'the time (or near upon it) of putting down that worldly government, and erecting this new kingdom' of God on earth had arrived, as the authors of 'Certain Queries' believed, the saints would have to assume their important role in the providential drama. Millennial expectations thus led to the demand for social and political action. According to this particular group, the saints' duty was to begin 'to associate' themselves 'together into several church-societies' in accordance with 'the congregational way'. The convening of all these gathered churches in general assemblies, or church-parliaments, choosing and delegating such officers of Christ, and representatives of the churches, as may rule nations and kingdoms', would in turn result in God giving them 'authority and rule over the nations and kingdoms of the world' and 'the kingdoms of the world' becoming 'the churches'. Fearing that their aims would be thwarted by the election of the ungodly to positions of authority, this group questioned the 'right or claim mere natural and worldly men have to rule and government' in a holy Christian commonwealth and advocated a form of government strikingly similar to the theocracy which had already been founded by the Puritans in the wilderness.<sup>31</sup>

31. 'Certain Queries Presented by Many Christian People' (1649), in A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, Chicago 1951, pp. 241-247. The similarity of the political proposals



Even before the king's death, millennial expectations and apocalyptic visions had led Puritans in England to propose barring the ungodly from political life and to argue for the exclusive right of the saints to rule in a Christian commonwealth. Thomas Collier, for example, in his sermon, *A Discovery of the New Creation* (1647), contended that 'as formerly God hath many times set up wicked men to rule and govern', so now 'he will give it into the hands of the Saints'. Using similar arguments during the Whitehall debates in 1649, Colonel Thomas Harrison expressed the belief that the day had come, 'God's own day', in which 'the powers of this world shall be given into the hands of the Lord and his Saints'. Harrison tried to calm his opponents who believed that 'our business is . . . only to get power into our own hands, that we may reign over them', with the claim that putting the reins of government into the hands of the saints was not usurpation, but rather the necessary consequence of God's 'coming forth in glory in the world'.<sup>32</sup>

Only after the king was executed, however, did the Puritans in England seriously undertake putting into action the theocratic ideas. This was especially true of the Fifth Monarchists, who sought to clear the way for the approaching millennium by political measures. Thus the author of *A Cry for the Right Improvement of all our Mercies* (1651) 'called for the restriction of membership of Parliament to those who were "in church fellowship with some one or other congregation"'. In the same year, the author of another tract, *A Model of a New Representative*, argued that 'borough M.P.s should be replaced by "two or more members" of the Congregational churches in their respective towns and that county M.P.s should be elected by the gathered churches of their shire'.<sup>33</sup>

Nor was the conviction that theocratic government should be established in England limited to radicals such as the Fifth Monarchists. Many other Puritans shared their beliefs and their desire for action. 'A hundred and fifty-three members of Morgan Llwyd's Independent church at Wrexham', for example 'urged' that 'the new representative should be elected by the gathered churches'.<sup>34</sup> Those who strove, then, to establish theocratic government in England, like the Puritans in America, assumed the ultimate association between the church covenant and the civil covenant, and therefore claimed the political realm as the exclusive domain of the saints.

of this group to theocracy in America is readily apparent. As Austin Woolrych wrote: the people of this group tried to establish in England "a government based not on the people as a whole but on the "gathered churches", that is to say those congregations which had been voluntarily formed by a company of "visible saints". See, Austin Woolrych, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Saints', in *The English Civil War and After, 1642-1658*, R. H. Parry (ed.), Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970, p. 63.

32. Thomas Collier, 'A Discovery of the New Creation' (1647), in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, pp. 290-396; Thomas Harrison's words appeared in 'The Whitehall Debates' in Woodhouse *Puritanism and Liberty*, p. 178.

33. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, Oxford 1978, pp. 135-6, 143; B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism*, London 1972, pp. 51, 230-1. On the relationship between the Fifth Monarchists and the American Puritans, see J. F. Maclear, 'New England and the Fifth Monarchy: the Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 32, April 1975.

34. Watts, pp. 137, 142.

Puritan theocratic impulses reached their peak in England during Barebone's Parliament in 1653. Never before had England been so close to the ideal of theocratic government as with this parliament with its revolutionary social and religious reforms. Many of its nominees had been elected upon the recommendations of the gathered churches, and the combination within it of Fifth Monarchists, radical Independents and Baptists, clearly revealed how serious the saints were in their intentions to play their role in providential history. As Woolrych writes, many members of Barebone's Parliament 'were not looking for a mere caretaker government to educate the people in the benefits and responsibility of a self-governing republic. They wanted a sanhedrin of the saints, a dictatorship of the godly that would prepare for the millennium by overturning every vestige of the old "carnal" government'. The radical goals of these saints were probably no better understood than by the anonymous author of *A True State of the Case of the Commonwealth* (1654); he warned that in 'this last Assembly' (Barebone's Parliament), 'there was a party of men . . . who assumed to themselves only the name of Saints, from which Title they excluded all others', and by 'pretense to an extraordinary Call from Christ himself' did 'take upon them to rule the Nation by virtue of a supposed Right of Saintship in themselves.' Their 'dangerous attempts', he continued, 'extended not only to the abolition of Law, but to the utter subversion of civil Right and Property'. Finally, this commentator on the radicals of the Barebone Parliament admonished against the dangers which would ensue should their policy succeed: 'it would have utterly confounded the whole course of Natural and Civil Right, which is the only Basis of foundation of Government in this world'.<sup>35</sup>

Gradually but inevitably, in their attempts to constitute all human life on the basis of a covenant relationship with God, the Puritans reached the conclusion that only one's covenant relationship as manifested in one's membership in the church could provide one with political rights. Those who emigrated to New England in the 1620s and 1630s made this premise the basis of their theocracy in the wilderness. When political conditions were ripe in England during the 1640s and 1650s, when English Puritans could seize the opportunity to create a theocratic system of government, they embarked on the very same policy.

The notion of a common ground shared by English and American Puritans concerning theocracy is supported by the case of Richard Baxter. A moderate Puritan, the Presbyterian Baxter clearly did not belong to the lunatic fringe of Puritanism; yet it was he who proposed the establishment of theocracy in England with arguments strikingly similar to those of the Puritans in America. In his book *A Holy Commonwealth, or Political Aphorisms Opening the True Principles of Government* (1659), Baxter demonstrates 'how a Commonwealth may be reduced to this theocratical temper' by instituting the rule, among others, that 'no persons

35. Woolrych, p. 68; 'The True State of the Case of the Commonwealth' (1654), in *The Puritan Revolution: A Documentary History*, Stuart E. Prall (ed.), New York 1968, pp. 264-5. Thus far the best study of Barebone's Parliament is Tai Liu, 'Saints in Power: A Study of the Barebone Parliament', PhD Thesis, University of Indiana, 1969.

... none as Cives (or free subjects, commonly called burgesses or enfranchised persons)' but only 'those who have publicly owned the Baptismal Covenant, personally, deliberately and seriously' should have the right to vote in a holy Christian commonwealth. He continues by emphasizing the need to exclude 'ordinary despisers of God's public worship, or neglecters of it, and of the guidance of God's ministers', from the body of electors. Above all, Baxter reiterates the principle that the foundation of theocratic government demands that the proper relationship between church and social covenants be maintained:

But that which I mean is, that the same qualification [that] maketh a man capable of being a member both of a Christian Church and Commonwealth . . . is, his Covenant with God in Christ, or his Membership of the Universal Church.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, then, Puritans of widely differing persuasions were equally concerned with establishing theocracy, and they all agreed that, to reach their goal, a revolutionary approach to defining the political body was absolutely essential. It was partly in response to this extreme Puritan design to reshape the political system that Thomas Hobbes wrote his refutation in the *Leviathan* (1651).<sup>37</sup>

Hobbes began by attacking what he perceived as pretentiousness in the Puritan claim to hold sole spiritual authority to exercise and impose the will of God:

For if every man, should be obliged, to take for God's law, what particular men, on pretence of private inspiration, or revelation, should obtrude upon him, in such a number of men, that out of pride and ignorance, take their own dreams, and extravagant fancies, and madness, for testimonies of God's spirit; or out of ambition, pretend to such divine testimonies, falsely, and contrary to their own consciences, it were impossible that any divine law should be acknowledged.

Hobbes goes on to deny 'that the present church now militant, is the kingdom of God', and therefore that 'the Church and commonwealth are the same persons'. Such identification of the Kingdom of God with the church, argued Hobbes, is unwarranted because 'by the kingdom of God, is properly meant a commonwealth, instituted by the consent of those which were to be subject thereto, for their civil government'. Contrary to Puritan belief that this was the time in which the kingdoms of the Earth would become the Kingdom of God, Hobbes asserted that 'the kingdom

36. Richard Baxter, *A Holy Commonwealth, or Political Aphorisms Opening the True Principles of Government* 1659, pp. 241, 219, 247, 249, 218. For an excellent study of Baxter's life and his millennial expectations see William M. Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium: Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution*, London 1979.

37. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651), Michael Oakshott (ed.), Oxford. On Hobbes' thought see the brilliant study by J. G. A. Pocock, 'Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes' in his book *Politics, Language and Time*, New York 1973. For the general ideological context of Hobbes' writings, see the series of articles by Quentin Skinner: 'Hobbes' *Leviathan*', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. VII, 1964; 'The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. IX, 1966; 'Conquest and Consent: Thomas Hobbes and the Engagement Controversy', in *The Interregnum*, G. E. Aylmer (ed.), Hamden 1972, and 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. VII, 1965.

of God is a civil kingdom', and as such should be ruled only by 'civil sovereigns' and not by the church or its saints. Comparing advocates of Puritan theocracy to the 'Roman clergy', Hobbes denounces them as 'a confederacy of deceivers' who seek power on the basis of 'dark and erroneous doctrines'.<sup>38</sup>

While Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic strove equally to achieve theocratic government, the Puritan experience on each side differed significantly. In New England, Puritans could, and did in fact, try to fully implement the premises immediately upon their arrival. In England, on the other hand, Puritans were given a similar opportunity only during the 1640s and 1650s, and even then faced such strong opposition that their holy scheme was never implemented. Only in light of the experience in England can one sufficiently appreciate the achievement of the New England Puritans in creating a theocracy in the wilderness.<sup>39</sup>

Considering New England within the framework of the larger Puritan movement, the American Puritans did in fact succeed in their holy experiment to constitute theocracy. In another context, however, this holy experiment was far from successful. As with many millennial and Utopian movements in the past, New England Puritans came to learn that human nature can be a tremendous obstacle in the quest to transform the world into a divine domain. Thus, at the moment when it seemed that while the Puritan movement in England had failed, the holy experiment in the wilderness would survive, sounds arose in New England indicating that there, too, something had gone awry. In his poem, 'A Word to New England' (1654) William Bradford laments:

Oh New England, thou canst not boast;  
Thy former glory thou hast lost.

Holiness, Bradford found, did 'languish more away', and

Love, truth, mercy and grace—  
Wealth and the world have took their place.

Likewise, Michael Wigglesworth wrote in 'God's Controversy with New England' (1662) that he found in Puritan America

In stead of holiness Carnality,  
In stead of heavenly frames an Earthly mind.<sup>40</sup>

Thus did the people who succeeded so well in constituting theocracy in the wilderness and in shaping their church and state according to their ideals eventually find that not human institutions but human nature was the real obstacle to the pursuit of the millennium, the quest for transforming the world into the Kingdom of God. However, as the Puritan experiment in New England shows so vividly, human history can hardly be understood without an appreciation of its search for the ideal society and the fulfilment of Utopian visions.

38. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 254-5, 451, 268, 295, 399, 233, 298, 306, 459, 452, 397.

39. For evidence of this theocratic quest among Dutch Calvinists in Holland during the first half of the seventeenth century, see Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration: A Study of the Dispute in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650*, Cambridge 1938.

40. William Bradford, *The Collected Verse*, Michael G. Runyan (ed.), Minnesota 1974, pp. 162-3; Michael Wigglesworth, 'God's Controversy with New England' (1662), in *Seventeenth-Century American Poetry*, Harrison T. Meserole (ed.), New York 1968, p. 48.