

Direct your letters to Henry Ashursts Esquire at the Golden Key in Aldersgate Street in London to be delivered to mee.<sup>39</sup> I never wrote to any that I remember in New England but Mr. Eliott. And I would faine know whether his Method of Councils be yet Communicated, and how it taketh.<sup>40</sup>

JOHN WOODBRIDGE, JR., TO RICHARD BAXTER <sup>41</sup>

KILLINWORTH, MARCH 31, 1671.

REVEREND AND WORTHY SIR,

In your worthy and welcome Lines that I received the last August (if I may not be ashamed that this acknowledgement should be compared with the date of this Returne) you advertise me in my following letters to leave out my Compliments, which I take as a valid License for me to be bold; and 'tis matter of Encouragement to me that, seeing you can overlooke nakednesse and deficiency of Compliments, I hope you will forgive my broad unmannerlynesse in that I rise this Late to serve you, for the late Returne may be easily Judged to be without Compliment in Carriage as well as in words. I Confesse were it wholly willfull and voluntary, any excuse of the Common bredth would be too narrow to cover it.

But, Sir, quickly after I received your Letter I intended a Journey to the Massachusetts and being at my Father's and neere the Ships to have given you thanks for your giving and knowledge of my receiving your good Letter; but being providentially Impeded from my Journey by a disease that then was Epidemicall (the change of our Manners in the wildernes from being heavenly to earthly and simply sincere and peaceable, to be cunningly sinfull and contentious, having changed our climate from Salubrious to unhealthy), my intention was frustrated. And I recovered not ability Agayne to write till winter drew on and all oportunities of Sending to you were run by. When I received your letter I blessed my selfe for the honour and satisfaction I received by it, and Account it my duty to blesse god for both; and had you not hinted unto me a subject for a 2d Epistle I should have taken my debt unto you for one the first that offered it selfe.

You asked of me a Relation of the Mold and manners of our Churches in this wilderness, and I wish my selfe as able as I am

<sup>39</sup> For an account of Baxter's relations with Ashurst, see Powicke, "The Reverend Richard Baxter and . . . Henry Ashurst" in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XIII, 2, 1-19.

<sup>40</sup> Baxter had written to Eliot (about 1667) some "Animadversions on Mr. Eliot's Book for Stated Councils." See Powicke, "Some Unpublished Correspondence of . . . Baxter and . . . Eliot" in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xv, 2, 25-28, *et seq.*

<sup>41</sup> Baxter Manuscripts (Letters), II, Folios 233-234.

willing to serve you, but more wish that the Knowledge of our churches would tend to their praise and greater glory. A letter is too narrow a Table for an History. I shall Endeavour to give you a Synoptical Narrative of them, which I hope is all that you expect. And that I may be the more perspicuous I shall divide the Country (as it is divided it selfe to my hand) into 4 quarters, *vid:* Road Island (if 'tis not too sluttish to be handled), Plimouth Colony, the Massachussets, and Connecticut.

Road-Island is a chaos of all Religions and like materia prima susceptible of all formes. Sir Henry Moodyes short description of it is merry yet true and apt that at Road-Island there is enough of 2 good things, Fat mutton and Liberty of Conscience. It is the Asylum for all those that are disturbed for Heresy, a hive of hornets, and the Sinke into which all the Rest of the Colonyes empty their Hereticks. So that the body of the people are an Heterogeneous Lump of Familists, Antinomians, Quakers, Seekers, and Antisabbatarians. The best Limb in it is a church of Anabaptists led by one Mr. Clarke who they say is an Animal Rationale, of Competent Abilityes and Morall principles, but ever duo gladii he is both a magistrate and a Teacher: I will not say an Elder for they hold no such stated office. As for the rest, or at least the Generality of them, they neither owne nor Attend any Sacrament. There is a small Town called Providence (if the Name be not too Sacred for the Thing) upon the Maine yet under the Jurisdiction of the Island (the Nest of that fallen Star Mr. Williams whose Name I presume is not unknowne to you) containing about 40 or 50 Householders, though so small yet tripartited into 3 distinct Churches and Congregations each differing from [the] other in their principles. And the whole Jurisdiction, if they Agree in any one position [it] is this, That Every man though of any Hedge religion ought to professe and practice his owne tenets without any molestation or disturbance.

Of Plimouth Jurisdiction I shall not Say much in particular because they differ but little from the rigid Independents whose principles and practices I shall speake of a little lower. I Question not but God knows many sincere hearts and faithful Subjects among them, yet they seeme oversprinkled with Brownisme and to be woven with some of the finer and more spirituall threds of Anabaptisme. The first members of the church of Plimouth (the head towne from whence the whole Colony is denominated) were (as 'tis possible you have heard) a swarme of Mr. Robinson's Church in Holland, and they have not yet thoroughly growne out the Cachexy that hung about them when they first transported themselves into the Country. I have not heard of any minister or church amongst them as yet that are awakened to open the Church-doors a little wider for those to enter who are onely unholy and uncleane because the porters are so strict. Though in the

other Colonyes, blessed be God, Truth and Charity have gotten ground of these Errours and pinching practices that we are reproached for by the world and we dayly heare of Enlargements of the Church, unlesse among some few that growe more strict by an Antiperistasis. Some of those of Plimouth are so liberall that they provide the bread for the Sacrament (though the Communicants are many) in one Loafe because Paul tells us Though we are many yet we are one bread.

In the Massachusetts-colony there are three formes of Disciplinarians Each one step higher then his fellow: Rigid Independents, moderate ones, and those that are Presbyterianly addicted, though their numbers are few and their Hornes kept short. Of the first sort are the gleanings of the Clergy and the Body of the Laity, which makes me thinke that a litle more of the oile of the Spirit would make them give; and were they as wise as their Teachers they would change their minds. Many of the Ministers would launch out farther but that they have so far humoured their churches that now displeasing of them will breake them in pieces. The True reason why Independency has kept its owne so long is because the Churches are such a heavy stone at the ministers leggs that they cannot fly their owne Course. The perswasions and practices of these girt independents, Sir, you are not Ignorant of, yet because Errour is multifarious and they differ something from their Brethren in England, I shall give you a Short Account of what they are and doe Amongst us.

Their grand Dogma is that a Councell has no decisive power unlesse materially, Jejunely to propound what is [Named?] <sup>42</sup> truth and Errour and that Every Church-Species has more formall power then an oecumenicall Council. Also that no person is in proximâ potentiâ a capable Subject of Baptisme but he who either himselfe or one or both of his parents are in explicit Confederation with a particular Society, relating the History of their conversion, the manner and Steps thereof. This last mentioned practice begins to steale away ashamed so that whereas the very women were bound (at least in most places) to deliver their relation before the whole Congregation, now in many places the men are admitted if their conversion be first Judged of by the Elder and an understanding brother or 2 in private and then approved by the house of Commons in publique. Every brother has equall power in judgements with the pastor, though the observation of some is not void of all Truth, that the Presbyterians take away the power from the people in word and give it them in practice; the Independents take it from the people in practice though they give it them in word; for in all matters that their zeales move in they are not content onely to hold the bridle but also justle for all the Roome in the saddle.

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<sup>42</sup> Torn.

They give the power of ordination in every unorganized church to the Laity and thinke that for the Elder of one church to Impose hands upon a Candidate for office in another is not lesse than Piacular an example whereof the last October might have been seen in the next towne (though through illness I was not present) *vid.* Saybrooke, where 2 of the brethren imposed hands on their officer while 4 or 5 Elders sate by blowing their Fingers; which Act (now the times begin to see and mens Judgments are 9 dayes old) made one of the Inhabitants to say that it was matter of Indignation to see a cooper and a Blacksmith (as the 2 Imposers were by trade) to ordaine an Elder.

Agayne, that Baptized children doe by Eating and drinking and the good Influence of the Sun grow out the membership and as they become Adult they drop their Church-relation and become non-subject to the discipline of the church, which made a prompt young man a while agoe tell one of the ministers that they dealt with children here as the people with their young shoates in Virginia, to take them up and marke them and then turne them into the woods.

Many of them hold that the civil magistrate has no power in Ecclesiasticall matters, neither are churches to give Account to Courts (much lesse to Councells) for any irregular proceeding, and some of them have said to the Excommunicate that have complained of mal-Administration in the Church that if they are wronged they must Tarry to be righted at the day of Judgment.

Now the more moderate and lax Congregationall men give some more honour, but very diminutive, unto Councells. They allow of ordination by the Eldership, which now is most generally practised. They baptize the grand children of members in full communion (as the phrase is) provided their Immediate parents solemnly owne the Parents Covenant in publique, as was Agreed on at a Synod held at Boston in 1662. They acknowledge that the power of Rule belongs to Rulers, but the power of Liberty to the Fraternity. Surely that *potestas Libertatis* is but a dry bone if 'tis any thing.

As for Connecticut Colony, That has waded farthest out of Independency and begins now to shew its shoulders Above water. There are in the Colony About 22 Townes in all and among them all about 12 ministers whose judgements are that churches are not de jure Independent but Integrall parts of the whole, though not all of these ordained officers, it being a fashion peculiar to New-England — though of no good either aspect or Influence for preachers (both Congregationall and Presbyterian) — to preach without being sent and to stand long, 5, 6, 10, or 12 years unordained. Such Reasons as these are pretended for it, as that the Timber is not growne for wisdomes house, that there are not a sufficient Number (*vid.* 7) of Faithfull and Sound Christians to constitute a church, which is allwayes gathered before ordi-

nation. And though many presbyterian Acts have been done Amongst us, yet no persons yet could ever Screw up things so high as to be ordayned before his church was moulded into order. Others that Judge that a preacher should be an officer suspend their ordination because of the slenderness of their maintainance, fearing least if they should give up themselves to feed the sheep they should starve themselves; they are willing to set their hands to the Plow, but wait if opportunity present to doe it in fatter land.

In other places Divisions are the great Remove and all things stand at a stay because part of the people pull one way and part the other. The breath of ordination has turned many a smoking into flaming Townies, it being so hard to find a minister such an Ambidexter as to be Able to please both sides. But I am gone from my purpose. The more Rigid and also the more unbent Congregationalists are the same in judgment and practice with those in the other Colonyes, excepting some few punctilios in which almost every Church differs from Another. The presbyterians here are more full in their practice, being not onely connived at at large, but on some considerations tolerated by the Law of the Commonwealth. But yet for fear of scattering motes in the eyes of some halfe inlightened Christians, they suspend the practice of some things that would be not onely convenient but commanded, could they be Acted without offense.

There are but 2 Townes in the jurisdiction wherein all the Christian Inhabitants are under the care, Inspection, and Government of the Eldership, *vid.* Wethersfield (to whom god has given Mr. Gershom Bulkly to be Their Rector (son to Peter Bulkly, the Authour of the Treatise of the Covenant of Grace), a man of good parts and spirit), and my owne Cure in which when I was ordayned I found above 60 unbaptized persons, men, women, and children, though the whole plantation consist not of above 30 householders. And till god stirred up the Spirits of some in Late years (as Mr. Haines at Hartford *etc.*) to roll off from his people the reproach of uncircumcision, the unbaptized began to be the more Numerous and the bigger end of the wallet. Yet though there be a partiall Reformation in respect of Baptisme and admissions, yet the converse is now and like to bee in respect of government.

Wee live in such a soil as will hardly ever beare a classis. The reasons for it are such as these: 1. Because the Revenues of the ministry for the Generality are but enough to keep them and theirs alive at home. 2. Because the people are growne so rude, Insolent, and Coltish (Independency has so fatted them) that the Ministers that have most Authority have not enough to stamp a Judgment and sentence of good mettall to make it currant with them. 3. Because the ministers cannot wholly give themselves to

the worke of the church both at home and Abroad for their many Necessary Avocations to wait upon the things of This world. He that would thrive, shall we saye, or live in this Country, must be of all Trades, and should many ministers attend the many occasions of guiding others flocks abroad Their owne Cowes would be starved at home. 4. Because the plantations, in this Colony Especially, are too remote for Convenient Assembling, the good Land lying in Independent spots seemes to be cut out for Independent churches. But the Inconvenience would be in part removed were all the ministers of one mind, but those that can digest a classis are but sprinkled here and there.

But our great wound and disease is a spirit of Separation, which so many are drencht with and so few without some tincture of. We ourselves in this Towne, through the unsettlednesse of the Times, the Infancy of Reformation, and the forementioned conditions of the Country, are little more than the embryo of a presbyterian Church in its formalities and maturity. Yet our next neighbours have both refused to joyne with us at the Lords table and also to admit our members occasionally into their Synaxis; yet professing that 'tis not any personall Scandall in any of our members already admitted that frights them, but that, were there occasion offered, then they that we use would open the door for the scandalous, which if it could be proved I should begin to thinke evil of it as well as they. The way that I proved in would be accounted the Narrow way in all churches of the world besides our own, and yet 'tis here Accounted the Broad way (as some preaching on Matthew, 7.13 have called the presbyterian way).

Those that desire to be Admitted Communicants first come to me and declare their desires; the next Sabbath I signify their desires to the Congregation, to the intent that whosoever know them to lye under Scandall and unsuitableness for that ordinance would According to rule seeke a reformation of it. If nothing Appeare against them, I Examine them concerning their knowledge and proficiency in the way of life, of the understanding of the Nature of the Sacrament, and the Qualifications of every Communicant; in which If I find them not deficient before the Sacrament, I declare to the Church that there is nothing Appearing why they should not partake with us in that holy feast. But the Common opinion is so riveted in the hearts of men, *vid.* That the infected and Infectious will steale in at the church-doors unlesse every brother be allowed a feeling of his pulse and smelling of his Breath and handling of his necke and hands least he should prove a smooth supplanter that 'tis extreame difficult (it being so pleasing to Naturall pride) to make men vomit it up.

The last year was fatall with us for the Dichotomizing 3 churches, Windsor, Hartford, and Stratford, and making them stand out into 6. It might have been foreseen without a prospec-

tive that the peoples having so much Line and Liberty amongst us would End in Hampering themselves and one Another; Yea so far that they cannot be disentangled without cutting the Bond of Unity. Though I think the bottome and rise of our contentions is that men of worth and understanding cannot bear it to have their children, orphan-like, deprived of their Legacy that Christ has left them and the others children should be markt for sheep and their owne, as good as the other, be left out for goates.

Now let a towne thus growing with discontent have occasion to choose and call them a minister (in which grand Affaire being left to themselves without Court or clergy to guide in the Act) the fire quickly gets to the top of the Chimney and in this particular the children left to themselves have the most brought their mother to shame Amongst us. The forementioned churches being overrun with mutuall brawles and prejudice, now meet in district Assemblies and live somewhat more peaceably and lesse tumultuously with the Bars between them. This distinct walking (as the soft phrase termes it) is taken notice of as strange by the blinded Indians and 'tis not easily Imaginable that they will embrace that religion that is a stranger to them when its owne Acquaintance doe so irreconcilably jar about it.

The Church at Hartford had very little reason to divide, Because Mr. Whiting, the dissatisfied Elder (and his adherents being the minor part of the church), were invited to continue a part of the Church and had liberty to practice his owne Judgement. When in the other Churches the presbyterians, being the minor part, were staved off from the rest. Mr. Whiting, though he had been ordayned to the whole church of which his adherents were members, yet when he withdrew, because *pars Ecclesiae non est Ecclesia*, was Reordayned.

Sir, I have In some measure pulled off our rags and showed you the wound. I should be prejudiciall to the Body of which I am a member if I should not desire you, as you have leasure and opportunity, to propound us a Salve that our breaches might be healed and paths restored to dwell in. A stander-by may see more of our game than we ourselves. I know you will not be unwilling to Impart to me the Knowledge of what methods of healing for us are with you, Though I confesse till men are more humble and self-denying Amongst us the most Sanative plaisters will be pulled off.

You desired in your letter to me some Information how Mr. Eliot's booke about Councelles takes. Truly, Sir, I thinke it better tooke with himself than with any of his Brethren, not because of his pride, I suppose you know him better, but the peculiar cut of his Genius; while some were smiling at it, others whispering about it, the booke, as I understand, was called in Agen and now none of them seen walking Abroad.

Sometime the Last Autumn, Since I received your letter, I heard warme Newes that yourselfe was submitted to conformity and that there is a Late booke of yours come over into this country (which I have not had either the happines or opportunity yet to see) defending of and pleading for conformity. The Truth of these things I have diligently Enquired after and I hear it still confirmed, not at all contradicted. When I first heard it I concluded that were it True you had spent much of the Time of your late vacation-years to satisfy your Judgment and conscience in that point. Some wonder at the Report of it, others grieve, others say nothing but it may be thinke the more. As for my selfe, Sir, I have nothing more to descant upon it than what I have here sayd, and mention it mostly to Informe you what the world sayes of you.

I shall Direct this my letter to Totteridge, trusting that Mr. Ashurst will provide for a sure conveyance of it to you though you should be Removed. If it shall please you to write any more, I desire you to direct your Letter to the other Gentleman that I spake of in my last letter, Mr. Nicholas Paige in Boston, Mr. Bradstreet being at present out of the way. I pray Accept of these my Rude and Incompetent Lines and Incomplete Narrative of Affaires. If you have any farther service to Impose on me, and can you relish my Indian Service, it shall be performed According to the best of his Abilities, who is Ambitious to please and serve you.

JOHN WOODBRIDGE.

KILLINWORTH,  
MARCH ULT. 1671.

Sir, if you have any opportunity to Converse with my unkle Woodbridge, he is able fully to Informe you in the State of the Church of Newbury (in New England) then that Royall of Independency where my Reverend unkle Mr. Thomas Parker and my Father are ministers. Neither doe I suppose will he be a little gratified with the perusall of these Lines to your selfe in case you have opportunity to Communicate unto him.

RICHARD BAXTER TO JOHN WOODBRIDGE, JR.<sup>43</sup>

[TOTTERIDGE, LATE AUTUMN, 1671?]

DEARE BROTHER,

You have greatly obliged me by the free and full narrative of the state of your Country and affairs. This Common aversenesse of the Stricter professors against communion with the lower sort of

<sup>43</sup> Baxter Manuscripts (Letters), II, Folios 240-241. The letter is twice addressed: "To Mr. Woodbridge, Junior, Pastor of the Church at Kenelworth in New England" and "To my Reverend and Much valued brother, Mr. Woodbridge, Pastor of the Church at Kenelworth in New England, this, with a bundle of books." It bears no place or date.