

# *Glass Eyes and Wooden Legs in 17th Century New England*

or

## *A Warning to Infant Baptisers*

### ***Introduction***

Infant baptisers always have to face the issue – the problem – of church membership. Of course, if they grossly abuse the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), the problem seems to disappear. They just end up with what they think is right: ‘mixed churches’ comprising believers and unbelievers.<sup>1</sup> They expect – and their system produces – churches which are composed of members, some of whom are regenerate and baptised as babies,<sup>2</sup> some of whom are adults who have been baptised as babies but are unregenerate, and some of whom are baptised babies but who give no evidence one way or the other concerning regeneration. What a mixed multitude! This inevitably leads on to the idea of visible churches. The Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, puts it this way: ‘The visible church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children’.<sup>3</sup>

But infant baptisers still have to come to terms with the obvious and inevitable result of such a system; namely, that with the passage of time, the balance is almost certain to tip towards

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<sup>1</sup> It is more than knowingly. R.L.Dabney, without batting an eyelid, was prepared to issue this challenge: ‘Cannot that which is worldly, in the true sense, be in the visible church?’ (R.L.Dabney: *Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985, p785).

<sup>2</sup> The baby baptism we are thinking of usually involves sprinkling, which is unknown in Scripture; ‘baptism’ means ‘dipping’, ‘plunging’. See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Confession of Faith* and other documents of the Westminster Assembly, The Publication Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967, p107.

the unbelieving element. History shows that it always does – given time.

Some infant baptisers, wanting to avoid this, try to do something about it, but if they stick with infant baptism and covenant theology they will always fail. To justify my claim, and to use it as a warning to those contemplating the adoption of infant baptism, I want to look at the way the 17th century settlers in New England tried to cope with the problem – and the spiritual disaster to which it led.

### ***The hope***

In the 1630s, the New England settlers were determined to set up pure churches (only the regenerate as members) in their new land;<sup>4</sup> they had had more than enough of the mixed churches in Old England.<sup>5</sup> On reaching the New World, they rightly demanded marks of regeneration in prospective church members. They would only receive those who were, in their terms, visible saints; that is, those who could give good evidence of an experience of saving grace and a life consistent with that profession; any who later proved hypocrites were to be removed. Thomas Shepard, for instance, though he admitted ‘that there is and will be a mixture of close hypocrites with the

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<sup>4</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Infant* pp246,277-286,298-299.

<sup>5</sup> As above, by ‘mixed churches’, so-called ‘visible’ churches, I am speaking of churches which are knowingly made up of believers and unbelievers, this being regarded as acceptable, even right and advantageous by those who advocate such. It is utterly unscriptural. I fully accept, of course, that those who insist on a totally regenerate membership do not always attain it – but they deplore the fact, and do all they can to put it right. Not all the churches in Old England at that time were mixed – the Anabaptists, for instance – but, it goes without saying, the would-be settlers, while they were still in Old England, would never have dreamed of touching them or their ilk with a barge-pole. Once in New England, however, they wanted to form *infant-baptising* churches composed only of those who were regenerate. They had had more than they could take of ‘mixed churches’. *This* is what I am referring to.

wise-hearted virgins in the purest churches’, nevertheless was clear. He urged ‘all the churches of the Lord Jesus, here planted in these western parts of the world, to maintain your church chastity and virginity; you have a name of it abroad, pure, chaste, virgin churches, not polluted with the mixtures of men’s inventions, not defiled with the company of evil men; pure ordinances, pure people, pure churches... Look you maintain it’. But he had a warning: ‘Few churches retain their purity long... In the last days, carnal security either is, or will be, the universal sign of virgin churches... This is the temper [spirit, state] of the body [bulk] of the churches’. Even so, this did not mean the New England churches should accept it. He spoke of ‘that diligent and narrow search and trial, churches here do, or should, make of all those whom they receive to be fellow-members with them... None have [a] right to Christ and his ordinances but such as shall have communion with Christ at his coming to judge the world; hence, if we could be so eagle-eyed as to discern them now that are hypocrites, we should exclude them now; as Christ will [when he comes], because they have no right [to be members]; but [although] that we cannot do [that is, we cannot find every hypocrite]... Yet let the churches learn from this to do what they can for the Lord now’. For the fact is, ‘the ruin of a church may be the letting in of... one ill member’. ‘One man or woman secretly vile, which the church has not used all means to discover [uncover, expose], may defile a whole church’.<sup>6</sup>

So far, excellent. But...

### ***The problem***

But these Puritans, for all their desire for pure churches, established a built-in contradiction right at the start; they

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Shepard: *The Ten Virgins*, Tyndale Bible Society, Florida, pp32,78,144,241; Edmund S.Morgan: *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1963, p114. Shepard preached *The Ten Virgins* from 1636 to 1640. The dates are all-important.

baptised (sprinkled) babies, accepting them as members!<sup>7</sup> Of course, in their zeal for purity,<sup>8</sup> they would baptise only babies born to church members; they had had more than enough of the promiscuous infant-baptism they had left behind in Old England.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, since they had large families, many baptisms followed, and thus the churches grew. True, these baptised infants, although church members, were barred from the supper until they gave evidence of a saving experience for themselves; even so, they were members.

But time has a habit of passing. Men and women grow old and die, even the godly. Baptised babies who are church members grow up, and, whether or not they prove to be elect, in turn they marry and have children. Thus, grandchildren were born to the original settlers in New England; in their turn, they had children; and so on. Now it is a sad but undeniable fact – whatever claims men make about the covenant and infant baptism – not all who are baptised as infants prove to be elect

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<sup>7</sup> It was (and is) more complicated than that. Richard Mather: ‘We do not believe that baptism makes men [babies] members of the church, nor that it is to be administered to them that are outside the church, as the way and means to bring them in, but to them that are within the church, as a seal to confirm the covenant of God unto them’ (Perry Miller: *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, p87; but see Robert Middlekauff: *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p75).

<sup>8</sup> I do not intend any note of scorn. I am a stickler for pure churches myself.

<sup>9</sup> The Presbyterians in Old England who, if they had gained power, would have baptised babies virtually indiscriminately, were shocked by the (initial – see below) exclusiveness of their friends across the ocean. In New England, Thomas Hooker felt the force of their arguments, and would have liked to have baptised more widely, but he could not break free from the covenant theology and New England culture in which he was trapped. See Miller pp84,87,89; Morgan pp119-120. As for Old England, in the Westminster debates, as Edmund Calamy reported, ‘many of the Assembly’ showed their hand when it was reported that they ‘will baptise the children of those they will not admit [to the Lord’s supper]’ (Robert S.Paul: *The Assembly of the Lord...*, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1985, p439).

when they reach adulthood. So it turned out in New England. However pure the original church, however sound and powerful the preaching and teaching, however rigorous the catechising, however strongly the parents pressed upon the growing children the profession they had ‘made’ as babies at the font, not all baptised babies came to saving faith in adulthood; no, not even in New England in the days of Thomas Hooker, John Cotton and Thomas Shepard!

The question was: What to do with *them*? In particular, what to do with their *children*? After all, the young adults in question had been baptised as infants and become church members, but now, when they were having children, they themselves could not give evidence of saving grace; therefore, they were barred from the supper. But what about their babies? Should they be baptised and become church members? Indeed, should the unregenerate adults be allowed to remain as church members? If not, when should they be expelled? Were they, after all, in the covenant? And what about their infants? If the parents were expelled, should the babies still be baptised, or expelled? Were they in the covenant, or what? And what now of the teaching they all had received and imbibed – concerning the purity of the church and its maintenance? To keep a pure church, expulsion ought to take place. But when, and who, and on what grounds?<sup>10</sup>

The second generation of New Englanders were forced to wrestle with such problems. Edmund S.Morgan:

Given both infant baptism and the restriction [broadening!] of church membership to visible saints, it was impossible for the Puritans, either to evade the questions..., or to answer them without an elaborate casuistry that bred dissatisfaction and disagreement. The history of the New England churches during

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<sup>10</sup> The trouble arose because promises made to Abraham and the nation of Israel were applied to the church. The churches of New England were not nations; they certainly were not the nation of Israel. In Israel, a circumcised boy was an Israelite – whether he was good or bad – he was an Israelite. The folly of infant baptism and ‘the covenant’ is to say a baptised baby is regenerate, or will be, or to work on that basis.

the 17th and 18th centuries was in large measure a history of these dissatisfactions and disagreements.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The problem dodged***

The New Englanders needed to sort it out, but failed to do so. True, the Cambridge Platform of 1648 properly denied the idea that the citizens of a parish are church members – quite right! It is unscriptural.<sup>12</sup> But that synod, although it had been asked to deal with the issues raised above, left them unresolved, pretending there was no problem, and so abandoned the churches without a chart upon a rising sea. Most churches shut their eyes to the predicament, allowed the non-regenerate adults to remain as members, and baptised their babies. The problem was compounded in 1657 when some Connecticut churches relaxed their stress on purity of membership, and recognised the parish churches of England as true churches, saying that members of such churches, ‘coming into New England, had a right to all church privileges, though they made no profession of a work of faith and holiness upon their hearts’. Meanwhile, their

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<sup>11</sup> Morgan pp128-129. Miller, speaking of the way the Presbyterians in England viewed the goings-on in New England: ‘The system pretended to admit none but saints... but if they retained the children and grandchildren, will they not have to embrace the doctrine of “baptismal regeneration”?’ And if they cut them off, will they not have to acknowledge that saints do not persevere...? New England had walked into a trap [of its own making]; could it get out?’ (Miller p89). For Samuel Rutherford’s sneer, see Miller p78. I give credit, of course, to these misguided Puritans for trying to discipline. What a contrast to the foolish notion – not unheard of today – based on a misguided interpretation of Matt. 7:1 – that it is wrong to ‘judge’ in this matter. But I am commenting on the folly of trying to discipline so-called ‘*visible*’ saints according to biblical principles set out for true believers. It is a mistake – it is impossible – to apply spiritual principles to carnal men. My advice for those who are tempted to repeat the mistake is: When in a hole, stop digging!

<sup>12</sup> It comes from Constantine.

home-grown problem did not go away; rather, it naturally increased.<sup>13</sup>

It could not go on. It had to be resolved.

### ***The problem ‘solved’ – the half-way covenant***

And, at last, the problem was solved. That is to say, it was *fudged*. In 1662, the New England synod declared that parents could have their infants baptised even though they themselves were unconverted – as long as they themselves had been baptised as infants, were not scandalously wicked, and were prepared to assent to certain statements of fact they were supposed to have believed when they were babies. These parents were to be regarded as church members – but without full rights, of course. It was nothing but a fudge; the membership afforded to these parents was a kind of half-way membership – and came to be known as the half-way covenant.

### ***The fudge – the half-way covenant – examined***

As Miller pointed out, ‘half-way covenant’ was a misnomer. The unregenerate *were* church members, but the covenant was now split into two, the external and the internal, the covenant of the church and the covenant of God. Instead of a ‘half-way covenant’, it was a ‘double-covenant way’. In other words, the unregenerate were in one covenant but not the other;<sup>14</sup> in short, it was a ‘two-sort membership’ – two sets of qualifications leading to two sorts of members.<sup>15</sup> It could be argued that it was in fact a ‘three-sort membership’ – regenerate adults, baptised as babies, taking the supper, in both covenants; unregenerate adults, baptised as babies, not taking the supper, in one covenant; and baptised babies, not taking the supper, whose

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<sup>13</sup> Let me state the obvious: the numbers produced by natural generation can never be fewer than the numbers produced by spiritual regeneration.

<sup>14</sup> Miller p96.

<sup>15</sup> Middlekauff pp55-56.

regenerate/unregenerate state was as yet undetermined, in one/two covenants!

The tortuous change of mind of Richard Mather, who lived through the crisis – having reached New England in 1635, and dying in 1669 – will illustrate the point. Its ins-and-outs are, for me at least, very difficult to unravel, but as I understand it, this is the road he travelled: In 1636, Richard Mather was uncertain about baptising the infants of unregenerate members, and was convinced hypocrites should be removed from the church. By 1645, however, he had changed his mind about infants; from now on, it was not the fitness of the parents – that is, their evident spirituality – which qualified the infants for baptism, but it was the fact that they, the parents, (and the children themselves?) were in the covenant, even though they gave no evidence of it in their lives. So Richard Mather argued. But which covenant was he talking about? On the question of unbelieving adults who applied for membership, Mather refused to budge, differing from Shepard, who now thought it better to include ten hypocrites and not exclude one believer (despite what he had written earlier. I remind you, reader: ‘The ruin of a church may be the letting in of... one ill member’. ‘One man or woman secretly vile, which the church has not used all means to discover, may defile a whole church’). Mather thought it better to keep out many believers rather than admit one hypocrite; he would never adopt Cotton’s view (and others)<sup>16</sup> that hypocrites have their uses in the church.

Even so, as time passed, he had to compromise; he wanted a pure church, but the system itself produced unregenerate members. And so he ended up accepting what at one time he would never have dreamed of: ‘The church must remain as pure as possible, but it must also recognise that while some of its members would be able to demonstrate their graciousness, others would not. Some would possess qualifications for the Lord’s supper; others would not. Some would be truly holy, though men would never be able to identify them with absolute

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<sup>16</sup> See below.



certainty; others, whatever evidence they gave or withheld, would be unregenerate'.<sup>17</sup>

But Richard Mather was uncomfortable. As Robert Middlekauff noted:

Late in his career, [Richard Mather] conceded that grace did not inevitably show itself. He made this sad concession to reality in the defence he made of the half-way covenant. But his preaching to his flock does not seem ever to have accommodated this reality.

And:

Among his last words to [his son] Increase was a plea that the children of New England should be baptised and brought into the church.<sup>18</sup>

How did this differ from promiscuous baptism?

Let me anticipate my conclusion at this point. Where is there any such weaving and wavering in the New Testament? I quite understand the lack of discussion about the motor car in the New Testament; it wasn't invented! But sinners were converted in those days; they married and had children; and so on; and we know that not all who professed faith and became church members proved to be true believers. In other words, the people of the New Testament were very much like 17th century New Englanders (and us), and met the same problems as they did (and we do). *But where in all the New Testament is there any discussion of the logic of covenant theology and its application to the problem of babies and their baptism?* The silence says far more than a thousand words from me. I can think of only one reason for the silence.

### ***The fudge 'justified'***

The fudge of the half-way covenant having been adopted – not without some disagreement – much work was now done by the

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<sup>17</sup> Middlekauff pp35-57; see also Miller pp87-100.

<sup>18</sup> Middlekauff pp74-75.

theologians to argue the case,<sup>19</sup> and to drum up evidence<sup>20</sup> from the works of the founding fathers (many of whom had by this time died) to ‘prove’ that they would have supported such a resolution. But this, of course, involved a 180 degree shift!<sup>21</sup> The now-dead Shepard, as I have already shown, had once strongly argued for the removal of hypocrites. Now another manuscript of his was dug out and published – to argue the contrary! This work showed that despite all Shepard had said at an earlier time – when the churches were starting out on their course – he had later argued that a true church could have ‘many chaffy hypocrites and often profane persons’, and that this was no bad thing, he thought; good could come of it.

Let me ‘explain’. On the utterly mistaken premise ‘that one and the same covenant, which was made to Abraham in the Old Testament, is for substance the same with that in the New; and this, under the New Testament, the very same with that of Abraham’s under the Old’, Shepard wrote of what he called the double covenant – the parent’s and God’s, the external and the internal covenant, the elect and the church seed. He saw nothing

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<sup>19</sup> And theologians will always provide the theology (or at least some logic or formula) required to ‘justify’ a practice. The logic in this case, however, as always with infant baptism, was mind-boggling. Consider the following. On the question of applying ‘the seal of baptism’ to babies of parents who were unfit for the supper, one of the ‘solutions’ was to talk of *jus ad rem* (‘right to the thing’) as opposed to *jus in re* (‘a right in the thing’)! (Cotton Mather: *The Great Works of Christ in America...*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1979, p303). See also Mather pp304-305 for talk of an ‘explicit’ covenant and an ‘implicit’ covenant. I wonder how many parents at the time really comprehended the difference between *jus ad rem* and *jus in re*? I wonder how many of the growing children got it?

<sup>20</sup> Which was not lacking. Naturally, with the passing of time (*the great test!*), the founders had themselves seen the warning signs – but, as I have noted, the dates must be watched.

<sup>21</sup> This explains the glaring contradictions in the works of these New England teachers. In their early days they were dogmatic for purity in the churches; later, they were all for compromise and tolerance of the unregenerate as members. The dates, as I keep repeating, are all-important in works of this period.

wrong in all the members of a believer's household – whether 'visibly godly or the children of such', the children, both 'good and bad' – being church members. Federal holiness covered it all, according to Shepard; the children may be unbelievers, of course, but even so be 'federally holy'. What if these children grow up profane? They are still church members 'until they are cast out', but for this they must 'positively reject the gospel', otherwise 'they are to be accounted of God's church'. As I say, all was based on the covenant with Abraham. Shepard admitted such churches would be 'mixed with many chaffy hypocrites, and often profane persons', but he thought all is well since 'ordinarily God gathers out his elect' from such 'profane and corrupt churches'. And so on, and on.<sup>22</sup> Shepard's entire treatise should be read. *That*, in itself, should give infant baptisers pause for thought.

John Cotton spoke to the same effect as Shepard. He tackled this question of church members who have no grace in them. Some left the church, thereby proving they were not true members, he said. But he had to face up to the certainty that 'there are some who continue faithful friends to the church, and never fall off'. Although they 'have no truth of grace in them', nevertheless they remain church members – what of *them*? Cotton was prepared to assert that 'they have the place of members, but they are not true members', and he was willing to keep them. To make his reasoning clear(!), he provided an illustration. He likened the church to a man with a glass eye or a wooden leg. Unconverted church members play the part of that glass eye or wooden leg, Cotton maintained! 'So such may be ornaments and supports of the church, but yet not true members', he declared.<sup>23</sup>

Reader, is this not a fantasy world? Frankly, it is madness. What is more, think for a moment of the spiritual state, the

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<sup>22</sup> Iain H. Murray: *The Reformation of the Church: A collection of Reformed and Puritan documents on Church issues*, selected with introductory notes, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1965, pp379-405.

<sup>23</sup> John Cotton: *An Exposition of First John*, Sovereign Grace Publishers, Evansville, 1962, p225.

spiritual danger, of those wretched unregenerate glass-eye-or-wooden-leg church members. Speaking spiritually: Allowing for a moment that they may be a benefit to the church – though I stoutly deny it – think of the curse the church has been to them! Some church ‘ornaments’ end up in hell! Who helped to send them there? Where is the Scripture for all this?

### ***The final ‘solution’***

The controversy over the half-way covenant was ‘ended’ by Increase Mather’s change of mind – at first he was against the half-way covenant, but in 1675 he produced, in addition to a work of his own, manuscripts from the founders, including his father and father-in-law (Richard Mather and John Cotton), to show that they too would have been half-way covenant men; indeed, that they all had anticipated some such scheme to get round the problem!<sup>24</sup> The capitulation of such a large and

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<sup>24</sup> For the part played by Increase Mather, see Middlekauff pp85-86,113-138; Miller pp94-109,227. Increase Mather wanted a pure church, and at the 1662 synod argued for the restriction of baptism to the babies of members in full communion. But five or six years later, he accepted the idea of the half-way covenant, because he felt he could still hold to church purity, and because he was forced to recognise that if the children of the unregenerate were not baptised, the churches would decline in membership. Increase had come to see one of the fundamental flaws in the practice of infant baptism. It is, so its advocates maintain, a seal. See my *Infant* pp where I show that baptism is not a seal. I ask infant baptisers: You say baptism is a seal. A seal of what? For the believer it is a seal, so it is said, of his initiation into Christ; for the child, it is a seal, so it is said, of what? Of his initiation into Christ, or into the *promise* of his initiation into Christ, or of the *desperate hope* of his initiation into Christ? These were the conundrums Increase Mather wrestled with in New England three centuries ago. But they need to be faced by infant baptisers today. Whichever solution is adopted, large consequences are inevitable for church life and beyond. The dates are significant. As I have already noted, Increase’s father, Richard, dying in 1669, urged his son to baptise the infants of New England. As I asked: Was this promiscuous baptism?

important figure, gave the *hoi polloi* all the sanction they needed to settle down, easy in conscience, to a life of respectable carnality, and still be church members and have their babies baptised. Naturally – literally so – they gratefully accepted Increase Mather’s pronouncement. The consequences for thousands will only be known at the day of judgement.

This invention was the only way the New England churches could ‘reconcile’ infant baptism and the attempt to preserve a godly church membership. But the fact is, churches – which started out by wanting at all costs to have a pure membership – after about twenty years, found themselves stocked with an increasing number of hypocrites and non-regenerate members, and having to agree that this was right. Indeed, they found themselves baptising babies belonging to unbelieving members – who were members because of their own baptism as infants twenty or thirty years before – but who, if they had presented themselves for membership as an adult, would have been refused.<sup>25</sup>

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When Increase Mather recognised that if there was any slowing in the rate of infant baptism then the churches would inevitably decline in numbers, he was facing up to the obvious – and the well-known. Oecolampadius, in 1527, trying to counter the Anabaptists: ‘If anyone no longer baptises children... then the number of visible Christians will immediately decline. That is a very important consideration’ (Abraham Friesen: *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, Wm. B.Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1998, pp67-68). Clearly, the love of numbers, and the justification of practices to keep them up, is not merely a *modern* god! When will believers learn that politicking is not the way, but that Scripture must be the rule, and must be obeyed?

<sup>25</sup> What now of the argument, based on 1 Cor. 7:14, that the baby is baptised because one of the parents is a believer? New England ended up baptising babies where neither parent was a believer! The Puritans of Old England attacked the whole affair, as might be expected. But both sets of Puritans vented their spite on the Anabaptists, the Puritans of New England being the more vitriolic. There seems to be a principle here. The Anabaptists wanted pure churches; the Puritans of New England wanted pure churches but had to live with, and try to justify, the failure of their system; the Puritans of Old England accepted mixed churches as the norm and right. The principle? The closer somebody gets to what he wants – but fails because of a systemic fault in his

The following generations, of course, felt little of such qualms. Being born under the system to parents who were inured to it, they themselves had been baptised as infants, grown up, married, had children, had them baptised... all the while being taught by prestigious ministers to think this was genuine Christianity. No wonder they were lulled into a carnal stupor, careless of their spiritual condition – but vehemently jealous of their church privileges and the social standing this gave them – sleep-walking into eternity.

### ***Conclusion***

I raise this episode as a clear warning to those who are setting out on the same course as the early settlers in New England. Such people should look before they leap. For those who believe the New Testament demands a regenerate church membership – and only a regenerate membership – and yet are thinking of adopting infant baptism,<sup>26</sup> I say this: It may seem a very easy matter to reconcile the two – *at the start*, where you are now. But take a glance twenty or thirty years down the road. By then the infants being baptised today will be producing their own children. What if those parents are not regenerate? Will they be church members? Will the church baptise their babies? Will *they* be members? Glance a further twenty or thirty years; your grandchildren will be bearing children. What then? The events in New England tell us of the in-built contradiction between infant baptism and the striving after a regenerate church membership. Reader, you may feel it does work in your present circumstances. But the start of the process – and it is a process – is not the time to test the *effects* of infant baptism. You have to wait twenty, forty years and beyond. *Now* is the time, of course, to test the *principles* of infant baptism, and to test them by Scripture. But the grievous *effects* of infant baptism will take

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approach – the more critical he gets of those who more nearly get the desired result by using the right system. ‘Attack’, seems to be the watchword, rather than think about changing – jettisoning – the failed system.

<sup>26</sup> And this is the first mistake – see my *Infant*.

*time* for them increasingly to impose themselves on *experience*. Which they will do. Do not let the lessons of this historical episode be lost on you. Are you prepared to contemplate your grandchildren in churches with many ‘chaffy hypocrite’ members, some of whom may well be elders and ministers? Are you content to think of them as ‘glass-eye-or-wooden leg ornaments and supports of the church’? Whatever you do, do not adopt Hezekiah’s policy.<sup>27</sup> Hezekiah? Yes. Amazingly, Hezekiah was relieved that the disaster he was told of would come only after his time: ‘At least there will be peace and truth in my days’ (Isa. 39:8), he said. But what about the days – and not so far off, at that – when what you are doing now will lead inevitably to what I have described here?

You may question my use of ‘inevitably’. Of course, in your case all the babies baptised now, and in every following generation, may be elect, and so will be regenerated. Or, it may be, the churches will expel the unregenerate – though how and whom and when has to be thought about long before the time arrives – and preserve a regenerate membership – and the people may accept perhaps many such expulsions without too much fuss, and without wanting their babies baptised. But these are large ‘hopes’. What if those who were once in the covenant do not accept that they are no longer? And what if they want their babies baptised? Which New Testament passage will you turn to in order to discover how the apostles dealt with this problem?

Things could only get worse in New England. And they did! Middlekauff:

By confining church membership to those believers giving evidence of their conversions, the founders of New England had strongly endorsed experimental religion. After them, their sons had striven valiantly to maintain their fathers’ faith, yielding only to half-way membership when the people proved incapable of undergoing any but the most perfunctory religious experience. And the grandsons, addressing churches empty of

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<sup>27</sup> Nor Pilate’s (Matt. 27:24). Pilate, of course, was working on a very different principle to Deut. 21:6-8.

believers, but full of hypocrites, felt themselves standing on the edge of the abyss as their generation spurned gracious experience in favour of carnal experience.<sup>28</sup>

In another article, I will look at the 18th century legacy of all this as it was played out in the life Jonathan Edwards and the events at Northampton, Massachusetts.

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<sup>28</sup> Middlekauff p279.