JOHN ELIOT USES CHRISTIANITY TO SUBJUGATE THE NATIVES

The book *New England's First Fruits* was published in 1643, alleging success for the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in converting the natives to Christianity and even helping other jurisdictions in their religious efforts. But it does not describe any organized evangelical effort that required the expenditure of funds. Despite this, the book was written to encourage benefactors in England to donate funds for further conversion efforts.

The real efforts of Reverend John Eliot to convert the natives had not yet started.

Those efforts started on September 15, 1646, when he was the Minister from Roxbury, near Dorchester. On that day, he preached his first sermon, using an interpreter, to Kitchemekin and other members of the Massachusett community of Neponset. Richard Mather was present. But that sermon was unsuccessful. Eliot said that the Neponset "rather despised what I said" (see page 40 of *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War*, by Cogley). This was the beginning of Eliot's efforts to convert the natives of New England to Christianity. Kitchemekin was the Sachem of the Massachusett Tribe and also of Neponset, one of the Massachussett communities.

On October 28, 1646, John Eliot preached another sermon to Waban and other members of the Massachusett Tribe with better success. This happened in today's Newton, now a suburb of Boston. Today there is a community of Waban which is a part of Newton.

Eliot believed that, as part of the conversion process, he had to segregate Waban and his followers "in their own town and have them write their own governing rules. And they would have to conform to English laws and behavioral codes, …Native men had to agree to cut their hair or tie it back, women must cover their breasts, …" (see page 169 of *When Last the Glorious Light* by Quill).

On November 4, 1646, at the request of Eliot, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (the Colony's legislature) granted land to establish the first praying town of Nonantum for Waban and his followers. Today there is a community of Nonantum that is also a part of Newton.

In September, 1647, John Eliot led a meeting in Nonantum that included Kitchemekin, his son and his wife at which Kitchemekin and his son confessed to their drunkenness and forgave each other for the wrongs they had done, amidst much weeping. At this point Kitchemekin had become a Chistian (see page 49 of *Tears of Repentance* by Rubin).

"Historian David C. Stineback wrote … Eliot expected of the natives … total capitulation to an English way of life … Since he was convinced that Indians had 'no principles of their own, nor yet wisdom of their own," their political submission to the Massachusetts

Bay Colony was, for him a de facto rejection of their ‘satanic’ way of life.” (See page 171 of *When Last the Glorious Light* by Quill)

Eliot helped to establish the praying town of Natick in 1651, for the Neponset and the residents of the earlier praying town of Nonantum. The General Court provided 2,000 acres straddling the Charles River, 18 miles upstream from Boston (see page 55 of *King Philip’s War, Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* by Mandell).

Kitchemekin was elected the ruler of one hundred in Natick, the ruler of one hundred being the highest level of ruler established by Eliot. Waban was elected one of two rulers of fifty.

Under the direction of Eliot, the praying Indians of Natick adopted a legal code that prohibited many traditional practices such as premarital sex and long hair. They built an English style meetinghouse and fort but continued to live in their traditional housing (see page 56 of *King Philip’s War, Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* by Mandell).

Humphrey Atherton was employed in 1651 as superintendent of the praying Indians resulting from Eliot’s attempts to convert them and to establish villages for them. Atherton held this position until his death in 1661.

On December 7, 1657, Eliot got the town of Dorchester to send its representatives to lay out an Indian Plantation at Ponkapoag not to exceed 6,000 acres of land, with the intention that it would be used to establish the second praying town. (see page 140 of *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians before King Philip’s War*, by Cogley).

“In pursuance of this desire, the apostle [Eliot] in 1657 addressed the following letter to Major-Gen, Humphrey Atherton, — one of the most distinguished and influential men of Dorchester: —

“Much Honored and Beloved in the Lord, — Though our poore Indians are much molested in most places in their meetings in way of civilities, yet the Lord hath put it into your hearts to suffer us to meet quietly at Ponkipog, — for which I thank God, and am thankful to yourself and all the good people of Dorchester. And now that our meetings may be the more comfortable and favorable, my request is that you would please to further these two motions : First, that you would please to make an order in your towne record, that you approve and allow y' Indians of Ponkipog there to sit down and make a town and to enjoy such accommodations as may be competent to maintain God's ordinance among them another day. My second request is that you would appoint fitting men who may in fit season bound and lay out the same and record it also. And thus commending you to the Lord, I rest. Yours to serve in the service of Jesus Christ,
John Eliot.

“The influence of " the apostle," not only on Major Atherton, but upon " the good people of Dorchester," is shown by the action at the next ensuing town meeting, Dec. 7, 1657. On that day, the town appointed Major Atherton, Lieutenant Clap, Ensign Foster, and

William Sumner a committee to lay out the Indian Plantation at Ponkapoag, not to exceed six thousand acres of land; and it was voted " that the Indians shall not alienate or sell their plantations unto any English, upon the penalty of loss or forfeiture of their plantations.""
(see page 11 of *History of the Town of Canton, Norfolk County, Massachusetts* by Huntoon)

From 1646 to 1657, Eliot's conversion efforts did not extend to Ousamequin or his Pokanoket confederacy.

In 1663, Eliot's translation of the Bible into the Massachusett dialect was published. This honouring of native dialects was a far cry from the later Indian schools where native children were beaten for speaking their own languages.

Eliot tried to convert Philip, the son of Ousamequin, and later one of the leaders in the catastrophic King Philip's War. On September 25, 1664, Eliot, as part of these efforts to convert Philip, and through him, his Pokanoket Tribe, wrote to the Commissioners of the United Colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut and New Haven. asking them to give encouragement to John Sassamon to teach Philip and his men to read.

The help presumably meant paying Sassamon, who was living with the Pokanoket at the time and was assisting Philip in his dealings with the English. He certainly worked as a translator for Philip and probably helped him to negotiate agreements with the English. But he probably had more loyalty to the English than to the Pokanoket after being partially brought up in the home of the Englishman Richard Callicott and being taught by Eliot and being paid by the English.

Like his father Ousemequin, Philip absolutely refused to be converted. (see page 197 to 99 of *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War*, by Cogley). He still did want to learn English, no doubt to be able to understand what the English (and Philip's translators) were saying in the course of negotiations. He may have been influenced by the experience of Kitchemekin which he may have learned from Sassamon. Kitchemekin's ability to act as a translator gave him significant power amongst his own people and also influence over the English.

Ousemequin probably, and Philip certainly, recognized that by converting to Christianity, they would surrender their spiritual independence to the English. Eliot's persistent efforts to convert Philip could have been viewed by Philip as similar to, and as dangerous as, the persistent efforts by the English to take the land of the Pokanoket.

The continued conversion efforts definitely were a factor that led to King Philip's War (see page 58 of *King Philip's War, Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* by Mandell).

In addition, Philip would have known, through Sassamon, that Eliot's praying towns were run by rules written by Eliot and that the natives living there were strongly encouraged to dress and farm in the manner used by the English. As a result, both their

spiritual and cultural independence could end up being surrendered to the English. That was clearly the intent of the English.

Through Sassamon, Philip may also have been aware that much of the tribute paid by the Massachusett to Kitchemekin was diverted to the praying town of Natick once Kitchemekin agreed to become the ruler of one hundred in Natick.

In 1671, John Eliot established the second Indian church in the Nipmuc praying town of Hassanamisset, 38 miles from Boston (see page 56 of *King Philip's War, Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* by Mandell). He had already established the additional praying town of Punkapoag (near to today's Stoughton) for the purposes of providing more protection for the praying Indians of Natick. He also established the praying towns of Wamesit, Okommakamessit (near today's Marlborough), Nashoba and Magunkaquag (near today's Ashland).

All these praying towns were a very effective way to subjugate the natives, using Christianity as the main weapon.

But nowhere in the Bible does it say that, in order to become a Christian, a person must have an English haircut. So it was really a perversion of Christianity that was used. Indeed Jesus might have been a little more respectful of the natives of New England than the Puritans were.

Jesus taught us that we should do unto others as we would want others to do unto us. How much would the Puritans have liked it if the natives had put them in towns where they were only allowed to pray to the native gods and have native haircuts.?

Most of the Puritans had not yet grown their own civilization to the point of believing in freedom of religion. Roger Williams was one of the exceptions. He believed in freedom of religion, which was one of the reasons his fellow Puritans banished him from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The natives did not show any interest in converting the Puritans to their spiritual beliefs. They were too civilized to do that.