

**OWENS:** We're here today to talk about your new book project, *Puritan Republic: A History of the American Republic*. One of the core themes is the use of prophetic rhetoric throughout American history. Can you give us a short version of that trajectory and its origins in the Puritan jeremiad?

**KAVENY:** The Puritans saw themselves as the new Israel; not simply as modeling Israel, but, with the help of Christ, as being God's new chosen people, and therefore as setting forth in a new land to organize their community in a way that fully reflected their commitment to God's will. This was done on the basis of a series of interlocking covenants. You had not just a church covenant—not just the covenant of grace of the individual believer, who was saved with God—but also a social covenant, which was meant to reflect in some form or other the special status of New England in the eyes of God. They saw themselves as being called to a higher status in terms of moral rectitude. They saw God as fully involved with them, as meting out reward or punishment depending upon the level of their commitment to the covenant. There would regularly be sermons calling the people to account in terms of the covenant, indicting them for their violations of the covenant. These would be calls of repentance in the hope that God would

see their repentance and then give them the chance to win a battle against the Native Americans or overcome famine or something of that sort, so that they could thrive both spiritually and materially.

What I found very interesting about the

been used by people on both sides of the current political spectrum. In the 1960s, you could see people like Martin Luther King, the Berrigans, and antiwar activists indicting people for violating the basic commitments of the society. In more recent years, it's been used by political and social conservatives, as you can see in the indictment around abortion, particularly—gay marriage as well, but the most fierce use of the jeremiad has been

**OWENS:** What role would humility play in a conversation like this, where science is mixed in with social analysis?

**KAVENY:** There are two basic types of humility. One is epistemological humility: we don't know enough about what the factual situation is, and therefore we should back off. That's always a good reason to move toward deliberative rhetoric, where you've got much more room for qualifications than you do.

There's another kind of humility that I talk about in the last chapter of the book, though. This is a kind of moral humility about one's own responsibility for causing problems, and about God's stance on a particular issue. I see this kind of humility in Lincoln's Second Inaugural and in the Book of Jonah, which ironizes prophecy. This second type of humility is always good in a pluralistic society when you are justified in using prophetic rhetoric. The first type of humility, though, should lead you toward deliberative rhetoric—not so much prophetic.

**OWENS:** One of the historically grounded aspects of the jeremiad is a