A Glimpse of the American Mind: the Diaries of Increase and Cotton Mather

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Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the relation that the soul establishes with the temporal and spatial setting of Puritan New England in the diaries of Increase Mather, "the foremost American Puritan", and Cotton Mather, an authentic herald of God in his community. Ceaseless introspection resulted from the conviction that all spiritual progress was centered on the individual, places the diaries in a perpetual state of becoming. The manifold process that the soul undergoes - struggles, backslidings, transformation, improvement, rapture, longing – does not express the sequence of a life time journey; the Puritan could experience daily contradictory, paradoxical, consuming states going from utter despair to bliss and back. And all is lived with the hope of a future establishment of a new order, a City of God after the end of Parusia, the end of history.

Key Words*: diary, communal history, typology, millennialism, Providence.*

In seventeenth - century New England, keeping a diary was a usual as well as extremely necessary activity; it was part of the Puritans' spiritual practice. Tom Webster locates the rise of spiritual diaries in seventeenth century England as a "response to the specific demands of a particular religiosity" (40). Self-scrutiny was central to the life of the Puritan community. Perseverant introspection played the part of a supreme court of the soul and the diary was a volume of "proceedings" of the encounters between the believer's past self and present self (when re-reading the entries), and of foretelling elements pertaining to a projection of the self (an improved self) into the future. Being linked to the most intimate thoughts of a person, the inner struggles and rejoicings, the diary is, of course, part of what Kenneth B. Murdock called „personal literature", more precisely the base of this pyramid (100). Included in the same category, autobiographies[1] (revised diaries) and biographies (further formalization of diaries) were mainly directed towards the others as guidebooks or didactic works of piety offering models to follow by emphasizing the concept of "calling" and, connected to the migration from Old England to the New World, that of "conversion", both intertwined with a strong reliance on Providence. Best examples in this respect are John Bunyan's autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) and that of Thomas Shepard and the biography of John Cotton written by John Norton (*Abel being Dead yet Speaketh* - 1658). These writings aimed at spurring the community towards an *imitatio* that would have maintained unchanged the ways of the first settlers as the seventeenth century was advancing and the "New Englander's pristine religious ardour was waning" (Murdock 128).

[1] Daniel B. Shea Jr. speaks at length about the traditional patterns of this type of Puritan writing in his book *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1968.

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Increase Mather (1639-1723) was a very important figure of the Puritan establishment of Massachusetts being involved in the government of the colony, the administration of Harvard College, and the Salem witch trials. He matriculated at Harvard at the age of 12 but then, due to weak health continued his studies with his tutor, Reverend John Norton of Ipswich. After graduating from Harvard, he completed an MA at Trinity College. In 1692 he received the first honorary degree in the New World, by which he became a Doctor of Sacred Theology (Middlekauf 82-95).

The diary of Increase Mather who has been called by Michael G. Hall "the last American Puritan" (2) was first published in 1900 by Samuel A. Green, member of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The manuscript had been given to the society in 1858 by Elizabeth Belknap and covers the period between March 1675 and December 1676. There is no other published edition of the rest of the diary. Michael G. Hall used the manuscripts for his biography but the typescripts remained in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Increase Mather had an unparalleled influence over Massachusetts Bay colony and his success was due mainly to his rhetoric. The way in which he chose to bewail the declension of New England was not by comparing contemporary situation with better past times, but to connect it with a bleak future. According to Middlekauff's threefold biography, typology is allotted to Increase Mather. He used this device with strong belief in the sacred destiny of the Massachusetts Bay colony provided it would not renounce its initial covenant.[2] *History of King Philip's War* (1676) is a most suggestive example in this respect. Typology will also be applied in his experience with astronomy which inspired three books: *Kometographia, Or a Discourse Concerning Comets* (1683), *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (1684), and the *Doctrine of Divine Providence* (1684). All in all, Increase Mather wrote more than 125 works comprising history, doctrine, books on witches, the first American biography –*The Life and Death of That Reverend Man of God, Mr. Richard Mather* (1670) -, the first book about comets in English, proselytizing sermons, and jeremiads proving the universality of his interests.

The diary uncovers intense religious emotionalism (not at the same height as Cotton Mather's was though) and records, in short entries, the preparation for sermons by intense study, for Sabbath by self-analyses and in longer entries a regular monthly assessment of his spiritual state. The beginning is under the sign of uncertainty due to his having suffered a great illness five years before, which had brought him very near death. This encounter made every moment even more special than before and signaled the necessity of more intense self-scrutiny. That is why the longest and most detailed entries in his diary are those regarding causes of humiliation followed by requests to God or matters of supplication. The diary opens with questions that lead to such spiritual analysis:

> And is it so indeed? Doe I live to write any thing in the year 1 675 ? Who could have thought that it should have bin so, whenn I was so near unto death above five years agoe ?

[2] Increase Mather was a strong opponent to the Half-Way Covenant as representing spiritual declension for New England. He will eventually accept it after the decision on the matter of the Synod held in 1662. Nevertheless, his opposition will continue regarding the liberal practices to which the Half-Way Covenant gave way, for example the one advocated by Solomon Stoddard who argued that each person who has good conversation and knowledge can approach the Lord's Supper.

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> Providence doth now put me upon Humiliatio" extraordinary ; & there is cause for it. 1. particular and private (…) 2. As to the publick state of things (I. Mather 5)[3]

The private causes for humiliation are always listed as rooted in old sins and feeble present progress. The future dimension belongs to the sections titled "Requests to God". The time to come is placed under God's providence regarding both private and public affairs:

> Causes of Humiliation 1. private, old sins, present progress. My weakness & deficiency in respect of gifts. My Sam. not well this day. Publick. 1. Backward spring. The weather unseasonable. 2. [9] The churches (espetiallyy thatt to which I am related) in a low condition. 3. There are scandalous reports of some malefactors belonging to this church, which is matter of great Humiliaton. 4. There like to be a Famin in Virginia, & amongst ourselvs, if Ld be not mercyfull. Requests to God in ct. 1 . That Hee would in his owne Time send a further supply as to ye Ministry in this church. 2. Be mercifull as to the season. As to my selfe 1. give more grace & enlarge ye gifts of his spirit. 2. that his presence may be with me, in work I am called to. In Labors in writing, e in my ministry on Lords days e Lecture days. 3. wisedome to goe in and out before his people, over whom Hee hath set me; Amen (I. Mather 8)[4]

This spiritual discipline and use of time so that such analyses would regularly be done will be later applied extremely thoroughly by his son, Cotton. The entries are not only of spiritual interest. They are also accounts of various aspects of or influencing the life of the community. Thus we find out about the desolate state of New England in the "sickly time" (I. Mather 29)[5] of King Philip's War: the trade was dead, the country poor, famine, the churches in low condition, low Protestant interest, and to these added the small pox epidemics – "The Lord hath lifted up his hand against Boston" (I. Mather 20), Increase Mather concludes in an entry on December 2, 1675. However, regardless of the hard times it goes through, New England preserves its place in sacred history and is still identified with the New Jerusalem. In April 1676 Increase prays that "The Lord have mercy on his Jerusalem" (I. Mather 26).

As suggested by the diary, time is extremely valuable for the Puritan divine with respect to his study. The attitude is obviously different from Michael Wigglesworth's confusing stance regarding the time dedicated to intellectual activity. There are numerous entries which begin with "interrupted in study by…". Visits and conversations are often a nuisance. On June 22, 1675 he complains: "P.M. at mr Peter Thacher and with Governor about prisoners so that time miserably lost as to my study." (I. Mather 13). Even if he grieves much and prays arduously for his children's sickness he (maybe unconsciously) records: "Interrupted in studies by Nathaniels illness."[6], "could doe little at my study bec of childrens sickness." (I. Mather 13)[7]. The diary abounds in short entries which only mention his having studied sermons. They were useful in keeping an account of the rhythm in which he worked and perhaps proved reviving in times of intellectual idleness if ever Increase Mather experienced such a state. Time for him meant

[3] March 25, 1675.
[4] April 21, 1675.
[5] May 9, 1676: "This is a sickly time".
[6] April 7, 1675.
[7] April 9, 1675.

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perseverant study as related to what was his calling: that of an outstanding intellectual useful for his own community. As Williston Walker states, he was "disproportionately devoted to his study rather than to the visitations of his flock" because he thought that the pulpit represented the real ministerial power (Walker 185). In *Parentator*, Cotton Mather writes that his father used to study sixteen hours a day preparing elaborately for his duties (181). Of course, he also sets apart time for private, secret fasts and days of humiliation as well as for prayer. The answers do not delay to come and he receives assurances of his godly, almost prophetic mission:

> (…) in the morning as I was sitting alone in my study, T was suddenly moved by ye spirit of God, e wonderfully melted into Tears, with a firm perswasion that God would make me his mouth, & owne ye words I should speak, in his name, so as that much good should be done thereby : Amen. (I. Mather 19)[8]

The prophetic implications of Increase Mather's message were strongly highlighted in his jeremiads[9], the first of which had opened, a year before the above entry was written, a series that was going to make him famous: *Day of Trouble is Near* (1674). The millenarist tone and the typological perspective on both the time of the forefathers and the time of his generation urge the members of the community towards internalizing the doctrine of the Biblical text and apply it to their own life. The diary records many causes of distress as regards the situation in New England. However, sincere self analysis and improvement of one's spiritual state contribute to the health of the community. The personal history of each individual of his flock as well as his own are, in Mather's view, deeply linked to the communal history. The diary is the record, behind the curtain if we may say so, of how he played his part in both the national and individual covenant with God.

Member of a most celebrated family of Puritan divines, the grandson of John Cotton and Richard Mather and Increase Mather's son, and the youngest Harvard graduate, Cotton Mather (1663-1728) followed in the steps of his predecessors in supporting and strengthening the New England way as a pastor of the "church in the wilderness" and as a writer of more than 450 works. We have already discussed his perspective on history especially in his vast *Magnalia Christi Americana*.

In 1911, the Massachusetts Historical Society published for the first time two thick volumes titled *Diary of Cotton Mather*. The habit of putting thoughts on paper was inherited by Cotton Mather from his father, Increase Mather, it is specified in the preface, but the latter's leaning towards a somewhat morbid introspection became exaggeration in the former (Chauncey Ford XIV)[10]. The initial title of this lengthy writing had been *Reserved Memorials* and it is in fact, regarding the younger years at least, a revised version of some previous notes. In an entry made on September 1683, Cotton Mather mentions that he had kept a diary of his "daily Actions (…).That I may but just exemplify the Watch which the Lord in those Dayes helped mee to keep over my Walk, I will here transcribe only the Actions of one Day, namely the first occurring in that part of the Diaries then written by mee." (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 72). Their aim had been that of assisting a spiritual exercise that he decided to practice in order to keep himself "up and

[8] November 10, 1675.
[9] The jeremiad had, of all sermon styles, the strongest grasp on the American Puritan imagination.
[10] All references to this Mather's diary will be to this edition, cited as *Diary of Cotton Mather*.

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doing". He was going to record twenty piously dedicated actions in a day. He eventually gave up the first diary because it considered it a waste of time. The published diary is consequently not a classical one, it does not record exterior events or the author's acts, but rather portrays the Puritan soul in its pilgrimage through a wilderness of sin to the light of God's countenance that Michael Wigglesworth, and every Puritan for that matter, begged so much for. It does not contain many elements of historical value as they trace, in Sacvan Bercovitch's esteem, "the growth of a prophet's mind in opposition to, not within, a recalcitrant world" (100). The diary is thereby not mainly a historical document, but a record of a Puritan divine's walk with God along his life, moving between seasons of great assurance and discouraging self-accusations. Hundreds of pages show him taking his religious observances "as men take opium" (Chauncey Ford XIX). Interestingly enough, for Cotton Mather each year started on his birthday, February 12, but he does not seem to have seen any evidence of his most loathed sin of pride in this. It is, we may argue, a way of establishing a temporal structure of a personal history within the human history which is, in its turn, circumscribed to sacred, providential history. This attitude is coherent with the early awareness of his mission in the world. In one of his conversations with God regarding the stammer which threatened his clerical career, Mather identifies himself with Moses:

> Lord! Thou art Hee that made man's Mouth; and thou wast angry with Moses, because hee would not make that consideration, an Argument for Failh, that thou wouldest bee with his Mouth. And now, because I would not so sin,therefore I trust in thee! Thou dost send mee forth, asthou didst Moses, in Service for thy Name among thy people (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 3)[11]

A climatic moment in Cotton Mather's life, which divided his existence into "before and after" regarding his soul's spiritual trajectory, was that of conversion. This "inescapable subjective experience" (58), as David Levin put it, is recorded as having happened in Mather's nineteenth year of life in an entry dated October 8, 1681. The illuminative turning point is thus described as a sense of "dwelling in God" and of a "new Life of Soul" (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 37). He felt this "tho' no Books or Men on Earth had ever instructed me how to do it, the thoughts of *being for God* (…) exceedingly ravished me" (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 37). The "dwelling in God" would always be experienced by Cotton Mather when all his acts and feelings could be stringed on the thread of religion. Three years later, before his twenty second birthday, the arduously working youth is visited by an angel, an experience that will repeatedly occur throughout his life, only this time the angelic apparition is prophetic and fulfills by its message all that young Cotton has dreamt and prayed for. The angel "whose face shone like the noonday sun" (*Diary of Cotton Mather* n.2 87) has been sent by Jesus to answer Cotton's prayers, to tell him what a great influence he will exercise not only over America, but Europe too in ushering the millennium, and speaks using the words of Ezekiel's messianic prophecy[12]. What was

[11] The entry was made in March 1681.

[12] "Behold, Asshur was like a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with thick shadowing boughs, and shot up very high, and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters nourished him, and the deep exalted him on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches were long, because of the multitude of the waters, which the deep sent out. (…) Thus was he fair in his greatness, and in the

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expressible about the episode is recorded in Latin so that it could be deciphered only by an intellectually and spiritually trained person. The rest is left uncovered because conceived of as being beyond human wording and understanding. Still, this world being the setting for the struggle between godly and diabolical forces, the young Harvard graduate is cautious not to be misled by some satanic plot: "What is the meaning of this marvel? From the wiles of the Devil, I beseech thee, deliver and defend Thy most unworthy servant" (*Diary of Cotton Mather* n.2 87). The sense of insecurity regarding godly visions impregnates Cotton Mather's life as depicted in his diary, being broken only from time to time by enlightening and delighting moments of assurance. Even if not as morbid as Wigglesworth, Cotton shares the same haunting fears and agonies that come, in Levin's estimate, according to a "compulsive pattern" (61). Nevertheless, he welcomes the torments and even asks for more as he does in an entry in May, in the year of his conversion: "afflict mee; do what thou wilt with mee; kill mee; for thy Grace hath made mee willing to dy; *only, only, only*, help mee to delight in thee, and to glorify thy dearest Name." (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 11). Affliction helped building up one's assurance that his/her lot was with the elect – "It is good for me that I was afflicted", Mary Rowlandson concluded after her captivity. The "Puritan dilemma" was a consuming thought which seem to have brought heavy pressure on the believer's psyche.

The diary presents a soul marked by a psychology of abasement which contrasts God's omnipotence with man's helplessness in managing his sinful heart. Inner dialogues held at scheduled moments illustrate this enormous gap:

> 'Do I need the Lord Jesus Christ?' 'Yes, infinitely. But cheefly on two Accounts. The Guilt of Sin on mee, is mountainous: none but Hee can remove it. The Power of Sin in mee, is marvellous: none but Hee can subdue it.' (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 39-40)

The state of his soul marked by "Fears that the Spirit of God was going to take a sad Farewell of mee" (*Diary of Cotton Mather* 7) is, according to many entries, marred by idleness, formality, hardened heart, lukewarm faith, periods of doubt that Cotton calls atheism, and especially pride – regarding language, learning, name -, a sin, which defies all his means of mortification. According to Robert Middlekauff, his psychological development resembles strongly that of Christian ascetics in its voluptuousness while immersing in denial, sacrifice, and martyrdom (207). The drawback of the soul is that of being linked with the body which is weak and more prone to sin: "Shame is to bee my Garment, Grief my meat. Tears my Drink, and Sighs my Language, as long as I am related unto this vile Body!" (*Diary…* 43). That is why the Puritan divine tries to organize time around his spiritual practice, so that not one second should pass without being used for redemption. In his book on the three Mather generations, Robert Middlekauff underlines the fact that the histories of the New England mind present Cotton Mather as the third generation's leading exponent of preparation who pushed the doctrine farther than anyone until his position became almost synonym with Arminianism (233). Nevertheless, he was not Arminian, even more, he strongly rejected this doctrine; preparation was beneficent only because it was connected to the "doing", with action, with motion, which he always advocated for a healthy spiritual life.

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length of his branches: for his root was near great waters. (…) I made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him." (Ezek. 31. 3,4,5,7,9, the *Geneva Bible*).

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In the process of being "up and doing", time was sanctified by spiritual exercises and distributed among various practices. Mather established six periods of worship in a day (later they would be seven) to which spontaneous prayers, called ejaculations in Puritan terminology at the time, added. Besides this daily schedule, he kept days of fast, supplication, humility, and thanksgiving. Such an entry as the one on March 22, 1705 would often appear in the diary: "I sett apart this Day, for the Exercises of a secret Fast, in my Study." (*Diary…* 555). Days that were thus "set apart" constituted what could be called a personal Christian history, secretly inscribed in and also supporting the historical progress of the community, announced by the angel's prophecy in Cotton's vision. These exercises bring forth moments of relief: "I spent this Day in the Travails of a secret Fast before the Lord: wherein I obtained from Him an Assurance of my Pardon and of His presence with mee" (*Diary…* 90), but then the repetitive pattern continues and he sinks again in the almost ritualistic recitations of his sins, in his fears and bitter conclusions. The next stage was to establish resolutions regarding the walk with God so that he would receive assurance again by fulfilling them. The resolutions were most related to a strict distribution of time. For example on March 12, 1681, he writes:

> As to my daily Courses of Duties.
> 1. To pray at least thrice, for the most part every Day.
> 2. To meditate once a Day; in the Meditation proceeding after some such Method as this; that there shall beetwo Parts of the work, doctrinal, and applicatory. The doctrinal to bee dispatched in an Answer to a Quaestion. The Applicatory to flow from thence into Examination, Expostulation, Resolution.
> 3. To make a Custome of propounding to myself, these three Quaestions, every Night before I sleep.
> What hath been the Mercy of God unto mee, in the Day past?
> What hath been my carriage before God, in the Day past. And,
> If I dy this Night is my immortal Spirit safe ? (*Diary…* 4-5)

Other times he structures his thoughts by making lists of common and special mercies, matters of humiliation and matters of supplication, designs, or "rising thoughts", namely thoughts to be pondered on immediately after waking up in order to sanctify the beginning of the day. The overall aim is that of redeeming of time, "husband (…) the golden Hours" (*Diary…* 21), in Cotton's own words. He would even pray, every time when entering a room, that he would not leave it unless anyone there should have a use of his presence.

A most trivial incident could set in motion thoughts regarding the waste of precious time as it is a toothache recorded on July 6, 1681: "I lost abundance of precious Time, thro' tormenting Pains in my Teeth and Jawes; which kind of Pains have indeed produced mee many a sad Hour, in my short Pilgrimage." (*Diary…* 24). The tension increased along with Cotton's growing certitude that "the time was near". Until the end of his life, the Puritan historian saw signs heralding the Second coming of Christ[13]. Millennialism functioned as background of all his

[13] The end of the world is analyzed in works like *Things To Be Look'd For* (1691), *Perswasions From the Terrors of the Lord* (1711), *Shaking Dispensations* (1715), *The World Alarm'd* (1721), *Terra Beata* (1726). His life-long preoccupation culminated in *Triparadisus* (1726-1727), in which he describes at length the wonders of the New Heavens which will have a Holy City in them namely the New Jerusalem whose seat was America.

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writings. The Augustinian City of God[14], a final destination for all those believing in and working for redemption, the climactic point John Bunyan's pilgrim's journey is sought also by Cotton the diarist. On February 27, 1697, he mentions the necessity of establishing a group of select Christians in order to prepare for the City of God considering that a great revolution and a great reformation were at hand. On a matter regarding mischief directed toward him from the Anabaptists who associated with the Church of England, he comments in an entry on September 30, 1699:

> Go to the Church of England Men, tell them from mee, that as for them, God has made mee a defenced City, an iron Pillar, and a brasen wall; and lett 'em fight never so cunningly against mee, they shall never prevail to do mee any Harm. (*Diary…* 318)

By quoting Jeremiah 1:18, Cotton Mather seems to have already tasted the feeling of assurance as he sees himself selected for God's special protection. In fact, previous entries, as for example those on March 12, 1681 and May 1686, mention a growing certitude of belonging to the elect by his calling, a calling gradually discovered by a long series of epiphanies:

> I know my Election, by my Vocation, and my Concernment in that Covenant, by my being made Willing to come under the Shadow of thy Wings in the Covenant of Grace. (*Diary…* 1)

and by his marital status: "After that [after the wedding] I received further Assurances from the Spirit of my Heavenly Lord, that I was Blessed, and should bee Blessed by Him forever" (*Diary…* 127). This makes him not only a possible inhabitant of the celestial city but also a guide for the community, a mission that he discovers while holding various lectures. Thus, on September 31, 1705, he enthusiastically notes:

> Oh! the marvellous Kindness, which the Lord showes unto me, before I come to the strong City! His Kindness in employing my poor Labours, to assist the Travel of His People, to the City! (*Diary…* 523)

As opposed to the heavenly city, the earthly realm is "this lower world" (*Diary…* 33) and he finds vanity in all the things in it. The opposition is also to be found here, in God's creation, as Cotton Mather conceives of history as a confrontation between good and evil, between Satan and the godly forces. This brings him close to Manicheism but, as in the resemblance with Arminianism this is only on the surface. On a personal level, Mather sees himself also as the special object of satanic "buffetings", a consequence of being the special object of divine love:

[14] In *De Civitate Dei* , known in English as *The City of God*, especially in the second part – Books XI to XXII-, St. Augustine speaks about the history and evolution of a godly city and its relation to the earthly city. In the *Argument* to *Book I*, he describes it as "a city surpassingly glorious whether we view it as it still lives by faith in this fleeting course of time, and sojourns as a stranger in the midst of the ungodly, or as it shall dwell in the fixed stability of its eternal seat" (*The City of God*, translation by Marcus Dods, introduction by Thomas Merton, The Modern Library, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, 1950, p. 1).

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> I begun to consider, whether these Buffetings from Satan, may not bee permitted by Heaven, to annoy mee, because I am about a special Peece of work, whereby the Kingdome of Satan may receive a more than ordinary Blow. (*Diary…* 286)

Like the world, a setting for the battle between the devil and God, Mather's soul is the battle field between God's grace and Satanic designs. His personal history is a parallel of the world's history. Devilish devices, assaults, temptations, energies, hindrances, rage also subtlety come upon him in order to test his strength. In these violent encounters he presents himself as either an Adamic or Job-like figure, perseveringly suffering or counteracting as a New England Samson against the demonic forces.

The craving for the union with Christ was intimately linked with the dream of the New Jerusalem and that is why Cotton's study of the prophecies had a sense of "awful urgency" (Middlekauff 208). Especially the 1690s are viewed through the lenses of chiliastic hopes. The coming of a great revolution and a great reformation as signs of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the very near future were the reasons for which Cotton formed the already mentioned special group in order to peruse the prophetic Biblical texts and prepare for the approaching heavenly city. In concrete and political terms, Cotton Mather's chiliasm was related to the fall of Louis the XIV and the liberation of French Protestants, religious turmoil in Ireland and Scotland, the death of King Charles II, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He arduously prayed for this and received secret assurance that a revolution was preparing to outburst in France. All along the "grievous decade", while New England was at war with New France[15], these prayers had a local as well as millennial meaning. The messages about the upcoming changes were transmitted to Cotton Mather not only in time of prayer, but also via spontaneous discoveries:

> This, Day, while I was at Prayer, before my Sermon, in a great Assembly of People, I received a strange Assurance; it was with a strong Hand of the Lord bore in upon mee, and I could not butt utter it, before the Congregation; that the Almighty Arm of the Lord Jesus Christ, was going to do a strange work in France, and bring such a wonderful Revolution upon that Kingdome, that men would not beleeve it tho' it were declared unto them. (*Diary…* 203)[16]

The revolution would also encompass Great Britain so that Reformation would come to its fulfillment as he recounts in an entry in February 1697:

> I took this Time to cry unto Him, that the Spirit of Reformation, may mightily come down upon the Nations of Europe, and that a mighty Revolution, upon France, and upon Great Britain, particularly, may accompany it. It will bee so! This poor Man cried, and the Lord heard his Cry, for this glorious Matter. (*Diary…* 222)

[15] The war known as King William's War (1689 - 1697).
[16] The entry was made on September 26, 1696.

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On September 19, 1697, the assurance comes[17]. The hours dedicated to spiritual practice are invaded by divinely revolutionary messages and Cotton seems to see himself as fulfilling the role of a prophet who mediates between God and the world and who is told not only the communicable but also the inexpressible:

> On this Lord's-day, at Noon, in my Study, I was in the Spirit. I cast myself prostrate in the Dust, on my Study-floor, to lift up a Cry from thence, for Zion in the Dust. The Spirit of the Lord came near unto mee; doubtless, the Angel of the Lord made mee sensible of his Approaches. I was wondrously Irradiated. My Lord Jesus Christ, shall yett bee more known, in the vast Regions of America; and by the means of poor, vile sinful mee, Hee shall bee so. Great Britain shall undergo a strange Revolution and Reformation; and sinful I shall bee concerned in it. France will quickly feel mighty Impressions from the Almighty Hand of my Lord Jesus Christ: and I shall on that Occasion sing His glorious Praises. Nor was this all, that was then told mee from Heaven: but I forbear the rest. (*Diary…* 234)

Cotton Mather sees himself as a herald of the millennium, a "forecaster of the corporate future" (Bercovitch 101), and his prophetic mission is strongly internalized by his identification with the impressive figure of John Baptist, a saint situated at the biblical crossroad of two worlds, two traditions, and two moral codes. This "in-betweenness" adds drama and greatness to the features of such a character of which Cotton is a mirroring image; he is also caught between two eras, struggling at a moment of transition between the values of the first generation Puritans and the changes envisaged by the one he historically belongs to. In three entries, dated February and November 1686 and April 1692, the Puritan minister mentions this special aspect of his work on earth. On a public Thanksgiving he prepares the auditorium for the coming of Christ "with some faint Imitation of John Baptist" (*Diary…* 117) and while giving a sermon at the Artillery-Elections he feels as having had " the further Part of the signalizing Advantage that John Baptist had" (132) in offering the soldiers religious counsel. The moment which brings him the clearest awareness of his role as God's forerunner is recounted on April 29, 1692. It came on a day spent in secret humiliation and supplication:

> This Day, I likewise obtained of God, that Hee would make use of mee, as of a *John*, to bee an Herald of the Lord's Kingdome now approching. and *the Voice crying in the Wilderness,* for Preparation thereunto. (*Diary…* 147)

Entries in June 1698 and May 1699 still mention the mighty revolution and Cotton's employment in "irradiating the Dark Recesses of America, with the Knowledge of the Glorious Lord" (*Diary…* 301). As the end draws nearer Cotton receives assurances regarding other apocalyptical signs: the reformation in the Spanish Indies and the conversion of the Hebrew people[18]:

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[17] One month before, Cotton also accomplished an important thing: the *Magnalia Cristi Americana.* Even if he would add other materials until 1700 when he finally sends it to be published, *Biblia Americana* was thought to be finished. This fact enriched his trust in the particular faiths and his special, prophetic role.

[18] "Afterward shall the children of Israel convert, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King, and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness in the latter days." (*The Geneva Bible,* Hosea 3:5)

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> …the Light of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ, shall bee carried into the Spanish Indies; and, that my Composures, my Endeavoures, will bee used, in. Yea, more than this; That I shall shortly see some Harvest of my Prayers and Pains, for the Jewish Nation also. (*Diary…* 276)

The hope, endorsed by his "Particular Faith", regarding the fall of the Turks and of the Pope, who Puritans assimilated with the Antichrist, completed the tableau of the close coming of the Parusia, the end of time, the end of History, and the beginning of the one thousand year Kingdom of God. The intensity and pious euphoria irradiating from the hopeful passages in the diary as well as the sermons in this period are compared by David Levin with the "manic expansiveness" in Herman Melville's letters during the composition of Moby Dick (276). It was not uncommon at the time to make such prognostics, but what sets Cotton Mather apart is the adamant manner in which he understands his responsibility regarding what is to come, the shaping of future events. His tears and prayers are the ones that would solve the end-time convulsions in France and bring God's light to the Hebrew people. His sermons are to prepare New England for the millennium. Cotton Mather elaborates an eschatological view which implies both the personal and the communal, and the unbreakable and moreover necessary link between the two. Even if neither the Pope and the Turks nor the Sun King fell after 1697, the year which Cotton established as that of the Second Coming by adding 180 years to the date when Luther's Reformation started (Levin 277), the Puritan divine kept his faith in this respect and continued to feel close to the next world through other experiences which, even if personal, were always linked to greater, sacred significance.

Cotton Mather's diary distinguishes among other such writings of the time by its complex array of experiences, which renders its author as perpetually living in an *imitatio Christi* and, in Bercovich's words by its "conscious, diversified, and transparently compensatory application of the concept." (102). The imitation implies a perspective on time as cyclic – his life as re-enacting a Christ's trajectory – whereas Cotton's chiliasm acknowledges time as linear, leading towards the one thousand year Kingdom of God. The specialness of his view consists of a double-oriented millennialism. The diary does not show only scholarly interest in the signs and portrayal of the Second Coming and the violent end of the world, but combines both the private and the public by its author's engaging in managing the signs of the Parusia. The unifying device of his eschatology, the background on which all his spiritual agonies and raptures unreeled, renders the diary as a most valuable document of the workings of the Puritan mind.

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