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Two Approaches to Indian Conversion

in Puritan New England:

The Missions of

Thomas Mayhew Jr. and John Eliot

Richard W. Cogley

In November of 1657, Thomas Mayhew, Jr., the thirty-six year-old minister on Martha's Vineyard, left his home in "Great Harbour" (Edgartown) and travelled to Boston, where he boarded a ship bound for London. The vessel sank before it reached its destination, and all hands were lost at sea. One of the mainland Puritans most affected by the tragedy was John Eliot (1604-1690), the minister at Roxbury, Massachusetts. "The Lord has given us this amazing blow," he lamented, "to take away my brother Mayhew." Eliot had special reason to mourn Mayhew's passing, for at the time the two Congregational clergymen were the leading Puritan missionaries to the Indians. Due in large part to the efforts of these two men, Martha's Vineyard and Massachusetts Bay were the locations of the most successful Indian missions in seventeenth-century New England.¹

1. Eliot, A Further Account of the Progresse of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England (London, 1659), p. 7. For the missions in the colonies of Rhode Island, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven, see Alden T. Vaughn, New

Mayhew and Eliot shared three broad missionary objectives. The first was to convince the Indians of their sinful condition and the necessity of repentance. This line of approach had been the standard starting point of Christian evangelism ever since the days of the apostles. The second was to instruct the natives in "Christian civilization." Mayhew and Eliot believed that this program of indoctrination was best pursued in special settlements, often called "praying towns," where the Christian Indians could learn about the Bible and Calvinist doctrine, and also receive training in English work habits, hygiene, domestic relations, sex roles, and similar matters. The third objective was to gather the Indians into Congregational churches, where adult Indians could receive the sacrament of communion and their children the sacrament of baptism. The two missionaries, ever mindful of St. Paul's admonition that "whosoever eats and drinks unworthily is guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (I Corinthians 11:27), permitted only the more advanced proselytes to receive communion. This policy was a source of pride for the Puritans, who wished to distinguish their missionary practices from those of the Roman Catholic friars, whom they wrongly accused of administering the sacraments to multitudes of unwashed natives.

Mayhew and Eliot had to overcome several obstacles in order to achieve these missionary goals. One was the Congregational polity, which tied ministers to their flocks. The two men had full-time responsibilities to the English congregations that had ordained them. Thus, Mayhew and Eliot were able to pursue the mission only during their spare time. A second obstacle was the difficulty of the local Algonquian dialects. The linguistic challenge surely discouraged many aspiring missionaries in seventeenth-century New England. In addition to facing these two obstacles to the mission, Mayhew and Eliot also encountered resistance from within the Indian bands. Much of this resistance came from the "sachems," or "sagamores" (chiefs), and the "powwows" (shamans). In traditional native society, the sachems and the powwows reinforced each other's power and prestige. For this reason, they often presented a united front against the missionaries.

In southern New England, the sachems were normally leaders of small bands, rather than heads of entire tribes. In most

England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675 (Boston, 1965), pp. 285-286 and 298-303.

cases, the office was reserved for males of certain privileged lines of descent. "The sachems' principal responsibilities," historian Neal Salisbury has explained, were "to carry out or coordinate those activities and functions that were the concern of the group as a whole rather than of families or individuals — hunting, inter-band trade and diplomacy, and the administration of intra-band justice," and also to "assign garden plots to families." The sachems ruled by consent and charisma, and not (as many Puritans believed) by absolutist decree. The subordinate members of the bands showed their allegiance to the sachems by offering tribute to them. This tribute typically consisted of wampum, labor, furs, and grains. The sachems reciprocated by bestowing gifts upon the subordinates.²

The powwows were the primary religious and medical functionaries in Indian society. Their major responsibilities were to predict the future, to heal the sick, and to cast spells. These functions were based on the powwows' presumed ability to manipulate the spiritual universe. In contrast to the sachems, the powwows rarely inherited their office. An Indian became a powwow when Hobbomack, a versatile Indian deity who was also known as Chepian, appeared in a dream or vision in the form of an animal, bird, fish, or serpent. These visitations were often preceded by a period of preparation, when an aspiring powwow went without sleep or food, and perhaps also used hallucinogens. The Puritans believed that Hobbomack was Satan's lieutenant, the powwows were witches, and their ritual practices were "diabolical exercises." As Daniel Gookin, the long-time Indian Superintendent in Massachusetts Bay, stated in 1675, "these powwows are reputed, and I conceive justly, to hold familiarity with the devil." Mayhew and Eliot shared Gookin's view on the matter.³

2. Neal Salisbury, Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643 (New York, 1982), pp. 42-43, 47-49, and 118-119.

3. Gookin, The Historical Collections of the Indians in New England (1674), in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, first series, I (1792): 154; Mayhew, in Eliot and Mayhew, Tears of Repentance (London, 1653), in *ibid.*, third series, IV (1834): 201-206; and Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, eds., John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction (Westport, Conn., 1980), pp. 85-90. For a fuller discussion of the powwows, see William S. Simmons, "Southern New England Shamanism: An Ethnographic Reconstruction," in William Cowan, ed., Papers of the Seventh Algonquian Conference, 1975 (Ottawa, Canada, 1976), pp. 217-256.

Although they pursued the same goals and faced the same problems, Mayhew and Eliot had different points of missionary focus. Mayhew concluded that the powwows represented "the strongest cord that binds them [the Indians] to their own way," and thus worked to destroy the power of the powwows. Eliot believed that the sachems constituted the "greater opposition" to the mission and centered his attention on evangelizing them.⁴ Mayhew did not disregard the sachems, and Eliot did not ignore the powwows. But because the two clergymen had contrasting orientations, the missions on Martha's Vineyard and in Massachusetts Bay developed in different directions. In the long term, Mayhew's mission proved more successful than Eliot's.

Mayhew's mission began shortly after the English colonization of Martha's Vineyard. In 1641, Thomas Mayhew Sr. (1593-1682) purchased Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the adjacent islands, from the Council of New England. In 1642, the two Mayhews and their families, along with approximately fifty other English settlers, moved onto Martha's Vineyard, which then was home to several thousand Wampanoag Indians. In 1643, Mayhew Jr. began to preach to the natives at the east end of the island. After Mayhew's death in 1657, his missionary duties were assumed by other family members: his father, his sons Matthew (1648-1710) and John (1652-1689), his grandson Experience (1673-1758), and his great-grandson Zachariah (1718-1806). In combined effect, these five generations of Mayhews carried the mission throughout Martha's Vineyard and also to Nantucket and nearby islands.⁵

4. Mayhew and Eliot, in Henry Whitfield, The Light Appearing More and More towards the Perfect Day (London, 1651), in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 3d series, IV (1834): 113 and 139.

5. For the history of the Mayhew mission, see Lloyd C. M. Hare, Thomas Mayhew: Patriarch to the Indians (New York, 1932), pp. 116-140, 189-202, and 218-225; Ronda, "Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha's Vineyard," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, XXXVIII (1981): 369-94; Simmons, "Conversion from Indian to Puritan," New England Quarterly, LII (1979): 197-218; Charles Banks, History of Martha's Vineyard (1911; reprint edition Edgartown, Mass., 1966), I: 213-57; Margery Johnson, "The Mayhew Mission to the Indians, 1643-1806," Ph.D. dissertation, Clark University, 1966; and E. Jennifer Monaghan, "She loved to read in good Books': Literacy and the Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1643-1725," History of Education Quarterly, XXX (1990): 493-521.

The younger Mayhew, Thomas Matthew Jr., labored in obscurity until 1649, when Edward Winslow, the Plymouth magistrate then serving as the Bay Colony's agent in London, published a missionary progress report, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England*. The tract, which focussed on Eliot's early achievements on the mainland, contained a letter that Mayhew had written in September of 1647 to an unidentified correspondent in England. Winslow, who did not explain how he obtained a copy of Mayhew's letter, stated that he chose to publish it, "lest the young man should be discouraged in his labors so hopefully begun." Mayhew's reputation in London increased in the early 1650s, when Henry Whitfield, the minister in Guilford, Connecticut, published two more accounts of Puritan missions, *The Light Appearing More and More towards the Perfect Day* (London, 1651) and *Strength out of Weaknesse; or a Glorious Manifestation of the Further Progresse of the Gospel among the Indians in New England* (London, 1652). These two tracts included letters from Mayhew and Eliot, and also from several minor missionaries in Plymouth Colony. Whitfield had learned about the Martha's Vineyard mission after the ship transporting him from Guilford to Boston was forced by a "contrary wind" to land on the island. The increased publicity enabled Mayhew to receive a salary from the New England Company, the London-based corporation that financed the Indian work in New England. By the mid-1650s, Mayhew's annual salary had risen from twenty pounds to fifty pounds, equivalent to Eliot's.⁶

The Martha's Vineyard mission began in 1643 when an Indian named Hiacoomes, "thinking there might be better ways and means among the English," came to Mayhew, Jr., and asked to learn about the Christian religion. Shortly thereafter, Hiacoomes' nascent faith was tested when a "very strange disease" visited the island later in that year. Instead of turning to the powwows for protection against the infection, he "held out, and continued his care about the things of God." Mayhew and Hiacoomes soon came to rely on each other. The minister provided instruction in the English Protestant way of life, and the Indian offered training in the local Algonquian dialect. By the end of the decade, Mayhew

6. Winslow, in *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1649), in *Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections*, 3d series, IV (1834): 76; and Whitfield, in *The Light Appearing*, pp. 107-109. For the salaries paid to Mayhew and Eliot, see William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776* (London, 1961), pp. 93 and 97-98.

and Hiacoomes were preaching regularly to the Indians in the vicinity. Hiacoomes, who lived until 1690, continued his ministry after Mayhew's death in 1657. In 1670, the Indian was formally ordained to the ministry in a ceremony in which Eliot participated. Hiacoomes also laid a family line of Christian Indians that lasted well into the eighteenth century. His best-known descendant was his son Joel, who was one of the six or seven New England natives who attended the "Indian College" at Harvard. Joel, who completed the requirements for the bachelor's degree in 1665, died shortly before commencement, when he was shipwrecked at Nantucket and murdered by the Indians soon after he came ashore.⁷

In 1645, a "universal sickness" ravaged Martha's Vineyard. The powwows proved unable to counteract the force of the epidemic. To judge from their inability to curtail it, the disease was almost certainly European in origin. Mayhew and Hiacoomes, who until then had achieved little missionary success, took advantage of the situation. As Mayhew recalled in 1647:

There was one [Indian] about sixty years of age, who was sick of a consuming disease, insomuch as the Indian powwows gave him over for a dead man. Upon which resolution of all the powwows on the island, the sick distressed heathen upon a Lord's day came unto me (the rest of the English being then present) to desire me to pray unto God for him. And so when I had by reasoning with him convinced him of the weakness of the powwows' power; and that if health were to be found, it must be had from him that gave life, and breath, and all things; I commended this case unto the Lord, whereof he rejoiced, gave me thanks, and he speedily recovered unto his former strength.

Mayhew's ability to cure an Indian whom the powwows had "given over for a dead man," as well as the fact that the epidemic spared Hiacoomes and his family, attracted the attention of two local

7. Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, pp. 109-110; and Eliot, A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England (London, 1671), p. 4. For the Hiacoomes family line, see Ronda, "Generations of Faith," pp. 375-376. For the "Indian College," see Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 340-360.

sachems, Myoxeo and Towanquattick, who converted later in 1645. Towanquattick, who was apparently the more potent of the two sachems, then asked Mayhew to provide Christian instruction at regular intervals. Two years later, Towanquattick faced a major challenge to his faith. In 1647, his son contracted a "fever." The sachem refused to seek treatment from the powwows, who told him that the boy "should die, because he sought not to them," and took the child to Mayhew, who managed to cure him. "I bound his arm, and with my pen-knife let him bleed, . . . and in a short time he began to be very cheerful," the missionary explained.⁸

The infant mission nevertheless remained controversial on the island. The leader of the opposition was the sachem at Chappaquiddick, Poneponesso. In 1643, this sachem "reproached Hiacoomes for his fellowship with the English, both in civil and religious ways," and then gave him a "great blow on the face with his hand." In 1644, Poneponesso challenged Hiacoomes in a less aggressive fashion, by asking him "What would you do if any of you should be sick? Whither would you go for help?" Shortly thereafter, the sachem was severely burned and knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning. Although Mayhew tried to convince him that the accident was an act of divine judgment, Poneponesso remained unpersuaded. His commitment to the powwows was soon put to a test, when his son contracted the "universal sickness" in 1645. Poneponesso sought treatment from the powwows, who were unable to save the child. The son's death did not dislodge the father from his opposition to the mission.⁹

Most of the local Indians soon became convinced that the powwows had lost their ability to cure disease. It was "an observation of the Indians of this island," Mayhew explained, "that since the Word of God has been taught unto them in this place, the powwows have been much foiled in their devilish tasks, and that instead of curing have rather killed many." Yet, at the same time, Mayhew recognized that he had not destroyed the powwows' hold over the native population. He noted that "many" of the Indians who attended his sermons "found it hard to get from under the yoke [of the powwows] . . . that they and their forefathers had so long groaned under." The proselytes were still

8. Mayhew, in *The Glorious Progress*, pp. 77-78, and in *The Light Appearing*, pp. 111-112.

9. Mayhew, in *The Glorious Progress*, pp. 77-78, and in *The Light Appearing*, pp. 109-111 and 113-114.

"halting between two opinions" because they remained fearful of "the powwows' power to kill men." For this reason, Mayhew and Hiacoomes resolved to challenge the powwows' ability to work sorcery. Hiacoomes offered to stand "in the midst of all the powwows of the island," to prove that "by the worst of their witchcrafts" they could do him no harm. The powwows accepted the challenge; however, their "horrible outcries, hollow bleatings, and painful wrestlings" were to no avail.¹⁰

Thus, Mayhew and Hiacoomes discredited not only the powwows' ability to heal the sick, but also their power of sorcery. In 1650, two powwows came forward, "with their joints shaking, and their bowels trembling, their spirits troubled, and their voices with much fervency," and they renounced "their wicked ways to serve the Lord." "Not long after the powwows had forsaken their old way . . .," Mayhew explained, "diverse Indians desired to become the servants of the Lord." This group of proselytes included a prominent powwow named Tequanonim. Shortly after his conversion, fifty more natives accepted the mission.¹¹ The surrender of the powwows proved to be the key that unlocked the island to Mayhew. The Martha's Vineyard Indians did not convert in large number until the powwows had accepted the mission. In 1650, just before Mayhew and Hiacoomes challenged the powwows' power of sorcery, there were apparently only twenty-two adult Indian proselytes on Martha's Vineyard. Later, in 1650, there were thirty-nine male converts and a greater number though unspecified of women, and by the end of 1651 there were nearly two hundred Christian Indian men, women, and children. By the spring of 1652, the total approached three hundred persons ("not counting young children"), and eight converted powwows. Later in the year, the Martha's Vineyard proselytes signed a civil covenant and moved into a "praying town," for further training in the English and Protestant way of life. In 1659, two years after

10. Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, pp. 113-117, in Tears of Repentance, pp. 204-205, and in Whitfield, Strength out of Weaknesse (London, 1652), in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 3d series, IV (1834): 187.

11. Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, pp. 115-116, in Strength out of Weaknesse, pp. 185-188, and in Tears of Repentance, pp. 202-203.

Mayhew's death, the Indians formally established a Congregational church of "visible saints."¹²

From one point of view, the younger Mayhew was blessed with good fortune. The epidemic of 1645, which initiated the chain of events that led to the breakthrough of the early 1650s, visited Martha's Vineyard at a time when he and Hiacoomes were ready to exploit it for their purposes. In this respect, the situation on the island contrasted with that on the mainland, where the major epidemics (the "plague" in 1616-1617 and the smallpox of 1633-1634) preceded the birth of the Eliot mission by twelve or more years. Moreover, the surviving sources contain no evidence that Mayhew Jr. failed to cure any of the Indians who came to him for treatment, or that the powwows managed to heal any of the natives who sought traditional medical remedies. Furthermore, no Christian Indian family on Martha's Vineyard encountered death until 1650, when Hiacoomes lost a five day-old baby to disease. Hiacoomes set an example of Christian fortitude by refusing to follow the native burial practices. "There were no black faces, . . . , nor good buried with it, nor hellish howlings over the dead," Mayhew explained.¹³

The island mission continued to expand after Mayhew drowned in 1657. Many of the sachems who had initially resisted the mission eventually acquiesced to it. By the eve of King Philip's War, in 1675-1676, there were nearly three hundred Christian Indian families on Martha's Vineyard, as well as two churches with around fifty communicant members. By this time, the Mayhew family had extended the mission to Nantucket, where there were roughly three hundred Christian Indians, and also to

12. Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, pp. 115-116, in Strength out of Weaknesse, p. 188, and in Tears of Repentance, pp. 203 and 207-208. None of the contemporary scholars who discuss or note Mayhew's crusade against the powwows fully appreciates this point. It was the conversion of the powwows, and not the disclosure of their inability to heal the sick, that led directly to the massive conversions of the early 1650s. Simmons, "Conversion from Puritan to Indian," New England Quarterly, LII: 205-215; Ronda, "Generations of Faith," pp. 370, 377, and 390; James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America (New York, 1985), p. 230; and Neal Salisbury, "'Red Puritans': The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d. ser., XXXI (1975): 40.

13. Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, p. 116.

Chappaquiddick, where approximately sixty families were "generally praying to God."¹⁴)

John Eliot arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1631, at the age of twenty-seven. In 1632, he became the minister in the Roxbury church, a position he held until his death nearly sixty years later. He began his mission in 1646, and continued it until his retirement in the late 1680s, when his advanced age no longer permitted him to travel to the Indian settlements. His missionary achievements include the creation of Natick, the model "praying town" that he established in 1650, and the publication of an Algonquian translation of the Bible, *Mamusee Wunneetapanatamwe Up-Biblum God* (Cambridge, Mass., 1661-1663).¹⁵

Eliot is better known than Mayhew, even though the latter began his mission three years earlier. It is Eliot, and not Mayhew, who is celebrated in history books as "the Apostle to the Indians." The mainland missionary had better publicity in London. Eliot also resided in a more prominent location, and he outlived his Martha's Vineyard counterpart by more than thirty years. Eliot was also willing to advance his reputation at Mayhew's expense. In November of 1648, Eliot told his readers in London that he had "entreated Mr. Mayhew . . . to teach them [the

14. Gookin, *The Historical Collections*, pp. 205-207; Matthew Mayhew, *A Brief Narrative of the Success which the Gospel Hath Had among the Indians of Martha's Vineyard* (Boston, 1694), pp. 33-45; Neal Salisbury, "Prospero in New England: The Puritan Missionary as Colonist," in Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Sixth Algonquian Conference, 1974* (Ottawa, 1976), pp. 264-265; John Eliot, "An Account of the Indian Churches" (1673), in *Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections*, 1st ser., X (1809): 124; and Eliot, *A Brief Narrative*, p. 4.

15. For fuller accounts of Eliot's mission, see Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 235-308; Salisbury, "Red Puritans," pp. 27-54; Robert James Naeher, "Dialogue in the Wilderness: John Eliot and the Indian Exploration of Puritanism as a Source of Meaning, Comfort, and Ethnic Survival," *New England Quarterly*, LXII (1989): 346-368; and Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, pp. 131-241. For the mission after Eliot's death in 1690, see Harold van Lonkhuyzen, "A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians: Acculturation, Conversion, and Identity at Natick, Massachusetts, 1646-1730," in *New England Quarterly*, LXIII (1990): 421-428; and Daniel Mandell, "'To Live More like My Christian Neighbors': Natick Indians in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., XLVIII (1991): 552-579. Francis Jennings's influential discussion of Eliot's mission contains numerous errors in fact and interpretation. See *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York, 1976), pp. 228-253. For a response to Jennings, see Richard W. Cogley, "Idealism vs. Materialism in the Study of Puritan Missions to the Indians," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, III (1991): 165-182.

Martha's Vineyard Indians]." This claim does not correspond to chronology, a fact first noted by Francis Jennings. Eliot soon apologized in print for this statement, and then used his influence in London to benefit Mayhew.¹⁶ It is uncertain whether Mayhew ever learned of Eliot's ill-advised remark in 1648. If he did know about Eliot's indiscretion, Mayhew seems not to have been offended by it. He visited Eliot on at least two occasions, in the fall of 1651 and the summer of 1654, and he encouraged his Indian proselytes to travel to the "praying towns" in Massachusetts Bay for fellowship. Mayhew also collaborated with Eliot on a missionary progress report, *Tears of Repentance: or a Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England* (London, 1653).¹⁷

Eliot had three major reasons for centering his missionary attention on the sachems. First, he anticipated that a converted sachem would bring subordinate Indians into line. "I do endeavor to engage the sachems of greatest note to accept the Gospel, because that does greatly animate and encourage such as are well-affected, and is a damping to those that are scoffers and opposers," he explained in 1648.¹⁸ Second, Eliot had a pre-existing constituency. In 1644, two years before the birth of his mission, six sachems in eastern Massachusetts Bay formally submitted to the authority of the Massachusetts General Court. The sachems promised, among other things, to obey the Ten Commandments and to be "willing from time to time to be instructed in the knowledge and worship of God." Much of his early missionary success came among these sachems and their bands.¹⁹ Third, Eliot subscribed (for a time) to a radical form of Puritan eschatology known as "Fifth Monarchy" millenarianism. Like other Fifth Monarchists, he awaited the appearance of a

16. Eliot, *The Glorious Progress*, pp. 81-82; Eliot, *The Light Appearing*, pp. 122-123; and Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 245-247. For Eliot's solicitation on Mayhew's behalf, see Kellaway, *The New England Company*, pp. 91-92.

17. Eliot, *The Light Appearing*, p. 125; John Wilson, in *Strength out of Weakness*, p. 176; and Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel* (London, 1655), in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., IV (1834): 272.

18. Eliot, *The Glorious Progress*, p. 83.

19. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston, 1853-1854), II: 55-58 and 73.

non-monarchical form of millennial political organization. Eliot identified this coming order as the system of rulers of tens through rulers of thousands found in Exodus 18. In his judgment, the sachems were the counterparts to the monarchs (a perspective that vastly exaggerated the power and prestige of the sachems). For this reason, he worked to destroy traditional Indian government, in preparation for the millennium. In 1651, Eliot installed the biblical polity, through a single ruler of one hundred, in the "praying town" at Natick. He later published a millennial blueprint for New England, *The Christian Commonwealth: The Civil Polity of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ* (London, 1659), that expanded the system through rulers of millions in order to accommodate the nation's population. This phase in Eliot's eschatology ended with the Restoration of the House of Stuart in 1660. Thereafter, he was less hostile towards the sachems, even though he continued to focus his attention on them.²⁰

Eliot delivered his first missionary sermon to Cutshamekin and the Massachusetts Indians at Neponset, near present-day Dorchester. Cutshamekin, who was one of the six sachems who had submitted to the General Court in 1644, "rather despised what I said," Eliot later reported. Some six weeks later, in late October of 1646, Eliot tried a second time. On that occasion, he circumvented Cutshamekin and preached instead to some of the sachem's subordinate Indians at Nonantum (Newton), where the leading Indian was Waban. This sermon was a success; Eliot was able to report: "I never found Indians so forward, eager, and desirous to learn." Eliot soon expanded the mission throughout the eastern portion of the colony. By September of 1647, he was preaching regularly at Neponset, where Cutshamekin

20. The Christian Commonwealth is in the Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 3d ser., IX (1846): 127-164. For discussions of Eliot's radical eschatology, see James F. Maclear, "New England the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," in William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., XXXII (1975): 247-248 and 253-255; James Holstun, A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America (New York, 1987), pp. 115-120 and 145-158; Timothy J. Sehr, "John Eliot, Millennialist and Missionary," The Historian XLVI (1984): 196-203; and Theodore Dwight Bozeman, To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), pp. 271-275. To judge from his extant writings, Mayhew was not a millenarian of any sort, let alone a Fifth Monarchist.

(however reluctantly) now professed to "know God."²¹ By the end of the decade, Eliot had also evangelized the Pawtucket sachems at Musketaquid (Concord), Wamesit (Lowell), and Nashaway (Lancaster), as well as some of the Nipmuck sachems near Quabag (Brookfield). By the mid-1650s, Eliot had created from among these Indian settlements six "praying towns" in addition to Natick.²²

Those settlements clearly were the exceptions, for Eliot met with stiff opposition from the other sachems in southern New England. In late 1648, he reported that Massasoit and the Wampanoag Indians in Plymouth Colony were "enemies to praying to God," and in the 1660s he tried and failed to convert Massasoit's son and successor, the legendary Metacom, who later became known as King Philip and who led the Indians in their resistance to the continued colonization of their land. Eliot's conclusion about the mainland Wampanoags was confirmed by Thomas Mayhew Jr., who noted in 1650 that some of the Martha's Vineyard Indians had tried in vain to interest Massasoit in "Christian civilization." In the early 1650s, Eliot also failed to proselytize Ninigret of the Eastern Niantics in Rhode Island, and Uncas of the Mohegans in Connecticut. As Neal Salisbury has noted, the Wampanoags, Eastern Niantics, and Mohegans had not submitted to any of the colonial governments, and for this and other reasons were able to resist Eliot. "The great and proud sachems hate it and oppose it," Eliot stated in 1656 in reference to his missionary program. Although later in the seventeenth century, other missionaries achieved some limited success among the Wampanoags, Niantics, and Mohegans, the doors to these bands remained effectively closed until the Great Awakening in the middle of the eighteenth century.²³

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21. Eliot, in Thomas Shepard, The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New England (London, 1648), in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 3rd series, IV (1834): 49-59; and [Shepard], The Day-Breaking If Not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New-England (London, 1647), in *ibid.*, 1-22, *passim*.
 22. Shepard, in The Clear Sun-shine, pp. 38-39; Eliot, in The Glorious Progress, pp. 81-83, and in The Light Appearing, pp. 123-125; and Gookin, The Historical Collections, pp. 180-189.
 23. Eliot, in The Glorious Progress, p. 81; Eliot to the Commissioners of the United Colonies (1664), in The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, IX (1855): 132; Bowden and Ronda, eds., John Eliot's Indian Dialogues, pp. 120-149;

Eliot also encountered strong opposition from the powwows. Like Mayhew, he recognized the importance of the powwows in traditional Indian culture. In September of 1647, he stated, in words that Mayhew could have written, that

. . . there is another great question that has been several times propounded, and much sticks with such as begin to pray, namely, if they leave off powwowing, and pray unto God, what shall they do when they are sick? for they have no skill in physick, though some of them understand the virtues of sundry things, yet the state of a man's body, and skill to apply them they have not. But all the refuge they have and rely on in time of sickness is their powwows, who by antic, foolish, and irrational deceits delude the poor people; so that it is a very needful thing to inform them in the use of physick.

But to judge from the extant sources, Eliot never made a sustained effort to discredit the powwows' powers of healing and sorcery. In the early years of the mission, he instructed the Indians in "the anatomy of a man's body and some general principles of physick," on the assumption that this would be "a most effective way to take them [the natives] off their powwows." In time, Eliot was obliged to acknowledge that in certain unspecified cases, English remedies were inferior to their native counterparts. "When you powwows use physick by root," he explained in 1671, through the person of a Christian Indian named Piumbukhou, "that is no sin. You do well to use physick for your recovery from sickness." Although it represents a commendable adjustment on his part to the value of traditional Indian medicine, Eliot's concession also indicates that he was unable or unwilling to challenge the powwows.²⁴

Mayhew, in The Light Appearing, p. 117; Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood (1656), in Jews in America (London, 1660), p. 54; Salisbury, "Red Puritans," pp. 35 and 38-39; and Simmons, "The Great Awakening and Indian Conversion in Southern New England," in Cowan, ed., Papers of the Tenth Algonquian Conference, 1978 (Ottawa, Canada, 1979), pp. 25-36.

24. Eliot, in The Clear Sun-shine, p. 56, and in The Glorious Progress, p. 84; Bowden and Ronda, eds., John Eliot's Indian Dialogues, p. 88; and Eliot to Sir Robert Boyle (1670), in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 1st series, III (1794): 177.

Throughout his long missionary career, Eliot had problems with the powwows. In 1647, he reported that many of the powwows, "seeing their employment and gains were utterly gone here, have fled to other places, where they are still entertained, and have raised lies, slanders, and an evil report upon those that hear the Word." He immediately concluded that he had defeated his rivals, that his proselytes "have utterly forsaken all their powwows, and given over that diabolical exercise, being convinced that it is quite contrary to praying unto God." Although some twenty years later he claimed that powwowing was "abandoned, exploded, and abolished" among the Christian Indians, Eliot seems to have been mistaken about the matter.²⁵ Daniel Gookin, whose duties as Indian Superintendent included enforcing the Bay Colony's legislation among the native population, sometimes fined Christian Indians for violating a 1646 statute that prohibited them from "powwow[ing] or perform[ing] outward worship to their false gods or to the Devil." On several occasions, Eliot himself admitted that powwowing remained a problem in certain "praying towns." Eliot's voluminous missionary sources contain only three examples of converted powwows.²⁶

By the time of King Philip's War (1675-1676), Eliot had attracted approximately eleven hundred Native Americans to the Christian faith, supervised the formation of three Indian churches that contained roughly seventy communicant members, and established sixteen settlements. King Philip's War devastated Eliot's mission. Many of the Nipmucks in the "new towns" allied with King Philip and subjected the exposed Puritan towns in the Connecticut River Valley to a series of devastating raids. Most of the "old town" Indians remained loyal to the government of Massachusetts Bay. Nevertheless, they suffered greatly at the hands of a lawless and hysterical English population. In 1677, in

 25. Eliot, in *The Clear Sun-shine*, pp. 50-51, and in "An Account of the Indian Churches" (1673), in *Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections*, 1st series, X (1809): 126.

26. Gookin, *The Historical Collections*, p. 192; Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, III: 98; Eliot, in *The Light Appearing*, p. 134; and Eliot to Boyle (1669), in John W. Ford, ed., *Some Correspondence between the Governors and Treasurers of the New England Company and the Commissioners of the United Colonies in America, the Missionaries of the Company, and Others* (London, 1896), p. 30. For the three converted powwows, see Eliot, in *The Clear Sun-shine*, p. 55; Eliot, in *The Glorious Progress*, pp. 81-82; and Eliot, in *Tears of Repentance*, p. 248.

response to the dramatically reduced size of the native population, the Massachusetts General Court relocated all the Christian Indians in the colony, except for those in indentured servitude, to four "praying towns," and in 1681 the General Court reduced the number of those towns to three.²⁷

In conclusion, the Mayhew mission proved to be more effective than the Eliot one. By the time of King Philip's War, there were more Christian Indians on the islands than on the Massachusetts mainland, and the conversions in the former location were stronger and deeper. One historian has stated that the younger Mayhew and other family members oversaw "the most successful cross-cultural transference of English Puritan identity" in the seventeenth century, a judgment shared by another respected scholar.²⁸ There were four major reasons why the Mayhews were more successful than Eliot. Two of the reasons were the result of historical circumstance. First, the island missionaries worked within a circumscribed geographical area, which provided the Indians with little opportunity for escape. On the other hand, the Indians in Massachusetts Bay were able to flee from Eliot, by taking refuge beyond the frontier. Second, the Mayhews lived in the midst of a small Puritan population which did not counteract their work in the way that unruly frontiersmen on the mainland often undermined Eliot's efforts. In 1675, there were only 180 English settlers on Martha's Vineyard, compared to approximately thirty thousand who lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Europeans did not outnumber the Indians on Martha's Vineyard until 1720. The absence of a large and aggressive English population on the islands accounts (at least in part) for the loyalty of the local Indians during King Philip's War.²⁹

27. Gookin, The Historical Collections, pp. 182-194; Gookin, An Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England (1677), in American Antiquarian Society, Transactions, II (1830): 423-534; Shurtleff, ed., Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, V: 136 and 327-328.

28. Simmons, "Conversion from Indian to Puritan," p. 198; and Ronda, "Generations of Faith," p. 371.

29. Ronda, "Generations of Faith," pp. 370-371; and Vaughan, New England Frontier, p. 244. For the island Indians during King Philip's War, see Hare, Thomas Mayhew, pp. 203-208; and Banks, History of Martha's Vineyard, I: 296-298.

The two remaining reasons were due to missionary practice. One of these two reasons has already been noted by scholars, who have correctly observed that the Mayhews were better informed than Eliot about traditional native culture, and that they were more willing to tolerate syncretism in the early stages of the missionary process. In these respects, the Mayhews resembled many of the Jesuit missionaries in New France.³⁰ The other point of contrast is the one developed in this essay. The Martha's Vineyard mission did not advance until the younger Mayhew and Hiacoomes convinced the powwows to accept the Christian religion. The mass conversion of the island Indians began shortly after the surrender of the powwows. The sachems on Martha's Vineyard eventually embraced the mission as well. Eliot's attempts to proselytize the sachems met with mixed results. The strong sachems were able to resist the mission, thus depriving him of access to their bands. Eliot failed to evangelize the powwows, who continued to frustrate his work among those Indians whose sachems accepted the mission. This point of comparison suggests that Thomas Mayhew Jr. was correct in his judgment that the powwows were "the strongest cord" that bound the Indians "to their own way."

30. Simmons, "Conversion from Indian to Puritan," pp. 215-218; Salisbury, "Prospero in New England," p. 264; and Ronda, "Generations of Faith," pp. 370-371 and 389-394. For a discussion of the Jesuits in New France, see Axtell, The Invasion Within, pp. 59-127.