Our hope cannot be that God will intercede and turn everything in America's favor, and such confidence is even contrary to much of the Puritan heritage. The Puritans had an acute sense of God's judgment that came as both blessing and curse. The words of John Winthrop are often quoted to stir American hearts: "Wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us." What is virtually always omitted is Winthrop's conclusion: "soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world." 13

Whether the United States shall become "a story and a by-word through the world" is unknown to all of us, but as Christians such a prospect ought not to be the cause of despair. Our hope should not lie in the preservation or cultivation of American power but in God's refusal to surrender history to us. Woodrow Wilson, in somewhat secularized terms, captured this basic sense that despite the injustice of human history, God was still in control, redeeming the world. "Power in its last analysis is never a thing of mere physical force," Wilson declared. "The power that lasts has as its center the just conception to which men's judgments assent, to which their hearts and inclinations respond. An unjust thing is ever ephemeral; it cannot outlast any age of movement or inquiry." 14

Wilson was pointing to the truth of what Paul said in Romans 8—that we need not fear death, or life, or angels, or principalities, or things present, or things to come because we are already more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. Or, in the words of the psalmist,

Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob
whose hope is in the Lord his God
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all
that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry (146:5-7).

That should be more than small comfort for a church as it enters the third century of American life and prophetic wisdom for a nation that has lost its way.

13 A Modell of Christian Charity, in McGiffert, Puritanism and the American Experience, p. 32.