

**AN OINTMENT POURED FORTH:
AN APPRAISAL OF COTTON MATHER'S
PASTORAL THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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An Abstract
Presented to
The Graduate Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Ronald L. Loughry
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ABSTRACT

As an effort to shed light on an ongoing historiographic discussion concerning the role of the Puritan minister in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England, this thesis examines the pastoral activities of one minister, Cotton Mather, as one approach to understanding the functions of the Congregational clergy in that colonial society. The scope of this thesis includes an exploration of differing historiographic positions, along with the criteria used in selecting Cotton Mather as a test case. This introduction is followed by a brief biographical sketch of Cotton Mather. Following the biographic perspective, the thesis examines Mather's pastoral theory and practices, seeking to demonstrate the quality and degree of interaction between the pastor and his parishioners. This examination is followed by a partial survey of Mather's publications in order to understand what motivated his prolific writing and what influence this ministerial literature may have had upon the lives of ordinary people. Finally, the concluding chapter restates the thesis, summarizes the particulars, and offers a conclusion based upon the accomplished research.

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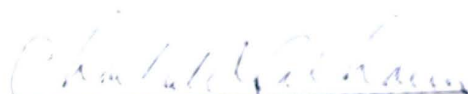
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Ronald L. Loughry entitled "An Ointment Poured Forth: An Appraisal of Cotton Mather's Pastoral Theory and Practice." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.



(Major Professor)

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the
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Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Bridging the Chasm

Mention of Puritan ministers conjures up H. L. Mencken's polemical image of a repressive society; stereotypes of witchcraft trials and dry, condemning sermons; The Scarlet Letter; and stern, inflexible ministers manipulating a sexually frigid society in order to maintain a theocracy. The term "puritanical" has taken on a meaning of its own in modern America. Yet, while many Puritan ethical standards are admired and upheld by middle-class America, popular opinion still holds that there was something evilly oppressive about a group of ministers who would not allow the celebration of Christmas. In part because of the continuing historiographic conflict surrounding New England's Congregational clergy, the role of these ministers in their society and their contribution to American culture remain confused and clouded.

The effort to understand the thought and practices which guided Puritan New England has stimulated extensive scholarship. As Edmund S. Morgan pointed out in 1966, "It could in fact be argued that we already know more about the Puritans than sane men should want to know"¹ That the amount of scholarship which early New England has spawned is so immense is perhaps best understood by realizing that the Puritans themselves attached great significance to their actions and were subsequently their own first historians. In his Magnalia Christi Americana, Cotton Mather offered an ecclesiastical history of New

¹Edmund S. Morgan, "The Historians of Early New England," in The Reinterpretation of Early American History, ed. Ray Allen Billington (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1966), p.41.

England capturing the spirit of the Puritan errand. In his interpretation of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Mather noted that, beset by bad weather and leaky vessels, the Puritans braved the "Atlantick" Ocean in order to "come to the Ends of the Earth." Comparing their voyages to "Israel's Peregrination thro' the Wilderness" Mather wrote that they faced "terrible storms" in order to establish a new Zion -- a "little Israel . . . going into a Wilderness" -- a community built upon the idea of virtue and order, governed by covenant. The settlers of New England were convinced of the historic significance of what they were doing. The diaries, correspondence, biographies, and sermons of these seventeenth and eighteenth century writers, many of whom were ministers, remain the most valuable resources to current historians.²

Throughout the nineteenth century, Puritans and their ministers received mixed reviews. While historians George Bancroft and John Palfrey portrayed the founding Puritans as "champions of political and religious freedom" and justified their actions accordingly, Charles Francis Adams, a gentleman scholar of Boston, "denounced the intolerance" of the Puritan leaders. Most of the New England history written in the nineteenth century was written from the perspective of political history, interpreting religious institutions and ministerial activities in terms of political manipulation.³

²Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (London, 1702), facsimile reprint (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p.7; A partial list of people who left excellent diaries, correspondence, and sermons would include Thomas Shepard, Ebenezer Parkman, Samuel Sewall, and of course Cotton Mather.

³Morgan, "Historians," p.44; George Bancroft, A History of the United States, 10 vols. (Boston: Appleton, 1834-1874); John G. Palfrey, History of New England During the Stuart Dynasty, 5 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1858-1890); Charles Francis Adams, Massachusetts: Its Historians and Its History (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893).

In the early twentieth century historical perspective shifted once again. An emphasis on economics and capitalism replaced politics as the basic explanatory device in historiographic interpretation. Historians led by Charles Beard began looking for the hidden economic motives behind the actions of the Founding Fathers. It was in that spirit that James Truslow Adams portrayed the Congregational clergy as monsters "inflicting torture and taking life to maintain their positions." With a similar economic determinism, Progressive historian Vernon Parrington "condemned the Puritan theocracy as bigoted and acquisitive."⁴ The error these historians made in interpreting the theology and religious life of Puritan New England solely in terms of politics and economics was in ignoring the motivating power of religious ideology. Caught in their own contextual flux, they held a perception of Puritan society that was hopelessly flawed. Serious incursions against the prevailing economic theories soon began to appear.

Kenneth Murdock's, Increase Mather: Foremost American Puritan, published in 1925, was the first of several works produced by a group of Harvard professors who came to be known as the Harvard Revisionists. Professor Murdock's work was in direct "challenge to the reigning disdain for the Puritans." Instead of searching for hidden economic motives Murdock venerated Mather's ideas and esteemed Puritanism as a powerful ideological

⁴Charles A. Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution (New York: MacMillan, 1913); James Truslow Adams, The Founding of New England (Boston: Little, Brown, 1921), cited by George Selement, Keepers of the Vineyard: The Puritan Ministry and Collective Culture in Colonial New England (New York: University Press of America, 1984), p. 3; Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought 3 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927-1930), cited by Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Modern America (New York: David McKay, 1962), p.470.

force. Murdock's colleague Samuel Eliot Morison, writing in a style appealing to the general public, published biographic sketches of the Bay Colony's founders and a history of Harvard both of which portrayed the Puritans as sympathetic characters, a people motivated by principles for which they were willing to sacrifice.⁵

Moving along similar paths, a new arrival at Harvard carried on an examination of Puritan ideology that would fundamentally change historiographic approaches to seventeenth and eighteenth century Colonial New England. Perry Miller's masterful analysis of Puritan thought beginning with Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, published in 1933, and continuing through two volumes of The New England Mind to Errand Into the Wilderness, published in 1956, led historians to reconsider the past by examining the ideological motivations which guided people's actions. Miller's scholarship, along with that of Murdock, Morison, and also Clifford Shipton successfully overcame, among colonial historians, the earlier Progressive view, that Puritanism was an "indelible stain on the pages of American history." Edmund S. Morgan's 1944 examination of Puritan life and sexual attitudes completed the decimation of the historiographic malediction which had plagued Puritan studies for over a century. Current historiographic discussion owes a great debt to the work of

⁵Kenneth Murdock, Increase Mather: Foremost American Puritan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925); Morgan, "Historians," p.49; Samuel Eliot Morison, Builders of the Bay Colony (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930) and Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946).

Perry Miller, Edmund S. Morgan, and the other revisionists.⁶

However, since the 1960's, social historians have dissented from the Millerite intellectual history model. George Selement recently noted how a "Young Darrett Rutman . . . combatively attacked the work of Miller and . . . some of Edmund S. Morgan's interpretations."⁷ Some social historians have challenged Miller's methodology as being too dependent on literary and sermonic sources. This dissension, coupled with the broader planes of analysis made available by computer technology, has created a chasm of both methodology and perspective among current colonial historians. It seems that the problem lies not with what Miller did, but with what he did not do. Perry Miller painted an exquisite picture of Puritan thought; he did not take the further step of translating that thought explicitly into social interaction.

During the last two decades, a number of historians, independent of Miller's intellectual methodology, have drawn on a variety of sources for their research. Using town and court records, graphs, and statistics, historians such as Bernard Bailyn, Sumner Powell, Darrett Rutman, John Demos, Phillip Greven, and Kenneth Lockridge have produced a collection of books and articles on local history, family and community life, business, and non-institutional

⁶Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933) and The New England Mind, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939-1953) and Errand Into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956); Clifford Shipton, Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College vols. IV-XIII (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1933-1965); Selement, Keepers, p.3; Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family (New York: Harper & Row, 1944).

⁷George Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638-1645," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser. 41 (January 1984): p.33.

religious practices.⁸

Still other historians, recognizing the opportunities provided by the intellectual history approach are, with proper accolades paid, using the Revisionists' work as stepping stones to advance broader social and cultural interpretations. Indeed historians such as Darrett Rutman and David Hall are realizing "that the approaches of social and intellectual historians are attempts to bridge the same chasm."⁹ Appreciating the role ideological motivations play in a society's dynamics, both groups of historians, using various methods, are attempting to understand the aspirations and social roles of the New England clergy in colonial America.

Some of the most perplexing questions facing current scholars concern the motivations which guided the actions of seventeenth and eighteenth century New England Puritan ministers. Were they, as James Schmotter asserts, acting only in immediate self-interest? Or, were they acting from a perspective of providential history in which they were responsible for both the physical and spiritual welfare of their "flocks"? Did a preoccupation with professionalism alienate the clergy from their parishioners? Was their social and political

⁸Bernard Bailyn, The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1955) and Massachusetts Shipping, 1697-1714: A Statistical Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); Sumner Powell, Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963); Darrett Rutman, Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town 1630-1649 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); John Demos, "Notes on Life in Plymouth Colony," in Colonial America: Essays in Political and Social Development, eds. Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), pp. 122-141; Phillip Greven, "Historical Demography and Colonial America," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser. 24 (1967): pp. 438-454 and Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970); Kenneth Lockridge, A New England Town, The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736 (New York: Norton, 1970).

⁹Selement, "Meeting of Minds," p.33.

prominence waning by the late seventeenth century, and if so, what were the causes of the disintegration of ministerial prestige? Was there a social barrier between an intellectual elite and the common sort which separated clergy from laity, or as David Hall suggests, did a "collective mentality" exist which allowed for a fluid interchange of thought between the different social classes? Along these lines Jon Butler asserts that historians "are challenged . . . to write a history . . . focused on the spiritual life of an entire population." Rather than viewing Puritan society as controlled by an intellectual and social elite oblivious to the common sort, or as a society defined solely by "the man in the village lane" indifferent to the influence of "God's Messengers," Butler's suggestion to look for the links between clergy and laity opens the way for renewed scholarship. George Selement's The Confessions of Thomas Shepard and Keepers of the Vineyard provide examples of the promise in this type of research.¹⁰

Addressing the pastoral work of Puritan divines, Selement remarked that, "This aspect of their ministry was as vital as preaching." The Puritan "Good Shepherds" had, Selement believes, a deep sense of responsibility for the care of their "flocks." Cotton Mather, one of the pre-eminent Puritan ministers, in referring to his duties as a minister called it "the solemnest work in the world." Selement points out in his historiographic essay at the beginning of Keepers of

¹⁰James Schmotter, "Ministerial Careers in Eighteenth Century New England: The Social Context, 1700-1760," Journal of Social History, 9 (Winter, 1975): pp. 249-263; David D. Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth Century New England," in Colonial America, eds. Katz and Murrin, pp. 162-176; Jon Butler, "The Future of American Religious History: Prospectus, Agenda, Transatlantic Problematique," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser. 42 (April, 1985): pp. 167-183; Selement, "Meeting of Minds," p.33; J. William T. Youngs, Jr., God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700-1750 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; George Selement and Bruce C. Woolley, eds., Thomas Shepard's Confessions Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Collections, LVIII (1981).

the Vineyard that the pastoral labors of the Congregational clergy serve to illuminate the amount of interaction between pastors and parishioners, and reveal to what degree colonial New England was a "collective culture" guided by Puritan ideology.¹¹

Examining the theory and practice of pastoral care provides a crucial test of the degree to which a "collective culture" was shared by the Puritan clergy and the lay people of the Bay Colony. How did these ministers view their calling? What ideologies inspired their actions? What influence did ministerial literature have upon the lives of ordinary people? One modern criticism of Puritan clerics concerns the amount of time they devoted to publication. If these "Wilderness Shepherds" coveted time to spend in their studies writing, what were they writing, and for what purposes? What, after all, was the role of the minister in the colonial New England society? How did the minister's interpretation of that role mesh with the laity's understanding of that function? How much importance was placed on visitations to the sick, poor assistance, catechizing the young, comforting and counseling the disturbed, and evangelizing the unchurched? Finally, as Jon Butler has suggested, what opportunities for interaction were made possible by such life-cycle events as births, marriages, and deaths, and how did the ministers use them to transmit Puritan ideology?¹²

¹¹Selement, Keepers, p. 1; Cotton Mather, Paterna: The Autobiography of Cotton Mather, ed. Ronald A. Bosco (Delmar, N.Y., 1976), cited by Kenneth Silverman, The Life and Times of Cotton Mather (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 24; Selement, Keepers, p. 23.

¹²Butler, "Future of American Religious History," Butler suggests an agenda of areas for future study which includes among other reasonable suggestions the exploration of life-cycle events as points of interaction between clergy and laity.

These are broad, difficult issues. One readily comprehensible approach is to examine the pastoral activities of one minister as an example or "test case." Cotton Mather seems a logical choice. He was articulate, leaving voluminous diaries, letters, and pamphlets. The content tells much about his daily routine as well as his attitudes. Also Cotton Mather was highly respected by his peers, which implies influence as well as approval. Ministering during a time of transition in the Massachusetts colony, Mather also had his critics.

Accused of vanity and bigotry, Cotton Mather has been criticized for devoting too much time to publication, meddling in politics, overzealousness in the witchcraft trials, and snobbish elitism. In the preface to Cotton Mather's diary, Worthington Chauncey Ford described Mather as "hollow . . . strident . . . and mechanical." Even Mather's recent biographer, Kenneth Silverman, seems on occasion less than sympathetic to the Boston minister.¹³ During the years of Mather's ministry (1685-1728), New England society saw the loss of its original charter and the growing secularization of its society. The people of Massachusetts experienced Indian wars, famine, epidemics, and the controversial witchcraft trials. Throughout this period of shifting demography and ideology, Cotton Mather ministered to the people of Boston, attempting to understand the changes that were occurring and to direct his parishioners along the proper paths of righteousness. Whether prostrate in the dust of his study floor, distributing devotional pamphlets, or encouraging inoculation against smallpox, Cotton Mather, the Arch-Puritan, pastored his "flock."

¹³Cotton Mather, Diary of Cotton Mather, 2 vols. ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1911), p.xiii; Silverman, Life and Times, passim.

CHAPTER 2

Cottonus Matherus

Cotton Mather's complex personality has often been misunderstood and frequently maligned. In order to obtain a clearer understanding of Mather's ministry, it is necessary to examine several influences that shaped his character. First, family background played an instrumental part in forming Mather's sense of pastoral duty. As a third generation Puritan minister, Mather possessed a mental outlook infused with the values and ideals of his grandfathers and father. Combined with this ideological inheritance was his awareness of social position. As founders and shapers of the Bay Colony, his progenitors were leaders held in high esteem by the Massachusetts society. Mather grew up acutely aware of both his family's and his society's expectations. Another factor which affected the Boston minister's thoughts and practices as a pastor was his experience as head of his own household. Mather's three marriages and rearing of fifteen children, combined with illnesses, death, and financial woes, profoundly influenced his ministerial perspective.

Finally, the social, political, and cultural events during his lifetime affected Mather's professional vista. The end of the seventeenth century and the beginning years of the eighteenth century were years of turmoil in the colony. The small Puritan covenant community had burgeoned into a booming provincial society. The changes involved in that growth wove their distinct threads into the tapestry of Cotton Mather's being. Family background, household concerns, and the historical context of his time provide essential insight into the complex nature of Cotton Mather.

Cotton Mather's naming symbolized the joining of two of New England's most highly respected families -- the Cottons and the Mathers. As Kenneth Silverman pointed out in his recent biography, "Esteem, prestige, position, and respect belonged to Cotton Mather by birth" ¹ It would be a mistake, in examining the thoughts and practices of Cotton Mather, to ignore the influence of his family background and its position in the struggling Massachusetts Bay Colony. At age twenty-seven, writing a dedication in a religious pamphlet, Mather acknowledged his own understanding of this influence,

I were a very degenerate person, if I should not be touched with an Ambition, to be a servant of this now famous Countrey, which my two Grandfathers COTTON and MATHER had so considerable a stroke in the first planting of; and for the preservation where of my Father, hath been so far exposed. ²

Refusing to conform to the Church of England's "popish" corruption, or its symbol the surplice, John Cotton and Richard Mather, along with other dissenting ministers, led their flocks into exile in order to practice a purer religion. These two Puritan "Aarons," Cotton Mather's grandfathers, were instrumental not only in the forming of the Bay Colony but in its continuing structure as well. ³

Committed to Puritan principles, John Cotton attracted many followers during his twenty years as pastor at St. Botolph's Church, Boston, Lincolnshire, England. However, in 1632, he was summoned by Church of England officials to answer for his non-conforming practices. Instead of appearing before the High

¹Silverman, Life and Times, p. 3.

²Robert Middlekauff, The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 197.

³Cataloguing the "First Classis" of ministers in New England, Cotton Mather listed seventy-seven names. See Magnalia, III, p. 3.

Court, which he feared meant being "choaked with . . . perpetual Imprisonment," he fled. In 1633, John Cotton, along with a number of his flock, sailed to Massachusetts Bay. The city of Boston, named for his parish back in England, was organized by Cotton and John Winthrop. Along with Winthrop, who was the colony's first governor, Cotton was one of the leading personalities in early Massachusetts, his influence being felt, for example, in the exile of Anne Hutchinson and in the expulsion of Roger Williams. Citing Increase Mather, Robert Middlekauf noted, "that John Cotton, more than any other man, gave New England its name and being." Ministering in Boston, at the First Church for nearly twenty years, John Cotton was both a mold of Congregational Church policy and a defender of orthodoxy in New England. He died in December 1652, after taking "wet in his passage over the Ferry" to Boston.⁴

Born in 1596, in Lancashire, England, Cotton Mather's paternal grandfather became "the founder of the family in America." Richard Mather did not, however, give up England easily. As a young school master near Liverpool, Richard Mather lodged with a family of Puritan convictions under whose guidance he experienced religious conviction. Mather continued to teach for several years, then, after a brief stay at Oxford, accepted the community's call to pastor. Ordained in 1619, Mather ministered in that community for close to fifteen years with growing repute. Eventually his non-conforming practices attracted the attention of the Church officials, and in 1633 he was suspended, but was restored to his pulpit a few months later at the insistence of

⁴Magnalia, III, p. 19; Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 196; Magnalia, III, p.23.

influential friends. He was suspended once again the very next year, and this time efforts to regain his pulpit provided futile. According to Cotton Mather's account in Magnalia Christi Americana, when officials were informed that Richard Mather had never worn a surplice, one of them swore, "It had been better for him, that he had gotten Seven Bastards."⁵

Rather than be "unjustly inhibited" from preaching, Richard Mather decided to emigrate to New England. Encouraging correspondence from John Cotton and other ministers already in exile probably also influenced his decision to "escape from the Windy Storm and Tempest" of England. Thus, in 1635 Richard Mather and his family set out across the Atlantic Ocean. Upon landing in Boston, Mather received invitations to pastorates from several towns. With the advice of a council of ministers he decided upon the church at Dorchester, Massachusetts, where he served for over thirty years. During these years he became an influential leader in the councils of New England Congregationalism.⁶

After the death of his first wife Katherine (mother of Increase), Richard Mather married Sarah, the widow of John Cotton. It was under this circumstance that the household of John Cotton was joined with that of Richard Mather, and Increase became acquainted with his step-sister Maria Cotton. After completing his studies and several years of service as a chaplain in England, Increase Mather returned home to New England, where in 1622, he married his step-sister Maria. Their eldest son, Cotton Mather, was born a year later.

⁵Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 10; Magnalia, III, p. 125.

⁶Magnalia, III, p. 126. As an example of Richard Mather's influence in New England affairs note his authorship of the Cambridge Platform in 1648.

In 1664, Increase Mather accepted the call of the Second Church (Old North) in Boston, where he served until his death in 1723. His career in New England was one of great eminence. He was a leader both in the pulpit and in public meetings. From 1688 to 1692 he served as the Bay Colony's agent in London. Received by both King James II and by King William III, Mather was instrumental in the official removal of Edmund Andros as governor of New England, and in the gaining of an enlarged charter for the colony after the old charter had been revoked. Mather also served as president of Harvard College for seventeen years. For thirty-nine of the fifty-nine years Increase Mather served as pastor of the Old North Church in Boston, he was assisted by his eldest son, Cotton Mather. In light of his family's sustained pre-eminence in the development of New England, Cotton Mather seemed destined to be a pivotal character in the course of events in the colony as well.

Descended from such a prestigious line of ministers and surrounded by a family of clergy (five of six uncles were also ministers) there could be little doubt as to Cotton Mather's choice of vocation. Yet, during his adolescence, Mather felt grave doubt as to his ability to follow in such hallowed footsteps. He viewed his grandfathers as "noble exiles" and regarded his father as an example of how "a member of a great family that had attained distinction in the service of the Lord" should act. The young Mather read scripture ardently, composed prayers for his friends and rebuked them for their evil ways. By the age of eleven, he read Latin classics, the Greek New Testament, Homer, and knew Hebrew grammar. In 1674 he was admitted to Harvard. His father had entered Harvard at age twelve, but entering at eleven and one-half years old,

Cotton Mather was the youngest student ever admitted.⁷

Ever anxious to live up to his family's high standards, Cotton Mather came close to losing all hope of entering the ministry. During his early years at Harvard he developed a stammer. He was so perplexed by this affliction that in a letter to his uncle he referred to himself as a "semi-vocale, a mute." Because of this "clumsiness of tongue," he leaned toward science and medicine in his studies. These interests remained with Mather throughout his life and played an important role in his ministry and in his association with the Royal Society in England. However, after a bout with serious illness at age fourteen, Mather experienced a religious crisis, and in 1676 he began practicing the Puritan devotional custom of intense meditation. Following advice from some of his teachers he also practiced speaking slowly, almost singing his words, in order to control his stammer. Mather's anxiety about his stammer was reflected frequently in his diary, where he noted that "by a careful Deliberation my public Services were freed from any Blemish by it, yett I was, by His Wisdome, kept in continual Prayer, and Fear, and Faith, concerning it." Mather was graduated from Harvard in August 1678 and in February 1681 became assistant to his father at the North Church. The Bay Colony society shared with the Mathers the expectancy that Cotton Mather would equal if not transcend his prestigious heritage. At Mather's graduation the president of Harvard, Urian Oakes, remarked, "Quantum Nomen! Quanta Nomina! (What a name! What names!)." In January, 1683, the congregation of the North Church elected Mather pastor along with his father, although he was not ordained until 1685.

⁷ Magnalia, III, p. 126; Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 197.

Thus the young minister stepped upon the stage of life in colonial New England with a rich background of examples for his role as a pastor.⁸

Personal family circumstances of his adult life also played a formative part in Mather's thoughts and practices as a minister. Widowed twice, he married three times. He found his first two marriages sources of happiness and contentment. Referring to his first wife, Abigail, as his "dearest Consort" he spoke of her as "a Meet help, and extremely desireable Companion for my Joys and Griefs." During their sixteen years of marriage, Abigail gave birth to nine children, five of whom died before her death, in 1702, after a long agonizing illness. A little over a year later Mather married Elizabeth Hubbard, a widow who was also a nearby neighbor. Elizabeth, "a Gentlewoman of Piety," also proved to be a good companion for Mather. He described her as "a Gentlewoman of good Wit . . . Discretion at ordering an Household . . . of incomparable sweetness in her Temper . . . and a very comely person." Elizabeth died of measles in 1713, just ten days after giving birth to twins. In the ten years of their union Cotton and Elizabeth added six children to the Mather household, although one child died in infancy in 1709, and the twins and another daughter died during the same measles epidemic which claimed Elizabeth. By the end of the year 1713, Mather listed the grim statistic that of fifteen children born only six remained alive. Of these six only two survived

⁸Kenneth Silverman, ed. Selected Letters of Cotton Mather (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 6; Diary CM, I, p. 2. Cotton Mather received his baccalaureate in 1678 and his master degree in 1681. Silverman, Life and Times, p. 23.

Mather himself.⁹

Besides the deaths of two wives and the loss of so many children, two other disappointments connected with his family jarred Mather's sensitivity. The first of these concerned his eldest son, Increase Jr. Mather had hoped that Increase would follow in his footsteps in carrying on the family's ministerial line, but "Creasy" fell far short of the high Mather standard. Though a bright and promising student, he lacked seriousness in his studies and began getting into trouble as a young boy. Cotton Mather went to great lengths to improve his son's condition even to the extent of sending him to live with an uncle in England. Creasy, however, continued to become "ensnarled in Vice." In 1717, a year after his return from England, Creasy was named in a bastardy case. Mather noted in his diary, "that an Harlot big with a Bastard, accuses my poor son, Cresy, and layes her Belly to him . . . What shall I do now for the foolish Youth!" Mather was able to divert Creasy from appearing in court and the trouble passed, but within weeks Creasy was running with a street gang, getting into trouble again. Resigned to the wastefulness of his eldest son's escapades, Mather transferred his hopes to his younger son Samuel, who in becoming a minister proved worthy of his father's confidence.¹⁰

⁹Abigail was already a widow when she and Cotton Mather married even though she was only fifteen. Diary CM, I, pp. 128 and 131; Silverman, Life and Times, p. 189. A list of Cotton Mather's children: By Abigail-Abigail, d. 1688; Katherine (Katy), d. 1716; Mary, no information; Increase, d. 1693; Abigail (Nibby), d. 1721; Mehetabel, d. 1696; Hannah (Nancy), survived Cotton Mather; Increase (Creasy), d. 1724; Samuel, d. 1700. By Elizabeth-Elizabeth (Lizzy), d. 1726; Samuel, survived Cotton Mather; Nathaniel, d. 1709; Jerusha, d. 1713; and the twins Eleazer and Martha, d. 1713.

¹⁰Silverman, Life and Times, p. 307; Diary CM, II, p. 484. For references concerning Mather's shift of attention from "Creasy" to "Sammy" see Diary CM, II, pp. 493, 496, 498, 499, 525, 526, 551, 741. Especially poignant is Mather's cry of despair for Increase immediately followed by joyful weeping for Samuel, Diary CM, II, p. 744.

Cotton Mather's third marriage proved to be his other family disappointment. Lydia Lee George, yet another widow, was "vain, jealous, manipulative" and as Kenneth Silverman noted, "perhaps psychopathic." After their wedding in 1715, despite occasional "outpourings" the couple enjoyed a few years of relative bliss. But by 1718, Mather was alarmed by his wife's erratic behavior and its effect on his "poor, distressed, oppressed Family." In addition to the raging abuses of her apparent insanity, Lydia Lee also brought additional financial burdens to Mather's already strained economic situation. In an effort to settle the debts of his widowed step-daughter's estate, Mather was pressed to apply to friends for assistance. After a number of years, Mather believed "the unhappy Entanglements of my Wife's and her Daughter's Estate" would force him to sell his books or go to debtor's prison. Fortunately, a number of loyal church members "generously joined for his deliverance" and paid off the remaining debt. Lydia's deranged behavior and the financial morass of her estate plagued Mather for the last ten years of his life.¹¹

In the midst of the "dreadful condition" of his third marriage, Cotton Mather suffered other griefs as well. On August 23, 1723, at age eighty-five, his venerable father Increase died. One year later Mather's wayward son, Increase Jr., drowned at sea. In 1726, his daughter Elizabeth Mather Cooper died, leaving just two of his children, Hannah and Samuel, alive. Broken by emotional, economic, and psychological stress Cotton Mather experienced ill health throughout his last years. After a long illness during the winter of 1727-1728, he succumbed on February 13, 1728, just one day after his sixty-fifth

¹¹Silverman, Life and Times, p. 309; Diary CM, II, pp. 591, 745.

birthday.¹²

During his sixty-five years Cotton Mather and New England witnessed vast changes. The wilderness society, formed by a group of Puritan exiles, had grown from a covenanted community into a secular provincial society. In 1689, the population of Boston numbered around six thousand, but by 1720 that number had doubled. The cramped, narrow streets of Boston were densely populated, and a scarcity of springs along with the expensiveness of digging wells made clean water scarce. Outhouses and open sewer ditches in the middle of the streets compounded the closeness of the city. In such an environment, disease and fire naturally took their toll. Between the years 1676 and 1721, Boston experienced seven great fires and at least six smallpox epidemics. The fire of 1711 destroyed most of the South Boston area, while in 1721 a smallpox epidemic claimed the lives of more than one thousand Bostonians. Death was a daily presence. The infant mortality rate hovered around fifty percent. Even if a child survived infancy, its chances of reaching maturity were slim. Measles, smallpox, fevers, and a multitude of other maladies more often than not resulted in death, so that the constant presence of death made life seem fragile and precious. Sometimes death and disaster almost overwhelmed the colonists, with one catastrophe following another. For example, in 1690 a smallpox epidemic swept through Boston; in that same year and the next, two great fires ravished the city, and in 1691 and 1692 a famine threatened the colonists. It was in such a charged atmosphere that the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials occurred. Experiencing the trauma of the witchcraft trials, many colonists

¹²Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 365.

feared that their recent "misfortunes were God's judgements."¹³

Besides an almost daily accounting of deaths resulting from illness, the diaries of men like Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather also recorded the deadly attacks of Indians in outlying areas. During King Philip's War, which lasted from June 1675 to August 1676, sixteen Massachusetts towns and four in Rhode Island were destroyed. According to M. Halsey Thomas, the editor of Samuel Sewall's diary, "In proportion to the population, the war inflicted greater casualties than any other war in our history." Yet despite such catastrophes the colony grew and diversified.¹⁴

The people of Massachusetts also felt the lash of Old World antagonisms in the revocation of their charter, the distasteful reign of Edmund Andros as governor of the Dominion of New England, and the shifting pleasures of several monarchs. The colony's original charter was revoked in 1686, and between that year and 1689 Boston held the status of an armed camp. The Anglican prerogative of Governor Andros grated against Puritan sensibilities to the degree that the colonists finally rebelled on April 18, 1689. Increase Mather, and other leaders sailed to England to petition first King James II, then William III for the return of the charter, while, in 1689, the colonists invaded Catholic French Canada as a sign of loyalty to King William. Both missions failed. Increase Mather brought back a charter which proved a source of political division within

¹³G. B. Warden, Boston: 1689-1776 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), p. 13. Warden's book is an excellent source on Boston for the years between the Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution. For Cotton Mather's time period see especially chapters I-V. Also note map on endpapers.

¹⁴Samuel Sewall, The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 2 vols. ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 13n.

the colony into the eighteenth century, and the Canadian invasion resulted in heavy casualties and high taxes.

Thus, it was during a period of social, religious, and political turmoil that Cotton Mather ministered to the people of Boston and New England. As the small, homogeneous community grew into a large, diverse society, roles and values experienced redefinition. While attempting to salvage as much of the old orthodoxy as possible, Cotton Mather recognized the necessity of adjusting to and accommodating the changes confronting him. This effort, embodied in the paradox of compromise and steadfastness, was a factor in Mather's ministry during this era of transition. But, personifying the concept of Puritan anxiety, he possessed a keen sensitivity to the cultural shifts his society experienced. Sometimes failing, oft-times succeeding, Mather's pastoral activities were attempts to do good in the world, his world. And for Cotton Mather, a third generation Puritan minister, that was God's world. From the perspective of Reformation, Puritan ideology, and the Enlightenment, combined with the existential import of his own experiences, the "Faithful Shepherd" ministered to his flock.

CHAPTER 3

Doing Good

Historians traditionally have paid little attention to the pastoral functions of the New England clergy. While noting that the Congregational clergy were a significant segment of New England's intellectuals, historians, like Darrett Rutman, nonetheless concluded that they were "isolated from reality." But as J. William Youngs observed, "A pastor's education and ordination tended to set him apart from the average man. His ministry, on the other hand, forced him into close association with the people."¹ Diaries, letters, and sermons reveal that Puritan ministers were, indeed, "abroad in their communities." "Domestic life and pastoral labors brought ministers into daily contact with their parishioners." Living in close community with his "flock", the "good shepherd" experienced many of the same "joys and trials." Participating in "common domestic and worldly concerns," the Congregational clergy "found practical application for their religious beliefs." Cotton Mather's domestic, social, and economic environment produced in him an "existential Calvinism" which characterized his labors as a pastor.²

Along with his everyday experiences, Mather's apocalyptic view of history also influenced his pastoral activities. Convinced that the world

¹Darrett Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," in Puritanism and the American Experience, ed. Michael McGiffert (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p.78; Youngs, God's Messengers, p. 40.

²Youngs, God's Messengers, pp. 41, 46; Lovelace points out that the "existential details of the Christian's daily life held an overwhelming importance for Puritans, especially Puritan pastors, and we cannot understand the motives behind their theology and their behavior unless we have penetrated their understanding of the Christian life." Mather's experiential history along with the legacy of Calvin molded his theology and shaped his teleological perspective.

was moving quickly toward the eschaton, he approached his pastoral duties with a sense of urgency. Asking, "What shall I make of this instance?" Mather visited the sick, comforted the bereaved, counseled the disturbed, catechized the young, evangelized the unchurched, aided the poor, and promoted civic and personal morality hoping that "thousands . . . may fare better for me."³

Regarding his calling as "the Solemnest Work in the World," he developed his ministry around the concept of "Doing Good." For Mather "doing good" meant seeing to it that "God's Word prevailed among men on earth." His was a "benevolent, social-minded Puritanism" that endowed his ministry with a sensitivity to both the physical and spiritual condition of his parishioners.⁴

Cotton Mather's diary abounds with notes such as, "visited a sick neighbor and prayed with him." Boston was a cramped, unsanitary city, and sickness and disease were endemic and frequently epidemic. Since illness and disease often resulted in death, the pastoral visit was an essential aspect of the minister's function. Whether it was "some very aged Women . . . for a long while confined" or "one poor, sickly, honest Man," Mather endeavored to "releeve them and make their Condicion comfortable." While praying with the sick person he also strove "to bee at pains to do what good he could upon the Souls of them, that attend in the room." His visitations naturally reinforced his early interest in science and medicine.⁵

Along with being a "soul physician," Mather also gave medical advice,

³Diary CM, I, pp. 11, 61.

⁴Silverman, Life and Times, p. 24; Silverman, Letters, pp. x, xi.

⁵Diary CM, I, p. 58; Diary CM, II, pp. 227, 199, 218; Diary CM, I, p. 105.

prescribing various remedies and treatments. During the smallpox epidemic of 1721, he enthusiastically supported, and participated in, the experimental use of inoculation to curtail "the greivous Calamity." But disease did not discriminate and death reached into all families, including the Mather household.

Experiencing over his lifetime the death of thirteen children and two wives, Cotton Mather knew a personal grief that bonded him intimately with his parishioners. His ministrations of medical advice to the sick and comfort to the bereaved were forged in the crucible of his own experiences and deep faith. On the occasion of his wife's illness and subsequent death, Samuel Sewall "call'd Dr. C. Mather to pray." Sewall noted that not only did Mather pray "excellantly" but that he also "Suggested good thoughts to my wife." A week later Mather preached Hannah Sewall's funeral sermon focusing on "Divine Providence" and "Bereaving Dispensations." Responding teleologically to illness, Indian attacks, outbreaks of measles and smallpox, and death, Mather used his pastoral visits "for the further Advancement of Religion."⁶

Another aspect of the minister's work was counseling with the "disturbed." Cotton Mather made it a special concern to note "any Person belonging to his Flock . . . in any peculiar Affliction or Temptation," and sought "an Opportunitie to assist them." In the pre-Freudian seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a "disturbed" person might be one who was suffering emotional or

⁶Diary CM, II, p. 624n, Not everyone, however, shared Mather's confidence in the experiment. In addition to ridicule in the newspaper, and numerous verbal assaults, Mather was physically threatened when someone threw a "fired Granado" through his window. Had the bomb exploded the results would have been deadly. Luckily it did not and Mather "marked his miraculous deliverance"; Silverman, Life and Times, p. 350; Diary CM, I, p. 118; Diary SS, II, pp. 863-865.

psychological problems, frequently interpreted as "demon possession." The term could also apply to a person experiencing religious doubts or considering unorthodox views fringing on heresy. Realizing that doubt and anxiety were basic elements of Calvinism, Mather advised against hasty persecution of heretics, stressing the need for sensitivity and compassion in his personal encounters with "witchcraft" and "possession."⁷

The Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 have assumed an infamous place in colonial Puritan studies. But contrary to tradition, Cotton Mather had little to do, directly, with the trials. He was suspicious of them and spoke against the use of "spectral evidence" and advocated the use of common sense and the common law practice of requiring two witnesses to verify an action. Accused by some contemporaries, and later by historians, of defending the trials, Cotton Mather was caught between his cautious attitude toward the proceedings and his respect for the judges, several of whom were members of his church. His personal approach to the problem was to offer to "fast and pray" (counsel) with six of the "possessed People." His offer was not accepted; but he kept personal fast days and preached to the prisoners "committed on Suspicion of Witchcraft." Later that year Mather noted praying and fasting with a "young Woman, horribly possessed with Devils." According to his account, "she was finally and forever delivered from the hands of evil Angels

⁷Diary CM, I, p. 105; Concerning heresy, Mather, in May, 1692, noted "I think, I am the only Minister Living in the Land, that have testified against the Suppression of Heresy, by Persecution." Instead he proposed "more spiritual and evangelical" endeavors. Diary CM, I, pp. 149, 10; Emory Elliott, Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 16n.

...brought home unto the Lord, and admitted to our Church."⁸

In the case of a friend who was "under some Degree of Alienation of Mind," Mather's pastoral counseling took on a somewhat psychological character. He reminded himself to "use exquisite Methods, to preserve him from an unhappy Conduct." Mather also experienced the hardships of his third wife's seemingly psychopathic personality. His anguish in dealing with her extreme mood changes and erratic behavior is poignantly evident in his resort to using Latin whenever he wrote about her in his diary. Yet even in his last years, he approached the problem with "praying" and sensitivity. Whatever manifestation it took, Mather sought to counsel the "disturbed" and "bee of Good Service."⁹

Catechizing the young was yet another area of responsibility. Mather took seriously the task of familiarizing the young people with maxims designed to bring them into an understanding of their "degeneracy" and preparation for "closing" with Christ. As a young minister, he resolved to "sett apart one Afternoon, every Week, to visit all the Families, in our Neighborhood; and therein essay as handsomely as I can, to bring Pesons of all Ages and Sexes, unto an Acquaintance with God."¹⁰ In 1683 he promoted "a pious and praying Meeting, among the Young People, in the south part of Boston, which eventually joined with a meeting he had previously organized in North Boston.

⁸Note Mather's letter of May 31, 1692 to John Richards, one of the judges at the Salem Witchcraft trials. Silverman, Letters, p. 36; Diary CM, I, pp. 152, 160-161.

⁹Diary CM, II, p. 453; Mather's Diary at the end of 1719 reveals that Lydia's strange behavior had been going on for about a year. By 1724 Mather had to resort to writing in Latin in his diary to evade Lydia's snooping. Diary CM, II, pp. 715-752 passim.

¹⁰Diary CM, I, p. 55.

Continuing his practice of taking "one and sometimes two Afternoons in a Week" to visit the families of his church he "essay'd . . . to treat every Person particularly . . . and of the young People . . . asked some questions of the Catechism." Mather also singled out "a number of Students" and met with them on Thursdays. His desire to "insinuate the Maxims and Lessons of Piety, into the Minds of . . . Children" was so fervent that he "would observe what Games and Sports they were upon . . . and . . . would . . . mind them of those pious Instructions, which the Circumstances of their play may lead them to think upon."¹¹ Even as his daughter Katy lay dying he prayed, "that she speak such Things, especially upon her two Brothers, as may leave a precious and lasting Impression upon them."¹²

Though concerned with catechizing the young, his efforts were not limited to children. He opened his house "for an Hour on the Lord's-Day Evenings, for Prayers and Psalms and a Repetition of the Sermons." Whether by financially supporting the religious education of Indians, admonishing prisoners, or using a pastoral visit to a dying person to "quicken" the survivors, Cotton Mather sought every opportunity to "improve" the spiritual condition of his flock.¹³

For Mather, his "flock" was not limited to just the members of the North Church. In the spring of 1702, he "prosecuted a Design of obtaining able and faithful Indians, to undertake the Work of Evangelizing the Savages in the eastern Parts of the Countrey." Writing to the General Assembly of Connecticut and the Governor of New York, he encouraged them to take action

¹¹Diary CM, I, pp. 68, 114, 115; Diary CM, II, P. 144.

¹²Diary CM, II, p. 387.

¹³Dairy CM, I, p. 131.

so that "a body of Indians yet in the darkest and vilest heathenism . . . may be Christianized." As a commissioner of the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians, Mather worked with the Indians at Martha's Vineyard and aided in the reprinting of John Eliot's Indian Bible.¹⁴

Inquiring into the "condition of poor Prisoners," Cotton Mather sought to find "some Objects of Charity" whom he might "releeve." Hoping for "Opportunities to serve the Kingdome of God, and the Cause of Piety," he admonished condemned prisoners in private and on the way to the gallows. He spent "many a weary Hour . . . to serve the Souls of those miserable Creatures."¹⁵

Cotton Mather's evangelical efforts led him to pray for and "discourse" with "an infidel Jew" who lived in Boston. Lying prostrate in the dust of his study floor the Puritan divine prayed for the "Conversion of the Jewish Nation, and for . . . the Happiness to baptize a Jew." He also endeavored to "show all . . . Kindness" to French Protestant refugees in New England. Displaying a similar earnestness Mather recorded the "special Occasion" of baptizing "four Negro's." He wrote letters to eminent people "in all the Islands to promote the design of Christianizing the Negroes." He also endeavored to "produce and support a Charity-Schole for Negro's in Evenings." While Mather's evangelistic interests were worldwide, he remained cognizant of the unchurched close at hand. Intimately familiar with the people of Boston, he noted "Several religious Families . . . among us, not yett joined unto any of the private Meetings in our

¹⁴Diary CM, I, p. 423; See letter to William Ashurst. Silverman, Letters, p. 144.

¹⁵Diary CM, II, pp. 237, 234; Diary CM, I, p. 165.

Neighborhood." He decided to "address them, to gett into this way of their Edification."¹⁶

While possessed of an earnest desire to secure the souls of his parishioners, Cotton Mather was also acutely aware of the need to provide for the physical welfare of people. His diary overflows with such reminders as "do good for a miserable Man in the Prison, who cries to me for my Compassions. I must clothe him and help what I can." Another notation reads,

A poor Woman belonging to the Church whereof I am a Servant, is languishing under an horrible Cancer, as well as conflicting with oppressing Poverty. I will visit her, and relieve here, and much concern myself that her Miseries may be mitigated and sanctified.¹⁷

Mather stirred his congregation to take up collections "for the Releef of the poor" whether they were immediate neighbors or "inhabitants on . . . Frontier Towns in the East." By placing a "Penalty" upon himself whenever he "omitted" any "exercise of Religion" the good pastor provided an example for his parishioners, forfeiting "a piece of Money to bee given to the Poor." Mather's alms-giving took other forms as well. Noting "a poor Man wants a good Employment" he asked, "What shall I find for him?"¹⁸

Part of the minister's function was to see to the care of widows and orphans. Mather designed to make weekly visits to "the headless Families" providing both financial and spiritual assistance. He also attempted to provide "comfortable Assistance" to the "Number of poor and old People in the Alms-house." During times of "extreme Searcitie," he promoted city-wide collections

¹⁶Diary CM, I, pp. 300, 200 134, 278, 570; Diary CM, II, p. 379; Diary CM, I, p. 135.

¹⁷Diary CM, II, pp. 337, 274.

¹⁸Diary CM, I, pp. 137, 71; Diary CM, II, p. 384.

for the "Releef of the Poor" and took pride that "the highest Contributions in the other assemblies . . . did not arise near the Sum that was gathered in ours." In times of famine, Mather worked to "obtain Bread for Neighbors." Beseeching God to "quicken him to greater Vigour," he lamented that "I grow too slack, in pastoral Visits of my Neighbors. Lord, help mee!"¹⁹

Busy with his own personal acts of charity, Mather encouraged and organized Societies to aid in "doing good." On several occasions he noted such incidents as "a poor Scotch young Woman, who is near her lying in, and is destitute of all Necessaries and Conveniences." He resolved not only to "send her some Releef," but also to "stir up the Neighbors to join in releiving her."²⁰

Christine Heyrman discovered, in her investigation of charity and social change in provincial New England, that Puritan ministers were active in organizing charitable societies and private funding of the public relief system among "hopeful young merchants" and "gentlemanlike and polite families." Mather would sometimes act like a conduit for "A Gentleman that has a considerable Quantity of Grain, to dispense among the Poor." Employed by the well-to-do man, Mather was to locate the needy "and send them with Notes of Recommendation" to the benefactor. As Heyrman pointed out, "ministerial advocacy of philanthropy" was not "historical accident" but "conscious design." Offering advice to young ministers, Cotton Mather admonished them "to mention the Condition of the Poor, in your Conversation with the Rich." He recommended that they "Keep a list of 'em!" Mather went on to advise

¹⁹Diary CM, I, pp. 168, 178, 190-191, 197, 115, 201.

²⁰Diary CM, II, p. 48.

"Eminent Merchants" to set aside their "Tenths in Pious Uses," promising that they would be "Rewarded with a Surprising Prosperity of their Affairs."²¹

Connected with the promotion of charitable acts, the Congregational clergy also exerted considerable time and energy in promoting civic and personal morality. Execution sermons were addressed to the public as well as to the prisoners. Though sometimes fearing that his "Labours were lost upon" the condemned, he hoped that his sermons might be "sanctified unto many others." Mather struggled with the changing moralities of his day and their effects. He prayed that "the Spirit of the Lord . . . might marvellously lift up a Standard agains the impious Men and Things they have come in . . . like a Flood." Coming across "a Catalouge of young Men, who visited wicked Houses" he resolved to "improve" the situation. Hearing about a family "wherein Parents and Children were at grievous Variance" Mather personally sought to "bring the Family into a better Condition."²²

Sometimes the task of addressing people's behavior required stern actions such as the expulsion from the North Church of a woman convicted of adultery. While regretting that she "fled from the Admonitions that should have brought her to Repentance" Mather rejoiced that two women convicted of consulting a fortune-teller "made a poenitent Acknowledgement" and were "reconciled" with the church. Preaching to two congregations from Watertown who "had a

²¹Christine Heyrman, "The Fashion Among More Superior People: Charity and Social Change in Provincial New England, 1700-1740," American Quarterly 34 (Summer, 1982), pp. 111, 107, 109; Diary CM, II, p. 380; Cotton Mather, Bonifacius: An Essay Upon the Good (Boston, 1710) American Culture Series, Reel 8, no. 105, p. 100, 140, 141.

²²Diary CM, I, pp. 165, 188; Diary CM, II, pp. 235, 62-63.

Strife . . . among them about the place of their Meeting-house," Mather stressed the principle that "where Strife is, there is Confusion and every evil Work." Agonizing over his own "manifold Sinfulness," he prayed to "become a Remembrancer unto the Lord, for no less than whole Peoples, Nations, and Kingdomes."²³

Cotton Mather's pastoral work brought him into contact with people of various social, political, economic, cultural, and religious circumstances. The practices of doctor, teacher, counselor, social-worker, evangelist, psychologist, and moralist were combined in the pastor's vocation. Whether in the pulpit or at a public meeting; in his own study or visiting in a home; traveling to nearby towns or walking the streets of North Boston; with poor or affluent; Negro, Indian, Jew, French refugee, or neighbor, Mather ministered to and influenced a great variety of people. From the experience of his own "Temptations" and "Calamities" he girded himself with the role of "servant" for the "Edification of the Flock."²⁴

²³Diary CM, I, pp. 180-181, 198, 199-200.

²⁴Diary CM, II, p. 385.

CHAPTER 4

Feed His Sheep

Pursuing their pastoral tasks, "Puritan ministers were among the busiest men in New England." One of the clergy's major responsibilities was the "Edification of the Flock." While they accomplished this in part by pastoral visits and personal catechizings, they pursued the moral and spiritual improvement of the people to a large degree through sermons and religious publications. Cotton Mather made it a practice to reinforce his visits by leaving behind a "literary echo of piety in the household." These "echoes" were, for the most part, pamphlets and tracts he himself had written. He estimated that in the year 1705 alone, he distributed "at least six hundred books." In his Manuductio Ad Ministerium, Mather advised his son on the importance of "scattering Books" during pastoral visits so that they might serve as "lasting Monitors . . . and a Salt for their Preservation."¹

In his article, "Publications and the Puritan Minister" George Selement numbered Cotton Mather's total publications at 338. While "ministers . . . offered a wide range of fare, from almanacs and poetry to works of history and popular divinity," sermons comprised the bulk of ministerial literature. According to Selement's statistics, 1,076 of 1,567, or approximately 68% of total ministerial publications were sermons. The same statistics show that 225 of Mather's 388 publications, or approximately 58%, were sermons.

¹George Selement, "Publication and the Puritan Minister," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser. 37 (1980): p. 219; Diary CM, II, p. 385; Lovelace, American Pietism, p. 208; Diary CM, I, p. 548; Cotton Mather, Manuductio Ad Ministerium (Boston, 1726), facsimile reprint (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 107.

His first published sermon, "The Call of the Gospel," was printed in 1686.²

Execution sermons such as "Call of the Gospel" were popular with the masses because of the sensation associated with them. For Cotton Mather and his colleagues, they provided an opportunity to address "simultaneously the congregation and the criminal." Execution sermons were just one of many kinds of public sermons. Addresses to artillery companies, ordinations, funerals, elections, and public-day sermons also provided ministers the opportunity to instruct the community at large. These sermons were frequently printed at popular demand or with the financial assistance of some patron.³

However, as frequent as those occasions were, they did not come close to matching the number of actual Sabbath-Day sermons. One hundred and forty-four of Mather's 225 published sermons, or 64%, were church sermons. Largely textuerial, these stylized sermons lent themselves to the New England tradition of congregational note-taking. Many of the published sermons were printed from such notes rather than from a prepared text. In most of these sermons Mather attempted to be a "Vigilant Watchman" speaking "Words in Season." The fact that he addressed subjects which were of concern to his congregation, in part, accounted for the popularity and publication of so

²Selement, "Publication," p. 224n; Hall, "World of Print," p. 174; See statistics on pp. 222, 226, 227, 234, 235, Selement, "Publication"; Silverman, Life and Times, pp. 47-48.

³Silverman, Life and Times, p. 48; For notes on patronage see Silverman, Letters, pp. 76, 88-89, 96, 98, 236-237, 249, 257, 267, 323, 334, and 399. An example is Samuel Sewall's printing of the funeral sermon written by Cotton Mather, for his wife Hannah Sewall, Diary SS, II, pp. 863-865. Community fasts and thanksgivings were generally the occasions for public-day sermons.

⁴Selement, "Publication," For comments on sermon preparation see p. 233; Manuductio, p. 92.

many of his sermons.⁴

After sermons, devotional tracts, catechisms, and instructional books and pamphlets comprised the second largest category of Cotton Mather's writing. Significantly, George Selement noted that, "Sermons and devotional-instructional tracts are so similar that when unidentified, he was unable to distinguish between them." Since it was impossible for him to travel everywhere and personally "instil the Lessons of Piety," Mather endeavored to scatter "Books of Piety about the Countrey; yea, in all the Towns and these Colonies." He labored to produce books "of Religion, as appeared most necessary and seasonable." Thus, walking among the wharves and warehouses Mather distributed books like The Mariner's Companion and Counsellour (1709) with the intent of "keeping good Orders in the Vessels." For people who "offered themselves unto the Covenant" by joining a church, he published "The Bonds of the Covenant" (1709). As a devotional guide "upon the nature of the Lord's Supper," he wrote "Companion for Communicants" (1690). The various titles of Mather's devotional tracts, catechisms, and instructional pamphlets indicate the variety and scope of his designs: "The A.B.C. of Religion" (1713), "Agreeable Admonitions to both Old and Young" (1703), "Believer's Gain by Death" (1713), "Best Ornaments of Youth" (1707), "Brethren Dwelling Together in Unity" (1718), "Case of a Troubled Mind" (1717), "Christian Funeral" (1713), "Companion for the Afflicted" (1701), "Death Made Easy and Happy" (1701), "Echo's of Devotion" (1716), "Fisherman's Calling" (1712), "Good Lessons for Children" (1706), "Instructions to the Living from the Condition of the Dead"

⁴Selement, "Publication," For comments on sermon preparation see p. 233; Manuductio, p. 92.

(1717), "Midnight Cry" (1692), "Negro Christianized" (1706), Reasonable Religion (1700), "Thoughts of a Dying Man" (1697), "Triumphs over Troubles" (1701), and "Winter Meditations" (1693). Though only a small example, these titles clearly indicate the broadness of his interest in the common crises of life.⁵

Though sermons and devotional-instructional books accounted for most of Cotton Mather's literary efforts, he also produced several scientific and medical works. He encouraged young ministers to pursue the sciences "with continual Contemplations" so as to gain "agreeable Acknowledgements of the Infinite GOD, whose Perfections are so display'd in His Works before you." He viewed "Natural Philosophy" as a method of gaining "Insight . . . into the Principles of our Perpetual Director." In his book, The Christian Philosopher (1721), Mather asserted that "science was an incentive to religion." In addition to a steady flow of correspondence to the Royal Society in England, his essays "Curiosa Americana" were apparently the instruments which gained him membership in that prestigious organization in 1713.⁶

While his scientific publications may have been written for a transatlantic audience, his medical essays were more often directed to immediate needs. In 1702, when smallpox, "the dreadful Disease," was "raging in the Neighbourhood" Mather realized that it was impossible for him "to visit the many Scores of

⁵Selement, "Publication," p. 238n; Diary CM, II, pp. 26, 14, 13; Diary CM, I, p. 41n; Index in volume II of Diary CM provides reference points for the various books and pamphlets. Also see Silverman, Life and Times.

⁶Sara J. Schechner, "John Prince and Early American Scientific Instrument Making," in Sibley's Heir: A Volume in Memory of Clifford Kenyon Shipton, ed. Frederick S. Allis, Jr. (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), p. 439; John Adair, Founding Fathers: The Puritans in England and America (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1982), p. 276.

sick Families." Yet, desiring to visit them "as far as possible," he wrote and had distributed a small pamphlet entitled, "Wholesome Words, or, a Visit of Advice to Families visited with Sickness." Mather mixed words of comfort and faith with practical medical advice.⁷

Cotton Mather also wrote a number of pieces on civic matters, history, church and social polity, and various points of religious and moral doctrine. Most of these were short with the exception of his epics, Magnalia Christi Americana and the Biblia Americana. He noted that his writing on these larger works "hath all been done by Snatches" and that he was "forced sometimes . . . to throw by the Work whole Months together." The Magnalia Christi Americana, begun in 1693, was eventually published in 1702, but the Biblia Americana remained unpublished.⁸

Cotton Mather's works found use among not only his parishioners and laypeople, other ministers appreciated them as well. Experience Mayhew, a missionary pastor to Indians, translated several of Mather's tracts for his work with the natives. Ebenezer Parkman, a minister at Westborough, noted reading "Dr. C. Mather's Directions to a Candidate of the Ministry, which pleased him very much." Written to his son, Samuel Mather, Manuductio Ad Ministerium (1726) became a seminal piece to young eighteenth century ministers. Concerning another book written by Mather, Parkman proclaimed it "the most illuminating and Instructing" of many he used as guides in his ministry.⁹

⁷Diary CM, i, pp. 445-446.

⁸Magnalia, General Introduction, paragraph 5; Diary CM, I p. 170n.

⁹Selement, "Publication," p. 229; Ebenezer Parkman, The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman, 1703-1782, ed. Francis G. Walett (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1974), pp. 9, 12.

Perry Miller insisted that Puritan ministers spent "ten or twelve hours a day in their studies," obviously an exaggeration, but Cotton Mather complained that his writing had to be done "by a stolen Hour or two a day." In a biography of his father, Samuel Mather noted that, hoping to discourage "various and impertinent visitors," Cotton Mather placed a sign over his study door imploring in capital letters: "BE SHORT." Yet according to his son, "let him be ever so busy when a friend came to see him, he threw all by." Rather than sacrifice time devoted to pastoral visits and other "public Ministrations," Mather resolved to "bee a more early Riser" in order to "do much more for God" in his studies. As Youngs pointed out, "The cares of his own family, his secular business, ministerial meetings, and pastoral labors generally consumed far more of the . . . minister's time" than did writing. Still, ministerial writing was an integral facet of the pastor's vocation.¹⁰

Burdened by "Parochial Incumberances," ministers such as Cotton Mather wrote their sermons, books, and pamphlets to edify the masses. While some social historians attempt to create a gulf between the intellectual elite and the illiterate masses, G. B. Warden illustrated that "New Englanders were avid readers," and placed reading second only to conversing on his list of colonial Boston's leisure activities. Mather's subject matter and tireless efforts at distribution seem to "bring together" what David Hall asserts was "often sundered, the written word and other actions." Publication was a vital part of pastoral care rather than in conflict with it. If Hall's assumption that those

¹⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, vol 1, *The 17th Century*, p. 21; *Magnalia*, General Introduction, paragraph 5; Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather* (Boston, 1729) *American Culture Series*, Reel 11, number 119, p. 22; *Diary CM*, I, pp. 67, 66; Youngs, *God's Messengers*, p. 57.

books which sold in largest quantity reflect collective ways of thinking," and as he notes "religious books outnumber all other kinds," then it is clear that Cotton Mather took seriously that part of his ministry which directed him to "Feed His Sheep." Seeking to nurture the spiritual and moral growth of his parishioners, as well as minister to their physical needs, Mather "as minister-writer . . . spoke to and for collective needs."¹¹

¹¹ Magnalia, General Introduction, paragraph 5; For one example of the social historian position see Kenneth Lockridge, Literacy in Colonial New England (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974); Warden, Boston, p. 20; David D. Hall, The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. xi; Hall, "World of Print," pp. 164, 1687, 175.

CHAPTER 5

Signalized

In one of the earliest passages in his diary, Cotton Mather recorded a prayer of mixed supplication and thanksgiving regarding his "Employment in the Ministry of the Gospel":

Lord, I know Thou wilt bee with mee.
Lord, I know Thou wilt improve mee
in eminent Services for thy Name.
Lord, I know Thou will signalize mee,
as thou hast my Father, my Grandfathers,
and my Uncles before mee. Hallelujah.¹

Mather had been "reared with the ministry in mind," and dedicated his entire adult life to the ministerial vocation. His theologically rich family heritage, steeped in Puritan tradition, combined with the existential import of his personal experiences to create in Mather a Puritanism that was "both a creative theological force and a profound existential concern." Thus motivated, he conducted "a vigorous pastoral program . . . which included evangelism," benevolent work, pastoral visits, personal catechizings, and the "labor of preaching, . . . and studying."²

Mather's pastoral activities carried him to people "on the streets and wharves, in homes, barracks, ships, taverns, prisons, slave quarters, Indian villages and mission fields." In times of famine, disease, and other hardships Mather exercised his concept of "doing good" in order to minister to both the spiritual and physical needs of his flock. He organized benevolent societies, and encouraged well-to-do parishioners in private acts of charity. Contrary to Perry Miller's assertion that Mather's handling of the poor was "most brutal,"

¹Diary CM, I, pp. 35, 34.

²Lovelace, American Pietism, pp. 12, 30, 13.

the Boston minister showed an exceptional sensitivity to the plight of the less fortunate. Devoting extensive time and energy to pastoral visits, he ministered to the sick, comforted the bereaved, counseled the disturbed, instructed the young, and aided the poor. In the words of his assistant, "He was catholick in his charity to all."³

As the Massachusetts Bay Colony evolved into a more complex and diverse society, Mather's outlook on ministry grew ever more evangelical and inclusive. In his role as "good Shepherd," his inclusion of unchurched New Englanders, blacks, Jews, and Indians, even the populations of other colonies and foreign countries in his prayers and evangelistic efforts, along with his own congregation certainly reveals a desire to "advance the Kingdome of God and of His Christ among them." Living in a time of social and political unrest, which intensified his eschatological sense of urgency, Mather felt compelled to warn "the Flocks against . . . the Snares of Sins whereof they were most in danger." As an elder pastor advising young ministers, he encouraged them to "Intimate the Catholic Spirit . . . in the whole Progress of their Ministry -- Catholicism without Popery." Writing about his father, Samuel Mather stated

That his usefulness might reach beyond his Country, he learned the French & Spanish Tongues, and in his Forty-fifth Year conquered Iroquois Indian; in which he . . . published Treatises for their Instruction.⁴

³Selement, *Keepers*, p. 56; Miller, *Colony to Province*, p. 402; Joshua Gee, cited in Lovelace, *American Pietism*, p. 27.

⁴*Diary CM*, II, p. 143; *Diary CM*, I, p. 347; *Manuductio*, p. 128; Mather, *Life of Cotton Mather*, p. 49; Edmund S. Morgan ascribed to Cotton Mather and other Puritan ministers a narrowness in their ministries, he stressed that they devoted their energies to their town congregation while neglecting the unchurched. Mather's evangelistic efforts seem to warrant a revision of Morgan's tribalism thesis. See Morgan, *Puritan Family*, Chapter VIII, and Selement's comments in *Keepers*, p. 55.

In addition, as George Selement points out, "Mather's evangelistic outreach through book distribution further documents his impact on popular culture."⁵

As a young minister, Cotton Mather proposed to direct "an old Hawker to fill this Countrey with devout and useful Books." Asking the question, "Why do I compose the DISCOURSES, which I Exhibit either in the Press or in the Pulpit?" Mather answered, "LORD, I desire to communicate unto others, what may Animate them or Accomplish them, for Living unto GOD." While his aim in "scattering Books" was mostly directed toward "spiritual edification," Mather produced books, pamphlets, and tracts on numerous topics. Rather than alienating him from his parishioners, Mather's writing demonstrates that he was "alertly responsive to the needs and . . . tastes" of colonial New England. Mather and his colleagues shared many of the day-to-day experiences of their neighbors; they ministered privately to the spiritual needs of individual parishioners, and they carried the life of the community into the pulpit, where they preached "seasonable" sermons.⁶ Cotton Mather's published sermons and essays ranging from "Cures of Sorrow" (1709) to "Thoughts for the Day of Rain" (1712) to "Pillar of Gratitude" (1700) were read and used by church members and the un-churched, rich and poor, Indians and slaves, clergy and laity, and many others. As Emory Elliott observed, ministers with a keen sensitivity to the needs of the people "created a literature continuous with human experience."⁷

⁵Selement, Keepers, p. 69.

⁶Diary CM, I, p. 65; Manuductio, pp. 11, 107; Lovelace, Americcan Pietism, p. 29; Hall, "World of Print," p. 175; Youngs, God's Messenger, p. 137.

⁷Elliott, Power and the Pulpit, p. 11.

Following the work of historians such as David Hall and George Selement, this examination of Cotton Mather's pastoral labors, and the ideology which guided those activities, provides a bridge across which both social and intellectual historians can traverse. At the same time, it has attempted to demonstrate that there was no vast cultural gap between an elite clergy and a secularized laity in colonial New England. The study of the pastoral labors and ideological motivations of Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather reveals an intimacy between pastor and parishioner. That he regularly preached to a congregation of 1500, was in demand as a speaker at other churches and at public meetings, and enjoyed a ready audience for his writing all seem to provide "graphic and unanswerable proof" that Mather remained popular and influential in Puritan New England. As his son wrote in tribute: "If Life consist rather in Works than Years, Your Age, great as Methusela's appears." To the many people he served as pastor, Cotton Mather's ministry was like "an Ointment poured forth."⁸

⁸Lovelace, American Pietism, p. 296; Manuductio, p. 148; Magnalia, Book III, p. 23.

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