

## **John Winthrop, “Reasons to be considered for justifying the undertakers of the intended Plantation<sup>1</sup> in New England, and for encouraging such whose hearts God shall move to join with them in it” (ca. 1629).**

*Reasons to be considered for justifying the undertakers of the intended plantation in New England, and for encouraging such whose hearts God shall move to join with them in it.*

1. It will be a service to the Church of great consequence to carry the Gospel into those parts of the world, to help on the coming of the fullness of the gentiles,<sup>2</sup> and to raise a bulwark against the kingdom of Antechrist which the Jesuits labour to rear up in those parts.

2. All other churches of Europe are brought to desolation, and our sins, for which the Lord begins already to frown upon us and to cut us short, do threaten evil times to be coming upon us, and who knows, but that God hath provided<sup>3</sup> this place to be a refuge for many whom he means to save out of the general calamity ...

...

*Diverse objections which have been made against this Plantation, with their answers and Resolutions:*

Objection I: We have no warrant to enter upon that Land which hath been so long possessed by others.

Answer 1: That which lies common, and hath never been replenished or subdued, is free to any that possess and improve it. For God hath given to the sons of men a double right to the earth; there is a natural right, and a civil right. The first right was natural when men held the earth in common every man sowing and feeding where he pleased. Then as men and their cattle increased, they appropriated certain parcels of ground by enclosing<sup>4</sup> and peculiar manurance,<sup>5</sup> and this in time got them a civil right. Such was the right which Ephron the Hittite had in the field of Machpelah wherein Abraham could not bury a dead corpse without leave,<sup>6</sup> though for the out parts of the countries which lay common he dwelt upon them and took the fruit of them at his pleasure .... As for the natives in New England, they enclose no Land, neither have any settled habitation, nor any tame cattle to improve the land by, and so have no other but a natural right to those

---

<sup>1</sup> The word ‘plantation’ was often used to talk about new settlements in the New World in the 17<sup>th</sup> and even 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> The coming of the fullness of the gentiles: from a Calvinist point of view, since God had predestined the elect from the beginning of time, Puritans believed that when all of the elect among the gentiles (= among all the nations of the world) have openly declared their faith in Christ, the end of the world would come. The Church would then be full with all those God had chosen from all eternity. This moment in time is the “fullness of the gentiles.”

<sup>3</sup> Who knows but that God hath provided: who knows if God has not provided

<sup>4</sup> Starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, more and more common land in England was enclosed, i.e. from being the common property of villagers, it became the private property of one man. This privatization was made manifest by enclosing the land, i.e. putting up barriers all around the parcel of land that had been privatized.

<sup>5</sup> Manurance = cultivation.

<sup>6</sup> See Genesis 23 in the Bible (<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-Chapter-23/>)

countries. So as if we leave them sufficient for their use, we may lawfully take the rest, there being more than enough for them and for us.

Answer 2: We shall come in with the good leave of the natives who find benefit already by our neighbourhood, and learn from us to improve a part to more use than before they could do the whole. ...

Answer 3: God hath consumed the natives with a great plague in those parts, so as there be few inhabitants left.

Objection II: It will be a great wrong to our church and country to take away the good people, and we shall leave it the more open to the judgement feared.

Answer 1: The departing of good people from a country doth not cause a judgement, but foreshoweth<sup>7</sup> it, which may occasion such as remain to turn from their evil ways, that they may prevent it, or to take some other calls<sup>8</sup> that they may escape it.

Answer 3: It is the revealed will of God, that the Gospel should be preached to all nations, and though we know not whether these barbarians will receive it at first, or no, yet, it is a good work to serve God's providence in offering it to them (and this is fittest to be done by God's own servants), for God shall have glory by it, though they refuse it, and there is good hope that the posterity shall by this means be gathered into Christ's sheepfold.

Objection IV: The ill success of the other plantations may tell us what will become of this.

Answer 1: None of the former sustained any great damage but Virginia, which happened through their own sloth and poor security.

...

Answer 4: There were great and fundamental errors in the former which are like<sup>9</sup> to be avoided in this. For: 1: their main end was carnal and not religious. 2: They used unfit instruments, a multitude of rude and misgoverned persons, the very scum of the land. 3: They did not establish a right form of government.

Robert C. Winthrop, ed. *Life and Letters of John Winthrop: 1588-1630*. Cambridge University Press, 1863, p. 309-314. The spelling and punctuation have been modernised.

---

<sup>7</sup> Foreshow = give warning.

<sup>8</sup> Call = (here) vocation, occupation.

<sup>9</sup> Like = (here) likely