

A Model of Christian Charity

John Winthrop left England in 1630 with a group of Puritan settlers bound for New England. After arriving in Salem, Massachusetts, and before leaving the ship, Winthrop wrote a statement describing the ideals on which this new Puritan colony should be based.

Primary Source

. . . Whatsoever we did, or ought to have done, when we lived in England, the same must we do, and more also, where we go. . . We must bear one another's burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren.

. . . Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to . . . do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. . . . We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work. . .

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us. . . He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world. . . . We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

Contemporary English

Whatever we did, or ought to have done, when we lived in England, we must do the same here, and more also, where we now settle. We must take up one another's burdens. We must look out for our neighbors and not only think of ourselves.

The only way to avoid problems and to provide for those that will follow us is to be just and merciful and to be humble in the sight of God. To do this we must work together as if we were one man. We must treat other settlers as our brothers. We must enjoy each other. We must make others' problems our own. We must rejoice together, mourn together, work and suffer together, always remembering that we are one.

The Lord will be our God, and be happy to live among us. God will have others who set up colonies in the future look to us with praise. They will call upon God to make their settlements like ours in New England. We are a chosen people and we must make our colony to be a model for all to come after us. We are to be a city upon a hill and everyone will look to us so. So if we do not honor God in this settlement we have begun we will cause Him to abandon us. We will have brought shame on ourselves. Our prayers will become curses and we will be driven out of this good land.

Source: *Annals of America*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1976), pp. 114-115.

Questions

1. According to John Winthrop, what rules must settlers in this new colony follow?
2. How are settlers to show their Christian charity?
3. Why does he say that this colony is like "a city upon a hill?" How were Puritans to live?
4. Why was the colony to be an example for others to follow?
5. What will happen if settlers do not honor and serve God?
6. What can you learn about Puritan beliefs from Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity?"

7. What type of society do you think the Puritans will establish in the New World? Explain what this society would be like.