

## Cotton Mather (1663-1728)



*Puritans such as Mather loved the study of the Scriptures*

### Key Designation:

- ◆ Father of American Church Historians
- ◆ Most Brilliant Thinker of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century
- ◆ Father of the Protestant Work Ethic

### Key Background:

- ◆ Son of Increase Mather, Cotton graduated from Harvard at age 18
- ◆ Discovered the small pox vaccination in 1721
- ◆ One of the key transitional leaders from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century
- ◆ One of the most well respected men in Colonial America
- ◆ Pastored the Second Church in Boston, and was the best known preacher of his generation.
- ◆ Benjamin Franklin heard him preach on many occasions in his youth but wasn't nearly as impressed with him as he will be the great George Whitefield.

### Key Ideas:

- ◆ One of the strongest exponents of the Divine origin of the colonies in America: "I write the wonders of the Christian Religion, flying from the depravation of Europe, to the American strand, and, assisted by the Holy Author of that religion, I do, with all conscience of truth, required therein by Him, who is the truth itself,

report the wonderful displays of His infinite power, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, wherewith his Divine Providence hath irradiated an Indian wilderness....

- ◆ “ The sum of the matter is that from the beginning of the Reformation in the English nation, there had always been a generation of godly men, desirous to pursue the reformation of religion, according to the Word of God.” In his estimation, the Puritans are that group of godly men.
- ◆ A leading exponent of the “Protestant Work ethic”, as it has come to be called. Mather believed that hard work usually equates to increased wealth, and vice versa. Laziness results in poverty and failure. This becomes one of the backbones for the success of America. Often contrasts are made with the lack of hard work back in Europe with the strenuous work of the founders of America. Those who are willing to make sacrifices and commit time, energy and money into their tasks find expanded wealth in America. This concept goes hand in hand with creativity and ingenuity which supported the capitalistic system in America, evidence by people like Benjamin Franklin who discovered electricity, as well as Mather’s own discovery of the small pox vaccination after years of frustration.

**Key Works:**

- ◆ 1703, *Magnalia Christi Americana (The Great Achievement of Christ in America)*: the most detailed history of the first 50 years of the Faith in the new world. He takes careful notice of the perseverance and hard work of the pioneers that founded this new world.