

66 JOHN WINTHROP
A Model of Christian Charity (1630)

BOTH AMONG the Separates of Plymouth (where Cushman delivered his sermon on self-love) and within Winthrop's group, it was not unusual for members of the laity to deliver sermons. Since these lay sermons were not constrained by the customary fourfold divisions (text, doctrine, reasons, uses), they were often more flowing and less staccato than the utterances of the clergy. Winthrop's *A Model of Christian Charity*, delivered aboard the *Arbella* prior to its landfall in Massachusetts Bay, is without question the most famous and most eloquent of American lay sermons. (The practice was forbidden once Anne Hutchinson had revealed how threatening to social order it could be.)

Winthrop's *Arbella* sermon was never published in his lifetime, so his contemporaries had no fixed text from which to measure how rapidly and in what ways his earlier, happier vision of New England dimmed and even darkened as he accommodated himself to the realities of the New World. *A Model of Christian Charity* seems a shining moment of light between the dark judgment of England of his *Reasons* and the harsh practicalities of *Defense of an Order* (which appears later in this volume). Its argument and its language betray little of Winthrop's training as an advocate, much less the adversarial relationship to ideas that might be expected of a lawyer. It can be read, as can so many Puritan utterances, as "restorationist," that is, as envisioning a social order in New England that would recapture the serenity of a recollected (or imagined) English past of well-defined place for all, and of clearly understood and easily fulfilled obligations within the social hierarchy. But it is not feudal nostalgia that inspires Winthrop's sermon. Rather, Winthrop envisions an American future in which a Pauline growth in grace might be possible, as it was not, to his mind, amid the economic and ethical tangles of Old England. He speaks of "a due form of government, both civil and ecclesiastical," but he defines neither (although he safely could have, since his sermon was not intended as a public document), for his emphasis is on

the spiritual opportunities available under such forms. The opportunity, and the imperative, is that of the spiritually thriving community, in which private good gives way almost inexorably to the general welfare. Having preserved themselves from the "common corruptions" of the Old World, the New World saints were now free to work out their salvation and, in Winthrop's telling, were in fact under solemn obligation to do so: to return God's favor by committing their hearts and wills to the community.

The most famous and frequently quoted of Winthrop's many eloquent passages is that in which he speaks of New England as being like "a city upon a hill." Many readers have taken this as evidence that Winthrop and his fellow voyagers undertook the New England venture in the hope of serving as an example, especially by way of forms of church government, to the saints and churches of Old England. Eventually, New Englanders did so conceive their "errand into the wilderness," especially after the question arose (both in England and in their own minds) as to why they were *here*, rather than marching with the New Model Army. But Winthrop suggests only that New England might, if a spiritual success, be emulated by "succeeding plantations." As for the other "eyes" looking toward New England, Winthrop depicts them not as hoping for a new revelation but as, it would seem, ready and even eager to see those who had deserted England as participants in a spiritual failure. In this larger sense, then, it was hardly necessary for Cotton to *abjure* Winthrop's people from "being unmindful" of their English brethren, since the settlers were acutely aware of those who, having questioned the entire enterprise, would continue to serve as a challenging and often oppressive superego.

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66 *A Model of Christian Charity*
Written on Board the Arbella on the Atlantic Ocean

I

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 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 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; 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*, 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 withal [is] commanded

to love his neighbor as himself.¹ 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. Matthew: "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 Gibeah.²

The law of grace or 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. 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 teacheth 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 thine enemy hunger, feed him; *love your enemies, do good to them that hate you*, Matthew 5:44.

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 give not all yet) must give beyond their ability, as they of Macedonia (II Corinthians 11:9). Likewise community of perils calls for extraordinary liberality, and so doth 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?³

Answer: If the time and occasion be ordinary he is to give out of his abundance. Let him lay aside as God hath blessed him. If the time and

1. In Matthew 5:43.

2. The story of Abraham's hospitality to the angels is in Genesis 18; the old man of Gibeah gives aid to a needy stranger in Judges 19.

3. What rule shall govern the size of a man's charity?

occasion be extraordinary, he must be ruled by them; taking this withal, that then a man cannot likely do too much, especially if he may leave himself and his family under probable means of comfortable subsistence . . .

Question: What rule must we observe in lending?

Answer: Thou must observe whether thy brother hath present, or probable, or possible means of repaying thee. If there be none of these, thou must give him according to his necessity, rather than lend him as he requires. If he hath present means of repaying thee, thou art to look at him not as an act of mercy, but by way of commerce, wherein thou art to walk by the rule of justice; but if his means of repaying thee be only probable or possible, then is he an object of thy mercy, thou must lend him, though there be danger of losing it, Deuteronomy 15:7, *If any of thy brethren be poor, etc., thou shalt lend him sufficient . . .*

Question: What rule must we observe in forgiving?

Answer: Whether thou didst lend by way of commerce or in mercy, if he have nothing to pay thee, [thou] must forgive (except in cause where thou hast a surety or a lawful pledge), Deuteronomy 15:2. Every seventh year the creditor was to quit that which he lent to his brother if he were poor, as appears [in] verse 8, *Save when there shall be no poor with thee*. In all these and like cases, Christ was a general rule, Matthew 7:22, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye the same to them also*.

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 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.⁴ 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 . . .

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

4. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, in part by persuading the moneylenders to place the common welfare above their own profit (Nehemiah 3).

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,⁵ not that it is enough to love our brother and so 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 hath to set all the faculties on work in the outward exercise of this duty. As when we bid one make the clock strike, he doth 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 of love in the heart which will as natively bring forth the other, as any cause doth produce effect.

The definition which the scripture gives us of love is this: "Love is the bond of perfection." First, it is a bond or ligament. Secondly, it makes the work perfect. There is no body but consists of parts and that which knits 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 apart 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. Ephesians 4:16, *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, a glorious body without spot or wrinkle, the ligaments hereof being Christ, or his love, for Christ is love*, I John 4:8. So this definition is right: *Love is the bond of perfection.*

From hence we may frame these conclusions. First of all, true Christians are of one body in Christ. I Corinthians 12:22, 27, *Ye are the body of Christ and members of their part*. 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, weal and woe. I Corinthians 12:26, *If one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one be in honor, all rejoice with it*. 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 . . .

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 estate⁶ was a perfect model of mankind in all their generations, and in him this love was perfected in regard of 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 continueth till Christ comes and takes possession of the soul and infuseth 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. I John 4:7, *Love cometh of God and everyone that loveth is born of God*, 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. Ezekiel 37, *Bone came to bone*. 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.

The third consideration is concerning the exercise of this love which is twofold, inward or outward. The outward hath 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 to 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 hath

5. Paul, in Romans 9:31.

6. Before the fall.

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 work of the spirit, his own image and resemblance in another, and therefore cannot but love him as he loves himself . . .

If any shall object that it is not possible that love should be bred or upheld without hope of requital, it is graunted; 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 served for the nourishment of all the other parts of the body, yet it hath 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. The party loving, reaps love again, as was showed before, which the soul covets more than all the wealth in the world. Thirdly, 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 hath left recorded, I Corinthians 13, may give full satisfaction, 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.

II

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.

First 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 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,⁷ from the mouth of one of the adversaries *Æneas Sylvius*,⁸ "mutuo [ament] pene antequam norunt," they use 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 overvaluing⁹ 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 oversway all private respects, by which not only conscience but mere civil policy doth 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 encrease 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

7. A French Protestant sect founded in the twelfth century.

8. Pope Pius II.

9. Supremely valuable.

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 burthens. 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 doth from those among whom we have lived; and that for three reasons:

First, in regard of the more near bond of marriage between him and us, wherein he hath 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,¹⁰ 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 Amalek, he indented¹¹ 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 commission.¹²

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 enterprize 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 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

10. Aaron's sons, whom God destroys by fire in anger at their disobeying his injunction against burnt offerings.

11. Made a formal agreement.

12. Saul spared the livestock of the Amalekites, thereby incurring the wrath of God, who had ordered their total destruction (I Samuel 15).

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 shipwrack, 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 others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' 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.¹³ 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 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 agoing.

And to shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel, Deuteronomy 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 other

13. Matthew 5:14-15.

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.