



Rev. Cotton Mather\_\_1709

*Theopolis Americana*

[God's City: America]

AN ESSAY ON THE  
**Golden STREET**  
**Of the Holy City:**

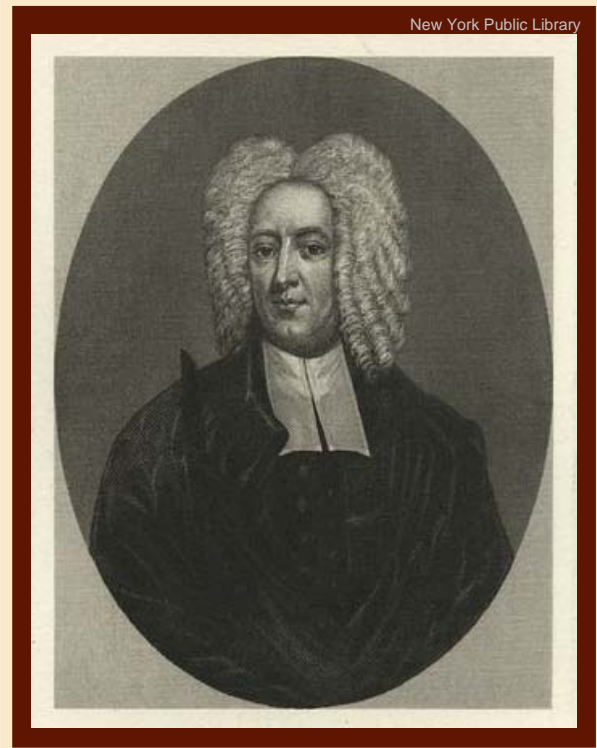
Publishing,  
 A TESTIMONY against the  
 CORRUPTIONS of the

**Market-Place.**

With Some Good HOPES of *Better Things* to be yet  
 seen in the AMERICAN World.

In a SERMON, to the GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
 of the Massachusetts province in NEW-ENGLAND.  
 September 3, 1709.

\_\_EXCERPTS\_\_



One downside of the unprecedented economic growth in eighteenth-century colonial America was the broadening of opportunities for excess, envy, ascendant materialism, unsustainable debt, and downright fraud — the “corruptions of the Market-Place” condemned by Rev. Cotton Mather in this sermon delivered in Boston. Not only were men cheating men, they were defiling God’s plan for America as “God’s City.” Although a slaveholder, Mather also condemns the slave *trade* and chastises slaveholders who do not Christianize their slaves and treat them humanely. Concluding with a positive call to virtue, he offers “Some Good Hopes of *Better Things* to be yet seen in the AMERICAN World.”

Rev[elation]. XXI. 21

**The STREET of the City was Pure GOLD.**

**G**LORIOUS *Things are Spoken of thee, O thou City of God!* The STREET be in Thee O NEW-ENGLAND; *The Interpretation of it, be unto you, O American Colonies.*

The Invitation, sounds Angelically; But my Hearers must have it now given them; *Come hither, and I will show you an admirable Spectacle!* 'Tis an Heavenly CITY, *descending out of Heaven, from GOD.* There is an Heavenly CITY, which the Great GOD, has *Prepared* for them, to whom *He will be a God:* A CITY to be inhabited by an *Innumerable Company of Angels,* and by the *Spirits of Just Men made Perfect* by a Resurrection from the Dead, with JESUS *the Mediator of the New Covenant* shining upon them: A CITY; where *God shall dwell with men, God Himself shall be with them,* and we shall *Inherit all things. . . .*

One incomparable Glory of the City, is now singled out for our present Meditation. **The Street of the City is Pure Gold.** I concur with *Peganius* and conceive That the **Street** here means, and so it may be translated, **The Market-Place;** the Place where the Affairs of Trade bring together a Concourse

of People. The meaning is, The *Business* of the CITY shall be managed by the *Golden Rule*. The Things that use to be done in the *Market-Place* shall be done without *Corruption*. There shall be no *Base Dealing* in it. It is added, It is *as it were Transparent Globe*: That is, The Dealing shall be so *Honest* that it shall bear to be *Look'd* into; it shall be so *Sincere* that men shall be willing to have their very Hearts *Look'd into*. There shall be no *False-Dealing*: All shall be done with all possible *Integrity*. . . .

O Happy CITY! O **Golden Street**, nowhere, nowhere to be found but in a *City of God*!

The Thing which I am to *Observe* is That in a CITY of GOD, the **Street** will be **Pure Gold**. The *Business* transacted in the **Market-Place** of an *Holy City* will have a *Golden*, that is to say, a *Gracious* Character upon it. *Golden* Proceedings, that is to say, *Godly* ones, will be found in the **Market-Place** of a CITY, which the Son of God, has a favor for. . . .

What is to be done, that the **Street** of our City, may be **Pure Gold**? And, What have we to do in our **Market-Place**, that so our Great SAVIOUR may *Espouse* us for *A City of God*, and become our *Saviour*?

...

Sirs, NEW-ENGLAND is a Country [colony] that has made a more than ordinary *Profession* of Religion. Our *Profession* is *Weigh'd* in the *Balances* of GOD. If there be anything Defective in the *Honesty* of our Dealing with one another, our *Profession* will have a woeful MENE TEKEL<sup>1</sup> Written upon it. Let a man be never such a Professor<sup>2</sup> and Pretender of *Religion*, if he be not a *Fair-Dealer* **That Man's Religion is Vain**. A Noise about *Faith & Repentance*, among them that forget **Moral Honesty**, tis but an Empty Noise. The men are utter Strangers to *Faith* and *Repentance*; God will *Reject all their Confidences*, of their being. The People of God, and they shall *not Prosper in them*. I have a Commission that Enables me, and Emboldens me, to say among you; **Woe, Woe, Woe**, to you Professors, and Hypocrites, who can make a Show of this and that Piety and *Purity*; but can *Cheat*, and *Cousen*, and *Oppress*, and *Wrong* others. People in your Dealing with them! . . .

But I have certain MOTIONS to make; and I assure myself that all the Good Men in the Country will concur to the making of them.

The **First** Thing for which I move is That the **Golden Rule of Charity** may Operate in all the *Dealings* of the **Market-Place**. Then will the **Street** be *Pure Gold*, when everything is done in it with an Eye to the *Golden Rule* of *Christ*. I am not versed in the Niceties and Mysteries of the **Market-Place**. But I am acquainted with a **Golden Rule**, which, I am sure, would mightily Rectify all our *Dealings* there. . . .

The **Second** Thing for which I move is That all **Frauds** in our *Dealings* of all sorts may be the *Abomination* of all that have anything to do in the **Market-Place**. All such Things as by the Irregular & Inordinate *Love of Gold*, men are too often betray'd into! Of the various Methods wherein men *Deal Dishonestly* with one another in the **Market-Place**, and particularly, **False Weights and Measures**, we read, Deut[eronomy]. 25.16. *All that do such things, and all that do Unrighteously, are*

---

<sup>1</sup> Mene Tekel: In the Book of Daniel [Old Testament], the mysterious riddle written by a hand on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. These Aramaic words may be translated literally as "It has been counted and counted, weighed and divided." Daniel interpreted this to mean that the king's deeds had been weighed and found deficient and that his kingdom would therefore be divided. [*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, sixth ed., 2007]

<sup>2</sup> I.e., one who professes religion but does not practice it.

an abomination unto the Lord thy God. May they Likewise, and Therefore, be an Abomination unto you, O People of the LORD.

As now;

For men to **Lie** to one another, in Dealing with one another; *Tis an Abomination!* It was required; Lev[iticus]. 19. 11. *Ye shall not Steal, neither deal False, neither Lie to one another.*

For men to put off *Adulterated* or *Counterfeited* Wares; or, for men to work up their Wares *Deceitfully*; When the **Fish** is naught; the **Tar** has undue mixtures; there is Dirt & Stone instead of **Turpentine**; there are thick Laves of **Salt** instead of other things that should be there; the **Cheese** is not made as tis affirm'd to be; the **Liquor** is not for Quantity or Quality such as was agreed for; the **Wood** is not of the Dimensions that are promised unto the Purchaser; or perhaps, there was a *Trespass* in the place of Cutting it; the **Hay** does hold our Weight by abundance; the **Lumber** has a false Number upon it; or, the *Bundles* are not as Good *Within* as they are *Without*; *Tis an Abomination!*

For men to *Over-reach* others because they find them *Ignorant*, or Scruce grievously upon them only because they are Poor and Low, and in great *Necessities*; to keep up the *Necessities* of Humane Life (I say, the *Necessaries*, which I always distinguish from the *Superfluities*),<sup>3</sup> at an *Immediate Price*, merely because other People want them, when we can more easily spare them; *Tis an Abomination!*

For men to *Employ* others and not *Reward* them according to *Contract* [A Crime, not at all the less, because the *Minister* is not seldom the *Sufferer* from it!], Or, to withhold from the *Labourer* his *Wages*, till his *Cry* reach up to Heaven; or break their Faith with the *Creditors*, and keep them out of their Dues! *Tis an Abomination!*

To Rob the *Public Treasury* by *False Musters*, or any other Articles of Charge falsely given in; or, to Abet [aid] the Robbers by any Assistance or Contrivance at such things in *Auditing* their Accounts; This also is a thing to be *Repented of*, where any have been Guilty of it. . . .

There is one sort of *Trade*, also, about which my way of Addressing you shall be by Reciting the words of the Excellent BAXTER. They are these: [His *Christian Directory*. Part II. Chap. 14]

To go as *Pirates*, and Catch up poor *Negroes*, or People of another Land, that have never forfeited Life or Liberty, and to make them *Slaves*, and Sell them, is One of the worst kinds of Thievery in the World; and such Persons are to be taken for the common Enemies of Mankind; and they that buy them and use them as *Beasts* for their mere Commodity, and betray or destroy or neglect their Souls, are fitter to be called *Incarinate Devils* than *Christians*, tho' they be no *Christians* whom they so Abuse.

I will go on to say; When we have *Slaves* in our Houses, we are to treat them with *Humanity*, we are so to treat them that their *Slavery* may really be their *Happiness*; Yea, In our treating of them, there must be nothing but what the Law of CHRIST will Justify. Above all, we are to do all we can to *Christianize* them. I will again give you the Words of my Honoured BAXTER.

---

<sup>3</sup> I.e., Necessities vs. Luxuries (superfluities). To charge high prices for the necessities of life because the demand is high, thereby making them too expensive for the poor to purchase, is wrong.

So use them as to preserve Christ's Right and Interest in them. Those that keep their *Negroes* and Slaves from Hearing of God's Word and from becoming Christians, because they shall then lose part of their Service,<sup>4</sup> do openly profess Rebellion against God, and contempt of Christ the Redeemer of Souls, and a contempt of the Souls of Men, and indeed, they declare, that their Worldly profit is their Treasure and their God.

*Fidelity* to the cause of *Righteousness* obliges me to take Notice of One thing more.

If there be any *English* People who are concerned with our *Christianized Indians*, but then take advantage of their *Ignorance* or their *Indigence* or their unchristian *Love of the Bottle* to decoy them into their *Debt*, and then use Indirect and Oppressive ways to Exact an *Unreasonable Satisfaction* [monetary payment] from them, and *Sell* them for Servants, or *Send* them out of their own Country, This Trade will be a Reproach to our *Christianity*, and, I am sure, it will be *Bitterness in the Latter End* [i.e., Judgment Day]. Certainly, our *Justices* will concern themselves to Rebuke and Prevent such Doings, lest the Guilt become so *Public* as to provoke the Justice of Heaven to Revenge it by *Indian Depredations*.<sup>5</sup>

The **Third** Thing for which I move is That there may not be so much as any **Tendency** to anything *Oppressive* or *Injurious* in the *Dealings* of the **Market-Place**. The Thing for which I bring a very pressing Exhortation is that, I Thes[salonians]. 5. 22: *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil*. If anything *Approach* to a thing that *Appears* an *Evil*, Sirs, Beware of it! There are Some *Ill Things* too frequently done among those who would count themselves greatly *Wrong'd* if they be not thought *Good People*. But they are things which anon, I am sure, prove a notorious *Wrong* to many others that really are *Good People*.

I will be free [direct] with you. There are *Crooked Things* that cannot be *Numbered*; I wish they could be *Straightened*.

I conceive There are some of them in certain *Extortions* used by some of them who let out *Money* upon *Interest*, I mean when they make People pay *Interest* for a Sum that really never was in their Hands; As it is, when the Usurer<sup>6</sup> immediately takes into his own the whole first year's *Interest* at the Instant of his Letting out [loaning] the Money.

I will go on to say, 'Tis a Thing of an *Evil Tendency* for People to Live *beyond themselves*,<sup>7</sup> or to take it for granted that they must brave it out with such a *Table*, or with such an *Habit* [clothing], tho' they have not wherewithal to bear the Expenses of it. They won't take in a *Reef* of their *Sails*, tho' they are on the point of Suffering *Ship-wreck*, tho' they must borrow, and defraud, and Whistle, and hurt other People, to Support their Vanity. How contrary, How contrary is this to that *Poverty of Spirit* which must be found in all that would have a claim to a part in the *Golden City*!

'Tis a thing of *Evil Tendency* for People to Run into *Debt* when they know they can't Run out of it, as well and as fast as they Run into it; so they Spend what is none of *their Own*; They Forget that Precept: *Owe nothing to any man, but to Love one another*.

---

<sup>4</sup> I.e., lose the financial investment made in purchasing and maintaining the slaves if the baptized slaves must be freed, a concern of slaveholders at the time.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., God might cause Indian attacks upon the colonists as punishment for cheating them financially.

<sup>6</sup> Usurer: one who lends money for a fee, usually a percentage of the loan amount (interest).

<sup>7</sup> I.e., beyond their financial means.

'Tis a thing of *Evil Tendency* for People to go from year to year without *Settling their Accounts*; to Jog on in a blind Confusion and not know how much they may be *gone backward*, or whether they have anything, they may call *Their Own* or no. If they would have done like *Honest Men*, their *Insolvency* should have been ingenuously Confessed some years ago!

And then, sometimes People that *Break* deal not so fairly, so truly, so justly with their *Injured Creditors* as they ought to do. Perhaps there are *Indirect Ways* taken to *Cover* from other Men what justly belongs unto them.

No man that understands the Gospel will Justify such things. The **Street** is not *Pure Gold* where such things are Practiced. On behalf of our Holy RELIGION, I do this day Testify against them! You that Fear GOD will do so too, and *will come forth of them all*.

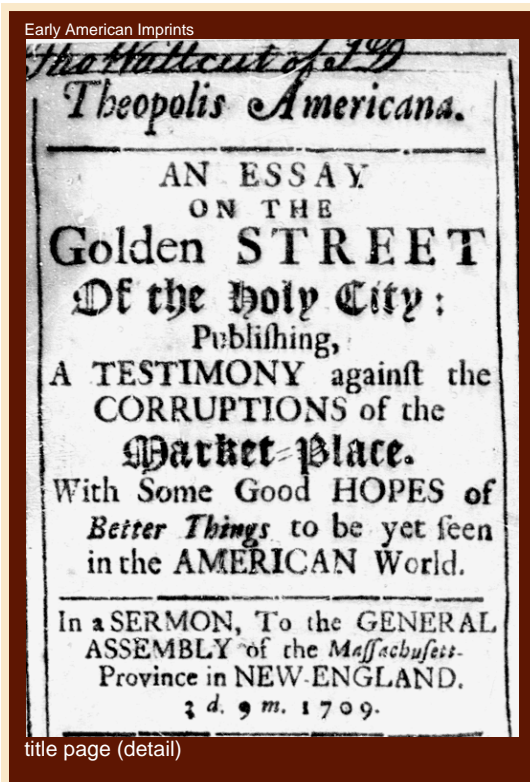
I must make a **Fourth** Motion. 'Tis that They who have **Command** of the **Street** would look upon themselves as concerned *Above others* to keep all *Dishonesty* out of it.

It is the Action of a JUDGE, Job 29. 7. *I prepared my Seat in the Street*. And May your *Seat* always be upon *Pure Gold*: But then, your *Hand*, a Stranger to it!

We are to *Pray* for our Honourable RULERS. We should make that *Prayer* That they may be always *Able Men such as Fear God, Men of Truth, and hating of Covetousness*. — It was once the Unhappiness of *Israel*; Hos[ea]. 4. 18. *Her Rulers with Shame do Love, Give ye*. — . . .

PEOPLE of GOD, May these be your Cares. Then there will be fulfilled unto us that Word: Isa[iah]. 1.26. *Thou shalt be called The City of Righteousness, The Faithful City*. A CITY of such a **Golden Street** will be a *Strong City*. God will *appoint Salvation for Walls and bulwarks* unto it, while

none but a *Righteous Nation which keeps the Truth* inhabits it. O NEW ENGLAND, Keep such a **Street**, and *Sweep* it where it wants to be better kept. Then there *will be no breaking in or going out*; there will be *no Complaining in our Street*. No, we shall be an *Happy People*, I say, an *Happy People*; for the LORD will be OUR GOD.



title page (detail)