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The Puritan View of History

or

Providence Without and Within

by Donald K. McKim

In October-December 1973 Dr. McKim made his debut in our pages with a paper on "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective". Since then he has continued his studies in the Puritans and has been awarded the Ph.D. degree by the University of Pittsburgh for a thesis on "Ramism in William Perkins". His director of studies was Dr. Robert S. Paul (author of The Lord Protector). He is joint-author (with Jack B. Rogers) of a recent work on The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach (San Francisco: Harper and Row).

I

In his biography of John Knox, Lord Eustace Percy wrote that in his *Institutes* John Calvin had expressed "something much more explosive than the dogma of predestination; [The *Institutes*] contained a philosophy of history, a statement of Christian faith in terms of divine purpose."¹

This statement about Calvin gets to the heart of his notion of the Sovereignty of God. The whole drama of human history is at stake in this doctrine, not just the final verdict of condemnation or acquittal for each human soul. Again as Lord Eustace Percy said of Calvin: "He could not paint the ultimate destinies of man in milder colours than his contemporaries, but he directed men's eyes to more immediate issues, and gave them, in practice, a nobler incentive to action than the hope of heaven or the fear of hell."²

In its "simplest" form, the doctrine of Providence through which the sovereignty of God expresses itself, means, in the words of Calvin, not that God "idly observes" from the heavens what takes place on earth, but that "as keeper of the keys, he governs all events." He "directs everything by his incomprehensible wisdom and disposes it to his own end." God "so attends to the regulation of individual events, and they all so proceed from his set plan, that nothing takes place by chance."³ There is both "general" Providence by which God oversees the universe, sustaining and governing it; and there is "special" Providence whereby God directs an individual's life, exercising his "special care."⁴

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¹ Lord Eustace Percy, *John Knox* (London, 1937), p.109.

² Percy, p.109.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1960), I. 16.4.

⁴ *Institutes*, I. xvi. 5, 6.

This doctrine had its roots in Christian theology long before the days of Calvin. As Shirley Jackson Case wrote:

According to the traditional Christian view of the world, God makes history. He stands at the beginning and at the end of time; and in the intervening area, where the course of temporal events is being shaped, providential guidance is continually operative. This is the major premise on which the older Christian interpretation of history is based.⁵

This interpretation of the divine activity in history (a "Providential view of history") took shape in a world dominated by Graeco-Roman views of "history." At the risk of oversimplification, R. G. Collingwood has seen Graeco-Roman historiography being characterized as "humanistic" and "substantial". Of the former he writes that for the Greeks and Romans:

It is a narrative of human history, the history of man's deeds, man's purposes, man's successes and failures. It admits, no doubt, a divine agency; but the function of this agency is strictly limited. The will of the gods as manifested in history only appears rarely; in the best historians hardly at all and then only as a will supporting and seconding the will of man and enabling him to succeed where otherwise he would have failed. The gods have no plan of their own for the development of human affairs; they only grant success or decree failure for the plans of men.⁶

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Their historiography is "substantial" in that "it is constructed on the basis of a metaphysical system whose chief category is the category of substance." Collingwood continues:

Now a substantialistic metaphysics implies a theory of knowledge according to which only what is unchanging is knowable. But what is unchanging is not historical. What is historical is a transitory event. The substance to which an event happens, or from whose nature it proceeds, is nothing to the historian. Hence the attempt to think historically and the attempt to think in terms of substance were incompatible . . . Graeco-Roman historiography can therefore never show how anything comes into existence; all the agencies that appear on the stage of history have to be assumed ready-made before history begins, and they are related to historical events exactly as a machine is related to its own movements. The scope of history is limited to describing what people and things do, the nature of these people and things remaining outside its field of vision.⁷

⁵ Shirley Jackson Case, *The Christian Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1943), p.14.

⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1937), pp.40-2.

things do, the nature of these people and things remaining outside its field of vision.⁷

These classical views were revolutionized by Christianity. Early Christian theologians from Justin Martyr through Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian and Eusebius developed the Christian theological view of history. But it was Augustine (354-430) who "may rightly be called the father of the Christian philosophy of history."⁸ In his *De civitate Dei contra Paganos* (*The City of God*), begun in A.D. 413 and completed in 426, he spoke an apologetic word for Christian faith in the face of the capture of Rome by Alaric on August 24, 410. Developing the notion of the Two Cities, the *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* which run through history, Augustine sharpens the eschatological note with his view that temporal history is acted out *sub specie aeternitatis* and will consummate in the Last Judgment with the final triumph of God.⁹ Augustine's contribution shaped the Christian view of history, seeing it as

linear in nature, beginning with Adam, with its central datum in Jesus, and with its "uni-dimensional movement in time" leading to the end . . . He elaborated further the providential view of history which the prophet Isaiah had long since consolidated, whereby God "giveth kingdoms to good and to bad": not rashly, nor casually, but as the time is appointed, which is well known to him, though hidden to us.¹⁰

In Collingwood's assessment, this Christian view of history "jet-tisoned two of the leading ideas in Graeco-Roman historiography, namely (i) the optimistic idea of human nature and (ii) the substantialistic idea of eternal entities underlying the process of historical change."¹¹ The former was disposed of by the Christian doctrine of sin,

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⁷ Collingwood, pp.42-5. Many other volumes also contain assessments of Greek and Roman views of history. Cf. Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, 1963), ch. 2; Matthew A. Fitzsimmons et al., eds., *The Development of Historiography* (Port Washington, New York, 1967), ch. 1; L. G. Patterson, *God and History in Early Christian Thought* (New York, 1967), ch. 1.

⁸ C. A. Patrides, *The Grand Design of God: The Literary form of the Christian view of History* (London, 1972), p.16. He includes substantial bibliographic material on Augustine and particularly on his philosophy of history, p.24. For the earlier developments and Augustine, see Patterson, ch. 2-5, and R. L. P. Milburn, *Early Christian Interpretations of History* (London, 1954). Cf. Patrides, p.10 for bibliographic materials on the Christian view of history.

⁹ On the two cities, see *The City of God*, ed. David Knowles (London, 1972), XIV. 28. On the final judgment and triumph, see Bk. XX. Cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, California, 1969), pp.316-23.

¹⁰ Patrides, pp.17-8. *City of God*, Bk. IV. 33.

¹¹ Collingwood, p.46.

the second by the doctrine of creation. These Christian ideas had a threefold effect on conceptions of history:

- (1) "The historical process is the working out not of man's purposes but of God's, God's purpose being a purpose for man, a purpose to be embodied in human life and through the activity of human wills, God's part in this working-out being limited to predetermining the end and to determining from time to time the objects which human beings desire."
- (2) One can see "not only the actions of historical agents, but the existence and nature of those agents themselves as vehicles of God's purposes and therefore as historically important."
- (3) "All persons and all peoples are involved in the working out of God's purpose, and therefore the historical process is everywhere and always of the same kind, and every part of it is a part of the same whole."¹²

It is into this type of framework that the doctrine of Providence as developed by Calvin was cast.¹³ It was Augustine who was to have the major influence on his view.¹⁴ The concept of predestination, so readily associated with Calvin's name, "can in fact be regarded as in some respects a particular application of the more general notion of Providence."¹⁵ While he lays out the doctrine in detail, he cautions against the danger of too much curiosity and always approaches the doctrine with the humility befitting its proper nature — "mysterious."¹⁶ The knowledge of Providence is a help in all adversity, and a doctrine without which life would be unbearable. For certainty of God's providence is a solace to the believer and is able to put a "joyous trust" in his

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¹² Collingwood, pp.48-9. This gives Christian historiography specific characteristics. It will be, according to Collingwood: universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized.

¹³ It is not possible here to follow the path of Christian historiography through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Suffice it to say that "the Christian view of history influenced mediaeval literature greatly," particularly through Dante who in his *Commedia*, "surveys history from the divine standpoint" (Patrides, pp.38-9). But as Collingwood writes, "What has happened here is that the pendulum of thought has swung from an abstract and one-sided humanism in Graeco-Roman historiography to an equally abstract and one-sided theocentric view in mediaeval" (p.55).

¹⁴ See *Institutes* III. xxi. 1. In n.1 it is noted that Calvin in his doctrine of predestination "argues from Scripture with much aid from Augustine." Indeed "Calvin may be said to stand at the culmination of Augustinianism" (Intro. X).

¹⁵ Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (London, 1973), p.178. In the 19th century, Alexandre Schweizer and Ferdinand Christian claimed predestination was the central doctrine of Calvin's theology (p.263).

¹⁶ *Institutes*, III. xxi. 1, xxiii. 5. Augustine is cited as providing the pattern for the right preaching of predestination (III. xxiii. 14).

heart.¹⁷ While God's rule, his "incomprehensible plans," will be observed in the earth, this does not relieve the Christian of his own responsibility, nor from due prudence, nor does it excuse his wickedness.¹⁸ God is at work in this world through many means and any cause may be the agent through which His plan and providence unfold.¹⁹ History, then, is the stage of God's activity and He is involved with all things that come to pass. The explosive effect which this notion had on those who held it (according to Lord Eustace Percy) is a matter of "history!"²⁰

The inheritors of Calvin's doctrines were the English Puritans. With regard to Providence and predestination, they accepted his teachings and continued to develop them.²¹ For example, William Perkins (1558-1602), writing his treatise *De Praedestinationis modo et ordine* (1598), or *A Christian and Plaine Treatise on the Matters and Order of Predestination* (English translation, 1606), lists ten reasons why this doctrine will "agree with the grounds of common reason" in his "Epistle to the Reader."²² This goes beyond Calvin's cautions about such things as "speculations", and indeed with regard to the doctrine of predestination itself, "it received a far greater emphasis in the works of theologians like

¹⁷ See *Institutes*, I. xvii. 8, 10, 6, 11.

¹⁸ See *Institutes*, I. xvii. 2, 3, 4, 5.

¹⁹ *Institutes*, I. xvii. 9. It is clear how Calvin's doctrine fits in Collingwood's schema. See above n.12.

²⁰ Examples are too numerous to list. Generally, see the story of Calvinism in *The History and Character of Calvinism* by John T. McNeill (New York, 1967). Cf. Michael Walzer, "Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology," *History and Theory*, III (1964), 59-90; also his *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York, 1974). These last two sources record the story of Calvinism in politics. For the relation of Calvin's followers to science, an activity to be engaged in and theologically justified only if God is sovereign over all, see R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, 1972); John Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Modern Science* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1960); Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1973), ch. 4. The Puritan relation to science is debated in articles from *Past and Present* collected in Charles Webster, ed., *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1974).

²¹ The development of "scholastic Protestantism" in England is a controversial story. See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1969). For the development of the doctrine of Scripture, see Jack B. Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids, 1967) and Donald K. McKim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective," *Evangelical Quarterly*, XLV No. 4 (October-December, 1973), 195-207.

²² William Perkins, *Works*, 3 vols. (London, 1626), II. 605. Cf. Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in G. E. Duffield, ed., *John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, 1968), 19-37, for his assessment of Perkins.

Beza, Zanchius, and Perkins than in Calvin or earlier English writers.²³

In terms of Providence, though, both general and specific, it is a doctrine found permeating Puritan writings. By observing this one can gain a perception of the Puritan vision of history. In this regard, attention will now be turned to expressions of this vision as it occurred generally in the component parts of the Puritan notion; specifically as seen in the daily expressions from Puritan diaries and then compositely in Oliver Cromwell — one who combined both aspects of the doctrine.

II

For many years now it has been realized that one of the prime sources of Calvin's theology and particularly his doctrine of predestination and providence was the Strasbourg Reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551).²⁴ While some have made too much of this dependence, forgetting the fact that two authors can conceive and express similar ideas without automatically being in debt to each other — particularly since both men were steeped in Augustine — nevertheless, in Calvin's 1539 and 1541 editions of the *Institutes*, there are "traces" of both Bucer's third edition of his *Commentary on the Gospels* and on the *Epistle to the Romans* published in 1536. With his *Institutes* of 1539 and 1541, Calvin adopts "the Bucerian point of view upon the theoretical and not only the practical importance of predestination."²⁵

With the victory of Charles V over the Smalcaldic League in 1547 and the subsequent placing of Imperial troops in power over the Reformed Church in Strasbourg, Bucer rebelled. Resisting the Emperor's authority, he accepted Thomas Cranmer's invitation of October 1548 to teach at Cambridge. Arriving there six months later, Bucer became Regius Professor of Divinity and by October 21, 1550, had written a manuscript entitled *De Regno Christi* which he sent to King Edward VI.

Bucer's treatise is a direct extension of his principles (and Calvin's) concerning the kingdom of God. These are made specific to the English situation. Bucer desired to introduce the Reformation into England and provide fundamental laws for English society in education, economics,

²³ Ian Breward, "Introduction" to his edited work, *The Work of William Perkins* (Appleford, England, 1970), p.45. Cf. Peter Toon, *Hyper-Calvinism* (London, 1967), pp.13-4.

²⁴ See Wendel's discussion, pp.137ff.

²⁵ Wendel, p.141. He also notes the differences. Cf. *Institutes*, "Author and Source Index," p.1602 for other marks of dependence.

social life and politics so that England might become a realm of the *regnum Christi*.²⁶

But the basis of this kingdom of God (identical with "the kingdom of Christ") is strictly predestinarian. The kingdom of Christ, he wrote, is for "the administration and the eternal salvation of the elect of God whom, notwithstanding that they are dispersed through the world and subject to the powers of the earth, he incorporates with himself . . . and governs."²⁷ Thus, Church and State are bound up together and "no Church or State would be true unless seen as manifestations of the rulership of God, i.e. the rulership of God in Christ."²⁸

The "Puritan party," however, could not capture the Elizabethan ecclesiastical establishment. Attempts to re-organize Church government along Presbyterian lines did not bear fruit as the *via media* of the Elizabethan settlement carried the day.²⁹ But by 1573, Walter Travers, a Calvinist writing from Geneva, expressed a Church polity which had the two jurisdictions (Church and State) as separate and independent with the magistrate duty-bound to protect the Church. For magistrates must know that inasmuch as the Church is in spiritual matters supreme,

they must also as well as the rest submit themselves and be obedient to the iust and lawfull authoritie off the Officers off the church. For seeing they not onlie rule by the authoritie of Jesus Christ, but in a manner do represent his person, seeing they rule not as they themselves list accordinge to their own will, but only accordinge to (the) word and commandment, Is it not meete that even kinges and the highest maygystrates should be obedient unto them? for it is meete that all the princes and monarchs off the world should give upp

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²⁶ See *De Regno Christi*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck, Library of Christian Classics, XIX (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 174ff. He says the purpose of his work is to describe "the ways and means by which, as we are taught by the eternal and only salutary Word of God," all Christian rulers, but especially the King of England, "both can and should firmly restore for their peoples the blessed kingdom of the Son of God, our only redeemer; i.e. renew, institute and establish the administration not only of religion but also of all other parts of the common life according to the purpose of Christ our Saviour and supreme King" (p.384). On Bucer, cf. C.L.R.A. Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1946) and Pauck's "Introduction," in LCC, pp.155-173.

²⁷ *De Regno*, p 225.

²⁸ Pauck, p.166. Bucer includes a chapter on the "History of the Church," describing the relation of the state to the "reign of Christ" in the present day (Ch. IV). See T. F. Torrance's discussion in "The Eschatology of Love: Martin Bützer," in his *Kingdom and Church* (London, 1956), pp.73-89.

²⁹ On these developments, see M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago, 1970), Ch. 9.

their scepters and crownes unto him whom god had made and appointed the Heyre off his kingdome and Lord of heauen and earthe.³⁰

Thomas Cartwright wrote even more strongly. Magistrates

must remember to subject themselves unto the churche, to submit their scepters, to throwe downe their crownes before the churche, yea as the Prophet speaketh, to licke the dust of the feete of the church.

For the sake of harmony, the State must conform itself to the church's needs. For,

the church being before there was anye common wealth, and the common wealth coming after, must be fashioned and made suitable unto the churche. Otherwyse God is made to geue place to men, heauen to earthe and religion is made (as it were) a rule of Lesbia to be applied unto anye estate of common wealth whatsoever.³¹

Comparing these expressions with those of Bucer's, one sees that here is nothing short of a "revolutionary" view of the Church for those days. Its implications of Church primacy as authority invigorated notions of God's sovereignty within the historical process. Cartwright's statements certainly implied that the rudder of the ship of state was the purpose of God at work through His Church. The milder statement of Bucer, presupposing a "Calvinist" view of history, was now sharpened for the English situation and this virtually declared war on a governmental establishment which sought to be Supreme Governor of the Church.

But with the "beginnings of a party" (later to be the Presbyterians) there were hints of the coming crisis in the English Church.³² Though Bishop John Jewel assured his readers that

we have restored our churches by a provincial convocation, and have clean shaken off, as our duty was, the yoke and tyranny of the bishop of Rome, to whom we were not bound, who also had no manner of thing like neither to Christ nor to Peter, nor to an apostle, nor yet like to any bishop at all,³³

the Puritans answered in two Admonitions to Parliament. In the lan-

³⁰ "A Full and Plaine Declaration of Ecclesiastical Discipline out off the Word off God," trans. Thomas Cartwright (Zurich, 1574), pp.185-6. On Travers, see S. J. Knox, *Walter Travers: Paragon of Elizabethan Puritanism* (London, 1962), especially ch. 2.

³¹ "A Reply to an Answer made of M. Doctor Whitgife Agaynst The Admonition to the Parliament by T. C. (Wandsworth, 1574), p. 144. On Cartwright see A. F. Scott Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism 1535-1603* (Cambridge, 1925).

³² The phrase is from Ch. 3 of Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), pp.45ff.

³³ "The Recapitulation of the Apology" in John Jewel, *Works*, ed. for the Parker Society by John Ayre (Cambridge, 1848), III, 106.

guage of the first, all manner of ecclesiastical prelates remain petty Antichrists and "their tyrannous Lordshippe can not stande wyth Christes kingdome."³⁴ Parliament was urged to "remove whole Antichrist both head, body and branch, and perfectly plant that puritie of the word, that simplicitie of the sacraments, and severitie of discipline, which Christ hath commanded . . . to his church."³⁵

It is here that eschatological viewpoints enter. In Bucer's *De Regno Christi*, the Catholic Church had been the *regnum Antichristi*.³⁶ Kings are to reduce their subjects to obedience to Christ and God in turn will protect kings who do His will. This position "became a theoretical justification for the royal supremacy, on which Elizabethan bishops like Jewel and James I himself could draw."³⁷ Yet with the publication of John Foxe's massive *Acts and Monuments*, running through nine editions between 1563 and 1641 and two more before 1684, an apocalyptic element was added to a view of history which had a powerful effect on the English mind and on the concretization of the Puritan view of history.³⁸

Basically Foxe told his readers that

All history . . . centred in the agelong struggle of Christ and Antichrist; the pope was Antichrist; and England, the elect champion of the true faith, was his chosen enemy, especially called by God to be the agent of his predestined overthrow. Henry VIII drove him out; Edward reformed the church; Mary brought popery back; Elizabeth, "that glorious Deborah", overcame the hydra of stout popelings at home and their supporters abroad. So in spite of all that Antichrist could do, the Lord, having delivered England out of Babylon, had then preserved her from Spanish invasion, gunpowder treason, and many other perils.³⁹

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The whole of Church history, yea, the history of the race, was interpreted this way. Foxe showed that in the persecutions recently visited upon England, the Protestant martyrs died for the same ancient faith "once delivered to the saints."

³⁴ "Admonition," in *Puritan Manifestoes*, eds. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas (London, 1954), p.5.

³⁵ In Frere, ed. p.19.

³⁶ See particularly *De Regno*, Preface, Bk. 1, ch. 2; Bk. II, ch. 1 and the last chapter.

³⁷ Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1971), p.13.

³⁸ These were: preliminary versions on the Continent in 1554 and 1559, the first English version in 1563, rev. and enlarged version in 1570 and 2 editions in 1576 and 1583 with additions. After Foxe died, 5 more editions appeared — 1596, 1610, 1631-2, 1641 and 1684.

³⁹ William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1967), p.19. Cf. his essay, "John Foxe and the Puritan Revolution," in Richard F. Jones *et al.*, eds., *The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope* (Standford, California, 1951), pp.209-24.

This account of Church history the book also linked to a history of the long succession of native rulers down to Elizabeth, shown as owing their authority directly to divine appointment and prospering or not, and their people with them, according as they heeded their vocation to defend the faith and the people in the faith, or suffered themselves to be misled by false counsellors, or overborn by misleading usurpers and invaders. And to conclude, the book made plain that by all the signs to be found in scripture and history the will of God was about to be fulfilled in England by a prince perfect in her obedience to her vocation, ruling a people perfect in their obedience to her authority.⁴⁰

According to Foxe, it was thanks to Elizabeth's "true, natural and imperial crown that the brightness of God's word was set up again to confound the dark and false-vizored kingdom of Antichrist."⁴¹ Elizabeth had this work of Foxe's (along with others by Jewel and Erasmus) chained beside the Bible in the churches of England.

Such a conception of history and of England's place in history had definite apocalyptic overtones. Since the Reformation Protestants had begun to urge that the Pope was Antichrist, "but it was John Foxe who combined this belief with the assumption that the Christian Emperor had a decisive part to play in the process."⁴² Much of this view was supported by renewed study of the Book of Revelation. As B. S. Capp writes:

The Reformation, stressing the Bible as the literal Word of God, made almost inevitable a literal rather than allegorical interpretation of the scriptural prophecies. Several responses, however, were possible. One could argue that the prophecies, though genuine, were so "dark and dubious" that they were best ignored until God chose to make clear their meaning. Or, secondly, it could be argued, as by Foxe, Jewel and others, that the prophecies referred to the Reformation and subsequent events, and proved that the end of the world was at hand. Thirdly, the prophecies could be seen as foreshadowing the fall of existing world-orders, not the world itself, and heralding an age of perfec-

⁴⁰ William Haller, *The Elect Nation The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'* (New York, 1963), pp.224-5. See the American appropriation of the "Elect Nation" theme in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. He writes: "There are many arguments to persuade us, that our glorious Lord, will have an Holy City in America . . . We cannot imagine, that the brave countries and gardens which fill the American hemisphere, were made for nothing but a place for dragons . . . O New England, there is room to hope, that thou shalt belong to the City."

⁴¹ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. S. R. Cattley, 8 vols. (London, 1838), VII, 466.

⁴² William M. Lamont, *Godly Rule, Politics and Religion 1603-60* (London, 1969), p.23. On the Pope as Antichrist, see Christopher Hill, ch. 1.

tion of earth. The second line of interpretation, elaborated by Foxe, enjoyed almost universal acceptance among Elizabethan Protestants.⁴³

In other words, the millennium of Revelation 20 is equated with a thousand years of Church history. At the same time the major contents of chapters 6-20 are interpreted in terms of events in Church history from the time of St. Paul to the days of Queen Elizabeth. This is the Augustinian approach to the millennium whereby the reign of Christ is set squarely in the context of history.⁴⁴

This apocalypticism is combined with Foxe's stress on England as an "elect nation". The Bishop of London, John Aylmer (1521-1594), who assisted Foxe in a Latin translation of his work, declared: "'God is English!' . . . Out of England came Wycliffe 'who begat Husse, who begat Luther, who begat the truth.'" ⁴⁵ Some form of the Reformation had always been present in England, Foxe taught. This stretched back to the early centuries when Joseph of Arimathaea had come to England as its original missionary and established Christian communities there. These continued to exist through all the changes in history and were

⁴³ B. S. Capp, "The Millennium and Eschatology in England," in Webster, pp.427-34. E. L. Tuveson has written: "What caused the change? A brief consideration of the historical situation and of the reformers' problems gives us, I believe, the answer. The Reformation was becoming a separate and distinguishable historical phenomenon. As it progressed there were embarrassing questions to be answered. How had it happened, for example, that the ark of the faith — the Word itself — had been entrusted to a nest of evil-livers and false preachers? How had it happened that the glorious renovation of the Church had been so long delayed, or at least that earlier advocates of reform had for so long a time had little or no real influence? These questions naturally became more and more pressing as a war of ideas raged between the respective champions of Rome and of the reformed churches. The reformed groups, moreover, were encompassed by powerful enemies, and it must have seemed that the preponderance of worldly power was with the enemy. A new set of ideas about the history of the Church was plainly needed. This need, we may surmise, led the reformers to the momentous step of reviving the Apocalypse as a pattern of history, an illumination of events past and a kind of obscure yet not wholly indecipherable prophecy of things to come" (*Millennium and Utopia* (Berkeley, California, 1949), pp.25-6).

⁴⁴ See Peter Toon, "The Latter Day Glory," in his edited work, *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge, 1970), p.25. See his "Introduction" for approaches to the Book of Revelation. Cf. the notes in the Geneva Bible on the Revelation.

⁴⁵ In Haller, *Elect Nation*, p.88. Cf. pp.87-90. On Aylmer see *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen (New York, 1885), II, 281-3. England was the New Israel. "As God had made himself known to the people of Israel as to no other, and it was in the light of their experience that the history of the English Church was to be seen. Just as God had chosen the prophets of the old covenant from among the children of Israel, so he had chosen the prophets of the new covenant from among his Englishmen" (D. M. Loades, *The Oxford Martyrs* (New York, 1970), p.28).

flourishing when Pope Gregory the Great had sent Augustine of Canterbury to Kent to start the Christian mission in 596/7. Though this facet of Foxe's "legend" was severely attacked in the seventeenth century, it did not die easily.⁴⁶ With Wycliffe the Reformation had begun and now "if Englishmen did their part, it was destined to be consummated and Antichrist brought to his final doom."⁴⁷ The end of the world was at England's doorstep!

This conception had powerful effects.

It drew strength from its very obviousness; more convincingly, more completely than any other rival scheme of explanation, it clarified the religious experience and organized the historical knowledge of Christian Englishmen. It gave God his glory, man his place, events their meaning — and England its due. And it drew strength also from its essential identity with the historical thinking of Christians who rejected many of its details: Continental reformers might not agree that God was English, but they were certain that he was Protestant, and in any event, whatever his nationality, they fully accepted the traditional Christian account of his historical activities.⁴⁸

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It was through these eyes that generations of Englishmen saw history.

Anglican and Puritans alike loved the *Book of Martyrs*, memorized it and told their children stories from it; the illiterate had it read to them and absorbed its message from heart-rending woodcuts . . . And less than half a century after

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- ⁴⁶ See Thomas Fuller, *Church History in Britain* (Oxford, 1845), I, 16ff. The Scottish appropriation of Foxe was even more complete than England's. She claimed the Celtic Church had not been fully Romanized till the high middle ages, "a circumstance which permitted Scotsmen after the Reformation to argue with a measure of plausibility that they had had Christianity long before Rome had extended its sway into the country" (S. A. Burrell, "The Apocalyptic Vision of the Covenanters", *The Scottish Historical Review*, XLIII (1964), p.8). No one spread the news that Scottish Christianity was not only older than England's, but also more free of "popish dross," more than John Knox: "For, as touching the doctrine taught by our ministers, and as touching the administration of Sacraments used in our Churches we are bold to affirm that there is no realm this day upon the face of the earth, that hath them in greater purity; yea (we must speak the truth whomsoever we offend), there is none (no realm we mean) that hath them in the like purity. For all others (how sincere that ever the doctrine be, that by some is taught), retain in their Churches, and the ministers thereof, some footsteps of Antichrist, and some dregs of papistry; but we (all praise to God alone) have nothing within our Churches that ever flowed from that Man of sin" (John Knox, *History of the Reformation*, ed. W. C. Dickinson (Edinburgh, 1849), II, 3).
- ⁴⁷ Haller, *Liberty*, p.47. Biblical commentators on the Apocalypse also played a part in fostering such interpretations: Brightman, Mede, etc. See Toon, *PMFL*, ch. 2. and *passim*. Cf. Michael Fixler, *Milton and the Kingdom of God* (n.p., 1964), pp.39ff.
- ⁴⁸ Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (Berkeley, California, 1966), pp.9-10.

Foxe's death, Englishmen took his book, and his philosophy of history, across the Atlantic, into the American wilderness.⁴⁹

Views about the future inevitably have effects on the present. This world, as viewed by Foxe and by Puritan appropriators of Foxe, was a battle ground between Christ and Antichrist. Though he would wax strong for a time, the assurance of Antichrist's final defeat was certain. Gradually he would be subdued, in the Church and in the world. The form which Antichrist took evolved as time went on. In the early period before 1640, he was seen as the Pope. But with the emergence of Puritanism, he might just as easily be that other source of antagonism to the cause of Christ: Anglican bishops! These too were to be resisted.⁵⁰ The Church was to be purified. And the reason, as J. W. Allen points out, that English Puritans were so vitally concerned with the form of Church government in their day is to be found in their belief that it was precisely the business of the Church to see that England, and all other nations as well, should become the *regnum Christi* of which Bucer had written.⁵¹ This providential understanding of history and of England's place in that history was a dynamic force in Puritan activities.⁵²

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III

One other source of "providential history" influential on Puritan thought was Sir Walter Raleigh's *A History of the World*. First published in 1614 and written while Sir Walter was captive in the Tower awaiting death for high treason (he was later released but executed in 1618), this secular history stressed "second causes" and "the ineluctable working

⁴⁹ Gay, p. 16. For the American appropriations, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston, 1971), ch. 16. William Bradford called Foxe: "Mr. Fox our English Martyrologer." See *Historie of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. W. C. Ford, 2 vols. (New York, 1912), I, 7. Cotton Mather also found Foxe to be an authority, not just on facts but even more on the meaning of history. See *Diary*, ed. W. C. Ford, 2 vols. (New York, 1911-12), I, 230.

⁵⁰ The implications of Foxe's work were not lost on Archbishop Laud who in 1637 refused to license the *Book of Martyrs* for re-publication.

⁵¹ See J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the 16th Century* (New York, 1961), pp. 217-8.

⁵² The theme becomes more explicit as the Civil War approaches and is seen most clearly during that period. The Puritan pulpit, especially in Parliament, was used "as a most effective organ for propagating their millenarian ideology, thus transforming what was primarily constitutional conflicts between the King and Parliament into a holy war between Christ and Antichrist" (Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion* (The Hague, 1973), p. 11). As John F. Wilson points out: Millenarianism is "the most striking and fundamental characteristic of the formal preaching before the Long Parliament" (*Pulpit in Parliament* (Princeton, 1969), p. 195).

out of cause and effect at the human level, so that evil actions ultimately but inevitably produce evil consequences for the doer."⁵³ With a patriotism as vigorous as Foxe's (he boasted that the English were better warriors than the Romans or Macedonians), Raleigh tells the story of English history, drawing lessons of his own as he goes. His severe judgments on kings from Henry I to Henry VIII provoked James I to remark that Raleigh was "too saucy in censuring princes."⁵⁴ But Raleigh was a confirmed believer in the Christian doctrine of Providence and "his *History* was esteemed by Puritans above almost any other secular book. They liked it not just because Raleigh had dared to criticize kings, but because he justified the ways of God to man, not in poetic fiction, but in sober fact." Raleigh's

historical synthesis was original and by it he accomplished what amounted to a reassertion of medieval ideas of universal history in terms which were meaningful to seventeenth-century Christians. A work of history which went through more editions in the seventeenth century than the collected works of Shakespeare may be assumed to have aroused deep responses.⁵⁵

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For Raleigh, the primary purpose of history was to provide means for living a good life. God's judgments which are "forever unchangeable" can be seen and understood in history. If so, then the symmetry between past and present was exact — and fearful! Men must learn the lessons God was teaching through the irreligious. God is the first cause of all things but he works in and through nature by means of second causes. Men themselves have "no more self-ability" than "a clock after it is wound up by a man's hand hath." Though he did not know how God might be said to work His purposes out in this process, he (like Calvin) was content not to speculate too far since "certain scholastical distinctions wrest and pervert the truth of all things." God was the spectator over history having foreknowledge about it, as well as the author of the historical script. Such assertions of course could not be historically "verifiable" and could be used to explain anything and everything. And, in facing the problem of "necessity" and "free will," Raleigh attempts to steer a middle course and confess both. Sometimes, though, he resorts to un-historical or anti-historical concepts, such as the operation of the stars, as explanation for man's wickedness. His source of authority was the Bible, which was absolute authority and took prece-

⁵³ Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (London, 1972), p.180.

⁵⁴ Hill, *Origins*, p.180. On Raleigh see *D.N.B.* XLVII, 186-206.

⁵⁵ F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640* (New York, 1962), p.193.

dence over all secular accounts. As a chronologer he reckoned the creation to have been in 4032 B.C.⁵⁶

In general Raleigh's approach centred around three problems: "1) The rôle of the individual in history. 2) The relation of continuity to change in history and 3) the derivation of political lessons from history."⁵⁷ As a contributor to the Puritan understanding it is obvious what impact Raleigh must have had, following as he did in the tradition of Augustine. Indeed,

in the seventeenth century, when the hand of providence was visible to the makers and to the writers of history, Raleigh's *History of the World* was held in highest esteem. Milton and Hampden and Cromwell could agree with Bishop Hall and Dr. Heylyn that Raleigh was a profound and exact writer of universal history. Few English historians of the seventeenth century failed to mention Raleigh's *History* "without some epithet or sentence in its praise." But the work had no sequel; Raleigh had admirers, but no successors. The date at which Raleigh's narrative broke off was 130 B.C. No universal history, comparable to Raleigh's in purpose and content, carried on the history of Rome's rise to power and developed the theme of why Rome, too, was destined to be cut down by "a rabble of barbarian invaders." One reason for this stillness was that the best seventeenth-century historians were primarily concerned, as were the scientists, with discoverable and verifiable facts. Raleigh's overall providential interpretation of history might still be accepted, but the methodological assumptions which sustained it were becoming obsolete.⁵⁸

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IV

But the place where the doctrine of Providence expressed itself most forcefully was in the lives and perceptions of individual Puritans. While countless examples of this could be amassed, a few are selected here to illustrate the point.

At the very heart of Puritanism is the personal faith that "a man's steps are directed by the Lord" (Ps. 37:23). Certainly God upholds the world and governs it, but even more he intervenes in the lives of individuals to provide for them in various ways and to remind them of His presence. As Woodhouse put it: "History is not 'the known march of the ordinary providence'; it is a protracted wandering from the way, relieved by sudden interventions of God's *extraordinary* providence."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ This summary is from Fussner, pp.193ff.

⁵⁷ Fussner, p.205.

⁵⁸ Fussner, pp.209-10.

⁵⁹ A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., "Introduction," to *Puritanism and Liberty* (Chicago, 1965), p.50.

These “interventions” often included miraculous deliverances or preservations from some natural force, or apparent “chance” happenings which believers could only ascribe to the workings of God. As Cotton Mather enumerated them:

Such Divine judgements, tempests, floods, earthquakes, thunder as are unusual, strange apparitions, or whatever else shall happen that is prodigious, witchcrafts, diabolical possessions, remarkable judgements upon noted sinners, eminent deliverances, answers of prayer, are to be reckoned among illustrious providences.⁶⁰

Increase Mather entitled a work *Remarkable Providences*.

The most frequent device used to chronicle such experiences was the Puritan diary.

In the Middle Ages preachers had enlivened their sermons with *exempla* — edifying tales of judgments upon sinners and mercies shown to the pious. In the 16th and 17th centuries the accumulation of such stories became a religious duty for everyone. The Puritan layman was expected to keep a record of the mercies bestowed upon him by Providence.⁶¹

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The utility of such a course of action is discussed by Isaac Ambrose in a publication on diary keeping. He wrote:

1. Hereby he (the diarist) observes something of God to his soul, and of his soul to God. 2. Upon occasion he pours out his soul to God in prayer accordingly, and either is humbled or thankful. 3. He considers how it is with him in respect of time past, and if he have profited, in grace, to find out the means whereby he hath profited, that he may make more constant use of such means; or wherein he hath decayed, to observe by what temptation he was overcome, that his former errors may make him more wary for the future.⁶²

In 1656 a whole book on this subject was published by John Beadle, an Essex minister entitled *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian*. He pointed out first that

We have our State Diurnals, relating the National affaires. Tradesmen keep their shop books. Merchants their Account books. Lawyers have their books

⁶⁰ Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providences* (London, 1890), Preface. Matthew Poole, the Presbyterian, near the end of the Cromwellian Protectorate, proposed the idea of compiling a complete list of fully documented providences in a co-operative venture across denominational lines. See Keith V. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), p.95.

⁶¹ Thomas, p.93. Also included in the notion of “diaries” are autobiographies. Some 363 diaries and 100 autobiographies (written till 1699) survive. On other aspects of “Puritan Piety” see Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (London, 1957) and Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality* (London, 1973).

⁶² Quoted in Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, a Seventeenth Century Clergyman* (Cambridge, 1970), p.6.

of presidents. Physicians their Experiments. Some wary husbands have kept a Diary of dayly disbursements. Travellers a Journall of all they have seen, and hath befallen them in their way. A Christian that would be exact hath more need, and may reap much more good by such a Journall as this. We are all but Stewards, Factors here, and must give a strict account in that great day to the high Lord of all our wayes, and of all his wayes towards us.⁶³

The element of personal responsibility, built into the nature of the relationship of man and God, is one of the stimuli for keeping such records of “providences.” A letter received by Ralph Thoresby from his father stresses this when father urges son to

take a little journal of any thing remarkable every day, principally as to yourself as, suppose, Aug. 2. I was at such a place; (or) I omitted such a duty . . . I have thought this a good method for one to keep a tolerable decorum in actions, etc. because he is to be accountable to himself as well as to God, which we are too apt to forget.⁶⁴

To call to mind the dealings which God has had with you is a reason to keep an account as was stated by an anonymous relative of Oliver Cromwell who wrote that she started her diary “for the Help of my Memorie, concerning the Worke of God on my Soule, which I desire thankfully to commemorate.”⁶⁵ William Haller sums up:

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The godly man should “keep a strict account of his effectual calling.” If possible, he should “set down the time when, the place where, and the person by whom he was converted.” He should make note of all the men and means that God has at any time used for his good, especially the services of parents, schoolmasters and patrons. He will find it singularly useful to put into his diary what Times we have lived in, what Minister we have lived under, what Callings we were of, what Wealth was bestowed on us, what places of Authority and Command were committed to us. Most important of all, the Christian should record all the mercies of Providence, all the answers vouchsafed by God to his prayers. “Indeed what is our whole life, but a continued deliverance? We are daily delivered, either from the violence of the creature, or the rage of men, or the treachery of our own hearts; either our houses are freed from firing, or goods from plundering, or our bodies from danger, or our names from reproaches, or our souls from snares.” The Puritan faith invested the individual soul, the most trivial circumstances of the most commonplace existence, with the utmost significance. Why should not a man

⁶³ In Macfarlane, p.7.

⁶⁴ In Macfarlane, p.6.

⁶⁵ In Macfarlane, p.6. Jane Turner recorded her spiritual experiences, she “ ‘finding from said experience, that . . . I am prone to forget the particulars, the remembrance of which I find to be much for the glory of God, and my own comfort and profit.’ ”

keep a record of matters in which God took so active an interest as he did in the petty moods and doings of any common sinner?⁶⁶

No happening or circumstance was too small to be recorded. When Ralph Josselin's wife gave birth and began to breast-feed her baby, Josselin noted it as being of God's concern: "It pleased God my wives breasts were sore." But fortunately things got better for, while it was "a grievance and sad cutt to her, but with the use of means in some distance of time they healed up."⁶⁷

For many, the diary was like an account book. This was heightened by the legal language of justification whereby a man brings to God nothing but his sin (debt) and God offers him nothing but His grace (credit). Spiritual and financial balances might both be reckoned together at the end of a month:

31 day spent in seeking to cast up my accounts with god and to see all ye debt discharged by ye full satisfaction allready made by my . . . blessed Savior Jesus Christ.

I haved Considered my Concerns ys moneth and find yt my Receipts have been 10L. 3s. 6; and have disburst and payd 9L. 4s. 6; Blessed be ye God of my mercys that sends me Receipts answerable to my charges and disbursms Amen.⁶⁸

Yet this dealing with God was not confined to periodic "checkups." The Puritans believed in a daily walk with God and a life of devotion. They would see the hand of God and experience his presence even in the discipline of a regularized life of piety. A Cheshire gentleman, John Bruen,

rose between 3 and 4 in the morning to spend an hour or two in prayer. Later he would gather his family for morning prayers and the singing of psalms; then he would read a chapter of the Bible to them, and then pray again, bringing before the Lord the requests of various members of the family. The same routine was gone through in the evening.⁶⁹

In the midst of such exercises, the Puritan felt the presence of God, of a God intimately concerned with his every move and a God with whom he

⁶⁶ William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1972), pp.96-7.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Macfarlane, p.86.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972), p.21.

⁶⁹ In Wallace Notestein, *The English People on the Eve of Colonization 1603-1630* (New York, 1954), p.151, from William Hinde, *Life of John Bruen* (New York, 1857). The routine of Thomas Wilson, rector of Maidstone, on the Sabbath is described in H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958), p.224.

could communicate and who could communicate with him through the means of grace. Ralph Josselin on February 11, 1659 says, "before I did anything I sought God in private, and he sweetly answered mee 'who art thou that thou art afraid of a man and feareth not mee'; and on the 13th: 'I sought God, he answered not; I was resolved to rest on his former answer; I sought again, and he answered, 'I will never faile thee nor forsake thee' the which word came with power, and commanded my heart."⁷⁰

God may speak words of grace to the Puritan, or words of judgment. A prime reason to keep the diary was for self-examination, as Richard Rogers, Vicar of Wethersfield, Essex put it:

It is an other thing that I desire, to know mine owne heart better, where I know that much is to be gotten in understanding of it, and to be acquainted with the diverse corners of it and what sin I am most in daunger of and what dilig[ence] and meanes I use against my sin and how I goe under any affliction].⁷¹

Looking at how one is making use of time or talents or circumstances providentially given; how one treats his fellow or family, indeed "the most striking feature of the Puritan way of life revealed in these diaries is the overwhelming predominance of the ethical element."⁷² God's Providence expressed itself within the spiritual life, always shaping and moulding, instructing, edifying and building up the man of God in godliness. In the experiences of daily life then, God's hand is to be seen. All is ordained by him, nothing happens by "accident." So, "he who has eyes to see, let him see"! Or, as the Elizabethan Bishop Thomas Cooper put it:

That which we call fortune, is nothing but the hand of God, working by causes and for causes that we know not. Chance or fortune are god's devised by man and made by our ignorance of the true, almighty and everlasting God.⁷³

V

In the Puritan view of history, then, God's Providence was experience

⁷⁰ In Macfarlane, p. 180.

⁷¹ "The Diary of Richard Rogers," in M. M. Knappen, ed., *Two Elizabethan Diaries* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1966), p. 62.

⁷² Knappen, *Diaries*, p. 2. This is from his introduction "The Puritan Character."

⁷³ In Thomas, p. 79. John Knox wrote: "Fortune and Adventure are the words of Paynims, the signification whereof ought in no wise to enter in the heart of the faithful . . . That which ye scoffingly call Destiny and Stoical necessity . . . we call God's eternal election and purpose immutable" (*The Works of John Knox*, ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1846-69), V, 32, 119; cf. *Institutes*, I. xvi. 8).

— both “without,” in the great overarching schema of history; and “within” — in the daily life of the saints.

Perhaps no one combined awareness of these two elements in Puritan belief like Oliver Cromwell. Most Puritans had a generalized notion, real but generalized, of the outworking of God’s grand design for history. Oliver Cromwell had a vital sense of participating in it. His whole attitude, concisely stated, is seen in a letter to Robert Hammond on November 25, 1648, when Cromwell wrote: “My dear friend, let us look into providences; surely they mean somewhat. They hang so together, have been so constant, so clear and unclouded.”⁷⁴ Here was Cromwell’s unqualified belief that God made plain His will to His saints through events in this world. The letter was written to Hammond at a time during the Civil War when events were causing Hammond to consider resigning his army post. Cromwell reminded him that God himself had laid responsibility on his shoulders when he had wanted to escape and become Governor of the Isle of Wight. Cromwell wrote:

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Dear Robin, thou and I were never worthy to be door-keepers in this service. If thou wilt seek, seek to know the mind of God in all that chain of Providence, whereby God brought thee thither, and that person to thee; how, before and since, God has ordered him, and affairs concerning him: and then tell me, whether there be not some glorious and high meaning in all this, above what thou hast yet attained? And, laying aside thy fleshly reason, seek of the Lord to teach thee what that is; and He will do it.⁷⁵

This is how Providence affects individuals. God orders events and with this kind of certainty — surely *anything* could be undertaken!

Cromwell had read Raleigh’s *History of the World* and recommended it to his son Richard, saying, “Recreate yourself with Sir Walter Raughleye’s *History*; it’s a body of history, and will add much more to your understanding than fragments of story.”⁷⁶ While speaking to the Barebones Parliament, Cromwell made distinctions between “stories that . . . give you narratives of matters of fact” and “those things where the life and power of them lay, those strange windings and turnings of Providence.”⁷⁷ He passionately believed in God’s unfolding plan for history, and just as strongly believed in his own part in it, by the grace of God. As his New Model Army troops drew up for battle at Naseby, Cromwell saw them as

⁷⁴ Wilbur C. Abbot, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1937-47), I, 697.

⁷⁵ Abbott, I, 696.

⁷⁶ Abbott, II, 236.

⁷⁷ Abbott, III, 53.

a company of poor ignorant men, [yet all the time he could not but] smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory, because God would, by things that are not, bring to naught things that are. Of which I had great assurance; and God did it. O that men would therefore praise the Lord, and declare the wonders that He doth for the children of men. [In this battle,] God was pleased to use his servants.⁷⁸

Here was a man participating in God's great world drama. It is well said that this strict doctrine of Providence

was not only the stimulus of Cromwell's single-minded purpose throughout the civil wars, and the foundation of his claim to a vocation of statesmanship, but during the vicissitudes of the Protectorate it was also the one sure anchor of hope that God would be with him to the end.⁷⁹

What were the roots of this faith? From where did Cromwell get this steady stability? Certainly and primarily he got it from his own appropriation of the Scriptures and Christian faith. Of his religious experience he wrote to his cousin:

My soul is in the congregation of the first-born, my body rests in hope, and if here I may honour God either by doing or by suffering, I shall be most glad.

His whole letter is filled with Scriptural phrases and illustrations and reference to his former life: "Oh, I lived in and loved darkness, and hated the light — I was a chief, the chief of sinners."⁸⁰ Such language, though a common style for Puritans, more strongly suggests, however, that Cromwell had been through a powerful religious experience. The date of his "conversion" has been speculated on but it seems to have been around 1628, near the time he suffered an attack of melancholia.⁸¹

But formative in Cromwell's view of Providence, it can hardly be doubted, is the influence of two teachers — Dr. Thomas Beard and Dr. Samuel Ward. Beard, a "rigid Calvinist and uncompromising Puritan" wrote an important work *The Theatre of God's Judgments* (1597) in the tradition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. In it, human existence is portrayed as a struggle between God and the powers of darkness. The elect of God fight for him and obtain certain victory insofar as they obey His laws. One chapter shows "how rare . . . good princes have been at all times", and how God's destructive power is aimed at the "mighty, puissant and fearful." Beard writes:

If you be mighty, puissant and fearful, know that the Lord is greater than

⁷⁸ Abbott, I, 365.

⁷⁹ Robert S. Paul, *The Lord Protector* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p.385.

⁸⁰ Abbott, I. 96-7.

⁸¹ For the discussion, see Paul, pp.37-42.

you, for he is almighty, all-terrible and all-fearful; in what place soever you are, he is always above you, ready to hurl you down and overturn you to break, quash and crush you in pieces as pots of earth.⁸²

God was immediately concerned with history, giving rewards and punishments. He is no respecter of persons and will intervene to help the poor and humble. There is a divine plan at work. Beard's work is here similar to Raleigh's except that for the latter God does not intervene to smite the sinner in such a forceful way. But Beard's work is in the Foxe tradition too in that it adopts the view that the "latter days" are the present times and that the Pope is Antichrist (see n.39). Indeed Beard's *Theatre* serves to introduce his later book (1625): *Antichrist the Pope of Rome*. This apocalypticism and view of Antichrist was imbibed by Cromwell. See, for example, an instance of this when he wrote to the Governor of Edinburgh Castle that Christ did not meddle with secular power. Cromwell wrote: "This was not practised by the Church since our Saviour's time, till Antichrist, assuming the infallible chair . . . practised this authoritatively over civil governments"⁸³

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But if Cromwell found in Dr. Beard the notion of God's universal providence, he must have found in Samuel Ward, the sweet doctrine of God's special individual care. Ward was Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, when Cromwell was a student there. He was influential with the students and his is one of the diaries kept which witness powerfully to the Puritan belief in God's personal, loving direction of a man's life. Ward's diary reflects sober self-examination about the "small things" of life, but also a passionate faith in the "workings of God."⁸⁴ Ward was a student of the great Puritan, William Perkins and one of his fervent admirers. At this time he held Puritan views: "In the University he was very intimately acquainted with Mr. John Dodd and

⁸² Quoted in Hill, *Origins*, p.180. See other lessons Beard taught in Hill, *God's Englishman* (London, 1973), pp.37-8. Cf. his chapter on "Providence and Oliver Cromwell." See Paul, pp.24ff.

⁸³ Abbott, II, 338. Further examples can be cited and this theme expanded. Consider Cromwell's relationship to the Fifth Monarchists and his speech on July 4, 1653 to the Barebones Parliament: "Truly you are called by God to rule with Him and for Him. I confess I never looked to see such a day as this . . . when Jesus Christ should be owned as He is, at this day. For this may be the door to usher in the things that God has promised; which have been prophesied of . . . some of us have thought, that it is our duty to endeavour this way; not vainly to look at that prophecy in Daniel" (Abbott, III, 61, 63-4). Cf. Paul, pp.141, 328, 334-5.

⁸⁴ See Ward's *Diary*, in Knappen, pp.103ff.

other Puritans; he himself being then counted one.’⁸⁵ Ward lamented Perkins’ death.⁸⁶

Thus in terms of Cromwell and Providence: he held the Puritan view that “God is responsible for every detail of the individual’s life, no less than for every circumstance of history, and once the evangelical experience was his, Cromwell could not help breathing the same air as Samuel Ward and Thomas Beard; for good or ill he would enter into the legacy of his earlier training.”⁸⁷

From the above it is clear that the view of history appropriated by the Puritans is that of the Calvin/Augustinian tradition. It stresses the transcendence of God and His imminence within the historical process. This view was mediated for seventeenth-century England by Foxe and Raleigh who gave a contemporary framework through which the past as well as the present could be viewed. In Puritan diaries, “providence within” is detected as God is seen as active in all the events of human existence. These two facets fuse in Cromwell, the influences on his thought being a collective sum of the Augustinian/Calvinistic/Puritan tradition. His involvement in “history” as a result of his belief well epitomizes that legacy gleaned from Calvin which is “more explosive than the dogma of predestination!”⁸⁸

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

⁸⁵ In Knappen, *Diaries*, p.39. Thus, it is sure that Perkins’ views on Providence, specifically “Predestination” on which he wrote a long treatise (*Works*, II, 606-41), were also Ward’s, hence Cromwell’s views.

⁸⁶ In Knappen, *Diaries*, p.130.

⁸⁷ Paul, p.38. Further elaborations of Cromwell’s belief in Providence and his rôle in the Civil War can be found in Paul, *passim*. On the other hand, Clarendon viewed the Restoration as: “‘such a prodigious act of Providence as he hath scarce vouchsafed to any nation, since he led his own chosen people through the Red Sea’ and was brought about ‘by such an extraordinary Influence of Divine Providence that there appears no Footsteps of Human Power in the Deliverance’.”

⁸⁸ See above, n.1. Hilaire Belloc wrote: “No Calvin, no Cromwell. You shall not understand the mind of Cromwell, nor any of the innumerable minds who have known themselves from that day till yesterday, to be Elect of God, until you have felt the fierce blast from the furnace which Jean Cauvin of Noyon, in Picardy, kindled” (cited in Paul, p.37).