Governor John Winthrop

A Modell of Christian Charity

Speech

April 8, 1630
The *Arabella* | The Atlantic Ocean

Background

John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, delivered these remarks aboard the *Arabella* toward the end of its voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

Guiding Questions

1. Why does John Winthrop say God gives different conditions to different people?

2. What are the work, end, and means of the Massachusetts Bay Colony?

3. What does it mean to be "a city on the hill," according to Winthrop?

"A Model of Christian Charity," Hanover Historical Texts Collection, https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html [Original Source: Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, 1838), 3rd Series 7:31-48.]

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A Model hereof.

GOD ALMIGHTY in his most holy and wise providence, hath 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 submission.

The Reason hereof.

1 *Reas*. First to hold conformity with the rest of his world, 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.

2 *Reas.* 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 and shake off their yoke. 2ly 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.

3 *Reas*. Thirdly, that every man might have need of others, 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 Ezek. 16. 17. he there calls wealth, *his gold and his silver*, and Prov. 3. 9. he claims their service as his due, *honor the Lord with thy 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;

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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 or 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 towards another; in both the former respects, the law of nature and the law of grace, or 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 with all 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 perform this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own goods, according to that of our Savior, (Math.) *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. The law of Grace or of the Gospel hath 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. 2ly, 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 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 the Canaanites….

…It rests now to make some application of this discourse, by the present design, which gave the occasion of writing of it. Herein are 4 things to be propounded: first the persons, 2ly the work, 3ly the end, 4thly the means. 1. For *the persons*. We are a company professing ourselves 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

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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 *Aeneas Sylvius* "mutuo ament pere antequam norunt," they use to love any of their own religion even before they were acquainted with them. 2nly for the *work* we have in hand. It is by a mutual consent, through a special overruling providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ, to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical. In such cases as this, the care of the public must over sway 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. 3ly 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. 4thly 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 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…

When God gives a special commission he looks to have it strictly observed in every article; When he gave Saul a commission to destroy Amalek, He indented with him upon certain articles, and because he failed in one of the least, and that upon a fair pretense, it lost him the kingdom, which should have been his reward, if he had observed his

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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 hath given us leave to draw our own articles. We have professed to enterprise these and those accounts, 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 hath 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 with our 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 [sinful] 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.* 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 other's 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, 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 likely 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 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

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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 a going.

I shall shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel, Deut. 30. *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 and serve other Gods,* our pleasure 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.

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