



## *The Clear Sunshine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New England*

Thomas Shepard (1648)

*Thomas Shepard was an English Puritan minister in colonial Massachusetts. He wrote the tract excerpted here to advertise the success of Puritan missionary efforts among the indigenous Massachusetts people. Diseases brought by Europeans had decimated Massachusetts communities; as the survivors rebuilt their lives, some of them looked to missionaries to teach them English ways of living, including the Puritan religion. Among the contents of Shepard's tract was a letter written by John Eliot, the foremost Puritan missionary working among indigenous peoples of New England. The following excerpts from the tract offer windows into the cultural changes that Christianization entailed for Massachusetts people, as well as showing how converts developed their own ways of practicing Christianity.*

*[Quotations from a letter by John Eliot]*

That which I first aimed at was to declare and deliver unto them the law of God, to civilize them [...] But when I first attempted it, they gave no heed unto it but were weary and rather despised what I said. A while after, God stirred up in some of them a desire to come into the English fashions and live after their manner, but knew not how to attain unto it, yea, despaired that ever it should come to pass in their days but thought that in 40 years more, some Indians would be all one English, and in an hundred years, all Indians here about would so be—which when I heard (for some of them told me they thought so and that some wise Indians said so), my heart moved within me [...] And therefore I told them that they and we were already all one save in two things, which make the only difference betwixt them and us: first, we know, serve, and pray unto God, and they do not; secondly, we labor and work in building, planting, clothing ourselves, etc., and they do not; and would they but do as we do in these things, they would be all one with Englishmen. They said they did not know God and therefore could not tell how to pray to him nor serve him. I told them if they would learn to know God, I would teach them—unto which they being very willing, I then taught them (as I sundry times had endeavored afore but never found them so forward, attentive, and desirous to learn till this time), and then I told them I would come to their wigwams and teach them, their wives, and children, which they seemed very glad of [...]

The effect of [God's] word which appears among them, and the change that is among them, is this: First, they have utterly forsaken all their powwaws and given over that diabolical exercise, being convinced that it is quite contrary to praying unto God; yea, sundry of their powwaws have renounced their wicked employment, have condemned it as evil, and resolved never to use it anymore. Others of them, seeing their employment and gains were utterly gone here, have fled to other places, where they are still entertained, and have raised lies, slanders, and an evil report upon those that hear the word and pray unto God, and also upon the English that endeavor to reclaim them and instruct them, that so they might discourage others from praying unto God. And besides, they mock and scoff at those Indians which pray, and blaspheme God when they pray, as this is one instance: a sober Indian, going up into the country with two of his sons, did pray (as his manner was at home) and talked to them of God and Jesus Christ, but they mocked

and called one of his sons Jehovah and the other Jesus Christ. So that they are not without opposition raised by the powwaws and other wicked Indians.

Again, as they have forsaken their former religion and manner of worship, so they do pray unto God constantly in their families, morning and evening, and that with great affection, as hath been seen and heard by sundry that have gone to their wigwams at such times; as also when they go to meat, they solemnly pray and give thanks to God as they see the English to do [...] Furthermore, they are careful to instruct their children, that so when I come they might be ready to answer their catechesis, which by the often repeating of it to the children, the men and women can readily answer it.

Likewise they are careful to sanctify the Sabbath; but at first they could not tell how to do it, and they asked of me how they should do it, propounding it as a question whether they should come to the English meetings or meet among themselves. They said if they come to the English meetings, they understand nothing or to no purpose; and if they met together among themselves, they had none that could teach them. I told them that it was not pleasing to God, nor profitable to themselves, to hear and understand nothing, nor having any that could interpret to them. Therefore, I counseled them to meet together and desire those that were the wisest and best men to pray and then to teach the rest such things as I had taught them from God's word, as well as they could; and when one hath done, then let another do the like, and then a third; and when that was done, ask questions, and if they could not answer them, then remember to ask me, etc., and to pray unto God to help them therein. And this is the manner how they spend their Sabbaths.

They are also strict against any profanation of the Sabbath by working, fishing, hunting, etc., and have a law to punish such as are delinquents therein by a fine of 10 shillings, and sundry cases they have had wherein they have very strictly prosecuted such as have any way profaned the Sabbath. As for example: upon a Sabbath morning, Cutshamaquin the sachem's wife,<sup>a</sup> going to fetch water, met with other women, and she began to talk of worldly matters and so held on their discourse a while, which evil came to Nabanton's ear, who was to teach that day (this Nabanton is a sober good man and a true friend to the English ever since our coming). So he bent his discourse to show the sanctification of the Sabbath, and reprov'd such evils as did violate the same and (among other things) worldly talk, and thereupon reprov'd that which he heard of that morning. After he had done, they fell to discourse about it and spent much time therein, he standing to prove that it was a sin, and she doubting of it, seeing it was early in the morning and in private, and alleging that he was more to blame than she, because he had occasioned so much discourse in the public meeting. But in conclusion, they determined to refer the case to me; and accordingly they did come to my house on the second day morning and opened all the matter, and I gave them such direction as the Lord directed me unto, according to his holy word.

[...A] man named Wampoowas, being in a passion, upon some light occasion did beat his wife, which was a very great offence among them now (though in former times it was very usual), and they had made a law against it; whereupon he was publicly brought forth before the assembly, which was great that day, for our governor and many other English were then present. The man wholly condemned himself, without any excuse; and when he was asked what provocation his

---

<sup>a</sup> That is, the wife of Cutshamaquin the sachem. The name of Cutshamaquin's wife is not given.

wife gave him, he did not in the least measure blame her but himself. And when the quality of the sin was opened—that it was cruelty to his own body and against God’s commandment, and that passion was a sin and much aggravated by such effects, yet God was ready to pardon it in Christ, etc.—he turned his face to the wall and wept, though with modest endeavor to hide it. And such was the modest, penitent, and melting behavior of the man that it much affected all to see it in a barbarian, and all did forgive him; only this remained, that they executed their law, notwithstanding his repentance, and required his fine, to which he willingly submitted and paid it.

Another case of admonition was this: Cutshamaquin the sachem having a son of about 14 or 15 years old, he had been drunk and had behaved himself disobediently and rebelliously against his father and mother, for which sin they did blame him, but he despised their admonition. [...H]e was called forth before the assembly, and he confessed that what was said against him was true; but he fell to accuse his father of sundry evils—as that he would have killed him in his anger, and that he forced him to drink sack, and I know not what else—which behavior we greatly disliked, showed him the evil of it, and Mr. Wilson, being present, labored much with him, for he understood the English. But all in vain; his heart was hard and hopeless for that time. Therefore, using due loving persuasions, we did sharply admonish him of his sin and required him to answer further the next lecture day, and so left him; and so stout he was, that when his father offered to pay his fine of 10 shillings for his drunkenness, according to their law, he would not accept it at his hand.

When the next day was come and other exercises finished, I called him forth, and he willingly came but still in the same mind as before. Then we turned to his father and exhorted him to remove that stumbling block out of his son’s way by confessing his own sins, whereby he had given occasion of hardness of heart to his son—which thing was not sudden to him, for I had formerly in private prepared him thereunto, and he was very willing to hearken to that counsel, because his conscience told him he was blameworthy, and accordingly he did. He confessed his main and principal evils of his own accord; and upon this advantage, I took occasion to put him upon confession of sundry other vices which I knew he had in former times been guilty of (and all the Indians knew it likewise) and put it after this manner: Are you now sorry for your drunkenness, filthiness, false dealing, lying, etc., which sins you committed before you knew God?—unto all which cases, he expressed himself sorrowful and condemned himself for them, which example of the sachem was profitable for all the Indians. And when he had thus confessed his sins, we turned again to his son and labored with him, requiring him to confess his sin and entreat God to forgive him for Christ’s sake, and to confess his offense against his father and mother and entreat them to forgive him; but still he refused. And now the other Indians spake unto him, soberly and affectionately, to put him on; and divers spake, one after another and some several times. Mr. Wilson again did much labor with him, and at last he did humble himself, confessed all, and entreated his father to forgive him, and took him by the hand, at which his father burst forth into great weeping. He did the same also to his mother, who wept also, and so did divers others; and many English being present, they fell a-weeping, so that the house was filled with weeping on every side [...]

There is another question that hath been several times propounded, and much sticks with such as begin to pray, namely: If they leave off powwawing and pray to God, what shall they do when they are sick? For they have no skill in physic, though some of them understand the virtues of

sundry things, yet the state of man's body, and skill to apply them, they have not; but all the refuge they have and rely upon in time of sickness is their powwaws, who by antic, foolish, and irrational conceits delude the poor people, so that it is a very needful thing to inform them in the use of physic [...] And therefore I have had many thoughts in my heart, that it were a singular good work if the Lord would stir up the hearts of some or other of his people in England to give some maintenance toward some school or collegiate exercise this way, wherein there should be anatomies and other instructions that way [...] By this means we should train up these poor Indians in that skill, which would confound and root out their powwaws, and then would they be far more easily inclined to leave those ways and pray unto God, whose gift physic is and whose blessing must make it effectual. [...]

You know, likewise, that we exhorted them to fence their ground with ditches, stone walls upon the banks, and promised to help them with shovels, spades, mattocks, crows of iron; and they are very desirous to follow that counsel and call upon me to help them with tools faster than I can get them, though I have now bought pretty store, and they (I hope) are at work. The women are desirous to learn to spin, and I have procured wheels for sundry of them, and they can spin pretty well. They begin to grow industrious and find something to sell at market all the year long: all winter they sell brooms, staves, eelpots, baskets, turkeys; in the spring, cranberries, fish, strawberries; in the summer, hurtleberries, grapes, fish; in the autumn, they sell cranberries, fish, venison, etc., and they find a good benefit by the market and grow more and more to make use thereof. Besides, sundry of them work with the English in hay-time and harvest. But yet it's not comparable to what they might do if they were industrious, and old boughs must be bent a little at once; if we can set the young twigs in a better bent, it will be God's mercy. [...]

*[A postscript by Thomas Shepard]*

There have been many difficult questions propounded by [the Indians], which we have been unwilling to engage ourselves to any answer unto until we have the concurrence of others with us.

First, suppose a man, before he knew God, hath had two wives, the first barren and childless, the second fruitful and bearing him many sweet children. The question now propounded was: Which of these two wives he is to put away? If he puts away the first, who hath no children, then he puts away her whom God and religion undoubtedly binds him unto, there being no other defect but want of children. If he puts away the other, then he must cast off all his children with her as illegitimate, whom he so exceedingly loves. This is a case now among them, and they are very fearful to do anything cross to God's will and mind herein.

Second, suppose a man marry a squaw, and she deserts and flies from her husband and commits adultery with other remote Indians; but afterward it come to pass that, she hearing [God's] word and sorry for what she hath done, she desires to come to her husband again, who remains still unmarried: Whether should this husband, upon her repentance, receive her again? And whether is he not bound thereunto so to do? [...]

I shall mention no more but conclude with the solemn speech of a sober and hopeful Indian at this lecture, whose name is Wampowas, who instead of propounding a question fell into these

expressions, viz., that “because we pray to God, other Indians abroad in the country hate us and oppose us; the English, on the other side, suspect us and fear us to be still such as do not pray at all. But,” saith he, “God, who knows all things, he knows that we do pray to him.” To which speech Mr. Eliot replied that it was true, indeed, that some of the English did so far suspect them for sundry reasons, “but I do not so, and others of us, who know you and speak with you, we do not so think of you”—and then gave them gracious and serious encouragements to go forward and make more progress in the things of God. [...]

I shall conclude, therefore, with a story I had, both by writing and word of mouth, from a faithful\* man, which he saw with his own eyes this October 7. There was one of the Indians at Noonanetum [who] had a child sick of a consumption many a day, and [the child] at that time died of it. When it was dead, some of the Indians came to an honest man to enquire how they should bury their dead. The man told them how and what the English did when they buried theirs. Hereupon rejecting all their old superstitious observances at such sad times (which are not a few), they presently procured a few boards, and bought a few nails of the English, and so made a pretty handsome coffin (for they are very dexterous at anything they see once done), and put the child into it; and so accompanied it to the grave very solemnly, about 40 Indians of them. When the earth was cast upon it and the grave made up, they withdrew a little from that place and went all together and assembled under a tree in the woods, and there they desired one Tutaswampe, a very hopeful Indian, to pray with them. Now, although the English do not usually meet in companies to pray together after such sad occasions, yet it seems God stirred up their hearts so to do. What the substance of their prayer was, I cannot certainly learn, although [...] this is certain by him who was occasionally an eye- and ear-witness of these things, that they continued instant with God in prayer for almost half an hour together. And this godly man’s words to me (who understands a little of their language) are these: that this Tutaswampe did express such zeal in prayer, with such variety of gracious expressions and abundance of tears, both of himself and most of the company, that the woods rang again with their sighs and prayers. And, saith he, “I was much ashamed of myself and some others, that have had so great light, and yet want such affections as they have, who have as yet so little knowledge.” All this he saw standing at some good distance alone from them under a tree.

---

\* Mr. Edward Jackson. [Note from the source publication]

**Source:** Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New-England* [...] (London: R. Cotes, 1648); as reproduced in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd series, vol. 4 (Cambridge [MA]: Charles Folsom, 1834), 25-67, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101076467305>. Public domain in the United States, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Italicized section headings added by Duffy. Page-number indications from the source publication omitted. A paragraph break added and some long sentences broken up for readability. Two verbs changed from present tense to past for consistency with the rest of the passage. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and typography (italics) modernized or Americanized. A currency abbreviation spelled out for clarity (*shillings*). The spelling *powwaw* is that of the source publication.

Many words capitalized in the source publication have been converted here to lowercase, for the sake of modernization and readability. These include religious terms (*law, word, catechesis, commandment*); offices, both colonial and indigenous (*governor, sachem, powwaw*); the word *barbarian*; and miscellaneous other words (*wigwams, sack, physic, school, country, shovels, brooms, cranberries, market, harvest*, and more).

These edited excerpts from Shepard's tract are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



© 2021, 2026 by John-Charles Duffy. Except as otherwise noted, this work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

All rights are reserved for the flag-shaped “Empire and American Religion” logo; if you alter this work, you may not reproduce the logo. Use of the Creative Commons license icon is subject to the Creative Commons Trademark Policy.