

Richard M. Golden, Editor

VOLUME II E-J



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

WITCHCRAFT

THE WESTERN TRADITION

Mary's glory was exalted even higher as she became the patroness of every anti-Protestant action, including military ones. The triumphant Catholic Church spread the iconography of the Immaculate Conception—the woman of the Apocalypse crushing the snake underfoot—over all countries under her rule, and her famous apparitions and miracles at Lourdes and Fatima have helped maintain her veneration until the present day.

PETER DINZELBACHER

See also: CHARMS; CURSES; JESUS; THEOPHILUS.

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MATHER, COTTON (1663–1728)

Cotton Mather was New England's most celebrated Puritan and a staunch believer in the reality of witchcraft.

Mather played an important role in the case of the Goodwin children in Boston in 1688 and later in the witch hunting in Salem in 1692–1693. During these years, Cotton Mather advanced his views on witchcraft in private correspondence, sermons, and books: *A Discourse on Witchcraft* (1689), *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689), and *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692). Mather preached that witches represented the Devil's special war against New England, but his actions usually discouraged witch hunting.

The son of Increase Mather, minister of the Second Church in Boston and president of Harvard College, Cotton Mather (named for his grandfather, John Cotton) entered Harvard College at the age of twelve and earned his MA in 1681, at age eighteen. In 1685 he was installed as his father's assistant at Second Church

in Boston. During Increase Mather's long mission in England (1688–1692) negotiating a new charter for Massachusetts, Cotton at the age of twenty-five was left in charge of the largest congregation in New England.

The author of over 400 works, Cotton Mather combined modern scientific interests, or "rational philosophy," with a strong belief in the existence of witchcraft. No Puritan better displayed the seventeenth-century New England curiosity about the physical universe than Mather did in his *Curiosa Americana* (1712–1724). An avid reader of current scientific literature, Cotton Mather was familiar with the writings of such mechanistic philosophers as René Descartes, Pierre Gassendi, and Robert Boyle. His lifelong interest in scientific issues earned him membership in the Royal Society of London, and his account of the smallpox inoculation episode of 1721 was published in the society's transactions. The best example of Cotton Mather's scientific attitude is his *Christian Philosopher: A Collection of the Best Discoveries in Nature, with Religious Improvements* (1721), where he pronounced Isaac Newton "the Perpetual Dictator of the Learned World in the Principles of Natural Philosophy" (p. 65). His magnum opus was *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), an ecclesiastical history of New England from its founding to his own time.

Cotton Mather's belief in witchcraft was influenced most by William Perkins, the prominent English Puritan preacher and demonologist, whose *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608) made him the chief authority in seventeenth-century England on witchcraft; by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, whose *Antidote Against Atheism* (1653) not only accepted the reality of witches but even upheld their sexual intercourse with the Devil; by the famous Puritan preacher Richard Baxter, whose *Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691) related many abnormal events as evidence of the invisible power of spirits; and lastly by Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus, or Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (1681), which attempted to ground the belief in witchcraft scientifically on the basis of unshakable evidence.

To the thought of these authorities on witchcraft, Mather added a uniquely American perspective; he was obsessed with the view that the Devil had waged a war against Puritan New England since its founding: "The New Englanders are a People of God" settled in America, which was "once the Devil Territories" (emphasis in the original). Hence it was "a rousing alarm to the Devil, when a great Company of English Protestants and Puritans, came to erect Evangelical churches" in America. The Devil, accordingly, "tried all sorts of Methods to overturn" New England. Events in Salem proved that an "Army of the Devils is horribly broke in upon" the land, and the witches found there are evidence of an "An Horrible Plot" on the part of the

"Devil against New England" (Mather 1693c, 13–14, 74). New England therefore played a crucial role in fighting the Devil; as Jesus resisted the Devil in the wilderness, so now New England should stand against the Devil's temptation in the wilderness of America (Mather 1693c, 174–178).

Cotton Mather's first practical encounter with witchcraft came in the case of the Goodwin children in Boston in the summer of 1688, a story he described in *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689). An old Irish widow, Mary Glover, had confessed to be in league with the Devil, bewitching the four children of John Goodwin and practicing image magic. Before she was hanged in Boston in November 1688, Mather twice visited Mary Glover in jail; he claimed "she never denied" her guilt of "witchcraft," or of "her confederacies with the devils," or "her covenant with hell" (Hall 1991, 272). Following her execution, Cotton Mather preached a suitably damning sermon on the threat of witchcraft, asserting that "Witchcraft is the most Monstrous and Horrid Evil" because it is "a Renouncing of God, and Advancing of the filthy *Devil* into the Throne of the Most High. . . . *Witchcraft* is a renouncing of *Christ*, and preferring the Communion of a loathsome lying *Devil*." And given "there are witches, we are to suppose that there are devils too" (Mather 1689b, 98–99).

Four years later, Cotton Mather was caught up in the drama of the largest witch hunt in New England. But we must remember two things about his role. First, his father Increase had returned from England in May 1692, and the younger Mather deferred to his leadership. Second, Cotton Mather's behavior (not unlike that of many European Protestant ministers facing witch hunts) displayed a curious mixture of public endorsement for these prosecutions and private warnings about their dangers.

Seventeenth-century New England exhibited many signs of a witch craze: a large witch hunt claiming twenty deaths, more than half of the total victims for all New England, occurred in Salem in 1692 (nineteen Massachusetts men and women and two dogs were hanged for witchcraft, and one man was pressed to death for refusing to plead to the indictment). The first witchcraft accusations occurred in Salem Village, a parish of the town of Salem, in early February 1692. Two young girls fell into strange fits, much like those in the case of the Goodwin children in Boston, and soon other girls in the village exhibited the same behavior. Claiming that witches were afflicting them, the girls provided names of villagers, who were arrested and put in jail on charges of witchcraft. Facing a growing witchcraft hysteria, the new governor of Massachusetts, Sir William Phips, established a special court of Oyer and Terminer on May 27, 1692, to hear and determine the witchcraft cases in Salem. On June 10 the first execution occurred. The trial

and its outcome troubled so many that in June the governor turned to leading ministers for advice. In response, Cotton Mather composed "The Return of Several Ministers," which urged caution in relying on the use of spectral evidence (an image of a person visible only to the witchcraft victim whom the specter was said to have attacked in some way) in court. However, the report nonetheless urged "the speedy and vigorous Prosecution" of those guilty of witchcraft (Mather 1693b, 291). The judges paid more attention to the second recommendation than to the first, giving the girls enormous power to manipulate the court. Accordingly, by July 19 five more women had been executed.

Cotton Mather's eschatological visions ran high during that time; events in Salem signified that "there never was a poor plantation, more pursued by the *wrath* of the *Devil*, than our poor *New England*" (Mather 1693c, 74). On August 4, 1692, he delivered a sermon warning that the Last Judgment was at hand. Calculating from Biblical evidence that the year 1697 would be the year of the End, he deemed New England as leading the final charge against the Devil and his minions. Seeing the affairs in Salem as proof of an "Horrible Plot against the Country by Witchcraft" aiming to "Blow up, and pull down all the churches in the Country," Mather urged New Englanders not to "allow the Mad Dogs of Hell" to have the upper hand (Mather 1693c, 14, 22).

By late September 1692, the witchcraft hysteria reached its peak, and eight more women had been hanged. Worried about the trials, Phips again turned to the spiritual leaders for advice. In October, Increase Mather composed his *Cases of Conscience*, challenging the court's procedures head-on by denouncing the use of spectral evidence and arguing that it was better for ten suspected witches to escape than one innocent person be condemned, a view endorsed by many ministers. However, Cotton Mather was given the official trial transcripts and in the same month composed *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, which described the court proceedings favorably. The governor, however, accepted Increase Mather's views and abolished the special court. Soon the storm was over.

Robert Calef, a Boston merchant who hated Cotton Mather, read *The Wonders of the Invisible World* as both a justification of the trials and an attempt to minimize Mather's own role. Calef claimed that Cotton Mather was constantly warning that "the Devils were walking about our Streets with lengthen Chains making a dreadful noise in our Ears" (Calef 1700, preface). The truth, of course, was more complicated. The younger Mather never repudiated his father's loathing of spectral evidence, which had fueled the Salem witch hunt. If Cotton Mather persuaded authorities to proceed with the execution of George Burroughs, a former Salem minister, despite Burroughs's ability to recite the Lord's Prayer perfectly while on the gallows, this intervention

must be set against Cotton Mather's visible desire to avoid turning Mercy Short's "unnatural afflictions" into a witchcraft case at Boston during 1692–1693 (Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974, 24–26). Although Cotton Mather repeated his original views on the Salem trials in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), his later diaries reveal regret for his role in the trials and executions.

AVIHU ZAKAI

See also: BAXTER, RICHARD; GLANVILL, JOSEPH; GOODWIN CHILDREN; MATHER, INCREASE; MORE, HENRY; NEW ENGLAND; PERKINS, WILLIAM; SALEM; SPECTRAL EVIDENCE.

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MATHER, INCREASE (1639–1723)

Increase Mather was an American Puritan minister, theologian, and demonologist; president of Harvard

College from 1685 to 1701 whose *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men* (1693), a response to the Salem trials, quoted numerous witchcraft treatises, some now neglected.

Evidence of demonic activity at Salem divided pastoral opinion in the Massachusetts Colony. Judges appeared naively to dismiss the possibility that God could allow the Devil to assume the shape of an innocent person to perform evil. On June 15, 1692, several Cambridge ministers wrote to the Salem judges, warning that "a demon may, by God's permission, appear even to ill purposes, in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man" (I. Mather 1980, 290). On August 1 the conclave commissioned Mather to write *Cases of Conscience*. By the time Governor William Phips received it, the trials were essentially over.

Increase and his son Cotton Mather disagreed over Salem. Cotton conceded that spectral evidence was unreliable but defended confessions as sufficient proof of guilt (C. Mather 1980, 14–16). His *Wonders of the Invisible World* was rushed into print before Increase's *Cases of Conscience*, though he had begun the former after the completion of his father's work. Cotton seemed to rebut his father's arguments preemptively (Hall 1988, 262–263). Contemporaries evidently thought so: Increase formally denied in a postscript to *Cases of Conscience* that the two books disagreed (I. Mather 1980, 288–290).

They did agree on the fascination of the "invisible world." In 1696 Increase published *Angelographia* and *A Disquisition Concerning Angelical Apparitions*, with a subtitle that revealed intimate connections with Salem: "In Answer to a Case of Conscience, Showing that Demons Often Appear Like Angels of Light, and What Is the Best and Only Way to Prevent Deception by Them."

Like Joseph Glanvill, Henry More, and others, the Mathers considered proofs of witchcraft necessary to rebut modern "Sadducees," who reputedly doubted the reality of "spirit"—angels, demons, ghosts, and the immortal human soul. "Sadducism [*sic*] is a degree of atheism, and commonly ends therein" (I. Mather 1696b, sig. K3v). *Angelographia* begins: "There are such beings as angels. They are not mere *entia rationis* [beings defined by reason alone], imaginary beings, or apparitions. . . . The Sadducees said. . . that the angels are not real beings, but only apparitions and impressions made in the minds of men" (I. Mather 1696a, 5).

Allusions to Salem (which was never mentioned by name) implied proof of demonic reality: "some who object that the age wherein we live has no demoniacks, or possessed persons, do from thence suspect the whole Gospel of fabulosity or imposture. That there are in this age energumens, late examples amongst ourselves (and more than a few of them) are an awful

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