

Increase Mather (1639-1723)



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Key Designation:

- ◆ Founding President of Harvard College
- ◆ Leading exponent of Puritan Theology

Key Background Information:

- ◆ The strongest Puritan leader in the new world.
- ◆ Fully supported the establishment of the Anglican church in Massachusetts
- ◆ Father of Cotton Mather
- ◆ Took a role in the Salem Witch Trials

Key Dates:

- ◆ 1636, John Harvard starts with donation of property and library originally called the College of Cambridge
- ◆ 1692-1701 President of Harvard College

Key Ideas:

- ◆ Came to support the notorious “Half-Way Covenant” which allowed the children of Anglican Church members to be immediately included in the church’s membership: the Half-Way Covenant provided a partial church membership for the children and grandchildren of church members. Those who accepted the Covenant and agreed to follow the creed within the church could participate in the Lord’s Supper. Crucially, the half-way covenant provided that the children of holders of the covenant could be baptized in the church. These partial members, however, couldn’t accept communion or vote.
- ◆ Adamantly opposed the nonconformist, such as Roger Williams and William Penn, who favored freedom of worship.

Key Works:

- ◆ 1676- *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England*. An account of King Philip's War with the Indians.
- ◆ 1684-*An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providence*.. A lengthy defense of the existence of apparitions, witches, diabolical possessions and "other remarkable judgments upon noted sinners." In it he reasserted puritan views of witchcraft and also asserted his belief that the sins of the population had brought on the Indian wars, the unusual thunderstorms, and other judgments of God upon New England. He warned his readers of the dangers of Satan and urged them to change their sinful ways.
- ◆ 1692- *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men, Witchcrafts, infallible Proofs of Guilt*. An account of the Salem witch trials. He had advocated caution in dealing with those accused of witchcraft, but the town council of Salem was much more determined to rid themselves of any possible threat.

Conclusions:

Mather was a devout and holy man of God. A convinced Calvinist, he was also a staunch Puritan. His vision for Harvard College involved being true to the tenets of the Anglican Church. Eventually one of the early Presidents, William Densmore, will convert to become a Baptist, thus causing the tenure of Densmore to be cut short..