

Reasons for the Plantation in New England

ca. 1628

Redacted and introduced by Marcia Elaine Stewart.

The following document was found among the papers of Governor John Winthrop. Other abridged versions are known, and variously ascribed to Rev. John White, John Winthrop or Rev. Francis Higginson. While the true originator may never be known, suffice it to say that this copy was written in the hand of Forth Winthrop, son and sometime secretary of the future Governor, and has marginal notes by the elder Winthrop, dated 1629. It was evidently a widely distributed and influential piece of propoganda in furtherance of the proposed settlement of Massachusetts Bay, judging from the number of copies in various forms which are still extant, along with numerous responses pro and con penned by various interested worthies of the day. The Rev. John White probably conceived the initial nine arguments, but we suspect, due to the legal style of its arguments, that Winthrop has here substantially amplified it to its present form with the addition of the objections and answers. In any event, it is surely an expression of Winthrop's own views on the subject, and is of great significance in revealing the motivation of the colonists.

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 fullness of the coming of the Gentiles, and to raise a bulwark against the kingdom of AnteChrist, which the Jesuits labor 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 this place to be a refuge for many whom he means to save out of the general calamity, and seeing the Church hath no place left to fly into but

the wilderness, what better work can there be, than to go and provide tabernacles and food for her when she be restored.

3. This England grows weary of her inhabitants, so as Man, who is the most precious of all creatures, is here more vile and base than the earth we tread upon, and of less price among us than a horse or a sheep. Masters are forced by authority to entertain servants, parents to maintain their own children, all towns complain of their burden to maintain their poor, though we have taken up many unnecessary, yea unlawful, trades to maintain them. We use the authority of the Law to hinder the increase of our people, as by urging the statute against cottages and inmates — and thus it is come to pass, that children, servants and neighbors, especially if they be poor, are counted the greatest burdens, which if things were right would be the chiefest earthly blessings.
4. The whole earth is the Lord's garden, and He hath given it to mankind with a general commission (Gen. 1:28) to increase and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it, which was again renewed to Noah. The end is double and natural, that Mankind might enjoy the fruits of the earth, and God might have His due Glory from His creatures. Why then should one strive here for places of habitation, at such a cost as would obtain better land in another country, and at the same time suffer a whole continent as fruitful and convenient for the use of man to lie waste without any improvement?
5. We are grown to that height of intemperance in all excess of riot that as no man's estate, almost, will suffice to keep sail with his equals. He who fails herein must live in scorn and contempt. Hence it comes that all arts and trades are carried on in that deceitful and unrighteous course, so that it is almost impossible for a good and upright man to maintain his charge and live comfortably in any of them.
6. The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted that most children (besides the unsupportable charge of their education) are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples and the licentious government of those seminaries, where men strain at gnats and swallow camels, and use all severity for maintenance of caps and like accomplishments, but suffer all ruffianlike fashions and disorder in manners to pass uncontrolled.
7. What can be a better work, and more honorable and worthy of a Christian than to help rise and support a particular church while it is in its infancy, and to join his forces with such a company of faithful people, as by a timely assistance may grow strong and prosper, when for want of such help may be put to great hazard, if not wholly ruined.
8. If any such as are known to be Godly and live in all wealth and prosperity here, and shall forsake all this to join themselves with this Church and to run a hazard with them of a hard and mean condition, it will be an example of great use both for removing the scandal of worldly and sinister respects which is cast upon the Adventurer, to give more life to the faith of God's people in their prayers for the Plantation, and to encourage others to join the more willingly in it.
9. It appears to be a work of God for the good of His Church, in that He hath disposed the hearts of so many of His wise and faithful servants, both ministers and others, not only to approve of the enterprise but to interest themselves in it, some in their persons and estates, and others by their serious advice and help otherwise, and all by their prayers for the welfare of it. (Amos 3:) The Lord revealed his secret to His servants, the prophets, and

it is likely He hath some great work in hand which He hath revealed to His prophets among us, whom He hath stirred up to encourage His servants to this Plantation, for He doth not use to seduce His people by His own prophets, but committeth that office to the ministry of false prophets and lying spirits.

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

Objection 1 — We have no warrant to enter upon that land, which has been so long possessed by others.

Answer 1:

That which lies common, and has 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 and peculiar cultivation, and this in time got them a civil right — such is the right which Ephron the Hittite had in the field of Mackpelah, wherein Abraham could not bury a dead corpse without leave, though for the out parts of the country he dwelt upon them and took the fruit of them at his pleasure. The like did Jacob, who fed his cattle as boldly in Hamor's land (for he is said to be Lord of the country) and in other places where he came, as the native inhabitants themselves. And in those times and places, that men accounted nothing their own but that which they had appropriated by their own industry, appears plainly by this — that Abimileck's servants in their own country, when they oft contended with Isaac's servants about wells which they had dug, yet never strove for the land wherein they were. So like between Jacob and Laban, he would not take a goat of Laban's without special contract, but he makes no bargain with them for the land where they fed, and it is very probable that, had the land not been as free for Jacob as for Laban, that covetous wretch would have made his advantage of it, and would have upbraided Jacob with it as he did with his cattle. As for the natives in New England, they enclose no land, neither have they any settled habitation, nor any tame cattle to improve the land by, and so have no other but a natural right to those countries. So if we leave them sufficient for their own 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 of our neighborhood and learn from us to improve a part to more use than before they could do the whole. And by this means we come in by valuable purchase, for they have of us that which will yield them more benefit than all that land which we have from them.

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 lay it the more open to the judgment feared.

Answer 1:

The departing of good people from a country does not cause a judgment, but warns of it, which may occasion such as remain to turn from their evil ways, that they may prevent it, or take some other course that they may escape it.

Answer 2:

Such as go away are of no observation in respect of those who remain, and are likely to do more good there than here. And since Christ's time, the Church is to be considered universal and without distinction of countries, so that he that does good in one place serves the Church in all places in regard of the unity.

Answer 3:

It is the revealed will of God that the Gospel shall be preached in all nations, and though we know not whether those barbarians will receive it at first or not, yet it is a good work to serve God's providence in offering it to them (and this is the fittest to be done by God's own servants) for God shall have glory of it though they refuse it, and there is good hope that the posterity shall by this means be gathered into Christ's sheepfold.