A Modell of Christian Charity
John Winthrop (1588–1649)

John Winthrop, first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, grew up in the tiny village of Groton in Suffolk, England, on the former abbey lands his grandfather had purchased at the time of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Winthrop studied for a time at Trinity College, Cambridge, before pursuing a career in law. Swept up in the Puritan movement and seeing little hope in England for godly government and the "pure ordinances" of Christ's church, he sold the family estate and led the first large migration of Puritan refugees to New England.

In the spring of 1630, Winthrop sailed for Massachusetts aboard the Arbella*, a 35-ton ship with a crew of 52 and armed with 28 guns to defend itself from the privateers prowling the busy sea lanes of the North Atlantic. The* Arbella *served as the flagship of what was meant to be a flotilla of eleven ships, but only four set out together in early April, the others following close behind. By the end of 1630, seventeen ships in all had carried about 1,100 settlers to the Puritan settlements in and around Boston. In the decades ahead, the "plantation," as it was known, survived disease, Indian warfare, political and religious dissent, and the return migration of many clergymen and homesick settlers to flourish as a populous and prosperous colony in the slowly expanding empire of British North America.*

At some point, whether before or during the voyage is not known, Winthrop wrote "A Model of Christian Charity." Drawing heavily from the Old and New Testaments, he exhorted his fellow colonists to strengthen the "bonds of affection" that would enable the Puritan community to fulfill its divine mandate. He offered them a "model," or template, after

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John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" *Old South Leaflets* 207 (1916), 7–21 [modernized].

The original copy of Winthrop's lay sermon has not survived. An early copy, not in his handwriting, belongs to the New York Historical Society and includes on the cover page of the manuscript, in yet another hand, nearly all the historical evidence connecting it to Winthrop and to the voyage of the Arbella in 1630. The "Modell of Christian Charity" appeared in print for the first time in 1838.

which they ought to pattern their lives as Christian brothers and sisters. The document makes clear that Winthrop thought the stakes of failing to do so were very high.

Over the past fifty years, the "Model of Christian Charity" has become one of the most frequently quoted documents in American history. But it remained unpublished from 1630 until 1838 and only gradually thereafter made its way into textbook accounts of America's origins. No copy of the discourse in Winthrop's handwriting survives. The earliest manuscript copy, held in the archives of the New York Historical Society, includes a cover page that provides almost all of the evidence we have linking the document to Governor Winthrop and to the Arbella*'s voyage.*

1630

God Almighty, in His most holy and wise providence, has so disposed of the condition of mankind as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection.

The Reason Hereof

First, to hold conformity with the rest of His works, being delighted to show forth the glory of His wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures; and the glory of His power in ordering all these differences for the preservation and good of the whole; and the glory of His greatness, that as it is the glory of princes to have many officers, so this great King will have many stewards, counting Himself more honored in dispensing His gifts to man by man than if He did it by His own immediate hands.

Secondly, that He might have the more occasion to manifest the work of His Spirit: first upon the wicked in moderating and restraining them, so that the rich and mighty should not eat up the poor, nor the poor and despised rise up against their superiors and shake off their yoke; secondly in the regenerate, in exercising His graces in them, as in the great ones, their love, mercy, gentleness, temperance etc.; in the poor and inferior sort, their faith patience, obedience etc.

Thirdly, that every man might have need of other, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection. From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy, etc. out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature, man. Therefore God still reserves the property of these gifts to Himself as in Ezekiel 16:17. He there calls wealth His gold and His silver. In Proverbs 3:9 He claims their service as His due, honor the Lord with the riches, etc. All men being thus (by

divine providence) ranked into two sorts, rich and poor; under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all others are poor according to the former distribution.

There are two rules whereby we are to walk one towards another: JUSTICE and MERCY. These are always distinguished in their act and in their object, yet may they both concur in the same subject in each respect; as sometimes there may be an occasion of showing mercy to a rich man in some sudden danger of distress, and also doing of mere justice to a poor man in regard of some particular contract, etc.

There is likewise a double law by which we are regulated in our conversation one towards another in both the former respects: the law of nature and the law of grace (that is, the moral law or the law of the gospel) to omit the rule of justice as not properly belonging to this purpose otherwise than it may fall into consideration in some particular cases. By the first of these laws man as he was enabled so withall is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Upon this ground stands all the precepts of the moral law, which concerns our dealings with men. To apply this to the works of mercy, this law requires two things. First, that every man afford his help to another in every want or distress. Secondly, that he performed this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own goods, according to that of our Savior, (Matt. 7:12) "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you. . . ." This was practiced by Abraham and Lot in entertaining the angels and the old man of Gibea.[1]

The law of grace or the gospel has some difference from the former as in these respects. First, the law of nature was given to man in the estate of innocency; this of the gospel in the estate of regeneracy. Secondly, the former propounds one man to another, as the same flesh and image of god; this as a brother in Christ also, and in the communion of the same spirit and so teaches us to put a difference between Christians and others. *Do good to all, especially to the household of faith*; upon this ground the Israelites were to put a difference between the brethren of such as were strangers though not of Canaanites. Thirdly, the law of nature could give no rules for dealing with enemies, for all are to be considered as friends in the state of innocency, but the Gospel commands love to an enemy. Proof: if your enemy hunger, feed him; love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.[2]

This law of the gospel propounds likewise a difference of seasons and occasions. There is a time when a Christian must sell all and give to the poor, as they did in the Apostles' times. There is a time also when a Christian (though they

[1]Genesis 18–19; Judges 19
[2]Matthew 5:44

give not all yet) must give beyond their ability, as they of Macedonia. Likewise community of perils calls for extraordinary liberality, and so does community in some special service for the Church. Lastly, when there is no other means whereby our Christian brother may be relieved in his distress, we must help him beyond our ability, rather than tempt God in putting him upon help by miraculous or extraordinary means.

This duty of mercy is exercised in the kinds: *giving, lending,* and *forgiving*.

Question—What rule shall a man observe in giving in respect of the measure?

Answer—If the time and occasion be ordinary, he is to give out of his abundance. Let him lay aside as God has blessed him. If the time and occasion be extraordinary, he must be ruled by them; taking this with all, that then a man cannot likely do too much, especially if he may leave himself and his family under probable means of comfortable subsistence.

Objection—A man must lay up for posterity, the fathers lay up for posterity and children and he "is worse than an infidel" that "provides not for his own."[3]

Answer—For the first, it is plain that it being spoken by way of comparison, it must be meant of the ordinary and usual course of fathers and cannot extend to times and occasions extraordinary. For the other place, the Apostle speaks against such as walked inordinately, and it is without question that he is worse than an infidel who through his own sloth and voluptuousness shall neglect to provide for his family.

Objection—"The wise man's eyes are in his head" says Solomon, "and foresees the plague;"[4] therefore we must forecast and lay up against evil times when he or his may stand in need of all he can gather.

Answer—This very argument Solomon uses to persuade to liberality, "Cast thy bread upon the waters"[5] and "for thou know not what evil may come upon the land."[6] "Make your friends of the riches of iniquity."[7] You will ask how this shall be? Very well. For first he that gives to the poor, lends to the Lord and He will repay him even in this life a hundred fold to him or his—The righteous is ever merciful and lends and his seed enjoys the blessing; and besides we know what advantage it will be to us in the day of account when many such witnesses shall stand forth for us to witness the improvement of our talent. And I would know

[3]I Timothy 5:8
[4]Ecclesiastes 2:14
[5]Ecclesiastes 11:1
[6]Ecclesiastes 11:2
[7]Luke 16:9

of those who plead so much for laying up for time to come, whether they hold that to be Gospel, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon Earth,"[8] etc. If they acknowledge it, what extent will they allow it? If only to those primitive times, let them consider the reason whereupon our Savior grounds it. The first is that they are subject to the moth, the rust, the thief. Secondly, they will steal away the heart; where the treasure is there will the heart be also. The reasons are of like force at all times. Therefore the exhortation must be general and perpetual, with always in respect of the love and affection to riches and in regard of the things themselves when any special service for the church or particular distress of our brother do call for the use of them; otherwise it is not only lawful but necessary to lay up as Joseph did to have ready upon such occasions, as the Lord (whose stewards we are of them) shall call for them from us. Christ gives us an instance of the first when he sent his disciples for the ass, and bids them answer the owner thus, "the Lord has need of him." So when the Tabernacle was to be built, He sends to his people to call for their silver and gold, etc.; and yields them no other reason but that it was for His work. When Elisha comes to the widow of Sareptah and finds her preparing to make ready her pittance for herself and family, he bids her first provide for him, he challenges first God's part which she must first give before she must serve her own family.[9] All these teach us that the Lord looks that when he is pleased to call for his right in any thing we have, our own Interest we have must stand aside till his turn be served. For the other, we need look no further than to that of I John: "He who has this world's goods and sees his brother to need and shuts up his compassion from him, how dwell the love of God in him,"[10] which comes punctually to this conclusion: if our brother be in want and you can't help him, you need not make doubt what you should do; if you love God you must help him.

Question—What rule must we observe in lending?

Answer—You must observe whether your brother has present, or probable, or possible means of re-paying you; if there be none of these, you must give him according to his necessity, rather than lend him as he requires. If he has present means of re-paying you, you are to look at him not as an act of mercy, but by way of commerce, wherein you are to walk by the rule of justice; but if his means of re-paying you be only probable or possible, then is he an object of your mercy, you must lend him, though there be danger of losing it, "If any of thy brethren be poor," etc., "thou shall lend him sufficient."[11] That men might not shift off

[8]Matthew 6:19–21
[9]I Kings 17
[10]I John 3:17
[11]Deuteronomy 15:7

this duty by the apparent hazard, He tells them that though the year of Jubilee were at hand (when he must remit it, if he were not able to repay it before) yet he must lend him and that cheerfully: "It may not grieve thee to give him" says He; and because some might object, "why so I should soon impoverish myself and my family," He adds "with all your work," etc.; for our Savior, "From him that would borrow of thee turn not away."[12]

Question—What rule must we observe in forgiving?

Answer—Whether you did lend by way of commerce or in mercy, if he have nothing to pay, you must forgive (except in cause where you have a surety or a lawful pledge). Every seventh year the creditor was to quit that which he lent to his brother if he were poor as appears—"save when there shall be no poor with thee."[13] In all these and like cases, Christ was a general rule, "Whatsoever you would that men do to you, do you the same to them also."[14]

Question—What rule must we observe and walk by in cause of community of peril?

Answer—The same as before, but with more enlargement towards others and less respect towards ourselves and our own right. Hence it was that in the primitive Church they sold all, had all things in common, neither did any man say that which he possessed was his own. Likewise in their return out of the Captivity, because the work was great for the restoring of the church and the danger of enemies was common to all, Nehemiah exhorts the Jews to liberality and readiness in remitting their debts to their brethren, and disposing liberally of his own to such as wanted, and stand not upon his own due, which he might have demanded of them. Thus did some of our forefathers in times of persecution in England, and so did many of the faithful of other churches, whereof we keep an honorable remembrance of them; and it is to be observed that both in Scriptures and later stories of the churches that such as have been most bountiful to the poor saints, especially in these extraordinary times and occasions, God has left them highly commended to posterity, as Zaccheus,[15] Cornelius,[16] Dorcas,[17] Bishop Hooper,[18] the Cutler of Brussells[19] and diverse others. Observe again that the Scripture give no cause to restrain any from be-

[12]Matthew 5:42
[13]Deuteronomy 15:2–8
[14]Matthew 5:42
[15]Luke 19
[16]Acts 10
[17]Acts 9
[18]John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester, was martyred in 1555 for his faith by Queen Mary I.
[19]Giles Tillerman, a cutler (knife-maker), was martyred in 1544 at Brussels for his faith.

ing over liberal this way; but all men to the liberal and cheerful practice hereof by the sweetest promises; as to instance one for many

> Is not this the fast I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness, to take off the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke, to deal the bread to the hungry and to bring the poor that wander into your house, when you see the naked to cover them. And then shall the light break forth as the morning, and your health shall grow speedily, your righteousness shall go before God, and the glory of the Lord shall embrace you; then you shall call and the Lord shall answer you.… If you pour out thy soul to the hungry, then shall the light spring out in darkness, and the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy the soul in draught, and make fat the bones, you shall be like a watered garden, and they shall be of you that shall build the old waste places.[20]

On the contrary, most heavy curses are laid upon such as are straightened towards the Lord and His people, "Curse you Meroshe because you came not to help the Lord.…"[21] "He who shuts his ears from hearing the cry of the poor, he shall cry and shall not be heard."[22] "Go you cursed into everlasting fire.… I was hungry and you fed me not."[23] "He that sows sparingly shall reap sparingly."[24]

Having already set forth the practice of mercy according to the rule of God's law, it will be useful to lay open the grounds of it also, being the other part of the Commandment, and that is the affection from which this exercise of mercy must arise. The Apostle tells us that this love is the fulfilling of the law, not that it is enough to love our brother and go no further; but in regard of the excellency of his parts giving any motion to the other as the soul to the body and the power it has to set all the faculties on work in the outward exercise of this duty. As when we bid one make the clock strike, he does not lay hand on the hammer, which is the immediate instrument of the sound, but sets on work the first mover or main wheel, knowing that will certainly produce the sound which he intends. So the way to draw men to works of mercy is not by force of argument from the goodness or necessity of the work; for though this course may enforce a rational mind to some present act of mercy, as is frequent in experience, yet it cannot work such a habit in a soul as shall make it prompt upon all occasions to produce the same effect, but by framing these affections

[20]Isaiah 58:6–12
[21]Judges 5:23
[22]Proverbs 21:13
[23]Matthew 25:41–42
[24]II Corinthians 9:6

of love in the heart which will as natively bring forth the other, as any cause does produce effect.

The definition which the Scripture gives us of love is this: "Love is the bond of perfection."[25] First, it is a bond or ligament. Secondly it makes the work perfect. There is no body but consists of parts and that which knit these parts together, gives the body its perfection, because it makes each part so contiguous to others as thereby they do mutually participate with each other, both in strength and infirmity, in pleasure and pain. To instance in the most perfect of all bodies: Christ and his church make one body. The several parts of this body, considered a part before they were united, were as disproportionate and as much disordering as so many contrary qualities or elements, but when Christ comes and by his spirit and love knits all these parts to himself and each to other, it is become the most perfect and best proportioned body in the world. "Christ, by whom all the body being knit together by every joint for the furniture thereof, according to the effectual power which is in the measure of every perfection of parts,"[26] "a glorious body without spot or wrinkle,"[27] the ligaments hereof being Christ, or his love, for Christ is love.[28] So this definition is right: "Love is the bond of perfection."

From hence we may frame these conclusions. First of all, true Christians are one body in Christ, "You are the body of Christ and members of their part."[29] Secondly, the ligaments of this body which knit together are love. Thirdly, no body can be perfect which wants its proper ligament. Fourthly, all the parts of this body being thus united are made so contiguous in a special relation as they must needs partake of each other's strength and infirmity: joy and sorrow, wealth and woe. "If one member suffers, all suffer with it, if one be in honor, all rejoice with it."[30] Fifthly, this sensibleness and sympathy of each other's conditions will necessarily infuse into each part a native desire and endeavor to strengthen, defend, preserve, and comfort the other.

To insist a little on this conclusion being the product of all the former, the truth hereof will appear both by precept and pattern. "You ought to lay down your lives for the brethren."[31] "Bear you one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."[32] For patterns we have that first of our Savior who out of his

[25]Colossians 3:14
[26]Ephesians 4:15–16
[27]Ephesians 5:27
[28]I John 4:8
[29]I Corinthians 12:27
[30]I Corinthians 12:26
[31]John 3:10
[32]Galatians 6:2

good will in obedience to his father, becoming a part of this body, and being knit with it in the bond of love, found such a native sensibleness of our infirmities and sorrows as he willingly yielded himself to death to ease the infirmities of the rest of his body, and so held their sorrows. From the like sympathy of parts did the Apostles and many thousands of the saints lay down their lives for Christ. Again, the like we may see in the members of this body among themselves. Paul could have been contented to have been separated from Christ, that the Jews might not be cut off from the body.[33] It is very observable what he professes of his affectionate partaking with every member: "who is weak" says he "and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not;"[34] and again, "therefore we are comforted because you were comforted."[35] Of Epaphroditus he speaks that he regarded not his own life to do him service.[36] So Phebe and others are called the servants of the church.[37] Now it is apparent that they served not for wages, or by constraint, but out of love. The like we shall find in the histories of the church in all ages, the sweet sympathy of affections which was in the members of this body one towards another, their cheerfulness in serving and suffering together, how liberal they were without repining, harborers without grudging and helpful without reproaching; and all from hence, because they had fervent love amongst them, which only make the practice of mercy constant and easy.

The next consideration is how this love comes to be wrought. Adam in his first estate was a perfect model of mankind in all their generations, and in him this love was perfected in regard of the habit. But Adam rent himself from his Creator, rent all his posterity also one from another; whence it comes that every man is born with this principle in him, to love and seek himself only, and thus a man continues till Christ comes and takes possession of the soul and infuses another principle, love to God and our brother. And this latter having continual supply from Christ, as the head and root by which he is united, gets the predomining in the soul, so by little and little expels the former. "Love comes of God and everyone that loves is born of God,"[38] so that this love is the fruit of the new birth, and none can have it but the new Creature. Now when this quality is thus formed in the souls of men, it works like the Spirit upon the dry bones. Ezek. 37: "Bone came to bone."[39] It gathers together the scattered bones, or perfect old man Adam, and knits them into one body again in Christ, whereby a man is become again a living soul.

[33]Romans 9
[34]II Corinthians 11:29
[35]II Corinthians 7:13
[36]Philippians 2:30
[37]Romans 16:1, 27
[38]I John 4:7
[39]Ezekiel 37:7

The third consideration is concerning the exercise of this love which is twofold, inward or outward. The outward has been handled in the former preface of this discourse. For unfolding the other we must take in our way that maxim of philosophy *Simile simili gaudet*, or like will do like; for as it is things which are turned with disaffection to each other, the ground of it is from a dissimilitude arising from the contrary or different nature of the things themselves; for the ground of love is an apprehension of some resemblance in things loved to that which affects it. This is the cause why the Lord loves the creature, so far as it has any of his Image in it; he loves his elect because they are like himself, he beholds them in his beloved son. So a mother loves her child, because she thoroughly conceives a resemblance of herself in it. Thus it is between the members of Christ. Each discerns, by the works of the Spirit, his own Image and resemblance in another, and therefore cannot but love him as he loves himself. Now when the soul, which is of a sociable nature, finds anything like to itself, it is like Adam when Eve was brought to him. She must have it one with herself. This is flesh of my flesh (says the soul) and bone of my bone. She conceives a great delight in it, therefore she desires nearness and familiarity with it. She has a great propensity to do it good and receives such content in it, as fearing the miscarriage of her beloved, she bestows it in the inmost closet of her heart. She will not endure that it shall want any good which she can give it. If by occasion she be withdrawn from the company of it, she is still looking towards the place where she left her beloved. If she heard it groan, she is with it presently. If she find it sad and disconsolate, she sighs and moans with it. She has no such joy as to see her beloved merry and thriving. If she see it wronged, she cannot hear it without passion. She sets no bounds to her affections, nor has any thought of reward. She finds recompense enough in the exercise of her love towards it. We may see this acted to life in Jonathan and David. Jonathan, a valiant man, endowed with the spirit of Christ, so soon as he discovers the same spirit in David had presently his heart knit to him by this ligament of love, so that it is said he loved him as his own soul. He takes so great pleasure in him, that he strips himself to adorn his beloved. His father's kingdom was not so precious to him as his beloved David. David shall have it with all his heart, himself desires no more but that he may be near to him to rejoice in his good. He chooses to converse with him in the wilderness even to the hazard of his own life, rather than with the great courtiers in his father's palace. When he sees danger towards him, he spares neither rare pains nor peril to direct it. When injury was offered his beloved David, he would not bear it, though from his own father; and when they must part for a season only, they thought their hearts would have broke for sorrow, had not their affections found vent by abundance of tears. Other instances might be brought to show the nature of this affection, as of Ruth and Naomi, and many others; but this truth is cleared enough.

If any shall object that it is not possible that love should be bred or upheld without hope of requital, it is granted; but that is not our cause; for this love is always under reward. It never gives, but it always receives with advantage; first, in regard that among the members of the same body, love and affection are reciprocal in a most equal and sweet kind of commerce. Secondly, in regard of the pleasure and content that the exercise of love carries with it, as we may see in the natural body. The mouth is at all the pains to receive and mince the food which serves for the nourishment of all the other parts of the body, yet it has no cause to complain; for first the other parts send back by several passages a due proportion of the same nourishment, in a better form for the strengthening and comforting the mouth. Secondly the labor of the mouth is accompanied with such pleasure and content as far exceeds the pains it takes. So is it in all the labor of love among Christians. First, the party loving reaps love again, as was showed before, which the soul covets more than all the wealth in the world. Secondly, nothing yields more pleasure and content to the soul than when it finds that which it may love fervently, for to love and live beloved is the soul's paradise, both here and in heaven. In the state of wedlock there be many comforts to bear out the troubles of that condition; but let such as have tried the most say if there be any sweetness in that condition comparable to the exercise of mutual love.

From former considerations arise these conclusions.

First, this love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary.

Secondly, this love is as absolutely necessary to the being of the body of Christ, as the sinews and other ligaments of a natural body are to the being of that body.

Thirdly, this love is a divine, spiritual nature free, active, strong, courageous, permanent; undervaluing all things beneath its proper object; and of all the graces, this makes us nearer to resemble the virtues of our heavenly father.

Fourthly, it rests in the love and welfare of its beloved. For the full and certain knowledge of these truths concerning the nature, use, and excellency of this grace, that which the Holy Ghost has left recorded may give full satisfaction,[40] which is needful for every true member of this lovely body of the Lord Jesus, to work upon their hearts by prayer, meditation, continual exercise at least of the special [influence] of this grace, till Christ be formed in them and they in him, all in each other, knit together by this bond of love.

It rests now to make some application of this discourse by the present design, which gave the occasion of writing of it. Herein are four things to be propounded: first the persons, secondly the work, thirdly the end, fourthly the means.

[40] I Corinthians 13

Firstly, for the persons. We are a company professing our selves fellow members of Christ, in which respect only though we were absent from each other many miles, and had our employments as far distant, yet we ought to account ourselves knit together by this bond of love, and live in the exercise of it, if we would have comfort of our being in Christ. This was notorious in the practice of the Christians in former times; as is testified of the Waldenses, from the mouth of one of the adversaries, Æneas Sylvius, "mutuo [ament] penè antequam norunt"—they used to love any of their own religion even before they were acquainted with them.

Secondly, for the work we have in hand. It is by a mutual consent, through a special overvaluing providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seek out a place of co-habitation and consortship under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical. In such cases as this, the care of the public must oversway all private respects, by which, not only conscience, but mere civil policy, does bind us. For it is a true rule that particular estates cannot subsist in the ruin of the public.

Thirdly, the end is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord; the comfort and increase of the body of Christ whereof we are members; that ourselves and posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world, to serve the Lord and work out our Salvation under the power and purity of His holy ordinances.

Fourthly, for the means whereby this must be effected. They are twofold, a conformity with the work and end we aim at. These we see are extraordinary, therefore we must not content ourselves with usual ordinary means. Whatsoever we did or ought to have done when we lived in England, the same must we do, and more also, where we go. That which the most in their churches maintain as a truth in profession only, we must bring into familiar and constant practice, as in this duty of love. We must love brotherly without dissimulation; we must love one another with a pure heart fervently. We must bear one another's burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren, neither must we think that the Lord will bear with such failings at our hands as he does from those among whom we have lived; and that for three reasons.

Firstly, in regard of the more near bond of marriage between Him and us, wherein He has taken us to be His after a most strict and peculiar manner, which will make Him the more jealous of our love and obedience. So He tells the people of Israel, you only have I known of all the families of the Earth, therefore will I punish you for your transgressions. Secondly, because the Lord will be sanctified in them that come near Him. We know that there were many that corrupted the service of the Lord, some setting up altars before His own,

others offering both strange fire and strange sacrifices also; yet there came no fire from heaven or other sudden judgment upon them, as did upon Nadab and Abihu, who yet we may think did not sin presumptuously. Thirdly, when God gives a special commission He looks to have it strictly observed in every article. When He gave Saul a commission to destroy Amaleck, He indented with him upon certain articles, and because he failed in one of the least, and that upon a fair pretence, it lost him the kingdom which should have been his reward if he had observed his commission.

Thus stands the cause between God and us. We are entered into covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a commission, the Lord has given us leave to draw our own articles. We have professed to enterprise these actions, upon these and those ends, we have hereupon besought Him of favor and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then has He ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, [and] will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it; but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles which are the ends we have propounded, and, dissembling without God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us; be revenged of such a perjured people, and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God.[41] For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make other's conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "the Lord make it like that of New England," For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall

[41] Micah 6:8

deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

And to shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel.[42] Beloved, there is now set before us life and good, death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in His ways and to keep his commandments and His ordinance and His laws, and the articles of our covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other gods, our pleasures and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

Therefore let us choose life, that we and our seed may live by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity.

[42]Deuteronomy 30

Speech to the General Court
John Winthrop (1588–1649)

Representative government was part of the New England Way from the beginning. Voters were termed "Freemen," a designation rooted in medieval England but having a special New England twist. In addition to being adult male property owners (and thus free, or independent of bondage to others), voters and office holders in Massachusetts Bay were required to be church members, which in effect certified that they were fit to uphold the covenant. The township was the basic unit of local government. Freemen in the towns elected Deputies to the General Court, the assembly charged with overseeing the commonwealth. Among the duties of the General Court was the annual election of a Governor.

John Winthrop was usually the Governor, often the watchdog of political orthodoxy, always the leading citizen of Boston. But even so prominent a man felt the effects of the "great questions that have troubled the country," which he defined as "the authority of the magistrates and the liberty of the people." In 1645 the General Court accused Winthrop of abusing his power by interfering in local matters. He was acquitted but humiliated, and he took the opportunity to speak to the Court about the fundamental problem of New England politics: liberty and authority in a covenantal culture.

1645

I suppose something may be expected from me upon this charge that is befallen me, which moves me to speak now to you; yet I intend not to intermeddle in the proceedings of the court, or with any of the persons concerned therein. Only I bless God that I see an issue of this troublesome business. I also acknowledge the justice of the court and, for mine own part, I am well satisfied, I was publicly charged, and I am publicly and legally acquitted, which is all I did expect or desire. And though this be sufficient for my justification before men, yet not so before the God, who has seen so much amiss in my dispensations (and

Robert C. Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1869), II:339–42.

even in this affair) as calls me to be humble. For to be publicly and criminally charged in this court is matter of humiliation (and I desire to make a right use of it), notwithstanding I be thus acquitted. If her father had spit in her face (says the Lord concerning Miriam) should she not have been ashamed seven days?[1] Shame had lien upon her, whatever the occasion had been. I am unwilling to stay you from your urgent affairs, yet give me leave (upon this special occasion) to speak a little more to this assembly. It may be of some good use to inform and rectify the judgments of some of the people, and may prevent such distempers as have arisen amongst us.

The great questions that have troubled the country are about the authority of the magistrates and the liberty of the people. It is yourselves who have called us to this office, and being called by you, we have our authority from God, in way of an ordinance, such as has the image of God eminently stamped upon it, the contempt and violation whereof had been vindicated with examples of divine vengeance. I entreat you to consider that when you choose magistrates, you take them from among yourselves, men subject to like passions as you are. Therefore when you see infirmities in us, you should reflect upon your own, and that would make you bear the more with us, and not be severe censurers of the failings of your magistrates when you have continual experience of the like infirmities in yourselves and others.

We account him a good servant who breaks not his covenant. The covenant between you and us is the oath you have taken of us, which is to this purpose, that we shall govern you and judge your causes by the rules of God's laws and our own, according to our best skill. When you agree with a workman to build you a ship or house, etc., he undertakes as well for his skill as for his faithfulness, for it is his profession, and you pay him for both. But when you call one to be a magistrate, he does not profess nor undertake to have sufficient skill for that office, nor can you furnish him with gifts, etc., therefore you must run the hazard of his skill and ability. But if he fails in faithfulness, which by his oath he is bound unto, that he must answer for. If it fall out that the case be clear to common apprehension, and the rule clear also, if he transgress here, the error is not in the skill, but in the evil of the will: it must be required of him. But if the case be doubtful, or the rule doubtful, to men of such understanding and parts as your magistrates are, if your magistrates should err here, yourselves must bear it.

For the other point concerning liberty, I observe a great mistake in the country about that. There is a two-fold liberty, natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt) and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, has liberty

[1]Numbers 12:14

to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts: *omnes sumus licentiâ deteriores*.[2] This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it.

The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal; it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man, in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard not only of your goods, but of your lives, if need be. Whatsoever crosses this is not authority, but a distemper thereof. This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. The woman's own choice makes such a man her husband; yet being so chosen, he is her lord, and she is to be subject to him, yet in a way of liberty, not of bondage; and a true wife accounts her subjection her honor and freedom, and would not think her condition safe and free but in her subjection to her husband's authority. Such is the liberty of the church under the authority of Christ, her king and husband; his yoke is so easy and sweet to her as a bride's ornaments; and if through forwardness or wantonness, etc., she shake it off at any time, she is at no rest in her spirit until she takes it up again; and whether her lord smiles upon her and embraces her in his arms, or whether he frowns, or rebukes, or smites her, she apprehends the sweetness of his love in all, and is refreshed, supported, and instructed by every such dispensation of his authority over her. On the other side, you know who they are that complain of this yoke and say, let us break their bands, etc., we will not have this man to rule over us. Even so, brethren, it will be between you and your magistrates. If you stand for your natural corrupt liberties, and will do what is good in your own eyes, you will not endure the least weight of authority, but will murmur, and oppose, and be always striving to shake off that yoke; but if you will be satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties such as Christ allows you, then will you quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority which is set over you, in all the administrations of it, for your good. Wherein, if we fail at any time, we hope we shall be willing (by God's assistance) to hearken to good advice from any of you, or in any other way of God; so shall your liberties be preserved, in upholding the honor and power of authority amongst you.

[2] "We all degenerate in the absence of control." Publius Terentius Afer, *Heauton Timorumenos* III, I:74.