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Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Apr., 2005, Third Series, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 141-174

Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3491598

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David J. Silverman

> Then I thought, if I prayed to God in our Language, whether could God understand my prayers in our Language; therefore I did ask Mr. *Jackson*, and Mr. *Mahu*, If God understood prayers in our Language? They answered me God doth understand all Languages in the World.
> —Conversion narrative of Waban, a praying Indian of Natick, 1653

JOHN Cotton Jr.'s maiden voyage to Martha's Vineyard in 1665 must have been a time of soul-searching and low expectations. Two years earlier this Harvard-educated son of a Puritan divine was run out of the Wethersfield, Connecticut, pastorate for sexual indiscretion and a sharp tongue. To rehabilitate his name, Cotton had to perform good Christian service and behave himself, so when the opportunity arose to replace the recently deceased Thomas Mayhew Jr. as preacher to the colonists of Martha's Vineyard and missionary to the island's Wampanoags, he reluctantly accepted the position. One imagines Cotton sailing toward this destination, eyes fixed on the shrinking mainland shoreline, reflecting on his fall from an elite family, college, and ministry, to become a poorly compensated missionary on a remote

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William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, Volume LXII, Number 2, April 2005

island, responsible for filling the poor ignorant savages (as New England colonists commonly called Indians) with a greater sense of God.[1]

Cotton spent the next year studying the notoriously complex Wampanoag tongue, but this work was hardly enough training, as he discovered when he finally met with a native audience at Chappaquiddick on the Vineyard's east side on March 6, 1666. He plodded through his inaugural Wampanoag language sermon, and then perhaps breathed a sigh of relief assuming the hard work was done, only to have the Indians shower him with questions sharpened by two decades of Christian education under Mayhew and his Wampanoag assistants: "How conscience came to be asleepe or silent in a man at any time?"; "Whether Judas was saved or damned?" And perhaps most surprisingly, "Whether John Baptist onely sprinkled christs face with water or plunged him under water?" The following week in Nunnepog (Edgartown), Indian schoolteacher John Tackanash shared his belief with Cotton that it was "Gods revealed will" to answer prayers only if he deemed them good, an idea which was contrary to the instruction of senior Vineyard missionary Thomas Mayhew Sr. Another Wampanoag added that Mayhew failed to cite scripture in his sermons. Twice over the next month, Sengekontacket's William Lay (or Panunnut), a rising star among the Indians on the east side of the island, advertised his independent access to the Bible by requesting exegesis of several passages from Revelation, a book missionaries preferred to avoid.[2] Cotton had

[1] [John] Eliot and [Thomas] Mayhew [Jr.], *Tears of Repentance; or, A Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New-England* (London, 1653), in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3d ser., 4 (1834): 231.

Cotton's career is traced in Mark A. Peterson, "The Plymouth Church and the Evolution of Puritan Religious Culture," *New England Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (December 1993): 582–91; Sheila McIntrye, "John Cotton Jr.: Wayward Puritan Minister?," in *The Human Tradition in Colonial America*, ed. Ian K. Steele and Nancy L. Rhoden (Wilmington, Del., 1999), 119–39. The Wampanoags of Martha's Vineyard were related literally and figuratively to the Indians of Nantucket, Cape Cod, and the mainland between Narragansett Bay to the west and Plymouth Bay to the east. The Wampanoags of these areas spoke a similar language (with some distinctive local accents), shared numerous other cultural traits, and intermarried extensively. Though most communities were left to guide their own affairs, each of them had paid tribute to the sachem of Pokanoket since at least the era of Massasoit's rule between ca. 1620 and 1660, extending through the tenure of his sons Wamsutta, or Alexander (1660–62) and Metacom, or Philip (1662–76)—thus the Wampanoags were sometimes referred to collectively as Pokanokets. The sachem, in turn, arbitrated intercommunity disputes, brokered trade and diplomacy, parceled out justice for egregious crimes, and led an occasional great hunt involving scores of his followers.

[2] On the complexity of New England Indian languages, see Henry Whitfield, *Strength out of Weaknesse; or, A Glorious Manifestation of the further Progresse of the Gospel among the Indians in New-England* (London, 1652), in *CMHS* 4 (1834): 181; Edward Winslow, *Good News from New England; or, A true Relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation of Plymouth in New England*, in *The Story of the Pilgrim*

gone head-to-head with New England's greatest minds during his college days, but handling sensitive challenges from lay congregants, never mind Indians, was startlingly unfamiliar. Fortunately, Cotton continued to record the Wampanoags' questions in his journal until he finally left the island in 1667. Historians tend to suspect the portrait of New England's Christian Indians presented in most cited primary sources because those accounts were written by missionary John Eliot and approved by Puritan leaders to raise donations for the evangelical effort. Cotton's journal, though, was private, and it furnishes compelling evidence that a broad cross section of Vineyard Wampanoags had become engaged, knowledgeable Christians.

Yet the Wampanoags' questions also contained hints that their Christianity was informed by and even consistent with their people's traditional faith. Seantan (or Sissetome) wanted to know "how God may be said to be a rock & fort to his people," like Wampanoag guardian spirits. Hearkening to the Wampanoag belief that guardian spirits resided in their wards' bodies, Lay asked, "How is a sinners heart satans house?" and "How doth sat[an] [kno]w the heart is empty of grace?" whereas Tackanash observed that "God had waited long knocking at the doore of their hearts before they would open to him." Hiacoomes's wife questioned "whether those that are buried in the sea shall rise againe at the last day, as well as those that are buried on land?" She might have puzzled Cotton, but the Wampanoags would have nodded in approval, since their ancestors taught that water was the opening to the underground lair of Cheepi, the god of the dead, whom they had recently come to identify with Satan.[3]

Scholars of Christian Indians, particularly the so-called praying Indians of New England, have reached a consensus that the natives' religious institutions, rituals, and other behaviors included Christian and traditional elements, often in syncretic form, yet few scholars have explored similar patterns in the natives' beliefs and fewer still have questioned how

Fathers, 1606–1623, A.D., as Told by Themselves, Their Friends, and Their Enemies, ed. Edward Arber (1624; repr., London, 1897), 591; Experience Mayhew, "Letter of Experience Mayhew, 1722, on the Indian Language," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 39, no. 1 (January 1885): 12–17. Most linguists identify Wampanoags as speakers of Massachusett, one of the Algonquian languages. In the last decade, however, the Mashpee Wampanoag linguist Jessie Little Doe Fermino has argued that Wampanoags spoke a distinct language. It is in light of her unpublished work that I refer to a Wampanoag language. For the authoritative study of the Massachusett language, see Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon, eds., *Native Writings in Massachusett*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1988), esp. vol. 2.

Len Travers, ed., "The Missionary Journal of John Cotton, Jr., 1666–1678," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 109 (1998): 59–60, 62.

[3] Travers, *PMHS* 109: 77, 80, 86, 88.

those beliefs developed. Leading studies of New England produced during the 1970s were skeptical of the Indians' Christianity. They rejected accounts of Indians suddenly seeing the light under the influence of altruistic missionaries and instead cast missionaries as ideological shock troops for colonial invasion whose zealotry blinded them to the fact that their supposed Indian converts were cynical fur traders, battered sycophants, or closet traditionalists.[4] During the 1980s and early 1990s, historians grew less critical of missionary intentions and, reflecting a scholarly trend toward highlighting the agency of American history's victims, began to assert that Indians sought out Christianity of their own accord. William S. Simmons argued that Martha's Vineyard became the site of the most successful Protestant mission in English North America because the island's Wampanoags believed that Christianity would protect them from epidemic disease and even the spells of their own shamans, whom they deeply respected but also feared. James P. Rhoda, James Axtell, Kathleen Joan Bragdon, and several others showed that Christianity was less imposed on Indians than pursued by them to reconstitute their frayed social structure and to cordon off some lands amid rapid colonial expansion. The praying Indians in these studies refashioned Christianity into something familiar by placing their standing elite in church offices, using Christian holidays and charity to express Indian communal values, adding Indian oratory and music to Christian rituals, and even reinforcing certain traditional gender roles

[4] Francis Jennings, "Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to the Indians," *Ethnohistory* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1971): 197–212; Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *WMQ* 31, no. 1 (January 1974): 29–31; Kenneth M. Morrison, "'That Art of Coyning Christians': John Eliot and the Praying Indians of Massachusetts," *Ethnohistory* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 77–92.

Exemplary studies of Indian Christianity outside of New England include John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto, 1984), esp. 239–63; Thomas McElwain, "'The Rainbow Will Carry Me': The Language of Seneca Iroquois Christianity as Reflected in Hymns," in *Religion in Native North America,* ed. Christopher Vecsey (Moscow, Idaho, 1990), 83–103; John Steckley, "The Warrior and the Lineage: Jesuit Use of Iroquoian Images to Communicate Christianity," *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 478–509; William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794–1870: Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence,* ed. Walter H. Cosner Jr. (Athens, Ga., 1994); Jane T. Merritt, "Dreaming of the Savior's Blood: Moravians and the Indian Great Awakening in Pennsylvania," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d ser., 54, no. 4 (October 1997): 723–46; Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle, 1999); Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Solidarity of Kin: Ethnohistory, Religious Studies, and the Algonkian-French Religious Encounter* (Albany, N.Y., 2002). The editors' introductory and concluding essays in Nicholas Griffiths and Fernando Cervantes, eds., *Spiritual Encounters: Interactions between Christianity and Native Religions in Colonial America* (Lincoln, Neb., 1999), 1–42, 276–85, skillfully treat the theoretical issues at play in this literature.

with appeals to Christian teachings.[5] Yet this rich scholarship rarely asked whether similar dialogical processes shaped the Indians' religious beliefs too, especially over the long term, since Puritan missionaries appeared far less likely than their Jesuit counterparts to tolerate religious melding. Only a few historians have begun to explore this question. Robert James Naeher, Charles L. Cohen, and Daniel K. Richter conclude that the praying Indians of Natick, Massachusetts, demonstrated an impressive knowledge of Puritan doctrine, contrary to earlier assumptions that reformed Protestantism was too cerebral to cross the linguistic and cultural divide.[6] Cohen and Richter caution, though, that the Indians did not share the Puritans' despair over original sin or ecstatic reception of God's grace, probably because of their own traditions of

[5] William S. Simmons, "Conversion from Indian to Puritan," *NEQ* 52, no. 2 (June 1979): 197–218; James P. Ronda, "Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha's Vineyard," *WMQ* 38, no. 3 (July 1981): 369–94; Kathleen Joan Bragdon, "'Another Tongue Brought In': An Ethnohistorical Study of Native Writings in Massachusett" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1981); James Axtell, "Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions," and "Were Indian Conversions *Bona Fide*?" in Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1988), 47–57, 100–21; Harold W. Van Lonkhuyzen, "A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians: Acculturation, Conversion, and Identity at Natick Massachusetts, 1646–1730," *NEQ* 63, no. 3 (September 1990): 396–428; Bragdon, "Native Christianity in 18th Century Massachusetts: Ritual as Cultural Reaffirmation," in *New Dimensions in Ethnohistory: Papers of the Second Laurier Conference on Ethnohistory and Ethnology*, ed. Barry Gough and Christie Laird (Hull, Quebec, 1991), 119–26; Dane Morrison, *A Praying People: Massachusett Acculturation and the Failure of the Puritan Mission, 1600–1690* (New York, 1995); Jean M. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (New York, 1997); Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999). This literature was anticipated by Susan L. MacCulloch, "A Tripartite Political System among Christian Indians of Early Massachusetts," *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 34 (1966): 63–73. For a sensible overview, see Neal Salisbury, "'I Loved the Place of My Dwelling': Puritan Missionaries and Native Americans in Seventeenth-Century Southern New England," in *Inequality in Early America*, ed. Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger (Hanover, N.H., 1999), 111–33.

[6] Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, eds., introduction to *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction* (Westport, Conn., 1980), 32; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York, 1985). Compare with Neal Salisbury, "Religious Encounters in a Colonial Context: New England and New France in the Seventeenth Century," *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (September 1992): 501–9. Robert James Naeher, "Dialogue in the Wilderness: John Eliot and the Indian Exploration of Puritanism as a Source of Meaning, Comfort, and Ethnic Survival," *NEQ* 62, no. 3 (September 1989): 346–68; Charles L. Cohen, "Conversion among Puritans and Amerindians: A Theological and Cultural Perspective," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Ango-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston, 1993), 233–56; Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 111–29.

emotionally subdued relations with the spirits and emphasis on works over faith.

The Wampanoags of seventeenth-century Martha's Vineyard also developed a firm understanding of core Christian precepts. But documentary and archaeological evidence about the island further demonstrates *how* they did so: in partnership with their missionary, Thomas Mayhew Jr., they filtered Christian teachings through Wampanoag religious ideas and terminology—a process that one might call religious translation. Religious translation was not a temporary expedient on Mayhew's part in the hope that the Wampanoags' Christian beliefs and practices would eventually be purified. Nor was it a masquerade by Wampanoags merely parroting a catechism to secure temporal gains. It was, rather, an acknowledgment that Christian and native beliefs were analogous at several critical points. Religious translation on Martha's Vineyard evolved through three overlapping stages. In the first, during the mid- to late 1640s, the Wampanoags agreed to host Mayhew largely in response to an argument he crafted with a native assistant named Hiacoomes that God was the source of the Indians' spiritual power, "manit," and capable of protecting them against epidemic disease. In the second, during the 1650s and 1660s, Mayhew, mainland missionaries, and a growing number of Indian assistants translated other Christian concepts as accurately as possible into meaningful Wampanoag words and ideas and then dissected the particulars in response to native audiences. Finally, in the years leading up to and immediately following King Philip's War of 1675–76, Wampanoags took the lead in their own Christianization, establishing churches and courts in which the traditional elite assumed the new duty of punishing sin and spreading their people's indigenized Christianity among other Wampanoags. Awareness that these reforms took place in a cultural context shaped by religious translation makes them more intelligible as expressions of the Indians' Christianity rather than merely as concessions to colonial pressure. Contrary to the missionaries' ambitions, the Wampanoags' adoption of Christianity did not involve the complete abandonment of their old religious beliefs and identity for an entirely new order after being overwhelmed by the gospel. Instead, it was a process in which the Indians thought they were digging deeper into ancient wellsprings of spiritual power to recover its purest, most potent form and truths that had been with them opaquely all along.

By the end of the seventeenth century, many, and probably most, Wampanoags were informed devotees to a brand of Christianity at once consistent with the basics of reformed Protestantism and shaped by distinctly Indian concepts and values. Large numbers of them subscribed to

Christian tenets that humans were prone to bad deeds, that Jesus sacrificed himself to answer for this corruption, and that faith in God through Jesus's mediation was the only way to salvation. At the very least, a few became hand-wringing Calvinists with a firm comprehension of predestination and original sin. None of the Indians became Puritans in the sense of a desire to reform Christianity on a model of the primitive church. All of them became Congregationalists in that they emphasized the independence of their churches and the responsibility of local churchgoers to one another. Most important, they believed they had entered into an alliance with an unprecedentedly powerful spirit whose guardianship renewed their hope for the future without severing their ties to the past.

The Vineyard mission began in 1642 or 1643 with a friendship struck between a Wampanoag named Hiacoomes and an Englishman named Thomas Mayhew Jr., preacher to a small band of colonists that had just arrived on the island under the patent rights of Mayhew's father. The two were a natural pair. Mayhew aspired to evangelical work but had little experience with Indians. Hiacoomes craved fellowship and empowerment since his own people scorned him as a "contemptible person" who was "scarce worthy of their Notice or Regard."[7] So when Hiacoomes began attending the colonists' church services at their new settlement of Great Harbor (later renamed Edgartown), it was only a matter of time before he and Mayhew fell in together. As a result of their mutual tutorials, by 1644 Hiacoomes had achieved basic reading skills. Three years

[7] On the start of the Mayhew mission, see Lloyd Custer Mayhew Hare, *Thomas Mayhew: Patriarch to the Indians, 1593–1682* . . . (New York, 1932), chaps. 3–5; Charles Edward Banks, *The History of Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, Massachusetts* (Boston, 1911), 1: 80–88, 104–26; Margery Ruth Johnson, "The Mayhew Mission to the Indians, 1643–1806" (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1966), 21–33; Neal Salisbury, "Prospero in New England: The Puritan Missionary as Colonist," in *Papers of the Sixth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa, Canada, 1974), 253–73. On the origin of Thomas Mayhew Sr.'s patent, see Isabel Macbeath Calder, "The Earl of Stirling and the Colonization of Long Island," in *Essays in Colonial History, Presented to Charles McLean Andrews by his Students* (New Haven, Conn., 1931), 74–95.

Matthew Mayhew, *The Conquests and Triumphs of Grace: Being a Brief Narrative of the Success which the Gospel hath had among the Indians of Martha's Vineyard (and the Places adjacent) in New-England* (London, 1695), 23 ("contemptible person"); Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts; or, Some Account of the Lives and Dying Speeches of a Considerable Number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard in New-England* (London, 1727), 1–2 ("Notice or Regard"). Hiacoomes might have been a member of the lowest Wampanoag social order that was "known to be *Strangers* or *Forreigners*," and "not Priviledged with *Common Right*," such as accompanying the sachem on his annual hunting drives. See Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 14–15, 23; Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, ed. John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz (1643; repr., Detroit, Mich., 1973), 96.

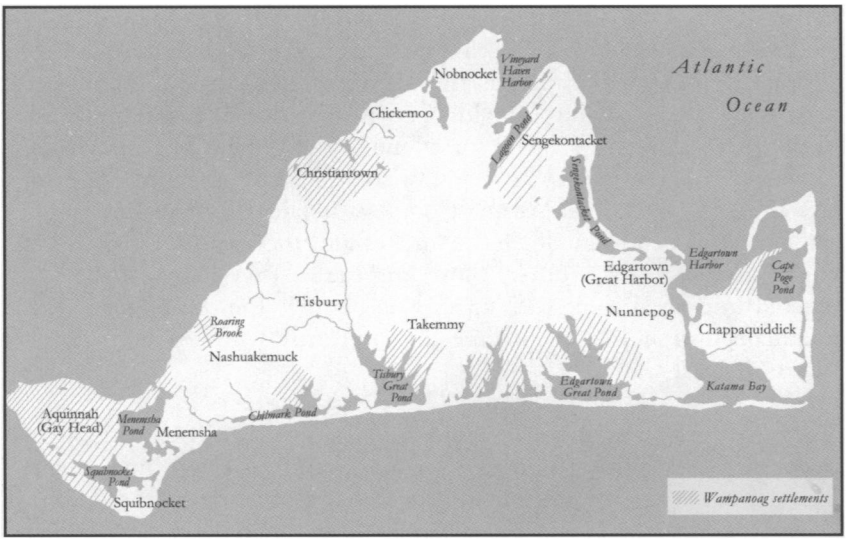

FIGURE I

Martha's Vineyard, ca. 1665–75, with areas of clustered Indian and English settlement. Drawn by Rebecca L. Wrenn.

later Mayhew reportedly spoke Wampanoag with "good understanding" and Hiacoomes and his wife had declared themselves Christians. Mayhew also sought out Hiacoomes's knowledge about Wampanoag religion, probably motivated by a conviction (often associated with his Jesuit contemporaries but rarely with Puritans) that missionaries could attract natives to Christianity by appealing to their traditions.[8]

New England Indian religious life centered on influencing the effects of spiritual power, called manit, by establishing reciprocal relations with holders of that power, known as manitous. Manit flowed through the Indians' universe, yet it was particularly strong in extraordinary things such as meteorological forces, prominent topographical features, and remarkable animals including bears and black wolves. Its most powerful sources were the spirits behind all the forms and elements of the world. In mythic times, the era in which the Indians' origin stories took place, humans formed a single symbiotic community with these spirits. They shape shifted into each other's likenesses, spoke one

[8] Henry Whitfield, *The Light appearing more and more towards the perfect Day; or, A farther Discovery of the present state of the Indians in New-England . . .* (London, 1651), in *CMHS* 4 (1834): 107 ("good understanding"); Edward Winslow, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel, amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1649), in *CMHS* 4 (1834): 78. For a comparative analysis of Jesuit and Puritan missions, see Axtell, *Invasion Within*.

another's languages, married, made love, fought, and in every respect behaved like kin and neighbors. This fluidity no longer characterized the Indians' material world, but it lived on in the natives' visions and dreams, and the spirits continued to influence the Indians' everyday lives—for instance, a giant deer spirit controlled the abundance and distribution of deer herds; the rain spirit decided whether showers would fall; the spirit of a shoreline rock might determine if canoes could pass. Maintaining good relations with the spirits, then, was the Indians' firmest guarantee of worldly success. On a daily basis this goal required the natives to honor the spirits with ritual and probe dreams for the spirits' instructions. A lifetime of spiritual favor, though, was best achieved through a vision quest. This seminal rite of passage involved a young man depriving himself of sleep and food and taking emetics in the hope of contacting one or more manitous, who would then take him on a shape-shifting adventure. The journey, a return to the power of the Indians' mythic times, might involve diving under the water with the spirits Turtle or Serpent, or visiting Beaver's lodge or Bear's den. Each experience was unique in detail but the lesson was the same: humans would find power and truth by collapsing the boundaries of their fleshy selves and entering a spirit world where human, plant, animal, and element were mutually dependent kin and ontologically the same. The edified seeker pledged to live the rest of his life by this principle, which meant always addressing the manitous humbly and treating their flesh and blood respectfully. The spirits, in turn, took residence in the seeker's body and provided him with songs and fetishes to procure their manit during times of need. It was precisely this kind of reciprocity with the spirits that separated great hunters and warriors from poor ones, and in recognition of such a transformation, a young man's successful vision quest earned him a new name. For young women an equivalent life event was their seclusion at first and subsequent menses, but there are few details in the historical record that address the spiritual side of this custom.[9]

[9] For discussions of manit, see Constance A. Crosby, "From Myth to History, or Why King Philip's Ghost Walks Abroad," in *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, ed. Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter Jr. (Washington, D.C., 1988), 192–98; Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1500–1650* (Norman, Okla., 1996), 184. On vision quests and guardian spirits, see Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978); Martin, *The Way of the Human Being* (New Haven, Conn., 1999); Åke Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians*, trans. Monica Setterwall (Berkeley, Calif., 1979), 66–83. In *Solidarity of Kin*, Morrison submits that Northeast Algonquian (a language family that included the Wampanoags) believed there was no ontological difference between people and spirits or between the real and supernatural. By contrast I argue that the Indians made such distinctions in their everyday lives, but thought of visions and dreams as places where the fluidity of mythic times persisted.

Soul wandering during dreams also exposed natives to the spirit realm. New England Indians believed every individual had two souls. The first, called "Míchachunck" in Narragansett, resided in the human heart and served as the body's animating force. During the dream state, it remained within the sleeping person to keep him or her alive. The other soul, "Cowwéwonck," traveled the evening in the form of a light to interact with other spirits. These wandering souls discovered lost objects and the identity of witches; they heard from spirit beings about where to find game animals; sometimes they learned about the manitous' eccentric desires. Cowwéwonck, in short, exposed sleeping humans to the invisible workings that shaped their waking hours.[10]

Cheepi (also known as Hobbomock and Abbomocho), the "god of the dead," was the most powerful spirit in Wampanoag visions and dreams, and the English could not mistake that he shared a number of qualities with Satan. Cheepi resided in the underworld, inclined toward wickedness, shape shifted, and typically appeared as a horned serpent casting the shadow of a man. His presence could also be found in the color black, the cold northeast wind, probably the moon, and an illuminative blur that hovered over people's deathbeds. Jealousy, which Indians considered the most tragic character flaw and the source of witchcraft, dominated Cheepi's personality, leading him to arbitrarily torment humans with "incurable Diseases . . . Apparitions and panick Terrours," including hauntings by the ghosts of "Murtherers, thieves, and Lyers" who were temporarily shut out of the Indian afterlife and condemned to wander under his governance. Consequently, New England Indians directed their prayers toward Cheepi for relief. As the Narragansetts explained, "the Evil Power hurts us, does all the Mischief, and who should we seek to to [*sic*] prevent or remove Mischief but to him that does it."[11]

Indians whom Cheepi contacted during the vision quest became powwows (or shamans); they were admired by neighbors for their abilities (variously held) to cure, affect the weather, or tell the future, but they

[10] Williams, *Key into the Language of America*, 193–94; John Josselyn, "The Second Voyage," in *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler: A Critical Edition of* Two Voyages to New-England, ed. Paul J. Lindholdt (1674; repr., Hanover, N.H., 1988), 95–96; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 191.

[11] Eliot and Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance*, 202 ("god of the dead"); Williams, *Key into the Language of America*, 194 ("Murtherers"); William Wood, *New England's Prospect*, ed. Alden T. Vaughn (1634; repr., Amherst, Mass., 1977), 111–12. See also the discussion of the Narragansett word for northeast wind, "chepewéssing," in James Hammond Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 25 (Washington, D.C., 1903), 250, under the heading "east." Josselyn, "Second Voyage," 95–96; Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D.* (New York, 1901), 1: 385–86 ("Evil Power"). See also [John Eliot], *The Day-Breaking, If Not The Sun-Rising of the Gospell With the Indians in New-England* (London, 1647), in *CMHS* 4 (1834): 17.

were also detested and feared as potential witches. Marshaling these powers required the powwow to dance, contort, and shout until reaching a state of ecstasy in which his (and sometimes her) Cowwéwonck could solicit the assistance of Cheepi and lesser manitous. But the spectacle did not end there. The powwow amazed onlookers by broadcasting his Cowwéwonck's interactions with the manitous, "sometimes roaring like a Beare, other times groaning like a dying horse, foaming at the mouth like a chased boar, smiting on his naked breast and thighs with such violence, as if he were mad." If, during these exchanges, the manitous diagnosed a sick person as cursed by a witch's dream spirit, the powwow then captured that spirit in a fly or mosquito to crush it dead.[12] Such talents won the powwow esteem but, if antagonized, he could use Cheepi's power to kill as well as to cure.

The spirit Kiehtan (also known as Cautantowwit) balanced Cheepi in almost every way. Kiehtan lived toward the southwest as sachem of the Wampanoag afterworld, which he provided with a steady round of pleasant weather, robust harvests, and plentiful game. He also favored Wampanoags in the present; that is, when he was able to thwart Cheepi's obstructions. Southern New England Indians had a tradition of dedicating their harvest celebrations to him, but by the early seventeenth century Wampanoags had become "more and more cold in their worship to Kiehtan; saying in their memory, he was much more called upon." Some natives blamed this neglect for a deadly epidemic that raged southward from the Saco River of Maine from 1616 to 1619. It stopped suddenly before entering the Narragansetts' country, ostensibly because of a new ceremony in which the people sacrificed riches to Kiehtan.[13]

The Indians' interpretation of this sickness illustrates that they were fully capable of using their religion to explain severe crises if they were left

[12] Wood, *New England's Prospect*, 101 ("roaring like a beare"); Eliot, *Day-Breaking*, 20. For secondary treatments of New England powwows, see William S. Simmons, "Southern New England Shamanism: An Ethnographic Reconstruction," in *Papers of the Seventh Algonquian Conference, 1975*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, Canada, 1976), 217–56; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 203–14; more generally, Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1972); Hultkrantz, *Religions of the American Indians*, 84–102. Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 20; Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702; repr., Hartford, Conn., 1853), 2: 445.

[13] Wood, *New England's Prospect*, 111; Roger Williams to Thomas Thorowgood, Dec. 20, 1635, in Glenn W. LaFantasie, ed., *The Correspondence of Roger Williams* (Hanover, N.H., 1988), 1: 30. More generally on Indian beliefs about Cheepi, Kiehtan, and the afterworld, see William Scranton Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House: An Indian Burial Ground on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay* (Providence, R.I., 1970), chap. 4; Winslow, *Good News from New England*, 585 ("worship to Kiehtan"). For the best study of this outbreak, see Timothy L. Bratton, "The Identity of the New England Indian Epidemic of 1616–1619," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 351–83.

alone and given enough time. But the Wampanoags on Martha's Vineyard in the seventeenth century were no longer alone and time was short. Mayhew launched his mission in 1643, just as a "strange disease" breached the island shore casting an unmistakable pall of terror. The Wampanoags ran "up and down till they could run no longer" and "made their faces as black as a coale, snatched up any weapon, spake great words, but did no hurt," probably as a ritual to frighten off the ghosts of the dead or the spirits behind the killing. The epidemic's end must have renewed the Wampanoags' faith in this rite but only temporarily, for in 1645 they were struck by another disease, a "universal" and "sore Distemper" that was "mortal to many of them."[14] These two outbreaks wiped out as many as half of the Vineyard Wampanoags and shook survivors to their core.

Such violent and unfamiliar European diseases unnerved the Indians' stoutest men. As Plymouth's William Bradford graphically explained, the Indians feared the most lethal contagion of all, smallpox, "more than the plague" because it reduced its victims to a "lamentable condition . . . the pox breaking and mattering and running one into another . . . they will be all of a gore blood, most fearful to behold . . . they die like rotten sheep." Leaders whom the people relied upon for defense, subsistence, wisdom, and religious instruction suddenly fell dead in bunches. Loss of life on this scale would have undermined any society, but it was particularly damaging to one without writing, since specialized knowledge died out with its keepers. Then there was the psychological fallout. In a study of modern disasters such as toxic poisonings, sociologist Kai Erikson writes that few experiences are as destabilizing as watching kith and kin destroyed from inside by an unknown force. Survivors become nervous and depressed, plagued by nightmares of their loved ones' ordeals and by a general feeling of helplessness. When an entire community shares in this suffering, its experience is best understood as social trauma, which "at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self but a loss of confidence in the scaffolding of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logics by which humankind lives, and in the ways of nature itself." Or, as one mainland colonist wrote of Indians coping with the devastation of epidemic disease, "their courage [is] much abated, and their countenance is dejected, and they seem as a people affrightened."[15]

[14] Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 110–11 ("strange disease"); Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 77 ("sore Distemper"); Morrison, *Praying People*, 6. The identity of this sickness is also unknown. In 1646, however, Indians on the Kennebec River suffered "a malady which caused vomiting of blood" and "destroyed a good part of their nation." That outbreak also opened the door for a Christian mission. See Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), 83.

[15] William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), 270–71 ("smallpox"). Kai T. Erikson, *A New Species of*

Indians, no less than their English neighbors, inhabited a world of spirits in which there were no accidents. They scrutinized even commonplace troubles such as failed crops for signs of a manitou's displeasure or a person's witchcraft. After repeated strikes by invisible, anonymous killers, they interrogated their world with greater desperation. Some mainland Indians linked the new diseases to a comet and others to a curse uttered by a shipwrecked Frenchman they had enslaved. On the Vineyard Wampanoags "laid the cause of all their wants, sicknesses, and death, upon their departing from their old heathenish ways" and, though they might have been collectively guilty for their neglect of Kiehtan, Hiacoomes was individually suspect as a witch.[16] He walked around displaying a primer the English had given him and, during the early stages of colonization, Indians often associated writing's soundless transfer of thought with shamanistic magic.[17] Hiacoomes was able to read the Bible, a book the English revered as the very word of God, which suggested that this marginal fellow had access to the colonists' potent spiritual power—power that had shielded Englishmen from the epidemics and perhaps caused them as well. Hiacoomes had forsworn

Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community (New York, 1994), 242; [Edward] Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628–1651*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York, 1910), 36; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), 90 ("people affrighted"). On epidemic diseases, see also Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *WMQ* 33, no. 2 (April 1976): 289–99; William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), esp. 206; Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, 1997), 73–94.

[16] Simmons, "Southern New England Shamanism," 3; William S. Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620–1984* (Hanover, N.H., 1986), chap. 3; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 192–93, 198–99, 207–8; Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, 39–40; Nathaniel Morton, *New-England's Memorial; or, A brief Relation of the most Memorable and Remarkable Passages of the Providence of God . . .* (Boston, 1721), 36; Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 110 ("heathenish ways").

[17] James Axtell, "The Power of Print in the Eastern Woodlands," in Axtell, *After Columbus*, 86–99. Compare with Peter Wogan, "Perceptions of European Literacy in Early Contact Situations," *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 407–29. Axtell limits his discussion to New France and discounts the power of writing in New England for three reasons: (1) by the time John Eliot launched his mission, the novelty of print had diminished for Indians; (2) unlike their Jesuit counterparts, Puritans were unwilling to put the Indian impression of their writing skills as shamanistic power to missionary ends; and (3) religious works were quickly available in Algonquian and native children were taught to read and write, distributing these skills. All these points certainly apply to mainland Massachusetts. On the Vineyard, however, Indians did not have steady contact with colonists before 1642. Nor were Mayhew and, more important here, Hiacoomes, as inflexible as Eliot. Lastly, Algonquian-language writings were neither available for another ten years nor widely distributed for another twenty years.

the powwows under Mayhew's influence, yet the diseases had spared him, his family, and his English friends. Even Wampanoags he proselytized "did not taste so deeply of it." His deviance grew so alarming that the Chappaquiddick sachem Pakeponesso intervened, chastising Hiacoomes "for his fellowship with the English, both in their civil and religious wayes, railing at him for his being obedient to them." Wampanoags would have expected someone of low rank like Hiacoomes to defer to a sachem's wishes, but he defiantly vowed to stay the course even after Pakeponesso gave him "a great blow on the face with his hand." Hiacoomes told a friend that Jehovah would exact retribution, and a short time later a bolt of lightning struck the sachem and nearly killed him. Mayhew related that "now Hiacoomes (as himself saith) did remember his former thoughts of God, and then thought God did answer him, and that he was brought more to rejoyce in God, and rest more upon him." His neighbors agreed that Hiacoomes had discovered something powerful, which put them "upon serious consideration."[18]

The Wampanoags' concerns led the petty sachem of Nunnepog, Myoxeo, to invite Hiacoomes to speak to an assembly about his newfound potency, a remarkable change of fortune for a man the Wampanoags once derided for having "nothing to say in all their meetings." Imbued with confidence from his new guardian spirit and English contacts, Hiacoomes rose to the task, opening with a lengthy speech about "all things he knew concerning God the Father, Sonne and Holy Ghost," then turning to the real test: addressing the questions of a skeptical but forlorn audience. Myoxeo wondered just how many gods the English worshipped. "Hiacoomes answered *ONE, and no more*. Whereupon Miohqsoo reckoned up about 37 principal Gods which he had; *and shall I, said he, throw away all these 37 for the sake of one only*?" Hiacoomes's response burrowed to the heart of the audience's interest in Christianity. He declared, "he did fear the great God only," not the ancestral spirits, adding "*For my part I have thrown away all these, and many more, some Years ago, and yet I am preserved as you see this Day*." He went on to explain, "in a speciall manner," basic Protestant tenets such as the fall, original sin, Jesus's sacrifice for believers, and the need to confess and repent for one's offenses against God, but probably his clearest message was that the Wampanoags needed to strive against a long list of "sins" to secure Jehovah's protection.[19]

In lieu of these reforms, Wampanoags sought out medical attention from Mayhew, who brilliantly, and quite consciously it seems, played the

[18] Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 111, 116 (quotations, 109–11); Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 4.

[19] Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 5 ("nothing to say"), 78 ("he did fear"); Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 111–12.

role of Christian powwow the Indians had cast for him. Called to the bedside of a sixty-year-old man named Ieogiscat, Mayhew "by reasoning with him convinced him of the weaknesse and wickednesse of the Pawwaws 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." Ieogiscat's recovery after the Wampanoags had resigned him to death seemed to confirm Mayhew's words. Still, Saul, the ailing son of Pakeponesso, turned a deaf ear to Mayhew's counsel, including his warning that reverting to the powwows in full knowledge of Christianity would evoke God's fury. Just as the missionary predicted, "so it shortly came to passe." Mayhew's fortune peaked when he cured the son of the Nunnepog sachem Tawanquatuck. Missionaries universally acknowledged that their success depended on the support of Indian leaders, and yet Mayhew had previously found "the Sagamores [or sachems] were generally against this new Way." Reflecting on the recovery of his son, especially in the wake of Hiacoomes's stunning transformation, Tawanquatuck concluded that his people's future lay in the mission. He confided to Mayhew "that a long time ago the Indians had wise Men among them, that did in a grave manner teach the People Knowledge; but they, said he, are dead, and their Wisdom is buried with; them." To restore wisdom, confidence, and spiritual power to his followers, Tawanquatuck arranged for Mayhew to hold Christian instruction in Nunnepog every other week.[20] By 1650 this meeting boasted some fifty members who pledged to follow in God's path.

Transforming the Wampanoags' interest in Christianity into firm commitment required Mayhew and Hiacoomes to identify and expand on similarities between the Wampanoags' customary spiritual beliefs and Christianity. To encourage the Wampanoags to accept monotheism, Mayhew, certainly with Hiacoomes's input, proposed that the Indians had "an obscure Notion of a god greater than all, which they call *Mannit*, but they knew not what he was, and therefore had no way to worship him." Now they did, since in Mayhew's formulation God became the source and embodiment of all manit in the world. Similarly, Mayhew cast Cheepi as Satan, Christianity's own sachem of the damned, and warned that appeals to him henceforth would provoke God's jealous wrath as never before. Mayhew also boasted that God, at his whim,

[20] Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 78, 77 ("Powwaws power"); Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 143; Salisbury, *WMQ* 31: 37; [Thomas] Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers who have Successively Presided Over the Work of Gospelizing the Indians on Martha's Vineyard and the Adjacent Islands* (London, 1727), appendix to Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 283 ("Sagamores"); Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 112; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 80.

could make Cheepi and the other Wampanoag spirits "all flee away like Muskeetoes," a subtle reference to the powwows' ability to imprison dream souls in insects. A powwow asked, "had his Imps," or guardian spirits, "gone from him, what he should have instead of them to preserve him?" Mayhew answered "that if he did beleeve in Christ Jesus, he should have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him, which is a good and a strong Spirit, and will keep him so safe, that all the Devils in Hell, and Pawwaws on Earth, should not be able to do him any hurt," alluding to the Wampanoags' belief that guardian spirits lay "treasured up in their bodies."[21] Mayhew's overall point was that Christianity obviated the Wampanoags' lesser manitous by leading its followers to the supreme source of manit and, as such, the power they needed to protect themselves from danger.

Yet Wampanoags did not embrace Christianity in large numbers until Hiacoomes convinced them that Mayhew's words were truthful. In 1649 participants in the Christian meeting admitted that even after years of instruction, "there is not any man which is not afraid of the Pawwawes." Then and there Hiacoomes proved otherwise, making the unprecedented declaration that he was impervious to the powwows because of his faith in God. Buoyed by his example, a few others shook their timidity to make similar claims. But the powwows did not give up so easily. One barged into a Christian gathering to avow, "I know the meeting Indians are lyars; you say you care not for the Pawwawes . . . the Pawwawes could kill all the meeting Indians if they did set about it." Hiacoomes took up the challenge, daring "that he would be in the midst of all the Pawwawes on the Iland that they could procure, and they should do their utmost they could against him, and when they did their worst by their witchcrafts to kill him, he would without feare set himself against them." For good measure he added, "that he did put all the Pawwawes under his heel." Wampanoags probably interpreted Hiacoomes's remarks as a boast that, with his new spirit protector, he could destroy the shamans' dream souls. Neither Hiacoomes nor any other praying Indians fell victim to powwow sorcery despite these confrontations, which made Mayhew and Hiacoomes's case appear foolproof to much of the Wampanoag public. As William S. Simmons writes, "to continue to believe in shamans denied one the greater healing power of the English God, and made one vulnerable to the injuries believed to be caused by shamans to which Christians were immune. Furthermore, [Mayhew] interpreted all suffering among nonbelievers as punishment from God for their sins, which included foremost the refusal to accept God's way. Mayhew thereby usurped the shamans' final power, the abil-

[21] Eliot and Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance*, 202, 205; Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 225.

ity to cure sorcery victims, by interpreting sorcery as an expression of God's displeasure with those who continued to believe in shamans." Such thinking, reinforced by the increasingly clear benefits of using Christianity to ally with the English and the growing number of mainland praying Indians, led to the rapid expansion of the meeting. By 1653, 283 adults, including 8 powwows, had vowed "to renounce their false Gods, Devils, and Pawwaws, and publickly, in set meetings, before many witnesses . . . to embrace the Word and Way of God." By the mid-1660s Christian services took place at every corner of the island, and by 1674 all but one of the Vineyard's three hundred or so Indian families called themselves Christians.[22]

There is a substantial historical record of Indian communities with missions splitting into Christian and traditionalist parties, often along preexisting political fault lines, but these trends were muted on the Vineyard.[23] Tawanquatuck was the target of an assassination attempt shortly after he endorsed the Christian meeting, and the sachemship of Aquinnah, which was heavily influenced by the antimission policies of the mainland Wampanoag leader Massasoit, actually banished its sachem, Mittark, for a few years after he came out in favor of Christianity. Overall, though, opposition to the meeting was weak. There is no evidence of further violence or of contending religious factions forming separate communities. To some extent the lack of foreign policy choices for island Wampanoags explains the lack of opposition. They were not courted by multiple imperial powers, quite unlike Indians along the borders of New France, New Netherland, and New England, or in the southeast between French Louisiana, Spanish Florida, and English South Carolina, and therefore the meeting was not associated with one alliance over another. For reasons that are somewhat unclear, island Indians did not produce wampum to exchange with the English, so trade was not a major issue. Their options were to engage the English to one degree or another or withdraw at the risk of appearing hostile. So little is

[22] Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 115–16, 184; Simmons, *NEQ* 52: 209; Eliot and Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance*, 203; Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers*, 290; Daniel Gookin, "Historical Collections of the Indians in New England," in *CMHS*, 1st ser., 1 (1792): 205; Thomas Mayhew Sr. to the Commissioners of the United Colonies, Aug. 23, 1671, in John W. Ford, ed., *Some Correspondence between the Governors and Treasurers of the New England Company in London and the Commissioners of the United Colonies* (London, 1896), 40.

[23] Daniel K. Richter, "Iroquois Versus Iroquois: Jesuit Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642–1686," *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 1–16; Rebecca Kugel, *To be the Main Leaders of Our People: A History of Minnesota Ojibwe Politics, 1825–1898* (East Lansing, Mich., 1998); Karim Michel Tiro, "The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Indian Nation from Revolution through Removal, 1765–1840 (New York)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999), 147–99.

known about the Wampanoags' social structure (particularly the people's clans) and local issues that mission politics cannot be linked to village politics. What it clear is that the succession of epidemic disease, the onset of the mission, Hiacoomes's transformation, and the discrediting of the powwows made Christianity appealing to the Wampanoags for religious reasons, which appears to account for most of the mission's momentum.

Wampanoag neophytes had ample opportunity to discuss the reformed Protestant creed. Their weekly Sabbath meetings included prayer, the catechism, Bible readings, psalm singing, a sermon, and preaching. Then, in the winter of 1652, Mayhew established an Indian day school, which soon employed a nine-man workforce, including eight Wampanoag schoolmasters, to teach young people the catechism, reading, and writing, mostly in Wampanoag although sometimes in English. Two years later mainland missionary John Eliot began publication of native language primers, psalms, sermons, and, in 1663, the entire Bible. Print runs large enough to supply a Bible to every Christian Indian family, combined with public readings by literate Wampanoags, brought these works to the eyes and ears of nearly everyone on the island. Moreover, Wampanoags held question-and-answer sessions after Sunday meeting and at midweek. In a span of just twenty months during the 1660s, John Cotton Jr. alone conducted 119 of these events among six different villages.[24] Such work, in addition to the schools, Sabbath meetings, recitations, and informal gatherings, meant the Wampanoags were receiving a steady stream of Christian education.

Since the Wampanoags' instruction took place in their own language, missionaries and their Indian interpreters had to search for appropriate native terms to express Christian concepts, perhaps the tallest of tasks in cross-cultural dialogue. Nearly a century later, David Brainerd, missionary to the Wampanoags' linguistic relatives, the Delawares of New Jersey, called such work "extremely discouraging"

[24] Eliot and Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance*, 208; Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers*, 289. On the "Indian Library," see Frederick L. Weis, "The New England Company of 1649 and Its Missionary Enterprises," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Volume 38, Transactions 1947–1951* (Boston, 1959), 216–18; William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649–1776* (New York, 1961), chap. 6; Bragdon, "Another Tongue Brought In," chap. 2; Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, 1998), 30–41; Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians*, 119–24; Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton, N.J., 1999), chap. 3.

During the 1660s the number of visits by Cotton per village was as follows: Chappaquiddick (42); Nashamoiess/Nunnepog (35); Sengekontacket (21); Takemmy (17); Tawanquatuck's Neck (2); Nashuakemuck (2). Native teachers were responsible for the outlying areas of Aquinnah, Nashuakemuck, and Menemsha (data culled from Travers, *PMHS* 109).

because "There are no Words in the *Indian* Language to answer our English Words, *Lord*, *Saviour*, *Salvation*, *Sinner*, *Justice*, *Condemnation*, *Faith*, *Repentance*, *Justification*, *Adoption*, *Sanctification*, *Grace*, *Glory*, *Heaven*, with scores of the like Importance." Yet Brainerd somehow managed to teach his Delaware interpreter enough Christian doctrine until, finally, the man was "capable of understanding and communicating without mistakes, the *Intent and Meaning* of my Discourses, and that without being confined *strictly* and oblig'd to interpret *verbatim*." Brainerd's New England predecessors cultivated Indian brokers of a similarly high standard: Mayhew had the aid of Hiacoomes and John Eliot worked alongside Cockenoe, a Montauk enslaved during the Pequot War, and John Sassamon, a man of Wampanoag-Massachusett descent who had spent his adolescence among the English. The advice of these Indians convinced Eliot to title the Gospels "Wun-aun-chemok-aonk," drawing on the native word, "Wun-nam-moo-waonk," meaning truth, which Puritans agreed was the Bible's significance. He preferred to leave God and Jesus Christ untranslated for fear of corrupting them, but occasionally followed Mayhew's lead by using "Manitoo" for God. "Matche-anitto" stood for the Devil in Eliot's writings, combining the native word for bad, "matchit," with manitou, but he, like Mayhew, conflated Satan and Cheepi in his translation of hell as "Chepiohkomuk." Eliot told his charges that "sinners should bee after death, Chechainuppan, *i.e.* tormented alive, (for wee know no other word in the tongue to expresse extreame torture by)." Other missionaries used the phrase "Awakompanaonk chepiohkomuk" for the misery of hell, which in Wampanoag meant something like lost people of Cheepi's place. Indians might have understood this term as a reference to the souls of malicious evildoers sentenced to haunt under Cheepi's rule before being admitted into Kiehtan's house. Abraham Peirson of Long Island called the souls themselves "Mittachonkq," the force in the natives' dual-soul scheme that kept the body alive while the other soul explored the dreamscape. In the early eighteenth century, Cotton Mather, who probably drew on Eliot's writings or consulted with the Vineyard's Experience Mayhew, used "negonne kuhquttum" for predestination, which literally translated meant previously appointed, and "pomantamooganit" for resurrection, drawing on the native terms "pomantam" (he lives) and "moocheke" (much, many more).[25] Christianity was filled with

[25] David Brainerd, *Mirabilia Dei inter Indicos; or, The Rise and Progress of a Remarkable Work of Grace Amongst a Number of the Indians in the Provinces of New-Jersey and Pennsylvania . . .* (Philadelphia, [1746]), 70–72, 226–28; Lepore, *Name of War*, 21–47; Eliot, *Day-Breaking*, 13 ("Chechainuppan"); [Josiah Cotton], "Cotton's Vocabulary of the Massachusetts (or Natick) Indian Language," in *CMHS*, 3d ser., 2 (1830): 155 ("Awakompanaonk chepiokohmuk": *auwa*, *auwog*, *auwate* = them, people, anyone; *ompenumanut* = to lose them; *ompenum* = he looseth it; chepi = Cheepi::Satan; kohmuk = district); Abraham Peirson, *Some Helps for the Indians:*

novel concepts, but applying Wampanoag names to them and then qualifying the definitions over and over again through face-to-face meetings had the potential to bring dedicated Indian Christians into close, if not always exact, alignment with their English counterparts.

Tenacious Wampanoag questioning left missionaries with little choice but to teach these doctrines within an Indian framework. Painfully fresh memories of epidemic disease led Wampanoags to ask Cotton: "Why doe [th]ose that are come to [Christ] afterward meete with troubles?"; "Whether faith will . . . heale the sick?"; "How doth the sp[iri]t Keepe out infirmities?" And the terrifying query, "what is meant by Gods visiting the Iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the 3d & 4th generation?" The Wampanoags feared going to heaven would separate them from their ancestors, prompting questions about "whether our fathers that died before they heard of God or knew him are saved or not," and the fate of infants who perished before they received the Word. Other Indians wondered how to judge certain customs in light of Christian teaching. If a man had two wives on joining the Christian meeting, which one should he divorce? What can separate husband and wife? What should be made of Luke 14:12, which reads: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee"? Was this a condemnation of the Wampanoags' communal ethic? John Amanhut's wife was interested in Revelations 12:1–2, which reads, "there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and

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Shewing Them How to improve their natural Reason, To know the True God, and the true Christian Religion . . ., in John Eliot, *A further Accompt of the Progresse of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England . . .* (London, 1659), 29 ("Mittachonq"); Cotton Mather, *Wussukwhonk En Christianeue asuh peantamwae Indianog; Wahteauwaheonaount Teanteaquassinish, Nish Englishmansog Kodtantamwog Indianog Wahteaunate kah Ussenate, En michemohtae Wunniyeuonganit* [*An Epistle to the Christian Indians, Giving them a Short Account, of what the English Desire them to Know and to Do, In order to their Happiness*] ([Boston], 1706), 4 ("negonne kuhquttum").

To examine native language terms in Eliot's writings, I use Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*. For other texts, I depend on Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusett*, vol. 2. This analysis draws vocabulary from a fifty-year span of native language texts, recognizing the need for a study of the evolution of Massachusett and Wampanoag religious terminology.

For several years now, scholars of Latin America, particularly Mesoamerica, have sought insights to native Christianity by analyzing native language texts, using methods far more systematic than the ones employed here. See, for example, Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson, Ariz., 1989). Overviews of this literature include Stafford Poole, "Some Observations on Mission Methods and Native Reactions in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," *Americas* 50, no. 3 (January 1994): 337–49; Matthew Restall, "A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (February 2003): 113–34.

the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." This passage seemed to contradict the Indians' stigma against women succumbing to the agony of childbirth.[26] Unfortunately, Cotton did not record his answers, but the Wampanoags had given him an opportunity to expound on faith and works, individual and collective judgment, earthly and heavenly rewards, and biblical authority, issues that rested at the heart of Christianity.

The more frequent these exchanges, the more sophisticated the Wampanoags' questions became. Cotton's charges demanded: "What is true Conversion?"; "Whether all th[at] xt [Christ] calles, come to him?"; "How comes the heart to be assured of h[im] & what are the parts of this Assurance?"; "What doth the soule doe to open the doore to xt?"; "Seeing God rewards a sinner with [de]ath for his evill actions, why doth he not reward him with a good [re]ward for any good actions?" Should one literally interpret Matthew 5:29, which reads, "if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out?"; "Why Judas betraying [Christ] was a sin seeing God had appointed it?" And "what may a man have in his heart to fit him to receive the Lord's supper?" Some Wampanoags brought sectarian perspectives to these issues, having been exposed to Anabaptists and Quakers before Thomas Mayhew Sr. could drum them off the island, and perhaps to members of unorthodox churches located throughout the colonies of New Plymouth and Rhode Island. One can almost see Cotton's teeth clench as the Wampanoags asked, "why children are baptised? If that wash [them] from sin, why doe they sin any of them when growne up?" Others challenged the New England Puritans' controversial requirement of conversion narratives for full church membership by asking, "why all belevers are not Baptized . . . & what shall they injoy in the church?" John Hiacoomes wanted to know, doubtlessly after meeting with Seventh-Day Baptists, why the Sabbath had been moved from the Hebrew Saturday to Sunday. Joshua of Chappaquiddick cited Matthew 24:24 to ask if false prophets could deceive God's elect. Mittark cut to the quick and demanded, "How many sorts of faith are there?"[27] These Wampanoags were not blank pages waiting

[26] Travers, *PMHS* 109: 65–66, 68, 71, 74, 79, 82, 86–87. For an illuminating analysis of Indian questions in the Eliot mission, see Naeher, *NEQ* 62: 351–55. Ann Marie Plane, "Childbirth Practices among Native American Women of New England and Canada, 1600–1800," in *Medicine and Healing*, ed. Peter Benes, The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife (Boston, 1992), 1–12.

[27] Travers, *PMHS* 109: 63–65, 68, 71–72, 74–76, 79, 84. See also Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 135–37. George Bishop, *New-England Judged, By the spirit of the Lord* (London, 1661), 123; Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 123, 203; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 49. William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630–1833* (Hanover, N.H., 1991), 5, 21–22; George D. Langdon Jr., *Pilgrim Colony: A History of New Plymouth, 1620–1691* (New Haven, Conn., 1966), 70. Generally on dissenters in New England, see Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan*

to be filled by their missionaries with absolute Christian truths. They sought out dissenting opinions and probed the faith's gray areas and contradictions, whether their missionaries liked it or not.

For all their impressive gains, the Wampanoags struggled mightily with the idea of sin, the acceptance of which some scholars use as a gauge of conversion.[28] Traditionally, Wampanoags believed that spirits might punish individuals and perhaps even groups for their offenses, but they shared nothing of the Puritan idea of corruption passed down from the time of origins, tainting even humankind's best deeds, and condemning everyone who did not open his or her heart to a selectively granted divine dispensation to eternal torture. Literal translation had no answer for this conceptual rift, leading Brainerd to conclude, "*'tis next to impossible to bring them to a rational Conviction that they are Sinners by Nature*, and that their *Hearts are corrupt and sinful* . . . they seem as if they thought 'twas only the *Actions* that were sinful, and not their *Hearts*." Most missionaries used matchit, the word for bad, as a root for ungodly ("match-tukeg"), sin ("matchuk"), and sinners ("matches-secheg"). These terms failed to distinguish between, on the one hand, permanent badness in the sense of a fallen humankind and, on the other, badness stemming from an isolated act or an individual tendency toward bad acts, which from a Puritan's perspective would have missed the point. Not surprisingly, then, Wampanoags struggled to grasp the notion of limited human means, a pattern Charles L. Cohen has also identified in the Natick Indians' first conversion narratives. John Kossunnut asked Cotton "whether man had power to convert himselfe," confused by the jousting ideas of God's omnipotence and his followers' responsibility to prepare themselves for grace. Another unnamed Wampanoag wanted to know "what comes

Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660 (Middletown, Conn., 1984); Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York, 1991); Jonathan M. Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen: The Puritan Adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay* (Westport, Conn., 1985).

[28] David Murray, "Spreading the Word: Missionaries, Conversation and Circulation in the Northeast," in Griffiths and Cervantes, *Spiritual Encounters*, 47; Van Lonkhuyzen, *NEQ* 63: 417. For discussions of how to define conversion, see David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167–90; Nicholas Griffiths, introduction to Griffiths and Cervantes, *Spiritual Encounters*, 2–14; and the following chapters in Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993): Hefner, "Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," 3–46; Hefner, "Of Faith and Commitment: Christian Conversion in Muslim Java," 99–125; William L. Merrill, "Conversion and Colonialism in Northern Mexico: The Tarahumara Response to the Jesuit Mission Program, 1601–1767," 129–63. Strong arguments against use of the term can be found in Neal Salisbury, "Embracing Ambiguity: Native Peoples and Christianity in Seventeenth-Century North America," *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 247–59; Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 147–72.

betweene [a] state of sin & a state of grace," and the sachem Wompamog demanded, "Why god commands sinners to turne from their evill wayes, seeing they have noe strength of their owne to turne?" Answers would have come automatically to most English Congregationalists, though they had their doubters too.[29]

Most Wampanoags struggled with the idea of sin for some time, yet as they sat through one meeting after another listening to the missionaries address their questions, they began to cross this widest of cultural gaps. In the early 1650s, Thomas Mayhew Jr. and Momonaquem traveled to the mainland to preach and take the Lord's Supper with the praying Indians of Natick, and during a pause the Wampanoag took some time to discuss his spiritual beliefs with several colonists, including William French. According to French, Momonaquem understood sin as "a continuall sicknesse in my heart" as well as "a breach of all God[']s Commandements," that could only be overcome "by the satisfaction of Christ," a realization that came to him after God "stripped mee as bare as my skinne." Momonaquem was not alone in his orthodoxy. In 1659 a handful of Vineyard Wampanoags rose before a mixed audience of Indians and Englishmen to publicly narrate the evolution of their faith that Christ died for them—the essential act for becoming a full member of many Congregationalist churches. Convinced of the sound doctrine and grace in these relations, the baptized colonists recognized the orators as visible saints and their meeting as a gathered church possessing equal standing to English congregations. Eleven years later Eliot and Cotton traveled to the Vineyard to usher in Hiacoomes and John Tackanash as the first ordained Indian pastor and teacher, respectively, in North America, and John Nahnoso and Joshua Momatchegin as ruling elders.[30] No record survives of what the Indians said that day, but biographies of their contemporaries, written in the early eighteenth century by Experience Mayhew based on notes left by his missionary predecessors, are suggestive. John Shohkow of

[29] Brainerd, *Mirabilia Dei inter Indicos*, 232; for uses of matchit, see Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*; Pierson, *Some Helps for the Indians*, 27; "Indian Grammar," Experience Mayhew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.; Cohen, "Conversion among Puritans and Amerindians"; Travers, *PMHS* 109: 62, 63–64, 68. For English Congregationalists, see, for instance, Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton, N.J., 2002).

[30] Whitfield, *Strength out of Weaknesse*, 176–77 (quotations, 192–93); Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 204–5; John Eliot, *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New-England, in the Year 1670* (1671; repr., Boston, 1868), 20–21; [John Eliot], "Eliot's account of indian churches in New-England, 1673," in *CMHS*, 1st. ser., 10 (1809): 124, 126; Increase Mather, *A Letter Concerning the Success of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England*, appendix to Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 66; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 10, 14, 34; Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers*, 300. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 567, 569, incorrectly dates the ordination as 1666.

Nunnepog reportedly expressed that "tho his Sins had been many and great, yet he had Hopes that thro' the Mercy of God, and the Merits of his Son Jesus Christ, he should obtain Life eternal." Japheth Hannit acknowledged that he needed God's assistance to resist temptation. Hannah Nohnosso called herself "a very filthy Creature; yet Jesus Christ my only Redeemer can, if he pleaseth, save me from my Sins." By 1678 more than forty Wampanoags had made public confessions to the same effect and become members of the Vineyard's two full-fledged Indian congregations. Many others would have joined them, but the Wampanoags, having taken over the governance of their own churches, continued to require conversion narratives for membership well into the eighteenth century though many English congregations had already relaxed this standard. Ironically enough, Indians had become standard-bearers for one of the defining features of New England Puritanism.[31]

The Wampanoags' leading lights had proven that they belonged in the Congregationalist fold, but because they carried their entire communities with them rather than formed segregated Christian reserves, their churches contained room for the tepid, unorthodox, and even profane. Some Wampanoags avoided complex theological issues such as the Trinity, claiming these mysteries were "too deep for us to understand." Others refused to send their children to school, neglected family prayer, or persisted in sin, and yet called on God when in trouble. One powwow tried to hedge his bets by encouraging his wife to adopt Christianity though he maintained his old manitous. Massachusetts superintendent of Indian affairs Daniel Gookin believed that though the praying Indians generally "do fear God and are true believers," others were "hypocrites, that profess religion, and yet are not sound hearted." Even Thomas Mayhew Sr. could not help but belie his own suspicions when he wrote to John Winthrop Jr., "I doe speake to them sometimes about an howre. I ask sometimes where they understand; they say yes; and I know they doe, for in generall I really know they understand me, but sometimes I doubt my sellfe, & then I ask." There were and would continue to be people like the mother of

[31] Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 30, 49, 90, 117, 166, 206; Thomas Mayhew to the Governor of Connecticut and Commissioners of the United Colonies, Sept. 24, 1678, in *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England . . . 1653–1679*, ed. David Pulsifer (Boston, 1859), 10: 404–6; Ford, *Some Correspondence*, 86; Letter of Josiah Torrey in [C. Mather], *Letter, about the present state of Christianity, among the Christianized Indians of New-England* (Boston, 1705), 9; [C. Mather], *Concerning the Essays that are made, for the Propagation of Religion among the Indians, in the Massachuset-Province of New-England*, appendix to Mather, *Bonifacius: An Essay Upon the Good, that is to be Devised and Designed, by Those Who Desire to Answer the Great End of Life, and to do Good While They Live* (Boston, 1710), 198; [Cotton Mather], *A Brief Account of the Evangelical Work among the Christianized Indians of New-England*, appendix to Mather, *Just Commemorations: The Death of Good Men, Considered* (Boston, [1715]), 51–52.

Job Soomanan who "was by some [Indians] thought to be a Heathen, yet she owned the true God, and did sometimes call upon him"; but this did not make her much different from English "'horse-shed' Christians," as David D. Hall calls them, who professed Christianity and held to many of its tenets but dabbled in the occult in private. Recognizing that there was a range of devotion in any Christian population and that faith was a deeply personal and invisible quality, Mayhew Sr. admitted that the sincerity of converts was simply impossible to determine absolutely.[32]

Only individuals can know their own hearts, but the Wampanoags left compelling evidence of a sincere commitment by promoting the faith among their own kind. Their reform of death ways sanctioned by tradition and taboo are especially telling. Responding in the 1650s to Mayhew's argument that Christians were supposed to resign fate to God's will, Christian Indians in mourning ceased blackening their faces, mangling their clothes and hair, and screeching: customs designed to provide emotional release and frighten the deceased's spirit toward the afterlife.[33] Archaeological studies show that during the next few decades they made a number of equally dramatic adjustments to their treatment of the dead. Instead of burying corpses in the fetal position and covering them in red ochre to symbolize rebirth into Kiehtan's house, they shifted to extended burials with coffins, headstones, and footstones, like the English.[34] Since

[32] Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 265 ("too deep"), 113, 110 ("a Heathen"); Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 18–19; Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 183, 205; Thomas Mayhew to John Winthrop Jr., Aug. 29, 1659, in *CMHS*, 4th ser., 7 (1865): 37. On horse-shed Christians, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, 1989), 243.

[33] Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 116; Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 153. See also Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking forth upon the Indians in New-England* (London, 1648), in *CMHS*, 3d ser., 4 (1834), 65.

[34] The following discussion draws on Susan G. Gibson, ed., *Burr's Hill: A 17th Century Wampanoag Burial Ground in Warren, Rhode Island* ([Providence, R.I.], 1980), 13; William B. Taylor, "The Taylor Farm Site," *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society* 43, no. 2 (October 1982): 40–46; Preliminary Site Reports of Cedar Tree Neck, Chilmark, and Gay Head sponsored by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (courtesy of Jill Bouck, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society); Elizabeth A. Little, "The Nantucket Indian Sickness," in *Papers of the Twenty-first Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, Canada, 1990), 181; James Axtell, "Last Rites: The Acculturation of Native Funerals in Colonial North America," in Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), 119, 123–27; Brenda J. Baker, "Pilgrim's Progress and Praying Indians: The Biocultural Consequences of Contact in Southern New England," in *In the Wake of Contact: Biological Responses to Conquest*, ed. Clark Spencer Larsen and George R. Milner (New York, 1994), 39. For a thorough discussion of Narragansett burial practices in the late seventeenth century, see Patricia E. Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings: An Archaeology of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians* (Washington, D.C., 2002), 132–64, 191–98.

funerals took place within the confines of Indian villages and, one might assume, often beyond colonial supervision, it appears these reforms were Wampanoag initiatives to symbolize their Christianity. Not surprisingly, then, Christian Wampanoag burials, no less than Christian Wampanoag religious beliefs, did not expunge traditional forms and meanings. Grave goods designed for the spirit's use in the hereafter, such as kaolin pipes, metal pots, glass bottles, and shell beads, continued to find their way into coffins. People still avoided mentioning the names of the deceased, using circumlocutions such as "nickanoose his father" (Nickanoose's father) to leave their ghosts undisturbed. They continued to point their graves westward toward Kiethtan's house, a practice based on the idea that the soul exited the body through the skull and should begin its journey to the afterlife traveling in the proper direction. The Indians no longer colored their corpses red, but during the nineteenth century one observer noted that Gay Head Indians buried their dead in coffins stained with red clay; in this sense, Wampanoag tradition had indeed gone underground. Moreover, though Wampanoag Christians referred to the spirits of the afterworld as angels and devils, they still received death's notice from an illuminated blur like Cheepi, and their souls left their host bodies for the afterworld in flashes of light no less than the traditional Cowwéwonck souls. Wampanoag-speaking angels and the ghosts of relatives contacted people through dreams to reassure them of their salvation or portend future events.[35] At once Christian and distinctly Wampanoag, these death ways paralleled the Vineyard Indians' religious beliefs.

The Wampanoags' public campaign against sin would appear to represent a more complete acceptance of the colonists' brand of Christianity, since it involved an entirely new bureaucracy created to suppress such previously tolerated conduct as premarital sex, polygamy, Sabbath breaking, powwowing, and a host of other customary behaviors. In 1670 John Nahnoso and Joshua Momatchegin were ordained as ruling elders, and the Indians called them "aiusk-omua-eni-nuog," which Experience Mayhew understood to mean "Reprovers, or Men of Reproofs, because they judge that their Office mainly consists in reproving of Sinners and censuring Offenders." These elders ushered sinners before the congregation to confess and repent and issued penalties such as exclusion from the Lord's Supper when the sinners resisted. A year later, in 1671, the Wampanoags decided to back up the elders with muscle by appointing magistrates to charge egregious sinners before courts

[35] Elizabeth A. Little, "Three Kinds of Indian Land Deeds at Nantucket, Massachusetts," in *Papers of the Eleventh Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, Canada, 1980), 65; Edward S. Burgess, "The Old South Road of Gay Head; or, Musings on Discontinued Byways," *Dukes County Intelligencer* 12, no. 1 (1970): 24 (coffins); Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 33, 147–48, 150, 160, 201, 221–22, 232, 262; Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes*, 116, 120–21, 134, 137.

of the sachems and their counselors. Magistrate William Lay (or William Panunnut) would approach evildoers as if he were a church elder, "to convince their Consciences of the Sins of which they were guilty, and bring them to a humble sense and Confession of their Faults . . . but if they appeared stubborn and obstinate, he would very severely chastise them for their Offences, making them known what *Stripes for the Backs of Fools* do intend." Lay answered critics of his harsh love that his people "[had] no more shame in them." The Wampanoags' crackdown on several traditionally permissible activities that, apart from incurring God's wrath, had little effect on other people, suggests that some of them had accepted the colonists' providentialism in which God rewarded or punished corporate morality.[36]

Church and court officers were new, as was the punishment of behaviors now labeled sinful, yet the men who filled these positions came disproportionately from the Wampanoags' leading families. At least six of nine known Indian magistrates from the late seventeenth century held the status of sachem, or were a sachem's relative or a sachem's counselor, and of thirty church officials (ministers, preachers, deacons, and teachers), a minimum of sixteen were of elite descent. Similarly, church figures dominated the Wampanoags' political ranks. Not only were the Vineyard sachems Mittark, Wompamog, and Tawanquatuck leading Christians, but in 1675 nine of Mittark's ten counselors held church positions. And in these joint capacities they continued to fulfill most of the elite's customary functions, such as treating community visitors to hospitality, caring for the poor and needy, hosting feasts, and arbitrating disputes. The appropriation of new titles by old leaders had made the Wampanoags' political, court, and church offices all but indistinguishable, not unlike their Christian and traditional religious beliefs.[37]

[36] During one meeting the praying Indians asked Hiacoomes "to reckon up their sins unto them; he presently found 45. or 50." See Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 112 (quotation, 115). On civil laws in mainland praying Indian communities, see Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 142. Eliot, *Brief Narrative*, 20–21; Eliot, *CMHS* 10: 124, 126; Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 205; Mather, *Letter Concerning the Success*, 66; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 10, 14, 34, 17 ("Reprovers"); Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers*, 300.

Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, esp. 61, also 16–18, 41, 50, 57, 61, 97; [Experience Mayhew], "A Brief Account of the State of the Indians on Martha's Vineyard . . . 1694 to 1720," appended to Mayhew, *A Discourse Shewing that God Dealeth with Men as with Reasonable Creatures* (Boston, 1720), 5–6; Bragdon, "Native Christianity in 18th Century Massachusetts," 119; Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers*, 293–94; Kathleen Joan Bragdon, "Crime and Punishment among the Indians of Massachusetts, 1675–1750," *Ethnohistory* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 24; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 26–27, 48, 89, 93–94, 99, 25–26 ("convince their Consciences"); Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), 24–85, esp. 30.

[37] The melding of Indian church and political hierarchies is a trademark of mission history. For example, see Steven W. Hackel, "The Staff of Leadership: Indian Authority in the Missions of Alta California," *WMQ* 54, no. 2 (April 1997): 347–76.

Such continuity resonated with the common Wampanoag argument that Christianity was less a new faith brought by the English than a colonist-spurred revival of ancient Indian ways. One Wampanoag on Cape Cod explained, "as [to] the Commandements of God, and concerning God, and the making of the world by one God, that they had heard some old men who were now dead, to say the same things." The Indians, however, had fallen into a "great sleep" and forgotten these truths. Christianity, by this train of thought, was a return to tradition, not an abandonment of it. For others the spread of Christianity was a fulfillment of precolonial prophecy. A mainland Wampanoag recalled that during the epidemic of 1616–19:

> Hee fell into a dream, in which he did think he saw a great many men come to those parts in cloths, just as the *English* now are apparelled, and among them there arose up a man all in black, with a thing in his hand which hee now sees was all one *English* mans book; this black man he said stood upon a higher place than all the rest, and on the one side of him were the *English*, on the other a great number of *Indians*: this man told all the *Indians* that God was *moosquantum* or angry with them, and that he would kill them for their sinnes, whereupon he said himself stood up, and desired to know of the black man what God would do with him and his *Squaw* and *Papooses*, but the black man would not answer him a first time, nor yet a second time, untill he desired the third time, and then he smil'd upon him, and told him that he and his *Papooses* should be safe, and that God would give unto them *Mitcheu*, (*i.e*) victualls and other good things, and so hee awakened.

Well into the eighteenth century, Vineyard Wampanoags told of the miraculous birth of their Christian leader Japheth Hannit, who survived only because his mother received a blessing from Jehovah and dedicated her baby to serve him—an event that occurred years before English settlement on the island and the onset of the Mayhew mission.[38] No Wampanoag would have denied that a Christian life required many changes. Yet the fullest account of the faith, according to these visions, was that Christianity was a return to the purity of old ways and a rediscovery of spiritual power.

Flush with religious enthusiasm, Hiacoomes, Momonaquem, Wompamog, Pamehanit, and numerous other Wampanoags spread the news about how to obtain ancient sacred power through new forms; they,

[38] Shepard, *Clear Sun-shine*, 43–44. Wuttununohkomkoo's and Japheth Hannit's stories can be found in Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 2: 440–42; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 44–45, 129, 135–36.

not the Mayhews or Cotton, were the most active missionaries on the island. Perhaps the most dramatic commitment came from the Aquinnah sachem Mittark, who suffered three years of banishment to the other side of the island for his support of the mission, only to make a triumphant return after convincing several of Aquinnah's leading residents to join the meeting. Other Vineyard Wampanoags traveled deeper into the missionary field. By 1673 their efforts, combined with the Mayhews', were largely responsible for spreading Christianity to ninety Nantucket Indian families. On the mainland colonist Richard Bourne preached to the Wampanoags of Cape Cod, native John Sassamon proselytized in Wampanoag settlements around Assawompsett Pond, and John Cotton Jr. made occasional visits to Acushnet and Saconnet, a stone's throw from the Wampanoag seat at Pokanoket. Such evangelical work led half or more of the Wampanoag people to become worshipping Christians before 1675. Their commitment to enforcing Christian principles and living peacefully with the English encouraged them to turn to their congregations and courts rather than to the unchurched paramount Wampanoag sachem, Philip, to mediate their disputes. In all likelihood they also halted their tribute payments to Philip, which would make one of his casus belli—that he had "a great fear to have ani of ther indians should be Caled or forsed to be Christian indians" because "the English made them not subject to ther kings"—even more serious than historians have appreciated.[39] Yet Philip's war against the English only served to alienate the praying Indians further from him, with those on Cape Cod and the islands either fighting alongside the English or remaining neutral, and to accelerate his people's Christianization. After his defeat a half dozen Vineyard Indians joined with John Cotton Jr. to promote Christianity among mainland Wampanoags who had received quarter from Plymouth late in the war in exchange for switching sides. The mainlanders could plainly see that the Vineyard had

[39] Whitfield, *Light appearing*, 118; Whitfield, *Strength out of Weaknesse*, 188; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 13, 20–22, 46–47, 73–74, 129; Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 37, 47–48; Pulsifer, *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth*, 10: 383–84; Gookin, *CMHS* 1: 196–207; "Letter from Rev. John Eliot, 1664," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 9, no. 2 (April 1855): 131; Eliot, *Brief Narrative*, 21; Eliot, *CMHS* 10: 124–29; Travers, *PMHS* 109: 93, 94.

For more on Bourne, see Mary Farwell Ayer, "Richard Bourne, Missionary to the Mashpee Indians," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 62, no. 2 (April 1908): 139–43; Francis G. Hutchins, *Mashpee: The Story of Cape Cod's Indian Town* (West Franklin, N.H., 1979), 35–38, 40–43, 45–46; Jack Campisi, *The Mashpee Indians: Tribe on Trial* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1991), 77–79. On Sassamon, see James P. Ronda and Jeanne Ronda, "The Death of John Sassamon: An Exploration in Writing New England Indian History," *American Indian Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1974): 91–102; and Lepore, *Name of War*, 21–47. John Easton, "A Relacion of the Indyan Warre, by Mr. Easton, of Roade Isld., 1675," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675–1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York, 1913), 10–11 ("a great fear").

been spared disease ever since the first praying Indians gathered in 1645 and that Christianity had enabled island Wampanoags, though they shared many of Philip's grievances, to keep the peace with local colonists. By contrast Philip's allies had resisted Christianity for years and most of them were dead or scattered by disease, starvation, and war. This comparison made taking up Christianity the only sensible choice. By the late seventeenth century, Wampanoags living north of Buzzard's Bay had organized into four Christian meetings run by Indian officers ordained by their Vineyard counterparts.[40] Christianity had become the Wampanoags' common religion.

Though no contemporary accounts of Wampanoag evangelical work survive, a transcript of a chance conversation in 1708 between New York Governor Lovelace and an unnamed Wampanoag from the mainland town of Dartmouth hints at the natives' approach. Lovelace was interested in this Indian's Christian knowledge, so he began quizzing him catechism-style. The native formulated answers (recorded in the vernacular) using his hand as a mnemonic device, a common Indian practice. The Wampanoag responded to Lovelace's question about the Trinity as follows: "He is one God (pointing to the Palm of his Hand.) and yett he Dree (pointing to his Three extended Fingers on that Hand.)—what you callum, my Lord—methink, you calum, Dree Person." On the issue of whether all people were condemned to hellfire, the Indian responded:

> Maybe no! . . . You see my-Lord! (Extending Three Fingers & pointing to his middle Finger,) He speakum Him (pointing then to his For-finger,) You so big Angry with Man. Me Luvum Man. What me do you no Angry[?] Then He (pointing to his Fore-finger,) speakum Him (so pointing to his middle Finger,) You go down; You be man; you do all Good Things for man who can do nune. You Dy, that man no Dy. Then you rise again. Then you come up here. Then you show man how to com here; You Lead Man here.

Lovelace was astounded to learn that, though John Cotton Jr. often preached nearby, this Indian's instruction had come from other natives: the Vineyard Wampanoags.[41]

[40] Grindal Rawson and Samuel Danforth, "Account of an Indian Visitation, A.D. 1698," in *CMHS,* 1st ser., 10 (1809), 130, 134; Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 38, 87, 110, 140, 161; Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 37; Letter of Thomas Hinckley, Apr. 2, 1685 (transcript), File 5, New England Company Collection, American Antiquarian Society; John Cotton Jr. to Increase Mather, Mar. 23, 1693, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Mass.; Travers, *PMHS* 109: 98–101; Mather, *Letter, about present state of Christianity,* 13; Mather, *Brief Account of the Evangelical Work,* 53; Mather, *Concerning the Essays*, 195–99.

[41] "A Conference with an Indian of New England, Dec. 1708," New England Company Ms. no. 7957, p. 3, Guildhall Library, Corporation of London. See also Laura J. Murray, "Joining Signs with Words: Missionaries, Metaphors, and the Massachusett Language," *NEQ* 74, no. 1 (March 2001): 62–93; Shepard, *Clear Sun-shine*, 46.

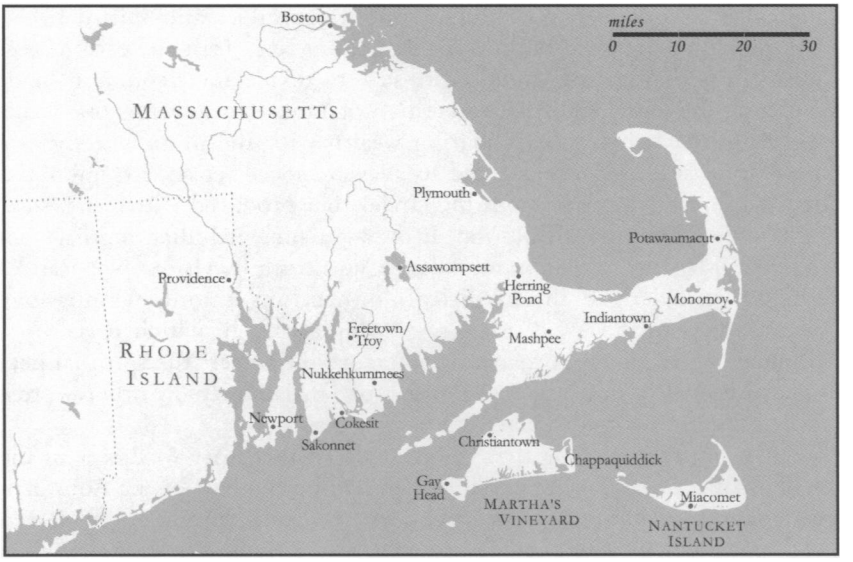

FIGURE II

Wampanoag Christian communities after King Philip's War. Drawn by Rebecca L. Wrenn.

In 1792 Thomas Cooper, a sixty-year-old Wampanoag from Aquinnah, told Benjamin Basset, a selectman from the Vineyard town of Chilmark, an oral tradition about how his people warded off yellow fever (a postcontact disease) "before the English came among the Indians": "After it had raged and swept off a number," Cooper explained, healthy people would gather to conduct a two-part ritual. First, the rich would form a circle and throw into the air miniatures representing their most valued possessions for the poor to seize as claims to that wealth. Next, the community would place the "most sprightly young man in the assembly" in a new wigwam, and then set the structure ablaze while the people outside sang and danced in two columns. "The youth would leap out of the flames, and fall down to appearance dead," Cooper continued. "Him they committed to the care of five virgins." Eventually the boy would awaken and recount a trance in which he traveled high up into the air "where he came to a great company of white people, with whom he had interceded hard to have the distemper layed; and generally after much persuasion, would obtain a promise, or answer of peace, which never failed of laying the distemper."[42]

Basset intended this story to be read as a quaint curiosity from New England's supposedly disappearing Indian remnant, but for Wampanoag

[42] Benjamin Basset, "Fabulous Traditions and Customs of the Indians of Martha's Vineyard," in *CMHS,* 1st ser., 1 (1792): 139–40.

audiences it contained powerful lessons about values and spiritual relationships that stretched back from the present to at least the early 1600s. With the Indians under intense pressure to divide their common lands and enter the individualistic competition of Yankee society, this oral tradition reinforced the ethic of sharing wealth with the ill and needy as a means to ease their suffering and to alleviate social tensions (symbolized by exclusion of the poor from the circle) that produced witchcraft, sickness, and community dissolution. It drew on ancient Indian motifs, such as renewal by fire, *communitas* by dance, and truth by vision. Not least of all, it acknowledged the historical connections among Wampanoag Christianity, prophesy, disease, and colonialism, in which precontact Wampanoag visions told that newcomers would possess the spiritual keys to future health and peace. Adoption of Christianity, in other words, made sense from a traditional Wampanoag perspective.

It is entirely possible that Cooper related this story to Basset in the shadow of the Gay Head church, which had been a part of the Aquinnah Wampanoags' community since the days of Mittark and had long served as a repository for the people's most cherished traditions. Initially, most Wampanoags came to Christianity largely, if not solely, in search of protection from disease, but once inside the fold, English and Wampanoag missionaries gave them a comprehensive education in the new religion. The Indians' goal was to learn how to ally with the Christian God and they sustained their effort because it produced clear benefits: most prominently, from the first Christian meeting in 1645 to the year 1690 not a single epidemic afflicted the island. By the time another one appeared, Christianity was already such a part of Wampanoag life that the Indian response was either to blame sin or sink into apathy but not to revive ancestral rites. On his deathbed in 1712, preacher Japheth Hannit wrote a stinging admonishment to his demoralized followers: "You bring Trouble on the People . . . by your Miscarriages. They procure Distempers & all other Chastisement from the Great God . . . God hath repeated his Chastisements upon us especially by Sickness . . . Yet only how full are all our Towns of Sin!" Marginalia from a native language Bible that circulated through the Wampanoag community during the early to mid-eighteenth century contains lines such as "I am a pitiful person . . . we are foolish"; "I am not able to defend myself from the happenings to the world"; "Forever is a person blessed who believes in God"; "We have disease in the whole world, because we do not"—and the entry suddenly ends there.[43] It might have taken the Wampanoags some time, but by this period they were all too aware of the meaning of sin, perhaps better than many of their English neighbors.

[43] Mayhew, *Indian Converts*, 68, 86; Mayhew, *Conquests and Triumphs*, 34; Suffolk Files no. 43637, p. 81, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.; New

The Wampanoags were Christians by any reasonable standard, yet they did not convert, as missionaries and many of their historians have used the word, by suddenly making a blanket rejection of ancestral identity, beliefs, and practices, to be replaced by Christian substitutes. Instead, through a process of religious translation, they and their missionaries associated Christian spirits with ancient ones, used familiar Wampanoag terms to express novel Christian doctrines, and placed longstanding elites in church offices. Indeed, some Wampanoags understood Christianity as an epiphany bringing clarity to the ancestors' teachings. The combined effect of spiritual revival, social restructuring around Christian institutions, and strengthened ties with the English was to quicken disease-ravaged Wampanoag communities, the locus of Indian lives. In these ways and more, Wampanoag Christianity was traditional. Yet the Wampanoags also embraced many of Christianity's novelties. They allied with a sky god of unmatched power who placed unprecedented demands on his followers and whose omnipotence challenged basic Wampanoag understandings of cosmology and causality. Fearful of this god's wrath—not only for active sins, but for an "evill heart"—the Indians established churches and courts to punish misdeeds and awaken sinners to their corruption. They asserted a new Christian public identity by adopting colonial burial forms and establishing Sunday meeting as the people's religious gathering, among many such changes. Even Puritan leaders known for their skepticism toward appearances conceded that Wampanoag communities had become Christian and probably contained some of God's saints, a radical departure from their assessment of other native peoples as savages.[44] Little did most of them know that even as the Wampanoags had become Christians in fundamental ways, the faith was now the Indians' own.

In many ways the mission of Martha's Vineyard was unique among its colonial peers. Unlike the Franciscans in Spanish Florida or New Mexico, the Mayhews were not backed by troops with a track record of brutally suppressing Indian resistance and of propping up cooperative leaders. Unlike the Jesuits of New France, they could not entice Indians with substantial trade benefits, military protection, or diplomatic favors.

England Company Ms. no. 7957, p. 9; Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusett*, 1: 429, 431, 437, 443.

[44] John Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England . . .* , in *CMHS*, 3d ser., 4 (1834): 279; Cotton Mather, *The Triumphs of the Reformed Religion, in America. The Life of the Renowned John Eliot* (Boston, 1691), 116–22; Mather, *Bonifacius*, 195; Samuel Sewall, *Phænomena Quædam Apocalyptica Ad Aspectum Novi Orbis configurata; or, Some Few Lines Towards a Description of the New Heaven as it Makes to Those who Stand upon the New Earth* (Boston, 1697), 34; Increase Mather, *Masukkenukeeg Matcheseaenvog* [Greatest Sinners Exhorted] (Boston, 1698), 163–64; Rawson and Danforth, *CMHS* 10: 129–34.

Nevertheless, all missionaries, whatever their local circumstances, faced the challenge of translating Christianity to native people across a broad gulf of culture and language. All of them would have preferred for the Indians to obliterate their former selves and adopt European models of living, thinking, and worshipping wholesale. But the Indians would not abide by this agenda, not in Vineyard praying towns, Spanish *reducciones*, French *reserves*, or anywhere else. It was neither possible nor, from the natives' perspective, desirable to do so. Indians were going to invest Christianity with certain traditional meanings and functions or else have little or nothing to do with it, as recent historians of other colonial regions, particularly Catholic ones, have recognized to a greater degree than their New England counterparts. Missionaries who refused to adjust to this basic fact risked their following and, in some cases, their lives. But those, like the Mayhews, who not only tolerated their charges' indigenization of Christianity but also participated in it, laid down the groundwork for what were often lasting Christian Indian communities. To some extent this news is familiar, but it is a story more commonly associated with French Jesuit missions than English Puritan ones. It is time to read between the lines of John Eliot's public pronouncements about his strictness to consider that Mayhew's flexible approach was more representative of peers such as Bourne, Cotton, and probably Eliot too, as testified by their charges' commitment to Christianity before and long after King Philip's War. Puritan missions, no less than Catholic ones, were sites of conversation between two dynamic religious traditions, rather than the imposition of a monolith. Moreover, this account of the mission to the Vineyard Wampanoags demonstrates that syncretic approaches to the Indians' evangelization could and did produce knowledgeable, even doctrinaire, Christians, including Congregationalists. Amid familiar accounts of cultural clashes and cultural misunderstandings in early American encounters were processes of cultural convergence, however ambiguous and incomplete. Only by considering them, too, can scholars begin to understand the numerous communities that were and are distinctly native with a church at the center.