ABSTRACT

Congregational Dynamics in the Early Tradition of Independency

Barbara Stone Griswold

Mentor: William H. Brackney, Ph.D

This study investigates the nature of congregational care within the membership of the earliest congregational-style churches in England during the period 1550-1689. The purpose of this research is to analyze the causes of their survival or demise that may be found within the congregational dynamics of the early separating churches. Having separated from the Church of England, and living on the fringes of the Puritan movement, these congregations experimented with new forms of polity and created unique roles for their pastors and members. New membership dynamics thus emerged. This research answers the question: What were the early manifestations of separatist ideology and independency that allowed some independent congregations to thrive under Tudor and Stuart repression, while others failed to survive?

The uniqueness of this study is its search through primary documents for the bases on which the body-life of the congregations were predicated, and for specific indications within their records as to how this body-life was lived out in mutual support and care of members for each other. Previously no other study has brought this information together in one project. Nor has anyone revealed the correlation between

membership nurture and care, and local church polity as a cause for the growth or demise of a congregation. My hypothesis was that, where faithfulness to one's gathered community of faith was implemented through the dynamics of mutual care and support, survival through jeopardous circumstances was possible, even while church leaders were imprisoned. However, where the dynamics of mutual care and support failed, the group failed to thrive, or even survive.

The conclusion is that, in order for these churches to have survived and grown into stable congregations and associative bodies, they entertained a unique ecclesiology, a theology of suffering, and a form of mutual congregational nurture and care, beyond what could have been carried out by the pastors and elders alone, which occurred within the congregations, and they formed supportive associations among independent churches. The records of the early congregational-type churches, such as those at Gainsborough, Scrooby, Spitalfields, Southwark, London, Bristol, and others presented herein, substantiates this conclusion.

Congregational Dynamics in the Early Tradition of Independency

by

Barbara Stone Griswold, M.Ed.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

W. H. Bellinger, Jr., Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

William H. Brackney, Ph.D., Chairperson

Rosalie Beck, Ph.D.

Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2006

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

CONTENTS

PREFACE

It has become a generally-accepted truism of English church historiography that the reform of the Church of England—unlike the grass-roots reformations on the continent—took place from the top-down. It was imposed upon the people and parishes by the royal agendas and fueled by over a century of struggles for power between competing prelates and presbyters before its final settlement as the Church of England of today. Viewed from the outside, that hierarchical paradigm does appear to describe the kind of reformation operating within the English Church, transforming it from being one entity within the universal Catholic Church under Rome, to that of a Protestant and national state-church under successive English sovereigns of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

There was, however, a parallel movement occurring underground that *was* taking place at a "grassroots level," the roots of which can be traced back to surviving pockets of Lollardy—those vital vestiges of John Wycliff's influence—striving for radical church reform ever since the fourteenth century. During the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558), underground congregations continued to crop up in spite of all the persecutorial measures taken to stamp them out of existence. This "popular" movement (i.e., of the people) declared heretical by the established church, and suppressed by persecution since its inception, continued to be suppressed each time it erupted anew in subsequent generations, until it gained sufficient visibility and viability to survive and thrive during the ferment of the Elizabethan Settlement, and the ensuing oppressive Stuart Dynasty.

The purpose of this historical investigation will be to address the question, "What were the congregational dynamics of this more radical movement that allowed it not only to survive, but thrive in the milieu of suppression and persecution?" This movement, gestated in the Puritan attempts to foster further reform in the Established Church of England, did not succeed in re-forming it according to a primitive church paradigm, but eventually, of necessity, separated from it to create what ultimately became the Congregational (Independent) and Baptist denominations. Again, what were the congregational dynamics within the early separatist tradition that gave it that vitality?

In order to appreciate the magnitude of the conceptual revolution this development toward Free Church Independency involved, the historico-religious context of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Church of England in which this movement occurred must be addressed. Separatism initially evolved in the sixteenth century as a result of the disappointment of many Puritans with the failure of the Elizabethan Settlement to divest the established church Book of Common Prayer and Thirty-nine Articles of vestiges of popery, and the further disillusionment of seventeenth century churchmen with the Stuart kings' requirements for conformity to Episcopal ecclesiology and "Romish" practices. Pressures to conform resulted in otherwise-loyal Puritans' forming Separatist companies in various types of voluntarily-gathered congregations. Some of these perpetuated the Edwardian Presbyterian (Synodical) organization based on the churches of Geneva and Scotland. Others adopted a "Brownist" or congregational form of independency, instituting a polity of independent governance by each self-constituted church. The Presbyterian-type churches, though separated, continued to strive for the status of establishment as a national church, but the congregational-style

churches desired only toleration for their independent status, because establishment was the antithesis of the principle of independency.

As these latter companies coalesced into viable congregations, they did so under conditions of severe persecution, because they were perceived by Crown and Parliament as disobedient to the authority of State and Church, and therefore, as disloyal or seditious factions that had to be suppressed. This suppression targeted both the leadership and "hearers" who attended the conventicles that gradually became organized into covenanted companies and churches. When obedience to conscience mandated their disobedience to and separation from the establishment, a unique concept of what it meant to be the church developed to nurture a new paradigm of independency that withstood all attempts to suppress it. What was that concept, and how did it create intra-church and inter-church dynamics that fostered the survival of this "Free Church" paradigm?

Chapter One will provide an overview of the historico-religious context of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Church of England in which this movement took place, and address in general terms the influences and motivations for separation. It will look at the political and socio-economic factors operating in sixteenth and seventeenth century British society, as well as the ecclesiological, theological and spiritual factors within the Church of England which prompted the various groups to deem separation from it as being necessary. Some of the earliest experiments in separation that formed the precedent for subsequent formal Independency will also be investigated.

Chapter Two will explore the rationale for separation found in the writings and personal experiences of the early advocates of separation: Robert Browne (1550-1633), Henry Barrow (1550-1593), John Greenwood (d. 1593), John Penry (1559-1593), Francis

Johnson (1562-1618), Henry Ainsworth (1571-1623), John Robinson (1560-1644), John Smyth (1570-1612), Thomas Helwys (1550-1616), and Henry Jacob (1563-1624).

Chapter Three will look at the types of early separatist congregations constituted by the above leaders according to the extant primary and secondary resources available.

Chapter Four will examine the ecclesiology of the viable separatist congregations: i.e., their concept of the church as apostolic-primitive, gathered, elect, covenantal, voluntary, communal, and visible. It will also look at the polity, discipline, ordinances and worship practices by which they implemented that unique ecclesiology.

Chapter Five will consider 1) the congregational dynamics within the early separatist churches in terms of the roles, responsibilities and controversies involving both their leadership and the discipline exercised within the congregations; 2) the persecution they experienced and their responses to it; 3) the evolving membership care and nurture that culminated in their survival or, in some cases, failure.

Chapter Six will draw conclusions as to the foundational principles that made the difference between failure and survival, and which factors promoted survival, and suggest implications for further research as may be applicable for the denominational and non-denominational churches of the twenty-first century.

Because various authors and historians have used the different terms denoting independency in somewhat arbitrary ways across the past four centuries, it is deemed necessary for the purpose of this research, to define the terms and usage as used herein for the sake of cogency and consistency. Definitions adhered to for the purposes of this research will be as follows:

The etymology of the word, "congregation," is from the Greek sunάgw, meaning "to gather together." Therefore, it would be anachronistic to view the early gatherings or "congregatings" as being what one thinks of as a constituted congregational church. Initially, the interface of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a time of flux in which preachers met with many groups in different locations to escape detection while they worshipped. They were working out their versions of what it meant to be a true apostolic church of Christ. The terms "Non-conformist," "Separatist" and Dissenter" changed over the course of these centuries, representing "not only an evolving attitude towards the established church, but a changing relationship with the state."[1]

The term "Non-conformist" initially referred to members within the Church of England "who declined to conform to certain practices prescribed by the Prayer Book of 1559." After the 1662 Act of Uniformity required the clergy to give "unfeigned assent and consent" to every aspect of that Prayer Book, "Non-conformist" meant those who refused to do so, and were therefore ejected from their posts, accompanied in many cases by parishioners who thus became "Separatists" from the established church. The term "Non-conformist" has also been used to describe those who called for "the necessity of personal decision as a basis of salvation and membership in the church," viewed as a community of the regenerate, gathered from the world.[2] "Brownist," and "Separatist," used to designate the groups, were initially epithets imposed on "small groups of extreme Protestants who, impatient of Puritan hopes of reforming the Church of England from

---

[1] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), 2.

[2] Robert Torbet, *The Baptist Ministry Then and Now* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1954), 11.

within, repudiated the ordinances and discipline of the established church and met in secret conventicles during the reign of Elizabeth I and the early Stuarts."[3]

Some Non-conformists rejected the very concept of an established church, opting for "Independency." These included Robert Browne, Francis Johnson, and later, the Baptists who stood for "gathered," as opposed to parish churches. They entertained a concept of the church as "a free community bound together by voluntary agreement to a covenant with God, and of a mutual contract between rulers and the ruled." They also believed that "each congregation should be distinct from and independent of one another with no external influence from others, except for friendly advice,"[4] and refused to accept the dictates of the state in matters of conscience.

"Dissenter" was the name given to sectaries after the Restoration (1660-1685), who refused to return to the parish churches of the restored Episcopal Church.[5] These men and women, having given up their livings, became dependent upon a private patron, or voluntary contributions of a congregation for their support, as they could no longer receive an income from Church tithes.

Several congregational-style companies of believers formed out of conventicles which gathered around a lecturer for spiritual guidance, in lieu of attendance at parish churches. These companies varied in size from a few souls, meeting secretly in private homes, to larger gatherings meeting in manor houses or hired halls. Periods of intense persecution were provoked by their challenge not only to the political and ecclesiological establishment of England but to the economic basis of the State-church by their refusal to

---

[3] Watts, 1

[4] Watts 3.

[5] Watts, 1.

pay tithes to support a structure they believed was incorrigibly corrupt and incompletely reformed. As suppression of their meetings became government policy, they began assembling or "congregating" out of doors wherever sympathetic supporters provided opportunity and security. Many sought exile on the continent or in the English colonies. Within these congregational-type churches, there was considerably more freedom to explore and develop theology and praxis—especially among those in temporary exile, where an atmosphere of official toleration for theological innovation and scriptural interpretation both permitted new definitions of a "true church," and motivated more stringent requirements for church membership. As a result of exercising such options, the congregational-type groups spawned principles that ultimately de-nominated them as Baptists and Congregationalists—the two surviving manifestations of the Free Church Movement to be investigated in this research.

During the period covered by this investigation, various congregations endeavored to incarnate the ideas of Robert Browne, Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, Francis Johnson, John Robinson, John Smyth, and Thomas Helwys into a church body that was faithful to their perception of a scriptural model. In the course of this endeavor they created their own covenants, confessions, articles of belief and polity, and apologetic writings to justify their stance and plead their cause before king and Parliament, and to record the persecutions they endured. This study will track the emergence of the Independents and Baptists who were congregational in polity (i.e., they believed that the authority resided in the congregation to choose its own pastors, administer discipline, and so forth) through their writings.

Again, the question to be addressed in this study is, "What can be discovered operating within the dynamics of those congregations that enabled them not only to survive persecution, but thrive to become two major denominations?" Much prior research has examined the documents produced by the various separatist groups for disclosures of the ecclesiology, polity, and discipline exercised by these proto-churches during the "long century" (from early 16th to late 17th centuries) of persecution that served as a catalyst in their formation. This study will cite and draw together relevant primary and secondary resources to discover the answer to the question posed above, specifically with respect to the dynamics operating within the congregations themselves.

A word about orthography: Original spellings will be preserved in titles and authors of documents, and original quotations, but will otherwise be modernized to facilitate ease of reading. So far as is possible, primary documents will be cited. Where they could not be located in the libraries of Baylor University, Regent's Park College and the Bodleian, Oxford, and Dr. Williams Library, London, a faithful rendering of them in secondary literature will be provided.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The subject of this research arose out of discussions with Dr. William H. Brackney, Professor of Religion and Director of the Program in Baptist Studies, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, concerning the author's interest in the interplay between persecution and toleration in the English Church Reformation. As doctoral advisor for the author's graduate program at Baylor, Professor Brackney has provided professional guidance and wise insights that enabled an in-depth investigation of the topic which will contribute to the field of Independent and Baptist Church history and thought. The author is also indebted to other Baylor Professors of Religion, Dr. Rosalie Beck, and Dr. William Pitts, whose instruction and assistance helped prepare the author to understand the significance of this topic for the history of the Free Church Tradition, and Dr. Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Chairman of the History Department at Baylor, for helping to place the study within a comprehensive historical context.

Special recognition is given for the expertise of Mrs. Betty Layton, Archivist, and Ms. Betsy Dunbar, Director of the American Baptist Historical Society archives located at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Mrs. Sue Mills, Librarian at the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, the staff of the Duke Humphrey's Reading Room in the Bodleian Library, and Dr. David Wykes, Director of the Dr. Daniel Williams Library, London. All of these and their staffs provided professional assistance in the location of primary materials that was invaluable for the investigatory process.

Appreciation must also be expressed to the author's family without whose encouragement and prayerful support this project could not have been completed.

DEDICATION

To my Lord,

My family,

And my church

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Overview

The reformation of the English Church was but one of many transformations taking place in Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So integrated were those socio-economic, political and ecclesiological transformations that it is difficult to segregate any one element from its synergistic relationships with the others. This chapter will endeavor to highlight the significant factors that simultaneously brought English society, including its church, out of the Middle Ages and into the Modern Age, ultimately moving English Christianity from its Established Church paradigm to an acceptance or toleration of Independency. This development spanned nearly two centuries, two dynasties, the Civil Wars, a Commonwealth interregnum, the restoration of the Monarchy, and finally, a coup that amounted to a bloodless revolution, before the roots put forth their full harvest of Independency with its Free Church legacy. As will be seen, no aspect of English life remained unchanged across those centuries except for one: an unwavering commitment to a Free Church ideal.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to recount the entire story of the English Reformation, but rather to focus on the factors that fostered the emergence of the English Free Church tradition which produced the Separatist Movement, and on those factors that were germane to it: viz, 1) Upheavals of the political and socio-economic status quo as a result of the Henrician severance of the Church from Rome; 2) Competing ecclesiological challenges to the established church paradigm; and 3) The spiritual and theological developments rooted in the ancient remnants of Lollardy that were given

fresh life by new covenantal concepts of the church held by returning Marian exiles, and nursed by the uniquely native version of English piety, "Puritanism." What were the circumstances that gave birth to the Free Church ideal and culminated in the (Independent) Congregational and Baptist denominations?

Influences and Motivations for Separation in the Tudor Period (1553-1603)

Ideological, Political and Socio-economic Influences and Motivations

Everything occurs within a context. That is a truism with which no historian of repute would disagree. Where historians part company and become historiographers, is in their assessment of which contextual factors are relevant, and how they operate to contribute to events. Such is the case with analysis of the operant influences surrounding the English Church Reformation which came out of the original Henrician agenda, spawning a variety of versions, in spite of the English Church's attempts to preserve uniformity. Several interpretations of events relating to the interactions between the evolving English Reformation and its socio-economic and political context will be presented below for consideration because it is the opinion of this author that no one view can account for the intensity or the breadth the English Church Reformation attained—unlike those of the Evangelical Reformation of Luther in Germany, and the Reformed Churches of Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland, both of which retained a remarkable measure of homogeneity in spite of their spanning both the North Sea and the English Channel to reform the churches of Scandinavia and Scotland respectively.

The legacy of Humanism and its accompanying spirit of individualism had infiltrated English society by the mid-sixteenth century. This is the observation of

Fredrick J. Powicke,[1] who sees that spirit as manifesting in a recovery of a desire for individual rights, including spiritual rights, which meant the right and duty of each person to know God for oneself, and the freedom to judge how the church had carried out Christ's intent. Having made this judgment, one must then consider whether one should remain in communion with the church, or, if not, exercise the right to separate from it. Powicke notes, however, that reformations such as those of Luther and Calvin set up churches which they believed the state should establish, thus squelching that principle of individual responsibility. The English Church, although born in schism itself, also allied with the state and made disobedience to its ordinances a political crime, equating recusancy with treason. Free Church advocates believed that this was because the English Church leaders failed to see that obedience to conscience, in light of what an individual believed to be the will of Christ, should be granted to every individual. Thus such state-regulated efforts at church reform resulted in a truncated reformation.

Scholars such as Christopher Goodman (1520-1603) of Chester, a graduate of Brasenose College, Oxford, pressed the movement of reform beyond the Erastian ideal toward the influence of the radical political ideas of the Marian exiles. In his "How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed" (1558), published from exile in Geneva, he posed four questions to Bullinger and Calvin that undermined *iure divino* sovereignty: viz.,

1) Is a king who is a minor a lawful magistrate to be obeyed as of divine right?

2) Can a woman rule by divine right and transfer that right to her husband?

---

[1] Fredrick J. Powicke, *Henry Barrow, Separatist and the Exiled Church at Amsterdam, 1593-1622.* London, James Clarke & Co.,1900), xvi-xix. Powicke (1854-1935) was a Congregational minister and historian of 17th Century Puritanism.

> 3) Must obedience be given to idolatrous magistrates, or may those in positions of military trust lawfully resist such magistrates?
>
> 4) Are the godly justified in rebellion if it is that of a religious nobility against an idolatrous sovereign?[2]

Though Goodman never returned to disturb English politics in person, his ideas did. When his work became disseminated in England, Goodman (along with John Knox) became the most hated man in Elizabeth's court, and had to remain in Geneva where he presided as leader of the Puritan party until his death.

Another early political theorist was better-known, though scarcely less hated: John Ponet (1514-1556), Bishop of Kent.[3] Ponet was a political pamphleteer who had been chaplain to Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556.). From Strasbourg, he and Edwin Sandys drafted the "Confession of the Banished Ministers to Parliament" in which they stated the fundamental principles of the church covenant upon which Congregationalism rests: "From the idea of a covenant between God and his people for the keeping of God's law, it is but an easy step to the theory of a social compact between a king and his people for the defense of . . . ordinances which the king breaks at his peril," because the commonwealth may stand without a king, but without a commonwealth there can be no king.[4] Statements like the above, smuggled into England, fueled the courage of persecuted reformers to stand against the English sovereign's state and church.

---

[2] Christina Garrett, *Marian Exiles, A Study in the Origins of Elizabethan Puritanism* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), 162-164. Garrett (b. 1898), M.A., Harvard, was an historical writer on the early English Reformation.

[3] Winthrop S. Hudson, *John Ponet, Advocate of Limited Monarchy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942). Ponet had written "A Short Treatise of Politike Power and of the True Obedience which Subjects owe to Kynges and other Civille Governours, with an Exhortation to all true Naturall Englishe Men," (London: 1556) in which he challenged the doctrine of almost unlimited obedience to authority.

[4] Christina Garrett, *Marian Exiles,* 255.

Evelyn D. Bebb views the impetus for further reform of the English Church as arising out of economic straits during the sixteenth century when a rise in taxes and prices necessitated an increase in tillable acreage. Because of an increased amount of drainage and enclosures of public lands formerly used to support rural populations, the occupation of former fens and forests by landlords displaced the lower echelons of yeomen (freehold farmers) and laborers, driving them into the towns where industry had not yet developed to the point of providing employment for them. This influx overwhelmed the Church's ability to care for them. In the Middle Ages, the needs of the poor had been regarded as the concern of the Church until the government enacted new Poor Laws in 1601, making them a public concern. The resulting vagabondry and related rise in crime created an outcry for the moral reform of society—a cry which was responded to by the growing number of Puritans with their demand for a "discipline" carried out by and within the Church. Thus Bebb subscribed to a "bottom-up" socio-economic paradigm which motivated reform, and offered a solution that appealed to many who were threatened by the economic upheavals.[5]

Two specific examples of how economic poverty resulted in acceptance of Puritanism in the counties of Kent and Essex are provided by the research of Peter Clark and William Hunt. Clark recounts that as a result of the economic crisis of the 1590's, the capacity of local sources of charity were overwhelmed when the townships of Faversham, Canterbury, Dover and others in Kent (diocese of Canterbury), were invaded by disease and vagrancy which became associated with moral degradation. The reaction

---

[5] E. D. Bebb, *Non-Conformity and Social and Economic Life 1600-1800* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1935),12-22. The development and influence of Puritanism will be addressed in the next section.

of the Puritan leadership was to establish more lectureships, pull down maypoles, and suppress the ale-houses and gaming in the belief that profanation of the Sabbath displeased God and contributed to the disturbance of the peace and increased impoverishment of the towns. This interpretation of socio-economic disasters as evidence of divine retribution helped forge the ideological ties between Puritan Sabbatarianism and respectability. Thus the epidemic plague of 1597-98 was construed as a divine warning and punishment against the frequenters of dens of iniquity, and those who allowed their existence in the community.[6]

In the adjacent shire of Essex (diocese of London), William Hunt reports that alarm at the growth of poverty and its association with moral decadence in the minds of the populace gave impetus to the cry for moral reform which supported the religious movement of Puritanism, because its emphasis on a culture of discipline identified spiritual holiness with social reform. "Religious precept, purportedly backed by supernatural sanction, remained the most effective means of regulating behavior."[7] The town fathers saw the swelling ranks of bastards that needed to be supported on their roles, and concluded that the solution was to close the ale-houses and punish immoral behavior. Thus the Puritans' concept of discipline imposed by church wardens and vestries appealed to those who desired to decrease poverty by elevating the moral standards of their communities. The following section will elaborate on how these counties had initially become strongholds of Puritanism.

---

[6] Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1977), 176-177.

[7] William Hunt, *The Puritan Movement: The Coming Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 81.

Another scholar who addresses the socio-economic milieu of the English Reformation is Christopher Hill of Oxford University who somewhat adheres to Max Weber's correlation between *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930). Hill demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between Protestant reform and economics.[8] He specifies that the influence of the Protestant ethic of the dignity of labor helped to foster an ideological transition from the cycles of farm labor to that of daily industrialized labor, a social problem that "the popish religion," being wed to a rural society, failed to address. The rising middle class of yeomen, artisans and merchants responded to the Puritan ethos of industry, thrift and competition, which fostered prosperity for themselves as well as for their community. Hill notes, for example, that Richard Baxter's cloth workers at Kidderminster eschewed idleness, since it and vagabondry were framed as being against the will of God.[9] There was opposition to this development on the part of the idle gentry, who lived by the fruit of others' labors and resented the ideological implications, and feared the rise of a prosperous, strong lower class. Thus few of them (in Hill's estimation) supported the Puritans' agenda which replaced the old "Romish" holy days and agrarian festivals of the Medieval Church with a regular Sabbath more suited to the rhythm of an industrialized society and the needs of a regulated work force. This imposed on employers the necessity of a weekly day of rest for themselves and their workers, equating Sundays with the Jewish Sabbath on the basis of the authority of Scripture, as opposed to the authority of the Church.

---

[8] Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Shocken Books, 1964), 129-159.

[9] Richard Baxter (1615-1691), the Puritan parson of Kidderminster, fought poverty in his parish by providing for a local weaving industry out of his own resources.

Charles and Katherine George believe that Max Weber's economic theory of Capitalism's being an outgrowth of the Puritan ethic is too simplistic in that it overlooks the many non-religious, intellectual factors operating on society in the 16th and 17th centuries: viz., the mathematics of Descartes, Pascal and Leibnitz, the physics of Newton and Galileo, the philosophies of Bacon and Descartes, and the secular social theories that emerged in the seventeenth century, culminating in the nation-state. They see these developments in the fields of science, secularism and political theory as contributing to both the spirit of Capitalism, and the reform of religion on the continent and in England. This insight has validity in that the earliest effective leadership for the Puritan version of Church reformation came out of the English universities, as will be seen.[10]

Christ Church historian Christopher Haigh has proposed revisionist theories to account for the ferment that produced the English Reformation, based on political and litigious influences. In his essay, "Anticlericalism and the English Reformation"[11] he theorizes that it was not anticlericalism nor hostility to the church that fostered initial reformation, but rather the ambitions of lawyers promoting ecclesiastical litigation, and court politicians who advanced their own causes by exploiting Henry VIII's concern for succession. As the Reformation progressed, he avers, there was actually more hostility toward "the minister who stressed Bible reading to a largely illiterate congregation, who denigrated the cycle of fast and feast linked to the harvest year, who replaced active ritual with tedious sermons . . . who refused to supply protective magic for this world and the

---

[10] Charles George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1961), 148.

[11] Christopher Haigh, "Anticlericalism and the English Reformation," Christopher Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation Revised* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73.

next," than toward those who shared the traditional beliefs of their people without threatening the security they found in traditional practices. The former seemed to be an outsider promoting heresy. The latter, "no matter how incompetent scholastically or morally, was accepted as the representative of the mediator of the means of grace that bestowed salvation," i.e., the Church.[12] This observation provides a plausible explanation for the enormous lag created by recusancy across the early Tudor period of the Reformation.

Addressing the Elizabethan period,[13] Haigh notes that prior to 1559, Protestantism had not been widely preached or accepted by the people. It was the queen who determined that political expediency required conformity to a uniform "Middle Way," a *Via Media.* Thus "the establishment of Protestantism as a mass religion was a consequence, not a cause of the political reformation. There was no deep-seated hostility to the late Medieval church in England."[14] He states that it was adroit political maneuvering for power in the Tudor church during the last years of Henry VIII and the regency of Edward VI that promoted the Reformed religion at and through the Court for self-interest as well as religious principles. Upon Mary's death, the ensuing Elizabethan Settlement was provided by a Court faction seeking to establish itself in power.

Such a revisionist interpretation presses the question as to why the imposition of an unpopular reformation was largely peaceful. Haigh offers four answers: 1) "the prestige and the power of the monarchy; 2) the slowness with which it was implemented; 3) personal gains to be made by land-grabbing gentry; and 4) improvements in the lot of

---

[12] Haigh, "Anticlericalism," 73.

[13] Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised,* 8-17.

[14] Haigh, "Anticlericalism," *English Reformation Revised,* 73.

many clergy."[15] Thus he sees the reformation as serving interests other than religious: i.e., cautious outward compliance for the sake of expediency and security, both of personal estates and the state itself, "because the unity of the realm was more important to them than the unity of Christendom."[16] This attitude was not the same as a rejection of the Catholic Church, because "a share in the spoils made the loss of the monasteries seem less egregious," and no one knew but what the tide would turn again to reinstate the old religion—a circumstance clerics would embrace from a more advantageous position.

"Because the Reformation came piecemeal, the significance of the pieces was not recognized….They could not recognize a composite Reformation-event; they could see only little events which might, in sum, add up to a Reformation." Meanwhile, clerics and laymen made choices: "for or against Wolsey; for or against the Aragon marriage, a revised Prayer Book, clerical taxes and marriages, etc." Haigh's conclusion is that "England accepted its Reformation because it did not quite see what it was doing. . . . The piecemeal Reformation was a peaceful Reformation."[17]

D. M. Palliser, professor emeritus of Medieval History at Leeds University, opposes any political or economic determinism as an operant cause of the Reformation, in favor of a sociological one, because such paradigms ignore the roles played by committed men like Latimer and Ridley. He avers that uniformity failed because zealots—both Protestant and Catholic—made their own households centers of evangelism across parochial lines. Rival nobles might rebel or conform in opposition to one another for purely competitive reasons. Consequently, alignments pro or con the

---

[15] Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised,*12-13.

[16] Haigh, *English Reformation Revised,* 14.

[17] Haigh, *English Reformation Revised,* 16, 17.

new religion depended on local situations. For example, conformity at the local level depended on enforcement by those employed by the state—church wardens, justices of the peace, and private citizens, (often influenced by the local gentry)—who might or might not support the reporting of church attendance of their neighbors. This could create safe havens for Non-conformity. Parish priests were also important molders of opinion in their parishes, encouraging either stance. Many who did conform did so for the sake of expediency, and with the expectation that the winds which had changed so many times in so few years, would probably change again—especially in the absence of a strongly-committed resident lord. This paradigm of reform explains the slow acceptance of change in the provinces and offers a reason as to why the Reformation in England took almost two centuries to arrive at a solution, concurrent with the Revolution of 1689.[18]

Ecclesiastical Motivations and Influences

For Elizabeth I, the settlement of the church she inherited from her Catholic half-sister Mary was a matter of statecraft. She believed that conformity to her church was necessary to prevent a resurgence of the papacy. For her, the *Via Media* was "her sole and only faith. It meant one land, one church, one absolute power on the throne."[19] Therefore, "the very act of separation from the established church was regarded as a manifestation of civil disobedience."[20] Consequently, she suppressed all diversity and non-conformity as inimical to the state religion, and sent countless Non-conformists into foreign exile.[21]

---

[18] D. M. Palliser, "Popular Reactions to the Reformation," in Christopher Haigh, ed. *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1987), 94-113.

[19] John Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1906), 7.

[20] Barrington R. White, *English Separatist Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 87.

[21] Champlin Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), 38-39.

Early Non-conformists accepted that it was the duty of the prince to suppress idolatry and wicked behavior in realm and church, and to compel subjects to attend sermons, but not to be a member of the church, "nor the church to receive any without assurance by the public profession of their personal faith, or to retain any members longer than they continue to walk orderly in the faith."[22] It was the contention of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood and John Penry, whose stories will be told in Chapter II, that the queen had failed in this duty as magistrate, so their books were interpreted as seeking the overthrow of the Church, and the general undermining of royal authority. Their execution was meant to teach the radicals a sharp lesson. In this respect, Elizabethan ecclesiology was bound up with politics in both church leadership and membership.

Subscription to conformity as uniformity was not new to Elizabeth. Her father had expected that loyalty to himself and his church was the same thing when he resurrected the old law of *Praemunire* which made it an act of treason to appeal to anyone beyond the king (i.e., the pope) in matters religious or political.[23] Henry's successor, the young Edward VI (1547-53) prescribed mandatory use of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549, and in 1552 he issued a second Act of Uniformity that altered it, and increased penalties for refusal to use it.[24] During the reign of Mary, at least 800

---

[22] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 88.

[23] It was Henry VIII who had executed Robert Barnes in 1540 as a seditious heretic for opposing the corruption of the bishops. As early as 1525 Barnes had warned that the people would turn against the church if it did not put its house in order. This earned him the charge of slander and sedition which culminated in his death. H. C. Porter, *Puritanism in Tudor England* (Columbia: U. of South Carolina Press, 1970), 24-25.

[24] In 1550, while Edward was on the throne, John Hooper returned from visiting Zurich and stood against the ceremonies and vestments as being against God's law. Martin Bucer, exiled from his native Strasbourg (1548-51) became Regent Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University. From this position, he warned that if the abuses of the Church of England were not reformed in discipline and doctrine, Antichrist was at hand. Henry's surviving wife, the Protestant Katherine Parr, encouraged Edward to complete the work his father had begun, and John Hooper urged him to "purge this church to the purity and

Protestants went into exile in Germany and Switzerland. One hundred twenty-five settled in Geneva, including the future bishops Edmund Grindal and Edwin Sandys plus nine others, five future deans of cathedrals, and twenty-seven future Members of Parliament (M. P's) who, upon returning, participated in the 1563 Elizabethan Convocation.[25] Upon her accession, the Forty-two Articles of the Prayer Book were reduced to Thirty-nine, and use of the revision was required as an act of conformity to the church and indication of loyalty to its new "Supreme Governor." Conformists to both church and state constituted the *Ursprung* of the Anglican Party.[26]

Other movements rapidly coalesced out of underground Protestant churches that had sprung up during the reign of Mary, from returning refugees, steeped in the Calvinist reform polity and theology of the continent, plus a "Precisian" spirituality among loyal churchmen who desired an elevation in the moral character of clerics and laity. This coalescence was viewed with distrust by Elizabeth and her Archbishops, Matthew Parker (1504-1575) and John Whitgift (1530-1604), and those prelates who were vested with power by their Episcopal system.[27] Their distrust was justified by the products of the

---

sincerity of God's word." Hooper, *Early Writings,* 542, quoted in H. C. Porter, *Puritanism in Tudor England, 55-56.*

[25] Porter, *Puritanism,* 57. Returning Marian exiles took their case against ceremonies and vestments, which had broadened into objections to the Prayer Book and Episcopal Church hierarchy, to the Parliament that met in concert with the Convocation in 1563. These bodies rejected their requests for change. At that point, many Puritan ministers left the church "to follow the lead of the apostolic church and the best Reformed churches in Europe." They presented their Admonitions to Parliament in 1572 and 1573 as a protest, published as tracts to present their case to the people. The first was authored by John Field and Thomas Wilcox; the second by Thomas Cartwright, not to justify their separation from the Church, but as an appeal for reconciliation between the factions, hoping to heal the breach. All were forced into exile for producing these documents. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, eds. *Puritan Manifestoes* (New York: Burt Franklin Pub. Co., 1972), viii-xiv.

[26] O. S. Davis, *John Robinson, the Pilgrim Pastor* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1903), 5-22.

[27] Walter Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches* (London: n.p., 1814), 13-14. Elizabeth's policies only increased disaffection of the Puritan churchmen, which escalated her own distrust of them as being disloyal to her person. For example, she forbade preaching on the basis that it disturbed

emerging Puritan press—e,g., John Field's *Parte of a Register* (1580), a record of Puritan pleas and persecutions, and the "Martin Marprelate Tracts,"(1588-89) those satirical attacks on "divine right" prelacy that lampooned the Elizabethan bishops, calling them "common Simoniarchs who make merchandise of church livings and benefices."[28]

In response to Thomas Cartwright's *Second Admonition to Parliament* (1573), Richard Cox, Bp. of Ely, wrote to Rudolph Gualter, Bullinger's successor in Zurich, that

> Heady men have spread confusion and are trying to condemn and pull in pieces the whole economy of our church, and bring all, bishops and other ministers of the word in to disfavor with the people, and also with the magistrates and nobility. Nay, they even reject this order as being of no use in the Church of Christ, and are striving by every means in their power that it may be altogether abolished (6/12/1573).[29]

---

the quiet of the church, according to a letter from John Jewel to Peter Martyr. She put a moratorium on "any publick prayer, rite or ceremony in the church but that which is already used, and by law received, or the form of letany [sic] used at this present in her majesty's own chapel, and the Lord's prayer and the crede in English, until consultation may be had by Parliament, by her majesty, and her three estates of the realm for the better conciliation and accord of such causes as at this present are moved in matters and ceremonies of religion." *The Zurich Letters,* ed. Hastings Robinson for The Parker Society (Cambridge: The University Press, 1846), p. 17.

[28] William Pearce, editor, *The Marprelate Tracts,1588-1589* (London: J. Clarke & Co., 1911), 391-397, has reissued *The Theses Martiniae* originally published in July, 1589. The response of the Church to the Puritan threat had been to mandate subscription to three articles: viz., That "the Prayer Book contents were not repugnant to the Word of God; the vestments were not against the Word of God, and therefore should be used; and that the Thirty-nine Articles contain true and godly doctrine." Those refusing to subscribe were removed. It was in response to these articles that Field and Wilcox wrote their "Admonition to Parliament" and "View of Popish Abuses," calling for abandonment of all popish remnants, because "either must we have a right ministry of God and a right government of His church, according to the scriptures . . . or else there can be no true religion." Wilcox's "True Platform of a Church reformed" added to the two marks of a true church—(the preaching of the word purely and the ministering of the sacraments sincerely), a third mark: that of "ecclesiastical discipline which consisteth in admonition and correction of faults severely" as in the primitive church, "when every pastor had his own flock, there were preachers, not readers, and the clergy were elected by the common consent of the whole church." Porter, 116-118.

[29] Quoted in *The Zurich Letters,* 17-18. This collection of letters between English bishops and the Reformed leadership on the Continent reveals an effort on the parts of both the Puritans and the prelates to triangulate the continental reformers into supporting their views. Rudolph Gualter, at first sympathetic to the Puritans, later chastised them for making so divisive an issue out of vestments and ceremonies, and refused to be further implicated. A greater sampling of the correspondence pertaining to this controversy may be read in *The Zurich Letters* ed. Hastings Robinson for the Parker Society (Cambridge: The University Press, 1846) 57-84 and 442-467.

Elizabeth's 1574 suppression of lectures and prophesyings by Abp. Matthew Parker's "Advertisements" was followed in 1577 by her exhortation to all bishops, forbidding all "unlawful assemblies of people outside their parishes," and urging them to enforce the 1559 Act of Supremacy and Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service within the Church, based on her belief that they could too easily become occasions for political agitation. Nevertheless, those innovations continued to be used by Puritans to compensate for the lack of preaching in the parish churches. One historian observes that "It was not in her nature to understand the intensity of conscientious religious feeling which glowed in the hearts of some of her subjects. It baffled her, and consequently she was annoyed by its manifestation. We have here the key to her lack of sympathy with the Puritan Movement."[30]

To Anglican churchmen it was inconceivable that their authority might be challenged from below; it was inexcusable for it to be challenged from within their own ranks. Those who did call for change, not of doctrine, but of moral and ethical purity, were called "Puritans," a sobriquet meant to be applied disparagingly, but embraced by its promoters as an appellation of honor. The Puritan leaders were men of honor and prestige in the church and universities. For example, Thomas Cartwright, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, was forced out of the church and university when he was ejected from his position for "erroneous teaching of Calvinism, and that the church and state are independent in administration; that the scriptures teach an authoritative system of polity of which the diocesan episcopate forms no part; that the members of the church ought to have a share in the selection of officers; . . and that the duty of the

---

[30] Walter Burgess, *John Smyth, the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1911),15. *cf.,* Porter, 176.

ministry is to train this body of members in holiness of life."[31] He held that the magistrate should suppress heresy and compel uniformity in worship, and that the true reformers should remain in, and work for the purification of the church, not separate from it, while waiting for the magistrate to take the initiative in the further reform the church.

Looking back across the centuries, it is difficult to comprehend how such an agenda could be so threatening to the ecclesiastical system of episcopacy, but in this stance of Cartwright's, one can identify encapsulated all the issues that became battlegrounds in the ensuing struggle between the Episcopal, Presbyterian and Independent camps: separation of church and state, authority of scripture over that of church and magistrate, the right of laity to elect clergy, and the call for a "holy" church. That struggle eventually led to actual separation from the Established Church by Christians who loved the church enough to leave it rather than participate in what they saw as its usurpation by forces of corruption, greed and lascivious living that failed to promote faith, holiness, or even ministry among the people.[32]

As early as 1550, Martin Buçer had written from Cambridge to John Calvin in Geneva recounting disagreements among bishops on Christian doctrine and discipline, noting that very few parishes had qualified pastors. In some parishes, no sermon had been preached for several years. When abuses are presented to rulers, he reported, they claim that it is the responsibility of the bishops; the bishops claim they cannot rectify the

---

[31] Ozora S. Davis, *John Robinson the Pilgrim Pastor* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1903), 13-14.

[32] This decision represented a serious concern for churchmen such as Lawrence Humphrey, Thomas Lever, Thomas Cartwright, and many others who remained within the church to cleanse it from corruption so that the people would not be left without shepherds and become "prey to the Romish wolves." Albert Peel, *The First Congregational Churches* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920), 5.

situation without an act of Parliament.[33] This telling account reveals the conundrum of a church-state relationship that was so enmeshed that no one could take initiative, or be held responsible for the failures of the system.

The present research will track the forces that impelled that separation (deemed a "schism" by conforming Puritans), the persecutions that alienated the Separatists from any possibility of reconciliation with it, and their responses to the persecution that culminated in churches purged by fire and resurrected from the ashes to become the first Free Churches born in Britain and transported to the New World as the Congregational and Baptist denominations. First, however, it is necessary to understand the role played by the Puritans in birthing the Separatist Movement, contrary to the original intentions of its leaders.

Richard L. Greaves at Florida State University notes that the term "Puritan" had a multiplicity of meanings during Elizabethan times, and those meanings evolved so that it is dangerous to impose later denominational characteristics on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, Puritans were not necessarily synonymous with Presbyterians. Nor were they necessarily opposed to faithful Anglicans, because there were many conforming Puritans in the Church of England. Neither group constituted an organized party, nor enjoyed a unity of opinion within itself. Greaves suggests that instead of holding dichotomous positions, each entertained a continuum of faith and ecclesiology, with individuals changing positions over time. His simplest contemporary

---

[33] Porter, 60-61.

model defines Puritans as "those Protestants who manifested dissatisfaction with the established church, but stopped short of separating from it."[34]

Puritans entertained assumptions about the church that were categorically different from those of the Established Church. They held that only that pattern for organization laid down in the New Testament was applicable for every generation everywhere, and failure to adhere to that pattern would bring the judgment of God down on the disobedient church and nation. Conforming Puritans were willing to wait for the magistrate to reform the church, whereas their Non-conforming brethren believed that the Church was too corrupt to be reformed because the membership consisted of all citizens of the parishes, including non-believers. They averred that the headship of Christ had been usurped by a hierarchy of men, and that the parish congregations, not having covenanted to live together according to the New Testament order, had lost the power to bind, loose, and reform corruptions.[35]

Many Anglicans were also working for upgrading morality to higher standards. Both groups shared the same doctrines of sin, faith and predestination. But they differed in their doctrines of the church, the sacraments, eschatology, and the relationship between ecclesiology, theology and ethics. They were inspired by such men as the Puritan Professor of Divinity at the University of Franeker in Friesland, William Ames (1576-1633), who promoted a definition of the church as "a company of men that are called and have communion with Christ, for the church is the body of Christ. It is a company

---

[34] Richard L. Greaves, "The Puritan Non-conformist Tradition in England 1560-1700." *Albion* 17 (Winter, 1985):449-455. Quote: 454.

[35] Barrington R. White, *The English Puritan Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 16-17. These represent key terms in the discipline of the Separatist churches.

because it consists properly in a multitude joined in fellowship together."[36] Puritan Conformists can be distinguished from Anglican conformity by the formers' appeal to scriptural authority, and their belief that all *adiaphoric* things must be edifying.

Most significantly, non-conforming Puritans linked theology to spiritual experience. They saw the Church of England, not Rome, as Babylon, and entertained millenarian expectations of an imminent Kingdom of God on earth. This translated into concerns for strict morality, discipline, and a polity derived from "a deep-rooted spiritual reorientation which . . . involved a keen striving for purity of heart, mind and worship," and included "an acute sense of the inner working of the Holy Spirit."[37] Their worldview emphasized the "first table" of the Ten Commandments which deal with duties to God, as opposed to the Anglican emphasis on the "second table" which deals with responsibilities toward other people.[38]

This "experiential" emphasis can be detected in the personal diaries of Puritans who used that medium as a means of accountability to God and a record of spiritual

---

[36] William Ames, "The Marrow of Sacred Divinity," 135, in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithful Minister of Christ, William Ames* (London: n.p., 1643). He addressed the controversy about the visibility vs. invisibility of the true church, stating that the English Church is both: Invisible in respect of its essential, internal and spiritual form; visible in respect of its "accidental" and outward form, which consisted of its outward profession of invisible faith, in spite of its impurities. Ames defined parish churches as a "species of the church in general. . . . A society of believers joined together by a special bond among themselves, . . the children of whom are members, though not perfect members, because they cannot exercise acts of communion." The bond that unites the churches constitutes an implicit covenant to "perform all the duties toward God and one another which pertaine to the respect and edification of the Church." Countering Non-conformity, he defended this Church as instituted by Christ alone, and dependent on Him as its head. Therefore, "the church may not properly make new Lawes to her self of new things to be ordained," 137-142. In another document, Ames stipulated the mutual obligations between ministers and their flocks, that ministers should be servants, husbandmen, shepherds and watchmen; the people owed their ministers reverence and respect, obedience, and maintenance of them so long as they were not unworthy "men-servers." Ames, "Conscience, with the Power and Cases thereof," n.p. 1641, in *Works*, 162-163.

[37] Greaves, "Puritan Non-conformist Tradition ," 461.

[38] Greaves, "Puritan Non-conformist Tradition," 462-463.

development for themselves. For example, one finds an almost obsessive concern for personal piety and devotion, and deep depression over sins of commission and omission, in the extant diaries and writings of Philip Henry and John Evelyn, and Samuel Howe, as well as the account of Richard Kilby's struggle to overcome his burden of sin, that he had published for the edification and instruction of others facing the same temptations.[39]

The Anglican John Bastwick's confessional legacy recounts how he had been raised to despise Puritans, but upon observing their faithfulness to each other in brotherly love, and to God, even in facing death, he concluded, "I found none in life and death happy and truly comfortable, but those that are branded Puritans; or least live and dye bye their faith . . . and their profession, then [sic] the greatest Prelates that ever lived upon the earth." Of those prelates he says, "I affirme that at all times they goe more like Princes, then humble ministers of Christ, and the Apostles' successors. . . . I call Bps, Priests and Deacons, Antichrist's little toes, and in my Litany, desire deliverance from them."[40] With such a testimony from an Anglican, we return to search out the beginnings of Puritanism.

---

[39] Philip Henry, *The Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry,* ed. Matthew Henry Lee (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1882); *The Diary of John Evelyn.* ed. John Bowle (Oxford: University Press, 1983); Samuel Howe, *Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning* (London, 1683); and Richard Kilby, *Hallelu-ia, Praise Yee the Lord for the Unburthening of a Loaden Conscience* (London, 1632), passim. Puritan autobiographies also became a popular genre, emphasizing experience as the evidence of their spiritual estate. Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), has collected and abridged several of these: viz., Richard Rogers, vicar of Wethersford, Essex 1574 (pp. 12-21); John Bastwick's *Confession of the Faithful Witness of Christ* (n.p:1641) was written to justify his anti-episcopal activities (p. 26); Henry Burton's *Narration of the Life of H. B.* (London: n.p., 1643) and John Cook's *What the Independents Would Have* (London: n.p.,1647) both testify to remarkable visions and works of grace through trials (pp. 27-29). Others published in the late 17th century include the life stories of Puritans John Rogers, John Bunyan, and Richard Baxter, the Independent Thomas Goodwin and Baptists Henry Jessey and Hanserd Knollys. All stress a sense of conviction of sin and depression, followed by a sense of calling from God, which leads to conversion, and struggles with temptations and doubts perceived as a war between the flesh and spirit, won by the help of God's grace, providing invaluable insights into the motivating spirit of Puritanism. Watkins, 43-86.

[40] John Bastwick, 2-3.

An understanding of the motivations and impetus of the Puritan Movement will help us understand why so many, over the ensuing generations, were willing to die or separate from the Established Church rather than compromise with it. Christina Garrett traces the Puritan Movement back to the Marian exile communities that found sanctuary in Emden, Zurich, Geneva and Strasbourg. In those safe havens of Protestantism, she claims, "we are dealing with the *embryo* of the Puritan party, both clerical and lay. Here they worked out their worship practices and political agenda using the *opportunity* of exile to organize themselves into a formidable opposition party" [41] (italics mine).

By the time they returned, they were well-buttressed by a barrage of pamphlet literature which had thrust printers into a dominant role in the forthcoming fight for influence over Parliament and people in Elizabeth's Settlement. Under the guidance of Peter Martyr and Pierre Alexandre in Strasbourg, and influenced by the preaching of Miles Coverdale and Thomas Lever in Wesel, "they built their plan upon inherited working models that a previous generation of exiles from the Continent had established in England between 1550-53 under the tutelage of John à Lasco, Francois Perucel and Valerand Poullain. They revised the Prayer Book they had brought with them, and it was in exile that Miles Coverdale completed his English translation of the Bible.[42]

As a result of her meticulous research into the activities of these fluid colonies-in-exile, Garrett concludes that theirs was not so much a flight as an organized migration:

---

[41] Christina Garrett, *The Marian Exiles,* vii – 59. Quote p. 40. This meticulously-researched resource by this Harvard graduate lists the names of leading English gentry and clergy found in the Puritan enclaves of Holland, Germany and Switzerland, p. 27. Their biographies are provided, pp. 84-346.

[42] Shakespeare, 4, credits the Vernacular Bible with being an indispensable cause of Puritan Non-conformity that culminated in Separatism. Likewise, Robert C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: The Carey Press, 1946), 56-63 ascribed the changing milieu of the seventeenth century to the availability of scriptures in the vernacular.

"one of the most astute maneuvers that ever carried a fledgling party to ultimate power." In Europe, she points out, the exiles not only became an experiment in "the school of self-government," but of democracy itself, being forced to live, as many as five families of different cultural backgrounds, in a single house. This broke down class barriers, "with gentlemen, merchants and craftsmen obliged to live under the same roof. As a result, the artisan and servant became aware of their enhanced value as individuals." In Frankfort, having rejected the jurisdiction of kings and bishops, the community became self-governing, repudiating even the domination of a minister, declaring that the congregation was the source of law. Such was the experience of the returning exiles, who were "determined to force the pace of their countrymen in religion and politics."[43] Garrett's rendition of the personal lives, conflicts and accomplishments of this "embryonic" Puritan party is a fascinating read, but is only preliminary to the subject at hand: viz., its impact upon the English Church, which drove it on to complete its reformation through intransigent non-conformity, even to the point of separating from it, when driven out.[44]

What, then, was the nature of the Puritanism that returned to fertilize the English Church Reformation? While in Europe, the exiled gentry and clerics had availed themselves and their children of the opportunity for education in the universities of Geneva, Strasbourg and Frankfort. In fact, of the several hundred exiles named by

---

[43] C. Garrett, 18-22. Quote, pp. 21-22.

[44] G. Lyon Turner, *Original Records of Early Non-conformity* III (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), 20-147, characterizes Non-conformity as "Puritanism excommunicated." His point is well supported by other historians of the period. Ernest Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1951), 62-63, tells the story of how the moderate Puritan, Richard Baxter was driven out of the Church for championing comprehension of Dissenters; John Browne, *History of Congregationalism* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1877), 55, and George Punchard, *The History of Congregationalism* (Salem: John P. Jewett, 1841), 229-242, both lay the blame for forcing Puritans to become Separatists on Elizabeth's policies.

Garrett, in addition to 106 gentry, 67 clergy, 40 merchants, 32 artisans, and 7 printers, 119 were theological students. Upon returning, these scholars acquired positions in the English universities of Cambridge and Oxford, where they spread their influence among students and communities vis-à-vis their lectures and writings, presented in scholarly and impeccable logic.[45] These university Puritans stimulated the spread of the movement by giving it a voice. By 1596 the movement had permeated Lincolnshire as a result of Puritan preaching and lectures, much of which was supported by local gentry.[46] Between 1559 and 1603, graduating theological students from Cambridge brought zealous preaching into available benefices with the support of local gentry and town councils that appreciated the godly order their efforts produced. We will meet some of them in the next chapter.

This is not to say that the returning exiles did not cause disputes and disruptions in the church, having become accustomed to a different model of Reformed church worship than the one established according to the Common Prayer Book. They brought back the practice of "prophesyings" which invited assemblies of clergy and sometimes laymen to question or expound on scriptural passages. These practices are credited by John Strype with forcing Elizabeth to press her authority through her Acts of Uniformity as Supreme Governor of the Church, and to enforce stringent punishment of offenders.[47]

---

[45] Shakespeare, 136.

[46] R. B. Walker, "The Growth of Puritanism in the County of Lincoln in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I" in *Journal of Religious History* I (June, 1961): 150-157. John Smyth was one such lecturer there in 1600. The story of his influence will be told in Chapter II.

[47] John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion in the Church of England During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign* Vol. I, Part 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 58, 465. Not all returning exiles were perceived as disruptors of the Established Church. In fact, many commissioners and bishops charged with enforcing uniformity in the parishes were former Marian exiles. Viz.: Edmund Grindal of London, Edwin Sandys of Worcester, Pilkington of Durham, Gilbert Berkley of Bath and Wells, Thomas Bentham of Coventry and Lichfield, Parkhurst of Norwich, Davies of Asaph, and Thomas Young,

Barrington White at Regent's Park College defines a Puritan as "an earnest Christian whose understanding of the Bible was shaped by a theology which was broadly Calvinist in type, who, while remaining in the Church of England, sought its further reformation . . . in the direction of Presbyterianism."[48] They objected to vestments, which represented a reversion to popery, and thought that the 1559 Revised Prayer Book reverted to the ornaments of the 1549 Prayer Book. They promoted, in its stead, the use of the Genevan Bible, and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments,* which characterized the Roman Catholic Church as an instrument of Antichrist. By their *Admonitions to Parliament*, they kept their ecclesiastical issues alive throughout Elizabeth's reign. Many Englishmen did not accept their agenda for reform, however. Both churchmen and courtiers, and self-serving priests characterized as a "Puritan" anyone who was crosswise of their personal interests, objected to ribaldry, or preferred sermons to licentiousness. As such, with the passage of time, these church "purifiers" became regarded as "enemies of the church," seditious and hypocrital, and were resented because they extended their desire for reform of personal life-style into the arenas of secular and ecclesiastical politics.[49]

Abp. of York. Claire Cross, *Elizabethan Religious Settlement* (Bangor: Gwynedd: Headstart History, 1992), 22-28. Many of these men ameliorated the severity of suppressive measures in their dioceses, giving Puritan Protestantism time to gain a foothold that enabled it to survive later efforts to stamp it out. In these assemblies, to prevent heterodox opinions from being expressed, the queen mandated that nothing might be expressed against the state, its laws, rites, policies or the church. Abp. Grindal protested having to enforce these measures because there were too few incumbents who could or would preach salvation effectively. He reminded the sovereign that "although ye are a mighty prince, yet remember that He which dwelleth in heaven is mightier." He was suspended from his position for the duration of his life. *The Remains of Edmund Grindal,* Vol. 19 (Cambridge: University Press, 1843), 389.

[48] White, *English Puritan Tradition,*12.

[49] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 10-15.

In order to appreciate the intransigence of Elizabeth and her archbishops toward the further reforms the Puritans called for, one must understand the nature of the church she inherited, and was trying to preserve against a resurgence of papal power from within the realm. She tried to resurrect a Protestantism that her predecessor had outlawed by abolishing the mass and replacing it with the Lord's Super in two kinds, adapting the Edwardian Second Prayer Book, removing images, and reducing the 42 Articles to 39, with as little aggravation as possible of her Roman Catholic subjects, with the aid of her 1558 and 1559 Westminster Conferences. Many parishes were bereft of clergymen and, according to Bp. Cox's letter to Gualter,[50] hardly one in one hundred was able and willing to preach. This dearth of preaching caused many to be drawn to the conventicles of the sectaries that had formed underground in Mary's days in the environs of London. Bp. Sandys expressed his fear to Ld. Burghley, the queen's secretary, that "the city will never be quiet till these authors of sedition who are now esteemed as gods (e.g., John Field, Thomas Wilcox, Thomas Cartwright and others), be removed from the city. The people resort unto them as in popery they were wont to run on pilgrimage."[51] Outside London, in Suffolk, for example, in 1567 there was not one preacher within a circuit of twenty miles. Yet well-qualified ministers continued to be ejected from their ministry for not wearing a garment. Replacements "had neither good learning nor good name, but were drunkards and of filthy life. . . . Others were charged with enormous crimes as well as lack of learning, gaming at cards, and haunting of ale-houses."[52]

---

[50] *Zurich Letters*,237.

[51] Benjamin Evans, *Early English Baptists* I, (London: J. Heaton & Sons, 1862), 141.

[52] Evans I, 143.

A pressing concern of the Puritans was not only the moral degradation they saw in church and society, but the woeful state of ignorance and error among communicants, due to the lack of preaching and catechizing. Edward Dering (1540-1576) noted that scarce one in a hundred parishes had an able preacher. This estate of spiritual turpitude was viewed as a result of the incompetence and non-residency of the clerics, a condition foisted upon the parishes by the bishops. "Would they and the Government be able to control the consciences of educated, well-paid and therefore independent clergy? On balance, dumb dogs seemed safer: they could not go far wrong if they stuck to the Prayer Book and Homilies."[53] This dearth of basic Christian instruction and spiritual succor motivated Puritans such as Sir Edward Dering (1598-1644) to advocate catechizing every Lord's Day afternoon.[54] Catechizing awakened such a thirst for instruction, that when preached sermons (as opposed to read homilies) were forbidden by James I, expositions of the Catechism were extrapolated into sermons. When expositions were forbidden by Charles I, parishioners insisted that their ministers defy the order.[55]

The call for discipline upon clergy and churches became the rallying cry of the Puritans. The above-mentioned Cartwright demanded that

> bishops, priests and deacons ought to be reduced to apostolic institutions (which would mean the abolition of the bishops), presbyters only should remain to preach the Word of God, and deacons be employed in taking care of the poor; every church ought to be governed by its ministers and presbyters . . . and the ministers ought to be openly and fairly chosen by the people.[56]

---

[53] Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 51.

[54] Edward Dering, "A Brief and Necessarie Catechisme or Instruction very needful to be knowne of all Householders" in *The Works of Edward Dering,* (1614).

[55] Hill, *Society and Puritanism* ,70-71.

[56] Evans I, 143.

This quote succinctly articulates the great divide between the church established by Elizabeth's Westminster Conference—one ruled hierarchically from the top by herself through successive ranks of archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, and their appointed ranks of clerics—vs. a church model influenced by the Reformed churches of the continent—one of individual presbyterial churches ruled locally and overseen by their delegated elder-representatives to a synodical authority.[57] A growing number of Puritans within the church subscribed to the latter, while many advocated a policy of conformity to episcopacy, urging and awaiting further reformation by the magistrate. Ultimately, the Presbyterian party would be forced out, taking a stand in opposition to the established church, while some wearied of waiting for the magistrate and separated from both groups. This section will focus on those Puritans who, while conforming, propounded a reformation model for the Church that directly influenced a growing number of Non-conformists who ultimately separated from it in order to implement the desired "purification."

The Established Church model, enforced by Abp. John Whitgift on behalf of the queen, was based on the premise that it is within the realm of Christian liberty for every national church to determine its own form of government, based on what is "useful." This was his primary criteria for church government: not that it be scriptural, but merely useful. In other words, since the office of archbishop is profitable to the government of

[57] It would constitute a major digression from the subject at hand to go into the issues, and polity of the Presbyterian churches in England, and the struggle between them and the Church of England, so these will not be addressed except as they impact the development of the Separatist Movement. Recommended readings for an understanding of the Presbyterian chapter in English Church history include: John Marsden, *History of the Early Puritans from the Reformation to the Opening of the Civil War in 1642*. 2d edn. (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1853), which relates the influence on Puritan theology of Calvin and Bullinger; and George Punchard, *History of Congregationalism*, 289-93, which elaborates on the views and practices of Conformist and Presbyterian Puritans.

the church, it is acceptable so long as scripture does not forbid it. This approach to ecclesiology permitted "alterations which fitted the church for usefulness, adapting it to altered times and circumstances."[58]

Such a view of the church was inimical to the Puritans who saw reform as a restitution to an apostolical model which they believed they could justify on the basis of scripture. Their ideal of the church was described as "the city of God, the kingdom of Christ on earth, . . having reciprocal relationships with the rulers of this world, but acting in complete independence of their authority." In the church, "parish by parish, people should elect their elders and ministers, and the national church should be knit together in a series of representative assemblies."[59] This paradigm offended the queen's sense of sovereignty over her church and resulted in attempts to suppress the movement as a whole, including its discipline, which was intended to foster morality. Total suppression failed because of the popularity of Puritan preaching, the dissemination of literature from its presses, the mobility of people and the wealth of the emerging middle class that supported Puritan standards of morality.

Because the Puritans looked to Parliament to enact measures for further reform, they did meddle in politics. For example, as the issue broadened from objection to vestments and rites in the Prayer Book, to that of a change of church government, Thomas Cartwright, after the Convocation of bishops had rejected these changes, took the cause before Parliament in 1571, requesting permission to worship according to the pattern of the Reformed churches in Europe. Elizabeth, seeing this as an affront to her

---

[58]Marsden, *History of the Early Puritans,* 93.

[59] William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia Press, 1938), 11-12.

authority, intervened and forbid any bills to be presented to Parliament unless first approved by Convocation. The Puritans responded with their two *Admonitions to Parliament* (1572 and 73). For their authorship of the first, Field and Wilcox were imprisoned and executed. For his authorship of the second, Cartwright was forced into exile.[60]

J. B. Marsden points out that "Puritanism naturally found its advocates amongst those who were least inclined to acquiescence in the sovereign's claim to absolute authority." For her part, "Elizabeth considered that whatever concerned the royal prerogative was forbidden ground, and under this description, she included everything related to religion."[61] Over time, her coercive measures such as fines, imprisonment, exile, and execution deepened the commoners' dislike of prelacy and gained support for the Puritans. It was not until 1604, however, after multiple petitions against non-residency, pluralism, slothful and non-preaching clergy, and a tyrannical episcopate, that new canons were introduced to rectify these abuses. They did not create the hoped-for ecclesiastical revolution, however, because the church remained frozen in its Episcopal hierarchy.[62] Given this maelstrom of ecclesiology, what were the accompanying issues of theology and spirituality that constituted the milieu of the Elizabethan Church out of which Separatism eventually emerged?

---

[60] Frere and Douglas, viii – xi.

[61] Marsden, 190.

[62] Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans* I (London: n.p., 1754), 377.

Spiritual and Theological Roots and Issues Motivating Separation

Scholars who have traced the remnants and influences of Wycliffian Lollardy from its suppression in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries demonstrate that it survived in underground enclaves in at least two counties in south-eastern England. Peter Clark, who identified active separatist groups at Maidstone and Faversham in Kent (diocese of Canterbury) as early as 1551, believes that it was residual Lollardy that provided the primary influence which promoted the initial movement beyond the conservative Henrician reformation, piqued by a growing disillusionment with the Protestant clergy's failure to eradicate pluralism and non-residency.[63] He notes that during the Marian years, the topographical area with the highest number of martyrs (exceeded only by those in London) correlates with that of Lollardy, and the Edwardian "Free-willers" who had expressed a separatist bias.[64]

Clark also recognizes the influence of "Stranger" congregations of European exiles who, fleeing persecution on the Continent, settled in Kentish towns, with official permission to worship in their own ways. These not only contributed to the economic prosperity of the area, but asserted their attitude toward state-church establishment, its abuses, and neglect of the parish churches.[65] It was to this locale that many exiles returned, and from which many leading Puritan spokesmen emerged, many of whom actively opposed the use of the surplice and liturgy.[66] Interestingly, Clark also identified

---

[63] Clark, 77.

[64] Clark, 101.

[65] Clark, 150. In 1561, ninety-two livings had only one curate, or no one at all to serve the parish. Thus pluralism was rationalized as a necessity at the parish level.

[66] Clark, 165-170. Sir Edward Dering was a Presbyterian extremist who, in his sermons, emphasized sin and the need for more preaching as the solution to moral degradation. He also protested

a "Protestant Matriarchy" of several prominent ladies who penned exhortations urging both social and religious reform.

William Hunt identified Essex (diocese of London) as a former Lollard stronghold. He cites the memory of both Lollard and Marian martyrs as constituting a religious tradition nurtured by John Foxe's martyrology that cast Protestant reform in the form of a "cosmic battle" between Christ and anti-Christ.[67] Hunt credits their zeal with inspiring a "thirst for gadding for sermons by parishioners who hoped by their example to awaken the consciences of their worldly neighbors."[68] Like their neighbors to the south in Kent, they saw the provision of more sermons as the key to reform, and began as early as the 1560's to support independent preaching. In spite of suppression, their lectures and "prophesyings" continued underground until the 1620's.[69]

The importance of preaching became a dividing issue between the Anglicans and Puritans, the latter seeing it as a primary bastion against popery. However, the years of deprivations and suspensions for vestarian non-conformity had decimated the ranks of conscientious ministers available for pulpits and benefices. Lack of sufficient numbers to

---

against the Church hierarchy as being more interested in promoting their *status quo* than in the defeat of popery, ignorance and ecclesiastical abuse. Other Presbyterians who took up the same issues in the 1570's were Bp. John Stroude, Bp. Richard Rogers and Archdeacon William Redman who supported their parish ministers' refusal to wear vestments when preaching, "because it is against God's Word to order these officers in the church." Dudley Fenner not only nurtured the growth of "embryonic Puritanism" in Kentish parishes, he also supported public schools for children of the poor.

[67] Hunt, 87-88. More will be said about this "cosmic dimension" and the influence of its Millenarian expression in Puritan theology later in this section. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837-1841, originally published 1641-1660).

[68] Hunt, 94.

[69] Hunt, 96. The most famous of these was the Dedham Conference to which as many as 20 ministers from Kent and Essex repaired weekly to discuss doctrine, evaluate qualifications for the ministry and resolve intra-parish conflicts. This Conference maintained liaisons with similar ones in other counties, including that led by John Field in London, constituting a network of organized resistance to the Established Church policies of Whitgift. Their practice provided an invaluable precedent for the ensuing development of Puritanism and its scion, Independency.

fill them necessitated pluralism, and the beneficing of men unqualified to preach. Consequently, the church resorted to providing "homilies" to be read in lieu of sermons, a measure of control over the pulpits that well-suited Elizabeth's agenda, because these "dumb dogs," as they were labeled by their detractors, were not free to promote political ideas in opposition to the establishment.

It was in response to this dearth of preaching that lectureships were underwritten, either by town corporations or voluntary subscription. The latter evolved in the direction of congregational independency when the subscribers chose their own minister-lecturers for their own gathered churches that grew out of those conventicles. These lectureships were filled by deposed educated former clerics who were independent of the control of the bishops. Some incorporated towns and parishes (e.g., the Minories in London) purchased their own advowsons, thus becoming their own "patron," and hired their own ministers, paying them with their tithes instead of allocating them to the Church. By 1583, one-third of London's parishes had lectureships, some elected by their own congregations.[70] Such notables as William Ames, William Bridge, and John Knowles were salaried by Colchester Township Corporation. Other incorporated township lectureships could be found in Essex and Norwich and Bury-St. Edmunds, Suffolk. These locales became not only hot-beds of Puritan activity, but seed-beds of Independency as suppression turned to persecution, and those with a taste for resistance to the Church were forced into exile where they developed their ideal of a visible, self-governing, gathered church, and transported it back to England as outright Separatism.

---

[70] Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 32-110.

During those years of exile, according to Barrington White, it was not European Anabaptistry that influenced their theology, although they did share a desire for the restitution of the apostolic pattern of church organization and congregational autonomy. The Puritans had been asserting the right of each congregation to choose its own ministers since the 1570's, and the Separatists, "seeking a rationale for their own withdrawal from the Established Church, and the authority of their covenanted groups . . . to establish congregational autonomy, appealed to the immediacy of the authority of the risen Christ, committed to each individual fellowship of believers." This was the same interpretation the Anabaptists had arrived at, but neither derived this paradigm from the other. Nor, according to White, were they the source of English Baptists.[71]

J. B. Marsden (1803-1870), ascribes early Separatist theology to the influence of Heinrich Bullinger's *Decades,* and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* both of which were held in high esteem at the Oxford and Cambridge universities.[72] He sees these as the source from which English Presbyterianism derived its Calvinist theology.[73] This "federal theology" of the Calvinistic Puritans shifted in emphasis from the assurance of salvation by grace, to the importance of evidence of salvation, as seen in human fulfillment of the demands of the law *before* God's reciprocal obligation would be brought fully into force. The Puritan divine, William Perkins of Cambridge, expounded this covenant relationship in these terms:

---

[71] Barrington White, *Separatist Tradition* 162-163.

[72] Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades,* ed. Thomas Harding, trans. H. I. (Cambridge: University Press, 1849-52); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (n.p.,1536; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953). Marsden is an ordained 19th century British ecclesiastical historian, M.A. from St. John's College, Cambridge University, 1830.

[73] J. B. Marsden, 217.

> God's covenant is his *contract* with man concerning the obtaining of life eternal, *upon a certain condition.* This covenant consists of two parts: God's promise to man, man's promise to God. God's to man is that whereby he bindeth himself to man to be his God, *if he perform the condition.* Man's promise to God is that whereby he voweth his allegiance unto his Lord, and to perform the condition between them.[74] (italics mine).

Thus another strain of Puritan theology was emerging that was not informed by Calvinism. This strand gave birth to a Non-conformity that culminated in separation from the Church. An historian of 16th century England, Leonard J. Trinterud, alluded to this new focus and its emphasis on the individual (as opposed to the synodical) church covenant idea that was basic to those who did take the step of separation to form independent, gathered churches. According to Trinterud, there were two distinct meanings of "Covenant" entertained by the non-conforming Presbyterians and the non-conforming Independents. The former interpreted the meaning of "Covenant" as a promise given unilaterally and unconditionally by God to His "elect." This was the theological construct adopted at the Synod of Dort in 1618, with its principles of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints—a unilateral expression of God's sovereignty by which salvation was independent either of desert or response on the part of its recipients.

Impelled by their desire to form true, visible churches, constituted as companies of believers in covenant with God and each other, those Independents who separated from the Church to form gathered churches did so on the basis of a radically different interpretation of the meaning of "Covenant," one not of a promise, but of a bilateral "contract" between two parties. Their version of the concept implied responsibility on

---

[74] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (Cambridge: 1591), 31-32. Quoted in Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625* (Oxford: The University Press, 1988), 33.

the part of the saints to live lives of holiness, and to exercise the authority of the Lord to discipline its membership to keep the church pure by pressing apostates and offenders to repentance vis-à-vis the exercise of the "Keys of the Kingdom." These keys were based in the Lord's authorization to warn, exhort, admonish and, if necessary, excommunicate members of their own company.

Trinterud and Stephen Brachlow have identified, I believe, a core theological divide between the churchmen and Non-conformists that has been over-looked. Trinterud traces what he calls the latter's "theology of conditionality" to William Tyndale, who found its roots in God's covenant with Adam by which all God's subsequent promises were conditional, based on man's responsibility to obey His laws, i.e., a conditional covenant, in essence, a contract, not a unilateral promise.[75] It was this covenant theology, of Tyndale's, as opposed to that of Calvin's, that accounts for the parting of the ways between those Puritans who believed they should conform to a church in which salvation rested upon God's unilateral promise, regardless of response, and those who believed that their very salvation depended on leaving the Church in obedience to God's commandment to holiness. On the basis of this theology, they took their stand in opposition to *iure divino* episcopacy.

Their radical theological paradigm extended beyond separation from a corrupt church, to one of separation from a worldly society, when Dudley Fenner (1558-1587) developed it into an entirely new schema of social organization founded on contracts, not

[75] Leonard J. Trinterud, "Origins of Puritanism" in *Church History* 20 (March 1951), 37-45. He notes that Tyndale subscribed to a concept of the church in which all were brothers, with no hierarchy, and served by two officers, an Elder who should preach, teach and distribute the sacraments, and a Deacon to care for the sick and the poor. These should be elected and ordained by the people.

only between clergy and laity, but between ruler and the ruled.[76] It was on this basis that the Non-conformists "claimed the right to gather themselves into churches by means of a church covenant by mutual agreement." The implications of this different "Covenantal theology" was revolutionary in that it meant that "recurrent or even perpetual revolution was possible, because the principle of mutual agreement of the people provided no check upon the number of times the people might change their minds in politics, in doctrine, in order, or in liturgy."[77]

It was precisely this theological paradigm that brought both Church and State government down on the new religion they called "popularism," threatening as it did the hegemony of both. The ensuing story of the early Separatist tradition will be one of unrelenting and unbridled persecution by both institutions. Other "left-wing" groups (e.g., the Fifth Monarchists, Levellers, Diggers and Baptists) employed different measures to reconstitute the church and society, but all agreed that authority resided within the people to form agreements, contracts and covenants on the basis of their reference point they called the *"Protoevangelium,"* which they traced to the original covenant between God and mankind. They viewed that covenant, not as an unconditional promise, but as a conditional contract by which salvation was offered to Adam and Eve after the fall—conditional upon their obedience to His rule.

No account of the spiritual and theological factors that inspired the Puritan reformers would be complete without acknowledging the impact that their "biblicism" had on the movement. One inexorable development was the millenarian eschatology that

---

[76] Dudley Fenner (fl. 1558-1587), was a protégé of Thomas Cartwright who co-pastored the Merchant Adventurers church in Antwerp with the Presbyterian Puritans Cartwright and Walter Travers.

[77] Trinterud, 49.

grew out of their emphasis on scripture as the source for all authority, polity, and spiritual inspiration. Millenarian eschatology was wide-spread among all reformers, not least among Elizabethan Puritans who believed that the light of the gospel was reappearing for the first time in sixteen centuries. Ergo, they were possibly living in the "last age."[78] Initially, it was the application of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation that formed the basis of their identification of the Church of Rome as anti-Christ, and the papacy as Babylon. It was on that basis that England had justified its separation from Rome.

In the seventeenth century the Separatists turned that paradigm against the established Church of England to justify their leaving it on the basis that it was not truly reformed. Conforming Puritans equated it with the lukewarm church of Laodicea, a true church, needing and awaiting the leadership of the magistrate to complete the reform. Some believed that the Lord would call other human instruments to force reform from within. Still others saw no hope of reform of so corrupt and false a church, and felt led to re-establish the primitive Church of Christ and the Apostles, consistent with the model of the primitive church they saw in the Bible.[79]

Sermons and publications of the Edwardian years were replete with apocalyptic references used to defend their Protestantism. With the accession of Mary, Protestants interpreted the return to Babylonian domination as God's punishment for their not having reformed their church sufficiently. This was the argument of the martyr, Nicholas Ridley. Some bishops interpreted the accession of Elizabeth as an answer to their prayers

---

[78] Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 77-79.

[79] Paul Christiansen, *Reformers and Babylon* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 1978, 9-11.

in exile for a godly magistrate who would carry out the reform of the church. As disillusionment with her *Via Media* grew, however, that apocalyptic view of the unfolding of English Church history was incorporated into the two major publications of Elizabethan and Stuart England: the Geneva Bible and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments.*[80] A belief in the imminent destruction of the disobedient fueled Puritan zeal, as they equated the Established Church with the anti-Christ, and identified oppressed Protestants with the saints persecuted by Babylon. Now that the Puritan press had provided knowledge of the will of God concerning the church, ignorance was no longer an excuse for accepting Elizabeth's "popish tyranny."[81] The clarion call to separation had been sounded.

Separation from the most traditional structure of society necessitated the creation of a new paradigm for a cohesive society within a true church for the former parishioners (and often their families): that of a congregation of believers formed on the basis of a church covenant that functioned like a surrogate family for the "last days" before the Lord's return. Henry Barrow became the articulate spokesman for the cause when he "synthesized the core of the separatist message into four main reasons for separating from the disordered and unholy synagogues and false teachers . . . in England," each directly related to Separatist apocalyptic vision:

> 1) Their false manner of worshipping the true God; 2) the profane and ungodly people received into and retained in the bosom of their churches; 3) the false and anti-Christian ministry imposed upon the churches; 4) the false and anti-Christian government wherewith their churches are ruled."[82]

---

[80] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments,* 8 volumes (originally published 1641-1660).

[81] Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints,* 77-82. This was the theme of Walter Travers' *Ecclesiastical Discipline*, 3-4, quoted in Albert Peel, *Second Parte of a Register* I (Cambridge: The University Press, 1915), 86. In 1585 Walter Travers had been expelled as a don from Cambridge by its Master, Thomas Hooker for expressing opposition to what later became his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

[82] Paul Christiansen, 73-74.

All subsequent Separatist literature recited and expanded on these four points.

All the currents converging to comprise Puritan and Separatist theology had one element in common: All came from a common spring of an avid biblicism which concluded that, because their authority was vested in the Bible, their stance was not subject to compromise, though loss, persecution, imprisonment or death be the consequence. The next chapter will look at the lives and writings of the leaders of the movement that culminated in the English Separatist Tradition and its denominational descendants, Congregationalism and the General and Particular Baptist churches. First, this overview of the context in which Separatism took place must be expanded to cover subsequent developments during the Stuart period (1604–1689) that culminated in a political revolution before the radically new schema for a church became acceptable.

Influences and Motivations for Separation in the Stuart Period

When Elizabeth died without an heir, England reached out to Scotland where the Protestant-raised James VI sat on the throne. It was widely assumed that he, reared in the Reformed Church tradition implemented by John Knox, would be fully supportive of the emerging party of Puritans devoted to a Presbyterian polity for the Established Church. In light of these hopes, and the prospect of latitude in religious matters that Elizabeth's "Settlement" had not afforded the various Puritan factions, James VI of Scotland was met en-route to becoming James I of England by representatives bearing a petition for reform in religious matters, known at the "Millenary Petition, supposedly signed by 1000 deposed Puritan ministers. James' response was to offer a Conference at Hampton Court

for consideration of their grievances and requests.[83] But James well-understood the destabilization that toleration for religious factions could cause, and had no sympathy with any version of Protestantism that did not bind the Church to State control. The cursory and insulting treatment the petitioners received at the Conference set the tone of the ensuing political, ecclesiological and theological milieu of the entire Stuart dynasty.

During the succeeding four reigns, Non-conformity became labeled "Dissent," which fomented separation from the Church, an act punishable as treason. Treason finally did erupt in civil wars between the throne and Parliament, culminating with the execution of both the king and his archbishop. During a brief interregnum, the Commonwealth was governed by parliamentary rule until the emerging swarm of sectaries threatened further destabilization of society itself, and martial law was enforced by the army under the "Protectorate" of Oliver Cromwell, which seemed (to a later generation) to be more repressive than a monarch under parliamentary control.

Once restored to the throne, Charles II and his successor's flirtation with Roman Catholicism proved to be a lethal threat to the Protestantism that had gained a firm foothold during the Interregnum. Not until 1689 was England finally ready to ameliorate its paradigm of rigid Church Establishment with a limited toleration for loyal Protestantism in various forms. Thus, this period concludes with a revolution of State and Church, vis-à-vis a "bloodless coup" that embraced a new, invited sovereign who would enforce a new religious milieu on the basis of toleration for religious Non-

---

[83] Henry Martyn Dexter and Morton Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1978), 334-354; White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 114; Marsden, 256-272. What English Protestants had failed to realize was that James had long taken umbrage at the way his mother, Queen Mary Stuart, had been treated by the Protestant Church in Scotland, eventually being forced to seek exile in the court of her cousin, Elizabeth, where she had been executed for her involvement in intrigues that threatened Elizabeth's security.

conformity. The following section will trace the highlights of the conflicts that ultimately brought about this "Glorious Revolution" with the accession of William of Orange and his wife, Mary, daughter of the Stuart James II, and the parliamentary Act of Toleration (1689) that legitimized toleration for dissent from the Established Church.

Political and Socioeconomic Motivations for Separation in the Stuart Period

In the Stuart regime, it becomes virtually impossible to unravel the religious from the political factors operating. William Bradford, in his endeavor to give a first-hand account of the political causes of Non-conformity resulting from the Puritans' having shown their hand to the new king and his Archbishop Richard Bancroft provides an insight as to the situation the Puritans would have to deal with for the next three-quarters of a century. Bradford wrote that

> Conformity, absence of schism, uniformity in service and doctrine, unquestioning obedience to the king as titular head of the Church was Bancroft's agenda, opposition to the canons of Convocation became opposition to lawful authority, and thus a menace to the supremacy of the king. This close intermixture of state and religious policy makes it difficult at times to determine which is a dominant factor, politics or religion. . . . While ceremonies were the ostensible cause of the disposition, political reasons formed quite an essential part in the policy [of James I.][84]

This researcher can identify with Bradford's difficulty, as political dictums had religious consequences, and religious conflicts sparked political responses. Both venues were affected by James' own immoral lifestyle. That, and his promotion of the "Book of Sports," widely seen as an official attempt to profane the Sabbath, raised the level of distrust among sincere Churchmen who were drawn into sympathy with the ideals of

---

[84] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 4th edn., 1912), 19.

Puritans. According to Puritan writers, all who evinced "piety, zeal and earnestness in religion were treated with contempt."[85]

Pious churchmen who had never concerned themselves with what they regarded as trivial quibbling over "indifferent" things found themselves forced to align with the only party by which they were not mocked. Anyone who discountenanced vice was stigmatized as a "Puritan" even if he conformed to the Prayer Book, ceremonies and vestments. "Preferring sermons to ribaldry made one a Puritan, and thus an enemy to the king and to his government, seditious, factious, and in short, a hypocrite."[86] Pious men like Richard Baxter (1615-1691), who sought out sermons across parish lines when lacking in their own church, were liable to persecution, presentment at ecclesiastical courts, fines, censures and even excommunication.

When James I sought a Catholic match for his son Charles with the Spanish *Infanta*, and it became known that all children of the marriage would be under Roman Catholic tutelage for thirteen years while retaining the right to succession, the king became suspect of facilitating the restoration of popery into England. When James' son Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625, he, like his father was unwilling to accept Parliament's attempts to restrain his *iure divino* sovereignty. He entered into a power struggle with Parliament over taxes to finance his government, and in 1638 fomented a rebellion in Scotland by imposing bishops and the English Prayer Book on that Presbyterian-Reformed nation.[87] When Parliament, instead of granting the appropriations

---

[85] Marsden, 348.

[86] Marsden, 349.

[87] Marsden, 399. This imposition was seen as a frontal assault, not only on the foundational Covenant on which the Kirk of Scotland was established, but the very liberty of Scotland which was bound up with that Covenant. In response, in 1638 they "bound themselves by this solemn oath to defend the

he requested, responded with the grievances of the people he dismissed it and resorted to levying fees on imports and manufacturers by "royal prerogative" for a period of twelve years. When Charles's Prime Minister, William Laud (1572-1645), replaced communion tables with altars, reinstated the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice of the real presence of Christ in the host, and re-introduced ceremonies and ornaments into the parish churches, these measures resurrected fears and protests against the trappings of popery. But all who opposed Laud's practices were seen as disturbers of the peace of the nation, and threats to the king's divine right to authority over state and church. Labeled Puritans and schismatics, and accused of disloyalty to England, they were targeted to be eliminated from their positions in church and state.[88] It was this intransigence of Charles (and Laud) that was a major factor that brought on the civil wars between king and people and culminated in the executions of both.

The economic duress of civil war, in addition to several years of bad harvests in the 1640's led to an increase in poverty. The Puritans responded to this by making provision of relief contingent upon the practice of religion, thereby asserting their understanding of the mutual dependence of religion and charity. Many Non-conformists also had experienced poverty due to suspensions and depositions from their posts, and the fines and imprisonments they had suffered under James and Charles. These economic straits and the response of the Puritans greatly increased popular support for their policies

---

ancient doctrine and discipline of the Kirk, under all penalties which might befall. . . . [and] to resist all those errors and corruptions . . . to the utmost of their power all the days of their lives." It was this Oath that Scotland in turn imposed on the Parliament of England five years later when it sought their aid in its Civil War against Charles. 398.

[88] Marsden, 356-366. George Abbott, James' Abp. of Canterbury, was under suspension for two years awaiting litigation for accidentally having killed a man. This hiatus of ecclesiastical control afforded Laud the time he needed to implement his innovations, buttressing them with ecclesiastical laws passed by Parliament. Those who opposed him (e.g., Bp. Joseph Hall of Exeter and Norwich) were impeached and committed to the Tower for treason. 384-390.

among the common people during these years in spite of jeopardous circumstances.[89] It was at this point that a new party of "Democratic Puritans" arose, that extended their original desire for reform of the Church to an agenda for the replacement of the entire church-state establishment, with a Presbyterian polity. It was this new brand of Puritans that exercised power in the Long Parliament during the Interregnum.[90] And it was in reaction to both the Episcopal and Presbyterian establishments that many became not only Non-Conformists and Dissenters, but Independent Separatists and Baptists. Their story will be told in Chapters Two and Three.

In response to the threat to the peace of the realm caused by the many emerging sectaries during the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell had himself proclaimed Lord Protector of England in 1653. He had welcomed sectaries of all stripes into the Parliamentary Army, and his constitution, the "Instrument of Government," had forbidden that any should be compelled by penalties to conform to the public religion. He had appointed both Independents and Baptists to positions as "Triers" and "Ejectors" and promised that no one should be ejected for holding Baptist views. Both groups stood for congregational, or "gathered," congregations as opposed to the former churches formed on parochial lines, and believed that they should be subject to the magistrate in civil matters only. The fiasco of the Presbyterian Westminster Assembly's attempt to

---

[89] Bebb, 129-141. Richard Baxter created a cloth-making industry in his parish of Kidderminster; the Baptist Richard Haines promoted the construction of a "Working Hospital for the Indigent" in Horsham, in which children would be trained in a trade and taught to read; and as early as 1656, many funds were set up to provide for the "new poor," i.e., ejected ministers. These are only a few examples of ways in which Puritanism exonerated itself and gained support at the "grassroots" level while dissatisfaction with the Establishment was growing into outright rejection of the Church and its leadership.

[90] Marsden, 409-424, elucidates the religio-political process during which Puritans attempted a new, Presbyterian, Established Church and the maneuverings by which they were purged and the Commonwealth became a Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. This is the period of burgeoning sectarianism which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

impose their Directory of Worship as the "established" form in place of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer had resulted in a purge of Presbyterian leadership from Parliament that year, and another, disparate and threatening view had arisen: The Fifth Monarchists, an extreme militant application of millenarian theology asserted that the time of Christ's reign was imminent and that "the saints should take the kingdom and possess it" by the sword if necessary.[91] When Cromwell took action to crush this destabilizing opposition to his government, he lost the support of many who had seen him as the champion of religious liberty. Upon his death in 1658, his government fell apart under the incompetent governance of his son, Richard. Fears of continuing unrest united both Independents and Royalists to restore a monarchy that would be subject to the hegemony of Parliament. Thus Charles II, son of Charles I, was invited to return from exile in 1660.

The story of the Restoration began with the largesse of Charles II's Breda Declaration that promised "liberty for tender consciences," but he soon attempted to force those consciences into submission by laws that made present or former Dissent subject to persecution through enforcement of a code of suppressive measures, the "Clarendon Code," promoted on behalf of the king's absolute and despotic rule. Once again, politics attempted to trump religion, and religion spread like seeds disseminated by a fierce gale. The 1664 "Act for Suppressing Seditious Conventicles" called for the banishment of all who did not commune in the Church of England, punishable by a sentence of death for those who returned. Some Non-conformists went to the American colonies; some

---

[91] Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* I (London: n.p., 1811), 257. This Interregnum period is treated in detail in this resource, pp. 220-262.

became occasional conformists; but most participated in underground conventicles to support each other against the persecution by what they believed was a false church.

The clerics of the parochial churches fled in 1665 with the arrival of plague in London. Deposed, Non-conforming ministers stepped in to fill abandoned pulpits and minister to the dying. Nevertheless the 1665 Corporation Act was passed to drive them from the towns if they did not subscribe to the "*et cetera* oath" of unabridged loyalty to the king in all matters. 1666 brought the fire of London, further collapse of the economy, and the impeachment of Ld. Clarendon, but Parliament retained the laws against conventicles in spite of Charles'1672 offer of Indulgence for Non-conformity in the hope of gaining their loyalty, intending to extend it to Roman Catholics. His sympathetic treatment of "papists" led to Parliament's passage of a "Test Act" (1673) that required anyone holding a position in the government to commune in the Church of England. Enforcement of this Act against Dissenters (the term for those who violated the 1662 Act of Uniformity) forced many of them into poverty as a result of fines and imprisonment.[92]

In 1685, Charles' brother, James II, ascended to the throne, openly declaring himself a Catholic. With little taste either for another civil war or for reversion to papal intrusions into the Court, Parliament required that he issue a proclamation reinstating all the penal laws against all forms of Dissent in the hope of restricting his agenda of filling bishoprics and university and government posts with papists. Church courts were activated and church wardens were enjoined to present any who did not commune in their parish churches. James assumed absolute power and issued a Declaration of Indulgence for Dissent, pretending to espouse the cause of Non-conformists in the interest of

---

[92] Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* I, 355-364.

granting toleration for Catholics. This was viewed with suspicion by Dissenters because it was issued by royal prerogative, rather than an act of Parliament, although some took advantage of the opportunity to procure licenses for preaching and places to worship unmolested.[93] James' blatant catholicizing agenda stimulated a sweeping change of regime in 1688: the "Glorious Revolution" of both state and church vis-à-vis a "bloodless coup" that invited William of Orange and James' daughter, Mary, to take the English throne and enforce a new religious milieu, on the basis of legislation for toleration of religious non-conformity.

Next, we must consider the ecclesiological, spiritual, and theological context of the Stuart period of the Reformation that drove Dissent into Separatism and fired it in the kiln of persecution until it became sufficiently strong to survive, and develop into the (Independent) Congregationalist and Baptist denominations.

Ecclesiological Motivations for Separation in the Stuart Period

Non-conformity has been called "Puritanism excommunicated from the Church and proscribed by the State."[94] During the Tudor years, it was primarily the monarchs who would tolerate no divergences from the outward observances of their religion. Under the first two Stuarts, however, it was the prelates who were the active persecutors. The interest of the Established Church and the object of all legislation was enacted for the purpose of conserving the Anglican hierarchy.[95]

---

[93] Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* I, 467-494

[94] Turner, 20.

[95] Turner, 36. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* I provides an example of this legislation enacted to suppress sectaries by both the Anglican and Presbyterian churches, viz.: In 1645, a Parliamentary Act forbade preaching by anyone that was not ordained in the Reformed Church.

In 1640 the Convocation of Bishops affirmed the divine right of kings, and extended the penalties against popish recusants to apply to all Non-conformists. Furthermore, they imposed an "*et cetera"* oath by which all clerics were constrained "never to consent to alter the government of this church by archbishops, deans, archdeacons, *et cetera,* as it stands now established."[96] This raised the question as to how broadly the "et cetera" might be applied with respect to prelates, or to altars, bowing, and liberty of conscience in doctrinal matters.

When the November 1640 Parliament convened (the "Long Parliament"), their first concern addressed the abuses in religion which violated the laws and liberties of England by which "good men were undone for not dancing on Sundays, while all popery is countenanced."[97] Those who wished to purify the church had been cast as the enemies of it, and of the kingdom. Measures taken against them by the Privy Council, Star Chamber and the High Commission Court came under review, the 1640 Convocation was declared illegal, and Prime Minister Laud was charged with forcing episcopacy on Scotland. He was brought to trial for treason, impeached, and executed in 1645.

This new state of affairs was brought about because sectarianism had spread through the proliferation of conventicles which wielded political as well as religious influence, having drawn people away from parish churches into their "faction." These new "democratic Puritans" now issued "Root and Branch" petitions to Parliament demanding the abolition of episcopacy, as an instrument of anti-Christ. Public sentiment turned violently against the bishops who had participated in the Convocation of 1640.

---

[96] Marsden, 418.

[97] Marsden, 421.

Religion then began to take second place to politics as Ireland rebelled, and Scotland invaded England in retaliation for Laud's attack against its Kirk. Parliament could not support King Charles I's agenda to bring Scotland under the heel of the prelates. His army marched north, and civil war broke out, with the democratic Puritans carrying the support of Parliament in rebellion against the monarch. They sought the aid of Scotland in defense of what they believed was the true Protestant faith and the rights of Englishmen which the king and his prelates had abrogated. Those whom Laud had tried to suppress joined this Parliamentary Army, taking their model from the Old Testament example of God's people going to war to promote God's cause. Led by Oliver Cromwell, who also believed that the Puritan cause was God's, they were anxious to propitiate the Scots to obtain their assistance. The Scottish General Assembly urged Parliament to establish a uniformity of church government in the two kingdoms, meaning the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in England, and England entered into the Solemn League and Covenant to execute its civil wars against its king.[98]

The sectaries filled the army and proliferated their schema of independence for individual gathered churches, so that, in spite of suppressive measures by the Presbyterians in Parliament, they penetrated parishes throughout the hinterland as well as the parishes of London by the end of the civil wars. Cromwell tolerated them to the point where some became a threat to the unity of his government. When the Interregnum ended, the Restoration was accepted by all on the basis of Charles II's Declaration from Breda that he would respect liberty for tender consciences. They soon realized that they had been betrayed, and would face their most dire persecution under the second Stuart

[98] Marsden, 430-456.

regime. However, since James I had expressly rejected toleration for their cause, they were deprived of any government support. Those who now saw the need to join those who were separating fully from the Church purchased advowsons and impropriations to become their own Patrons, and exercised the right to elect their own ministers.[99] Being self-supporting in every way, they managed to survive and grow through the coming persecution that was aimed at driving them into poverty or exile. Chapters V and VI will recount the story of how this was possible.

The legislation known as the "Clarendon Code," passed during the second Stuart regime, proved to be most devastating to the sectaries, resulting in the ejection of almost 2000 ministers who refused to conform to the 1662 Act of Uniformity. In 1661, the Corporation Act had required all ministers to commune in the Church of England. The 1664 Conventicle Act made it illegal for more than five people in addition to a family to worship in a way other than by the Common Prayer Book. The 1665 Five-Mile Act prohibited Non-conformists from coming within five miles of a previous pastorate, and a second Conventical Act (1670) doubled the fines and imprisonment penalties for participating in an "illegal" worship service. The unintended effect of this Code was that it caused more emphasis to be placed on autonomy and independence on the part of separated congregations in order for them to survive as Independents.[100]

---

[99] Watts, *The Dissenters* I, 60-61. This resource recounts the story of the Stuart persecution in full, noting that in the end, "it marked a strengthening, not a weakening of Dissent." In fact, shared persecution caused many Presbyterians who had formerly upheld the idea of a national Church, to become sympathetic to the Independents and cooperated with them in finding ways of resisting persecution. It was not this local support, however, that adequately accounts for the survival of Independency, but the "zeal of individual Congregationalist incumbents" and their small companies of believers, who created a new concept of what it meant to be a church for each other, 243.

[100] Ernest A. Payne and Norman S. Moon, *Baptists and 1662* (London: The Carey-Kingsgate Press, 1962), 21-23, 36.

Theological and Spiritual Motivations for Separation in the Stuart period

During the reign of the early Stuarts, and Prime Minister Laud, the issue of Sabbatarianism was fueled by their issuance of the "Book of Sports" (1633), which not only permitted, but mandated public sports on Sundays. This piqued the Puritans' Sabbatarian response because they believed that keeping the Sabbath holy meant that the day should be spent in spiritual exercises: i.e., hearing sermons, studying the Word of God, praying, and engaging in godly conversation. They regarded this as a "moral law," as opposed to the king's law that required games which they believed profaned the Sabbath. When the State-church added "injury to insult" by suspending ministers and arresting those who violated its version of Sabbath, the offended felt assured that they were up against anti-Christ in the person of Laud and his enforcers.[101]

During the early seventeenth century the Puritan party had grown in response to hatred for the scandals and abuses of the clergy. Episcopacy was seen as protecting the corruption as opposed to trying to root it out. According to the Baptist historian, Ernest Payne, in addition to the lay evangelism propagated by the New Model Army during the Civil War, it was the Church's "attacks against Puritan lectureships [that] resulted in the real beginning of Independency from within Puritanism."[102] The Westminster Assembly of Presbyterian divines that controlled Parliament during the Interregnum did not support toleration for dissent from their own form of government and liturgy, but instead, suppressed "heresies, sectaries, Separatists and Anabaptists—including Non-conforming

---

[101] Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 161-177. At this juncture, doctrinal issues became the primary impetus for dissent—not only because of Laud's "Arminianism," but because the Puritans believed that "the connexion between correct Christian doctrine and a holy life is closer than some suppose." Evans, *Early English Baptists* I, 198.

[102] Payne, *The Free Church Tradition,* 51.

Puritans."[103] The clash over Sabbatarianism became so virulent the issue took on a momentum that propelled it across the 1640's and '50's, where it was transplanted in the ensuing decades. Thus, when the later Stuarts (1660-89) resurrected the 1633 Book of Sports to assert their authority over the Church and society, they were met with a theological resistance that had taken on eschatological dimensions.

In Puritan theology there was no secular realm. All events had spiritual meaning, including plague, famine and war. These were instruments of divine vengeance for the sins of England (i.e., its idolatry of authority). The Puritan preachers' theme was that the plagues and depression were the punishment of God's wrath for the immorality of the people and especially for the king's marriage to a Catholic, his countenancing idolatry, and England's betrayal of the Huguenots at La Rochelle. They "saw themselves as prophets of the culture of discipline, at a time when the economic crisis made a reformation of manners more than ever imperative," and assumed the mantle of Old Testament prophets, warning of future disasters.[104]

This new expression of Puritanism, which Hunt calls "Militant Protestantism," resolved enough difficulties to allow the anti-prelatarians and royalists to coalesce around a common cause, and gave the cause its cultural validation by creating "a synthesis of religious, political and economic discontent." Thus by "reorienting social policy at the local as well as the national level, it provided a structure for discipline within and across

---

[103] From within the Westminster Assembly, five "Dissenting Brethren" were first called "Independents" because they stood for the right of every congregation to govern itself. It was due to the witness of the outcast Independents, who had gained numbers and strength under the guidance of the Army's "mechanic preachers" that the Presbyterian attempt at establishment failed, and the new government of the Revolution finally recognized the need for toleration as a policy in 1689. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition,* 52-59.

[104] Hunt, 198. The basic premise for Howe's *Sufficiency of the Spirit's Teaching* was that the natural man is at enmity with God, and that human learning is of the world, so that all spiritual knowledge must be laid on the true foundation of scripture, 3-4.

the parishes as local church officers assumed responsibility in their own communities, imposing a culture of discipline in the face of traditionalist resistance." Puritan theology was gaining credibility in a society "fissured by social and constitutional conflicts that broke apart along essentially religious lines." The Puritan preachers offered a persuasively simple explanation for all of England's woes. The disaffected of all classes were beginning to share the belief that "the question in England is whether Christ or anti-Christ should be Lord." [105]

In this religious milieu, their theology of eschatological millenarianism projected the Independents' "militant Protestantism" across the entire second half of the seventeenth century. Motivated by apocalyptic expectations, they saw their efforts as a battle against the anti-Christian forces entrenched in the Established Church. Having unseated King Charles to make way for King Jesus, they believed they were ushering in an era of Christ's reign. This impelled them to plant Independent churches into which they believed Christ was gathering his saints for the ultimate purpose of ruling a new Kingdom of God on earth.[106] Their model for their "Congregational Way" was the theocratic Israel of the Old Testament, extrapolated into the last days in which they saw themselves as the embodiment of a "New Israel," taking visible shape at the end of days, when the Lord would return as king, and they, "insofar as they were true to their vocation as saints," would be part of His kingdom.[107] Buttressed by this vision and the hope that

---

[105] William Hunt, 312-313.

[106] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* I, 130-134. The more radical, under the influence of the preaching of John Owen and the instigation of Leveller leader, John Lilburne, and Thomas Venner's Fifth Monarchy Men believed they should accomplish this by force. Their radicalism tarred the reputation of all Independents, whose agenda was a peaceful one they called the "Congregational Way" which will be explicated in Chapter V.

[107] Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 143-157.

their sacrifices were bringing in the New Age, nothing—neither the kingdom of this world, nor its anti-Christian Church—could discourage or defeat them.[108] The next section will look at the earliest actual experiments in English Separatism, going back to the reign of Queen Mary, which set the precedent for the development of the movement.

Earliest Experiments in Separatism

As mentioned above, some scholars trace the roots of Separatism back through the Marian underground congregations to Lollardy. A. B. Ely has made the case for this origin through John Wycliffe's (1329-1384) theological successor, William Tyndale (1492-1536), whose 1525 translation of the New Testament rendered presbutšroj as "elder" and ekklhs…a as "Congregation," suggesting that these would be the meanings those words held for the Apostles. As we investigate the tenacity with which all succeeding generations of Separatists resisted State-church attempts to stamp them out, we will see that one of the principles to which they clung was their belief that they were endeavoring to reconstitute Christ's Church according to His will and the apostolic intentions preserved in the scriptures.[109]

---

[108] Joshua Toulmin, *An Historical View of the State of the Protestant Dissenters in England, and of the Progress of Free Enquiry and Religious Life from the Revolution to the Accession of Queen Anne* (London: Longman, Hurst, Reese, Orme and Brown, 1814), provides a more detailed overview of this period of history than the present study allows. He offers a description of the major sects of Dissenters at the time of the Revolution. Those called Puritans had become denominated into Presbyterians, (263-79), Independents, (279-86), Baptists, (286-369), as well as Quakers and other groups that had diverged from the Puritan Movement into more radical expressions.

[109] A. B. Ely, "The Germs and Germination of English Congregationalism," *The Congregational Review* 2 (Sept. 1871): 443-446. Ely makes reference to a mid-fifteenth-century allusion to early "congregational" churches of the Lollards, (called Gospellers, Bible-Men or Known Men) as being "the only source of instruction the poor people had." They were accused by their bishop of "willing that all priests be one in degree and none of them above other of them, and they willed that under the priests be deacons, and no more orders, states or degrees in the clergy at all." 445. This radical "polity" became foundational for all congregational-style churches, at least in ideology. There is no record of continual surviving congregations, but Ely believes that the principle passed from Tyndale through John Frith (1503-1533), who resided with Tyndale in Germany, joining him in the production of texts and tracts for

R. Tudor Jones found the roots of what came to be called "The Congregational Way" even earlier in the "monastic ideal of a holy society knit together in godly discipline."[110] He also credited the influential example of the "Stranger Churches" of European exiles residing in England with permission to worship in their own way, independently of the Established Church. As a result of such activity in south-east England, there occurred a cross-fertilization of the ideas of old Lollardy and continental radicals, which gave birth to many indigenous conventicles that practiced freedom of worship during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary. Thus, when the Marian exiles returned in 1558, they did not create Non-conformist conventicles; they joined them, and nurtured them with the benefit of their experiences in congregational living. Inspired by such models, many recusants who were not able to go into exile formed underground congregations to preserve their Edwardian Protestantism, passing their example on to the

---

distribution in England. Frith, along with Nicholas Ridley (1500-1555), Hugh Latimer (1495-1555), and Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), joined the earliest roster of martyrs for Protestantism. Thus the roots of Separatist Protestantism went deep and were nurtured by the Word of God and the blood of martyrdom. It should be noted that David Lopez's *Separatist Christianity: Spirit and Matter in the Early Church Fathers* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) demonstrates that a precedent for separatism for "purist" ideals can be found in the first five centuries of Christian history.

[110] R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1692* (London: The Independent Press, Ltd., 1962), 13. The "Stranger Churches" (e.g., of John a Lasco in the 1550's and Valerand Poullian's congregation at Glastonbury) were originally subjected to active persecution until exonerated of the accusation of spreading the heresy of Anabaptism into England. The commission formed to discover their heresy discovered Joan Boucher of Kent and executed her and her mistress, the Lady Anne Askew for their colporteur activity, distributing Tyndale's Text and texts at Court. Nuttall, 4-5. E. B. Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience* cii – cxxiii, records the activities carried out to root out and suppress any hint of Anabaptistry in England. C. J. Clement, documents the martyrs of Essex and Kentish Non-conformity and exonerates them (including Joan and Lady Anne) of any Anabaptistical heresy. *Religious Radicalism in England 1535-1565,* Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology, ed. David E. Wright and Donald MacLeod (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1996), 62-172. *cf.* John Strype, *Historical Memorials . . . of Edward VI*, II pt. 1, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1822), 369-375.

next generation of those who became disillusioned with what they regarded as Elizabeth's incomplete reformation.[111]

Information on Marian congregations is scarce because they avoided keeping records, but some tracts and a few records have survived. There seem to have been three types: "Radicals" such as those led by the "Free-Willer," Henry Hart at Bocking, Essex in the mid-1550's; the "Orthodox," who used the Edwardian Prayer Book (e.g., those of Thomas Bentham and Thomas Rose in London); and a "Mixed" type that used the Prayer Book, but added a "sectarian" pattern of worship of Bible reading, prayer and discussion of religious questions, e.g., those who met at Islington, of which 22 members were imprisoned. Other groups met at Great Bentley, where a 19 year old and a 60 year old man were burned for reading scripture and praying, at Brighton, at Colchester, where 23 persons were apprehended and executed in 1556, and at Dedham and Billericay, Essex. Mary's Abp. "Bloody" Edmund Bonner (1500-1569) reported that there were many such meetings held in private houses during the time of service in the parish churches. They also met in woods and barns for fellowship, exposition of scriptures and opposition to the revived Roman Catholicism. Their commitment was constant enough to raise money for the support of members in prison, but their meetings and membership were fluid, coming together as they felt the need, and as leadership could be found to officiate. When a leader was arrested, they dispersed and re-grouped.[112] We will look at three such

---

[111] It is beyond the purview of this study to discuss the persons, places and controversies of the Marian exiles to the Continent. Resources that address these include John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials . . . of Edward VI,* III, pt. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1822), 230-418, and Punchard, 220-226.

[112] J. W. Martin, "Protestant Underground Congregations of Mary's Reign," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (Oct. 1984), 521-536.

congregations, whose existence has been documented, in order to appreciate the legacy inherited by the seventeenth-century Separatists.

One conventicle was led by the most influential English sectary of the post-Henrician period, in the hope of provoking righteous living among the lethargic "antinomian" Christians he found in the parish churches. Henry Hart exhorted the people to "follow Christ by taking up the cross of suffering, for only through self-denial in this life can beatitude be obtained in the next."[113] As early as 1548-56, Hart was conducting meetings of "privy churches" in the town of Bocking, Essex. He used the English Bible that Thomas Cromwell required to be placed in all the parish churches—(The Genevan Bible was not translated until 1560)—to point out discrepancies between scripture and church practices, and exhorted people to live not according to the ceremonies, but according to the Bible, which, he assured them, brought assurance of salvation to all who believe and practice holy living. Ergo, he was labeled a "Free-Willer." He advocated separation from the Established Church, first, to meet the need for religious fellowship that was uncontaminated by the company of the wicked and hypocritical, and secondly, because people need to hear or read the Bible for themselves and apply it to their own lives. His conventicle, which also drew an audience from Kent, addressed the question that echoed through the following 150 years: What does the Bible command concerning religious worship? Their provocative conclusion was that it is not the ceremonies or postures, but the hearts of the worshippers that are important.[114] The ground had been prepared and the seeds planted. There were two other early underground congregations

---

[113] Clement, 213.

[114] J. W. Martin, "English Protestant Separatism at its Beginnings: Henry Hart and the Free Will Men," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 7 (October, 1976): 55-74.

whose records have been preserved. We will look at their contribution to the Separatist Tradition.

The Marian Recusants' Church of Mr. John Rough

The first pastor of this congregation was Edmund Scrambler, D. D. of Cambridge University, who united himself with them at the beginning of Mary's reign until persecution forced him to go abroad. He was followed by Mr. Fowler, of whom nothing is known, and then in 1557, by Mr. John Rough, a friend of John Knox's from Scotland, who pastored them until he was betrayed to the Romanists while his group was meeting at Islington, Middlesex, now absorbed into London, "at their accustomed exercises of prayer and hearing the Word of God." Both Rough and Deacon Cuthbert Simpson were racked and burned, but their record book survived, having been placed in the hands of Mrs. Rough, because Simpson had had a dream about being taken prisoner.[115]

At issue in these secret gatherings was the question of whether authority resides in the minister and elders or the members. This issue would continue to be debated throughout the ensuing century as congregational polity and dynamics took shape out of these amorphous "proto-separatist" congregations. They could not rightly be called "Separatists" since they utilized the Prayer Book, but they did meet independently of their parish churches, refusing to receive the Mass there, and returning to them only after Mary died. They preceded Robert Browne's covenanted "company" in Norwich, but

---

[115] Walter, Wilson, 5-7; Benjamin Hanbury, *Ecclesiastical Memorials Relating to the Independents and Congregationalists from their Rise to the Restoration of the Monarchy* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1839), 15-18. Though racked three times, tortured in the stocks, and committed to the flames, this "pious, faithful and zealous man" never revealed the whereabouts or contents of the book. Wilson, 7. The stories of their martyrdom is told in Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* III, 722, and Samuel Clarke's martyrology, *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons* (London: n.p. 1683), 405-406.

established a precedent for it, paving the way for actual Separatism during the reign of Elizabeth, where a congregation testified that they recalled that a group of

> devout men and women had learnt that in a small company of Christian people, united to each other by strong mutual affection and a common loyalty to Christ, it was possible to realize in a wonderful way the joy and strength of the communion of saints and that such an assembly, though it had only a weaver or wheelwright for its minister, might have a vivid consciousness of access to God through Christ, and might receive surprising discoveries of divine righteousness and love.[116]

The Elizabethan Separatist Church of Mr. Richard Fitz[117]

In *Parte of a Register,* that invaluable compendium of Puritan documents published in 1593 by John Field, one finds this explanation of the rationale for separation from the Elizabethan Church taken from an epistle published in 1570 by a Mr. D. W., written "in his own defense, and the brethren that suffer deprivation for the popish ceremonies urged by the Bishops":

> As the Devill was the authour of corrupting the Church with worldly pompe, soe doth he now contende for reteyning some parte thereof. . . . Such Bishops as fled in Queen Mary's time . . . renounced and forsaken all this trumperie for which the peace is now disturbed, and afterwarde for their promotion sake, put them on agayne . . . until such time as they not regarding the peace of God's Church did thrust us their brethren from them: They therefore regard not the peace but are authours of this disturbance. The Lord God open the eyes of their minde that they may see what they doe.[118]

---

[116] Albert Peel, *First Congregational Churches,* 2.

[117] An exploration of the primary literature reveals several "fluid" congregations meeting privily during the Elizabethan reign. Timothy George, *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer U. Press, 1982), 5. One such group, led by John Browne, under the patronage of Katherine Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, was known as the "Brownings" from which the Fitz congregation seceded. Several scholars identify this church with the "Plumber's Hall" congregation, among them, Albert Peel, *First Congregational Churches,* 7-12, 24-28, and Ernest Payne, *Free Church Tradition,*17-18. *cf.* Watts, 24. Williston Walker makes the point that at this stage, all "the early separatist groups were of a fugitive and temporary character. *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner, 1985), 546.

[118] John Field, *A Parte of a register contayninge sundrie memorable matters* (1593), 11-12.

As in the days of Mary, the effect of suppression was to create a feeling of congregational identity and loyalty. One such expression was what Albert Peel regards as the first regularly constituted English congregational church. Led by Richard Fitz, with elected elder John Bolton and Deacon Thomas Bowland, it held clandestine but frequent meetings in houses every Sabbath day, and on the fourth day in the week, which "fostered a sense of personal loyalty and congregational identity which increased in proportion to the feeling of alienation from the institutional church." They saw themselves as either joined to Christ's body or, forsaking that union by yielding to the discipline of anti-Christ by communicating with the "Traditioners." For them, "the nature of the church and state, and supremacy of the Queen as Governor of the Church were at stake, with the challenge of the evolving new concept of the church as "local, visible, disciplined—subject to the Prince only in so far as the Prince was subject to the authority of the Word of God."[119]

Fitz's church, like all Elizabethan separated churches, which formed when Non-conforming parish ministers were displaced by the Elizabethan canon laws, was modeled after the Marian churches of London. But this church took the further step of articulating its *raison d'etre,* declaring in writing in 1567 that its aim was "to have the Word preached freely and purely and the Sacraments ministered purely without any tradition or invention of man." These they stipulated as being the "three trewe markes of Christe's Churche," and they were resolved "to have none of the filthy Canon Law, but discipline

[119] Timothy George, 30-32; Peel, *First Congregational Churches,* 34.

only, and altogether agreeable to the same heavenly and almighty word of our good Lord Jesus Christ."[120]

Albert Peel believes that this was the first truly "congregational" church because it was constituted on the basis of a covenant which has come down to us, viz.:

> Beyng thoroughly persuaded in my conscience, by the working and by the worde of the almightie, that these reliques of Antichriste be abominable before the Lorde our God. And also for that by the power and mercie, strength and goodness of the Lorde my God onelie, I am escaped from ye filthynes & pollution of these detestable traditions, through the knowledge of our Lorde and sauiour Iesus Christ: And last of all, in asmuch as by the working also of the Lorde Iesus his holy spirite, I haue ioyned in prayer, and hearing Gods worde, with those that haue not yelded to this idolatrouse trash, notwithstanding the danger for not commyng to my parish church, &c. Therefore I come not backe agayne to the preachynges, &c, of them that haue receaued these markes of the Romysh beast.[121]

The issues articulated in this covenant were reiterated through the ensuing century as Puritanism spawned separation, and Separatism spawned Independency.

We owe our knowledge of this congregation and the precedent it set, to the record of the arrest of its principle members, and their examination before Abp. Grindal. Their names and responses to interrogation are recorded in *The Remains of Edmund Grindal:*

> Here you have shewed yourselves disorderly, not only in absenting yourselves from your parish churches . . . but also you have gathered together and made assemblies, using prayers and preachings, yea and ministering the sacraments among yourselves . . . yea, and no longer than yesterday you were together in the number of an hundred; whereof there were about 14 or 15 of you sent to prison, and our being here is to will you to leave off or else you shall see the Queen's letter . . . .

To which, one John Smith (not Smyth, the se-Baptist born 1570), replied:

---

[120] Quoted in Burgess, 24, and in Peel, *First Congregational Churches,* 32.

[121] "Covenant of the Priuye Churche of Richard Fitz." State Papers. Dom. Eliz. Addenda. Vol. xx (107.) ii. Quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters II Illustrative Documents* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), 13-15. Fitz's reasons for separation may be found in Appendix A.

> When it comes to this place, that all our preachers were displaced by your law so that we could not hear none of them in any church . . . except Father Coverdale . . . and yet God knows that man was so fearful that he durst not be known unto us where he preached . . . . Then we bethot us what were best to do; and we remembered that there was a congregation of us in this city in Queen Mary's days; and a congregation in Geneva, which used a book and order of preaching, ministering of the sacraments and discipline most agreeable to the word of God . . . by that godly and well-learned man, Master Calvin . . . which book and order we now hold."[122]

Grindal responded, "In this severing yourselves from the society of other Christians, you condemn not only us, but also the whole state of the Church reformed in King Edward's days, yea, and many good men have shed their blood for the same."[123] These courageous people left their legacy to us in the form of written testimonies and a 1571 Petition to Queen Elizabeth, requesting that she "cast down popish idolatries." They received no official response other than increased persecution for all separation.[124]

In this chapter, the influences and motivations for separation from the Established Church have been traced from an historiographical perspective. Pertinent evidences have been cited through the Tudor and Stuart periods with respect to the political, socio-economic, ecclesiological, spiritual and theological domains within which the Free Church movement took place. Parallel movements taking place on the continent were considered outside the purview of this research because the over 300 documents surveyed pertaining to the English Separatist Movement did not make reference to them as exerting a substantial influence. On this basis, movements such as the continental Anabaptist's theology and ecclesiology, although existing in parallel, were not considered to be

---

[122] These samples are extracted from *The Remains of Edmund Grindal,* Vol. 19, edited for the Parker Society by Wm. Nicholson (Cambridge: The University Press, 1843), 202-204.

[123] Claire Cross, *Elizabethan Religious Settlement,* 29.

[124] Watts, 23.

sources, since the documents pertaining to the radical Reformation in England did not cite them as such, although some interfacing did take place between the English churches in exile and the Mennonite milieu in Holland, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two will examine the specific rationale for separation as it was expressed by its leaders, and lived out in the experiences of those who became Separatists, and pioneers of the Independent (Congregational) and Baptist denominations. For other "popular" reformation movements, see "Suggestions for Further Research," Chapter Six.

CHAPTER TWO

Rationale for Separation in the Lives and Writings of its Initiators

It is the opinion of J. W. Marsden that it was the separated church of Richard Fitz that spawned those "extreme Puritans" who, in turn, spawned the Separatists that we recognize as the first Independent Congregationalist and Baptist congregations under the leadership of those whom we will address in this chapter.[1] Robert Browne and Robert Harrison led the first covenanted company of believers to declare their separation from the established church. Their experience and influence will be addressed first.

Robert Browne (1550-1633) and Robert Harrison (d. 1585)

Robert Browne is best known for being the architect of the first attempt at separation. He articulated what separation should be, and demonstrated what it should not be. Nevertheless, he posed such a threat to the Established Church, his name became an epithet for all Non-conformity—"Brownism." This is because the Church hierarchs realized that he had laid the groundwork for an alternative Church polity and order which, if effected, would place the religious life of the nation beyond their control and jeopardize the sacrosanct structure of the national government itself. Who was this man?

Browne graduated from Cambridge University in 1572. That institution had become a focal point and breeding ground of Puritanism as a result of the influx of scholars returning from exile on the Continent. Before attending the university, Browne had been an attaché to a British diplomat in Holland, and had been influenced by the

[1] Marsden, 56-57.

Reformed Church Protestantism he witnessed there.[2] Upon taking his B. A. in 1572, and with a commitment to furthering the reform of the English Church, he moved to Dry Drayton in Cambridgeshire in 1578, where he sat under the tutelage of Richard Greenham, a parish priest known for his Puritan sympathies. Greenham allowed Browne to preach in his pulpit in spite of Browne's having rejected a license from Abp. Grindal on the basis that, according to his reading of scripture, Christ had not appointed bishops to add their own laws and authority to Christ's, and therefore were "anti-Christs." Having become convinced that "the Kingdom of God was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather by the worthiest, were they never so fewe,"[3] and hearing of some "forward" (i.e., progressive) preachers in Norwich, he sought them out in 1580. He found lodging with a former Cambridge colleague, Robert Harrison, serving as a parish minister there.

In spite of Harrison's reservations, Browne convinced him that "every true Christian was to leave such parishes and to seek the Church of God wheresoever" even if coerced to conform under threat of persecution.[4] He finally prevailed upon Harrison to leave his parish church on the basis that "God will receave none to communion and covenant with him, which as yet are at one with the wicked."[5] In 1581, he and some followers, "gave their consent to joine themselves to the Lord in one covenant and fellowship together," and formed the first "congregational" church on English soil.[6]

---

[2] Ernest Payne, *The Free Church Tradition,* 38-39.

[3] Robert Browne, *A True and Short Declaration,* 6, quoted in Albert Peel and Leland Carlson, ed., *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 67.

[4] Robert Browne, *True and Short Declaration,* 7, 8.

[5] Robert Browne, *True and Short Declaration,* 407, quoted in Timothy George, 36.

[6] Robert Browne, *True and Short Declaration,* 422, quoted in Shakespeare, 22.

Imprisoned for preaching at conventicles, Browne obtained release only by the intervention of a distant relative, Ld. Burghley, the Queen's Treasurer. There is an extant and revealing letter from Bp. Freke of Norwich to Ld. Burghley concerning Browne who, upon release, had been apprehended for preaching again. It reads

> Upon complaint made by many godly preachers, for delivering unto the people corrupt and contentious doctrine. . . . The man also to be feared, left, if he were at liberty, he would seduce the vulgar sort of the people, who greatly depend on him, assembling themselves to the number of 100 at a time, in private houses and conventicles to hear him, not without danger of some thereabout. . . . Mr. Browne's late coming into my diocese and teaching straunge and dangerous doctrine in all disordered manner, hath greatly troubled the whole country, and brought many to great disobedience of all laws and magistrates. . . . having private meetings in such a close and secret manner as that I know not possibly how to suppress the same. . . . [which] enforceth me to crave most earnestly your Lordship's help in suppressing him. . . . Ludham, 19 April, 1581.[7]

In this environment, Browne began to articulate his unique concept of the Christian Church as

> I. A company of persons of Christian character, united to God in the bonds of a covenant. To every such church belong all the powers necessary for self-organization, government and discipline. Such a church is a democracy, under the supreme and immediate headship of Christ, and each member is responsible to Christ for the welfare of the church to which he belongs.
>
> II. But each church is also bound to its sister churches, and is to give and receive aid and counsel whenever these are needed.
>
> III. The Church and State are independent of each other, and therefore civil magistrates have no right to exercise lordship in spiritual affairs.[8]

Under threat of further incarceration, and convinced that "Christians must have no fellowship or ungodly communion with wicked persons who worship in popish ways which are of anti-Christ, whose repetitions have a show of religion with litanies and

---

[7] Quoted in Hanbury, *Historical Memorials,* 19.

[8] Quoted in Davis, 17.

forms without knowledge and feeling," Browne and Harrison led their followers to Holland where they tried to form a congregation on these principles in Middleburg, where Thomas Cartwright had formed a congregation of English merchants after his advocacy of Puritanism cost him his chair at Cambridge University.[9]

Here Browne produced the writings that expounded his grounds for separation, and principles for the gathering of a true church that propelled the experiment into a movement. In 1582 he published his three-part volume, *A Book which Sheweth the Life and Manner of all true Christians, and how unlike they are unto Turkes and Papists and Heathen folke.* The first part of this tome is his best-remembered work, "A Treatise of Reformation without tarrying for anie" in which he called for separation as a means towards the ideal of producing a true church unhindered by the Magistrate, the members of which "should be raised to a state of all possible perfection."[10] The following year he produced his *True and Short Declaration both of the gathering and ioining together of certaine persons and also of the lamentable breach and division which fell amongst them* in which he laid out the covenant, polity and principles of his gathered church. He also candidly admitted to the turmoil into which it degenerated.[11]

In Holland, free of the cohesive effects of persecution, the little covenanted company split into irreconcilable pieces. There was much to be learned from what went

---

[9] Champlin Burrage, *The True Story of Robert Browne* (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), 12; *cf.,* Payne, *Free Church Tradition,* 39.

[10] Robert Browne, *A Book which Sheweth, &c.,* (Netherlands: 1582) quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 101-102; and Albert Peel and Leland Carlson, *Writings of Robert Browne &c.,* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 153-170. This work contains Browne's constitution for his ideal church based on his exposition in Part 2 of "A Treatise upon the 23. of Matthew."

[11] Robert Browne, *A True and Short Declaration, &c.* (Netherlands: 1583). Peel and Carlson's *Writings* present the arguments, pp. 399-431. Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I provides Harrison's account of his experience in what he calls "a veritable hornets' nest," 110-111.

wrong. Two scholars have offered an analysis of what caused this initial experiment in separatism to fail. They concur that it was the very principles of democratic congregational polity carried to the extreme that proved to be too idealistic for those not used to exercising such authority. Commitment to watch over the souls of their brethren rapidly degenerated into minute scrutiny of each other's faults and broke out, according to Browne's own words, into "contention, evil speeches and slanders . . . to open defiance and railings." Ultimately, "whisperings, back-bitings and murmurings, threats, taunts, revilings and false accusations" characterized the church as it split into parties in support of Browne vs. Harrison until Browne took his followers to Scotland and Harrison remained at Middleburg to minister to the church until his death in 1585.[12]

In Scotland this "pioneer" did not hesitate to declare that "the whole discipline of the Church of Scotland was amiss."[13] This aroused the rancor of the presbyters whose reaction convinced him that their rule was far more abusive than that of the bishops, because it was multiplied by a thousand. Upon returning to England with his wife and child, Browne discovered that two men had been hanged for selling his books. This was the final trauma that caused him to sue for peace. He wrote to Ld. Burghley, requesting a letter of recommendation for an "ecclesiastical preferment" in the Church he had defied, and became known ever since as the one who defected from the cause by conforming. He lived for 40 years as curate of Achurch-cum-Thorpe, Northamptonshire, where he hired a vicar to conduct services, living to the age of eighty-three, and dying, an

---

[12] Browne, *True and Short Declaration, &c.,* 21-22. Henry Martyn Dexter, *Congregationalism of the Last 300 Years as Seen in its Literature* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1880), 112-113. Powicke's analysis is that being "too eager to scan and correct the faults of one another, and so too easily betrayed by the whispered malice which poisons truth," Brown and Harrison parted company. *Robert Browne, Pioneer of Modern Congregationalism* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, Inc., 1910), 36.

[13] Powicke, *Robert Browne, Pioneer,* 37.

embittered man, having been accused of abandoning his principles for the sake of security, while those whom he had influenced to separate, suffered for them in exile.[14]

Defection is not his only legacy, however, for it was Robert Browne who first articulated the principles of ecclesiology that became foundational for future Independency. He denied that it was the role of the civil magistrate to effect reform of the Church, because church and state are separate realms. He stipulated a model of the Church according to the New Testament, of which Christ is the head and members are united not by compulsion, but by covenanting together willingly into a church. Officers are elected by the congregation, and authority is given to all members to guide and teach. Sister churches exercise no hierarchy over one another, but are local bodies which support each other, and the purpose of separation was to constitute a pure, undefiled community.[15]

Thus, Robert Browne departed from the Puritan mainstream by carrying it to its logical conclusion of separation from the corruption and laxness he saw them willing to tolerate, seeing separation as the only way of dissociating from the ungodly. His system, which denied the bishops their power, became known as the offense of "Brownism." Subsequent reformers embraced the principles for which they stood, viz.,

> It is "the first duty of every true Christian to endeavor the highest attainable purity of faith and life;"
>
> Because the Church of England was "so corrupt under subjection to an unscriptural hierarchy, true Christians, failing to reform their parish church must separate from it to follow Christ elsewhere."[16]

---

[14] Burrage, *True Story of Robert Browne,* 61-71. *cf.,* Shakespeare, 48-53.

[15] Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1893), 12-14.

[16] Browne, *True and Short Declaration, &c.,* 13.

> Because there was no hope of reform by the Magistrate, Christians are not obligated to wait for them, though they be persecuted for it, and since they have no more authority over the Church than other Christians, they ought not to be obeyed in religious matters.[17]
>
> Those "true believers, separating themselves from the corrupt State-church and rightly associating themselves together, in so doing, constitute themselves a true Church of Christ, independent of all control but His."
>
> Such a church must be constituted by a covenant with God and on their own behalfe, sealed with the sacrament of baptism.[18]

With Browne's subscription to the Established Church, leadership of the second stage of Separatism passed to a trio of reformers who were martyred trying to put these principles into practice, while attempting to correct for the mistakes they believed caused the failure of the "Brownists." They rightly denied that they were "Brownists" because their congregation was constituted differently, but nevertheless were "tarred" with that epithet as threats to Elizabeth's Church Settlement, to their ultimate destruction.

John Greenwood (d. 1593), Henry Barrow (1550-1593) and John Penry (1559-1593)

When Robert Browne conformed in 1583, John Greenwood, a Puritan who, while matriculating at Cambridge, had come under the influence of Thomas Cartwright, Walter Travers and Sir Edward Dering, and joined their movement, was already leading a privy church of over 100 persons in London. Greenwood denied any connection to Browne, while asserting the right of people to form separate churches, as in the days of

---

[17] Browne, *Reformation without Tarrying,* 17.

[18] Definitions # 35 and 36 in *A Book which Sheweth.* Such was the covenant formed at Norwich to which "all gave consent to keep and seek agreement under his laws and government." That church authority rested in the Lord Himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to whose will the people submit and obey, exercise their callings, and "keep his lawes and commandments to their salvation and welfare."

the Apostles, without waiting for the magistrates.[19] He was arrested and deprived of his living at Norwich in 1585 for reading scriptures to students in a private home. One of his converts to Separatism, the former "debauched" courtier, Henry Barrow, was also arrested as an accomplice while visiting Greenwood. During the ensuing six years of incarceration, they produced learned treatises and short tracts which were smuggled to Holland for publication, then returned to England for dissemination. When Greenwood was temporarily released from prison in 1592, he organized a "regular Congregational church" at the home of Roger Rippon in Southwark, Surrey, appointing elders and other officers, before he was re-arrested, subjected to "examinations," and executed in 1593.[20]

During these years, the congregation acquired a new pastor. Francis Johnson, the former preacher of an English Church at Middleburg, had been employed by the Established Church to discover and destroy their manuscripts. However, upon reading a copy of Barrow and Greenwood's "Refutation of Mr. Gifford's Treatise," that George Gifford wrote in support of the Established Church, Johnson became convinced by their arguments. He returned to England to confer with the authors, and remained there to serve what became known as the "Ancient Church" throughout its subsequent sojourn in

---

[19] The facts relating to Greenwood's background are sparse, but are agreed upon by several scholars, viz., Payne, *Free Church Tradition,* 40; Dexter, *England and Holland of the Pilgrims* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1978), 203, 208; Shakespeare, 60; and Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 11. Among those listed on the arrest warrant with Greenwood were names identified with the Fitz congregation who had been imprisoned in the 1560's and 70's—a testimony to the vitality and ongoing influence of that congregation, and a clue that these congregations were not arising in isolation from one another. Watts, *Dissenters* I, 35. Dering's sermon before Queen Elizabeth in 1570, in which he "told her in plain terms of the disappointment such men as he felt at her failure to satisfy their expectations of reform" is considered to be the acknowledged birth of the Puritan movement. Haller, 12.

[20] Edward E. Cleal, *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1908), 2. Cleal contends that this was the beginning of the oldest, i.e., "ancient" congregational church.

England and Holland. The story of Johnson and this benighted church will be told in the next section.[21]

What were the principles for which Greenwood and his associates suffered martyrdom? Knowing that "the very act of separation from the Established Church was regarded at the time as a manifestation of civil disobedience,"[22] they nevertheless took their stand against it in their belief, first, that it was apostate because it contained unconverted and profane members; second, its ministers were appointed by bishops and paid by stipends rather than their being patterned on the Apostolic ministry and supported by their members; third, its worship was according to a book devised by men, not God; and fourth, it was governed by the secular power of the state, rather than the members. On this basis, they concluded that the Word of God mandated that they separate from it, and in doing so, went beyond Browne, reconstituting their church by a renewed covenant with God, while acknowledging no superior ecclesiastical authority on earth, but placing local authority in the hands of elders to avoid any tendency toward congregational anarchy. It was Greenwood's contention that the Prayer Book encouraged worship in the flesh, stifling worship in the spirit, and that read prayers result in "idolatrous worship and quenching of the Spirit."[23]

These precepts were articulated in Greenwood's *Collection of Certain Letters and Conferences* (1590) and his two responses countering Gifford's accusation of the heresy

---

[21] Robert Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), 39-40. *cf.,* Watts, *Dissenters* I, 34 and Shakespeare, 59.

[22] Barrington White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 87.

[23] Barrington White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 68-87. Greenwood articulated this stance in an extant fragment of a letter written from prison (1587) in which he stated that "the task of building a true church belonged to the whole body of Christians, of whom the queen was only one member; her royal power was civil, not ecclesiastical." Quoted in Leland H.Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow 1587-90* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 39-40.

of Donatism, *A Brief Refutation of Mr. George Gifford, his consimilitude between the Donatists and us,* and *A Few Observations of Mr. Gifford's Last Cavills about Stinted Read Prayers and Devised Leiturgies,* both published in 1591. In the latter he called the English Church an "Apparent Church" in which he charges,

> these ministers and people which stand in a professed bondage to a false government, their prayers are an abomination unto the Lord, till they repent and submit themselves unto Christ and His lawes and ordinances, whiche the Lord gyve them grace to doe, even speedily to depart out of the house of bondage and from all subjection of his anti-Christian hierarchie.[24]

The account of Greenwood's trial and "examinations" will follow in the next section which investigates the experiences and writings of those martyred with him in 1593.

Henry Barrow, one of Greenwood's converts to Separatism, became its most eloquent spokesman. So aggressively prolific were the writings of this Gray's Inn lawyer, that a new epithet was coined by Churchmen whose authority he defied: "Barrowist" became the term applied to all who dared question the hegemony of the Queen and her ecclesiastical hierarchy, and their treatment of him constituted a warning to all whom they placed in that category.[25] He was arrested while visiting Greenwood in prison, for his refusal to attend his parish church or to take the Oath of Supremacy, and charged under the "Act to Retain the Queen's Subjects in Obedience." Both men were executed at Tyborn on April 6,1593 after being subjected to grueling examinations by the Ecclesiastical High Commission Court.[26]

---

[24] These documents are preserved in Leland Carlson's *Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), 1-47. Quote p. 73.

[25] Joseph Fletcher, *History of the Revival and Progress of Independency* (London: J. Snow Pub., 1862), 12-13.

[26] Watts, 35-37; Burgess, 35; Barrow asserted to Abp. John Whitgift that the Queen herself might be excommunicated as a transgressor, by the Church of which Christ is the only Head. Shakespeare, 63-69.

The followers of Barrow denied being Brownists, having derived their model for church polity from the scriptures, not from that "coward who caviled about separation to remain free," while they went to prison for the cause.[27] They were more adamantly against attending parish churches, calling their worship false, and an abomination to the Lord because it was an invention of men. They opposed the geographical parish structure because it included unbelievers within the Church. They called its ministry anti-Christian because it was imposed by bishops or patrons and paid for by tithes rather than voluntary support. And they deplored its Discipline by an Episcopal system of ecclesiastical courts regulated by Prince and Parliament, rather than Christ's own governance, which was meant to be the guardian of Christian liberty.[28]

Barrowists expressed equal contempt for Conformist Puritan preachers who forsook their consciences, and the bishops, whom they called "mercenaries and sycophants of the nobles; hypocrites who accept licenses to preach as though the gospel were for sale." Nor did they spare the rising party of Presbyterian Puritans, whom they accused of forsaking their consciences, and trying to erect a Presbyterian system that was no less tyrannical than the Episcopal, by exerting synodical power over local congregations. Barrow agreed with John Milton's assessment that "New Presbyter was but old Priest writ large."[29]

In a conscious attempt to avoid the fragmentation of the Brownists' church (the object of common rule and mutual criticism), Barrowist church organization was an amalgam of their congregational polity and Presbyterian structure in that it was formed

---

[27] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 68.

[28] Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow1587-90*, 1-3.

[29] Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 143-144.

by a covenant and elected and ordained its own officers, and was then ruled by those elders.[30] The initial covenant of this congregation was simply a "promise to stand with the said congregation soe long as they did stand for the truthe and glory of God."[31] They met at pre-arranged houses, fields or riverbanks, for Bible reading and exposition, a common meal, and collection of money for the needs of prisoners. Prayer was extemporaneous, and no professional leadership was required for worship. There is no record of the Lord's Supper being served until Francis Johnson became their pastor after Greenwood and Barrow were executed.

After his arrest in 1586, Barrow remained as prolific and pugnacious as ever. Bp. John Aylmer decided that some Puritan preachers should meet with him, Greenwood, and 52 other sectaries in the Fleet Prison in order to persuade them to conform. Barrow knew that the purpose of these "conferences" was inquisitorial, but answered candidly and loudly, in the hope of convincing those who were listening at the windows. Most questions addressed revolved about the unlawfulness of uniting the civil and ecclesiastical rule in one office, an issue that he, as a lawyer, was convinced was both unscriptural and illegal. The debate merely honed his arguments for Separation which he set down in several treatises that he bribed his jailers to smuggle out for publication. Because they articulated the foundational principles on which all future movement toward independency was erected, a brief synopsis of them will be offered.[32]

---

[30] Henry Martyn Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism* (Boston: Congregational Publishing Soc., 1880), 6-7. *cf.,* Powicke, 125-127. Earliest accounts of this congregation are in the *Harleian MSS* #6848 and 6849.

[31] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 123. By 1590, over 50 members were arrested for meeting at Islington, and by 1593, 72 members were imprisoned, 17 or 18 of whom had died. Watts, 36-37.

[32] The complete documents have been published by Leland H. Carlson in four volumes, viz., *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590* and *The Writings of John Greenwood 1587-1590* (London: George

In 1589, Barrow wrote and smuggled out of the Fleet Prison what has been dubbed "a Constitution for the true Church of Christ" in which "all power of election, calling, ordination, administration, discipling and excommunicating according to the laws of Christ and examples of the Apostles as revealed in the Scriptures" belongs to the people-members of the congregation. This document, *A True Description of the Visible Congregation of the Saints Under the Gospel, According to The Word of Truth,* defined the church as "a fellowship of believers, rightly gathered out of the world, truly worshipping God aright, correctly governed by laws and officers of Christ" elected and ordained by faithful members.[33]

In 1590 Barrow submitted his *First Part of the Platform Which may serve as a Preparative to purge away Prelatisme: with some other parts of Poperie,* to Ld. Burghley, the Queen's secretary. This document stipulated that "all false and anti-Christian ministeries . . . ought by the Prince's authority to be rooted out," and "by like authority their anti-Christian and idolatrous livings ought to be converted to charitable civil uses: and are not to be given or appropriated to God's true ministrie for the maintenance thereof: neither ought it to receive the same."[34]

Allen and Unwin), 1962; *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1590-1591* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966); and *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970). Frederick Powicke has provided a summary of the most significant of these writings in *Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam, 1593-1622* (London: James Clark Pub., 1900) Appendix III, 331-349. The substance of these *Conferences and Letters* was published in 1590.

[33] Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590,* 21-23. These officers are listed as preachers, teachers and elders (to assist the pastor and teacher) "to enforce the laws and ordinances to prevent and redress evils and to maintain order and decorum." It described the duties of Deacons and Widows, and advocated that the discipline of admonishing and excommunication "should be used with great care."

[34] This document was not published until 1611. It advocated that the Prince should "promote true preaching and practice of the gospel of Christ," and should extirpate all other forms of religion. including Anglican, Catholic, Judaism and Anabaptistry. It so offended Ld. Burghley that a "Second Part" was never written. Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow 1587-1590,* 24-25, 46; 334-336.

That same year saw the publication of *A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church, 'As the mother such the daughter is,"* a reference to the similarity between the Roman and English Churches. This 400-page book called the Elizabethan Settlement a "halfway program of reform" and accused its officials of participating in anti-Christian and popish practices: i.e., for their appointment of ministers, their use of the unscriptural *Book of Common Prayer,* and administration of false and adulterated sacraments—false, because they are not administered by a lawful ministry to a faithful people. He does reject the need for re-baptism, however, "if the faults of incorrect baptism are purged by repentance and faith."[35] Barrow asserted that

> every member hath interest in the public actions of the Church" and therefore "hath power . . .to examine the manner of administering the sacraments, as also the estate, disorder or transgressions of the whole Church . . . to call them all to repentance, etc., if he find them obstinate and hardened in their sin, rather to leave their fellowship than to partake with them in wickedness.[36]

Concerning the use of the Prayer Book, Barrow asserted that it was

> abstracted out of the Pope's blasphemous Mass Book . . .it being nothing less but rather abominable and loathsome sacrifice in the sight of God when thrust upon men's consciences, yea upon God himself. . . . Is not this presumptuously to undertake to teach the Spirit of God, and to take away his office which . . . instructeth all the children of God to pray, even with inward sighs and groans inexpressible, and giveth both words and utterance? . . . Is this the unity and uniformity that ought to be in all churches . . . to make them agree in a stinking patchery devised apocrypha Liturgy; good for nothing but for cushions and pillows for the idle priests and profane carnal atheists, to rock them asleep and keep them in security?[37]

---

[35] Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590,* 336-337; 28-33.

[36] Barrow, *A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church,* 35.

[37] Barrow, *A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church,* 62-65.

Barrow penned two refutations to Mr. George Gifford's *Treatise against the Donatists of England* (1591)[38] in which he stated that his hope that the church under present governors will reform was an error because their transgressions had leavened the whole church, making it too corrupt to reform itself. Furthermore, to say that Christ has established the present Church is to accuse him of erecting a false kingdom. He called upon Christians to do the will of Christ without the prince's license, so that God's true religion be established on His own Holy Word and laws, not upon man's laws. "Laws that have no warrant in God's Word cannot be said to be consonant with His will, and so are to be avoided as superfluous, burdenous, and contrary to God's Word."[39]

A published account of the examinations of Barrow, Greenwood and Penry was appended to *The Plaine Refutation.* It contained the earliest Separatist Manifesto in *A Briefe Summe of the causes of our Separation.* This document, which Carlson has called the Separatists' Declaration of Independency, was actually written in 1588, and was used by Barrow in his defense against Gifford's accusation of Donatism. Powicke quotes it in full in Appendix II, from which the following is extracted, viz.,

> 3. We seeke the fellowship of His faithfull and obedient servants, and together with them to enter Covenant with the Lord, and by the direction of his Holy Spirit, to proceed to a godly, free, and right choise of ministers and other officers by Him ordeyned to the service of His Church.

---

[38] George Gifford had been suspended from his vicarage at Malden, and was a Petitioner to Parliament in 1587, but had conformed and, in league with Bp. John Aylmer, defended the Church of England against Barrow's accusations that it was guilty of false worship. He had written *A short Treatise Against the Donatists of England Whom we call Brownists*, and a *Defense of Read Prayers and Devised Leiturgies*, both of which elicited responses by Greenwood, *A Briefe Refutation of Mr. George Gifford,* and *A Few Observations of Mr.Gifford's Pretended Defense of Read Prayers and Devised Leiturgies,* all published in 1591. Leland H. Carlson, *Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591-1593*,1-73.

[39] Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590,* 364.

> 5. We purpose (by the assistance of the Holy Ghost) in this faith and order to leade our lives, and for this faith and order to leave our lives, if such be the good will of our Heavenly Father, to whom be honor and glorye.
>
> 6. And now that our forsaking and utter abandoning of these disordered assemblies as they generally stand in England, may not seeme strange nor offensive to any man that will judge or be judged by the Word of God, we alledge and affirme them heinously guiltie in these four principall Transgressions.[40]

These were followed by the four principles of Separatism mentioned above on p.71. We have here the context in which they were forged and put into practice.

From these documents one can gain an understanding of the emerging ecclesiology, polity and worship practices of Separatism at the end of the sixteenth century. Their church order called for a separate church organization with an eldership elected by the local church to manage all things in a Session of Elders, endorsed by the whole congregation. The Session was not to take government of the church into their own hands, but to see that the people observed Christ's order in the church, as prescribed in scripture. Barrow was not a Presbyterian, however, because he was opposed to the idea of a Synod of presbyters wielding authority over individual churches.[41]

From his *True Description* of the visible congregation of saints one can see that these leaders subscribed to the ideal of a primitive, visible church, as opposed to the sacerdotal model of the State-church. Their ideal church was built on the foundation of Christ, as his body, formed by every part working together in love with every other; a holy temple of the Kingdom of God made up of the family of God dwelling in harmony. The guiding principle of Barrow's thought was the spiritual rights of the individual for whom Christ died. Thus the believer "must be treated as a being directly related to

---

[40] Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* APPENDIX II, "The Earliest Separatist manifesto," 330.

[41] Dexter, *Congregationalism of the Last 300 Years,* 222-223, 238.

Himself, called to live and think and act in the light of his own conscience, accountable for the making of his own character, and the working out of his own salvation." The basis for this church was "the voluntary faith of one man" which, Barrow believed, governed the building up of the earliest Christian communities of "living stones, slaves of Christ and submitted to Him as their only Master." To the degree that any church hindered that relationship, it was a bad church.[42]

This ideal visible church was a restitution to the primitive type of "a faithful people gathered by the Word unto Christ and submitting themselves to Him in all things," and having a like interest in His Word and the faith—all affairs and actions belonging to and taken by the body as a whole. "All are charged to watch, exhort, admonish, stir up, reprove," and so forth. The spirituality of this ideal church was not mediated through an ordained priesthood or sacraments. It was spiritual through the possession of Christ's own Spirit which may be received by all members, fostering a personal relationship with Him. Such spirituality was important because it is the work of the church to foster "holiness in the sight of God, and to be an agency for the salvation of the world."[43]

Primary authority was placed in the scriptures, interpreted by the Holy Spirit. Each congregation was complete in itself, and all the affairs and actions of the church belong to all severally. All were charged to watch over one another, but all were not equal, because the church gave honor and reverence to the Elders for their labor, and diligence in guiding, but not dominating, the Church. Failure to deserve honor resulted in their becoming subject to public censure by the whole church. The Pastor, as foremost

---

[42] Powicke, *Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church at Amsterdam,* xxiv-xxvi.

[43] Powicke, *Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church at Amsterdam,* xxvii-xxix.

Elder, was chosen and ordained by the whole congregation to be a servant and steward of it, not Lord over it. He was honored for his faithfulness and labor, but the least member had as much liberty and freedom in Christ as he, though not the same gifts. They believed that the New Testament provided an exact pattern for the church on the basis that God would not take more pains for the details of his Temple than for his Church. The discipline they adopted was from Matthew 18: 15-17, interpreted to mean that the power of censure was committed to the whole church, and excommunication must be exercised publicly.

Their criteria for a true church, then, were: 1) a lawful minister to deliver the sacraments; 2) a faithful people to receive them, and 3) the outward elements and form of words which the Lord ordained, in contrast to the Church of England's ministry, and its assemblies of profane people, corrupted by "trifling ceremonies" derived from Rome. This is an expansion of the two criteria subscribed to seventy-five years earlier by the Continental reformers, Martin Luther, John Calvin and Hulrich Zwingli, who were in agreement on the two *notae* (marks) of the true church as being, "the Word purely preached and the Sacraments duly administered."[44]

The account of the examinations and execution of Barrow and Greenwood will follow the account of the story of their fellow-martyr, John Penry. If Henry Barrow, the lawyer, was the spokesman for the cause of Separatism, John Penry, the pastor, was the spokesman for the needs and souls of the people he perceived as being neglected by the Church. He journeyed from Wales to England in 1586, speaking at Cambridge and Oxford, "pleading for the preaching of a more vigorous gospel in Wales." It was his

---

[44] Barrow, *Discovery of the False Church,* 242-243, 100-105; Timothy George, 98.

contention that preaching was the only way to save souls, as opposed to the reading of the "homilies" prescribed by the Elizabethan Church. Convinced by Henry Barrow that he was seeking "to bring in Christ by the arm of flesh, and not by the power of His Word and virtue of His spirit," he cast his lot with the Separatists who were meeting secretly in private homes. In 1587 he had addressed his *Aequity of an Humble Supplication* to the Queen, asking that "some order be taken for the preaching of the Gospel among those people"[in Wales],[45] which offended her and, in the opinion of John Whitgift, her Abp. of Canturbury, made him suspect of being a "disloyal schismatick, guilty of seditious intentions, denying her majesty's authority."[46]

Penry fled to Scotland under the accusation that he had authored the anti-Prelatical publications known as "The Martin Marprelate Tracts." No evidence has been found of his complicity in this propaganda attack on the Church hierarchy, but a reading of the material he did author, demonstrates that the tracts did represent the views of many Puritans and Separatists such as himself.[47] While in Scotland he penned *A Treatise of Reformation wherein is proved that Reformation and those that sincerely favor the same are unjustly charged to be enemies unto her Majesty and the State, Written both for the clearing of those that stand in that cause, and the stopping of the scandalous mouths of all the enemies thereof.*[48]

---

[45] Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 246; Marsden, 187; Shakespeare, 91; Jones, 18-19.

[46] Paule, Sir George, *The Life of John Whitgift, Abp. of Canterbury in the times of Queen Elizabeth and King James I* Book IV, chap. 11 (London: n.p., l699).

[47] Barclay, 41; Dexter, *Congregationalism. . .,* 246-247.

[48] John Penry, *A Treatise of Reformation &c.* (n. p., 1590). The Black Letter edition of this document is located in the Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Collection of the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York. Original pagination of excerpts will be given in the text.

Because this treatise represents Penry's core convictions, material extracted from it will be offered in Appendix B. After citing his case against the corrupted hierarchical structure of the Church of England, he called on the bishops to "publish their enmity to the Lord and his Kingdom, or to the murdering Antichristian prelates and their bloody train." [I 1 verso] Closing with an explanation of the historical meaning of the role of bishops, ministers and priests up until the seventh century, he challenged them that "if they present their credentials and warrant for their present-day hierarchy, he will yield." [I 2 verso]

Upon returning to England in 1592, he was apprehended at a meeting with Francis Johnson in April 1593 and imprisoned under the "Act for Retaining the Queen's Subjects in their due Obedience," which required total conformity, under penalty of exile or death.[49] He was condemned to die on the basis of an unpublished petition to the Queen found among his papers, which stated that "the Lord and his church hath cause to complaine of your government . . . because wee (*sic*), your subjects are not permitted to serve our God under your government according to his word."[50] In prison, he composed an Apology, denying any guilt for "sedition against or disturbance of her Majesties royall State and peaceable gouernment," and his personal confession of faith, expressing his subscription to the orthodox, Calvinistic, faith of the Church of England. He did add, however, that "This Church, I beleue to be the Companie of those whom the word calleth Saintes which do not onlie professe in word that they know God, but also are subject unto

[49] Barclay, 42; Watts, 39.

[50] Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 248.

him, unto his lawes and ordinances indeed."[51] Orthodox belief did not imply submission to what he regarded as unorthodox praxis.

At his Examination by the High Commission Court, Penry averred that he was "submissive to the kingdom and rule of the Queen, but not to that of Antichrist in the Church."[52] Knowing that he was to be executed, he penned two letters: One, to Ld. Burghley, on behalf of his widow and four infant children, the eldest of which was not yet four years old. This letter concluded with his submission that "if my death can procure any quietness unto the Churche of God, and unto the State of my Prince and her kingdom wherein I was borne, glad I am that I had a lyfe to bestowe in this service."[53] He received no response. The second letter was a plea to his church whose pastor, Francis Johnson was also incarcerated, asking them to care for the poor out of their resources and earnings from their trades so that

> the church may be kept together and built whithersoever they go; let not the poor and friendless be forced to stay behind here, and to break with good conscience for want of your support and kindness to them, that they may go with you; and here I humbly beseech you . . . that you would take my poor and desolate Widow, and my mess of fatherless orphans with you into exile.[54]

This appeal may have exerted a significant influence in the ensuing dispute that took place in this "Ancient Church" when it went into exile and was joined by its pastor and his new wife, Thomasina, the financially well-endowed widow of Edward Boyes, in whose home they were arrested, and whose extravagances were resented by one

---

[51] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* II, 79-81.

[52] *Examinations of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood and John Penry before the High Commissioners and Lords of the Council* (London: n.p., 1662), 31.

[53] Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 250.

[54] *Examinations of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood and John Penry before the High Commissioners Court* (London: n.p., 1662), 47.

contingent within the congregation. Penry went on with a testimony to his own "theology of suffering:"

> This stamping and treading of us under his feet, this subverting of our cause and right in judgment is done by him, to the end that we should search and try our ways, and repent us of our carelessness, profaneness, and Rebellion in his fight; but he will yet maintain the cause of our Souls and redeem our lives, if we return to him; yea, he will be with us in fire and water and will not forsake us if our hearts be only and especially of the building of Sion, whithersoever we go. J. Penry, 24 April,1593[55]

Neither Burghley nor Whitgift were moved by his pleas. The Abp. recalled only that this was the provocateur who had questioned both the Queen's authority and her Christianity, whose "people remain in infidelity and stand generally condemned to hell" so that "an honest man cannot possibly live under her government in any vocation whatsoever"; and had stated that she "may as well make a new religion as new laws for religion." Penry was hanged at Tyburn, along with Barrow and Greenwood, the following month.[56]

Penry's sentiments were characteristic of those of his fellow-martyrs in their Examinations; therefore, their testimonies will not be repeated here. It is important to note, however, that Henry Barrow, facing execution, and seeing the need for the company to go into exile in order to survive, left a financial legacy for their support. In 1592, the congregation had met clandestinely and elected officers: Francis Johnson was chosen to be their Pastor, Greenwood, their Teacher, Daniel Studley and George Kniveton, their ruling Elders, and Christopher Bowman and Nicholas Lee, their Deacons. All were out of prison on bail at the time, but were re-arrested in 1593. Barrow never was released, but

---

[55] *Examinations,* 47. *cf.,*Albert Peel and Leland Carlson, *Cartwrightiana* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), 3.

[56] John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign* IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 249.

was tried in March 1593, and executed with Greenwood on April 6th, in spite of his protest that he "had no evil mind toward the State, laws or judges, but only contended that the Church ministry that was to be salt and light had become so corrupt all the body had become unsound."[57]

The church did emigrate to Amsterdam as a group, under the leadership of their newly- elected teacher, Henry Ainsworth, where they faithfully awaited the release in 1597 of their pastor, Francis Johnson, who, although in prison, was not condemned to death. It is these new leaders of the Ancient Church that we will consider next.

Henry Ainsworth (1571-1623) and Francis Johnson (1562-1618)

The man chosen to replace Greenwood as Teacher of the exiled church was Henry Ainsworth, a Cambridge scholar of Latin and Hebrew. He had already produced Latin translations of the "Confession of the Church" plus 23 volumes of works, including *The Pentateuch*, *Psalms*, and *Annotations upon the Song of Solomon.*[58] Appended to a 1623 edition of the latter, an anonymous writer had written a description of his character as

> Of nature, kind, courteous and affable; of disposition, humble, loving, meek and peaceable; in judgment, sound, modest and judicious; in knowledge, excelling most as an able minister of the New Testament, continuing a lightsome star in God's right hand; . . in speech, profitable and familiar; patient in bearing injuries; not opening his mouth to disgrace in the least even him that notoriously and untruly slandered him; but clearing himself, commended his case to Him that judgeth justly.
>
> Briefly, for personal qualifications, he was a man of a thousand; yea, worthy of the rank of them that are to be preferred before ten thousand. In his ministry, . . faithful, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Full

---

[57] Amory H. Bradford, *The Pilgrim in Old England* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1893), 63; Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 77-82. Additional details relating to the Examinations of Greenwood and Barrow can be found in *The Examinations &c.*,3-17 and 22-25; Hanbury, I, 35-36; and Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 213-247.

[58] Shakespeare, 107-108; Jones, 19.

> of faith and good works; fruitful in his life; comfortable in his death, to all the beholders, of which there were many, myself being one.[59]

Under Ainsworth's guidance, and with Barrow's financial assistance, the congregation continued in worship and mutual support until 1597 when Johnson arrived with his new wife, the widow of Edward Boyes, a former member and host of their church, who had died in prison. She had been left a legacy of £ 200, the equivalent of 20 years' income of a simple vicar. Dissension soon broke out over her unwillingness to share her abundance with the church that was in dire straits financially.[60] Johnson, under pressure to suppress the dissension, moved toward a Presbyterian polity of rule by the Elders, who supported him. The dispute was exacerbated by the excommunication of all those who opposed him, including his own father, John, and brother, George.

The conflict escalated from the personal to the ecclesiological level when neither Johnson nor Ainsworth could resolve the inconsistency between a polity that tried to conflate both popular democratic congregationalism and synodical Presbyterianism. Ainsworth insisted that the power and right to observe the commandments of Christ resides within the people, but not in the actual government of the church. This abstruse explanation did not satisfy the Johnson faction who interpreted Matthew 18: 17, "tell the church," as meaning "tell the elders." Unable to reach a resolution, the congregation split in 1610, with the Ainsworthians seceding, and being excommunicated by the Johnsonians.[61] After resorting to the disgrace of litigation over possession of their house of worship, the Johnson faction, having been dispossessed, removed to Emden, where,

---

[59] Quoted in Hanbury, I, 433-434.

[60] Jones, 19.

[61] Dexter, *Congregationalism. . . 300 Years,* 325-332; Jones, 19.

after his death, they were led by John Canne, a vigorous separatist who authored *A Necessitie of Separation from the Church of England* (1634) and future minister of the Broadmead Baptist Church at Bristol. Eventually, however, this Ancient Church dissolved away, losing members to the Dutch Reformed congregation of John Paget.[62]

The tragedy of the dissolution of this covenanted company,[63] established on such idealistic principles as cited below in Ainsworth's *Communion of Saincts,* was ameliorated only by the understanding that these men were experimenting with church polity, and plowing new, cross-wise furrows in well "established" ground. The acerbity of their conflict provided opportunity for their opponents, such as Christopher Laune and others who had been excommunicated by the "Johnsonians," to attack both the men and their cause.[64] One positive outcome is that the ramifications of their conflict found expression in writings that "expounded the concept of the covenanted community of the gathered church in the light of scripture," and "developed the inner core of a species of

---

[62] Barclay, 67. White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 155. Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 181.

[63] Johnson had required that the company sign a document that read very much like a covenant: "We doe willinglye ioyne together to live as the Church of Christe, watching one over another, and submittinge our selves unto them to whom the Lorde Jesus committeth the oversight of his Churche, guidinge and censuringe us according to the rule of the worde of God." Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 138.

[64] Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 332. The exiled church had attracted many sympathizers who joined them: e.g., a company of 12 or 13 from western England, led by Thomas White. White, not being given a position of leadership, withdrew, and in 1605 published *A Discovery of Brownism, or, a briefe declaration of some of the errors and abominations daily practiced and increased among the English company of the separation remaining for the present in Amsterdam.* In 1612, Laune had published "*The Profane Schisme of the Brownists or Separatists with the impietie, dissensions, lewd and abominable vices of that impure sect"* in which Elder Daniel Studley was accused of gross wickedness. Richard Clyfton, teacher of the Johnsonians after the secession of Ainsworth, defended them in *An Advertisement concerning a Book lately published by C. Laune,* to confute his slanders. Ainsworth penned an *Animadversion to Clyfton's defense.* Richard Bernard, the former Separatist pastor at Worsop, who had conformed, wrote *The Separatists' Schism,* to which Ainsworth responded with *Counterpoyson (1608).* Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 310-311. Punchard, 320-325; Hanbury I, 245-255.

churchmanship which provided the characteristic organization, not only of the sectaries, . . . but also of much of the Protestantism . . . of the United States."[65]

The most significant of these writings was Ainsworth's *Communion of Saincts,* first published in 1607.[66] This, his *Magnus Opus,* opened with an exhortation to the saints to bear one another's burdens, and expanded on the communion that only those cleansed by the blood of Jesus and restored to fellowship with him can experience with God, the angels, and one another. He called them to join together to enjoy a loving communion in the unity of the faith and Spirit, and for mutual help and comfort. In his exposition of his ecclesiology, we can see his concept of the church as a community,

> built and coupled together by faith, that they grow into his holy temple in the Lord, to be the habitation of God by the Spirit . . . set forth by the similitude of one bodie in Christ . . . being by one Spirit all baptized into one body, which is called by Christ a Church or congregation, because we are gathered and joined together unto him our head. This fellowship ought all men to labour to come to . . . endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.[67]

The purpose of this fellowship was that they might edify one another and better resist their adversaries, as well as mutually strengthen and console one another in their Christian duties by building one another up in the faith,

> Labouring together in the truth, admonishing the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, bearing with the weak, considering one another to provoke unto good works, rebuking for sinne and trespass, confessing of faults one to another, and praying for one another, bearing one another's burdens, . . and distributing to the necessities of one another, visiting them in sickness.

---

[65] Barrington White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 168-169.

[66] This popular and influential work was reprinted in 1615, 1618, 1628 and 1640.

[67] Henry Ainsworth, *The Communion of Saincts: A Treatise of the Fellowship that the Faithful Have With God and His Angels and With One Another in this Present Life* (Amsterdam: n.p.,1628), 249-252.

> If one member suffer, all suffer with it . . . so neere a conjunction doth God's Spirit work in the hartes (*sic*) of the faithful which maketh them to look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. [68]

Such a gathering of saints required a separation from the wicked of the world, and collection together of themselves in faith and love of Christ in a perpetual covenant which stands on the two pillars of faith in God by Jesus Christ, and observance of his laws in love. The covenant was that they

> Promise to walk in the pathes of God as he shall teach them . . . walking worthy of their calling, admonishing and reproving one another when they sin, and seeking to restore them in meekness, but withdrawing from the disobedient, and putting away such as are wicked from among them.[69]

He advocated that only those who make profession of faith and obedience are to be admitted in to the covenant, and that infants of one believing parent may be baptized, but warns against accepting any

> prophane, idolatrous or irreligious children of the world, but only such as confess the truth, renouncing their former evill ways, promising submission . . . and obedience in the Gospel. . . . Only such may be admitted into the citie of truth, the mount of holyness, the secret congregation of the righteous. . . . It is the house of the living God.[70]

These passages became foundational for the ecclesiology and polity of the churches of the Separation. He concluded by enjoining inter-church communion between particular congregations, as sisters to each other, with none having authority over another, on the basis that it is Christ's prerogative to remove a candlestick from its place.

Another significant contribution of Ainsworth was *Counterpoyson* (1608), his response to Richard Bernard's book, *The Separatists' Schism,* in which the former

---

[68] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 261-262.

[69] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 269.

[70] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 278-279.

Separatist pastor of Worsop, Nottinghamshire, who had reneged on his stand and conformed to the Church of England, rationalized his doing so for the purpose of working for further reform of the Established Church from within, and accused the Separatists of being "schismatics" who scrupled about corruptions. In this work, Ainsworth wrote as an apologist for the cause, to motivate faithfulness among those who had come under attack. He replied that the issues were far greater than their scrupling about the corruptions, manners and morals of the clerics and people in the Church of England, but rather, its very constitution as a national church, with polity, prelates and priests imposed on the people, and the corruptions of benefices, tithes, pluralism, and non-residency that arise out of that constitution, which is neither scriptural nor apostolic according to the primitive model for churches in the New Testament. He reiterated the argument that it had retained the anti-Christian form of the popish church from which it has not completely separated.[71]

The Ainsworthian branch of the Ancient Church did survive after his death in 1623, attending the English-speaking Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam, served by John Paget, and others, until 1701 when they merged with the Scottish Reformed Church in Holland. Paget (d. 1638) was a Reformed Puritan Presbyterian minister from Leicestershire who went into exile in the Netherlands after having been ejected from his living at Nantwich in 1604 for non-conformity. He published *An Arrow against the Separation of the Brownists* in 1618, against the "schism" of the Separatists.[72]

---

[71] Henry Ainsworth, *Counterpoyson,* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1608), passim.

[72] Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 334-346.

Next we will look at the dynamics of this early experiment in Separatism from the perspective of its pastor. Francis Johnson, a Yorkshire man who had been influenced by the Presbyterianism of the Puritans while teaching at Cambridge, was expelled for his opposition to Abp. Whitgift's Episcopal Church polity. He found a haven in Holland as chaplain to Thomas Cartwright's former congregation of English Merchants at Middleburg. There, he was assigned the responsibility of seeking out and destroying the anti-prelatical tracts of Barrow and Greenwood that had been smuggled out of prison for publication in Holland. Discovering their *Plaine Refutation of Mr. Gifford's Book* in 1591, he read it, intending to refute those "Brownists," and became so convinced of the rightness of their opposition to the Established Church that he visited Barrow in prison in 1592, and remained in England to pastor his congregation at Southwark when he was executed in 1593. Johnson was apprehended that same year, leading worship at the home of Edward Boyes, and remained incarcerated for four years during which a part of the church fled to Amsterdam under the leadership of Henry Ainsworth.[73]

The covenanted community grew to over 300 members, in spite of grappling with problems, viz.: the defection of some members to the Anabaptists, (Johnson believed that infants should be baptized as the seed of the faithful, to be included in the covenant);[74] heresy (defined as attending a parish church service, which constituted compromise with evil, which would result in excommunication); and financial struggles. Nevertheless they

---

[73] Shakespeare, 112-114. *cf.,* Slaydon Yarbrough, "English Separatist Influence on Baptist Church/State Issues" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (July 1985), 18-20. A remnant of this church remained at Southwark until it merged with Henry Jacob's church in 1616. Barclay, 55. Henry Jacob, whose story will be told in a following section, had tried to win Johnson back to the Church by writing his *Defense of the Churches and Ministry of England* (1600). For Jacob, subscription to the 39 Articles was sufficient to make one a true Christian, if one believed them. Johnson rebutted that the issue for him was not doctrinal, but the corrupted Episcopal constitution of the Church. Eventually, John Robinson, whose story will be told in the next section, led Henry Jacob to Separate. Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 229-232.

[74] Francis Johnson, *A Treatise against two Errors of the Anabaptists* (Amsterdam: 1609).

were described by William Bradford, a leader of the "Pilgrim Church," as being "many worthy men, and if you had seen them in their beauty and order, you would have been much affected therewith.[75]

The sordid story of disaffection and dissolution that followed the arrival of Johnson was published as "A Discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam" by his brother George in 1603.[76] The details of the rupture do not concern us as much as the issues that were involved. Briefly stated, when the wardrobe and demeanor of Mrs. Johnson were perceived as being unchristian and offensive by some members, including Ainsworth, their church polity dictated that she be publicly censured by the congregation as a whole. To prevent this, Johnson reinterpreted the basis of their discipline, Matthew 18:17, "tell the church," to mean "tell the Elders," as in the Assembly of Elders in the synagogue. One group supported Francis Johnson, i.e., the "Franciscans," accepting his new interpretation which placed the church disciplinary process in the hands of the two elders, Studley and Kniveton, and the pastor, taking it out of the hands of the congregation.[77]

The significance of this measure is that it moved what had begun as a true congregational church toward a rule by a presbytery of elders. Thus the conflict had

---

[75] Barclay, 69; White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 84; Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 110; William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912) quoted in Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 237.

[76] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 158. Powicke, 238-245, gives a comprehensive description of the acrimony that became so acerbic that other exiled groups (e.g., that of John Robinson, whose story will be told below) removed themselves both from fellowship and from the city of Amsterdam to avoid contamination by involvement in the conflict.

[77] Dexter, *England and Holland of the Pilgrims,* 464-466. In 1611 Johnson published his "Short Treatise Concerning the Exposition of those words of Christ, 'Tell the Church, etc.'" in which he contended that "Church" meant the Elders who have the responsibility for hearing and judging causes between the brethren, as opposed to the whole congregation. Hanbury, I, 216-217.

escalated to one of *the source of authority* within the church, a bedrock issue that could not be reconciled without a compromise, not of life-style, but of basic principles. Johnson, influenced by the Presbyterian Puritans at Cambridge, declared that their form of church government was most consistent with the New Testament pattern. Ainsworth disagreed, remaining true to the 1596 Confession he had authored for the church which distinguished between government and the power in the church, acknowledging government to be by the officers; but power residing in the whole body of the church.[78]

The atmosphere in the church changed, according to George's account, (which is not altogether objective, his having been excommunicated by his brother), into one in which "discipline was excessive, inquisitorial, pharisaical, and mischievous. There was no error so minute that it could be disregarded. Christ had left a law for His Church which could not be varied in the slightest iota. There was nothing too trivial or paltry for the scrutiny of a church member."[79] This led to quarrels, scandals, excommunications, and dispossession of the Franciscans from their place of worship by means of the shame of public litigation. As one scholar noted, "Congregationalism had a weary path to tread before it discovered the bond of church life, which consists not in knowledge, but in love."[80] The story of the split and demise of the two congregations has already been told. We will now turn to the account of the first English Baptist Church which also split from the Ancient Church, that of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys.

---

[78] Burgess, 31; Dexter, *England and Holland of the pilgrims,* 522-524.

[79] Shakespeare, 116-118.

[80] Shakespeare, 124.

John Smyth (1570-1612) and Thomas Helwys (1550-1616)

As mentioned above, the religious milieu of Cambridge in the 1580's was strongly Puritan.[81] John Smyth, a student of Francis Johnson, and influenced by this environment, gravitated toward Lincoln after receiving his M. A. in 1593, having heard of the "forward" preaching there. He received an appointment as lecturer in that town, but had his license revoked in 1602 for his criticisms of the Established Church, and for "setting forth ideas that were rapidly becoming Non-conformist."[82]

The religious environment did not improve when James I ascended to the throne. In response to the Non-conformists' request at Hampton Court for changes in church polity and liturgy, he had made known his threat to "harry them out of the land" in order to pursue his policies of unity of State and Church, and uniformity of religion in his realm. After being deposed, Smyth returned to his home in Gainsborough, where he joined a congregational-style church that had been gathered in a small geographical triangle formed by that town and the villages of Worsop and Scrooby at the juncture of Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Led by John Robinson, whose story will be recounted in the next section, they met at the Manor House of William Brewster,

---

[81] During Smyth's matriculation at Christ's College, 1586-1593, many Puritan notables were at Cambridge, viz.: as Sir Walter Mildmay, founder of Emmanual College for the training of Puritan preachers; Laurence Chaderton (1536-1640), Presbyterian Calvinist within the Church of England, and one of four Puritan ministers present at the Hampton Court conference, 1604, who appealed for indulgence for Non-conformists with respect to the "indifferent" ceremonies in worship; John Udall (1560-1592), Puritan lecturer at Kingston, who was sentenced to death in 1590 for his radical views; Walter Travers (1548-1635, Presbyterian promoter of the Puritan Discipline; William Perkins (1558-1602), Church of England theologian at Christ's College, Cambridge; Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632), Puritan minister who helped draft the Millenary Petition to James I, for reforms in liturgy; Richard Bernard (1568-1641), Vicar of Worksop, Nottinghamshire who initially joined John Smyth and John Robinson in their separation, but later conformed and attacked them for their schism; and Francis Johnson (1562-1618) future Separatist leader of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam. After being deposed, Smyth took up his pen to write *A Pattern of True Prayer* (1605) to prove that he was still a faithful member of the Church of England. Burgess, 29, 49-58

[82] Robert Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1950), 62-63.

postmaster of Scrooby. However the rapidly growing size of this illegal congregation, and the distance between the three towns, increased the danger of detection by agents of the bishop. This suggested the advisability of their dividing into three groups. Richard Bernard served as pastor at Worsop (until he conformed), Robinson led the church at Scrooby, and John Smyth was appointed Teacher of those meeting at Gainsborough. However, under constant surveillance and threat of fines and imprisonment, the Scrooby and Gainsborough congregations removed to Amsterdam in 1607 and 1608, where Smyth supported himself as a practicing physician.[83]

Initially they joined with the Ancient Church of Johnson and Ainsworth, which had been there since 1593. It was not long, however, before Smyth becoming embroiled in their disputes over church authority, opposing their Calvinist theology, and use of English translations of the Bible, separated from them with a group of followers, including Thomas Helwys, to establish the "Second English Church" in Amsterdam. To justify this move, and the gathering of individual congregations, Smyth again took up his pen in 1608 to write *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*.[84]

Soon after arriving in Amsterdam, Smyth had expressed his strong views as to what the nature of a true church should be. He asserted that a church must be constituted according to the principles of the New Testament, defining it as "a visible communion of

---

[83] Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Soc., 1907), 201-202. William Bradford, (a teen-aged orphan and a future leader of the "Pilgrim Church" to Massachusetts), Thomas Helwys, and John Murton were members of the Scrooby congregation. Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 376-378; *cf., Burgess,*64-93; Watts, 41-42; and Walker, 156-157.

[84] Watts, 41-48. *cf.,* William T. Whitley, ed., *Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594-1598* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1915), lxxxii – lxxxvi provides details of his objections.

saints" all of whom "are to be accounted faithful and elect . . . til they by obstinacy in sin and apostasy declare the contrary."[85] [See excerpts in Appendix C.]

Church polity and worship practices were not the primary cause of the schism between the Smyth and Johnson congregations. Smyth's biblicism had already convinced him that infant baptism was unscriptural, and that members should be received only on the basis of a testimony of faith and obedience. This stance was expressed in his *Character of the Beast* (1609), in which he argued that the Separatists, to be logical, "must either go back to England, or go forward to true baptism." Baptism, he regarded as "the baptism of the Spirit, the confession of the mouth, and the washing with water."[86] He saw it as the means of entering into a personal covenant with God. Following this concept to its logical conclusion, he justified both the necessity of believer's baptism, and his own self-baptism on the basis that true separation from a false church required reconstituting the original church anew. A small of group of followers, including Thomas Helwys, were baptized by Smyth, constituting the First English Baptist congregation. They rejected baptism by the local Dutch Reformed Church, believing that its holding to the heretical doctrines of Calvinism meant it was not a true church; and

---

[85] John Smyth, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church* (Amsterdam: 1607), 7. In Whitley, *Works,* lxix. Smyth goes on to declare that "A church must consist only of saints, joined to God and one another by covenant. Some of these would be gifted to lead in worship, others only private members [delineating two types of officers, elders or pastors or teachers, and deacons]. In the whole body resided the full power of Christ, the church collectively was to administer the affairs of the church in obedience to the will of the Lord. . . . Mutual care, watchfulness, and helpfulness was of the essence of church-life; sin was to be detected and admonished with a view to its abandonment." Whitley, lxix – lxx. Burgess provides a comprehensive synopsis of this document, re Smyth's church polity, 99-105. The underlying precepts for Smyth's spiritualized ecclesiology will be explicated in Chapter III.

[86] John Smyth, *Character of the Beast* (Amsterdam: 1609), 567.

likewise insisted that their own baptism in the Church of England was not efficacious, because it was also a false church.[87]

The four issues over which Smyth scrupled and broke from the Ancient Church may be summarized as: 1) the use in worship of Bible translations, as being human writings; 2) the acceptance of funds from non-members into the treasury; 3) the baptism of infants; and 4) the five functions of pastors, teachers, rulers, deacons and relievers need not mean five distinct offices, for one person may perform all functions.[88]

The very act by which Smyth's church was constituted was regarded as scandalous by the other Separatist companies in Holland. He and about 30 members of his congregation were ultimately excommunicated by Thomas Helwys and John Murton, Helwys' future successor, not for replacing the covenant with baptism as the means of entry into the church, but for what they regarded as heretical opinions regarding free-will Arminianism and the nature Christ had derived from his human mother. Finally, it was Richard Clyfton, the elderly pastor of the Scrooby congregation, who convinced him to reconsider his se-baptism and approach the Waterlander Mennonites, a more irenic remnant of the sixteenth-century German Anabaptists, for baptism.[89]

The effect of Smyth's demands for controversial doctrines, combined with his increasingly erratic character, contributed to the fissiparous nature of the fledgling churches in exile. His own congregation split under the instigation of Thomas Helwys and John Murton, whose story will be told in the next section, after which he and his

---

[87] John Smyth, *Character of the Beast,* 659. Synopses of Smyth's argument for believer's and self-baptism can be found in White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 132-139; Burgess, 146-149 and Ivimey I, 114.

[88] Hanbury, I, 180-183. Elaboration of these issues may be found in Appendix C.

[89] Wilson, 28-29; Dexter; *England and Holland,* 442-453, 520-521.

followers applied for membership in the Waterlander Church, in 1610, offering them a statement of their faith. However, Smyth died of consumption in 1612, two years before they were accepted. Among the articles of their statement, # 29 stipulated that "holy baptisme is given unto them in ye name of ye father, ye sonne, & ye holy ghost, which we here believe, & with penitent hartes receave ye doctrine of ye holy gospel: for such hath ye Lord Jesus commaunded to be baptized, and no un-speaking children."[90]

Smyth's final book was the result of much soul-searching during his final illness. In *The Retraction of his Errors and the Confirmation of the Truth* (1612), he repented of his former "biting and bitter words" against those who opposed him, in that "contention for outward matters, which are of inferior note, hath broken the rules of love and charity which is the superior law." He acknowledged that "without repentance, faith, remission of sin, and the new creature, there is no salvation—but there is salvation without the truth of all the outward ceremonies of the outward Church."[91]

Slayden Yarbrough, formerly at Oklahoma Baptist University, traces the legacy these first Baptists crafted for the future of the church. He noted that the English Baptists arose out of the Separatist Movement and carried their principle of separation to the ultimate end of separation of Church and State, which had not been addressed by the Separatists previously, because of their wanting the state to intervene to support the true church. The Baptists appealed to the authority of God over the prince, and of Christ over his church of independent congregations, formed on the basis of covenants with Him, culminating in the principle of "voluntary membership in a gathered church in which

---

[90] Quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* II, 187. Smyth had also composed a 100-article Confession of Faith for apologetic purposes early in his career. *Cf.,* Whitley, *Works*, 733-750; Torbet, 66.

[91] Quoted in Burgess, *Early English Dissenters* II, 259-261. *cf.,* Whitley, *Works,* 751-759.

Christ was accepted as King and law-giver." The principle of separation of Church and State was incipient in their repudiation of the right of civil authorities to "make demands upon the faith of the believer which were inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible," raising the issue, whether the civil authority had the right to persecute persons for their faith and practice." In 1612, the year of his death, Smyth published *A Plea for Religious Freedom for All Christians.* Thomas Helwys extended that plea to include toleration for all men, including heretics, Turks or Jews, because no man ought to be persecuted for his religion.[92] It is to Thomas Helwys' contribution we turn next.

Thomas Helwys, a landed gentleman of Broxtowe Hall, Nottinghamshire, was a barrister of Grey's Inn, the most highly-regarded law school in England. At the age of 45, he had married Joan Ashmore on December 3, 1595, and fathered seven children over the next 12 years, when they became members of John Smyth's congregation at Gainsborough. Under threat of increasing harassment, the congregation followed the Scrooby church and removed to Amsterdam, leaving Joan and the children behind in 1608.[93] The story has already been told of the Smyth congregation's split with the Ancient Church, over doctrinal and baptismal disagreements, and Helwys's split from Smyth when the latter renounced his se-baptism. Helwys, and his future successor, John

---

[92] Yarbrough, "English Separatist Influence," 20-21.

[93] ExLibris Org., "English Dissenters: Barrowists," accessed March 3, 2006, Online URL: http://www.exlibris.org/nonconform/engdis/barrowists.html. This document, and Burrage *Dissenters* I, 229, suggest that Joan would have had seven children, the eldest of which was eleven, when the congregation left for Holland in 1608. Did she remain behind by choice, thinking that she would be safe at the family estate at Broxtowe Hall? That year she was imprisoned for three days for non-attendance at the parish church. *cf.,*William Estep, "Thomas Helwys: Bold Architect of Baptist Policy on Church-State Relations" *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (July, 1985): 24-25. *cf.,* Dexter, *England and Holland,* 385; Watts. 42.

Murton, defended that se-baptism, finding sufficient warrant for it in the New Testament (e.g., on the basis that John the Baptist, stirred by the Holy Ghost, had baptized others).[94]

After casting Smyth and his followers out of their church, Helwys and Murton remained in Amsterdam for a year, publishing the first "Declaration of Faith of English People remaining at Amsterdam" (1611), to gather the scattered English believers to themselves and justify their position, which steered a middle course between Johnson, Ainsworth and Smyth's doctrine of the church.[95] This was the first Confession produced by any company of English Baptists. It denied predestination to reprobation and the necessity of baptizing infants for original sin because they cannot express faith and repentance, and professed belief in general atonement on the basis that Christ died for all men, but not that man had power to work his own salvation, which is granted by grace. This 1611 Confession of Faith became the doctrinal foundation of the General Baptist tradition. It also retained their Separatist views of the Church, that it was

> primarily a fellowship of believers; that each congregation should be of such a size that all its members could know each other; that each congregation had power to discipline its own members; that its officers only had authority within the congregation which appointed them; that civil power was God's ordinance; and that magistrates could be members of the church.[96]

---

[94] Barclay, 70; Burgess, 182-224.

[95] Dexter, *England and Holland,* 538. The Declaration was Arminian in theology and agreed with Ainsworth's doctrine of church government and eldership. Helwys also wrote "A Short and Plaine Proofe by the Word and Workes of God, that God's decree is not the Cause of any man's Sinne or Condemnation" and "An Advertisement or Admonition unto the Congregations which Men Call the New Fryelers," (1611) in which he affirmed the human nature of Christ's body from Mary, and the first day of the week as the Sabbath. Also, that Magistry "debarreth not anie from being of the Church of Christ," but denying any "succession or privilege to persons in the holy thinges" but rather to those who walk with God, "for by the free gifts of God's grace, and through their faith in Christ, all things are theirs." 44.

[96] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 164-165.

Helwys reconsidered the propriety of fleeing to avoid persecution. By 1612, he became convinced that because many were perishing for lack of instruction in England, he should return there to bear testimony to their truth and encourage those facing persecution. He penned his *Mistery of Iniquity* in 1612 to explain his views,[97] and returned to England where, within a year, he and Murton were incarcerated in Newgate Prison. Their little company of believers, holding clandestine meetings at Spitalfields, held together in spite of the imprisonment of their leaders. In the words of Baptist historian Walter Burgess, "these brave men and women were dignified by the greatness of the cause they had espoused. Their church formed a nucleus round which those of kindred mind amongst their countrymen could group themselves."[98] The church became a magnet for religious "radicals" and returning refugees, so that within 40 years, this first Baptist Church on English soil had spawned at least 30 General Baptist churches in central England.[99]

When Helwys died not later than 1616, John Murton succeeded him at Spitalfields before becoming pastor of a church in Newgate that numbered 150 members by 1626, in spite of the fact that 18 people had seceded from it in 1624 to form a church under Elias Tookey. He set the precedent for subsequent "Associations" by actively seeking fellowship with other Baptist churches formed at Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry and

---

[97] Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquitie* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1612), denied that the Magistrate, being a mortal man, had any power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws or set spiritual Lords over them, and stating his claim for freedom of worship on the basis that "men should choose their religion themselves seeing they only must stand themselves before the judgment seat of God to answer for themselves." Quoted in Torbet, *History of the Baptists,* 67, 68.

[98] Burgess, 276-283; *cf.,* Barclay, 94-96 and Ivimey I, 122; Vedder, 204; Wilson, 30.

[99] Murray Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints: the Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1977), 5; B. R. White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 165.

Tiverton.[100] Murton did not allow incarceration to prevent him from writing and ministering to his flock. There is a story recounted by Roger Williams that, while in confinement, Murton used milk provided by a faithful servant of the church, to write his *Most Humble Supplication to the King and Parliament* (1620) on the paper stopple in the neck of the bottle, smuggling it out daily in the empty bottle. His invisible message was made visible by warming the paper over the flame of a candle, and was then transcribed by the church.[101] In this document, Murton repeated his arguments against persecution for cause of conscience, as being against the Word of God and the law of Christ. He had already published *Persecution for cause of Conscience Judged and Condemned* (1615), offering arguments as a lawyer would in a court of law, and "calling the all-seeing God to witness, that we are your Majesty's loyal subjects, not for fear only, but for conscience sake."[102]

Neither arguments nor supplications convinced James I of the justice of the liberty of conscience for which they pleaded—not only for themselves, but for all people: "be they heretics, Turks or Jews, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them."[103] This plea for liberty of conscience constituted the Baptists' initial inroad into the whole domain of Church-State relations which challenged the power of the magistrate to

---

[100] Barclay, 94-96; *cf.,* Walton, 69.

[101] Roger Williams, *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution,* (1644), 36; Burgess, 299-310; Watts, 50.

[102] John Murton, *Most Humble Supplication,* in Underhill, ed., *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience*, 181-231. *Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned* (London: Wrightman & Cramp Pub., 1827), 73-82.

[103] Helwys, *Mistery of Iniquity,* 69. There is an anonymous hand-written "Account of Some of the Most Eminent and Leading Men Among the English Anti-paedobaptists," last recorded date of 1652, located in the Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Collection of the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York, which offers contemporary and sympathetic insights as to the issues being dealt with by Helwys and Murton, as well as those who came after them: e.g., Mr. John Tombes and Mr. Henry Denne, whose work is beyond the purview of this study.

exercise authority over the spiritual lives of his subjects. They did acknowledge that magistrates could be members of the church, as agents of government who bear the sword for God, but limited their authority to the secular affairs of the State. Thus, what began as a personal quest for liberty of conscience became the defining Baptist principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state.

Allusions have been made to the exiled Separatist Church of John Robinson and William Brewster. Robinson has been called "the father of the Independents," and his church, "the fountainhead of Congregationalism." Timothy George, at Samford University calls his Separatism the "most radical form of Protestant protest" against compulsion in matters of religion, and a "quest for new community" that defied both Elizabethan and Stuart attempts to bring it under control.[104] Who were these men, and what were their motivations for separation and contributions toward survival of a fledgling congregation that became a new denomination?

John Robinson (1575-1625) and William Brewster (1560-1644)

John Robinson had become a fellow of Cambridge University after graduating from that institution in 1598/99. He was expelled from that position under the policy that denied funding to any institution that did not subscribe to the Queen's supremacy over the English Church, but obtained the Cure of St. Andrews, known as "the most forward parish in Norfolk," a "donative cure" where lay members had impropriated control of the tithes, and could appoint their own ministers—a *de facto* congregationalism in which the

[104] Timothy George, vii-viii, 44; Wilson, 30-36; Punchard, 313-323.

lay trustees could dispense with the otherwise obligatory Episcopal induction." [105] While serving his parish church, he conducted clandestine meetings with a group of like-minded supporters until ejected in 1604 for not wearing the vestments and not following the Order of Worship in the Prayer Book. At the same time, John Smyth was deposed from his lectureship at Lincoln. Both men made the decision to separate from the Church of England and moved to Nottinghamshire where there was a Separatist cell. They joined the two gathered churches there: Smyth at Gainsborough, and Robinson at the Scrooby church pastored by Richard Clyfton, that met in the Manor House of William Brewster.

Robinson's separation was motivated by his "concern for corporate sanctification through obedience to Christ in a visible church." To his mind, "as saints are gathered into a communion, the true church becomes more visible, so that the ekklhs…a is distinguished by integrity in an organic network of mutual dependency," with emphasis on the interrelationship of the individual members as they participate in the up-building of the community. Thus oikodom» (edification) is "the process of mutual service and obligation by which the church is knit together." This requires discipline, for only by it can a church "maintain its integrity of life and purity of witness." It was the lack of such discipline in the Church of England that accounts for Robinson's reaction against the non-separating Puritans' willingness to tolerate the corruption within it.[106]

It was their sincere belief that they were to be judged by the Word of God as "a manual of obedience with a veritable blueprint for restoring Christianity" that distinguished the Separatists from the Puritan Conformists. The Separatists viewed the

---

[105] Stephen Brachlow, "John Robinson and the Lure of Separatism in Pre-Revolutionary England" *Church History* 50 (Sept. 1981), 288; Davis, 62 and T. George, 59-79.

[106] T. George, 105-114.

Church of England as being anti-Christian because it was defiled by false worship and idolatry, and consequently felt compelled to separate from it.[107] Seeing church history as an age-long contention between Christ and Antichrist, Robinson felt compelled to oppose the admixture of saints and unregenerate people in the church which would culminate in the triumph of hell over the corrupted church. James I's promise to harry Puritans out of the land discouraged any hopes of reforming the church from within. So, when Robinson found himself joining the increasing numbers of deposed and impoverished clergy, "he moved from being a reformist curate to revolutionary Separatist."[108] He did not, however, reject all fellowship with the Church of England, as some Separatists did. His objection to it was not that it contained unbelievers, but that these were compelled to be in it, as opposed to being committed to it voluntarily. On this basis, he considered the Established Church to be falsely constituted.[109]

The irony of the Separatist Church meeting at Scrooby Manor where William Brewster served his Majesty as Postmaster is that it was the property of the Abp. of York. Here, the bishop's pursuivants staked out their homes, and harassed them with fines and imprisonment until they decided to remove to the Netherlands in 1607.[110] By the time they arrived in Amsterdam, the Ancient Church was already known for Mrs. Johnson's

---

[107] T. George, 116; Robinson, *Of Religious Communion, Private and Public* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1614), 17. Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 56.

[108] Brachlow, "John Robinson," 289-292. Robinson credited the writings of Thomas Cartwright and Henry Jacob, whose story will be told in the next section, with influencing his concept of the nature of the church as visible, particular and vested with the right to practice congregational discipline and elections.

[109] B. R. White, *English Puritan Tradition,* 106; Watts, 42.

[110] Dexter, *England and Holland,* 219-237. Brewster was responsible for distribution of the mail and accommodation of officials traveling north. The buildings and 6-7 acres of grounds of the Manor House could accommodate 500 persons of rank, plus their horses. Burgess, 93. Amsterdam had been a haven for those persecuted for religion since 1569 when the States-General of Holland had granted liberty of conscience and freedom for sects to exercise religion in public meetings. Dexter, 418-419; Watts, 50.

contentious behavior, Elder Daniel Studley's sexual misdeeds, and the pastor's attempts to prevent a division in the church by altering its polity from congregational to that of a presbytery of elders. In order to avoid becoming involved in their conflicts, the Robinson Church sought permission to settle in Leyden. Here they thrived for a generation, attracting exiles from England until their membership swelled to over 300.[111]

The guiding principle for their ecclesiology was

> their sense of Christian community, centered around their experience of the One who . . . had called them out of their separate ways in the world and into the spiritual community of a covenanted community, so that they believed the act of covenanting had formed them into an entirely unique, divinely blessed community by virtue of Christ's spiritual presence in their midst. This community was not a bare assembly, but a holy fellowship united in spiritual communion by the Spirit of God [who had bound them together] to grow into a holy temple in the Lord.[112]

This ecclesiology required discipline and dictated church polity. A community of gathered saints inhabited by the Spirit of God, did not derive ministerial power by a sacerdotal succession, but by the authority granted by the indwelling Lord of the Church, who, in addition to giving them a covenant, imbued them with the power of binding and loosing. Thus the congregation itself acted as proprietors of Christ's own ministerial authority to govern their church, and choose and ordain their own officers, exercising democratic ("popular") rule through the elders who administered all actions only "with the knowledge, presence, approbation and consent" of the gathered congregation "since the mind of Christ is to be found in the shared fellowship of the covenanted believers."[113]

---

[111] T. George, 86-88. In Leyden, they purchased land and buildings, Brewster was made an Elder, and many members became citizens of Leyden. Dexter, *England and Holland,* 504-518.

[112] Stephen Brachlow, "Life Together in Exile" in *Pilgrim Pathways,* ed. William Brackney and Paul Fiddes (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999), 116.

[113] Brachlow, "Life Together," 116, 118-119.

The church covenant became the *sine qua non* of a Congregational church, with its focus on the corporate life of the congregation being bound together to walk together in the ways of the Lord. William Bradford recounted that "the Lord's free people joined themselves by a covenant with the Lord into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatsoever it should cost them."[114] This covenant had a vertical dimension (with God), and a horizontal dimension with each other as "spiritually hewn and lively stones" laid together by the Holy Spirit and united by a bond of close fellowship, interdependence, and shared love.[115] To affect this unity, a congregation should be small enough to meet together for worship and know one another well. They added a third "mark" of the true church to that of Word and Sacraments, that of discipline exercised by the entire congregation, according to the "Keys of binding and loosing," to keep the church from being burdened with "noisome, rotten members" which could reduce it to becoming a spiritually lifeless institution.

Though called "Brownists," this was the first church to regard themselves as "Independents." Their officers were servants, not rulers, and the congregation became known for their life of love, peace and holiness, so that they attracted exiles from England who desired to experience "the fellowship of the communion of saints with an intimacy and a reality utterly unknown to the casual and undisciplined assemblies which met for worship in the parish churches around them."[116]

---

[114] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation,* ed. Samuel E. Morison (1620), 9. 4h edn., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912).

[115] The principle of covenant and how it effects church ecclesiology are articulated by Robinson in *Justification of Separation* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1610), 135, 212, 482.

[116] B. White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 83; Brachlow, "Life Together." 119-124; T. George, 2.

R. Tudor Jones, an early Congregationalist historian at the University of Wales, ascribes this harmony of fellowship to Robinson's own irenic temperament. John Shakespeare credited "the nobility and wisdom of Robinson and the leaders of the church who followed "a free and sagacious interpretation of 'Congregationalism' for their success. There was no autocracy or oligarchy. . . . Spirit was infinitely more to him than form." To him, the people were the church.[117] These principles of ecclesiology can be found throughout his writings, some of which have been cited. Perhaps the document that provides the most revealing insight into the character and leadership of the man is his *Essays or Observations Divine and Moral* (1625) in which Robinson gave his thoughts about Christian morality and virtue: For example, Observation #7, On Religion:

> Disputations in religion are sometimes necessary, but always dangerous; drawing the best spirits into the head from the heart and leaving it either empty of all, or too full of fleshly zeal and passion, if extraordinary care be not taken still to supply and fill it anew with pious affections towards God and loving towards men. . . . He that strives for error strives for Satan against God; he that strives for victory strives for himself against other men; but he that strives for truth against error, helps the Lord against God's and his own enemy, Satan, the father of lies; and this, specially, if withal he handle God's cause according unto God. A man shows most knowledge and understanding in the matter of truth; but most grace in the manner of handling it, with reverence, holiness and modesty.[118]

Observation # 33, Of Afflictions:

> Both good conscience and wisdom must be used in applying such Scriptures as speak of the afflictions of Christians for well-doing; . . . It is a most dangerous thing for any to deem his afflictions extraordinary; lest by so doing, he prejudice himself against ordinary comforts; which we should with readiness and thankfulness embrace, and not look for angels from heaven to comfort us, or for manna from heaven to feed us.[119]

---

[117] Jones, 21-24; Shakespeare, 159-161; Dexter, *Congregationalism . . . 300 Years,* 397-408.

[118] J. Robinson, *Essays or Observations Divine and Moral Collected out of Holy Scriptures . . . Tending to the furtherance of Knowledge and Virtue* (Leyden: 1625), 79.

[119] J. Robinson, *Essays,* 317.

Robinson's last treatise, "On the Lawfulness of Hearing Ministers in the Church of England," (1634) was probably his most significant contribution to the future progression of Independency to Congregationalism. It eschewed avoidance of fellowship with parish churches, making the distinction between sharing devotional activities and actually communing with them by sharing in the sacraments, and set the tone for an attitude of latitude that others rejected in their strict and rigid Separatism, viz.,

> This practice of hearing the Ministers of the Church of England is not against any article of faith which is by this church professed. . . . I esteem that so many in that Church . . . are as truly partakers of that Faith,--and I account many thousands to be my Christian brethren, and myself a fellow-member with them, of that mystical Body of Christ . . . That I have always in spirit and affection all Christian fellowship and communion with them; and am most ready in all outward actions . . . to express the same . . . that I am persuaded the Hearing of the Word of God there preached, in the manner and upon the grounds formerly mentioned, is both lawful and upon just occasion necessary for me and all true Christians withdrawing from that Hierarchical Order of church government and ministry and the appurtenances thereof.[120]

This particular exiled church at Amsterdam provided another legacy whereby Independency gave rise to the Congregational movement. As the second generation of its membership began to come under the urbane influence of Leyden, the desire arose to propagate the Kingdom of God in the New World. Permission was obtained from King James I to plant a colony in Virginia, and after many frustrations and false starts, it was decided that Elder Brewster should lead a group of the strongest to establish a foothold in that territory, to be followed later by the infirm and elderly. In 1620, this colony, off its nautical course, and in dire straits, finally arrived in Massachusetts Bay to establish the Plymouth Colony for which it has thereafter been known.

---

[120] J. Robinson, *A Treatise of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England* (Leyden: n.p., 1634), published posthumously.

Their sponsors never did provide for the remainder of the church to join the "Plantation,"—Robinson died in Leyden in 1634—but those who did survive to carry out their theocratic mission under the leadership of Gov. William Bradford and Elder Brewster became the progenitors of the Congregational Churches of New England. Here they propagated Robinson's policies and lived out his departing exhortations to "follow me only so far as I follow the Lord," and to be open to whatever new light the Lord may have for them, "if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of his, to be ready to receive it, as ever we were ready to receive any truth by his Ministry," confident that "the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word."[121] Next we turn to Henry Jacob, founder of the first true Congregational Church in England, which became the progenitor of the Particular Baptist movement.

Henry Jacob (1563-1624) and the Brownist Congregational Church at Southwark

Henry Jacob, having graduated from Oxford University and receiving orders in the Church of England, was serving a parish church in Kent when he visited Francis Johnson in prison in 1593, intent upon persuading Johnson to conform. As a result of that unsuccessful debate, Jacob put his views into writing, publishing his "Defense of the Churches and Ministry of the Church of England" in 1599. His thesis was that that church was a true church, although in need of reform. In 1603, Jacob was one of the Puritan composers of the Millenary Petition presented to James I at Hampton Court,

[121] Dexter, *England and Holland,* 565-570; 583-594. Quote p. 587. Shakespeare, 162-165.

appealing for further religious reformation, the rejection of which moved him toward Non-conformity and cost him the loss of his benefice.[122]

The subsequent progression of his religious views can be traced in the record of his writings, beginning with *Reasons taken out of God's Word and the best human Testimonies; Proving a necessity of Reforming our Churches in England,* (1604) in which he noted that there had been no diocesan churches for 200 years after Christ, whose order for the pastors of his church differed "only in priority of order, not in majority of rule."[123]

In this, his opening salvo toward reformation, he asserted that that order should be kept for all churches to the present, and that "every Particular Church is a Visible Church of Christ" and "therefore ought to have and use the ecclesiastical government of itself." This meant that bishops had no authority to rule over pastors. For publishing these views, Jacob was imprisoned. Nevertheless, he elaborated on them in 1605 with his publication of the earliest completely developed Independent or Congregational "Catechism" in which, in addition to the standard doctrinal topics of God, Man, Christ, and Salvation, he addressed questions of the Church, Officers, Sacraments, Christ's three offices (Prophet, Priest and King), and Sanctification, from a Non-conformist point of view. For example:

> Question: "What is a true Visible or Ministeral Church of Christ?"
> Answer: "A particular congregation, being a spirituall perfect corporation of Believers and having power in itselfe immediately from Christ to administer all Religious meanes of faith to the members thereof."
>
> Question: "How is a Visible Church constituted and gathered?"
> Answer: "By a free mutuall consent of Believers joining and covenanting to

---

[122] John von Rohr, "The Congregationalism of Henry Jacob," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 19, #3 Oct. 1962), 107-108. B. R. White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 165.

[123] Henry Jacob, *Reasons taken out of God's Word . . .Proving a necessity of Reforming our Churches in England* (1604), 17. *cf.* Shakespeare, 174; Dexter, *England and Holland,* 368-369.

> live as members of a holy society together in all religious and virtuous duties as Christ and his Apostles did institute and practice in the Gospell. By such a free mutuall consent also all Civill perfect Corporations did first begin."
>
> Question: "Wherein standeth the Church's holy Government?" Answer: "In their Election of Ministers and their Spirituall Correction of offenders."

Jacob defined the officers, the means of their election, and their roles in guidance of the church, concluding with a protest that "To be wronged in our souls, in our callings, in our bodies, is a matter of surpassing indignity and grief, considering the nature of the cause for which we suffer."[124] Following the publication of this "Catechism," Jacob's next work was a bold appeal to the King to be allowed to live and practice their religion in England as loyal subjects, exempt from the jurisdiction of the prelates, entitled, *An Humble Supplication for Toleration and libertie to enjoy and observe the ordinances of Christ Jesus in the Administration of his Churches in lieu of humane Constitutions* (1609). He claimed that, whereas the Prelates had usurped the authority of the king over the churches by managing state and civil affairs, "we Ministers keepe ourselves within the limits of our function Ecclesiastical, wholly refusing all publique civill offices and government."[125]

When this appeal failed to do anything but place him in more jeopardy, Jacob went into exile, joining the Robinson Separatist Church in Leyden for six years. He

---

[124] Henry Jacob, *Reasons,* 45. Synopsis of questions from Burrage, *English Dissenters* II, 153-160

[125] Henry Jacob, *An Humble Supplication,*11. "We hold that all Officers and Ministers of the Gospel ought to be subject to your High[ness] . . . . That Civil Magistrates ought to take notice of any ecclesiastical misgovernment or life or teaching on behalf of the King, but the Prelates take this function upon themselves." Appealing to the King's ultimate authority over the Church, he accused the Prelates of presuming the power to enact laws "and leave to your Majesty a bare command for the execution of them. They imprison, they deprive; they degrade; they excommunicate; they anathematize. They exercise power over the entire kingdom and over the Nobility and gentry, whereas We the Ministers soliciting reformation . . . doe exercise a jurisdiction and government most compatible with your Imperial Scepter." 12-15.

continued to see himself not as a Separatist, but as a Puritan striving for reform of the English Church. There is speculation among scholars as to which man, Robinson or Jacob, exercised most influence over the other's stance. Slayden Yarbrough has made the case for a mutual influence exercised during these years, with Robinson's strict Separatism being ameliorated until it culminated in his "Lawfulness of Hearing the Ministers of the Church of England," and Jacob's return to found a "separated" but not Separatist Church at Southwark, London in 1616, (i.e., a "semi-separatist church").[126]

While in Holland, Jacob had continued to press for acceptance of reform, penning his *Plaine and Cleare Exposition of the Second Commandment* in 1610, in which he emphasized the importance of being in a "visible, ministerial Church of Christ . . . for out of a true, visible church there is no salvation," echoing his position in *Reasons* that Christ only is Head of the church, and "if his will is not carried out in church government, he cannot truly be said to rule."[127] This was followed the same year with his most articulate description of what he meant by a "visible church," *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ's true Visible or Ministerial Church; Also the Unchangeableness of the same by Men,* in which he defined the church as

> a number of faithful people joined by their willing consent in a spiritual outward Society or body politic, coming together into one place; instituted by Christ in his New Testament and having power to exercise ecclesiastical government and all God's other spiritual ordinances—the means of salvation—in and for itself immediately from Christ. It has in it a power of spiritual polity that is single; that is to say, over persons not of many ordinary congregations, but of one ordinary congregation only.[128]

---

[126] Slayden Yarbrough, "The Ecclesiastical Development in Theory and Practice of John Robinson and Henry Jacob," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 5 (Fall, 1978): 201-205.

[127] Jacob, *Reasons,* 53-54, and *Plaine and Cleare Exposition,* (Leyden:1610); *cf*., von Rohr, *108.*

[128] Jacob, *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ's True Visible or Ministerial Church; Also the Unchangeableness of the same by Men* (Leyden: 1610), 28.

Jacob refused to regard the Church of England as a false church, and would not totally separate from it "because there are in them many true Christians."[129] In fact, he wrote a letter to a friend back in England in which he stated that "for my part I never was, nor am, separated from all public communion with the congregations of England. I acknowledge, therefore, that in England are true visible churches and ministers . . . such as I refuse not to communicate with."[130] The point he wanted to make was that "all churches of Christ's and the Apostles' institution were ordinary (i.e., ordered) congregations, and furthermore, each of them . . . ought to consist of people belonging to no more ordinary congregations, but to one only," and ought to give their free consent to their own government.[131] Jacob did see, however, that it was imperative to obey God, rather than man, since no one, neither Prince nor Magistrate, can answer for another. His solution was to establish an Independent congregation that kept open the channels by communing on occasion with the parish churches. For him, "Independency" meant church membership by free, voluntary consent, and "popular" government by the people, as opposed to an oligarchy imposed on them against their wills.[132]

Jacob returned to England to put into practice the principles in his writings, establishing his "semi-separatist" church in Southwark, (Surrey) in 1616 alongside the parish church, but in communion with it. Because this church became the direct

---

[129] From *A Confession and Protestation of Faith* issued by the Robinson Church, 1616, Sig. D-5.

[130] Published in Jacob's *A Declaration and Plainer Opening of certain Points, with a sound Confirmation of some other, contained in a Treatise intituled "The Divine Beginning, &c."* (1612).

[131] Hanbury I, 231; Quote from *Declaration and Plainer Opening,* 10, 13.

[132] This is the gist of Henry Jacob's *An Attestation of many Learned,Godly and Famous Divines, Lights of Religion and Pillars of the Gospel; Justifying this Doctrine, viz., "That the Church-Government ought to be always with the People's Free Consent"* (Middleburg: n.p.,1613), 100, 115, 306.

progenitor of both the Congregational and Particular Baptist traditions, we will pay specific attention to its organization, its covenant, its confession, and its chronology. He and a group of like-minded, godly and learned men appointed a day of prayer and fasting, and each made confession to the others of his commitment and profession of faith "to walk in all God's ways, as He had revealed or should make known to them." They appointed and ordained Jacob as their pastor and drew up a Confession of Faith pertaining to 28 particulars in which they dissented from the Established Church,[133] viz:

> 1) Christ's offices; 2) The all-sufficiency of scripture; 3) Their church's distinction; 4) The visible church; 5) Synods and councils; 6) The Catholic Church politick; 7) The Provincial church; 8) The parish church in bondage; 9) Archbishops and Lord Bishops; 10) Making ministers; 11) Communion with parish churches; 12) Pluralism and non-residency; 13) Disciplinary censures; 14) Pastors and their power; 15) Mixed multitudes; 16) Human traditions; 17) Traditions Apostolic; 18) Prophecy; 19) Reading of homilies; 20) Christ's descent to Hell; 21) Prayer; 22) Holy Days; 23) Marriage, Burying and Catechism; 24) Ministers being Magistrates; 25) Lord's Day offering; 26) Tithes and church dues; 27) Magistrates' powers; 28) Necessity of obeying Christ rather than man.[134]

This was a "Barrowist" church in that the "power of government" belonged to the Elders, but the "power of privilege" resided in the congregation, so that any action taken by the church had to be taken by the consent of both, in meetings conducted by the Elders, and participated in by all members. Their doctrines were consistent with those of John Calvin, as stipulated at the Synod of Dort, and their "order" was based on their understanding of the New Testament churches: i.e., each congregation, under Christ as its

---

[133] Benjamin Stinton, *A Repository of Divers Historical Matters relating to the English Anti-paedobaptists Collected from the Original Papers of Faithful Extracts* (1712) is an invaluable resource for the history of this church, which became known as the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church. This manuscript, referred to as the "Jessey-Stinton Repository" is housed in the Angus Library of Regent's Park College, Oxford. Robert Paul, "Henry Jacob and 17th Century Puritanism," *The Hartford Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1967): 96-97.

[134] "Jessey-Stinton," 1-3.

Head, should be organized and governed locally, appointing its own pastor, to serve (but not exercise control), with all members standing in equality and brotherhood, with no hierarchy of some exercising dominion over others. Deacons were chosen according to Acts 6: 1-6, and internal discipline was carried out on the basis of Matthew 18:15-18, taking their example from the Apostles' choice of Matthias to replace Judas by the whole body (Acts 1: 15-26). They interpreted *episcopos* (often translated "bishop") as "overseer" to look after, but not rule the congregation. The duty of all members was to share with the others as needed (Acts 2:42-44).[135]

After serving this church for eight years, Jacob departed for Virginia in 1624, leaving it to edify itself for two years until a Kentish preacher, John Lathrop, was chosen to pastor them through the ensuing nine years of intense persecution. In 1630, the church renewed its covenant "to walk together in all the ways of God, so far as He had made known to us, or should make known to us, to forsake all false ways."[136] Their insistence upon retaining open fellowship with parish churches both attracted many members to them, and made them vulnerable because of their "visibility." In 1632, Lathrop and 42 members were seized and imprisoned. He was released, appealing on behalf of the needs of his family, but upon the death of his wife in 1634, he also emigrated, taking 30 members to join the Plymouth Colony in New England.[137]

During 1636-37, when Henry Jessey became their pastor, Benjamin Stinton recorded that many were taken captive, "but the Lord gave them wisdom and favor with

---

[135] Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism,* 9-29.

[136] "Jessey-Stinton," 9; Paul, 99.

[137] "Jessey-Stinton," 3; Paul, 102; Vedder, 207. The first split from this church occurred in 1633, by a group who adopted believers baptism by affusion, i.e., pouring. Stinton, 6; Paul, 100.

their keepers, so they were permitted to be bailed out." Between 1638-1641, they were treated with increasing violence, "kicking, beating, thrusting, and pinching" both men and women whom they seized.[138] It became necessary to meet secretly, but the congregation had grown too large to do so. In 1638, John Spilsbury (1593-1668) of Aldersgate, London, led a group to form another congregation, and in 1640 the church split amicably again to form two congregations, one continuing to be led by Henry Jessey, the other by Praise God Barbone. Jessey retained both infant baptism, and re-baptism of believers, but began doing so by immersion; the Barbone group continuing infant baptism by affusion, or pouring.[139]

John Spilsbury, wrestling with the scriptural validity of baptism, produced his *Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptism* in 1643. His arguments convinced William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys to withdraw from the Jessey church to form immersionist congregations. In 1645, Henry Jessey received believer's baptism at the hands of Knollys, but did not impose that mode on his congregation, so it did not become a "closed communion" church. He continued to work for good relationships between the parochial and congregational churches during the Protectorate, producing his *Storehouse of Provision to further Resolution in Several Cases of Conscience,* a children's catechism, and a new translation of the Bible between 1650-1653.[140]

---

[138] "Jessey-Stinton," 7-8.

[139] Among the many scholars who address this development are Paul, 101, Vedder, 206-208, Wilson, 46; and White, "Henry Jessey in the Great Rebellion," in *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent,* ed. R Buick Knox (London: The Epworth Press, 1977), 135-137.

[140] Henry Jessey, *A Storehouse of Provision* (London: 1650), was a book of "Questions Propounded with Answers thereto," urging toleration and love for those who differ in belief," and addressing the issues of separation, 43-44; dealing with intra-church offenses with love for the sake of the peace of the church, 47-50; and the importance of sharing the ordinances in open communion (93-101). Barrington R. White, "Henry Jessey," 141-152. Jessey also co-authored a pamphlet, "A Declaration of Congregational Societies in and about the city of London, as well as those commonly called Anabaptists,"

In 1644, Kiffin, Spilsbury, and twelve other Baptists produced "A Confession of Faith of the Churches that are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists . . . for the vindication of the truth and information of the Ignorant, and . . . the taking off of those aspersions that are frequently . . . cast upon them." In this 53-Article confession, they protested their desire to walk in love, peace, and obedience to authority as it is due.[141] Here is to be located the beginning of the Particular Baptist Denomination (i.e., subscribing to the Calvinist theology that Christ died only for the elect, in contrast with the General Baptists, derived from Smyth and Helwys, whose General Atonement theology stressed that Christ died for all who, enabled by grace, would accept the gift of Christ's atonement).

This chapter has examined the rationale for separation as it developed out of the experiences, and was expressed in the writings of those Puritans who felt constrained to separate from the Church of England, and thereby laid the groundwork for Independency in its two primary manifestations in England: the Independent Congregationalists and General Baptists. While these did not agree as to theology or praxis, they did agree on their ecclesiology. Chapter Three will offer a recapitulation of the forms sectarian Separatism took, with a view to understanding those elements that promoted survival, or precipitated failure, in the insalubrious atmosphere of exile and persecution in which they germinated.

(1651) in which he advocated that Protector Cromwell should call a Parliament elected by members of the gathered churches. This took place in what became known as the "Barebones Parliament" in 1653. However, when the monarchy was restored, Jessey was imprisoned for opposing it, and he died in 1663.

[141] "Jessey-Stinton," 12-13. Dr. Daniel Featley, loyal Anglican churchman, acknowledged that those who subscribed to this confession were not heretics or schismatics, and the Rev. Stephen Marshall (1594-1655), an avid supporter of Puritan preaching, called it "the most orthodox of any Anabaptist Confession that ever I read." "Stinton Repository," 24. Marshall told the House of Commons in 1640 that "preaching is the chariot on which salvation comes riding into the hearts of men." Christopher Hill, *A Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), 82.

CHAPTER THREE

Principles of Independency Worked out in the Separated Churches in Exile

This chapter will examine the dynamics of the congregations themselves, which were gathered by the aforementioned pioneers of Separation, seeking clues as to their survival or demise, which will be analyzed in Chapter VI. Most of these companies of believers did not survive, except in off-shoots of the Robinson and Helwys groups, but their experiences provided invaluable lessons from which the next generation of Independent (Congregationalists) and Baptists created surviving denominations. What were those experiences and the lessons gained?

At the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, there was a variety of English/Scottish churches in exile in Holland:

> 1) The Scotch Presbyterian Church of John Paget (founded in 1607);[1]
>
> 2) The Ancient "Barrowist" Church of Francis Johnson (1597-1610), which split that year into the "Franciscans" (1610-1619), and the "Ainsworthians" (1610-1701), later pastored by John Canne in 1623, and absorbed into Paget's church in 1701; [2]
>
> 3) The Gainsborough congregation of John Smyth, (1603-1612), from which Thomas Helwys split in 1609, returning to England in 1613; and
>
> 4) The "Brownist" Scrooby Church of John Robinson (1608-1634), joined by Henry Jacob's company in 1610, until their return to England in 1616, and the "Pilgrim Church," from which Elder William Brewster led a group to plant a colony in Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1620. After

---

[1] John Paget, an opponent of the Separatist churches in exile, wrote *An Arrow against the Separation of the Brownists* (1618), charging Robinson with inconsistency between his earlier stance of complete separation and later allowing his members to attend the Church of England to listen to sermons.

[2] The designations "Brownist" and "Barrowist" are appellations developed from the type of polity by which they were ordered. The former indicates those whose discipline was derived from Browne's plenary congregational authority; the latter, from Barrow's polity that placed authority in the hands of the Eldership. These terms will be further explicated in the treatment of the individual churches.

Robinson's demise, his church gradually became absorbed into the Dutch Reformed Church at Leyden.[3]

Note that Robert Browne's congregation is not included in this list. After he departed for Scotland and subsequently conformed in England, Robert Harrison assumed leadership of the congregation in 1583-85, which lost its identity after his death. The influence of their ecclesiology lived on, however, through their writings. Champlin Burrage has uncovered evidence that Browne's followers established a church in Norwich pre-1587, that there were "Brownists" in western England by 1588/89, and in Ireland by 1594, and "Brownists" are found holding surreptitious meetings in Kent and London in 1626. It is questionable as to whether these were true Brownists, however, because the authorities tarred all Separatists with that same epithet.[4]

In his *Booke which Sheweth the Life and Manners of all true Christians* (1582), Browne had published his utopian idea of a "voluntarily gathered Christian church under a Covenant with the Lord to be under His government, with each member functioning as a prophet, priest and king under Christ, and sharing the responsibility for guiding and ruling with Christ to subdue the wicked and make one another obedient to Christ."[5] Because he was convinced that the Church of England's all-inclusive membership

---

[3] Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-1623 A. D. as Told by Themselves, their Friends and their Enemies* (London: Ward and Downey, 1897), 98-100. This resource provides many details of the intra- and inter-church controversies among these churches, and draws heavily from William Bradford's account of the *History of Plymouth Plantation,* beyond what space will allow in this study. Peel and Carlson, *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne,* 3.

[4] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 185-207. An anonymous document published in 1643 gives voice to the Brownist polity calling for individual congregations, none having authority to lord it over others, with each man having the liberty to use his God-given gifts to preach or teach. *A Dialogue between a Brownist and a Schismatick* (London: n.p., 1643), 5.

[5] Browne, *A Booke which Sheweth* (Middleburg: n.p., 1582) This document can be found in Peel and Carlson, *Writings of Robert Brown and Robert Harrison* 254-388, and extracts of it in Peel's *Seconde Parte of a Register,* 62-63.

prevented it from being pious or reforming itself, his purpose for organizing his company on the basis of a covenant was not to establish a new church polity, but to assure that his church be "composed only of visible saints . . . covenanted together with God to keep his laws in a holy communion, with each individual submitted to obeying God's laws, to be the church and people of God."[6] The substance of their covenant concerned discipline:

> the manner howe to watch to disorders and reforme abuses, and for assembling the companie for teaching privatlie, and for warning and rebuking both privatlie and openlie, for appointing publick humbling . . . for separating cleane from uncleane, for receiving anie into the fellowship, for presenting the dailie successe of the church and the wantes thereof, for seeking to other churches to have their help being better reformed, or to bring them to reformation, for taking an order that none consent openly, nor persecute, nor trouble disorderlie, nor bring false doctrine, nor evil cause after once or twise warning or rebuke.[7]

Browne's utopian covenant and "unintentionally democratic" polity was constructed on a disciplinary process of rebuke, condemnation and excommunication based on Matthew 18:15-18. Its officers consisted of Relievers to care for the needy, and Widows who ministered to the distressed and afflicted in the church, in addition to the Pastor and Elders, all of whom were elected by a vote of the majority and ordained by the laying-on-of-hands. The responsibility of the pastor was to preach and administer the sacraments—baptizing only the children of members by sprinkling or dipping in the name of the Trinity. The final authority in disputes was to be the entire congregation, led by, but not ruled by, the Elders. Preparation for communion was strict, requiring self-examination for private offenses, the clearing up of all conflicts, and separation of the

---

[6] Richard L.Greaves, "Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought," *The Historian* I (Nov. 1968): 31; Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms,* 9-16.

[7] Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1904), 46-48.

unworthy.[8] It was this practice that proved to be the Achilles heel of this congregation, as "the little company, which had set out to reform the Church of God ended in sordid strife, back-biting and jealousy, failure and apostasy, [having become] a separated church with a censorship which flagrantly violated Christ's word in Matthew 7:1, 'Judge not that ye be not judged.'"[9]

What is the relevance of this early experiment in gathering a voluntary congregation for the answer to the question of survival under duress posed in this study? Browne had initiated the idea of a voluntarily gathered church vis-à-vis a covenant, with each member taking responsibility for the kind of watch-care over one another which consisted of "guiding and ruling with Christ to subdue the wicked, and make one another obedient to Christ." The experiment failed for two discernible reasons that were apparent to future leaders, who endeavored to correct the faults. Even though Browne's ideal description of a church had stipulated that "each member of the church was responsible to Christ for the welfare of the church to which he belongs," in actual application, this kind of juridical oversight with which the "visible saints" were charged, rapidly descended into a process of legalistic criticism, accusations and factions.

Furthermore, even though Browne's ideal called for mutual aid and counsel of sister churches for support of a particular church, there were no sister churches, nor even daughter churches of this congregation, because the internal animosity produced a spirit of bitterness rather than allegiance or support toward each other. Thus this church

---

[8] B. R. White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 61-65. I have chosen the term "unintentionally democratic" because Browne's polity did place authority in the people under Christ's headship, but the concept of "popular rule" was so anathema in that milieu that he was defensive about being accused of it.

[9] Thomas Cartwright, pastor of the Puritan colony at Middelburg, quoted in Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers,* 40.

became an example of what could happen in the absence of a supportive context of associations, such as was eventually achieved in future independently-gathered churches.

I contend that watching his ideal congregation of gathered saints dissolve into factious wrangling so discouraged Robert Browne about the efficacy of his ideal, that it became a major factor that influenced his return to England and subsequent subscription to the Established Church, for which he was castigated as a defector by the very men his writings had inspired. These men, following in his train, saw that ideal and tried, in various ways, to construct a more stable foundation on which successfully to erect such a voluntarily-gathered church.

Browne's ideal church, in which plenary authority resided in the congregation, gave birth to more than an epithet. It became the model for other Separatist and future Independent churches that are categorized as "Brownist": e.g., those of Henry Ainsworth, John Robinson, William Brewster, and Henry Jacob, which will be covered below. Another type of Separatist church emerged, which evinced a different polity that placed ultimate authority in the hands of an Eldership. This model became known as "Barrowist" because it was derived from the application of Henry Barrow's style of church governance. Barrow, in a conscious attempt to avoid the fissiparous tendencies in Browne's congregation, placed plenary authority in the membership to elect officers, but restricted church discipline and decision-making processes to the Elders. As will be seen, this policy in effect disenfranchised the members, because all officers, once elected, were inducted into their roles for life. The "Ancient Church" led by Francis Johnson, and the General Baptist congregation of John Smyth were "Barrowist" in polity. It is to the progenitor of this model to which we turn next.

The Ancient Church of John Greenwood, Henry Barrow and Francis Johnson

The "Ancient Church" of Francis Johnson, exiled in Amsterdam, was a descendant of the congregation originally gathered by John Greenwood in London. In order to "make clear its doctrinal position and ecclesiology in view of the attacks on both," it produced its 1589 "True Confession."[10] The 45 Articles were crafted on the principles of Barrow and Greenwood's *True Description out of the Word of God of the Visible Church* (1589), and underwritten by scriptural references, because the underlying assumption for this Confession was that Christ had given power "to every member of his Church, to keep it in order . . . in his last Will and Testament . . . both an order of proceeding and an end to which it is used."[11] Its discipline, for example, was based on Matt. 18:15-18, and the Keys of the Kingdom, the power to bind and loose (Matt. 16:19).

For the purpose of understanding the ensuing difficulties confronted by this church, the most relevant points stipulated in this Confession, are asserted in Articles:

> 23, that Christian congregations had the power to elect and ordain their own ministry, and to depose them for default in their life, doctrine, or administration of duties;
>
> 26, that the Lord had laid the authority and duty on all members to watch over one another;
>
> 32 and 33, that all who would be saved must come out of the Antichristian church, and join together in Christian communion and covenant, and by confession of faith and obedience to Christ, unite themselves into particular congregations, wherein as members of one body

---

[10] *A True Confession of the Faith, and Hvmble Acknowledgment of the Allegeance, which we hir Majesties Subjects, falsely called Brownists, doo hould towards God, and Set down in Articles or Positions for the better & more easie vnderstanding of those that shall read yt: And published for the clearing of our selues from those vnchristian slanders of heresie, schisme, pryde, obstinacie, disloyaltie, sedicion, &c which by our adversaries are in all places given out against vs.* William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959), 81-82.

[11] Williston Walker, *Creeds,* 38-39.

> of which Christ is the only head, they are to worship and serve God according to his Word, remembering to keep the Lord's day holy;
>
> 38, that each congregation, "as a compact citie in itself . . . must have the counsel and help of one another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ, their Lord;" and
>
> 42, that they must covenant to walk in the obedience of Christ in all trials and afflictions, "not accompting their goods, lands, wives, children, Fathers, Mothers, brethren, sisters, nor even their own lives dear unto them so as they may finish their course with joy, remembering always that we ought to obey God rather than man."[12]

The narrative of the tragic dissolution of this church as a result of Johnson's attempt to limit the authority relegated by Christ to all members to that of a rule by the officers, has been recounted above. As a result, it divided into four branches: one under Henry Ainsworth, another under John Robinson, which moved to Leyden, the third under Francis Johnson, which moved to Emden, and the fourth under John Smyth which eventually united with the Waterlander Mennonites. The first three baptized infants of members only, as the seed of the faithful in covenant relationship with God through their parents, but did not accept them into membership until personal confession of faith could be made. They all elected and ordained their own five officers (Pastor, Teacher, Elders, Deacons and Widows, i.e., Deaconesses). The Johnson and Smyth congregations, however, were ruled by the Elders, whereas in the Ainsworth and Robinson churches, officers were part of the church, "not lords over God's heritage," since the church could exist without officers, but not officers without the church.[13]

The issues underlying the conflicts that arose over the life-styles of Thomasina Johnson and Elder Daniel Studley had to do with application of the above articles of their

---

[12] Lumpkin, 89-96.

[13] Barclay, 99-102. For Robinson, Prophecy was not an office, but a gift from the Lord that could be exercised by all who received it for the edification of the church.

Confession, especially Article 23 that affirmed that the church could dismiss officers for misconduct. Ainsworth stood on that principle, but Johnson supported the "offenders" even to the point of claiming that "tell the church" meant "tell the Elders." They were in uncharted territory, dealing with the question of local, independent church authority: i.e., does the church at large have "a right to determine upon all matters affecting its interests," or is it the prerogative of the officers to admit and exclude members, and determine cases of discipline, in all matters save the election of officers? Ainsworth believed that Johnson's preference for the latter stance "would leave the independency of the church a merely nominal thing." This was Ainsworth's position when he led a party to separate from the ancient church in 1610. Subsequent Separatist congregations observed this tragedy, and adopted Ainsworth's "Brownist" polity.[14] The success of this polity is testified to by the successors of Ainsworth, one of whom was John Canne, who returned to England from Amsterdam in 1640 to serve the Broadmead Church at Bristol.[15] Even though the "Ancient Church" technically proved to be a failure—largely because of the heavy-handedness of Johnson—it formed a critical link between the early Barrowist attempt to compensate for the failure of Browne's covenanted congregation and later excursions into Independency that learned to avoid the extreme applications of both polities by developing a more compassionately supportive covenantal relationship within and between companies of believers. It is to one such church that we turn next.

---

[14] Fletcher, 18-21. Ainsworth also entertained a concept of the church as being Christ's Body and Temple, and actively worked to foster a spirit of fellowship in an atmosphere of mutual love and care amongst those he led, which, I believe, enabled them to survive. *Communion of Saints,* 246-284.

[15] John Canne was leader of a Conventicle at Deadman's Place, but had fled to Holland where he published his *A Necessitie of Separation from the Church of England* (1634). Evans, II, 107. The story of the Broadmead Church will be told in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

The "Pilgrim" Church of John Robinson and William Brewster

This church was comprised of the Scrooby and Gainsborough congregations that in 1608 were forced to seek exile in Leyden (Holland) because of persecutions suffered under the1562 Act that required subscription to the 39 Articles and submission to the prelates of the Church of England. It had been gathered according to the principles in John Robinson's *Justification of Separation from the Church of England* (1610) which said that "a company consisting though of but two or three separated from the world . . . and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk in all the ways of God known unto them, is a church, and so hath the whole power of Christ."[16]

The concept of a covenant was key to the gathering of this church, in that Robinson was seeking to create a new sense of Christian community, with an emphasis on sanctification manifested in a visible church, which he redefined as a "covenanted congregation, maintained by discipline applied according to the method prescribed by Christ."[17] He required for acceptance into membership, not merely a verbal profession of faith, but also "evidence of active godliness," i.e., of the "actual faith" demonstrated in the life of a candidate for membership.[18] He held that that principle of Independency whereby the election of officers, the admission of members, and excommunication of heretics was the responsibility of the whole church of which he is a member, because

---

[16] Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 60. Arber, 67-93, provides the details of this difficult move.

[17] T. George, 166. The differing concepts of covenant, as bilateral-contractual (Zwinglian) vs. unilateral-promissory (Calvinist), have already been discussed. Robinson was a Calvinist, but he interpreted the meaning of covenant with God as a "law-grace contract" by which the law requires perfect obedience, and the gospel works perfect faith and repentance in the believer so as to fulfill the demands of the law. This balance informed both his clement ecclesiology and his wisdom in ministry. Greaves, "Origins of English Covenant Thought," 31.

[18] Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 143. This is stipulated in Robinson's *Justification,* 271.

"God hath not tied it to any one office, but left it a public duty of the whole congregation to be done of all with one consent."[19]

William Bradford (1590-1657), a member of this congregation, who became Governor of the company of "pilgrims" who planted their colony in Plymouth, Massachusetts, provides this insider's view of the order of this church as having "this crowning advantage that it originated from the people and was not imposed on them from above by an act of royal authority." He described this church after its removal from Amsterdam to Leyden, as

> Being thus settled (after many difficulties) they continued many years in a comfortable condition injoying much sweete and delightfull society and spiritual comfort together in the wayes of God, under the able ministrie and prudent government of Mr. John Robinson and Mr. William Brewster . . . in the place of an Elder, unto which he was now called and chosen (1613) by the church, . . so as they grew in knowledge and other gifts and graces of the spirit of God and lived together in peace and love and holiness, and many came unto them from diverse parts of England, so as they grew a great congregation.
>
> And if at any time, any differences arose, or offenses broake out (as it cannot be but some time there will, even amongst the best of men) they were ever so mete with, and nipt in the head betimes, or otherwise so well composed, as still love, peace and communion were continued; or else the church purged of those that were incurable or incorrigible, when after much patience was used, no other means would serve, which seldom came to pass.[20]

Bradford had the highest praise for the character and ministry of Pastor Robinson:

> Yae, such was the mutual love and reciprocal respecte that this worthy man had to his flocke, and his flocke to him. . . . His love was great towards them, and his care was all ways bente for their best good, both for soule and body; for besides his singular abilities in devine things . . . he was also very able to give direction in civill affairs, and to foresee dangers and

---

[19] Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* 125-127, quoted from *A Plaine Refutation,* 79.

[20] W. Bradford, 41-42.

> inconveniences, by which means he was very helpful to their outward estates, and so was every way a common father unto them.[21]

He described the church as having grown to 300 communicants, having eminent men for Pastor and Teacher, four able Elders and three godly Deacons, and a Deaconess who was

> An ornament to the congregation, who did frequently visit the sick and weak, especially the women, and as there was need, called out Maidens and young women to watch and do them other helps as their necessity did require; and if they were poor, she would gather relief for them of those who were able, or acquaint the Deacons. And she was obeyed as a Mother in Israel, and an Officer of Christ. . . . They lived together in love and peace all their days without any considerable differences, or if any disturbance, such as was easily healed in love; and so they continued until, with mutual consent, they removed to New England.[22]

The Leyden "Pilgrim" Church held to an ecclesiastical position that, although separated from the Church of England, was against separation from any of the churches of Christ, allowing for private communion with them, (e.g., the Dutch Reformed Church). Robinson hated schism, and, with the passage of time, grew more open to union with other congregations, so far as agreement in faith could permit. His parting words to the pilgrims leaving for the New World was an exhortation to be open "to receive whatever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word," and to try to "shake off the name of 'Brownist,' being a mere nickname and brand, to make religion odious, and

---

[21] W. Bradford, 42. Samples of Robinson's pastoral care can be read in extant letters written in response to other churches that sought his advice re accepting members from other churches, and exhorting compassionate responses toward members who had "offended." Robinson, "A Letter to a Congregational Church in London" (Leyden: n.p., 1624) and "An Appeal on Truth's Behalf: A Letter to the Church in Amsterdam" (Leyden: 1624), urging them to confront by witnesses rather than to engage in slander.

[22] Quoted in Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth from 1602-1625* (Boston, MA: Charles Little and James Brown Pub., 1841), 455-456. He describes Robinson as "a learned man of good judgment, tender conscience, a hater of hypocrisy, courteous, affable, and sociable in his conversation," 451.

the professors of it, to the Christian world."[23] John Bastwick, the Presbyterian Divine, reported that Robinson had told him that "if he might in England have enjoyed but the liberty of his ministry there, with an immunity but from the very ceremonies; and that they had not forced him to a *Subscription* to them . . . that he had never separated from it and left the Church."[24]

Robinson, while adopting the Brownist principle of attributing plenary authority to the entire (male) membership of a local congregation, **c**onceived of that congregation as a community, gathered vis-à-vis a covenant that fostered, rather than undermined the communal life of what he regarded as the living Body of Christ. These concepts of the church and principle of association were integral to the survival of this church and its daughter congregations. In fact, for Robinson, the principle of association was so important that he, in his typical spirit of largesse, acknowledged that the Church of England contained many true ministers and believers, and advocated communing with them privately.[25] With this congregation, we have moved from considering examples of Separatism to the precursor of Independency, and its self-declared "Semi-separatist" stance, which came to fruition with Henry Jacob, to be covered in a later section.

---

[23] Edward Arber, 176-183. This attitude was carried to the new settlement by one of its founders, Edward Winslow, who observed in *Hypocrisy Unmasked* (1646), 92-99, that "Our practice being wholly grounded on the written word, without any addition or human invention known to us, taking our pattern from the Primitive Churches . . . I say, if we must still suffer sure reproach, notwithstanding our charity towards them who will not be in charity with us, God's will be done." Quoted in Arber, 185.

[24] Quoted in Arber, 186-187.

[25] John Robinson, *Of Religious Communion Private and Public* (1614). Robinson's premise is that, whereas public communion in the disordered Church of England is not permitted, for it implies participation in and agreement with its disordered polity, private prayer and devotion shared with faithful believers within that church is permitted, as between brethren within Christ's invisible church. *cf.,*Robinson, *Justification of Separation,* 346-351.

The Baptist Churches of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys

The church that John Smyth led in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire in 1606 was gathered on the basis of a covenant with God "to walk in all his wayes, made known, or *to be made known unto them* . . . whatsoever it may cost them," in the Free Church tradition of making a compact "to be God's people, to wholly deny themselves, and to obey every one of His precepts" (italics mine).[26] This "further light" clause in the covenant assumed a principle of progressive revelation. For Smyth, this precept removed all barriers to innovation in theology, praxis and scriptural interpretation. It justified the changes he underwent in his spiritual pilgrimage from predestinarianism to Separatism to re-baptism, and finally to acceptance of the Dutch Mennonites as being a true church. The principle also assumed that if God revealed a new truth to one individual, the congregation would accept it if it were composed of sincere believers open to new truth. If they rejected the revelation, they were obviously apostates to be judged accordingly.[27]

Smyth's intention was to make his congregation a visible group of professing believers. It was ordered on the same format as the Ancient Church of Barrow, led by Francis Johnson, with an elected pastor, teacher and elder. When they arrived in Amsterdam in 1608, however, they did not unite with the Ancient Church, but separated from it, calling themselves "The Second English Church in Amsterdam." Whereas Johnson's church was Calvinist in theology, accepting the principles later laid down by

---

[26] William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (Westport, CT: Praeger Pub. Co., 1994), 3.

[27] James R. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation. English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1991), 117-120. The story of the fissures that opened, and finally fragmented this congregation, can be traced to Smyth's cavalier application of this premise. John Robinson also subscribed to the further light precept, as stated in his parting words to the Pilgrims en-route to the New World, that "the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His Word." The account of the success of the Robinson congregation testifies to their more responsible application of it.

the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) regarding election, predestination and limited atonement, Smyth subscribed to the theology of "general" atonement.[28] According to James R. Coggins, Mennonite historiographer at Waterloo, Ontario, there were other differences between the two as well, as a result of Smyth's dualistic perception of reality as being divided between the (secular) kingdom of the world and the (spiritual) kingdom of God, which culminated in his insistence upon "spiritual worship," that he believed was hindered by the use of any books (including English translations of the Bible).[29]

The idea of a church's being ordered according to a covenant was central to Smyth's ecclesiology, because "in the covenant promise of the local congregation, the eternal covenant of grace became contemporary, and man's acceptance of it was actualized in history." For him, "the very foundation of the Separatist position was the covenanted community committed to obedience to God's will . . . even if only two or three faithful people arise in the world, in what country or nation soever, at what time soever, there and then the covenant promises, and Christ are theirs, and with them."[30] It was Smyth's contention that such a covenanted church truly reconstituted the primitive

---

[28] Edward Arber, 133-138; Shakespeare, 134, 137; Whitley, lxxxvi. Smyth also remained aloof from the Henry Ainsworth and John Paget congregations, for reasons he explicated in his *Differences of the Churches of the Separation* (1608). See also, Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2003), 207-208. Lee, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, stated that Smyth had initially subscribed to the tenet of limited atonement under the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church, but vis-à-vis exposure to the Mennonite theology of Hans de Ries of the Waterlander Mennonite congregation that he hoped to become a part of, he adopted their view of General Atonement, having come to the conclusion that "the Reformed doctrine of predestination put the responsibility on God for sin and eternal condemnation." Smyth came to believe that "through Christ's atonement, human free will and original innocence were preserved, so that humans could freely choose or reject God's offer of salvation. . . . This view retained the goodness of God in his redemption as well as His creation." It also served as a rationale for redeemed persons being capable of entering into a covenant with God and with each other—the original foundation of his congregation.

[29] Coggins, 121. See also, Jason K. Lee, 113-115.

[30] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 128-129. Smyth concluded that such a church in covenant with God received the "binding and loosing "authority the Lord had given to the churches for discipline.

Apostolic church in three things: "1) the true matter, which are sayntes only; 2) the true form which is the uniting of them together in the covenant; 3) the true propertie which is communion in all holy things and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ for maintaining of the communion." As will be seen, he later changed his mind about the second, (the form), from that of a covenant, to baptism as the mode of entry into the visible church.[31]

Smyth saw discipline as necessary in order to preserve the purity of such a "visible" church community. This required that "men separate from all known sin, practicing the whole will of God, known unto them . . . growing in grace and knowledge . . . inwardly animated by the Spirit, and united by faith and love of the members of the body for each other, and united outwardly by a covenant that expresses the promise of God to his people and obedience of the people to God and toward each other." Thus discipline was basic to Smyth's concept of a voluntary church, united by a covenant, and a commitment to care for one another, with personal responsibility to watch over, bear one another's burdens, admonish, comfort, and restore each other. These precepts found their way into both General and Particular Baptist confessions.[32]

Smyth had studied the scriptures to determine who could be considered members of a true visible church, and concluded that it must be "only those who have voluntarily responded in faith to the gospel and have given witness to it in believers' baptism." For him, a newly constituted church must begin with a new baptism. On the premise that "as

---

[31] Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 68-76. Thus for Smyth, baptism became the "visible" form of the church instead of the former "true" form of the church, and the church was redefined as "a company of the faithful, baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ. Evans, *Early English Baptists* I, 154, Appendix F, Article # 12. Thomas Helwys and his successor, John Murton agreed with this change that replaced covenant with baptism as "the visible forme of the church."

[32] James R. Lynch, "English Baptist Church Discipline to 1740" in *Foundations* 18 (April – June 1975), 121-126. Smyth delineated his precepts re discipline in *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church* (1609), basing them on Matthew 18: 15-17.

people who are unchurched can constitute a church with each other, so could they assume the right to baptize themselves," he, Thomas Helwys and several followers disbanded their church and reformed it on the basis of personal confession of faith and baptism. In spite of the danger of becoming identified with the radical Anabaptist movement, Smyth baptized himself, then Helwys, and the rest of the congregation. With this act, he became excoriated among other Separatists as the se-baptizer, (i.e., self-baptizer).[33]

At this point, for Smyth, Helwys and Murton, baptism became the central organizing principle around which a church was formed. They saw themselves as not only the first truly constituted English Church in Amsterdam, but the only one, and regarded the other Separatists as false churches, because they were all formed on the basis of a covenant rather than baptism. In fact, Smyth's *Character of the Beast* (1609) depicts paedo-baptism as the "mark" or "sign" of the beast in all false churches.[34] The scions of this church became the General Baptist Denomination, believing that Christ's atonement was "general" for all who would, enabled by grace, receive it.

In his *Differences of the Churches of the Separation* (1608), Smyth had laid down six principles basic to the General Baptists: They were opposed to reading scripture from a translation, to prophesying with an open Bible, and to singing from a Psalm book—because all these quench the extemporaneous expression of the Spirit. He opposed a tri-formed presbytery of elders, pastors and teachers. All elders were pastors; therefore there were no "lay elders." Finally, only members might contribute to the "sanctified" church treasury. The strictness of these principles does not, however, imply that Smyth

---

[33] Torbet, 14; Brackney, *The Baptists,* 4. Leon McBeth, "Baptist Beginnings" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 15 (Oct. 1980): 38. They did not regard themselves as ana-baptists (i.e., re-baptized), because they rejected the baptism they had received as infants in the Church of England as being false.

[34] Walton, 83.

entertained a narrow attitude of intolerance. Acknowledging the reality of the hegemony of state churches in most nations, he was an advocate of toleration for religion in terms of liberty of all men in matters of conscience.[35] Furthermore, Smyth understood that a church reconstituted on such a basis as his could not possibly ever be a national church because a state religion abrogated the primacy of liberty of conscience. This understanding became basic to the distinctive Baptist principle of separation of church and state.[36]

By 1610, Smyth, having become convinced that the "Waterlander" Mennonites were a true church, had second thoughts about his own self-baptism, and applied to them for acceptance of himself and his people into their church, appending a short, 20-article Confession to assure them of his orthodoxy.[37] This represented a significant move on Smyth's part, from total Separation, to a desire to associate with another "true church."

Smyth's "dualistic thinking also made him amenable to the influence of the Mennonite's spiritualized Christology, whereby Christ had brought his "celestial flesh" from God the Father, to be merely nourished in the womb of the virgin Mary, without partaking of her flesh (which was tainted with the guilt of original sin). This "celestial flesh" theory of the Anabaptist Melchior Hoffman, preserved the sinless nature of Christ, so that his flesh was entirely of a divine nature, as required for the perfect sacrifice for sin.[38] This Christology became another matter of dispute between Smyth and Thomas

---

[35] Barclay, 106-111.

[36] Tolmie, 70.

[37] William H. Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life and Thought, a Source Book* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1998), 26-28.

[38] Lee, 209-213. Lee contends that Smyth accepted, but never actually advocated this Mennonite Christology in order to be acceptable to the Waterlander Mennonite church he hoped to join in 1610.

Helwys, who also opposed paedo-baptism but did not agree that adult baptism must be administered by a church in apostolic succession, and parted company with Smyth over these issues.[39] Helwys was also having second thoughts, about the right of a true church to flee persecution, leaving others languishing for lack of support and instruction in England. Thus by 1611, he had determined to return there with John Murton and a small group of like-minded souls. An anonymous hand-written "Account" provides an early account of Helwys's momentous decision:

> 1614 – About the same time also Mr. Helwisse began to reflect upon his own conduct and of the other English dissenters in leaving their own country and friends—fleeing into a strange land to escape persecution: whether this did not proceed from fear and cowardice? Whether they ought not return that they might bear a testimony for the truth in their own land where it may be in danger of being wholly extinguished, that they might encourage and comfort their brethren who were there suffering persecution for Christs sake. The conclusion was that he and his church quickly left Amsterdam and removed to London where they continued their church as publickly as the evil time would permit.
>
> He wrote a treatise intitled "Persecution for religion judged and condemned," 1615 wherein he endeavors to show in it the case it was unlawful to fly in times of Persecution. . . . To prove their orthodoxy in the point of Christs Incarnation, the lawfulness of Magistry and reform. . . . They went on with great courage and resolution, and not withstanding the severity used against them by the civil power, they increased very much in their numbers.[40]

---

[39] Arber, 137-138; Tolmie, 71. Helwys had written to the Mennonites, casting aspersions upon Smyth's orthodoxy. To reassure them, Smyth composed a "Short Confession" to accompany their application. However, he died in 1612, two years before his congregation was accepted in 1614. In 1612-14, the church composed a 100-article "Long Confession" that was published posthumously along with his "Retraction of his Errors." These confessions can be found in Lumpkin, 102-113 and 124-142. Helwys, *A Short and Plaine Proof, by the Word and Workes of God that God's Decree is not the cause of Anye Mans Sinne or Condemnation; and that All men are Redeemed by Christ, as also that no infants are Condemned* (London: n.p., n.d.), 8, 21, in Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought,* 28-29.

[40] Anonymous, "Account of Some of the Most Eminent and Leading Men among the English Antipaedobaptists, (last date entered, 1652), 7-10. Located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University. Recent research has challenged the idea that Helwys, a man of the 17th century, thought in terms of making one's own spiritual decisions as exercising a "right." Lee Canipe, a doctoral fellow in the Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University, argues convincingly that pre-Enlightenment thinking conceived of exercising one's conscience, not in terms of post-Lockean innate

Upon returning in 1611/1612, with 10 or 12 followers, including John Murton, who succeeded him, Helwys began meeting in Spitalfields parish, London and published *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity* (1612), in which he attacked John Robinson for emigrating to escape persecution. Robinson's response defended the biblical precedent for flight, and challenged the practice of re-baptism on the basis that "We retain the seal of the covenant of grace, though ministered in Babylon, and not the baptism of Babylon, but the baptism of the Lord itself."[41]

When Helwys died in 1616, he was succeeded by John Murton (sometimes spelled "Morton), whose intrepid preaching and writings contributed significantly to the growth of the beleaguered "English Anabaptists." Murton affirmed that "any disciple of Christ . . . he, by the Word and Spirit of GOD preaching the way unto others, and converting, may and ought also to baptize them." This was a bold statement in support of "mechanick" (i.e., untrained) preachers and a departure from the Separatists' insistence that baptism be administered only by ordained pastors. In his *Most Humble Supplication,* Murton had asserted that freedom of conscience would not deprive kings of any power given them by God.[42] So successful was the work at Spitalfields, that by 1640 there were

---

human rights, but in terms of one's spiritual obligation to be obedient to the will of God, as interpreted from scripture. It was this element of imperative obedience, not individual human rights, that provided the early Baptists with the impetus to go to any lengths—exile, separation, loss of worldly attachments—to obey what they believed God required for true worship in a true church, according to the primitive model they found in scripture. "That Most Damnable Heresy: John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and Baptist ideas of freedom," *Baptist Quarterly* 40 (July 2004): 399-407.

[41] Robinson, *Of Religious Communion, Private and Public*.(1614) In Robinson, *Works,* 3: 167, quoted in Davis, 220. Robinson held that true baptism was "a sign of the inner baptism of the Spirit," 22.

[42] John Murton, *Truths Champion* (undated), quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 256. Murton also authored the above-mentioned *Most Humble Supplication of Many of the King's Majesty's Loyal Subjects Ready to Testify All Civil Obedience, by the Oath of Allegiance . . . and that of Conscience; Who are Persecuted (Only for Differing in Religion), Contrary to Divine and Human Testimonies"* in 1620, smuggled from his prison cell daily, written invisibly in milk. Watts, 50; Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, xi. This tract may be found in Underhill, 181-231.

six daughter churches, and by 1650, forty-seven General Baptist Churches in London.[43] These General Baptists, the descendants of the original Gainsborough congregation of John Smyth, were in the vanguard of promoting liberty of conscience, of lay preaching, and separation of church and state, the hallmarks of the Free Church Tradition.[44] We turn next to the Independent church of Henry Jacob from which emerged the Particular Baptist churches.

The "Semi-separatist" Church of Henry Jacob

This, the first Independent Church on English soil, was regarded as separated, but not "Separatist," because Henry Jacob permitted his members to commune in parish churches. It was an "Independent" church in that "the congregation giveth their free consent in their own government, there certainly each congregation is an entire and *independent* body politic, and imbued with power immediately under and from Christ, as every proper church is, and ought to be." Jacob has been called the "chief architect" of the new Non-conformity because his Southwark, London congregation, founded in 1616, was "the focal point for the movement, recruiting and spawning sectarian leaders for 25 years." This church was diverse enough to harbor ordinary Independents, rigid Separatists, and those who doubted the efficacy of infant baptism, because of its policy of latitude and toleration for different views, so that by 1642, it had become a parent church,

---

[43] Winthrop S. Hudson, *Baptist Concepts of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Judson Press, 1959), 14; See also McBeth, 38.

[44] Helwys asserted the responsibility of each man (including the king) to God, and, while asserting his loyalty, repudiated the king's right to use earthly power to coerce spiritual compliance—even on "Turcks or Jewes." His 1611 Confession iterates commitment to believer's baptism, religious liberty, and separation of church and state, with a more positive attitude toward the state than the Mennonites, thereby distinguishing his General Baptist churches from the one of John Smyth. See Estep, 32-33.

not only to Independent congregations, but to strict Separatist and Baptist churches.[45] This section will look at the beginning of that mother church and its scions through those years of burgeoning growth in spite of intense persecution.

Henry Jacob had been a member of John Robinson's congregation in Leyden from 1610-1616, returning to England that year to establish his church at Southwark (Surrey), which he served until he moved to Virginia in 1624. As mentioned above, some scholars credit Robinson's influence on Henry Jacob for his ecclesiological openness. However, considering that Jacob had advocated a "non-separating congregationalism" in his *Defense of the Churches and Ministry of England* as early as 1599, I agree with Slayden Yarbrough that the two men most likely reinforced each other's openness to whatever godly ministry was to be found in the Church of England.[46]

This church, like the fully-separated ones, was formed on the basis of a covenant that has been preserved in the Jessey Records in the Gould Manuscript, viz.:

> The Church Anno 1616 was gathered: Hereupon ye said Henry Jacob with Sabine Stairsmore . . . & divers others well informed Saints having appointed a Day to Seek ye Face of ye Lord in fasting & Prayer, wherein that particular of their Union, together as a Church was mainly commended to ye Lord: in ye ending of ye Day they were United, Thus, Those who minded this present Union & so joining together joined both hands each with other Brother and stood in a Ring-wise: their intent being declared, H. Jacob and each of the Rest made some confession or Profession of their Faith & Repentance, some ware longer some ware briefer, Then they

---

[45] Henry Jacob, *An Attestation of Many Learned, Godly and Famous Divines . . . justifying this Doctrine that the church government ought to be always with the People's Free Consent.*(1612), 13; Fletcher, 34; *cf*., Tolmie, 3

[46] Yarbrough, "Ecclesiastical Development." 203, 209; Davis, 222; Jones, 21-22, credits Robinson's "irenic temperament," expressed in his writings, as being a positive influence on Jacob because "Robinson took no pleasure in the indiscriminate condemnation of individuals with whom he had an obvious spiritual affinity. . . . Hence his concern to define his position in such a was as to preserve spiritual communion with kindred souls while maintaining his conscientious objection to those institutional characteristics of the Church of England which seemed to him to be destructive of the church order which Christ had willed for His Church."

> Covenanted together to walk in all God's Ways as he had revealed or should make known to them.[47]

After their having been two years without a pastor, John Lathrop succeeded Henry Jacob, resigning his living in Kent to minister to them 1626-1634. During those years, two small groups led by John Duppa and Samuel Eaton withdrew to form Separatist churches, and, in 1638, John Spilsbury (1593-1668), having become convinced that baptism should be for believers only, withdrew from Jacob's mixed communion, was re-baptized, and organized the first Particular Baptist Church at Wapping, East London.[48] In 1632, forty-two members of the mother church, including its leaders, were imprisoned for two years, after which, upon Lathrop's release, and the death of his wife, he led 30 members of the congregation to New England, leaving the church without a pastor again for three years.[49]

By 1640 the church had grown too large to meet undetected by Laud's pursuivants, so it voluntarily divided into two congregations: one led by Praise-God Barebone (1596-1679), who also became a Baptist in 1654, and one led by Henry Jessey (1603-1663), who had received believer's baptism at the hands of Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691), but did not impose re-baptism on the congregation. Henry Jessey, a Cambridge graduate and Puritan convert, moved to London in 1637, to minister to the

---

[47] Quoted in Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 212. Burrage notes the simplicity of all early Independent church covenants.

[48] William H. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought,* 29; Robert Torbet, *A History of the Baptists,* 69-72; Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* I, 144.

[49] Cleal, 2-5; Jessey-Stinton Records, 3, 6. The records of the Jessey church are available in transcript by Benjamin Stinton, "A Repository of diverse historical matters relating to the English Antipaedobaptists Anno 1712," located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, and in published form by W. T. Whitley, *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* (1908-1909) I, 203-45.

congregation.[50] He refused to unchurch members who remained in communion with the Established Church, so some groups withdrew to form closed communion churches, but retained good relations with the mother church. Others withdrew to form "immersionist" congregations led by Hanserd Knollys and William Kiffin (1616-1701), a leading Baptist polemicist. Jessey himself was baptized by Knollys, but his church did not become a closed communion Baptist Church. In 1644, Spilsbury, Kiffin and Knollys developed a 52-Article Confession of Faith signed by seven Particular Baptist churches that stipulated Calvinist theology and baptism of confessing adults by immersion.[51]

This chapter has investigated the dynamics of the congregations founded and led by Robert Browne, Francis Johnson, John Robinson, John Smyth, and Henry Jacob for clues as to what caused their demise or success. To summarize briefly: It was not Browne's abandonment and subsequent subscription to the Church of England that was responsible for the dissolution of his congregation. Nor did they succumb to the pressures of persecution in the tolerant atmosphere of Amsterdam. Rather, it was the severity with which the strictures of their own church discipline were applied legalistically that they degenerated into internal animosity and bitterness which resulted in the formation of factions, as opposed to developing a spirit of mutual support and allegiance within this community existing in exile and isolation from other congregations.

---

[50] Walton, 81; *cf*. McBeth, 38, designates this congregation as the "Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey church."

[51] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 325; RobertTorbet, *The Baptist Story* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1957), 16; White, "Henry Jessey in the Great Rebellion," 132-147. Jessey worked for good relationships between the parochial and congregational churches, and in 1651 penned a pamphlet entitled "A Declaration of Congregational Societies in and about the City of London as well as those commonly called Anabaptists" in which he advocated that Cromwell call a Parliament elected by members of the gathered churches, which came to pass with the "Barebones Parliament" of 1653; Lumpkin, 144-170.

Henry Barrow had observed this break-down of fellowship in the congregational style polity of Browne, and attempted to correct for it by giving some authority to ruling elders, elected by the congregation. After Barrow's execution, the new leader, Francis Johnson, confronted with intra-congregational disputes, corrupted the "Barrowist" polity by extending the authority of the elders to exercise all discipline in private session, alienating Henry Ainsworth, the erudite Teacher of the congregation, as well as others who felt that their interests were not being fairly represented or served. Thus Johnson's autocratic leadership led to the fracturing of that "Ancient Church," and its ostracization by the other English churches in exile so that it, too, died for lack of internal commitment and external support.

One such congregation in exile, led by John Robinson, actually moved from Amsterdam to Leyden to avoid entanglement in the internal wrangling of the Ancient Church. Robinson hated schism, and had separated from the Established Church only because he believed that God had further revelations to unfold for the ongoing reformation of His church. This belief, in addition to an irenic temperament and a wise and pastoral disposition made him more tolerant of both disagreements and differing interpretations of the will of God for His church as found in scripture. Robinson's congregation adhered faithfully to the Brownist ideal of congregational suffrage in concert with a ministry and eldership carried out vis-à-vis a spirit of servanthood, rather than oligarchic rulership.

John Smyth's congregation at Gainsborough was formed on the basis of a covenant, which contained a "further light" clause that assumed progressive revelation. This concept removed all barriers to innovation, and justified Smyth's theological

changes from being a staunchly predestinarian Puritan, to becoming a Separatist, then a Baptist, and finally a Mennonite. It was further assumed that "new truths were not thought up, but were made known" by God, and that once an individual had received a new truth, all sincere believers would recognize and accept it as such.[52] Such an assumption created an atmosphere in which believers could readily be judged on the basis of holding right doctrine as revealed, and condemned for rejecting that revelation. The dissolution of the Smyth congregation in Amsterdam can be largely accounted for by the consequences of Smyth's application of this perception of progressive revelation, and the development of Smyth's own dualistic thinking that pervaded his theology. For him, everything was relegated to a spiritual or a secular realm—if worship was meant to be spiritual, and written books were secular (i.e., of the letter rather than the spirit) books should be banned from worship as hindering the free flow of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Smyth contended that Christians, "reborn from God become spiritual-minded, righteous and holy." He expected to see such holiness evinced in their personal conduct and acceptance of his leadership. When he did not, he continued to split from them, to preserve the purity of his own company. As he lay dying, before his remnant was accepted into membership with the Mennonite congregation, he expressed regret that he "had been willing to separate over too many issues" and acknowledged "that theological perfectionism could not be enforced in all cases." It was Smyth's dualistic ideology of perfectionism that cost his church its viability, as first John

[52] James R. Coggins, 117-121.

Robinson, and then Thomas Helwys parted company with the radical views he adamantly asserted in response to receiving "further light."[53]

The Henry Jacob congregation thrived under jeopardous circumstances in London largely because it, unlike the exclusiveness of the Separatists in exile, remained diverse enough to harbor ordinary Independents, rigid Separatists, and retained an open communion for both paedobaptists and anti-paedobaptists in an atmosphere of toleration for the saints within, in contrast to the intolerance without, that made enforced uniformity the enemy of all who desired to exercise freedom of worship.

A more comprehensive analysis of the failure or success of several of these early Independent and Baptist congregations will be provided in Chapter VI, "Analysis and Conclusions." In order to appreciate the jeopardous circumstances in which these churches were spawned and grew, a brief review of the persecutory milieu to which they were subject when they returned in England is in order.

Persecution and Proliferation in England

In 1640, after a long power-struggle between the Royalists and Parliament, England was on the brink of civil war. By 1643, Presbyterian Puritanism had gained the ascendancy over Prelacy and was determined to become the new "Established Church," abolishing episcopacy, and setting up its Westminster Assembly to direct the radical reorganization according to the requirements of a "Solemn League and Covenant" with Scotland, in return for its support against the Royalists. The Assembly crafted its own

---

[53] Coggins, 123-125, 154. Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth,* passim, also provides an analysis of Smyth's dualistic theology, and an explanation of his Mennonite Christology, which he believes was influenced by Smyth's determination to unite with that congregation to preserve his diminishing congregation from extinction.

pattern for uniformity in religion, according to a Synodical form of church government, and substituted its Directory of Worship for the Book of Common Prayer. Non-conformity was re-defined in terms of the new rules, but Separatism, Independency and "Anabaptistry" were no more acceptable than under the former church order. Over a century of persecution had proven that hard-line dissent would not succumb to it, so a different strategy was employed to persuade them to conformity.[54]

In 1643 the Long Parliament passed "Certain Considerations to Dis-swade Men from Further Gathering of Churches," in the hope that asserting the rights of particular congregations to exist would undermine their need for separation, and isolate those sects that would not conform, from those Independents who would, thus drawing the latter into an alliance with the establishment. They would not extend concessions to the extent of permitting the gathering of churches across parochial boundaries, however, viewing such efforts as providing alternative forms of worship, contrary to their requirements for uniformity in the parish churches. The issue proved to be more volatile than expected, so that in 1644, Parliament passed another bill forbidding any but ordained ministers, appointed by itself, to preach. The Independents again found themselves on the proscribed list of dissenters.[55]

The hiatus of persecution had encouraged the return and proliferation of many "sectarian" churches in England. One index of *Separate Churches in London, circa 1646* lists four distinct types co-existing at that time: viz., Independent gathered churches, (e.g., those of Henry Jessey, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), Sidrach Simpson (1600-1655),

---

[54] Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church,* 554-555.

[55] Tolmie, 125-126.

Henry Burton (1578-1648), John Goodwin (1594-1665) plus eight others; Separate churches with lay pastors, (e.g., those gathered by Praise-God Barbon, Richard Rogers (1550-1618), and John Duppa, plus six others; General Baptist churches, (e.g., those of Thomas Lambe (d.1686), and Edward Barber (d. 1674), plus three others; and Particular Baptist churches, e.g., those of John Spilsbury, William Kiffin, Hansard Knollys.[56]

The narrative has been recounted of the civil war years (1642-1648) during which the Independents and sectaries in the army enjoyed the opportunity to plant churches with relative impunity. By the end of the war, however, the Presbyterians, having gained control of Parliament as a result of the Solemn League and Covenant with Scotland, attempted to established their polity and suppress all Independency, including the Baptists. Although some members of these groups were made "Triers and Ejectors" of ministers during the Commonwealth, and in spite of the fact that the Independents' "Savoy Declaration of Faith" (published in 1658, two weeks after Oliver Cromwell's death) agreed doctrinally with the Westminster Confession, their congregational polity, differing from the Presbyterian, was unacceptable. Richard Cromwell favored the latter over the "Congregational Way" of self-governance without established Synods. John Owen (1616-1683), a Member of Parliament and convert to Independency, presided over the "Rump" of the Long Parliament from which Presbyterians had been purged in 1648, but in the ensuing morass of the Army and Parliament's vying for political control, Richard Cromwell abdicated. The Congregationalists of London asked Gen. George

[56] Tolmie, 122. These churches were all within the environs of London. A fuller index is provided by this resource on page 245. Henry Burton's *Protestation Protested* (1641) had called for reform of the Church of England by gathering believers out of the parish churches on the basis that a parochial congregationalism was impractical where the State supported an established church. The gathered congregations insisted that they were separated from the corruptions of the world, but not from the civil state of which they remained peaceable members, subject to the king and laws. He also eschewed tithes, stipulating that pastors should be supported by their congregations without any compulsion.

Monck to bring his troops from Scotland to re-establish the peace. To a war-and-riot-weary nation, restoration of the Monarchy under the control of Parliament seemed appealing.

Charles II's Declaration of Breda had offered "liberty to tender consciences," but with his restoration to the throne, Royalist clerics demanded restoration to their livings. The Independents withdrew, requesting mere toleration. But such a prospect threatened the hegemony of the prelates, and the Cavalier Parliament ruled against any dissent from the restored Episcopal Church. All "sects" lost not only political power and the right to hold office, but toleration as well. A "Bill for Uniformity of Public Prayers and Administration of the Sacraments" was passed, and all Non-conformists were declared "Dissenters" and ejected from their pulpits on August 24, 1662.[57]

This chapter has explored the congregational dynamics of the first Separatist, Baptist and Independent congregations for the purpose of detecting clues as to why some failed, and some produced viable off-shoots. It has been observed that those which survived conceived of the church as a living Body of Christ, were formed on the basis of covenants that fostered a nurturing care of their members, and entered into associations with sister churches for mutual support, aid, and counsel. These dynamics would prove critical to the survival of these groups through the ensuing decades of the worst outbreak of persecutory suppression of all Dissent in the 1640's and 1650's.

What were the polity and characteristics of the "Congregational Way?" The next chapter will look more closely at the ecclesiology of the Dissenters which was so critical to their survival, while it was perceived as being a dire threat to the establishment.

---

[57] Jones, 27-77. This date became known as the Great St. Bartholomew's Day Ejection.

CHAPTER FOUR

Emerging Characteristics of Early Independency

None of the aforementioned churches of the Separation survived their sojourn in exile. They are important, however, for the significant role they played in the development and survival of Independency. It was in the churches in exile that the principles of the Independent Congregational and Baptist traditions were worked out, and returned to England as the off-shoots of the English General Baptists, under the leadership of Thomas Helwys and John Murton, the semi-separatist church of Henry Jacob, and the Plymouth colony planted in New England by the Robinson Church.[1]

Looking back through a lens of time that is now over four centuries thick, it is difficult to realize how very radical the concept of a "Congregational Way" seemed in the seventeenth century. It was an unprecedented idea for a society to be governed from the bottom upward.[2] Government was equated with rule, and "rule" assumed a top-down hierarchical structure, whether in the state or church. In Erastian England, this meant that the state controlled the church. When some men proposed that the arena of religion should be exempt from that structure—indeed, actually be free from state control—it was not only the religious establishment, but the very warp and woof by which society was woven together and bound into a unit that was threatened. England had not moved so far

---

[1] Barclay, 62. These principles specified that "each particular church was a distinct society . . . a company of people called and separated from the world by the Word of God and bound together by voluntary profession of faith. Each had the power to elect its own officers, who were supported by voluntary contributions of the church."

[2] The most notable exception was the religious milieu in Holland whereby the Estates General had granted freedom of worship by permission of the government, and become a haven for religious exiles.

from a medieval paradigm that its religion and society were not still one. This is why the account of the sixteenth century had been one of drastic vacillations between Catholicism and Protestantism, precipitated by the religious predilections of its monarchs.

Elizabethan England as a whole, wanted "religion's peace," and the young queen who had survived the vagaries of her father's partial reformation, the influence of continental reformers during the Edwardian years, and the jeopardous reign of her sister, Mary, saw religious uniformity as a core principle around which to consolidate the security of her throne and the loyalty of her subjects. Any threat to that unifying principle was perceived as a threat to her sovereignty and the very peace of her kingdom, which was still assailed by papal intrigues and sectarian interests. Elizabeth could not comprehend that her "Middle-Way" would fail to satisfy any but the most extreme malcontents and incorrigible religious miscreants.

Those ministers and bishops she gathered around her in Privy Council and Convocation had the clear responsibility for carrying out her agenda for providing stability in state and church vis-à-vis the established State-church. Parliament, understanding the benevolent intent of her "Settlement," did her bidding by enacting laws which outlawed all detractions from it, buttressing them with enforcement measures designed to discourage, punish, or banish recalcitrants. In sixteenth-century England, national unity was still bound to religious uniformity, so that a challenge to one threatened the other. It seemed incomprehensible to the queen, her councilors, and her successors, why any well-meaning persons would wish to destabilize their own society, undermine the unity and security of the nation, and reject the unifying precepts of its religion. Elizabeth's own father, Henry VIII, had opened the "Pandora's Box" of

scripture by permitting English translations of the Bible in the parish churches, but his intention was to promote unified submission to his headship of the Church, not to instigate free-thinking about the scriptural foundations of its polity and praxis.[3]

From this historical vantage point, it seems inexorable that the latter should happen, and that it should be the university scholars, with the ability to read those scriptures—often in the original languages—that would be the ones who pressed for further purification of the church from the what the Puritans regarded as superstition and the offensive vestments of popery. This was the Puritans' agenda for further reform, written in learned treatises which fell on bishops' ears that were deafened by their own investment in the status quo. Those who did have ears to hear, chose exile, writing, and smuggling out tracts aimed toward stirring the people's desire for greater liberty of conscience and worship, free of the hegemonic institution of the Church hierarchy. As hopes for further reform from within became frustrated, their choice became one of conform within, or reform without, the Church. The former chapters have surveyed the accounts of those who chose the latter recourse, laying the groundwork for reformation vis-à-vis separation. This chapter will analyze the characteristics of that movement as it went beyond Separatism to Independency.

Definition of the Congregational Way of Independency:

What was the "Congregational Way" that King James I feared would introduce "anarchy" into his realm?[4] The answer to this pivotal question will rely heavily on the primary sources because it was those writings that influenced the progression of the

---

[3] Charles and Katherine George, 309-311.

[4] William Bradford, 16-20.

movement and contributed to its viability. In order to gain credibility, the Independents had to wage not only a battle "against the grain" of societal structure, they had to fight a personal battle against the defamation visited on them for over a century. Since King Henry's days, their hopes of further reform had been dashed by prelatical practices which accused them of being "Innovators, Hereticks, erroneous ones, calling them Puritans, Brownists, Donastists, Anabaptists and Sectaries . . . saying they would be destroyers of the nation." By the mid-seventeenth century, James I's maxim, "No bishop, no king" had been countered by a Presbyterian Church government "which raised up a popish hierarchy of Elders to rule in nowise like the elders of New Testament times."[5]

The most succinct description of this dramatically different ecclesiology which defied that of the State-church was expressed by William Bartlett, minister of the gospel at Wapping, East London, in his *ICNOPAOIA, or, A Model of the Congregational Way,* (1647).[6] Bartlett developed his thesis that a sacred, *visible* church order and polity had been instituted by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and believers were to submit themselves only to Him. This *visible* church-state was a free society of visible saints, *gathered together voluntarily* to worship God in a holy fellowship in individual *ordinary*

---

[5] John Rogers, *Ohel, or Beth Shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun: or Irenicum Evangelicum. An Idea of Church Discipline, In Theorick and Practick Parts.* (London: n.p., 1653), 12-14. The year this document appeared, Rogers (1627-c.1665) was serving as an Independent lecturer at St. Thomas Apostle's, London. During the Commonwealth, after Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament in 1653, Rogers became an ideological leader of the Fifth Monarchist sect, hoping that Cromwell would use his power to bring in the reforms that would institute a godly government. When Cromwell dissolved the Nominated Parliament, and had himself declared Lord Protector, the ensuing arrest of fellow Fifth Monarchist leaders Christopher Feake and John Simpson convinced Rogers to seek exile in Holland, where he received his M. D. at the University of Utrecht. Convinced of the hopelessness of their cause by the Restoration of the monarchy, he returned to England in 1662 to pursue a medical career in Surrey, living in obscurity until his death. For further information about Rogers' influence on Independency, see Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller III, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals* (London: Harvester Press, 1982), 107-110.

[6] William Bartlett, *ICNOPAOIA, or, A Model of the Congregational Way: Or, satisfaction offered and endeavored by unfolding what the right order of the Gospell and Way of the Saints, in the visible worshipping of God after the Congregational manner and way (so much opposed), is.* (London: n.p., 1647), passim. (Italics mine.)

congregations, each of which had the power to govern itself. The administration of the seals and censures were bound within every *particular* congregation. That church-state should remain perpetual until the return of the Lord, without alteration, and the godly everywhere were called to gather themselves into such a church-state, or to join one already in existence.[7] (italics mine.)

Bartlett also addressed the impediments, hindrances and objections to fulfilling this practice of "embodying," reminding his readers that Christ forbade his disciples to Lord it over one another, and that the apostles had served the churches in ministry, not in Lordship, nor in their own power, but in His, as the only Head of the *primitive* New Testament Church. The parish churches, he averred, were not scripturally constituted churches because they were not gathered out of the world, and were therefore carnal. They could not be a church of Christ because they were under an anti-Christian church government, with preachers imposed on them by prelates and patrons, unlike the time of the apostles, when pastors and teachers were chosen and settled in particular churches and congregations, and charged to look after their own flocks. Bartlett concluded that "the church under the Gospel cannot be Universal, National or Diocesan, but Congregational," and the function of its officers was limited only to the congregation to which they belonged.[8]

---

[7] Bartlett, 1-144. This overview has been offered, and specific words italicized, because herein are found the major components of Independent church character, polity and practice that will be developed in this chapter. For example, "embodiment" is essential because only so were the saints able to prevail against those who would destroy them. By being "knit together," they could perform the mutual duties which Christ called them to: "watching over one another's souls, reproving offenders, and building one another up as they walk together in the Word," 33.

[8] Bartlett, 56-63.

In this description of the Congregational Way, all the saints of the Lord were enjoined to come out of the anti-Christian churches and voluntarily to gather themselves together, separated from the "profane multitude" of the world, and from sinful practices. For the sake of the purity of the Church, they were called to look to themselves and watch over one another, establish a discipline, choose their own officers, admit and examine members, and in case of differences, seek the counsel of other churches, as in Acts 15. The author exhorted them to hold one another in high esteem, love, pray for, and watch over one another, sympathizing and endeavoring to recover such as are fallen; to care for their reputation, strive for unity of mind in judgment and in afflictions, and, if possible, avoid divisions, "giving each other a liberty in the use of such things as are indifferent, and . . . being patternes and examples in word and conversation." Bartlett called on England to reform its Church "according to the rule of his word, and not after the will and commandments of men or their own or others' inventions."[9]

Followers of this Congregational Way subscribed to a world-view that saw the Church as "having been for a long time under anti-Christian darkness and Discipline, as opposed to that happy time of the Apostles when it thrived," before it had come under the popish rule of the fourth century that replaced the pure discipline and doctrine of the primitive times with superstitious worship.[10] The key principle in this perception is the

---

[9] Bartlett, 88-110.

[10] Rogers, *Ohel,* 9-11. Franklin Littell describes this paradigm as "the Fall of the Church" from a primitive apostolic pattern to one of compulsion and coercion of religion by the state under Roman Imperial Power (325 A. D.). *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), 53-64. For the Anabaptists, religious liberty stood on two affirmations: 1) "the civic right of a free man to private religious interpretation; and 2) the Christian duty of the voluntary association to enforce a strong internal discipline. Their goal was the recovery of the life and virtue of the Early Church vis-à-vis a Free Church, consisting of voluntary laity in a congregation restored to biblical apostolicity as opposed to "apostolic succession," consisting of members who were re-born of the Spirit, all of whom possessed the Keys of Peter granted by Christ to the community of faith, and exercised by the power of the Ban (i.e., intra-church

importance of a "primitive" estate to which they believed they were restoring the church, rather than merely reforming it. This agenda alone justified their separation for the sake of restitution. Their system was grounded on specific premises: First, that there is, in the Word of God, a gospel-discipline, or church-state for saints, of divine institution, and that that church should not be a mixed congregation, but should differ from worldly polity, being perpetual through time, under the leadership of the Lord.[11]

Secondly, the basis for congregational ecclesiology, was that the "matter" of Christ's Church was composed of "visible Saints, holy, living stones," of which His Temple was to be rebuilt upon Himself, as the only foundation. Such saints were identifiable by their repentance, and their embracing of the gospel. Mere professors did not qualify to be fitted into the Church, but only such as had union with Christ, the head, and who lived to honor and glorify God, by loving and edifying one another.[12]

Third, there should be no distinction between the visible and the invisible church, because all who were "churched" were truly saints. The parish churches, by this measure, were anti-Christian, because they were constructed of a mixture of holy and

---

discipline.) In both their precepts and their expectation of the necessity of suffering to effect the restitution, one can identify Anabaptist parallels with the early Independent and Baptist churches. Littell, 67, 79-89.

[11] Rogers, 1-7.

[12] The concept of the church as consisting of "matter" and "form" reflects a sacramental view of the church which, Stanley K. Fowler, Theologian at Heritage Baptist Seminary, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada, contends was both an aspect of the primitive apostolic church, and an important element of the theology of baptism, to be recaptured "as an integral part of conversion and an instrument by which grace becomes operative in individual experience." For 17th century Baptists, the efficacy of baptism was more than a symbol of union with Christ, in that it mediates the experience of salvific union with Christ. (i.e., One submitted to baptism as a penitent sinner in order to experience the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, rather than as a confirmed disciple in order to bear witness to a past experience of union with Christ.") They thought of it, as well as the restitution of the church in obedience to the ordinances of Christ in sacramental terms, often using the terms sacrament and ordinance synonymously. *More than a Symbol,* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster Press, 2002), 3-6. See also, John Rogers, 29-60. This is consonant with the ecclesiology of John Robinson's *Justification for Separation,* 346, and Henry Ainsworth's *Communion of Saints,* 246-284, that the body of Christ must be constructed of stones, hewn, set apart, and appointed by Him (i.e., consecrated) to the service of God.

profane stones, and administered the sacraments to all, indiscriminately. The fourth premise followed, that, such a visible church estate required both a segregation from the world, and an aggregation of the saints, separated and called out to Himself, in union with Christ, that union being His spiritual Temple, and Body, because "He will dwell in our midst only if we have no fellowship with darkness, with unbelievers, or with sinners." This did not mean having no civil concourse with unbelievers, however, because "we must seek their soules' welfare, doing good to them."[13]

Rogers' *Ohel, or Beth Shemesh* also responded to the accusation that Independents were schismatics, charging that those who refused to separate from the mixed congregations for the sake of their own souls were the real schismatics, because it was not a sin to separate from Antichirst and his church. Parish churches were called "Satan's Synagogues," because there must be a response to the preaching of the Word in submission and obedience to Christ before one can be fit for His Church. Nor did the administration of the sacraments make a true church, but the dispensing of them according to Christ's ordinances, in His Order. "Every church of Christ hath his Rule to bee ordered, fitted, formed, squared, and measured by Christ's rule." These principles constituted the criteria for true churches of Christ as being "ordinary," i.e., ordered and conducted according to His revealed will.[14]

---

[13] Rogers, 61-74. This concept of a distinctly "visible church," consisting of true believers only, went beyond that of Martin Luther's ecclesiology which acknowledged the existence of an "invisible church" of true saints, known only to God, within the visible, comprehensive church.

[14] Rogers, 116-119. Church fellowship is described as of "sweetest harmony and most love, with Christian liberty, and no one is robbed by the Rulers of his or her right . . . to walk according to his light . . . in self-denial, humility of minde, and readily serving one another in order and Gospel decency . . . and pity, where their union consists not in the unity of the form, but in the unity of the Spirit," 212.

Christ's revealed rule for the ordering of His church was that "every man and woman that enters into Church-fellowship, must have a full, free and clear consent . . . having a voluntary submission to all the Ordinances and Orders of Christ of that church whereinto he or she is entering," so they could worship willingly. Otherwise, they would be hypocrites, like those who were forced to participate in the Church of England by magistrates who were not given authority by Christ over men's consciences—except they be won by forceful arguments— i.e., " by the weapons of the Word and strength of truth," compelled only by the Spirit.[15]

When problems arose within such a church, they should be solved by seeking the advice of sister churches. If a church became apostate, the others could withdraw and excommunicate it from fellowship. Interference by the civil magistrate to suppress errors, heresies or blasphemies was rejected, because "Christ hath left other Laws in force to do it without them, as appears in I Tim. 1: 20; Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:4-5. It is Antichrist who arrogates secular weapons to suppress the Saints under the guise of heresy."[16] An implicit "theology of suffering," was expressed in Rogers's statement that, "walking in the Light of the Word, the Saints must expect to be at war with those who walk in darkness. But let not the Saints be in the least discouraged at our sufferings, which are a token to us of Salvation, and that we are of God (Philippians 1:27-29)."[17]

---

[15] Rogers, 123-129. Quote, 129. Rogers offered an historical summation as to how the bishops gained control over secular affairs and continued to violate their offices by exercising lordship in civil and spiritual matters, 166-168, concluding that "for Civil Powers to meddle with matters of Religion as Judges is sacriledge." Nor may ministers meddle with civil matters, 172. Here, we can identify the incipient principle of separation of church and state in early Independency.

[16] Rogers, 112, 176-177.

[17] Rogers, 114.

The polity of such an Independent Church of Christ was an out-working of the principle that "Christ's power is in the Body to admit members or exclude them (Acts 15:22)." To be admitted, members (including women) were required to give testimony of their experience of Christ's grace, in order that the church might know who was "elect, called, and fitted for Christ." All believers were to be admitted, though differing in opinions about things "indifferent," because Christian charity required liberty in things doubtful or indifferent; and, only by tolerating others' disagreements, and discussing them for the church's edification in love, without requiring uniformity of opinion, could the Christian community function as a family. In the absence of such Christian liberty, "Christ is honored only in form and letter," which culminated in "idolatry of outward things and neglect of spiritual things." A covenant was not essential to the gathering of an Independent church because covenants were "indifferent." Nor was re-baptism required for entrance into membership, because one's initial baptism was regarded as a true ordinance, though not of a true order.[18]

When Independent clerics who had not separated from the Church of England returned from exile in the 1640's, they were qualified to occupy parish church pulpits, which they used as a forum "to exercise their gifts in accordance with their evangelical duty to convert the elect."[19] In these parishes, the pastor conducted both regular services,

---

[18] Rogers, 286-299; 311-347; 451. The role of women was ambiguous. Rogers affirmed that in the Church, "all members, including the sisters, have a right to all Church affairs." So "Tell the Church means the women as well as the men, as proved by many learned writers," and noted that in scripture, the Gospel was spread by women as well as men. 463-477.

[19] Tolmie, 103-104. One such prominent Independent was Nicholas Lockyer (b. 1611), educated at Cambridge and Oxford, who became one of the most radical preachers in London, having gathered a church of St. Pancras there in 1646. In the 1650's he was made Provost of Eton College by Oliver Cromwell, and was succeeded by George Cokayne (1620-1691), under whose leadership the church attracted and produced many influential Independents: e.g., Robert Tichborn (d.1682), Colonel in the Parliamentary Army and regicide; Henry Ireton (1611-51) parliamentary General in the Civil Wars, and Bulstrode Whitlocke (b. 1605), Cromwell's ambassador to Sweden, 1649.

and "quasi-Separatist" meetings in private homes for prayer and discussions of scripture or sermons. Semi-Separatist members, communing occasionally in the parish church, attracted others to their gathered meetings. However, when those meetings drew people from across parish lines, they raised the ire of the Presbyterian ministers, whose "holy discipline" was inclusive within parish boundaries, as opposed to the exclusive, voluntary membership of the Independents' "visible church" paradigm.[20]

During the Interregnum, (1640's and 1650's) the Presbyterians were attempting to impose their Synodical ecclesiology on the nation. The Westminster Assembly, invited by Parliament to recommend a form of polity and worship to replace the Episcopal form (which was rejected with the expulsion of Abp. Laud), moved to mandate the use of its *Directory of Worship* within the old diocesan parish boundaries. A group of five "Dissenting Brethren" opposed this measure, submitting an *Apologetical Narration* to Parliament, appealing for toleration for their "Way of Independency." These Brethren, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughs, Sidrach Simpson, Philip Nye and Thomas Goodwin, failed to gain what they sought, but did manage to have the phrase "so far as according to the Word of God" inserted into the *Directory*. They hoped this would afford them the desired latitude for their way of gathered churches, independent of the Presbyterian Establishment. They were wrong.

The Presbyterians' rejection of the Dissenters' *Narration* was predicated on the fact that they had failed to present a satisfactory justification or explanation of their Congregational Way. This prompted a response entitled, *What the Independents Would Have* (1647), in which the tenets of Independency were spelled out for the purpose of

[20] Tolmie, 97-101.

proving their orthodoxy, and gaining toleration for their Independent Church paradigm, which necessitated a separation of church and state.[21] This document assured the Assembly of the Independents' "submission to the civil government, and accountability to the magistrate for what they shall do amisse," and that they held "no opinions destructive of state-policy, nor desire to disturb the peace." It further asserted,

> I shall tell you in a word what will content all the Independents in England, 'tis this; they desire neither more nor less, then what the Puritans desired of Queen Elizabeth and King James; viz., an entire exemption from the jurisdiction of all Prelates and Ecclesiastical Offices other than such as themselves shall choose. . . . but otherwise to be as free to choose their own company, place, and time, with whom, where and when to worship God, as they are in the choice of their wives for a forced marriage will not hold.[22]

The tenets espoused are consistent with those of Bartlett and Rogers, cited above, emphasizing the equality of churches and the members and officers within churches, under Christ, as the only Head in all spiritual matters, and affirming that

> The Law of Unity is supreme, to which all inferior orders of Uniformity must do homage, as the ceremonial law to the Moral.
>
> In the discipline of the Church . . . the Independent binds himself to a Church covenant which is no more than to promise to do that, by God's assistance, which the Gospel requires of him, not out of contempt for ordinances or desire for carnal liberty. He is enemy to all violence in matters of conscience, because to force men to come to Church is to make them hypocrites.[23]

Many points were offered to reassure the Presbyterians, viz.: that the Independents counted it licentiousness, not Christian liberty, to affront those in authority,

---

[21] John Cook, *What the Independents Would Have, or A Character Declaring some of Their Tenets, and their desires to disabuse those who speak ill of that they Know not.* (London: n.p., 1647).

[22] Cook, 2. It is possible the author thought an appeal to what the Puritans had wanted would resonate with the Assembly, since it was composed of many former Puritans who had suffered persecution at the hands of the prelates, while seeking liberty for their own form of worship and church order.

[23] Cook, 3-5

and did not criticize the National way of worship except to justify his own, if called to do so. He held his persuasion to be the way of the Gospel, and desired to live lovingly with all the world, rather than contending with a heretic "to break his head with the Bible" but rather to love him more, witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ. He joined with all Protestants against popery, loved an honest Presbyterian more than a dishonest Independent, and desired to grow in truth and peace for the sake of the kingdom, believing that contention between Protestants strengthened the common enemy, the Papists. In fact, he accounted a lack of liberty of conscience as being the reason for all the wars between Protestants.

Regarding baptism, the Independent would baptize the child of one or two believing parents "as federally holy" (i.e., in covenant with God). As for theology, the Independent was theologically a Calvinist, who judged "the doctrine that Christ died for all to be an error, for then all must be saved," but believed Christ should be preached to all, even as one does good works though not gaining salvation by them. He justified toleration on the basis that by considering different opinions, one learned to clarify one's own principles, "and so to walk in love and peace," and saw no reason why all brethren should not live lovingly together. He desired no toleration for errors against religion, but if an error "will not raze the foundation," saw no cause to use the sword to enforce conformity to settle Religion, "as though prison could cure a Heretick. Spiritual errors must be killed spiritually. Otherwise, we make only Hypocrites."[24] The Presbyterians' use of politics to put Parliament between themselves and the people, was lamented for

[24] Cook, 4-9.

encouraging the persecution of other Protestants, even as the bishops had, for "differences in heads need not breed differences in hearts."[25]

Continuing his appeal for religious equanimity, the author expressed the belief that the Independents and Presbyterians should seek to preserve the ordinances in purity, and join to purge the church from scandal. Otherwise, "God's people shall be in a worse condition for their liberties than ever." He went on to assert that an Independent was

> an enemy of all oppression and cruelty, a reall friend to justice . . . and thinks he is no good neighbor that desires it should onely raine in his Garden. . . . He marvels that any man should be an enemy to tender consciences, but reckons Liberty of Conscience to be England's chiefest good, because nothing else can procure love and peace. . . . He thinks it strange that none but in office may preach, and yet one may preach to get an office, and thinks there is less need of solemnity in worship than of people's salvation, and sees it incongruous that men, called to preach by an inward call are forbidden, while men with only an outward calling are ordained.[26]

This irenic offering concluded by deploring "a Generation of rigid Formalists, making Religion overthrow itself by destroying mercy and Humanity," and expressed the hope "that no ingenuous man will envy him those Liberties which were purchased for him by the bloud of Christ, knowing that a Communion in Unity will be a glorious supplement to the rent of Uniformity, which may seeme strange for a time, but will quickly be embraced by all honest men"[27]

---

[25] Cook, 10-11. This author believed "all the wars of Christendom to have sprung from one depraved principle, to suffer no opinion but his own, for how can truth appear, but by argumentation," and he "is most troubled, when there be sheep without, and wolves within the fold, that one sheep should bite and persecute another."

[26] Cook, 12-14.

[27] Cook, 15-16. These issues were by no means resolved by the issuance of this document. As late as 1680, John Cotton's *A Platform of Church Discipline of the Churches Assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New England* (Boston: n.p., 1680), was still responding to accusations of "Heresie and Schism."

Cook's *What the Independents Would Have* has been presented in summary as the best depiction this researcher has found of the issues in the forefront of the religious milieu at the point where Independency emerged from Semi-Separatism, and faced persecution at the very hands of those Presbyterian Puritans who, now in the ascendancy, had originally spawned Separatism and its principles, viz., the right of local churches to be self-governing and visible churches, responsible for their own discipline, accountable for their own theology and enjoying their own worship practices on a primitive church model as gathered, elect, covenantal, voluntary religious communities.[28] Each of these elements will be addressed briefly in the remainder of this chapter.

The primary distinction between the Established Church and the Independent Church paradigms can be seen in how each defined the meaning of "church." For the Church of England, it was an institution inclusive of all people; for the latter, a church was conceptualized in terms of the people themselves.[29] For example, the true Church of Christ was characterized by the Independents as

> A society of believers sanctified in Christ Jesus, separated from the world, false ways and worship, uniting together into one Body, Independent; or having a plenary power within itself, without the least subordination, to any but Christ; having a special presence of God in the midst of her; and being gathered and ordered by Christ's rule alone; all her members freely and voluntarily embodying without the least compulsion (having communion with the Father and the Son); all seeking the same End, viz., The honor and glory of God in his worship.[30]

---

[28] Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism,* 19, 64-66, also delineates these principles, and goes into the formation of local associations, which became a unifying factor as the denomination grew and spread, 123-126. This latter practice became a critical factor in the survival of the local congregations.

[29] Greaves, "Puritan Non-conformist Tradition," 459, points out that for the Anglicans the Church was a non-living institution; for the Separating Puritans, it was "a living body . . . composed of living stones, which therefore necessitated the formation of a covenanted community of the godly"—i.e., the members did not merely belong to the church, they had to *be the church* to one another!

[30] Rogers, 137.

Baptists, being Independents, shared these same characteristics, but for them the Bible was central, and their emphasis was on regeneration, in addition to right preaching and administration of the sacraments. Article 33 of their First London Confession (1644) stipulated that a church is "a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world . . . to the visible profession of the faith of the gospel, being baptized into the faith and joined to the Lord and to each other by mutual agreement."[31] They were prone to schism, however, because, due to their rapid growth, they had an insufficient number of trained pastors to deal with "speculative theologians" who emphasized some texts over others, and called for separation on points of doctrine. In such cases, there was no external authority that could be exercised to restrain separation. This did not mean the congregations existed in isolation, however, because of the importance they placed on fellowship between the churches' "giving themselves to the Lord and to one another."[32]

Other "traditional marks" that characterized the church, as affirmed by early Baptists included holiness, (i.e., purity of life), catholicity, (i.e., the unity of all Christians redeemed in the "invisible" church); apostolicity (not by succession or ordination, but by the call of the Lord, authenticated by the local church, and a council of ministers and laymen from associated churches); unity in spite of diversity (because all believers belong to each other); right preaching of the Word for the sake of the salvation of sinners, and the edification of the saints; correct administration of the ordinances, (interpreted as "outward signs of an inward and spiritual grace"); offices bestowed on charismatically-

---

[31] Lumpkin, 165; *cf.,* Gerald Borchert, "The Nature of the Church: A Baptist Perspective," *American Baptist Quarterly* I (Dec. 1982): 160-161.

[32] *Second London Confession,* 1677 and 1688, Lumpkin, 235-294.

gifted members of the church; the necessity of corporate worship; the need for loving fellowship, and the importance of discipline.[33]

It has been stated above that those who undertook to constitute what they believed to be "true Churches of Christ" subscribed to a biblicism by which everything they stood for, and everything they did, was drawn from scripture. For the Puritans, scripture was the only basis for authority in that it contained all truth, including a complete guide to life, as "the absolute and universal Word of God." To the extent that a church deviated form the biblical pattern, it was "anti-Christian."[34] Due to limitations of space, this document has not included all the scriptures with which they buttressed their writings and justified their practices, but the result, applied by those pioneers of the Free Church Movement, has been succinctly stated by William H. Brackney, at Baylor University, in his 1997 work on *Christian Voluntarism:* "The basic ethic of Jesus' ministry was predicated upon a voluntaristic response and voluntary service. Here are the roots of a theology of voluntarism." Brackney's treatment of the scriptural bases for the early church which they were trying to reconstitute concludes that "It is not overstating the case to assert that the apostolic churches were a carefully created network of *voluntary associations*."[35] (italics mine.) I would go so far as to say that this did not go unnoticed by those biblically-oriented leaders who, having become discouraged with the hope of

---

[33] Borchert, 163-165. Additional elements that characterize Baptist polity and practices will be covered in Chapter VI.

[34] M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1939), 355-356; 363-364.

[35] William Brackney, *Christian Voluntarism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 15, 22. Even the characteristics of a believer were taken from the Bible, e.g., "love, obedience to Christ's commandments, sacrifice, and a declaration of Christian experience." The *Second London Confession,* (1677), chapter I, stipulated that "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience . . . because it is the Word of God." Brackney, *The Baptists,* 24-25. This *Confession* is found in Lumpkin, 248-295.

reformation, were endeavoring to re-constitute the Churches of Christ according to the criteria delineated in the foregoing primary literature: 1) As voluntary, gathered churches; 2) As visible, elect, communal companies; and 3) Formed on the basis of covenants.[36] The out-working of these characteristics of Independency in both the Congregationalist and Baptist Denominations will be considered next.

Voluntary, Gathered Churches

Christopher Hill, at Oxford, traced the beginnings of voluntary, gathered churches to the emergence of household churches out of the medieval manorial system, in which heads of families, exercising their authorities over their extended households, took responsibility for instruction in godliness, as responsible directly to God for their spiritual estate. As those most able to pray or expound scripture did so for a gathering of several households, an independent congregation was formed and nurtured by an outburst of lay preaching in the 1640's. This was more appealing than the read homilies and prayers of those appointed to parish cures in the absence of sufficient numbers of trained clerics. During the civil wars, lay preaching at conventicles founded by sectarians in the Army spread the concept of voluntary, gathered meetings outside of the parish churches.[37]

The specific policy for withdrawal from parish churches, and gathering semi-Separatist churches alongside of the parish system was explained by the Independent,

---

[36] John Smyth's *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church* claimed that "God's word doth absolutely describe unto us the only true shape of a visible church . . . for there is only one faith and truth in everything," 252. His concept of the church included "a horizontal responsibility accepted by the faithful for each other, which mutually containeth all the duties of love whatsoever," 252-253. Quoted in B. R. White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 124, 126.

[37] Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 446-468 traces this development that laid the groundwork for local, non-parishional, gathered meetings as "a new social and religious unit . . . inserted between the household and the State," 470.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1600-1646), as: "not condemning those [parish] churches they join not with, as false, but still preserve all Christian communion with the saints as members of the same body of Christ . . . and join also with them in all duties of worship that belong to particular churches, so far as they are able." This is an outworking of Henry Jacob's policy of "living in a true church in the midst of the parish churches," a non-parochial, gathered-church type of congregationalism, in which the gathered congregations were separate both from the Church of England, and from the corruptions of the world.[38]

John Smyth's *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church* (1607) had stipulated that the very nature of a true visible church required that men "separate from all known sin, practicing the whole will of God known unto them . . . growing in grace and knowledge," inwardly animated by the Spirit, and by faith and love of the members of the body for each other, and united outwardly by a covenant that expressed the promise of God to his people and obedience of the people to God and toward each other. These principles were regarded as being of central importance for the English Baptists, in order to ensure fulfillment of the responsibility of a church to the members, and members to the church and each other, grounded in Smyth's definition of the church as a "voluntary gathered community of believers."

A Booke containing a Record of the Acts of a Congregation of Christ in and about Bedford and A Brief Account of their First Gathering (better known as "The Church-

---

[38] Tolmie, 91-93. This policy of Burroughs's is also consistent with Henry Burton's *Protestation Protested* (1641) which called for reform of the Church of England by gathering believers out of the parish churches, because a parishional congregationalism was not practicable, where the State supported an Established Church. When Abp. Laud was imprisoned, Thomas Goodwin, another of the Dissenting Brethren, preached his sermon, "A Glimpse of Sion's Glory," brought his church back from exile in Arnhem (1641), and petitioned Parliament for permission for all such gathered churches to return and worship on the model of the French and Dutch congregations in England. In addition to the Jacob church, the churches of Burroughs and Sidrach Simpson, another Dissenting Brother, were the first congregational churches in London in 1641. They hoped eventually to replace the parish churches with gathered ones.

book of the Bunyan Meeting, 1650-1821," because John Bunyan preached there from 1656), provides an account of the gathering of that church by John Gifford in 1650, when, after much prayer and consultation and waiting on the Lord, they "first gave themselves up to one another by the will of God," and chose Brother Gifford to be their pastor. This extant document reveals that

> The principle upon which they entered into fellowship one with another, and upon which they did afterwards receive those that were added to their body and fellowship, was Faith in Christ and Holiness of Life, without resort to this or that circumstance or opinion in outward and circumstantial things. By which . . . grace and faith were encouraged, love and faith maintained; Differings and occasions to janglings and unprofitable questions avoided, and many that were weak in faith confirmed in the blessing of eternal life. This principle was maintained in the Church . . . even till the death of Br. Gifford, who, also of his care to the congregation while he was [illegible] his last breath, wrote an Epistle to the Congregation to perswade them to continue in the faithful maintaining of the above-named principles among them, with many other exhortations tending to . . . holiness and brotherly love. . . . Exhort, Counsel, Support, Reprove one another in Love. Finally brethren, be all of one minde, walk in love to one another, even as Christ Jesus has loved you, and given himself for you. . . . John Gifford.[39]

In this account by an unnamed recorder, one can see the principles by which the voluntary gathering of a visible church were put into practice, and perpetuated across nearly two centuries. The longevity of this gathered church leads one to conclude that it was not merely the leadership, but the principles themselves, adhered to by the leaders and members, that accounted for its success.

---

[39] This Church Record Book (originally published in London: n.p., 1708) is found in pristine, manuscript condition in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford (shelf-mark U.m.1). Quotes taken from pp. 3-4 of the hand-written record.

These first-generation gathered churches were formed on more than a voluntary basis. According to Brackney, they understood that a true church is visible, composed only of true believers.[40] This is the second criterion to be addressed.

Visible, Elect, Communal Churches of Christ

In a national church paradigm, the church consists of "a mixt company of men professing the faith. . . . In it are both believers and hypocrites, corn and tares." Because no man could judge who was saved or reprobate, the church would necessarily contain both the saved and damned, i.e., be an invisible church within a visible church. For the Puritans, however, the church should consist only of the elect of whom Christ was the head. The Separatists tried to bring this Puritan paradigm to fruition by gathering churches exclusively of elect saints, so that the invisible church became visible. They took literally the foundational principle that "where two or three are gathered to pray and worship, there the church is fully . . . present." The concept of a "calling" by God was applicable to both clergy and laity, which is the reason they protested so vehemently against the incompetence of ministers appointed by bishops. They expected a true calling to the ministry to be at least partly manifested through talents and training.[41]

An early tract by Henry Barrow entitled "A True Description out of the Word of God, of the Visible Church" (1589) expressed the view that though the church universal contains all the elect of God for all time and places, "The Church visible, consists of a company and fellowship of faithful and holy people gathered in the name of Christ Jesus,

---

[40] Brackney, *The Baptists*, 39.

[41] Charles and Katherine George, 313-334.

their only king, priest and prophet, being personally and quietly governed by His offices and laws, keeping the unity of the faith in the bond of peace, and in love."[42]

John Robinson believed that the basis of the true visible church was God's sovereign election. His motive for separation was "a concern for corporate sanctification through obedience to Christ." For him, the visible church was no guarantor of salvation, but "unto it alone pertained the promises of the outward covenant, the valid seals of the covenant, and the benefits of the Christian ministry." He saw sin as corporate and contagious; therefore separation from the corrupted Church of England was necessary, so that, as the saints were gathered into a communion, the true church became more visible. He sought a new sense of Christian community at odds with both the Anglican and Puritan models, with an emphasis on sanctification manifested in the visible church, redefined "exclusively in terms of a covenanted congregation," and maintained by "discipline applied according to the method prescribed by Christ."[43]

For Robinson, the visible church consisted of penitent and believing persons only. "He who hath true faith and holiness is a member of the invisible church, and the same

---

[42] Quoted in Barclay, 36-37. Barrow refused to accept the reality of an invisible church that was not visible as well, "localized in true visible churches . . . spiritually unified, but geographically diverse," defined as "a fellowship of believers, rightly gathered out of the world, truly worshipping God aright." *A True Description out of the Word of God of the Visible Church* (1589). Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow,* 21-22. Barrow referred to the visible church as the "Aparant" church, which could not exist under the Episcopal system, since it was not structured as Christ instructed His disciples to build His church, and because the magistrate enforced false worship, and punished the spiritual worship of God, appointing ministers who were subject to the Prince, not to Christ. Barrow, *A Breefe Summary of Our Profession* (1587). This document has been called the Separatists' "Declaration of Independence." Quoted in Leland Carlson, *Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590,* 3-5. Barrow's intent was to establish a church on the basis of a covenant with only true, obedient Christians as members, who choose their own officers to govern according to the laws of Christ on a New Testament pattern, to realize a true church that repudiated the "false worship, profane membership, anti-Christian ministry and unscriptural polity of the Church of England." Barrow also wrote a "Pastoral Letter from Prison" calling the brethren to separate themselves and "refuse fellowship with the throng of iniquity," 9.

[43] Timothy George, 104-107, 166. The following section will address the centrality of covenants.

person, making profession thereof outwardly, in the order left by Christ, is a member of the visible church . . . invisible in respect of the inward faith seen of God, and visible in respect of the outward manifestation before men, arising from the former."[44] The visible church as a community was distinguished by Robinson in terms of election, but also by its government, ministry and worship, which must be carried out as commanded by scripture, not a human Service Book. "As Christ's Kingdom is spiritual and invisible, so is it spiritual and visible also,"—by the rule of Lord Jesus erected within hearts, and manifested in lives. Therefore, the visible church could not be a mixed company, but one in which every member was "united unto the head, informed by one Spirit, and called in one hope." Robinson believed that the churches were, from the beginning, "gathered and planted by the Lord's line and level . . . in their collection and constitution, simple, uniform and unmixed, consisting of good alone."[45]

For Henry Jacob, the visible Church of Christ consisted of

> Christ's people, whether few or many, joined together in a constant society of one orderly congregation to serve God according to his Word is his Kingdom upon earth, his deare Spouse, his own Body. . . . Christ hath given power to his kingdom, to his Spouse, to his Body, to govern it selfe, to preserve it selfe, to provide for it self (when it wanteth) all things ordained for it in the best manner it can, [including the making of ministers].[46]

John Canne (1590-1667), pastor of the English Separatist congregation in Amsterdam, allowed that, although not all the Churches of England are false churches, as

---

[44] John Robinson, *Of Religious Communion Private and Public* (1614), 274.

[45] J. Robinson, *Justification of Separation,* 49-55; 104-118. He spoke of the visible marks of that union, including "the word and testimony of God by which He makes a people His people" and called for a profession of faith evinced by both the word and life of the believer, 331-333.

[46] Henry Jacob, *An Attestation of many Learned, Godly and famous divines, Lights of Religion and Pillars of the Gospell, justifying this Gospell, viz., That the Church government ought to bee always with the people's free consent, Also this , that a true Church under the Gospell contayneth no more ordinary congregations but one.* (n.p., 1613), 164-165.

there may be some true pastors in them, they are not true *visible* churches, because "every true visible Church of Christ, or ordinary Assemblie of the faithful, hath by Christ's ordinance, power in it selfe immediately under Christ, to elect and ordaine, deprive and depose their ministers and to exercise all other ecclesiastical censures." Since none of the parish assemblies of the Church of England have such power, they are not true visible churches of Christ; therefore separation from them is justified.[47]

Henry Burton (1578-1648), the Independent minister of St. Matthew's, London, protested against the establishment of the "true reformed Protestant religion" that was proposed by the Westminster Assembly, on the basis that "a particular church or congregation rightly collected and constituted, consists of none but such as are visible living members of Christ the head." Burton called for the "new forming of a church" by gathering all believers into congregations "that are fitted, and desire to draw near unto Christ in a holy communion with him" in a true and visible congregation of Christ. He asserted the right of parish ministers to reform their own congregations, separating the worthy from the vile, and establishing Christ's government over their churches, and refusing to accept tithes or public support, but rather only voluntary contributions from their own members.[48]

Burton's call did not go unheeded. Many parish ministers gave up their livings, or, where the majority of the congregation agreed, conducted their parish church as a

---

[47] *A Necessity of Separation Proved by the Non-Conformists' Principles, specially opposed unto Dr. Ames, his Fresh Suit against human ceremonies in the point of Separation only, by John Canne, Pastor of the Ancient English Church in Amsterdam* (1634). Canne had led a Conventicle at Deadman's Place, but fled to Holland where he published this document. William Ames' *Marrow of Theology* (1629), had stated that "the church living upon earth, though it is not wholly visible, is visible in its parts, individually, and collectively in its . . . congregations," as professions of faith are made by them. (Article # XXXII).

[48] Henry Burton, *The Protestation Protested* (1641), sigs. A3, B, B3. Quoted in Watts, I, 84-85.

gathered church in which they refused to administer baptism or the Lord's Supper to parishioners indiscriminately, to those they deemed unworthy to receive them, believing that any hope of converting others was contingent upon a witness of holiness in a Church that was visibly different from the world. Thus, "in these small gatherings of believers, something was recovered which had almost disappeared from Christendom, and without which Christian society can never attain to the fullness of its being. The ordinary layman who believed in Jesus found himself accepted into a real *community of saints* . . . such as had scarcely been seen since the early days of the simplicity of the people of Christ."[49] The concept of formation on the basis of a covenant was integral to such a community.

The Role of "Covenant" in the Formation of Visible, Gathered Churches of Christ

Oaths of allegiance, by which one swore loyalty to another (God or person) harkened back to the medieval world, when oaths were integral for the maintenance of social order. When the sectaries rejected the imposition of state-imposed judicial oaths, it immediately made them suspect of sedition, and subject to arrest, and coercive measures to reassure the state and church of their allegiance. They did, however, adopt the principle of a covenantal oath as the foundation on which their churches were formed, as a "solemn agreement, a mutual compact, and an implicit creed" between the members. In fact, Robert Browne had originally defined a church as "a company or number of believers which, by a willing covenant made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keepe his lawes in one holie communion."[50]

---

[49] Nuttall, 161-163. (Italics mine.)

[50] Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 392-403; Robert Torbet, *Ecumenism . . . the Free Church Dilemma* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1968), 39. Quote from Robert Brown, *A Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of all True Christians* in Peel and Carlson, *The Writings of Robert Harrison and*

A church covenant, drawn up in articles like a legal document, became the *sine qua non* of Congregationalism. Faithfulness to one's membership by covenantal oath placed the judgment of the community in precedence over that of the individual. By means of this kind of watch-care, "congregational separatism offered assurance that one's vile and corrupt nature could be subdued by relying on the strong hand of God, manifested in the corporate conscience."[51]

William Ames, (1576-1633), the Norfolk Puritan scholar at Cambridge, who served an English church at the Hague after being deprived for preaching against immorality, and later, a chaired professor at the University of Franecker, in Friesland, Holland, advocated the use of a church covenant to bind people first to God and then to each other. He saw it as essential to "the function of the visible church, as it perpetuates the covenant of grace to serve the needs of the people." Ames believed that, on the basis of such a transaction, Congregational polity was not only scriptural, but freer in its simplicity to sense the spiritual concerns of the community and present the covenant of grace in new ways.[52]

Examples taken from the primary literature will help document the importance and function of covenants within the emerging Free Church tradition. Hugh Peters (1599-1660), the popular Puritan preacher at Cambridge, who was banished to Rotterdam

---

Robert Browne, 227. From their beginning, Brownist churches were formed as "Covenantal" communities. Brackney, *The Baptists,* 44.

[51] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 77; Brachlow, "Life Together," 113-115. Brachlow, "John Robinson and the Lure of Separatism," 300. *cf.,* Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 58.

[52] William Ames, *Marrow of Theology* I, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden from the 3d Latin edn., 1629 (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 57. Abp. Matthew Parker's private papers contained a copy of an anonymous Separatist covenant from the early 1570's, which stated, "I have now joined myself to the Church of Christ, wherein I have yielded myself subject to the discipline of God's Word as I promised at my baptism." Watts, *Dissenters* I, 25.

in 1633 by Abp. Laud for drawing people away from the Established church, was influenced by William Ames to gather his church in that city on the basis of a covenant of 15 Articles, the last five of which stipulated that the signatory would

> 11, take nearly to hart our brethrens condition and to conform our selves to their troble (*sic*) some tymes both in dyet and apparel, that they be with out excesse in necessities.
>
> 12, deal with all kynde of wissdome and gentleness toward those that are without.
>
> 13, Studie Amitie and brotherly love.
>
> 14, Put one and other in mind of this *Covenant* and as occasion is offered, to take an acomte of what is done in the premises.
>
> 15, For the furthering of the Kingdom of Christ: diligently to instruckt Children and Servants; yea to look to our wayes and acomptes dayley.[53]

Covenants were foundational to the gathered congregations of both John Robinson and John Smyth. Robinson's church had covenanted "to walk in all the ways of God made known unto them." Smyth "believed that the very foundation of the Separatist position was the covenanted community, committed to obedience to God's will." For him, "in the covenant promise of the local congregation, the eternal covenant of grace became contemporary, and man's acceptance of it was actualized in history."[54]

Two historically well-known churches, formed on the basis of a covenant, were the Church of Christ in Broadmead, Bristol (1640), and the congregation at Bedford, gathered by John Gifford (1650) and led by John Bunyan, 1656-1688. The church at Bristol, Gloucestershire, was gathered on the basis of a covenant by the wife of its pastor,

---

[53] Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 80-83. This was one of the earliest covenants to be developed into a written document with specific, numbered divisions, thus influencing the format of future ones.

[54] Quoted in White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 157, 128-129. The Covenant on which the Jacob Church was formed in 1616 has been cited above. Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 79.

Rev. Hazzard, plus five others, who had become convinced that they should withdraw from worshipping according to the Book of Common Prayer, as being "of the Beast of Revelation 14:9-11." They resolved "to separate from ye world and times they lived in, and that they would go noe more to it, and with godly purpose of heart Joyned themselves together in ye Lord; and only thus covenanting, that they would in ye Strength and assistance of the Lord, come forth of ye world, and worship ye Lord more purely, persevering therein to their end." They would attend Mr. Hazzard's sermons after common prayer was over, and meet together in the afternoon for prayer and discussion.[55] Their covenant stipulated

> That they would in ye Strength of Christ, keepe close to ye Holy Scriptures, ye word of God: and ye plaine truths and ordinances of ye Gospell, of Church fellowship, breaking bread, and Prayers; and to Subject to one another, according to ye Discipline and admonition by ye Rules of Christ, in ye New Testament or ye Scriptures.[56]

When Mr. John Canne, "a man very eminent in his day for Godliness, and for Reform in Religion," arrived in Bristol from pastoring an Independent church in Amsterdam, Mrs. Hazzard entertained him, while

> he taught them ye way of ye Lord more perfectly, and settled them in Church Order, and showed them ye Difference betwixt ye Church of Christ and Antichrist, and left them with a book . . . to prove that every particular congregation hath from Christ absolute and entire power to exercise in and of herself every ordinance of God, and is an independent body, not standing under any other ecclesiastical authority out of itself.[57]

---

[55] Roger Hayden, ed. *Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687* (Printed for the Bristol Record Society, 1974), 89-90.

[56] Hayden, 99.

[57] Hayden, 93-94. The book Canne gave them may have been his *A Necessity of Separation from the Church of England,* (1634). The little covenanted community grew to 160 members by the time Civil War broke out (1642), under the leadership of "gifted brethren" without an ordained minister, until Mr. Pennill "left off his conformity, and closed in with them." In 1651, Mr. T. Ewins, a Puritan lecturer, came from Wales to lead them in the "comfort, Peace and Increase of ye Church." Hayden, 97, 103.

After Mr. Canne's instruction, they refused to hear any man who read Common Prayer (including Mr. Hazzard), in the belief that they were "casting off popishness, idolatrous Holy days, and Carnal, debauched preachers, superstitions and ceremonious inventions of men, . . the use of pictures and images as relics of Idollatry, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, and the hearing of Common Prayer." Later, under Mr. Ewins's ministry, and in their faithfulness to their covenanted promise to hold closely to the truths of the Gospel, "they began to Question what Rule they had for Sprinkling of Children, and upon Examination, finding noe bottome for it but men's Inventions and traditions." In 1653, Mr. Ewins and Elder Purnell traveled to London to receive baptism from Henry Jessey "by dipping in a River as was first done by the Apostles." That year, the Broadmead Church became an "open communion" Baptist Church, allowing those members who desired to receive believer's baptism to do so.[58]

The principles upon which the Bedford Church of John Bunyan was gathered have been mentioned above. The covenantal principles that served this company of believers well stated that they had formed themselves into a fellowship on the principles of "Faith in Christ and Holiness of Life. . . by which means grace and faith were encouraged; love and amity maintained; disputings and . . . unprofitable questions avoided; and many that were weak in the faith, confirmed in the blessing of eternal life." Their pastor, John Gifford, admonished them from his deathbed in 1655,

> concerning separation from the church about baptism, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, psalms or other externals . . . remember you will give an account of it to our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that none of you be found guilty through a zeal for God and . . . have made a rent in the true church which is

[58] Hayden, 103-105. This Record Book kept by Elder Edward Terrill ends in the year 1687, but this historic Particular Baptist Church (it adopted closed communion after 1687) is still active in 2006.

> but one . . . . Let all things be done decently and in order according to the scriptures. [59]

The following year, Mr. John Bunyan, the "wicked Tinker of Elstow," whom Gifford had baptized and introduced into the church, became their preacher. "Little did he think such a 'chosen vessel' was sent to his house, when he opened his door to admit the poor, the depraved, and the despairing John Bunyan."[60]

A perusal of some other extant early church record books reveals at least fragments of covenants by which they were formed. For example, *The Book of Records of the Church at Warboys,* Cambridgeshire, included the following entry dated 1645:

> All we whose names are hereunto written are resolved to continue in the administration and participation of all the ordinances which the Lord Jesus hath left with his Church, to be observed until his second coming, (having already been baptized in water since we believed: and confirmed by the laying on of hands, according to the doctrine of he Lord Jesus), knowing that if we continue steadfast and immoveable in the ways of our god unto the end, we shall receive a crown of life, but if we fall therefrom, our names will be blotted out of the large books of life.[61]

A reading of several covenants by which Independent churches were gathered between 1645 and 1695 reveals that they were very much the same, promising to walk in the ways of the Lord and watch over one another's conduct and needs. Some inserted brief confessions of orthodox belief in God and Christ (the Woodbridge and Cockermouth Covenants of 1651), a commitment to the Gospel as their rule for life, and submission to

---

[59] *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821 at Bedford* (London: J. M. Dent & sons, 1708), 2. *cf.,* Paul M. Humphreys, "John Bunyan's Church" in *The Chronicle* 9 (April, 1946): 60-62.

[60] Humphreys, 65.

[61] *The Book of Records of the Church of Warboys* [Cambridgeshire] *since the time of their first gathering together with their proceedings and order of times and other Memorials,* (1644) Other memorials referred to were the churches at Fenstanton and Hexham, Northumberland. Located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

their officers (Rowell, 1655), and allusions to their discipline (Guestwick, 1695).[62] Faithfulness to such covenants was motivated by the belief that they were restoring the original primitive Christian church-estate instituted by Christ and the Apostles.

Restitution of the Churches of Christ

"Restitution" was the term used for the process of reconstituting, or restoring the church to its original, primitive, apostolic estate. When it became obvious that the Church of England was so corrupt that purification from within would not be possible, many became convinced that only a *restitutio,* "root and branch," would do, by laying the axe to the root of the tree of English religion. They became convinced that separation was the only way open, if their holy desires and aspirations were not to be quenched, and the Spirit of God within grieved.[63] This agenda was premised on the assumption that "in the apostolic age the church was organized and constituted according to one pattern only, and that the New Testament provided sufficient evidence of that pattern to enable those who came after to reconstruct it." It also assumed that that pattern could and should be reconstructed by any generation in any situation.

Restitution of the church was a compelling goal for separating Puritans from the beginning. This was the impetus for Henry Barrow's decision to separate. He defined his ideal of a visible church vis-à-vis restitution to the primitive model, as "a faithful people gathered by the Word unto Christ and submitting themselves to Him in all things"; with all affairs and actions belonging to, and taken by, the body as a whole.[64] It was on this

---

[62] These covenants can be found in Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 128-143. *cf.,* Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 74-75; 78-81.

[63] Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 44-45.

[64] Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* xxvi.

basis that the Puritans had presented their 1572 "Admonition to Parliament," calling for the restitution of the Church to the New Testament model, in which the Word would be preached purely, the sacraments administered sincerely, with an "ecclesiastical discipline which consisteth in admonition and correction of faults severely."[65]

The "Second Admonition" presented by Thomas Cartwright, a Cambridge Puritan, called for ministers to be recommended to a church, for their personal knowledge, before being chosen by the church, rather than appointed by the bishops, because the present-day magistrates and ministers could not "lay surer foundations of the church than the Apostles." The Cambridge scholar and Puritan cleric, Walter Travers (1548-1635), spelled out his concept of a restored apostolic church, including its officers, ascribing civil authority over members to the magistrate, but in spiritual matters, all, including the magistrate, should be subject to the church.[66]

John Robinson, pastor of the exiled church in Leyden, became convinced that the Separatists were the true heirs of the martyrs (e.g., John Wycliffe and Jan Hus), and that it was their responsibility to restore the primitive church at the end of the final age of salvation history, at which the spiritual and bodily dispensations would come together, to implement the overthrow of Antichrist. For Robinson, the issue as to what constituted a "true church" was one that was *rightly constituted,* and reformed on the basis of the

---

[65] White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (Didcot, U. K.: Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 12. It was on this basis that the Separatists assumed "the right and duty to form themselves into a church under the guidance of the risen Christ [with] the power to accept other members into fellowship with them, and the duty to discipline, or if necessary, cast out those who erred in doctrine or conduct." They presaged this authority on the biblical accounts such as the Acts 15 Council of Jerusalem. *Cf.,* Hanbury I, 8.

[66] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 34-40. This Admonition brought Cartwright, who was of the Presbyterian persuasion into disfavor with the Church, so that he removed to Geneva to teach church polity. The substance of these Admonitions can be found in Frere and Douglas, 6-37 and 82-132.

Scriptural pattern: "The true apostolic churches having a true constitution, were gathered and constituted of such men and women by the preaching of the gospel, were made disciples, had faith and repentance wrought in them to the obtaining of the forgiveness of sins and promise of life eternal, and to sanctification and obedience. . . . The Church of England was not so gathered from popery, but without preaching of the gospel," so that men and women were "ignorant, faithless, impenitent, disobedient, to whom no promise of forgiveness of sins and life eternal appertains." He iterated the principle that a church might consist of but two or three faithful people in any place, "separating themselves from the world into the fellowship of the gospel," and possessing the authority of Christ to so gather themselves, with or without officers.[67] So threatening was this principle, that William Bradford, governor and chronicler of the Plymouth Colony, averred that it was the Separatists' attempt to restore the church to its primitive estate that gave rise to their persecution "for wanting the churches of God to revert to their ancient puritie and recover their primitive order, libertie and bewtie."[68]

The complete title of William Bartlett's *Model of the Primitive Congregational Way* expressed his concept of the church-state that he believed Christ had instituted in the New Testament. His thesis was that "there is under the New Testament a sacred visible Church-state, order, or polity, instituted and appointed by Jesus Christ and him only; to the observance of which, Believers are everywhere bound willingly to submit and subject themselves."[69] A Baptist document, the very title of which promoted the principle of

---

[67] J. Robinson, *Justification of Separation,* 96-97; 154-155; 232; See also, T. George, 134.

[68] Bradford, 3.

[69] Bartlett, *ICNOPAOIA, or, A Model of the Primitive Congregational Way: Wherein Satisfaction is offered by unfolding—according to the Scripture—What the Right Order of the Gospel, and Way of the Saints in the Visible Worshipping of God is, in the days of the New Testament. And, How the Saints, in*

restitution of the church to its primitive estate, was *Christianismus Primitivus* (1678). It exhorted Baptists to feel "obliged by the Word of God, the example of the first churches, and their own consciences, to hold fast the professions of our faith without wavering [n]or to forsake the associating of ourselves together," even if this meant that "we must still be exposed to a suffering condition for what we hold in the Cause of Christianity; we shall commit ourselves unto the Lord as into the hands of a faithful Creator."[70]

John Smyth's justification for his self-baptism was predicated upon the necessity of constituting an entirely new church on the pattern prescribed in scripture. He explained his rationale in his *Differences of the Churches of the Separation,* that "wee will never be satisfied in endeavoring to reduce the worship and ministry of the Church to the primitive Apostolique institution from which as yet it is so far distant."[71] Following his example, both the General and the later Particular Baptists believed that the New Testament model for the church gave the responsibility to all believers to witness, to ordain their own ministers, and called for "the necessity of personal decision as the basis of salvation and membership in the church, as a community of the regenerate, gathered from the world . . . a priesthood of believers, with no separated order of priests."[72]

---

these Days may walk up to it, notwithstanding their present Hinderances, Together with the main points in controversy, touching the right Visible Church-State Christ hath instituted under the Gospel; with the extend of Church-Officers, and power of Particular Visible Churches, and continuance of Divine Ordinances and Institutions, under the Defection and Apostacy of Antichrist, (1647), 19. Bartlett, deprived from his cure at Bideford, founded the Congregational Church at Wapping, Middlesex, in 1647.

[70] Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus, or, the Ancient Christian Religion . . . Vindicated from the Many Abuses which have Invaded the Sacred Profession by Humane Innovation, or pretended Revelation, Comprehending likewise the General Duties of Mankind . . . and Particularly the Obedience of all Christians to Magistrates, And the Necessity of Christian Moderation about things Dispensible in Matters of Religion.* (London: n.p., 1678), 50.

[71] Quoted in Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea,* 67.

[72] Robert G.Torbet, *The Baptist Ministry Then and Now* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1954), 11-12.

The experiences of the early Separatist churches in exile had demonstrated the necessity of their instituting an internal discipline to counter a tendency to split into successively smaller units over points of doctrine, or personal agendas. The Independents also turned to scripture, not only for a divine mandate to separate and aggregate, but for a basis on which to hold their fledgling communities together, should members violate their covenantal promises, or the moral standards of the congregation.

Church Discipline in Early Independency

This section will survey the observations of writers regarding the need for a kind of discipline distinctly different from that exercised in the Established Church, and investigate the applications of that unique precept in the extant records of early Independent churches. John Robinson's *Justification of Separation* (1610) had challenged the use of excommunication by the Church of England as being little more than a source of income for bishops who accepted monetary bribes as a sign of an offender's repentance and submission. He charged them with having corrupted the practice of discipline mandated by Christ in Matthew 16:19 and18: 15-17, by arrogating to themselves the authority He granted to the entire Body to bind, loose, reprove and/or excommunicate a person in sin. Such power must not be in the hands of any one person, Robinson asserted, because fear of the prelates on the part of the ministers causes them to participate in their corruption, afraid to do the Lord's battle against evil, thus making them parties to the sin committed.[73]

---

[73] J. Robinson, *Justification for Separation,* passim. In this document, Robinson articulated the Separatists' foundational principle for church discipline, adopted by the Independents: that the Lord's command to "tell the church" meant the entire, local church community. Luther, Calvin and the Church of England were agreed on two *notae* (marks) of the true church: the Word purely preached and the Sacraments duly administered. The Separatists added Discipline, elevating it to the status of a *"notae."*

The idea of discipline was not an original insight of Robinson's. The records of the London Elizabethan privy church of Richard Fitz, reveal that for them, the three "trewe marks" of Christ's church are "the Glorious worde and Evangell preached . . . freely and purelye . . . . The Sacraments ministered purely . . . without any tradicion or invention of man. And last of all, to have not fylthye Cannon lawe, but dissiplyne onelye, and all together agreeable to the same heavenlye and almighty worde of oure good Lorde, Jesus Christe."[74]

For moderate Puritans, "concern with discipline and church polity was a way of realizing in community the consequences of a gracious election and the joys and demands of holiness." For rigid Puritans, discipline was an integral element of ecclesiology that "should be as rigorously observed as any other theological doctrine"—as opposed to Elizabeth's Abp. John Whitgift, for whom ecclesiology was *adiaphora*, i.e., an "indifferent" matter.[75] Even though the Independents rejected the Puritans' Presbyterian polity, they agreed about the importance of discipline, a reaction on the parts of both groups against the lack, or corruption thereof in the Established Church.[76]

---

[74] Peel, *First Congregational Churches,* 32.

[75] Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 19, 26-27. Presbyterian Puritans elevated Discipline to the status of being a "third mark" of a true church, and entered upon a program of replacing the entire polity of the Church of England with a Presbyterian System consistent with the Reformed Churches of Europe. Brachlow, 118. John Field and Thomas Wilcox's *First Admonition to Parliament,* (1572) had stated that the end (i.e., goal) of Discipline was "the reforming of the disordered and to bring them to repentance. . . . The last resort is excommunication by the church for egregious offences, not by the pope for small offences of disobedience, or lack of money to appease the hierarchy. " Frere and Douglas, *Puritan Manifestoes,* 17. The *Second Admonition* by Thomas Cartwright stipulated that excommunication should not be private by one man, but public, by the whole church which may, upon repentance, receive the offender back by congregational consent, a process "whereby we may caste out the tirannie of the bishops." Frere and Douglas, 119.

[76] Hill, *Society and Puritanism,* 220-252. It is beyond the purview of this study to elaborate on the Presbyterian system by which discipline was enforced by local "lords of the congregation" through Consistories and authoritative representative Synods. Hill treats that subject here, concluding that the Independents rejected that system as being a new form of coercion from above. Brackney concurs, that for them, "no other form of the church was valid, largely because in some form or other, coercion was

One primary foundational principle on which Congregational churches were erected was the precept that all authority must be exercised by the whole body, every member of which, (with the exception of female or minor members) "has rights, powers, and privileges equal to those of every other," for choosing or disposing of officers, and admitting, dismissing and disciplining members.[77] This was seen as being crucial, not only for the purity, but for the credibility of their churches, which allowed more *personal* freedom than the State Church. Consequently, they had need of regulation by an internal discipline—especially in cases of drunkenness, for desertion of a wife and child, for perjury, and for domestic quarreling. It was conduct such as this which, while it might have been overlooked by a parish church under authority *in absentia*, was regarded as intolerable in a church community that would not accept those whose lives seemed unworthy of their Christian profession.[78] Indeed, extant Church-books record multiple instances of discipline being carried out against just such behaviors. It should be kept in mind that their application of discipline was intended to be reformative, rather than punitive, and was ameliorated by expressions of brotherly love. Egregious failings, such as unorthodox interpretations of scripture or gross public drunkenness, however, were cause for excommunication from the Lord's Supper, and eventually withdrawal of fellowship.[79]

---

present." *Christian Voluntarism,* 33. John Cook's *What the Independents Would Have,* 256, had also eschewed any form of spiritual coercion, because "Compulsion can no more gain the heart than the fish can love the fisherman."

[77] Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism,* 65.

[78] Bebb, 58.

[79] Jones, 82.

The word "discipline" can be both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to the operational structure of a church; as a verb it refers to the process applied for preservation of the integrity of a church. The *Book of Records for the Church of Reading,* provides examples of both meanings of the word. The record speaks for itself:

> Five brethren set apart overseers, were chosen unanimously, and charged to deal with differences arising among the brethren, and if so, to bring them before the church, calling for the assistance of the pastor, if need be; also to take care of the money and dispose of it accordingly [and] that they appoint one they think fit to preach, giving them 2 or 3 days notice.
>
> In case of debates, they should appoint one to take care that one speak at a time, and that all members be present to participate in these meetings. If any be absent, they require sufficient reason to be excused. The purpose is to improve communication, prevent jealousy, and preserve the church from the subtle wiles of Satan.
>
> Brother Jo. Streater was admonished for idleness and false accusing of another. Refused to hear the church, for which he was excommunicated.[80]

Faithful attendance at all meetings and worship was a high priority in these churches, even to the extent that one could be excommunicated for absences, as in the Fenstanton (Cambridgeshire) Record Book kept by John Denne, son of its founder, Henry Denne: After Brothers Denne, Mayle and Disbrowe had traveled a great distance to seek out John Rich to inquire about his repeated absences, Brother Aldrich was sent to reprove him, and was told by Rich, "I will come when I feel like coming." This being reported to the church,

> On the 13th day of the 12th month [1653] at a meeting, J. Rich was excommunicated for: 1. dissimulation and hypocrisy, professing a willingness to walk in the ways of God, but by his actions utterly denied

[80] *Book of Records for the Church of Reading, County of Berkshire, beginning in the year of the Lord God 1656,* 2, 4. (Unpublished. Specific dates for the above entries not given, but the book is paginated.)

> them; 2. for absenting himself from the congregation contrary to scripture; 3. for utterly despising and contemning the reproof and admonition.[81]

It was not only errant members who were admonished. Church officers—even preachers—could be subject to church discipline, as at Broughton, Lancashire:

> Feb. 2, 1678, the matters relating to Jo. Croome being taken into consideration, it was agreed upon as the duty of the church to chastise the said Jo. Croome, with these things following in order to his contrition: That he has sinned against God and his lawes in consulting with a person practicing unlawful arts for the knowledge of some things that were lost .hath seemingly to justify [illegible] works, than be humbled for it, as being a person pure in his own eyes; notwithstanding they fear he is not cleansed from his evil, not only relating to the matter under consideration, but for he has seemingly instead of being humbled for the grave dishonor he has brought to the profession of religion by preaching, but now are as yet seeming to be proud of not behaving himself as becoming a man fearing god and being guilty of so grave offense. [After seeking the advice of a neighbor] he did of himself confess all in the Church.[82]

Not all actions taken in this church ended so happily. Six years earlier, an incident was recorded whereby a man of Turrington was excommunicated "for being guilty (as himself confessed of these actions following): First, for abusing himself with mankind, condemned as sinful by the Lord's Word in Rom. 1 and I Tim. 1:10. Secondly for that he having acknowledged god to have Reproved for this his evile; (but he taking not heed), was found in the same transgression afterward for these things . . . . with a continuous course of life not being agreeable to the gospel."[83]

Doctrinal as well as behavioral issues were subject to discipline by these churches. For example, one Thomas Tillam, minister and messenger of one of the

---

[81] *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644-1720,* entry dated Dec. 13, 1563. All of these unpublished church record books cited above are located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

[82] *Broughton Church Book, L*ancashire (Unpublished manuscript dated from 1660-1682), 44, 48.

[83] *Broughton Church Book,* entry dated the 14th day of the 4th month, 1672. Unpublished.

churches in London, was accused of "a subtle design to break or divide the Church of Hexham" in a letter received from the Church at Newcastle, in response to which, the church required "a Christian sober and faithful answer and such as they did hope would amount to the satisfaction of these that follow after such things as make for snares amongst brethren." The issue was that Tillam had practiced the laying on of hands when baptizing, and a Mr. Anderson threatened "a schisme about imposition of hands, but failing therein, he opened his mouth in blasphemy against Mr. Tillam's doctrine and plunged himself into other grosse errors for which he [Anderson] was by the Elders with the joint approbation of the Church delivered unto Satan." Apparently Mr. Tillam was exonerated. Other accounts refer to members being withdrawn from for fathering a child in adultery, for drunkenness and despising the church, for marriage with an unbeliever, and for neglecting "to give a 7th part of time to the worship and service of God, judging it a doctrine not according to godliness."[84] Neighboring churches moved to restore the Hexham Church to its spiritual estate and fellowship vis-à-vis an inter-church discipline:

> After this the church began sadly to decline their Duties, breaks of their meetings, and forgot their [illegible], so hard upon miserable efforts ensued to be their portion. So the most of them returned to folly. In this state they continued for many years though reproofs and admonitions were not wanting from several members of the church at Gadbridge (on Dawson), butt little of a Spirit of God remained in them to return unto the Lord until the aforesaid church was pressed in spirit in the year 1672 to send Bro. Warde and Bro. Blooming . . .to give them a meeting att Dollard [Park], when and where the Lord was pleased to speak so powerfully and commodingly through them that they began little fewe of them . . . to return to the Lord and sometimes meet together.
>
> But notwithstanding they could not come up to walke in all the appointments of the Lord in respect of the fewness of their number and the remoteness of the dwellings of those few, which began to be a grief of heart

[84] *Churchbook of the Baptist Church at Hexham, 1651-1680,* 4-6. Unpublished.

> to some of them who went to advise with the Church of Dawson what course to take herein whom they found very ready to assist in it.
>
> [The elders of the Dawson church] sent a Bro. Richard to the remote members to exhort them to return to their places and duties in the Lord's house, which motion was so desirable unto them, they did embrace it with readiness of minde.[85]

Failure to attend worship faithfully was seen as a symptom that something was amiss in the life or in the faith of the absent one. The Church at Warboys sent two brothers to inquire about the circumstances of Mr. John Warde, who had long absented himself, but "found his hart drawn off from the truth, confirming that the scriptures were but a dead-letter . . . also maintaining baptism to be nothing, and deining (*sic*) to have fellowship with us, for which things we in the name of the Lord Jesus did exhort him on the 17th day of the 1st month, 1656." After admonishing him two more times the record for June 21st reads, "we in the name of the Lord Jesus did deliver him up to Satan."[86]

Personal, moral, and marital relationships did not escape the disciplinary ministrations of this church. A list of "Admonitions" tendered in 1660 included, "John Chrismas for not loving his wife as he ought, and for speaking hateful and despising things against her . . . after sundry admonitions was withdrawn from. . . . Afterwards, he desired to be a partaker with her; the church in holy duty was joined in fellowship again." Also withdrawn from was "Mary Clay for marrying with one not in the fellowship of the gospel, and so forsaking the assembly, with Thomas Churry, and besides committing fornication before she was married." Their record of excommunications included "a man

---

[85] *Churchbook of the Baptist Church at Hexham,* 6. Entries dated April 1660 – Oct. 1672. The brothers from the Dawson Church continued to hold meetings with them until 1674, until the little congregation of 18 was re-built and functioning "in every good word and worke to the praise of His grace."

[86] *Booke of Records . . . Warboys,* (1656) 13-14. Local Quakers were making inroads into this church at this time, drawing away other members with such doctrines such as Bro. Warde espoused, 15-16.

accused of speaking filthy and of going to hear a man of the Church of England, and breach of promising to amend his ways, and guilty of hypocrisy, and for responding to admonition with much malice and anger in the face of the Christ's church accuser."[87]

The effectiveness of such measures can be observed in the cases in which many were restored to fellowship. Even when they were not, the church was kept from being contaminated by the false doctrines or the "disorderly walking" of those withdrawn from. An example of such effectiveness can be found in the Bedford Church records: The entry for the 27th of the 11th month [1656] reads,

> Whereas at our last General Church meeting, a full debate concerning the fact charged upon Oliver D . . . was had, and the matter left further to be determined this meeting; we being also now informed by one of our members that he doth deny part of what was charged upon him, and proved to his face, we are agreed that our former determination remains firme, and also that Bro. S, Bro. H. and Bro. J. do admonish him and tell him that the Church did expect to heare of another frame of Spirit in him, and that they are now more dissatisfied than before.
>
> 28th day of the 11th month, [the next day] Bro. D., appearing this day and giving evidence of the truth of his repentance, [to] the church's satisfaction was, according to the Scripture, received again into full communion.[88]

Why did such disciplinary actions not degenerate into the kinds of disputes and party factions that had caused the dissolution of the Browne, Johnson, and Smyth congregations? The answer is that the membership understood that the intent of such measures was both restorative of the persons, and preservative of both their faith, and of the church body itself. For the first generation of Independents in England, church

---

[87] *Booke of Records . . . Warboys,* (1660), 33, 38, 82. Another, the *Church Record books of Corningsby, Counsby and Tattershall 1654-1728,* 11, recounted a woman's being withdrawn from after being "reproved before all for her hypocrisy, and double-dealing which was thoroughly made manifest" until she "declare her sorrow for and willingness to forsake the same." (Entry dated July 22, 1660.)

[88] *The Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821 at Bedford, entitled A Booke containing a Record of the Acts of a Congregation of Christ in and about Bedford, and A Brief Account of their First Gathering.* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1708), 16, 20. Located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

discipline was but one element of their overall commitment to "Watch-care," (Robert Browne's own initial "utopian" ideal), implemented in such a way that the church community was, of necessity, its own primary support system in a social and religious milieu that was aggressively hostile to them (in contrast to the tolerant environment enjoyed by the exiled churches in Holland). References to such watch-care have been seen in the covenants by which they bound themselves. When the churches formalized confessions, they articulated the importance of watch-care to express the positive aspect of their church discipline. For example, a 45-Article Confession of Faith issued by several Churches of Christ in 1656 included Article 25, stipulating that they be

> watching over one another (Heb. 12: 15) and caring one for another (I Cor. 12:25) by visiting one another, especially in sickness and temptations (Matt. 25:36), exhorting one another (Heb. 3:13), and Discovering [i.e., revealing] to each other, and bearing one another's burthens (Gal. 6:2), Loving (Heb: 13:1), and Reproving (Matt. 18:15), and Submitting one to another in the Lord (I Pet. 5:5).

Thus, admonition and even excommunication were tendered within a caring, supportive context, and the latter was rarely resorted to, because, the Article continued, the goal was to seek reconciliation between the offender and offended, in a context of "administering to one another according to their gifts in Spirituals or Temporals (I Pet. 4:10)." Gossip, accusations, and slanders against an offender, were considered offenses in themselves. Private admonition was to proceed according to Matt. 18:15, and public admonition according to I Tim. 5:20. No one person could exercise the prerogative of discipline beyond telling the church, and no one leader or party could withdraw fellowship without the consensus of the whole body.[89]

---

[89] *A Confession of Faith of Several Churches of Christ in the County of Somerset,* (1656), 19-22. The Baptist Confessions of 1644 (Art. #44) and 1651 (Arts. # 67-72) also wedded discipline to watch-care.

The phrase "in Spirituals or Temporals" is significant in that it covered care for both the spiritual estate and the physical needs of the membership. The records of other churches are replete with detailed accounts of money provided to an individual "to satisfy his/her necessities. The church at Fenstanton was exhorted by its pastor, Henry Denne,

> Beloved brethren, against the administering to the necessities of the saints I will not be, but rather to the utmost of my abilities further it, knowing that it is according to the will of God . . . .Yet I think it meet and convenient to proceed in an orderly way, which that we may do, I will propound some few things under your consideration, viz: That it is the duty of these persons that are in want truly to declare their condition to the church, or to the deacons. My reason is, because otherwise the saints may be blamed when they are not blameworthy; for it is impossible for any man to search into the condition of any other unless it be declared by themselves.
>
> Secondly, that after due examination had of the condition of any brother by the deacons, they are to declare it to the congregation. . . . Third, my reason for this is that the deacons should give nothing at anytime, or to any person, without the consent at least of two or three of the congregation, of which one is to be an elder . . . that the congregation may always know how their stock is laid out.
>
> Fourth, if anyone belonging to the congregation have any in want and are nearly allied to them . . . they are to their utmost to relieve them.[90]

The Bedford Church meeting recorded for the 28th day of the 8th month [1656] that

> it is agreed that two brethren should be made choyce of every monthly meeting to go abroad to visit our brothers and sisters and to certify us how they doe *in body and soule,* to stir them up to come (especially at our monthly meeting to us at Bedford), and to let us know if they come not. The church will expect an account of the reason of their absence. . . . It was decided to deposit something into the hands of . . . for our poor and distressed friends to use according to his knowledge of their several necessity which shall by any means come to him.[91] [italics mine.]

In these entries, one can observe support and provision intimately wedded to church discipline. Not all of the fledgling churches survived, and many did not keep

---

[90] *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton &c.,* 17. Entry dated Apr. 27, 1652.

[91] *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting,* 16.

record books because of the danger they posed to members if discovered by the authorities. Extant records and documents such as these cited above, are treasures that give us insight into the degree of courage and commitment that enabled their survival in jeopardous times. The next section will explore how their polity also fostered success.

The Polity of the Early Churches of Independency

Congregational polity was unique to Independency, but it did not originate with them. It was premised on principles derived from scripture and articulated in the writings of the Separatists cited in Chapter Two. Early Separatists, while disagreeing on the application of scripture for church polity, did agree on two basic principles: 1) "Every individual is independent of human authority in all matters pertaining to religious faith and practice;" and 2) "Every congregation, or local church, composed of Christians meeting in one place, is independent internally and externally of all human authority in matters of religion." Faithfulness to these precepts necessitated separation for them.[92]

The foundations for independency had been laid by the pioneers: Robert Browne had distinguished between civil and religious matters, defining the limit of the civil magistrate's authority as pertaining to outward justice, and had rebuked the Puritans for waiting for the magistrate to deliver the church from "the yoke of Antichrist." Barrow and Greenwood averred that it was the magistrate's duty to keep God's laws, not to make their own. Barrow had asserted that in the constitution of a true church, the power belonged to the people.[93] Francis Johnson had charged the magistrates with the responsibility to "command and compel a reformation according to the word of the

[92] Joseph Fletcher, *History of . . . Independency in England* III (London: John Snow, 1862), 18, 30-31. A synopsis of the above sources is provided in more detail in this tome, pages 41-48.

[93] Henry Barrow, *A True Description out of the Word of God of the Visible Church* (1589), 22.

Lord." Henry Jacob, though refusing to fully separate, adduced scripture and the Church Fathers to support his thesis that church government is independent, and immediately derived from Christ, whereas the magistrate governs only the civil government, asserting that "we submit ourselves to be ruled spiritually by Christ's true visible church . . . independent and immediately derived from Christ, though in civil matters, we submit to the civil magistrate."[94]

For John Robinson, church polity was closely tied to theology. He believed that the paradigm of a National church was derived from the Old Testament, whereas Christ's Church should be based on a New Testament model, in that a New Testament Church possessed all the authority granted by Christ to ordain ministers, to administer the sacraments, to receive, and cut off members. His justification for this stance was based on his reading of the accounts of the early churches, formed by private brethren, as well as the Apostles publishing the gospel. The Church of England, he contended, robbed Christians of their Christian liberties by mandating "indifferent" popish ceremonies.[95]

Henry Ainsworth agreed that all true churches should be particular and independent, composed of saints who chose and ordained their own officers, decided controversies, confronted sinners, and appointed men to distribute the benevolence of the saints to the needy. He also moved the precepts of polity forward, enjoining communication between churches as between brothers and sisters within a congregation, for spiritual and temporal blessings, without any church asserting authority over any other, beyond a responsibility to advise, exhort and comfort. They might, however,

---

[94] Jacob, *An Attestation,* 115. Jacob's thesis is developed throughout this document.

[95] J. Robinson, *Justification for Separation,* 21, 17, 129-145. He adduces Acts 8:12; 10:36-48; 11:19-23; 13: 2, 12, 48; 14: 1-2 to demonstrate his point. *cf.* Davis, 118.

withdraw from communicating with a church that lay in known sin, rather than suffer contamination by its errors.[96]

In 1634, John Canne published his *Necessitie of Separation*, in which he advocated that "whatever is contrary to the institution of Christ and his written word is Antichristian and is to be banished out of the Church of God." This included the entire prelatical structure of the Church of England, which should be replaced by true ministers (to pastor), in addition to Teachers (to teach sound doctrine and preserve knowledge), Deacons (to look after the needs of the bodies and souls of members by dispensing the liberality of the saints to the poor—not to be administrators), Ruling elders (to assist the Pastors and Teachers and preserve good order), and Widows (to look after the sick and weak). This order for officers, Canne asserted, was in practice from the time of the Apostles, and should remain forever. He also affirmed that officers should be ordained by the churches they serve, because "a minister is a shepherd only to his own flock."[97]

In 1647, during the Civil War, when Independency was in the ascendancy, the heirs of such documents as the above, presented an anonymous pamphlet to both houses of Parliament, appealing for that body to legitimize their right to gather churches. Excerpts from this pamphlet are offered for their concise articulation of the principles that constituted Independency, while eschewing the word itself, arguing that,

---

[96] Henry Ainsworth, *Communion of Saints. A Treatise of the fellowship the faithful have with God and his Angels, and one with another in this present life.* (Amsterdam: 1628), 292-382. Another early document that promoted the ideal of independent polity, as opposed to prelacy, was by the excommunicated lecturer at Kingston, Surrey, Rev. John Udall' (1560-1592), *A Demonstration of the truth of the Discipline which Christ hath prescribed in His Word for the government of his Church* (London: 1588), 17-36. Udall called for a local church's choice of its own resident minister by election and ordination, after examination by the elders, adducing the writings of Ambrose, Jerome, Nazianzen, Augustine, Basil and Chrysostom, and the rulings of General Councils at Nicea and Carthage.

[97] John Canne, *A Necessitie of Separation Proved by the Non-conformist Principles* (Amsterdam, 1634), 3-10, 147-150. Canne became a millenarian Fifth Monarchist pamphleteer in the 1650's, but that does not negate the validity of his proposed polity for an Independent Church of Christ.

> When a Church is to be erected, the Members that are gathered may be visible saints and believers, whose lives and conversations are free from scandal and blame. [Such as these] being so gathered together for the constituting of a Church, they may unite themselves into a body, by a Covenant with the Lord to congregate with a true heart in full assurance of faith having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water; to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and consider one another to provoke to love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of themselves together to serve the Lord.

One can recognize the influence of their Separatist precursors, as the authors went on to assert, after this reassuring description of their praxis, that such congregations so gathered have full power to choose their own Officers, without the help of Bishops, Synod, Classis or Presbytery, "for such Congregations are Churches before they have Officers, so have a right to election." This pamphlet called every congregation a distinct church, maintaining and censuring its own officers if need be; and held that each congregation had the authority to judge only its own members, leaving civil matters to the civil magistrates.[98]

This appeal failed to gain the support of Parliament for the legal gathering of churches, in spite of a hiatus of persecution during the Commonwealth years under Oliver Cromwell. The persecution suffered by Independents, who were tarred with the brush of "sectarianism" after the Restoration, will be told in the next chapter. An apologetical narrative entitled *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government* by John Owen (1616-1683), who had formed an independent Congregational Church at Coggeshall, Essex, was published posthumously in 1688 in an attempt to explain the principles and polity of Independency. He listed the same officers mentioned above, the means of their choice by the whole church, and their duties, noting that the Apostles, though having all

---

[98] *Propositions to both Houses of Parliament for Gathering of Churches, in the Behalf of many Congregations in the City of London and other parts of the Kingdom: Who are Honest, godly, well-affected People, and of approved integrity: Commonly but falsely called Independents* (London, 1647), quoted in Hanbury, III, 247-248.

power and office in themselves, would not exercise it, but by the consent of the whole multitude and direction of the Holy Ghost. His description of the duties of the Elders is especially informative: they are to watch, warn, visit the prisoners, advise Deacons, inform the Pastor of needs for edification, and preserve the Church from disorder and violence.[99] This document, published on the eve of the "Glorious Revolution" which saw the enactment of the Act of Toleration (1689), appealed to what had become the keystone of the polity that had held the embattled Independents and Baptists together since their inception: "communion with each other, with no subordination or jurisdiction of one over another, for that destroys the 'Ecclesiastical Harmony' that is of Christ's institution." Owen's narrative concluded with the principle that gave the lie to the false understanding of what it meant to be an "independent" church, emphasizing the basis of their unity:

> The union of churches consists in their Relation unto God as their Father, and unto Christ as their only immediate Head of Influence and Rule, with a participation of the same Spirit in the same Faith and Doctrine of Truth, the same kind of Holiness , the same Duties of Divine Worship, especially the same Mysteries of Baptism and the Supper, the observance of the same Rules of Commandments of Christ, in all Church-Order with mutual Love, effectual unto all the ends of their Being and Constitution, or the Edification of the Church Catholik.[100]

The polity of the General Baptist churches was erected on that same foundation of Christ and His Word. Their "keystone" however, was the principle of "individual

---

[99] John Owen, *The True Nature of the Gospel Church and its Government* (London: William Marshall, 1688), 150-174. This entire document is a statement of Independent Church polity. In 1658, over 100 Independent churches had met at Savoy to review their religious beliefs and practices." No minutes of the conference are extant, but a committee was elected to draw up a Confession that represented their "Declaration of Faith and Order," known as the *Savoy Confession.* Doctrinally, it was identical to the Westminster Confession of the Reformed Churches of Scotland and the Continent, but differed from them with respect to church order, or polity, articulating the principles of church government iterated above. See also, Jones, 35-36.

[100] John Owen, 234, 243. This "keystone" was seen as being erected on Christ, who was the "cornerstone" of their polity, as expressed in the 1656 *Confession of Several Churches . . . in Somerset,* Article #29: "The Lord Christ Jesus being the foundation and cornerstone whereupon the Apostles built . . . he gave them power, and abilities to propagate, to plant, to rule and order" His churches.

competence" in religious matters, sometimes called "soul liberty." This meant the competency of a Christian to approach God directly, and to carry out spiritual roles within the congregation "for stewardship, education, edifying fellowship, evangelism, apologetics to defend the faith, and worship."[101] Individual competence had three aspects: 1) That of the individual and the church in that one's sole allegiance is to Christ; 2) Equality of all Christians (i.e., the pastor has no more authority than any other member, except that which the community vests in him); and 3) Non-interference (i.e., no jurisdictional authority from outside the church). Baptists also strongly affirmed the principle of voluntary association, placing great importance on fellowship between the churches, both in search of a balance between independence and authoritarian domination, and as a check upon their proneness to schism over doctrinal minutia, the result of their having an insufficient number of trained pastors, due to their rapid growth, and their leaders' having been ostracized from the Established Church universities.[102]

The second expression of individual competency was manifested in Baptists' opposition to all distinctions between clergy and laity, holding that "all baptized believers were equal in rank and privileges, administering its affairs under the headship of Christ, united in the belief of what He has taught, covenanting to do what He has commanded, and cooperating with other like bodies in Kingdom movements." In this egalitarian polity, "the congregation, not the pastor made the decisions, deciding upon matters relating to each other's welfare, the mission of the church, provision for a pastor, and what should be the social and perhaps political concerns of the church." Pastors and

---

[101] Brackney, *The Baptists,* 71.

[102] Borchert, 161-162. The problem of education was addressed as associations founded and funded Academies for training Baptist pastors.

clergy did have defined roles in church discipline, calling for admonition by the pastor; then the deacons would censure the person, depriving them of benefits of church membership; after which the entire congregation could vote for excommunication until they were convinced of repentance. Restoration to fellowship was also a function of the entire congregation.[103] Such distinctions were only a matter of the kinds of services rendered, since all Christians were regarded as ministers, and could carry out all the functions of ministry, including preaching, administering the Lord's Supper and conducting church business. This principle grew out of the Baptist concept of the church as a society of believers, each of which was called to minister according to his "gifts," under the authority of the Holy Spirit. Early Baptist ministers often held lay occupations through the week to supplement the support the church could afford them. Therefore, an active lay ministry was needed to supplement their role.[104]

The very idea of a body of believers' ordaining its own minister, and supplementing his work with lay preachers was literally anathema to the sacerdotal system of the Established Church, whereby one's calling was conferred, not by the ministrations of the Holy Spirit and affirmed by the community of saints, but by a bishop in apostolic succession. Sacerdotal "successionism," originally implemented to preserve purity of the faith, had become usurped by the Established Church to preserve its primacy of control. Once in place, control was extended into all aspects of church body life and

---

[103] Brackney, *The Baptists*, 49-50. The Particular Baptist Churches were not only egalitarian, they were gathered on a voluntary basis at a local level, consisting of saints only, called out of the Kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of Christ, and could give evidence of the work of grace in their lives. A local church so constituted was seen as being entrusted by Christ with the power and authority to carry out all activities of worship, discipline, administration of the ordinances, reception and casting out of members, trying, calling and ordaining its own officers "independent of any other church or assembly whatever" under the headship of Christ; i.e., "free of external human control, but free only to follow Christ . . . according to Scripture." Hudson, *Baptist Concepts of the Church,* 35, 36.

[104] H. Wheeler Robinson, *Life and Faith of the Baptists* (London: Methuen & Co., 1927), 96-126.

worship, inserting the "ordained" cleric into a priestly role between the worshippers and God, and redefining Christ's ordinances of grace as "sacraments" mediated by a priestly figure, only to those who submitted to his rule. Thus throwing off the mantle of this sacerdotal system restored the very worship of God to that of a personal relationship.

The Theology, Ordinances and Worship of Early Independent Churches

All Independents, regardless of their differences, agreed that the Bible contained the purposes of God and should be the basis for their doctrine.[105] It was an inexorable corollary of Independency, however, that interpretation of scripture would be personal, rather than imposed from above, as in the Established Church. Robert Browne's own theology had not developed *ex nihilo,* but was influenced by the radical Puritans in the 1570's, which was based on their personal interpretations of scripture, and set within a covenantal construct. Browne's theology informed his ecclesiology. That is, he viewed the true church of Christ as a Christian community bound by a mutual and conditional covenant of obligation between God and man—as opposed to a Calvinistic paradigm of a unilateral covenant, dependent solely on the will of God, in which election was more important than the obedience or disobedience of man. Thus, Browne's theology required that true believers must separate from the Church of England in order to create a truly constituted church with membership restricted to the personally committed, who would "keep the covenants and sacraments unpolluted."[106]

Most of the early Separatists were Calvinistic, to one degree or another, however. The "True Confession of Faith" published by Henry Ainsworth's church in 1596,

---

[105] Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms,* 2.

[106] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 53-60.

prescribed the doctrine and practice of their congregational way in 45 articles that were Calvinist: (e.g., articles 4 and 5 asserted the total depravity of mankind, and articles 14 and 15 asserted limited atonement for the elect.)[107] John Robinson's theology was Calvinistic. He had participated in a public debate against the Remonstrant, Episcopus, at the University of Leiden in 1615, and in 1624, wrote *A Defense of the Doctrines propounded by the Synod of Dort*, defending the doctrinal points of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints, while maintaining that Christ's death was *sufficient* for all, but *efficient* only for those for whom Christ died. He believed that the foundation of salvation lay in God's eternal decree and Christ's sovereignty, and that the basis of the true visible church was God's sovereign election. This was also the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Robinson's theology informed his New Testament Church polity, as opposed to that of the National Church, (which he regarded as being constituted on an Old Testament model). He believed that within the latter, the ceremonies of the Book of Common Prayer had taken the highest priority in worship, displacing the centrality of the preaching of the Word, which had been omitted because of the inability of the ministers. Otherwise, he agreed with the 39 Articles of the Church of England, and at the end of his life, his stance softened toward it, making a distinction between the faith and the order of that church, concluding that he and his congregation might "lawfully communicate in private prayer and other like holy exercises . . . with the godly amongst them."[108]

---

[107] Shakespeare, 110-111; Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller, ed.,104.

[108] Davis, 149-176. Robinson explained his more tolerant stance in "Of Religious communion Private and Public" printed as an appendix to his book entitled *a Treatise of the Lawfulness of Hearing of the Ministers in the Church of England* (1624), written just before his death in 1625. The covenant of Robinson's church had included a commitment "to receive whatever new light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word." He believed that this open-minded attitude that "more light was yet to

Robinson believed that there were elect saints, as well as hypocrites, within the Church of England and outside it. Therefore, his motive for separation was not soteriological, but "a concern for corporate sanctification through obedience to Christ." The primary difference between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Separatists was not theological, but ecclesiological, in that the latter believed congregations should contain no more members than could meet together, because of being bound by a personal covenant with God and each other.[109]

The major theological divide that took place among the Separatists, which profoundly affected the Independents, was that which occurred between John Robinson, and John Smyth, who rejected the tenets of Calvinism, and affirmed redemption by a "general atonement" for all mankind, giving rise to the term, "General Baptists." This breach was exacerbated by their disagreement over retention of the baptism received in the Church of England. For Robinson, it was a true baptism, even though administered in a church that was not of a true order. For Smyth, (and Thomas Helwys), re-baptism was fundamental to the reconstituting of a true church of true believers. All true Separatists saw the Church of England as being antichristian. Thus, they had renounced their ordination and confirmation, at the hands of "Antichrist's servants." Smyth and Helwys renounced their earlier baptism as well, and rejected the baptism of infants who could not

---

break forth from the Bible," (expressed in his parting words to the departing Pilgrims in 1620), was consistent with Calvin's theory that it was "not possible that the Christian world should come out of such Antichristian darkness, and that full perfection of knowledge should break forth at once." Davis, 247-250.

[109] T. George, 100-105; Davis, 210.

confess faith, as a "mark of the beast" and a sign that the Church of England was a false church.[110]

When Smyth applied for a merger of his congregation with the Mennonite Church in 1610, he accompanied his application with a 38-article "Short Confession" that was decidedly anti-Calvinist: Article 5 rejected total depravity, articles 6 and 7 denied predestination to reprobation, and 13 opposed limited atonement. The Mennonites, while eschewing the sobriquet of being "Anabaptists," did baptize only believers, and rejected the Calvinistic tenets later adopted by the Synod of Dort (1619).[111]

For both the General Baptists, and the subsequent Particular Baptists that arose in England, baptism, not covenant, was the means of entrance into church membership, accompanied as it was by a confession of sins and faith. For some Baptists, neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper were regarded as "sacraments" that provided grace to believers, but as "ordinances which gave expression to the inner spiritual experience of the believer." They also subscribed to what has been called the "fourth principle of Baptists," the priesthood of all believers. This precept meant that every baptized Christian possessed the Holy Spirit's power for witnessing, and was therefore permitted to preach, make converts and even administer baptism.[112]

Even as the Independents' ecclesiology had been derived from the principles of the Puritans through the Separatists, so the worship practices in the Independent churches harkened back to that same source. Gerald Cragg, former professor of church history at

---

[110] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 135-139; Whitley, *Works of John Smyth,* xci-cvii. Smyth, *Character of the Beast* (Middleburg: 1609), passim.

[111] Lumpkin, 82-97; 102-113. Shakespeare, 140.

[112] Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 261-261; Torbet, *The Baptist Story,* 11-14.

Andover Newton Theological School, summed up all Non-conformity as being really a result of a "struggle about the true nature of the church and the proper character of its worship." He stated that "The Puritans assumed that worship which followed the divine pattern would fulfill the divine purpose: it would be 'in spirit and in truth.'" Thus, their suspicion of all reliance on externals and rejection of liturgical worship, believing "that elaborate ceremonial distracted the mind from the proper consideration of God's glory" and was "an invasion of the divine prerogative" to lead by His Spirit. "Moreover, set forms could never achieve the directness, the particularity, the immediate relevance to specific circumstances, that belonged to free prayer."[113] This succinct appraisal of the Puritan desire for simplicity of worship, and the rationale for it, helps to explain the degree of adamancy with which all promoters of the Free Church movement rejected the Book of Common Prayer and the rites and accoutrements it associated with "worship." Even those who maintained a connection with their parish churches were not prepared to accept them as the only form of religious association, and would not conform so long as they had doubts regarding the worship, discipline, doctrine and order of the Established Church—especially so long as the parish minister could not "satisfy a religious hunger" by preaching sermons or expostulating on scripture.[114] It was the lack of such satisfaction that created the Puritan "lectureships" around which "conventicles" of hearers collected, and from which the first gathered churches emerged, meeting in secrecy when they were suppressed, becoming officially separated churches when banished to exile. The issue came to a head over who would control the church—the

---

[113] Gerald Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1688* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1957), 194, 198-199.

[114] Cragg, 225, 237, 243.

prelates or the laity. The Puritan lectureships survived for over two centuries because they were offering more of the worship and preaching the people wanted than the Established Church was willing to permit.[115]

The Barrowists considered that a formal liturgy or read prayers was an actual encumbrance to spiritual worship, whereas "charismatic prayer" held a sense of the immediacy of the Spirit. So strongly did they believe that the Book of Common Prayer stifled "the movement of the Spirit and spontaneous response of the people that should characterize worship," that they had met for worship at 5:00 a.m. in a designated field or house for scriptural exposition, extemporaneous prayer, taking a collection and sharing a common meal, sometimes followed by the Lord's Supper.[116]

One of the reasons cited by John Robinson as a justification for separation was that the worship of the Established Church is "unholy" in that "the Word is abused and false meanings wrested from it to justify their practices." Their practices of prayer, preaching and sacraments were carried out "in respect of the unhallowed communion, forged ministry, and superstitious order." He claimed that participation in the Lord's Supper within a profane assembly profanes the sacrament unless reformation and repentance of sin precede lawful communion, because "no religious communion may be held with . . . such lewd persons as deserve excommunication," and prayers not conceived in our hearts are "unnatural, dastardly and profane." He went so far as to charge that "the two feet on which the dumb ministry stands, like Nebuchadnezzar's

---

[115] Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, CA: The University Press, 1970), 292, 298.

[116] T. George, *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition,* 50-51. Quotes from *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590,* 365-366.

image upon the feet of iron and clay, are the Book of Common Prayer and of Homilies."[117]

It was inevitable that the biblicism of the Separatists should find expression in their call for scripturally-based worship practices. The venerable John Canne reiterated the same objections to Common Prayer, that the Liturgy was "culled and picked out of the Popish Dunghill . . . the masse book, full of abominations." Furthermore, "all worship devised by man is abhorred by the Lord, for he likes nothing but what he appointeth himself. . . . He promiseth his presence only in his own worship." True worship, appointed by the Lord "hath given a perfect platforme and absolute rule, how he will be worshipped in the time of the New Testament . . . in Spirit and Truth . . . grounded in the Word." Canne's *Necessitie of Separation* insisted that "we may not have any religious communion or partake in divine worship with idolators. . . . We must separate and come out from among them. . . . Otherwise, we lay ourselves open to the daunger of infection of our Soules, defection from our God, and in the end, of all destruction, both of body and Soule."[118]

Whereas the Episcopalians and Presbyterians wanted an established state church, the Independents wanted "the privilege of unmolested worship and fellowship according to their own convictions." Their worship was not regulated by a "platform," but was determined by each congregation, so that if one desired simplicity, and another, full ceremonial dress and rites, each was acceptable. For most, however, worship was a simple reading of scripture, exposition, and prayers. "The preaching was careful,

---

[117] John Robinson, *Justification for Separation,* 86, 93, 265, 270, 451, 505.

[118] Canne, *Necessitie of Separation,* 72-91.

scholarly, doctrinal and exhaustive because the people had taken great risks to attend, and wanted to be fed spiritually." Free prayer was offered, and baptism and the Lord's Supper administered if a minister were present. Many Congregational ministers opened schools for children, and, because they were banned from the universities, Dissenters' Academies for higher education were run by individual tutors, in an effort to elevate the standard of scholarship, since preaching was the centerpiece of Free Church worship.[119]

The emerging Baptist tradition also placed exposition of the Word at the center of their worship. One of the reasons John Smyth broke from the Robinson church was his extreme interpretation of "spiritual" worship. He forbade not only the Common Prayer Book, but all books, including vernacular translations of the Bible from worship, so that both prayer and prophesying would be extemporaneous.[120] One excellent explication of the reasoning behind these strictures is found in an extant letter written by a member of the Smyth-Helwys congregation to a cousin, Sir William Hammerton, in London, 1609:

> We have thought good to add certayne arguments.
>
> 1. no Apocrypha must be brought in to the publick assemblies, for there only godes word and the lyvely voice of his owne graces must be heard in the publique assemblies. But mens writings and the reading them over for prayer ar (sic) apocrypha, therefore may not be brought in to the publique assemblies.
>
> 2. argument. We must do nothing in the worshippe of god withowt warrant of his worde, but redd prayers have no warrant in his worde. Therefore redd prayers ar not to be used in the worshippe of god.
>
> 3. argument. We may not in the worshippe of god receive any tradition which bringeth oure libertie into bondage.

---

[119] Fletcher, III, 249; Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism,* 88; Jones, 84-87; Walton, 91.

[120] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 126-127; Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* vol. I, 240, vol. II, 167-168.

> 4. argument. because true prayer must be of faith uttered with hearte and lyvely voice, It is presumptuous Ignorance to bring A booke to speake for us unto god.
>
> 5. Argument. to worshippe the true god after an other maner than he hath taught is Idolatrie, but commaundeth us to come unto him heavy loaden with contrite hartes to cry unto him for oure wants &c. Therefore we may not stand reading A dead letter in steade of powring foorth oure petitions.
>
> 6. argument we must stryve in prayer with continuance &c but we cannot stryve in prayer and be importunate with continuance reading upon a book. Therefore we must not reade when we should praye.
>
> 7. argument we must pray as necessi[tie?] requireth but stinted prayers cannot be as necessitie requireth, Therefore stinted prayer is unlawfull.[121]

Not all Baptists, let alone Independents, imposed such a strict regimen on their worship practices. Some entertained the singing of Psalms from memory, or from Psalm books, and eventually an entire trove of devotional literature, including hymns, composed from the poetry of such literary masters as Sir Isaac Watts, was developed in the Free Church traditions, which has continued to enrich worship from the eighteenth century to the present. Use of such devotional aids has never been permitted, however, to usurp the principle of free, responsive worship, and the centrality of the preached Word in the scions of these fledgling Baptist fellowships.[122]

This chapter has addressed the emerging characteristics of Independency as it developed out of Separatism, with respect to various elements of its ecclesiology as constituted of voluntary gathered congregations, its discipline and polity, that were congregational and egalitarian, derived from what they believed was a scriptural model, and its worship practices that were free of liturgical forms and accoutrements. The

---

[121] Quoted in Burrage, II, 174-175; Original orthography preserved. The document goes on to explain that read prayers are an "antichristian and Idoll Ministry" which they eschewed.

[122] Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1778), 17.

uniqueness of the “Congregational Way” was defined and described from the primary sources which reveal the evolution of each characteristic from an experimental stage to a state that was strong enough to sustain both its principles and its people through the ensuing persecutorial reaction of the Establishment until it gained sufficient credibility to be granted toleration.

The next chapter will investigate the congregational dynamics within these young churches that provided for viability through nearly a century of egregious persecution, in search of the answer to the question: how did they not only survive, but thrive, to become the Congregational and Baptist denominations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Congregational Dynamics within the Early Independent Churches

What was happening within the early Independent congregations that provided for cohesiveness, and made them strong enough to overcome the debilitating effects of persecution perpetrated by the State, the Established Church and other Protestant groups, such as the Presbyterian party? In search of the answers to that question, this chapter will look at the roles of their leadership, their discipline, their polity, their membership nurture and care, and their responses to persecution from the 1640's through the 1680's, when Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1689 which made Dissent from the Established Church legal for the Independent Congregationalists and Baptists.

Independent Church Leadership

John Robinson had set the precedent for the kind of leadership he believed Christ had intended for His church in 1614, insisting that church governors should be "not lords, but servants of the congregation."[1] This was a theme echoed by William Ames's stipulation concerning the mutual obligations between ministers and their flocks, that "the Duty of Ministers should be to serve as Servants, Husbandmen, Shepherds, and Watchmen." The reciprocal duty of the people toward their ministers, was to give them "Reverence, Respect, obedience," and to maintain them so long as they were not "unworthy men-servers."[2]

---

[1] J. Robinson, *Of Religious Communion,* 23; *cf.,* T. George, *John Robinson,* 153.

[2] William Ames, *Conscience, with the Power and Cases thereof* (1641) in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithful Minister of Christ, William Ames* (London: 1643), 162-163.

Independents generally regarded a professional ministry as non-essential to the existence and functioning of a church. John Owen (1616-1683), the Independent minister and theologian from Oxfordshire, and graduate of Queen's College, Oxford, had asserted that "the church exists before it has a pastor, and it can continue to exist, if only for a time . . . without a pastor. The ministry is not essential to the church." This conviction became a key understanding that served the churches well through years when they were deprived of the ministrations of their imprisoned pastors, as will be seen. Owen did, however, encourage every church, as one of its first actions, to find a pastor who possessed the spirit, gifts, and graces to be qualified, because, "Nothing at all can be done without these Spiritual Gifts; and therefore, a Ministry devoid of them is a Mock-ministry, and no Ordinance of Christ."[3]

According to Owen, a popular spokesman for the Independents, election by the people constitutes the call to the office. Ordination was merely the outward approbation or confirmation of the call, administered by prayer, and sometimes laying-on-of-hands. Ordination was not regarded as a sacrament, like baptism and the Lord's Supper, but was the explicit sealing, confirmation, and solemnization of a covenant between the church and the minister, that was implicit in their choice of him and his acceptance of their choice. The laying-on-of-hands in ordination did not imply an apostolic successionism, which was not required among Independents for the ministerial authority. Unlike the Baptists, however, who believed that all Christians possessed the authority to administer the ordinances, the Independents, although they held worship services in the absence of a minister, did not offer baptism or the Lord's Supper unless they had an ordained pastor.

---

[3] John Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work* (1687), 228, quoted in Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 85, 87.

Preparation of members to receive communion was one of the responsibilities of a pastor, who exhorted them to examine themselves for private offenses and clear up outstanding conflicts, thereby separating the unworthy from those worthy to partake.[4]

The *Book of Records of the Church at Warboys,* Cambridgeshire, yields a glimpse of the internal process of the actual choosing of a pastor by an early Independent Church. An entry for the year 1646 concerned a visit by Henry Denne, minister at Fenstanton, during which he had preached and baptized twenty-three, and advised them about choosing someone

> who may carry on the work of gospel and administering the ordinances among us, to whom we agreed, and consulting with J. Matthew, he replied that after this manner, that seeing three of you use to teach the word of god, my advice is that you cast lots for an overseer. . . . Then we agreed to it, then appointing a time we of Warboys together with Brother Bass of [illegible] and Brother Pamer, after supplication to our god we desired that you which knows the harts of all men and ordered all things would dispose of this lott and casting it upon the hand of Wm. Dunn, J. Ward, Will Askew and J. Richards, which fell on Wm. Dunn, overseer and J. Richards, Deacon. . . . Then saed Brother Pamer . . . the Lord answered our Desire for our desire was for him. I hope you are all content, then all answered, we are content.[5]

Several characteristics of the choice of leadership in ministry stand out in this vignette. First, the church at Warboys was not attempting to function in isolation from surrounding churches. They reached out to the Fenstanton Church for administration of the ordinance of baptism, and readily received their advice. Second, they set apart a time that allowed for consultation with others. Third, the choice was made from among their own members who had had experience in exercising the gift of teaching, and were therefore known to the entire body. Fourth, the actual choice, though made by a casting of lots, was made

---

[4] White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 75-82, 64.

[5] *Book of Records of the Church of Warboys,* entry for 1646. (Not paginated).

"after supplication to our god." Fifth, the choice, which had been committed to God in prayer, was then confirmed by the entire body, to the satisfaction of all. One cannot be certain that this was the precise pattern followed by all the Independent Congregationalists and Baptists, but it is generally compatible with the polity and discipline they espoused, which included the seeking of advice from sister churches, and the choice of leadership from among the membership, made and ratified by the entire congregation.[6] Their polity and discipline were not merely external scaffolding within which the Independent churches were constructed. In actual practice, they constituted an integral element of their congregational dynamics. It is to the application of these constructs, as they functioned to provide for cohesiveness within and between churches which would otherwise have been vulnerable to extinction in their isolation, (as the Separatists had been), that we turn next.

The Role of Polity and Discipline within Independent Church Dynamics

The ideal for Independent church polity and discipline can be traced to the early 1589 Confession of the Ancient Church, formulated soon after their arrival in Amsterdam, which stated that that Church had been given "the keyes of the Kingdome of Heaven, that whatsoever they bynd in earth by his word, shalbe bound in heaven: and whatsoever they loose on earth, shalbe loosed in heaven. *Mat. 16, 19. John 20, 23. Mat. 18,18."* The Confession goes on to say that

[6] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 63-64, notes that in the tradition derived from the Separatists, only those who were ministers of their own covenanted congregation were considered true ministers because their authority was both derived from, and circumscribed by, the authority of the congregation. This principle applied to all church officers, including, in addition to pastors and elders, relievers to care for the needs, and widows who ministered to the distressed and afflicted in the church. The process of selection always involved prayer, a vote of the majority, discussion of objections, and local church ordination by laying on of hands. The Independent ministers who baptized children, did so only for those of members, "by washing, sprinkling, or dipping in the name of the Trinity."

> Now this power which Christ hath given unto his Church, and to every member of his Church to keep it in order, hee hath not left it to their discretions and lustes to be used or neglected as they will, but in his last Will and Testament, he hath sett downe both an order of proceeding and an end to which it is used.
>
> If the fault be private, holy and loving admonition & reproof is to be used, with an inward desire & earnest care to winne their brother: but if hee will not heare, yet to take two or three other brethren with him, whom he knoweth most meet for that purpose, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word maybe confirmed: And if he refuse to heare them, then to declare the matter to the Church, which ought severelie and sharpelie to reprehend, gravelie to admonish, and lovinglie to perswade the partie offending: showing him the heynousnes of his offence, & the daunger of his obstinacie, & the fearefull judgments of the Lord. Lev. 19. 17. 18. Mat. 18.15. Mat, 18.16.
>
> All this notwithstanding the Church is not to hold him as an enimie, but to admonish him and praye for him as a Brother, proving if at any time the Lord will give him repentaunce. For this power is not given them to the destruction of any, but to the edification of all. If this prevaile not to draw him to repentance, then are they in the Name and power of the Lord JESUS with the whole Congregation, reverently in prayer to proceed to excommunication . . . & committing him to Sathan for the destruction of the flesh that the Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, if such bee his good wil and pleasure.[7]

The tragedy of the Ancient Church is that they did not abide by the precepts in their own Confession. The success of the Independents is found in their faithful application of these very precepts, viewing them as essential for the preservation of the sanctification of the body life of their congregations. William Ames's *Marrow of Theology* (1629) had asserted that this was the purpose of congregational discipline, for without it, "men do not safely enough content themselves unless that public defect be made up by a private care and watching over one another."[8]

---

[7] W. Walker, *Creeds and Platforms,* 38-39.

[8] William Ames, *Marrow of Theology* I, 157. *cf.,* Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 127.

Independent Church polity was most directly derived from John Robinson, in response to his observations about the disintegration of the community spirit in Robert Browne's company, and the power struggle for authority in the Ancient Church of Francis Johnson. Robinson penned an "Appendix to Mr. [Wm.] Perkins' Six Principles of the Christian Religion" (1641), pertaining to what he believed the ecclesiastical polity and discipline of a visible Church of Christ must be, addressing the extreme action of excommunication he saw being abused in those settings. He stipulated that it must be according to the rules of Christ in Matthew 18:15-17: The sin must be scandalous, and the person obstinate, and must be done by the congregation of which he is a member. For Robinson, the church must be the whole body. The elders might exercise the discipline of rebuking privately for private sin; then with two or three witnesses, followed by public rebuke before the church. Its purpose was to prevent contamination of the body by the sin, which would profane the name of Christ, and to humble the sinner for the sake of the salvation of his soul. The excommunicated person should be withdrawn from, but not so far as to violate any civil bond. This procedure was meant for a warning to the church about the sin, and to prevent their becoming a cause of reproach by society.[9]

Discipline became a distinguishing mark of Independent churches, essential for ensuring that the integrity of their initial separation would be maintained. For them, its role went beyond the discipline advocated by the non-separating Puritans, which descried, but tolerated the corruption in the Church of England. Those who left the church held that the integrity of a life of purity and witness could be maintained only by

---

[9] John Robinson, *Appendix to Mr. Perkins, his Six Principles of Christian Religion* (1641), Sig. 8vo., C 4v. *cf.,* Davis, 189, 199-200. Perkins (1558-1602) was a Puritan cleric and theologian of Church of England at Christ's College, Cambridge.

discipline, believing they were to be judged by the Word of God, which they regarded as being "a manual of obedience and a blueprint for the restoration of Christianity."[10] For Baptists, discipline was seen as of central importance to ensure the fulfillment of the responsibility of the church to its members, and members to the church and each other in the maintenance of the congregation as a "community," by effectually bearing one another's burdens.[11]

Thus, among Independents, the purpose of congregational discipline was born of a positive concern for "maintaining what they held to be the Christian standard of faith and conduct within a church," because, as a separated company of believers, "they were bound to insist on a Christian ethic, the expression of a Christian faith that would stand out emphatically from the conventionalism and loose morals of the age." The application of intra-church discipline within the Dartmouth Baptist Church, Berkshire, clearly served this end. Among the offenses and offenders censured by this church were: taking money under false pretences, presenting a forged document in a lawsuit, failure to pay debts because of intemperance in drink, wife-beating, failure through idleness to provide for a family, a wife's use of bad language toward her husband, due to his neglect to provide for her, an apprentice who had an affair with his master's wife, the heresy of denying the divine nature of Christ, immorality of a preacher with women, and non-attendance at meetings due to giving lectures at Presbyterian Conventicles.[12]

Discipline touched on every aspect of a church member's life. The motive behind admonishing, censuring, and ultimately excommunicating, was meant to be reformative,

---

[10] T. George, 136-138.

[11] Lynch, 121-122.

[12] H. W. Robinson, 42-49.

rather than punitive, and was ameliorated by patient expressions of brotherly love.[13] The goal was to bind the congregation together through decades of trial during which both government and Established Church informers were on the watch for any violations of doctrine or conduct for which they might be brought to trial. A later section of this chapter will address the response of these churches to the persecution they endured.

The Baptists were especially sensitive to avoid any accusations of being like the Anabaptists of Mānster, as well as desiring to preserve the purity of their churches by lives of holiness, as they attempted to regain the features of the primitive church. Thus, for them, discipline was both preventive and corrective. It was applied by exhorting adherence to their church covenants, by regular visitation in homes by officers, and by compulsory attendance at regular meetings.[14] One entry in the Bedford Church Record Book, the 29th day of the 2nd month [1658] referred to "Bro. Bunyan and Childe, having neglected to visit with Sister Chamberlain and Br. Skelton, were again reminded of it and required to take care of it against next meeting."[15]

Perhaps the best articulation of the role played by discipline within the Independent churches is found in *A Vindication of Churches commonly called Independents* (1644) by Henry Burton, (1578-1648), graduate of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Independent minister in Yorkshire, who became an active apologist for the cause of Independency. This document was written in response to a series of questions by the Presbyterian Puritan, William Prynne (1600-1669), challenging the

---

[13] Jones, 82

[14] T. Dowley, "Baptists and Discipline in the 17th Century," *The Baptist Quarterly,* London, 24 (October, 1971): 157-158.

[15] *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting,* 20.

legitimacy of the Independents' rejection of the ruling of the National Assembly that had instituted a settled form of Presbyterian church government. After denying the right of secular governments to require that church polity be changed to suit the vagaries of civil government, Burton insisted that "Christ did not grant liberty to men to alter what he laid down," adducing the many changes that had taken place in the English Church since Henry VIII, through the early Stuart regimes. He further asserted that

> as governments change their settled religions, they cannot force churches to accept a discipline that is not consonant with God's word. . . . Nor does a National Synod speak with Christ's voice, as the Apostles did, which is obvious, *as there is much looseness in the discipline of the Church of England,* and if the rule of a National Assembly is something godly people cannot submit to, they are subject to penalties for obedience to their consciences, and called arrogant, contumnacious Schismaticks. (By that token, Christians living in the land of the Turks should adopt their religion.) There is no assembly of men, since the apostles, that is infallible in judgment.[16] [italics mine.]
>
> The only church government warranted in Scripture is that of the Independent Particular Church, of which each has his own presbytery of elders and authority within itself to rule itself, equal to all other churches. [Such a church] is less liable to error, *for a whole congregation watches over its membership,* rather than an Assembly removed from the local church. . . . Nor should any be regarded members of churches except those that can give account of the work of grace within them or profess their faith, thereby being worthy to receive the seales of the covenant.[17]

Burton's thesis is that "Independency should not be subordinate on the basis that it is a Novel church government; it was God's own institution, and Independency means independent only of civil government rule in ecclesiastical affairs by human authority."[18]

---

[16] Henry Burton, *A Vindication of churches commonly called Independents, Or, A Brief Answer to two Books, entituled Twelve . . . Questions touching Church Government: the other, Independency examined, unmasked, refuted, etc. by William Prynne* (3d edition, 1644), 5, 12-15.

[17] Burton, *Vindication,* 18, 21, 27, 29. Italics mine.

[18] Burton, *Vindication*, 32. This apology concludes with an appeal that they be judged "not by what you hear, but by what you observe of the Independent churches," 44.

Discipline was so important an issue among both Congregational and Baptist churches in the seventeenth century that several extant church record books devote a large portion of their entries to explain their procedures and give specific examples of it. The Baptist Church in the village of Smarden, County of Kent, for example, specified that offenders first be visited and admonished, but not until after a second admonition was ignored, was their membership suspended, because their goal was persuasion, not punishment. More serious sins resulted in outright expulsion for the sake of the reputation of the church. This was a last resort measure, taken only after the problem was laid before the congregation, for its consent to removal from fellowship. Offenses meriting this action included adultery, drunkenness, dishonesty, disputing and slander.[19]

Discipline in practice was also noted in the records of the Churches of Christ at Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire, with the caveat that "no excommunication was done without several face-to-face meetings, and all those that repented and wished to walk in the way of the Lord were received back." Offenses listed as egregious and obstinately held, contrary to the doctrines of this fellowship, which was accosted by very aggressive Quaker, as well as other sectarian groups, included: seeing spirits and believing no need or reason for communion or test[ing] the spirits by scripture; for forsaking the assembly of the saints; for denying [the] ordinances of the Lord, as prayer, preaching, baptism, breaking of bread; for believing they had already grown to perfection; for saying God is the author of all actions, and that the creature is a mere passive creature; for saying there is no such thing as sin; for despising and condemning the admonitions of the church.[20]

---

[19] Norman Hopkins, *The Baptists of Smarden and the Weald of Kent, 1640-2000* (Canterbury, Kent: n.p., 1999), 38.

[20] *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton . . .,* 8-15.

Disciplinary actions were enacted with gravity and formality. This did not mean, however, that the process was always peaceful. The Records of the Broadmead Church, Bristol were presented with a candor that permits one to realize the intensity with which such measures were carried out. In 1677, a Br. Fieldust interrupted afternoon worship "to exclayme against one Mr. Young . . . about some worldly business and dealings between them; for that somebody had given a bill to our Pastour, as if for one to be prayed for, wherein was signified that H. Fieldust did by law endeavor to ruin a family." He assumed it was done by a member of Young's family. Fieldust's wife loudly supported him, and continued to clamour after the Pastor charged them to be quiet. After the meeting, two brothers were sent to admonish him about prophaning the Sabbath and grieving the people. The record notes that Fieldust's apology and repentance was accepted and he was restored to fellowship.[21]

Not all offenses were so quickly dealt with. In two cases of drunkenness, several entries recount repeated confrontations and admonition: e.g., Brother Jacob, "after the third time admonished to repent by the church as a whole, but was not cast out, hoping he would amend his ways." A month later, Bro. Jacob was seen drinking, and "was shut up from the Lord's Supper, instead of being cast out, while the church watched for the fruit of Repentance, i.e., reformation." Finally, "after a year, Jacob was seen to be drinking openly, abusing his wife, and fighting in the street. Therefore he was cast out of membership (1677)." Likewise, a Mr. Lingwood, who had been excommunicated for drinking was required to rejoyne with the church, but because he had been seen drinking

[21] Hayden, 193-197.

again recently, and had originally withdrawn from attendance, it was declared that he had excommunicated himself.[22]

It has been stated that the purpose of discipline was reformative, and that it was administered with brotherly love. The Bristol records recount the degree to which that church went to put that principle into practice. In 1678, Br. Countenay was admonished before the church a second time for the sin of drunkenness,

> confessing his Evill and finding ye deceit of his heart and hardness that he saw where strength and help was, but did not know how to come att it. Hee seemed as one in a sight and view of his sinne, but did not come up to a thorough Resolution against it, yet seemed in his conscience not to like it. The Elders read to him from Deut. 29: 18-21 about the curses that shall lie upon him, and blott out his name out of ye church; and whereas God had once separated him to Good by bringing him into ye church, now God would separate him to Evill, as saith ye scripture.
>
> Re the Backsliding and declineing condition of Br. Countenay for ye sinne of drunkenness, at the request of his wife, the brethren set aside a day of solemn prayer and fasting, if it might bee ye Lord would bee entreated to cast ye Drunken Divill out of him, which did overcome him and carry him captive at his Will; and considering ye Lord saith, some kind come not out but by prayer and fasting. A day was kept for prayer and fasting and Br. Courtenay offered that he would abstain from wine and strong Liquors for a year as a sign of repentance (on the 21st day of the 3rd mo., 1678).

On the 7th day of the 8th mo. of 1679, the church, not finding Jeremy Courtney

> restored to full communion nor reformation of his Evill, the congregation agreed to cast him out of ye Church into ye world, And noe longer to be Partaker with us in ye Holy Ministries of ye Lord, nor Fellowship with us, nor to enjoy ye Privileges of God's house—and ye Lord have mercy upon his Soule.[23]

As persecution became more intense in the 1660's, and it became dangerous to meet illegally for worship, stringent church discipline remained an important means of holding the church together. An entry in the record of the Broadmead Church, Bristol,

---

[22] Hayden, 188-196.

[23] Hayden, 201, 202, 217.

noted that the 1664 Act of Banishment caused them to meet more secretly in private places, where they were constantly harassed by soldiers, and many were imprisoned. Because of moving around, and the many imprisoned members, one day per month was set for the Brethren to meet "to consider of Persons or things amiss in ye congregation." In 1665, six members were declared "no-members, some for neglecting their duty of Assembling through fear, and some for Evills in their conversation."[24]

Whereas this may seem like a severe measure, it was entirely consistent with the purpose that church discipline was meant to serve under circumstances of extreme duress:

> A major purpose of their 'embodying' was to become 'visible saints': only by 'holiness of life' could they either support one another within the church or bear their witness to the world outside. Within, there were aids towards the fulfillment of their purpose: in particular, forbearance and forgiveness could be practiced, and the covenant renewed; and in cases where backsliding seemed incorrigible, the knot could always in the last resort be cut in the manner approved by St. Paul, by excommunication.[25]

It has been stated above that Independent church discipline included not only negative admonition and censures, but was expressed positively in supportive watch-care of the members over one another. It is to this aspect of their congregational dynamics that we turn next, to gain an appreciation for the strength of the bonds that held these faith communities together in spite of relentless persecution that threatened not only freedom of conscience, but jeopardized their families, fortunes, and their very lives.

---

[24] Hayden, 121. In both the Particular and General Baptist traditions, discipline served the positive goal of bearing one another's burdens, thus preventing estrangement from the community. There was a distinction between the parameters of discipline between the General and Particular Baptists, however. Among the Particular Baptists, it was administered at the level of the local church only, whereas the General Baptists extended it to larger assemblies of associated congregations. Lynch, 131, 134.

[25] Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 129.

The Role of Membership Care and Nurture within Independent Church Dynamics

Allusions have been made to the positive aspect of Independent church discipline that was manifested in mutual support of the membership for one another. This section will provide specific information and examples of this element of Independency. Several primary sources already cited have given evidence of the precedents for this dynamic that was critical to their survival. A brief review of some of these sources will provide reference points for connecting the illustrations with their underlying ideology.

John Penry, facing execution for his stand against the remnants of popery in England, penned a letter to the congregation in London of which he was a part in 1593, imploring them to provide for his widow and four infant daughters (the eldest of which was four years old), especially if exile should become necessary for them. He requested that those of means provide for the poor that they might also emigrate to safety, and closed with an appeal that they "be kind, loving and tender-hearted . . . towards one another; labor to increase love, and to show the duties of love, one of you towards another; by visiting, comforting and relieving one the other. . . . Be watchful in prayer." This letter was dated 24 April, 1593. He was hanged on 29 May of that year.[26] Penry's dying plea for loving care did not go unheeded. Where his plea was applied, it became a principle that ensured stability within congregational dynamics for the ensuing century during which Independency emerged out of the fragments of Separatism.

John Robinson's ecclesiology regarded all the saints as being called to be as Christ to each other as they functioned in the "triple office" of kings, priests and prophets, under the headship of the Lord. William Bradford offered his personal

[26] Quoted in Punchard, 269, 272, 274.

testimony of the operation of this principle in the Robinson church, which described themselves as "knit together as a body in a most stricte and sacred bond and covenant with the Lord, of the violation whereof we make a great conscience, and by virtue whereof we do hold ourselves straitley tied to all care of each other's good, and of the whole by everyone and so mutually."[27]

This precept, which I will term "watch-care," had found expression in the articles of the 1596 Confession of the Ancient Church, viz., Article 26: The Lord "hath given authority and laid duty on them all to watch one over another;" and 42, which called a congregation to "covenant to walk in the obedience of Christ, even through the midst of all trials and afflictions, not accompting their goods, lands, wives, children, Fathers, Mothers, brethren, sisters, nor even their own lives dear unto them, so as they may finish the course with joy, remembering always that we ought to obey God rather than man." Article 38, extended such watch-care to the inter-church associational level, stating that, though each congregation is "as a compact citie in itself," they "must have the counsel and help of one another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith, under Christ their head."[28] Such precepts were not exclusive to the Separatists or Independents. They were merely putting into effect principles evinced by the Consistories of the Reformed Church of John Calvin in Geneva as well as their Puritan forefathers, who believed that morality was expressed in charitable works as well as personal conduct.

---

[27] Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* I, 76.

[28] W. Walker, *Creeds and Platforms,* 67, 71, 73. Lumpkin, 90, 96, 94.

All of society was stressed economically during the Civil Wars, which, in addition to a series of bad harvests, had increased the burden of taxation and impoverished many marginal free-holders and yeomen. The Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-1691) had advocated relief of the poor as a necessary prerequisite for them to be able to practice religion, thereby asserting the mutual inter-dependence of religion and charity. Non-conformists, as a whole, experienced additional impoverishment, becoming known as the "new poor," due to the repeated fines and imprisonment to which they were subjected. There are accounts of deprived Non-conformist ministers, such as Thomas Gouge (1609-1681), who provided work for the poor of his parish, paying them out of his own means. They responded to the needs they saw out of a belief that relief of the poor was a Christian duty, and it must include, in addition to money, personal service to the poor, the sick, and prisoners, which translated into acts of forgiving debts, visiting and helping prisoners, taking poor men's sons as apprentices, and lending money to young tradesmen. The General Baptists established funds to provide for ejected ministers as early as 1656.[29]

The ecclesiology of the Independents, by which they perceived the church, not as a non-living institution to which one belonged, but a "living body . . . composed of living stones," necessitated the formation of a covenanted community of the godly, in which the members must *be* the church to one another. This ecclesiology was translated into covenants in which watch-care was an integral element of congregational dynamics.[30]

---

[29] Bebb, 101-130, 136-141 provides many more examples of piety expressed as charity: (e.g. the Baptist Richard Haines of Horsham advocated the construction of a "Working Hospital for the Indigent" run by representatives of all parishes in which children would be trained in a trade and taught to read, 129. Specific examples of the effectual outworking of this precept of watch-care will be seen in the next section on their responses to persecution.

[30] Greaves, "Puritan Non-conformist Tradition," 459.

For John Smyth, mutual care was the very essence of church life.[31] The Baptist principle of the "priesthood of all believers" placed responsibility for church life on the congregation, and their understanding of "soul competency" provided individuals with the authority directly from God to carry out the functions of stewardship, education, edifying fellowship, leadership, and apologetics to defend their faith and worship.[32]

Their commitment to be the church to one another was articulated in explicit or implicit covenants, to which new members subscribed, thus providing parameters within which "the saints could actively exercise their gospel duties of mutual exhortation, edification and provoking one another to the doing of good works. . . . Moreover, each member was to be actively engaged in serving the whole: each must be one another's member . . . serving to the benefit of all . . . by diligence and love." This watch-care was seen as an aspect of discipline by which "church membership offered a controlled public setting in which individuals could learn to frame their wills and doings according to the law of God, since every member was responsible for instructing and admonishing one another in faith and practice."[33]

Among the Calvinistic Independents, who believed that "the extent to which the saints appear to have proved their calling by the faithful performance of social virtues toward members of the family and religious group," fulfillment of the covenant provided a consoling source of spiritual security. It was expressed through meeting the spiritual as well as the emotional needs of the membership in "the mutual exhorting, and building up

---

[31] Smyth, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church* (1607), in *Works of John Smyth,* ed., William T. Whitley, 150-268

[32] Torbet, *The Baptist Story,* 11; Brackney, *The Baptists,* 71.

[33] Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 121-123.

of one another in faith, labouring together unto the truth, admonishing the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, bearing with the weak, considering one another to provoke unto love and good works, rebuking for sin and trespass, confessing of faults one to another, and praying for another, bearing one another's burdens, etc."[34]

Emphasis on subscription to a covenant, rather than to a creed marked one distinction between the Independent and the Presbyterian churches. The Independents assumed that faith in Christ and holiness of life would go hand in hand. On this basis, acceptance for membership was based upon candidates giving witness to their own experience of the Lord in their life, as well as a confession of personal faith as a result of the work of grace in their heart. For example, members of the Suffolk Bury-St. Edmunds Church promised "to bear the frailties and infirmities of one another, to cover with a skirt of love"; and "in such ordinances wherein our judgments are differing, to walk peaceably and orderly towards each other, in the spirit of meekness and forbearance." Such a commitment allowed a variety of opinions of the head, while preserving unity of heart.[35]

Whereas watch-care was the responsibility of every member toward each other, from the beginning it had been the special duty of elected Deacons, Deaconesses and

---

[34] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts* (1607), 249; Brachlow, *Communion of Saints,* 134-135. See Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* for examples of articles in covenants re watch-care: e.g., A covenant of a church at Norwich that stipulated "that we will in all love improve our communion as brethren by watching over one another and . . . counsel, admonish, reprove, comfort, releeve, assist and bear with one another, serving one another in love," 130. Words such as exhort and admonish have taken on negative meanings in colloquial English usage, but their original meanings were positive in intent: i.e., to exhort meant to urge earnestly by advice; to admonish meant to caution or warn against what was improper. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan, 1994). The Broadmead Church in Bristol was organized in 1640 on the basis of a covenant that "with godly purpose of heart [they] joined themselves together in the Lord, only thus covenanting that they would, in the strength and assistance of the Lord come forth of the world, and worship the Lord more purely, persevering therein to their end," 151.

[35] Nuttall, *Visible Saints,* 110-114. It was this allowance for freedom of judgment on the part of the Independents that initially won them the favor of Oliver Cromwell. It is Nuttall's opinion that it was their being united on the basis of a covenant, as opposed to subscription to a creed, that "contributed to the preservation of the Congregational churches from the tendencies to rationalism which developed within the Presbyterian churches," 112.

Widows. The church of Robert Browne specified that in addition to Pastors and Elders, Relievers were to care for the needy, and Widows were to pray for, visit, and minister to the distressed and afflicted in the church.[36] The Ancient Church of Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth also had specified roles for Deacons and a Deaconess, an elderly Widow, who "visited the sick and weak, called out women to watch and help as necessity required, and gathered relief for the poor."[37] This same function can be found in the Broadmead Church, Bristol. Their deaconesses were required not to marry, and were assigned the duties of visiting the sick and providing for their needs, while speaking "a word of support to them that might strengthen their faith in Christ," and report to the elders and deacons any special needs they discovered.[38]

In the Baptist churches of Smarden, Kent, it was the role of the Deacons "to look over and take care of the congregation in respect of their inward and outward condition—that is, to see how it stands between God and their souls, and how it is with respect to their outward wants." Thus their deacons were not merely administrators of material needs, but were charged with pastoral care.[39] One study of this shire reveals that one of the initial appeals of Separatism had been their emphasis on brotherly care that helped "many poorer folk at the lower end of respectable society to weather the economic crisis" of the late sixteenth century, when a redistribution of power and wealth had consolidated control in the hands of local elites, isolating numbers of respectable citizens, who turned

---

[36] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 63.

[37] Shakespeare, 115.

[38] Hayden, 266; Charles DeWeese, "Deaconesses in Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 12 (Jan. 1977): 53.

[39] Hopkins, 37.

to membership in a conventicling group for communal identity and societal security in the midst of economic and social disintegration. During the economic duress and persecution of the mid-seventeenth century, the Independent congregations' emphasis on membership care likewise attracted the marginalized "new poor" of lesser tradesmen, apprentices, and newcomers which had been displaced from their land in the "weald," i.e., the rural, wilderness area of Kent.[40]

As with the illustrations of discipline cited above, many examples of material and spiritual care can be gleaned from extant church record books: e.g., at Fenstanton, a 1653 entry that Mr. Denne "declared the condition of Mary Whittock, saying—Here our sister Whitock, who is destitute of harbour, and her mother being very sick and her children small, and the ways dirty, she is not able to travel from place-to-place . . . therefore we desire to take her condition into consideration." After doing so, "thereupon the congregation, being willing to manifest their love towards her, and their care for her, [decided] to use utmost effort for providing a house for her." The following year, "Sam Shatbold certified the congregation of loss of all barns, outhouses, houses of John Wilson had burned down. . . . After some consultation we resolved to help our brother amongst ourselves and not to trouble any other congregation far distant from us." Two months later the money to pay for the buildings was delivered.[41]

---

[40] Peter Clark, 177-178. One specific instance recorded in the Smarden Baptist Church, Kent, is that of a surgeon, Matthew Hartnupp, who built cottages adjacent to his own home for the sick and elderly he treated, because "in those times the parish had to take responsibility for the poor and the overseers of the poor were often the physicians." The membership of this congregation were primarily weavers, tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths and craftsmen, but the leaders were prosperous men of standing and prosperity who employed the less-educated and often supplied the needs of the poorer brothers. Hopkins, 25-26.

[41] *Records of the Churches of Christ . . . Fenstanton,* 83, 108-109, 114.

The Bunyan Meeting at Bedford was likewise responsive to monetary needs, as demonstrated when a Sister S. expressed the desire to join with the church. Several sisters were appointed to go to seek satisfaction of her condition. Finding her impoverished, the record shows that "it is agreed that a [illegible] course be taken, either by petition or some private way to gather a summe of money for the releafe of our Sister S."[42]

Spiritual needs also involved the ministrations of the entire faith community, as at the Broadmead Church in Bristol. Elder Edward Terrill recounted that in 1673, when one Brother Fry, attested to be a godly man, came down with "fitts" of cursing and blaspheming, and violently striking out against those who would restrain him, the church committed itself to entire days of prayer from "being thus sorely Assaulted and pressed by ye Devill (as all that beheld and heard him could not otherwise Judge.)" Following his release from "ye Spirit of Rageing" he lapsed into despair as a "Spirit of Fear" for his salvation overtook him. After another day of very concerted prayer by the Church,

> very observably ye Spirit of Fear left him, that he was not soe much in horror and frightfull apprehensions as he had been. And meanes were used Physically for his recovery, as Bloodying, Purgeing and Leeching, to draw ye Distemper from his head. . . . But when he began to come to himself . . . though his Fitts ceased for above a Month, yet he could not arrive at any comfort or faith, . . he lay under such despairing thoughts still that it was all in vaine. . . . he was so filled with a Spirit of shame . . . they could not yet prevail with him to go but to a near neighbor, nor hardly see a person that came in.
>
> Therefore the church appointed another day of Prayer for him, and soe came together again . . . at his house, to seek ye Lord (as it were to perfect ye worke of his Recovery) to take ye Spirit of Shame from him, that he might go about his lawfull calling forth of doors. To which ye Lord gave gracious answer of Prayer, also to Admiration. For the very next day after this he was emboldened to go forth about his business in ye Citty, as he did formerly. . . .

---

[42] *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting,* 15-16.

> Thus ye Lord Cast, as it were, three Spirits, visible, to be seen out of him: viz: A Spirit of uncleannesse for Rage and Blasphemy; 2ndly, a Spirit of horror and fear; and 3rdly, A Spirit of Shame, as it were, Dumbness. Oh ye condescention, Mercy, grace, favour, and faithfulnesse of ye God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he should answer prayer . . . for his own name's sake. . . . To this day, nearly three years since he recovered, ye Lord hath kept him in his former gracious frame of spirit . . . and hath been well Ever since in his body.[43]

Barrington White offers an astute assessment of the critical function that spiritual and material support played in the survival of the young churches, in that it both kept members from becoming vulnerable to the need to depend on their former secular associations, and demonstrated to the local magistrates that their own poor would not become a charge upon the parish. Congregational watch-care also guarded the reputations of members against public scandal, which kept the secular community from intruding into the lives and businesses of the church.[44]

After the Restoration of the monarchy (and the Established Church of England) persecution of the Independent and sectarian congregations reached its zenith. The following section will recount details of the persecutory measures taken against them, and their response to it. First, however, it would be informative to view those responses in terms of the application of their membership watch-care. The Second Conventicle Act (1670) provided that, in case poverty prevented some from paying the heavy fines on preachers and hearers, anyone present at the meeting could be assessed for their fines. This measure was designed to bring financial ruin to Non-conformity. Many families, on the basis of nothing more than the word of secret informers, were utterly impoverished by exactions of fines and confiscation of their personal, household and trade goods. Because

---

[43] Hayden, 139-141. The modern reader will recognize the symptoms of a bout with depression , and appreciate the support tendered to this brother by this congregation that enabled him to recover.

[44] White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century,* 45.

of their commitment to mutual care and support, however, rather than members becoming discouraged, and churches being split, they became more firmly bound to each other.[45]

The Andover-Newton historian, Gerald Cragg's analysis of this reaction is quite insightful:

> The sufferer knew that he belonged to a community of faith and love, and the prayers of his fellows constantly sustained him. The support of fellow-believers was a factor of inestimable importance in breaking the power of persecution. . . . To an amazing degree they were willing to share one another's sufferings; they constantly visited the prisoners, they helped those whose goods had been plundered . . . . The same unity that enabled the victim to receive, helped him also to give. He knew that he suffered as a member of a community, and his witness was to a corporate faith. His constancy and courage contributed to the spiritual resources of the church; they strengthened and confirmed his fellow-members.
>
> In one area after another . . . the believer found new sources of encouragement. And in quite ordinary ways, the disciplines of daily life ministered comfort to the sufferer. . . . They discovered ways of accepting and bearing "crosses" that made even grievous ones seem light.
>
> They grew in faith and courage as material resources were swept away, in their belief that this persecution was God's instrument for purifying their own souls and fostering a sense of unity within the persecuted group, and the practical spirit of brotherhood which it created. . . . It was impossible to drive from his position a man who has suffered persecution for it.[46]

This observation provides a segue to the final topic of this chapter, which surveys the causes and conditions of persecution experienced by the Independents, and how they responded to it in ways that made them stronger and more united.

Congregational Dynamics of Independent Churches in Response to Persecution

The ideological causes of the suppression of Non-conformity and persecution for dissent have been addressed in previous chapters. Basically, those repressive measures

---

[45] W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church,* 558. Jones, 89-90,

[46] Cragg, 81-82, 84.

arose out of a paradigm that equated unity of the state with uniformity of its religion. As England moved out of the Tudor era into the Stuart dynasty of the seventeenth century, it was immediately obvious that Elizabeth's intended "Settlement" had not settled the state of religion in the nation, but instead had fomented further dissension among parties waiting in the wings: one, the non-separating Puritans, desiring to restore a Presbyterian-style reform after the Edwardian model of Protestantism; the other, alienated Puritans, waiting in exile, and desiring to return with their agenda of sweeping away all vestiges of "popery," and to instigate, not mere reform, but a complete reconstitution of the church after their model of New Testament Christianity.

Anticipation of a new regime stirred the hopes of both camps that the new king, James VI of Scotland, might be amenable to their vision for the church—or, at least, tolerant of differing views and styles of worship. Thus it was that James, en-route to become crowned James I of England, was met by a petition, supposedly endorsed by 1000 Puritans, appealing for a further purification of the church.[47] The royal response to that "Millenary Petition" was a conference at Hampton Court (1604) to which only four Puritan ministers, and no Separatists, were invited. Instead of the hoped-for reforms, the petitioners were met with an official set of Canons, of which the third stipulated that "Whosoever shall hereafter affirm that the Church of England by Law established under the King's Majesty is not a true and Apostolical Church, teaching and maintaining the Doctrine of the apostles, let him be excommunicated *ipso facto* and not restored, but only by the Archbishop, after his repentance and public revocation of this his wicked error." These Canons of 1604 were accompanied by the king's ultimatum that they choose "to

[47] The substance of this "Millenary Petition," with its particular grievances against prelacy, and proposals for reformation, can be found in Hanbury I, 112-117.

conform, either to be *harried* out of the land, or to expect that from him which was worse." Within one year about 300 Puritan preachers were silenced and turned out of their pulpits for rejecting the ceremonies, as being "popish."[48]

James I, raised in Presbyterian Scotland, but resentful of the treatment his Catholic mother had received at the hands of the Kirk, made it clear that his church would be not Presbyterian, but Episcopal, and compliance with the Book of Common Prayer, its liturgy and ceremonies (i.e., the cross at baptism, kneeling for communion and the wearing of the surplice to preach) would be enforced. It was in response to the king's intransigence that the Separatist congregations coalesced out of the conventicles for lectures and prophesyings that had formed during Elizabeth's reign. These congregations became lightning rods for the wrath of the king and his prelates. The ideological issue of uniformity now gained political currency, as both state and church employed the juggernaut of established religion to impose, not merely peace, but domination of the nation, down to the parish level.

Non-conformists had known suppression, imprisonment and banishment under Elizabethan rule. Now these measures were elevated to a policy of cruelty, recrimination and ruination under the subsequent Stuart reigns (with a brief hiatus during the Commonwealth interregnum). General allusions have been made to persecution of non-conformity in previous chapters. This section will describe how egregious it became, as James' promise to "harry them out of the land, or worse" was fulfilled by himself and his successors, while kings and Parliaments vied for power in a political tug-of-war, using religion as their rope. It will also identify the dynamics within the target congregations

---

[48] Hanbury I, 121-126.

that enabled them to grow stronger, rather than break, under duress, until toleration was finally granted by Parliament in 1689 on the eve of England's "Glorious Revolution."

The primary instrument of oppression of Non-conformity was the Court of High Commission, originally instituted by Henry VIII "to control ecclesiastical affairs by commissions appointed to investigate and adjudicate without being bound by the ordinary processes of law." Elizabeth had increased its powers, but it reached the zenith of its authority under James I. "It could examine and imprison anywhere in England, and had become the right arm of Episcopal authority under James I's Abp. Richard Bancroft (1544-1610)." His successor, the staunch Calvinist, George Abbott (1611-1633), was succeeded by Charles I's "Arminian" Abp. William Laud, whose goal was to enforce conformity by any means, while Charles determined to rule the realm by royal prerogative, and raise money without convening a Parliament between 1629 and 1640.[49]

In the hands of Charles I and Laud, the High Commission Court extended its powers by employing an *ex officio* oath by which anyone presented was required to swear to any crime or offences of word, thought or action, without having been charged with an offense. Refusal to take the oath was interpreted as guilt, "as though he had confessed, and been legally convicted of all the articles and matters to which he refused to be sworn." This oath *ex officio* made even thoughts a crime against the State and Church, and was used to deprive and imprison ministers (and their hearers), and to justify intrusion into private homes, and confiscation of their goods without a writ of *habeas corpus,* the testimony of witnesses, or warrants against them.[50]

---

[49] W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church,* 547-548, 553-554.

[50] Evans, II, 72.

Such violations of Common Law and defiance of Parliament raised so much discontent among the people that when Charles was forced to convene a Parliament in April, 1640, it contained many Presbyterian members of parliament who presented him with grievances to be addressed before they would allocate money for his war with the Netherlands. He dismissed this "Short Parliament," but the need for funds forced him to re-convene it in November of that year. This "Long Parliament" began by enacting a ruling that it could be adjourned only by its own authority. Meanwhile, the accumulated animosity between Royalist supporters and Presbyterian members of parliament erupted in mob violence in the streets of London. To restore peace, Parliament proposed the calling of a General Synod of Divines to establish conformity in religion throughout the land "to that order which the laws enjoin according to the Word of God." This synod of divines, (known as the "Westminster Assembly"), which began meeting in 1643, was called upon to complete the reformation of the Church.[51]

It was the Long Parliament, advised by the Westminster Assembly, that established the Presbyterian Church, impeached Laud (1642), conducted the civil wars, and eventually prosecuted and executed Charles I (1649), instituting a Commonwealth government with a Republican Parliament under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. The failure of the Commonwealth Parliaments and the "New Model Army" to establish peace among the factions of Royalists, Presbyterians, and Independents, culminated in another eruption of violence, which Cromwell tried to quell by having himself declared "Lord Protector," to the dismay of all parties. When he died in 1658, his son, Richard, was not strong enough to prevent anarchy without the oppressive rule of the Army.

---

[51] Watts, 83.

A younger generation, that had not tasted the oppression of the earlier Stuart regime, opted for restoration of the monarchy. In response to his Declaration of "liberty to tender consciences," (a politically astute, but empty phrase, which gave all factions hope of re-establishment or at least toleration for their views), Charles II was invited to return from exile and assume the throne. His accession to the throne in 1660 was quickly followed by the most egregious persecution of all Independency, which had proliferated and strengthened during the tolerant milieu of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. The very concept of "Independence" was threatening to the newly-crowned monarch, and anathema to the prelates he re-instated to their former positions of authority.

During the Commonwealth, radical sectaries had also proliferated. One chiliastic sect, the "Fifth Monarchists," who were committed to facilitating the arrival of the Kingdom of God by political and military means, perpetrated two uprisings led by Thomas Venner (1608-1661), in 1659 and 1661. Such rebellion against the government further convinced the "Cavalier" Parliament that non-conformity meant disloyalty. At the behest of the new king, a series of repressive measures known as the "Clarendon Code," calculated to drive all non-conformity out of the land, were marshaled through Parliament by Charles' Chancellor, Edward Hyde, Ld. Clarendon. The opening salvo was a new Act of Uniformity for Public Prayers (1662), under which nearly 2000 ministers were ejected from their pulpits and livings on St. Bartholemew's Day, August 24, of that year, for what was now labeled "Dissent." All sectaries lost political power and the right to hold public offices, resulting in the harassment and impoverishment of ministers and civil servants, their families, fellow conventiclers and supporters.[52]

---

[52] White, *English Baptists,* 98; Jones, 54-59.

The Corporation Act (1661) prohibited Non-conformists from holding public office. The first Conventicle Act (1664) prohibited any group of more than five persons in addition to family members, from meeting for worship unless they used the Prayer Book. The Five Mile Act (1665) forbade any non-conforming minister or teacher to come within five miles of an incorporated township. Penalties for violation of these laws included fines and imprisonment. When it became obvious that the wealthier members of the conventicles were paying the fines for those less fortunate, a second Conventicle Act (1670) increased the fines, and the length of jail terms, intending the intentional impoverishment of the Dissenters and the enrichment of the magisterial enforcers.[53]

As the conflict between Charles II and Parliament escalated over the possibility of his openly Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, becoming the successor to the throne, the Rye House Plot against the royal lives, and the Non- conformists' support of the Exclusion Bill (1681) by which any Roman Catholic would be barred from ascending to the throne, increased the king's distrust and animosity for Dissent, leading to the "Bloody Assizes" intended to break Dissenters financially as well as physically.[54] When Charles died, Dissenters supported the bid of his Protestant, but illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, to take the crown, but Parliament acquiesced to the claim of legitimate royal blood, and James II was crowned in 1685, with an agenda of promoting Catholic partisans in all positions of influence in the government and universities. His subsequent offer of an Indulgence for non-conformity was viewed with suspicion by those who could

---

[53] Hopkins, 41-42; *cf.,* Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1953), 184.

[54] Jones, 97-104; Watts, 231-232. Fines for attendance at a conventicle were meant to be financially ruinous. When they could not be paid, furniture and bedding, as well as the means of making a living (e.g., anvils, kilns, wood, cattle, feed, and tools), were confiscated, to be sold at auction, the value of which was shared with the anonymous informers.

have benefited from it, because they saw through his ulterior agenda of gaining toleration for Roman Catholicism. These were the circumstances that promulgated incidents of persecution to which the extant primary sources of the period testify.

An early account dates from 1646 when the city of Oxford, a Royalist stronghold to which Charles and Parliament had retreated, surrendered to the Parliamentary Army:

> suddenly, with the incoming of Fairfax's troops, it was exposed to a flood of revolutionary ideas and practices which authority no longer had the means to check. . . . To the orthodox, the regimental chaplains of this strange army were dangerous innovators; but scandalous beyond measure was the missionary ardour of the private soldiers, many of whom were Independents and Anabaptists. A Baptist Church came into being in Oxford. Almost immediately, Messengers were sent to Tetsworth to participate in the formation of a Berkshire Association.[55]

This record also notes that the new doctrines made a deep impression on the young who maintained the cause through the ensuing years of persecution, when the 1661 Fifth Monarchist rising in London, brought down suppression of all "seditious sectaries who attended conventicles under the full force of the Clarendon Code." The Ecclesiastical Courts were revived and Baptists and Independents were constantly presented for offenses, such as non-attendance and non-payment of tithes in parish churches. Being excommunicated by these courts meant that one had no means of recovering debts or gaining satisfaction for injuries through the law courts. In 1669, the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford paid spies to hunt them down and betray them. The final entry recounts that the Rye House Plot (to assassinate Charles II and the future James II) also spurred active measures against Dissenters in 1681.[56]

---

[55] Walter Stevens, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1646), 3.

[56] Stevens, 4-7.

A collection of *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661* concluded that, as a result of Charles II's Declaration of Breda, petitions for "liberty for tender consciences" poured forth from sects that had tasted persecution during the reigns of former monarchs. On July 26, 1660, the London Baptists presented their "Humble Apology," complaining of "unjust aspersions and calumnies, . . groundless and injurious reports taken up against them by the press, in the pulpit, and in common discourse." In response, they were charged with disobedience to magistry and civil government. They again resorted to offering proofs of their fidelity, assuring his majesty that they eschewed any and all intents and means of injury or violence against his person or his government. These assurances failed to stay the onslaught of persecution.

In September, 1660, Parliament ordered the suppression of the Northamptonshire Sectarian Churches. In November, John Bunyan was jailed for preaching at Bedford. The General Baptists of Kent, Chatham, Dover and Canterbury also felt the oppression with many members being imprisoned in the Maidstone Gaol. Their petition, issued in the hope of eliciting compassion or amelioration of their estate, was rejected. The date of their release was uncertain, but their churches, the account assured readers, "continued to prosper, and the hand of the Lord was with them while bearing the cross."[57]

---

[57] Underhill, 292-294. This "Humble Petition and Representation of the Sufferings of Several Peaceable, and Innocent Subjects, Called by the Name of ANABAPTISTS, Inhabitants in the county of Kent, and now Prisoners in the Gaol of Maidstone, for the testimony of a good Conscience" (London: 1660) charged that "We have had our houses broken open in the dead of Night, without producing any Authority from thee, . . . our goods and cattle taken away, and yet detained from us: Our Bodies, Some taken from our own dwellings, some from peaceable meetings and made prisoners . . . which proceeding doth bring great distress and Ruine to ourselves and families. . . . The bread which our Families have eat this 10 or 12 months, hath been taken up upon Credit; and all of us being detained from our employments, the cryes of our Families (who suffer hunger) becomes great." Loyalty to the King was promised, and an appeal made for mercy based on the injustice of punishment for worship, closing with "in case anything should be by thee commanded in Spiritual Matters Wherein we cannot obey, we shall not then take up any carnal or temporal Weapon against Thee, or thy Authority, but patiently suffer such punishment as shall be inflicted on us for our Consciences." Dated 25th day of the 11th month, 1660. Signed by William Jeffery,

Some congregations, (e.g., the General Baptist Church at Tiverton, Devonshire) destroyed their Record Books to prevent their being found and used by the bishops' pursuivants to identify and prosecute members. A later recreation of the history of this meeting stated that "harassed on every hand, not knowing that their freedom or property was safe for a single day, it is not surprising that our fathers sorrowfully yet deliberately destroyed all records and writings of their little church, lest such papers should prove their undoing from unfriendly magistrates." The recorder recalled a tradition that the members had "walked to Upottery, 21 miles, to worship to get around the Five Mile Act," noting that "stalwart Christians were these spiritual fathers of ours, and if we may measure their love and devotion to Christ by their self-denial, their love and devotion were both real and intense." It was not until the Act of Tolerance permitted open worship again that the Tiverton Church began keeping its Record Book again, for the next 220 years, "our former book containing matters of this nature being lost in the late times of trouble."[58]

Under James II (1685-1689), the "Bloody Assizes" implemented in response to the rebellion of Monmouth, "exiled the Upottery congregation to Jamaica, there to be whipped and sold as slaves." Thus, worship in "secrecy was absolute, sentinels were posted to give the alarm; no singing was permitted. Trap doors were devised for the surreptitious withdrawal of the preachers. . . . Dead bodies of men and women who loved

---

and James Blackmore, General Baptist co-pastors of the churches at Biddenden, Rolvenden and Cranbrook, near Smarden, Kent.

[58] H. B. Case, *The History of the [General] Baptist Church in Tiverton 1607-1907* (London: Baptist Union Publications, 1907), 15.

Protestant principles poisoned the sweet air of Devonshire and made lanes of Somerset hideous."[59]

The extant original records of other churches confirm the degree of fear and the courageous measures taken to meet for worship during these decades. In 1675, the four Non-conforming churches in Bristol, (three Independent congregations and one Presbyterian), resorted to holding united services when as many as three of their ministers were imprisoned simultaneously. They contrived curtains and trap doors to hide the brother who was preaching, so that when informers arrived, they could not tell who to arrest, because all would be singing a psalm.[60] At Warboys, (Cambridgeshire), the record for 1660 recounted tersely that "Charles King comes to the throne again and . . . he sends a declaration from Amsterdam wherein he grants Liberty in matters of gods worship." This was followed by, "the King gets out a Declaration to suppress meetings that are for gods worship and multitudes in the gaill. The churches now brake up their meetings like men unwilling to bare the cross of Christ. . . . For if it be of god to meet together, then it is not of god to brake us." The following year, the record reads "Again the church is in a good order, again blessed by god, and upheld by our meeting throught (*sic*) good report and eccellent progress we end this year."[61] The record for 1682 – 1683 continues, "we uphold our meetings together through the blessing of god, although they are broken up in many places of this nation." Rumors of meetings broken up in London and people imprisoned, are reported, "yet this noyse doth not trouble us with fears for we are content

---

[59] Case, 15-17.

[60] Hayden, 149-159.

[61] *Book of Records of the Church at Warboys,* 17.

to suffer for Christ knowing it is the lot of the Righteous not only to [illegible] but also to suffer for his sake." The following years testify to continued growth in spite of danger:

> [1684]: Notwithstanding ye aforesaid troubles . . . the Brethren are zealous for the faith and increasing in number, there being some added to the church . . . and continue in the Apostles doctrine in Breaking of bread and . . . with preaching from house to house, not being permitted to preach in open meeting houses.
>
> [1685]: The Lord hath kept us still in the faith who is worthy of praises. Yet great troubles abound in many places for the truth's sake. . . . Some added to the Church this year . . . who after confession of their faith were baptized with water.[62]

Imprisonment proved to be no deterrent to dissent, although conditions in some jails were deplorable. Prisons were administered privately under contract with the government, but not regulated by it, so there was no uniformity in them. Conditions ranged from some that offered all the comforts of home furnishings with room for one's spouse and family members, to the other extreme of squalor, and deprivation of the most essential elements of life and health. Some keepers did not feel obliged to provide for prisoners, and used their positions to extract money for food and drink, requiring bribes from anyone bringing in provisions to sustain life. Those who lacked personal resources or support from outside, simply died of starvation. Crowded conditions obviated privacy, especially during periods of intense persecution and arrests. Cragg reports incidences of as many as 13 prisoners crowded into a cell built to accommodate one, and 50 women sharing four beds. Overcrowding often meant lack of segregation of men and women, with no provision for sanitary conditions or means of warmth, with only bare floors or straw to sleep on, and no protection from chilling wind and rain. The Quaker, George

---

[62] *Book of Records of the Church at Warboys,* 34-39.

Foxe's health was broken by the cold and dampness, exposure to the stench of excrement that was never cleaned out, and the crawling vermin it attracted.[63]

"Close" confinement entailed "physical hardship, social disability and economic disaster" because it meant no contact with visitors bringing supplies, and, the food being inadequate, resistance to disease was lowered, with no release permitted to recover from illness. "Close prisoners" were locked in cells for many days or weeks, and in common gaols, "they were mixed in with felons who wreaked noisy violence on other prisoners, while appropriating the less revolting sections of the room, forcing new prisoners to sit and lie in the most foul places where excrement had been dumped," so that they had to stand all night to avoid lying in it. Those caught holding services in jail were "thrust into dungeons so loathsome that visitors could not bear the stench." Some were manacled to restrict movement.[64]

Such shared suffering had an unintended effect on those subjected to it. It fostered a sense of fellowship between members of diverse sects, who saw themselves as united in affliction for a common faith, and joined in worship together in their quarters for mutual spiritual sustenance. Many prisoners, "though cut off in varying measure from the outer world, had numerous contacts with the community beyond the prison walls. Those who shared the faith for which they were suffering did not forget them." They continually assailed the authorities on behalf of their conditions and the wrongfulness of their imprisonment. (The primary sources cited below give evidence of such petitions.) Food, warm clothing, and supplies for use in carrying on a trade (e.g.,

---

[63] Cragg, 89-93. John Wagner, ed., *The Historical Dictionary of the Elizabethan World* (Phoenix, Az.: Oryx Press, 1999), 305-306 points out that the conditions to which prisoners were exposed often had much to do with the social class of the prisoners—those of the upper class receiving preferential treatment.

[64] Cragg, 94-99, 116-129.

John Bunyan made laces to support his family out of the materials his wife brought to him), and encouragement sustained them, as did news that their congregations were flourishing spiritually.[65]

A booklet published in 1661 by Henry Jessey (1601-1663), the Particular Baptist who had become leader of the Henry Jacob church at Southwark in 1637, mentions that, although Abingdon Baptists were imprisoned in Reading Gaol for refusing to take the oaths of loyalty and subscription (to the King and Church), their congregations were reported to be "exceedingly cheerful, and a very lively spirit of faith and prayer is amongst them, and their meetings rather increase than otherwise," in the belief that they were fulfilling the Baptist principle of obeying God rather than man.[66]

As conditions permitted, many imprisoned pastors preached daily to fellow inmates and continued to minister to their congregations vis-à-vis letters and sermons smuggled out of jail. There is a charming vignette about how John Murton, the successor of Thomas Helwys, maintained his pastoral care over his flock from his cell in Newgate Prison by writing invisibly in milk, on paper used as a stopple in the bottle brought to him daily by a friend who dutifully returned each evening to retrieve and replace it with a new supply of milk and paper. It is said that he wrote his *Most Humble Supplication to the King's Majesty* (1620) in this manner. The received paper, with its invisible dried milk inscription, was smoothed out and held over the flame of a candle that turned the milk

---

[65] Cragg, 102-104.

[66] Henry Jessey, *The Lord's Loud Call to England* (London: n,p.,1661), 24-25. Quoted in White, *English Baptists,* 96-98. This principle of liberty of conscience to obey God rather than man was the basis for the Baptists' stance for separation of church and state, so that civil magistrates would have no authority over doctrine or discipline. Hopkins, 41. See also Canipe, 406.

brown before scorching the paper, thus revealing the daily message.[67] Others, notably, Joseph Alleine, (1634-1668) an ejected dissenting minister from Taunton, Somerset produced a multitude of letters and devotional literature from his cell in Ilchester, 1663-1664. His letters were preserved and published by his wife, and his *Call to Archippus,* encouraging courageous preaching in spite of danger, became one of the most popular Puritan devotional manuals of the time.[68]

Imprisonment usually meant great suffering, regardless of the physical conditions of the confinement, because sentences were not exactly prescribed, so there was no expected date of release. For some, support from those in their community of faith meant both physical and emotional survival, so that "in the moment of his trial, a minister found himself surrounded and upheld by the love of his people; and when distance cut off personal contact, letters maintained unbroken the bond of fellowship." The spiritual morale this fostered should not be overlooked in an investigation into reasons for survival during such duress. "As one by one the great phrases of faith were filled with new meaning, the sufferer realized that he had found in prison a means by which he could be more nearly conformed to his Master. It was an honor, not an indignity to be in gaol. . . . and it was only the vivid sense of God's presence which made it possible." Suffering led to self-examination, deepened faith, and more complete obedience in every area of life.[69] Needless to say, this was not the intent of the perpetrators of persecution.

---

[67] This vignette was originally recorded by Roger Williams in his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644), 36, and has been cited by several secondary sources, e.g., Watts, 50 and Burgess, 306-308.

[68] Joseph Alleine, *A Call to Archippus . . . to some Ejected Ministers . . . to take heed to their Ministry that they fulfill it* (1664) and *Christian Letters full of spiritual Instructions,* (1672). John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) and *Pilgrim's Progress,* (1678) and William Penn's *No Cross No Crown* (1669), were also the products of their authors' incarceration for conscience's sake.

[69] Cragg, 120-121. White, *English Baptists,* 115, calls this attitude their "theology of suffering."

Great creativity was exercised in finding ways around the Conventicle Acts. One minister wrote out sermons in four copies that were distributed to four members of his congregation who in turn copied and distributed them, until everyone had read or heard each sermon. Another preached daily in private homes of large families to which four "guests" were invited to visit, thus not violating the "family plus no more than five" rule. In places where Puritans were in great numbers, they defied authorities, meeting in large groups, even removing partitions of rooms to create a hall. In Bristol and elsewhere, guards were posted, pregnant women blocked the entrance, and preachers spoke from behind divided doors or above trap doors, in disguise, or had access to lofts where they could hide. Some preached through the windows of adjacent buildings. To avoid detection, one congregation met at Newcastle at 5:00 a.m. Another met at midnight, and some resorted to meeting in fields and woods as their fore-runners had in the past.[70]

The tri-centennial publication of the Stalham, Norfolk, Baptist Church recounts:

> With the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the Baptists found themselves an illegal body and their worship was perforce carried out by stealth. Tradition has it that the minister would visit his flock disguised in the smock-frock of a drover, and carrying a whip. Meetings were held in a thatched cottage which may still be seen. . . . In the cottage the table would be laid for supper so that the meeting might appear to be a convivial one. A hole in the wall, covered by a movable panel, communicated with an out-building so that the minister could address the gathering without actually entering the room. By such subterfuges the church was kept together until the King's Declaration of Indulgence, 1672.[71]

Congregations not only supported their ministers financially, but when a minister or member was caught and incarcerated, or died in prison, the congregation provided support for his widow and children. The Broadmead Church in Bristol raised and

---

[70] Watts, *Dissenters* I, 229-230. Hayden, 252-254; Jones, 78-80.

[71] C. B. Jewson, *Stalham Baptist Church, 1653-1953.* (n.p.: 1953), 1.

presented a year's salary to the wife of an incarcerated school teacher who had defied the Five Mile Act. Another man's release was secured by the church's paying his fine, so he could be free to support his family.[72] When the authorities realized that imprisonment was no deterrent to non-conformity, but that congregations were willing to pay fines, they used paid informers to spy on suspected dissenters, to fill the magistrates' coffers, while undermining the economic power of the Dissenters. As their financial reserves were depleted, they became even more dependent on each other. Thus the duress of persecution increased, rather than weakened, feelings of solidarity, making the churches more cohesive.[73]

The zeal with which suffering was embraced by Congregationalists and Baptists earned the sympathy and support of some who had stood for a national church. At Great Yarmouth (Norfolk), a town in which the majority of the Councilmen were moderate Episcopalians, most of their wives attended the Independent congregation served by the Dissenting minister William Bridge (1600-1670). When the town tradesmen acted against the conventiclers, their businesses suffered for it, so that even the magistrates acted leniently because of public sympathy. When any were presented for non-conformity, juries refused to convict them.[74]

---

[72] Cragg, 157-166; Hayden, 252

[73] Jones, 75-83; Cragg, 179-182.

[74] Watts, *Dissenters* I, 243-246. An example of public sympathy resulting in leniency was attested to by Edward Terrill, the recording Elder of the Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol. The record for 1684 recounted that, being non-conformists, they were not allowed to bury their dead in the church yards, so they had purchased a lot for their own burial ground. While burying a one-year-old child, "informers watched and reported their names to ye Mayor. A jury was empanelled, and they were accused for a Riot; but ye Jury would not find it a Riot, but an unlawfull assembly for not burying in Consecrated Ground. So ye Mayor fined ye father of ye Child 40s plus court fees." See also, Hayden, 262.

Where persecution became most egregious, merchants' stock, craftsmen's tools, and farmers' crops, animals, and stores of food were seized, and offered for sale at auctions, until their neighbors refused to buy them; or, if a man could not redeem his own goods, some neighbor paid the fine and bought them back. When a home was targeted for an illegal search, neighbors began hiding the family and harboring their furnishings, so they could not be confiscated, until the search was over. Eventually, the blameless character of the victims won the respect of the magistrates, and their disgust with the plundering and violence against them, until the overwhelming number of reports by informers hoping to share in the plunder, culminated in the constables' refusal to pursue them. Finally, it became obvious that such victimization was economically counterproductive because "persecution presupposes a temper which believes that, because truth is indivisible, minorities cannot be endured." Toward the end of the seventeenth century, however, "the rising authority of reason commended moderation and restraint. Practical considerations, such as the Puritans' contributions to society by their industry and honesty outweighed theological arguments as seventeenth century men realized that persecution was bad for trade. To ruin industrious people contributed nothing to the prosperity of the nation."[75]

It was not leniency, however, but zeal in the face of threat that drew Non-conformists into mutual support. For example, Geoffrey Nuttall (b. 1911) formerly a distinguished lecturer in Church History at New College, London, asserts that "shared persecution . . . brought those persecuted into close mutual sympathy and collaboration. It also forced Non-conformist churches . . . into becoming a company of independent

---

[75] Cragg, 64-65.

societies bound together by loose ties of counsel and mutual support, rather than by any regular, organized, hierarchic church order." A Non-conformist church might contain members with varying views and sympathies, so that neither churches nor pastors could be classified in terms of distinct denominational preferences, except where Non-conformity was strong, as in Kent in the 1660's – 1690, where congregations could be distinguished as Presbyterian or Congregational (Independents) or Baptists. In some other places, "persecution, distraint of goods and imprisonment did result in breaking up meetings," but in Kent, the records of ejections between 1669-72 give evidence that Non-conformity was well-established there, and that the General Baptists outnumbered all other Dissenters in that county. The "Weald of Kent" had long been a focal point to which ejected ministers had gathered, some issuing tracts, and all holding conventicles.[76]

Not all gathered congregations survived to leave a legacy of success. The initial fear of the "establishment" that Independency would cause the breakdown of parish boundaries and create social, spiritual and political bonds beyond the narrow kinship group, resulting in instability, disorder, and illegality within parishes and households, did prove to be at least partially well-founded. Parish boundaries were crossed, and many laws, passed to preserve the established order, were violated. However, because of the cohesiveness within the gathered churches, which resulted from shared suffering and mutual support, a new social order was being created, especially as it mirrored a parallel unfolding of political values amenable to the changing needs of an upward-striving class

---

[76] Geoffrey Nuttall, "Dissenting Churches in Kent before 1700," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (October 1963): 177-179, 181. This article documents the founding of Congregational churches in Kent at Canterbury, Dover, Sandwich, Staplehurst and Adisham in the 1640's, and the etiology of Baptist churches there since the 1620's, e.g., Helwys' Spitalfields Church at Eyethorn, and its scion at Deptford (both in 1624); Faversham, Maidstone and Smarden (1640), Staplehurst (1644, pastored by Richard Kingsnorth at his home at Spilshill), and Chatham (1660). Luke Howard, *A Looking Glass for Baptists* (1672) is an example of a tract that provides a "narrative of their root and rice [rise] in Kent."

of tradesmen and prominent citizens. During the Long Parliament, many of these, who had gained experience with governing Independent churches, became active politically, replacing the traditional gentry as M. P's. This threat of the rise of political power in the hands of a new socio-economic class, associated with a different form of religion that was represented as "Independency," exacerbated the sense of insecurity among members of the old order, and was one element that contributed to their determination to eliminate their churches which were perceived as being breeding grounds of divisiveness and instability in state and church. This perception partially accounts for the intrepidity of suppression of Non-conformity, and broadens the scope of its impact on society beyond that of religion. The political activities in support of Independency within the London church of John Goodwin (1593-1665) for example, which waxed strong during the period of initial threats, but waned in the face of their defeat at the Restoration, probably represents the experience of many small churches which dissolved, without leaving records of their existence and demise.[77]

Regardless of how the establishment (Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Gentry) perceived the encroachment of Independency in its various forms, those who pressed for a reconstitution of the church according to a scriptural paradigm saw the issue as a religious one, and viewed themselves as risking everything to obey Christ's mandate and model for His Church in the face of reactionary, anti-Christian forces. This was, according to their own words, the most inspirational motive for the sacrifices they were willing to make, and the indignities and losses they were willing to suffer.

---

[77] Ellen S. More, "Congregationalism and Social Order: John Goodwin's Gathered Church 1640-1660," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (April 1987): 210-213. More offers a history of Goodwin's Independent Church which he gathered in his home in Coleman Street, London after having been ejected as vicar of St. Stephens Presbyterian Church, in 1635. Goodwin (1593-1665) was an exponent of toleration, and many of his members were active in politics as supporters of Cromwell until the Restoration, 1660.

Gerald Cragg offers an explanation for this compulsion that would not yield to any amount of persecution, noting that, "For the Puritans, persecution was essentially a spiritual experience" that had been prophesied in the Gospel. They "believed they were contending for a purer form of the Gospel . . . in the tradition of the first Reformers, seeing themselves in a train of martyrs from the time of Haman, through the days of Queen Mary." Thus they believed "they should not avoid the cross, being disciples of their Master," interpreting their suffering as proof they were truly the people of God, who allowed it in order to separate the hypocrites from true believers, and purge them of sin.[78] "In one area after another . . . the believer found new sources of encouragement. In quite ordinary ways the disciplines of daily life ministered comfort to the sufferer. . . . They discovered ways of accepting and bearing 'crosses' that made even grievous ones seem light." They grew in faith and courage as material resources were swept away, "in their belief that this persecution was God's instrument for purifying their own souls, and fostering a sense of unity within the persecuted group, and the practical spirit of brotherhood which it created. . . . It was impossible to drive from his position a man who has suffered persecution for it."[79]

One of the most significant outcomes of the Establishment's failed attempts at suppression is that, under such persistent and prolonged persecution, the case for Independency gained its voice. Church record books, letters and devotional literature, alluded to above, were not the only extant documents to come out of these decades of duress. Many apologia and petitions, ostensibly aimed at the Kings and Parliaments,

---

[78] Cragg, 66, 69-70.

[79] Cragg, 84, 87.

found their way into print by the underground publishers, and served their real purpose of gaining converts and supporters, as well as confirming for the faithful the rightness of their cause. For those of us who have inherited the blessings of those who staunchly bore their suffering, these documents provide an appreciation for our legacy, and the rationale that produced it. It is beyond the purview of this study to cover the polemical literature produced, but a few characteristic samples will be offered to provide the tone and stance of the Non-conforming advocates.

The *Most Humble Supplication* (1620) of John Murton, smuggled in invisible writing from Newgate prison in 1620, has already been mentioned. His thesis was that "the vileness of persecuting the body of any man, only for the cause of conscience is against the Word of God and the law of Christ."[80] In 1646, Richard Overton, (1631-1664), the Leveller pamphleteer who protested both Laud's Episcopal hierarchy and the later Presbyterian hegemony, wrote from the same prison, *An Arrow against all Tyrants,* requesting the removal of the "tyrannous Acts by which the free Commoners of England are fined, and condemned, against the express letter of Magna Charta." He challenged both the legality of the Presbyterian system, and their claim that they were promoting unity, "for the Spirit of Christianity, for Christian charity, suffers long, is kind, etc. . . . Sirs, if you should suffer this bloody inroad of Martyrdom, cruelties and tyrannies upon the free Commoners of England . . . if you should be so inhumaine, undutiful, yea unnatural to us, our innocent blood will be upon you. From the most contemptuous Gaole of New-gate, Sept. 15, 1646."[81]

---

[80] Murton, *Most Humble Supplication,* quoted in Underhill, 192.

[81] Richard Overton, *An Arrow against all Tyrants and Tyranny, Shot from the prison of Newgate into the Prerogative Bowels of the Arbitrary House of Lords, and all other Usurpers and Tyrants by*

Sometime during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649), Edward Barber (1620-1649) another prisoner, identifying himself as "sometimes Prisoner in Newgate for the Gospel of Christ" issued an appeal *To the King's most Excellent Maiesty and the Honourable Court of Parliament,* protesting the miseries suffered by "his Maiesties loyall and faithful subjects, some of which having been miserably persecuted by the Prelates and their Adherents, by all rigorous courses, for their Consciences, practicing nothing but what was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ." After buttressing his arguments against such injustice by a plethora of scriptures, Barber concluded:

> Therefore Christians are to be exhorted, not compelled: for he that will not doe that whereunto he is exhorted and perswaded, the Gospel enjoyning, is no true Christian as yet; and they that goe not this Gospel way, to perswade men by exhortation and Counsell, but seeke to doe it by constraint, shew themselves not Gospel Teachers.
>
> Thus wee conceive it is cleare, That no man ought to be forced in matter of Religion, the Gospel being spirituall, and requireth only spirituall worshippers, like to it selfe: which cannot be made so, but by the Word and Spirit of God, which breatheth where and when it listeth, and not where and when mens Lawes and Statues pleaseth; which may make hypocrites, but not true Christians.[82]

An interesting debate written in iambic pentameter issued forth from a Baptist prisoner, Thomas Grantham (1634-1692) of Lincolnshire, entitled *The Prisoner against the Prelate, or A Dialogue between the Common Gaol and Cathedral of Lincoln* (1662). This author adduces both scripture and the Church Fathers in an hypothetical debate between a Jayle, representing those persecuted for the faith, and a Cathedral, representing the established church, which he holds responsible for "unchurching" the faithful by

---

Richard Overton, Prerogative Archer to the Arbitrary House of Lords, Their Prisoner in Newgate for the just and legal properties, rights and freedoms of the Commons of England. (London: 1646).

[82] Edward Barber, *To the Kings most Excellent Maiesty and the Honourable Court of Parliament* (n.p., n.d.). This document, and the ones previously cited, are located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, Didcot, U.K.

exercising power it has not been given by scripture to execute Church-discipline over the Spouse of Christ.[83]

One of the more brazen treatises produced by Roger Jones, under the pseudonym "Laophilus Misotyrannus" (which translates roughly, "a lover of the people against tyranny"), in response to the persecution after the "Great Ejection of 1662" asserted the justification for resisting a tyrannical Governor, advocating that

> "Resist not evil" cannot mean do not resist those who murder, rob and burn us, ravish women and take children into slavery. A private person must resist such insufferable evil against his own, and the people must resist a tyrannical Governor who oppresses, murders, imprisons and impoverishes, while enslaving all his people. Otherwise, it were impossible for the World to subsist.[84]

Many of the documents published during periods of persecution went beyond protesting the injustice of it, to advocating toleration for worship according to conscience. A sampling of these will be presented in chronological order as this concept developed since Henry Jacob's 1609 *Humble Supplication for Toleration,* addressed to James I. Jacob's appeal had been for the "liberty to enjoy and observe the ordinances of Christ Jesus in the administration of his churches, in lieu of humane constitutions." He presented his case not only in terms of what the law required, but suggested that toleration would be advantageous to the king, as it would elicit loyalty to him in appreciation for the liberty to worship as they understood scripture to require. He suggested that the king's own prelates, by persecuting Christians, were usurping his authority in exercising jurisdiction that belonged to the king as the sovereign over the church, and assuming to themselves the power of enacting laws ecclesiastical. This

---

[83] Thomas Grantham, *The Prisoner against the Prelate, or, A Dialogue between the Common Gaol and Cathedral of Lincoln written by a Prisoner of the Baptized Churches in Lincolnshire* (n.p.: 1650).

[84] *Mene Tekel: or, the Downfall of Tyranny by Laophilus Misotyrannus* (n.p.:1663).

appeal concluded by expressing the hope that "the grant of Toleration persuaded by us, is accompanied with this invaluable effect of giving end to the Controversies and Dissentions in a State, such as issue from difference in opinion touching points of our religion."[85] Not until three-quarters of a century later did this hope begin to materialize.

The year 1614 saw the production of *Religion's Peace, Or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience . . . presented to King James* by Leonard Busher, leader of a small group of Baptists who had separated from the Ancient Church in Amsterdam, alongside, but not in union with the Smyth and Helwys congregations, (his having rejected some of the radical theology of Smyth). This tract was accompanied by a letter by Henry Burton, which claimed that bishops were not true ministers or successors of the Apostles, but "descended from the Romish hierarchy to whom they owed their instauration, ordination, and function," and demonstrating by scripture that the only way to preserve happiness, love, peace and tranquility in a nation "is to give liberty to all to serve God according as they are persuaded is most agreeable to his word . . . without molestation." Burton predicted that oppression and persecution would "set the faces of one sort of men against another till liberty of conscience is allowed." Busher's appeal was for a spiritual reformation using spiritual weapons only, presenting the argument that coerced conformity results in false religions that will be continued within the Church, while persecution drives away many true Christians, scattering, but not eliminating them.[86]

John Murton, writing on behalf of "His Majesty's faithful subjects, commonly (but falsely) called Anabaptists," was published in1615 with *Persecution for Religion*

---

[85] Henry Jacob, *An Humble Supplication for Toleration and liberty to enjoy and observe the ordinances of Christ Jesus in the administration of his churches in lieu of humane constitutions* (1609), 23.

[86] Leonard Busher, *Religion's Peace, Or A Plea for Liberty of Conscience . . . presented to King James and the High Court of Parliament* (1614).

Judged and Condemned in which the successor to Helwys charged that the kings of England had given their power to "the Romish beast," so that they set up a pretended worship of God, and the present one, James I, is doing as much or worse,

> in forcing his subjects to dissemble to believe as he believes by means of persecution to lie many years in filthy prisons, in hunger, cold, idleness, divided from wife, family, calling, left in continual miseries . . . so as death would be to many less persecution.
>
> Christ's law is that one brother not offend another, for fear of wounding the conscience of a weaker brother, forcing it to practice that it had not faith in, bringing it thereby unto sin and condemnation.

This document presented a dialogue between a Christian and an Antichristian (representing the established church) in which the king's power over spiritual matters, believers' baptism and free-will are debated. The conclusion of the Christian is that "I must worship God as he requireth and not as mortal man requireth."[87]

The Particular Baptist, Samuel Richardson (fl. 1637-1658), a member of John Spilsbury's congregation in London who helped draft the "Confession of Faith by Seven Particular Baptist Churches," was an avid proponent of toleration for Non-conformity. The most well-known of his writings was *The Necessitie of Toleration in Matters of Religion* (1647) written at the height of Presbyterian dominance of the Church. This treatise adduced Church Fathers and scriptures, as well as the edicts of ancient emperors to substantiate his premise that the reason religion ought to be free is that coercion is not God's way, since he does not want unwilling worshippers, and only God can work faith to believe in the hearts of people. His conclusion was that Non-conformists cannot submit to the establishment of religion because proponents of it "turn with the wind,

---

[87] John Murton, *Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned in a Discourse between an Antichristian and a Christian* (1615), quoted 95, 98 in Underhill, reprinted 1662. Located in the Bodleian Library, London.

according to the leading of the chief magistrate, . . teaching that the current trend was the government of Christ," and are thus seen as "enemies to the truth and guilty of murder, using their authority to destroy those who differ from them, seen to be ravening wolves in sheep's clothing—more like usurpers and tyrants than like lambs of Christ." Nor could they submit to a presbyterial church government because it is not a Church of Christ, let alone a reformed church, "for the church of Christ consists of living stones, visible saints. But in the Church of England, there be many dead stones, which are visible swearers, drunkards and persecutors." Furthermore, "no true church, nor minister, hath power over any other member of another church or congregation."[88]

After the Restoration, *A Plea for Toleration of Opinions and persuasions in Matters of Religion Differing from the Church of England* was penned by the General Baptist, John Sturgion (fl.1653-1662), on behalf of Baptists whom Oliver Cromwell had turned against because of their refusal to support his being named as "Lord Protector." Sturgion based his appeal for toleration of Baptists on Charles II's Breda Declaration of liberty for tender consciences, and related as his own work among sectaries on behalf of the Restoration. The arguments presented are similar to those cited in the foregoing documents: that the use of force is contrary to the Spirit of Christ, and His "Golden Rule." Furthermore, coercion in spiritual affairs denies men the use of their reason, the God-given agency of persuasion in matters of faith. He assured Charles that the baptized people, if granted their requests for abolition of tithes, the reconvening of the Long Parliament, and amnesty for those who opposed the monarchy in the Civil Wars, would be loyal to the king in their desire "to serve the Lord without molestation in the faith they

---

[88] Samuel Richardson, *A Necessitie of Toleration in Matters of Religion* (London: 1647). Quoted in Underhill, 253, 279-282.

found in scriptures, giving honor to the king and worship to God, and tolerance for those who cannot be persuaded, that they be left to God, who alone judges innocency and sincerity."[89] Thus this was an appeal for liberty of conscience for all Dissenters.

General Baptists from Buckinghamshire and Kent also presented Charles II with their case for toleration in *Sion's Groans for her Distressed, or Sober Endeavors to Prevent Innocent Blood* (1661), appealing to the apostolic precedent for forming churches in the New Testament, which precluded the rule of civil magistrates over the Church. Making the distinction from the theocratic national religion of Israel in the Old Testament, they argued that Christians live under a "gospel dispensation" that is "far different in all its laws and administrations. . . under which the Lord Jesus is the only lawgiver, who doth not, as Moses, proceed against transgressors of his precepts by external force and power, to the destroying of them in their bodies and estates in this life; but in longsuffering waits on men, not willing they should perish, but rather that they should repent and be saved." The fear that diverse ways of worship is inconsistent with the well-being of a nation was disproved by adducing the experiences of France, the United Provinces of Holland, and many provinces of Germany. Their bold conclusion was that, rather than uniformity being the will of Christ for this religion,

> it is observable that restraining of liberty, imposing upon men's consciences and lording it over their faith came in with the retinue and train of antichrist . . . as other abuses of the church did, by reason of the iniquity of the times, and cooling of the first heats of Christianity . . . when the church's fortunes

[89] John Sturgion, *A Plea for Toleration of Opinions and Persuasions in Matters of Religion Differing from the Church of England* (London: 1661). Quoted in Underhill, 332, 338. Sturgion uses a graphic illustration that "To use force to change the mind can have no more success than clapping a shoulder to the ground to stop an earthquake," 336.

> became better and her sons grew worse, and some of her fathers worst of all.[90]

An anonymous tract dealt with the seventeenth-century concept of conscience and its role in relating God to man, in its original and fallen state. Because it is the function of conscience to be God's means of governing man through his understanding of His will, even though man is fallen, conscience remains "a Law unto man before even the Law was given, which will accuse men at the Judgment." Even though people differ in their consciences as a result of an innate infirmity since the fall, "to lead men in divers paths, to force men out of these, through any door than that of understanding . . . is to force them out of their very nature and existence."[91]

Conscience is not capable of coerced impression from without, but can be influenced by family and magistrates. Thus the role of the magistrate is to suppress moral evil and encourage moral good, but "the magistrate has nothing to do with things of a spiritual nature." Nor is any magistrate fit to judge the truth or error of a man to cast him out of the Church, for magistrates are not infallible. "Every man . . . is to be a Judge for himself, in all matters of the Gospel Religion, and so ought not to be forced to believe or practice anything he is not convinced of." To do otherwise is to reduce man "from a rational creature to a bruit." Thus one cannot by force establish right gospel-worship because it is a spiritual worship, and it is voluntary. Compulsion does not work real conversion, but only outward conformity. The conclusion is that "it is equally

---

[90] *Sion's Groans for her Distressed, or, Sober Endeavors to Prevent Innocent Blood* (London: 1661), by Thomas Monck, General Baptist minister in Buckinghamshire, Joseph Wright, pastor of the General Baptist Church at Maidstone, Kent, and Francis Smith, preacher and printer. Quoted in Underhill, 375, 378.

[91] *Liberty of Conscience Upon its true and proper Grounds Asserted and Vindicated Proving that No Prince nor State, ought by force to compel Men to any part of the Doctrine, Worship or Discipline of the Gospel* (London: 1668), 5-13.

unreasonable and as unlawful, to force men about things wholly Supernatural and purely Spiritual."[92]

Evidence that all the above scripturally-based arguments for toleration had little impact on the Stuart kings can be deduced from an anonymous document published in 1682, which descried the executions of persons on the word of informers without any recourse to processes of law, such as the right to face one's accusers. It stated that that practice was contrary to both law, *and the Light of Nature,* (italics mine),

> that every man is . . . to be allowed the unblameable defense of himself and his own innocency against evil and hurt from others . . . . which is according to *Natural Equity* [for the sake of] "the preservation of publick Good and Peace . . . for the practice takes away all Security of the Goods and Estates from many peaceable Subjects. Hereon Perjuries have been multiplied amongst this sort of persons . . . to the dishonour of God, and great increase of Sin in the Land; and whatever becomes of Non-conformists, if the same kind of procedure should be applied unto other cases . . . others would find themselves aggrieved as well as they.[93]

This document, to which no one felt safe enough to append a signature in 1682, offers an insight not only as to what was transpiring just a few short years before the Glorious Revolution and Parliament's Act of Toleration (1689), it provides a revealing hint as to the emerging epistemological basis on which toleration was finally granted—that of the "natural rights of man,"— the basis on which toleration, for at least some forms of dissent pertaining specifically to our subject of Independency, was finally accepted.

---

[92] *Liberty of Conscience,* 42-52.

[93] *The Case of Present Distresses on Non-conformists examined In the Execution of an Act, Entituled, An Act against Seditious Conventicles . . . This Practice hath been of late taken up, that upon the Oath of some informers, Convictions are clancularly made and Executions granted on the Goods of those informed against . . . without Notice, Warnings or Summons or any intimation of Procedure against them or allowance for them to make their own Defence.* (London: 1682), 2-4. The natural rights of humans was the premise of John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (London: 1689).

This chapter has surveyed the primary literature produced by the Independents and Baptists during the oppressive Stuart regime, for insights as to how their unique and zealously-guarded polity and discipline enabled them to endure and proliferate under the duress of persecution that was calculated to obliterate them physically, financially and spiritually. It can be observed that their spiritual interpretation of that persecution evoked a tenacious resolution to absorb and dignify suffering as a sacrifice of obedience to the Lord they were committed to serve at all costs. Their extant records reveal an emerging theology of suffering for the Cause of Christ against the establishment which they perceived as being antichristian, which stimulated mutual watch-care within and between congregations for the well-being of both souls and material means of survival, to the point where pressures of deprivation that were intended to ruin entire congregations, actually created bonds of interdependency that made them invulnerable to loss. Imprisonment itself, even to the point of death, only succeeded in producing martyrs, further convincing the sufferers of the rightness of their cause, and stimulated motivation to articulate it in sermons, letters, devotional literature, and official protests that eventually gained sympathy and support for the cause of freedom of conscience in religion that finally culminated in the Parliamentary Act of Toleration in 1689.

The sampling of documents, cited above, constitutes a response to persecution, which developed from mere petitions protesting personal mistreatment, to formal challenges to the injustice of violations of the protection afforded English subjects under Common Law, to treatises advocating toleration for differing religious views and practices. Analysis of these documents provides evidence of the development of a new social movement congealing out of the Independent tradition, an ideological rationale

whereby the social milieu of seventeenth-century England itself was being prepared to accept legislation of toleration by Parliament, as an antidote to the “Indulgences” capriciously issued and revoked by monarchs for political purposes.

The final chapter will analyze the factors that made the difference between the survival or dissolution of the early congregations, and demonstrate how the conditions and experiences that fostered success were applied, to become the foundational principles on which the Baptist and Congregational denominations were constituted.

CHAPTER SIX

Analysis and Conclusions

At its genesis, this research asked the question, how were the early Independent and Baptist churches able to survive in spite of official policies of suppression by the state and persecution by the church? Chapter One presented the socio-economic, political and religious milieu into which Separatism gave birth to Independency. Chapter Two covered the leaders whose writings and acts of separation influenced the movement out of the Established Church toward a Free Church tradition. Chapter Three recounted the learning experiences of the earliest churches of the separation which laid the groundwork for Independency, under jeopardous circumstances. Chapter Four addressed the emerging characteristics of Independency as it developed out of Separatism, with respect to various elements of its ecclesiology, discipline, polity, theology and worship practices. Chapter Five surveyed the congregational dynamics within these young churches that fostered viability through a century of persecution.

This chapter will answer the question by drawing together and assessing the intra- and interchurch dynamics which have been observed as operating either to foster survival of the Independent and Baptist congregations, as they emerged to become successful denominations, or culminated in their dissolution. Conclusions will be drawn as to the specific dynamics of the particular congregations that resulted in one or the other outcome, and an appraisal will be offered as to the legacy bequeathed to their descendants with respect to lessons learned about the functional constructs that promoted viable congregational dynamics.

Early Separatist and Independent Congregations that Failed to Thrive

Robert Browne and Robert Harrison's congregation, exiled in Middleburg, Holland, was the earliest company gathered on the basis of a covenant, by which all members pledged to watch over one another. However, in spite of having separated from the State-church which required uniformity of ecclesiology and worship, these first "Brownists" retained an ideology that required a uniformity of those very elements within their own congregation. Existing in a state of isolation, from a lack of any sister churches that might have advised them, and having utterly rejected fellowship with both the English parish churches in the Netherlands, and the classes of the Dutch Reformed Church, which might have ameliorated their fissiparous tendency by offering counsel or support, these fledgling "saints" proved incapable of tolerating any differences in opinion or in personal conduct. Controversies erupted between Browne and Harrison at Middleburgh, until Browne, condemned by his own congregation in 1583, went to Scotland, and then returned to England where he conformed in 1584, spending the last forty years of his life as curate of Achurch-cum-thorpe, Northamptonshire. He had become disillusioned about congregationalism, not as a theory, but because of the maliciousness that had arisen as they turned their covenant to watch over one another into a disciplinary whip to be wielded self-righteously against one another. Being inexperienced in accepting the responsibilities inherent in a "democratic" polity, they succumbed to a state of virtual anarchy that neither Browne, nor his successor, Harrison, were able to sublimate into fulfillment of the ideal of a cooperative fellowship.[1]

---

[1] Both Dexter, *Congregationalism,* 112-113, and Powicke, *Robert Browne, Pioneer,* 36-37, agree that it was the principles of congregational polity, carried out the extreme, that proved to be too idealistic for those unused to exercising such authority, so that their discipline degenerated to rebuking, condemnation, and mutual excommunications. *Cf.,* Shakespeare, 41-53.

Thus it was not Browne's abandonment and subsequent subscription to the Church of England that was ultimately responsible for the dissolution of this congregation. Nor did they succumb to the pressures of persecution in the tolerant atmosphere of Middleburgh. Rather, it was the severity with which the strictures of their own church discipline were applied, so legalistically that they degenerated into internal animosity and bitterness, even within the leadership, that resulted in the formation of factions, as opposed to their developing a spirit of mutual support and allegiance.

Nevertheless this abortive attempt to exercise an alternative polity to both the hegemonic prelacy of the Episcopal Church and the polity of the Presbyterians did pass on a legacy to future Free Church proponents. Browne's separation from the Established Church expressed an implicit theory of separation of church and state, by denying that it was the role of the civil magistrate to effect reform of the Church because they were separate realms. He called for a New Testament model of the church gathered voluntarily, not by compulsion, on the basis of a covenant of mutual care, and a polity of congregational suffrage, in which all authority is given under Christ, its Head, to guide and teach. Ideally, sister churches were to be local bodies which supported each other, but exercised no authority over one another. The purpose of such drastic measures as separation and intense discipline was to constitute a pure, undefiled community.[2]

In carrying the principles of Puritanism to their logical conclusion of separation from the corrupt Established Church, Browne articulated and acted upon precepts that subsequent reformers embraced and worked out in more effective ways, viz.: 1) the purity of the church is the responsibility of all true Christians, not of the civil magistrate,

---

[2] Williston Walker, *Creeds,* 12-14.

who should not be obeyed in religious matters, having no more authority over spiritual matters than any other Christians; 2) when a church proved to be too corrupt for the people to effect reform, it was their duty as true believers to separate from it, and associate together in a true church of Christ, independent of all control but His.[3] Such was the idealistic, though failed, legacy of the congregation of Robert Browne.

Henry Barrow had observed the break-down of fellowship in the congregational-style polity of Browne's congregation, and attempted to correct for it by giving some authority to ruling elders, elected by his London congregation. After Barrow's execution in 1593, the church fled to Amsterdam, where they existed in equanimity, awaiting the release from prison of their new pastor, Francis Johnson, in 1597. Upon his arrival with his new wife, however, Johnson found himself confronted with disputes over her personal conduct, and accusations of immorality against elder Daniel Studley. In order to assert control over the situation, Johnson corrupted the "Barrowist" polity by extending the authority of the eldership to exercise all discipline in private session, alienating Henry Ainsworth, their Teacher, as well as others who felt that their interests were not being fairly represented. A major split occurred between the two parties, one allied to Johnson and the other allied to Ainsworth, until distrust erupted into disputes over personal grievances that could not be healed. William Bradford, a member of John Robinson's "Pilgrim Church" at Leyden, which tried to reconcile the factions, testified from personal observation about the degree to which fellowship ultimately degenerated, recounting that the Separatists of Amsterdam had so many differences among themselves that

---

[3] Articulated in Browne's *True and Short Declaration,* 13, *Reformation without Tarrying,* 17, and *A Book which Sheweth,* Definitions #35 and 36.

> there were more disputes, contestes and Quarrels amongst the few Brownists, and other Independent sectaries . . . than among the whole Dutch nation, ever since they Reformed: Tis accountable what impertinent controversies arose between them, even to the Colour of Aaron's Ephod, whether it was Blew or Sea-green, which made an irreconcilable difference between their Pastors, and consequently the Flockes divided.[4]

George Johnson, the excommunicated brother of Francis Johnson, testified that, although ideally the power in the Amsterdam church resided in the entire congregation, it actually was wielded by the pastor, and Daniel Studley, and a handful of elders, while conditions for membership became lax, so that on applying for membership, "he may be a member though if he be tried, he be not able to give account of any part of faith; if he confess the English Church to be a false Church, promise to separate from it, and walk with them, it is enough even if the candidate for membership had not the slightest notion of the difference between a true and false Church." Formerly, a candidate for membership had to make a confession of faith and demonstrate Christian conduct.[5]

The tragic end of the Ancient Church did not obviate its contribution to the foundation of the Independent Church tradition, however. Its legacy was promoted through the writings of its founders, Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, and its teacher, Henry Ainsworth. They had articulated the justification for separation from the "apostate" Church of England, on the basis that it contained members that were unconverted and profane, ministers who were appointed and supported by bishops and tithes rather than by the congregations they served, worship according to a book devised by men, not God, and its being governed by bishops and priests as arms of the secular

---

[4] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation,* 46-47.

[5] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 102-103, 115. White suggests that the demise of this church was exacerbated by this lowering of standards for membership, and further aggravated by John Smyth's "anabaptism."

power of the state. Eschewing the epithet of being "Brownists," at a time when the very act of separation from the established church was regarded as a manifestation of civil disobedience, these "Barrowists" went beyond mere separation, to reconstituting their church on the basis of a renewed covenant with God, repudiating any superior ecclesiastical authority or successionism as the basis for ministerial authority. They held that a church could exist without an ordained minister until the congregation itself ordained one when his gifts for ministry were ascertained, the role of officers being important, however, since only an ordained minister could baptize and administer the Lord's Supper.[6] Barrow's own description of a true church included a lawful minister to deliver the sacraments, a faithful people to receive them, and the outward elements and form of words ordained by the Lord, as opposed to the corrupt ministry, profane assemblies and Romish ceremonies of the Church of England.[7]

Central to Barrow's thought were the spiritual rights of the individual for whom Christ died, who must therefore "be treated as being directly related to Himself, called to live and think and act in the light of his own conscience, accountable for the making of his own character, and the working out of his own salvation." Thus, the "voluntary faith of one man" was the foundation for a "Barrowist" church, which they believed governed the building up of the earliest Christian communities of "living stones," as "slaves of Christ, and submitted to Him as their only Master." To the degree that a church hindered that relationship, it was a false church. Thus, in Barrow, one notes the seeds of an ideal, visible, congregational church, restored to the primitive type, consisting of "a faithful

---

[6] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 68-87.

[7] Barrow, *Discovery of the False churches,* 242-243, 100-105.

people gathered by the Word unto Christ, and submitting themselves to Him in all things," with all actions belonging to, and taken by, the body as a whole. All were charged to watch, exhort, admonish, stir up, and reprove one another. Such a charge demanded spirituality on the part of the laity, as opposed to the "sacerdotal/ sacramental model" which contended that the spirituality of a church consisted in its priesthood rightly ordained, and its sacraments rightly administered.[8]

It was Henry Ainsworth, their teacher, who preserved these principles of Barrowism in parting company with the Johnson faction, and propounded them in his writings, which most effectively contributed to the development of congregational ecclesiology and polity, by articulating the premises of separation from both the world and false churches, and the gathering together of themselves in faith and love, in a perpetual covenant on the two pillars of faith in God by Jesus Christ, and the observance of his laws in love (as opposed to the hegemonic exercise of authority).[9] Constructed on these two pillars, the Ainsworth branch of the Ancient Church survived in Amsterdam until its merger with the Scottish Reformed Church there in 1701, leaving its legacy to inform and inspire other congregations through the writings of Barrow and Ainsworth.

Another significant example of a congregation's failure to thrive was the one gathered by a covenant at Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, under the leadership of John Smyth, which also fled to Amsterdam to escape persecution. James R. Coggins, a Canadian Mennonite pastor and author, offers a plausible explanation for what has been regarded by historiographers as Smyth's instability, vacillation, and unorthodoxy—

---

[8] Powicke, *Henry Barrow,* xxiv-xxvii.

[9] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 249-279, and *Counterpoyson,* passim.

personal faults which have been blamed for the failure of his congregation to survive. Coggins notes that the Gainsborough congregation's covenant contained a "further light" clause by which the congregation pledged "to walk in all the ways of God, known, or to be made known unto them," which assumed progressive revelation. This concept removed all barriers to innovation, and justified Smyth's theological changes as he moved from being a staunch predestinarian Puritan, to becoming a "general atonement" Separatist, then a Baptist, and finally a Mennonite. Smyth's ideology assumed that "new truths were not thought up, but were made known by God." Ergo, once an individual had received a new truth, he expected that all sincere believers would recognize and accept it as such. Such an assumption created an atmosphere in which believers could readily be judged on the basis of holding right doctrine, as revealed, or condemned for rejecting that revelation. Thus the dissolution of the Smyth congregation in Amsterdam can be largely accounted for by both the consequences of Smyth's application of this perception of progressive revelation, as well as the development of Smyth's own dualistic thinking which led to a dichotomizing typology that made him amenable to the influence of the Mennonites' unorthodox Christology. According to Smyth's "typological thinking," everything was relegated to a spiritual or a secular realm (e.g., of the letter or the spirit), so that, if worship was meant to be spiritual, and written books were secular (of the "letter"), then books should be banned from worship, as a hindrance to the free flow of the Spirit.[10]

Jason K. Lee, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, also credits the Mennonites and the Christology of Melchior Hoffman, with influencing Smyth's

[10] Coggins, 117-121.

theological aberrations. Hoffman had asserted that Christ brought his "celestial flesh" from his Father in heaven, receiving nothing but nourishment within the womb of Mary, thus partaking nothing of her flesh, which was tainted with the guilt of original sin. This dualistic, "spiritualized" flesh theory was meant to preserve the sinlessness of Christ, making him a pure and acceptable sacrifice for sins. (This was one key doctrine over which Smyth and Thomas Helwys parted company, and Helwys's small company excommunicated the Smyth congregation.) Furthermore, Smyth's dualism expected that Christians, "reborn from God, became spiritual-minded, righteous and holy." He expected to see such holiness evinced in their personal conduct, and acceptance of his leadership. When that did not happen, he continued to split from them to preserve the purity of his own diminishing company.[11]

As Smyth lay dying in 1612, two years before his remnant was accepted into membership with the Mennonite congregation, he expressed regret that he "had been willing to separate over too many issues" and acknowledged the "theological perfectionism that cost his church its viability and ended in isolation, as first John Robinson and then Thomas Helwys, who became the founder of the General Baptist Denomination, parted company with the radical views he adamantly asserted in response to receiving 'further light.'"[12] This does not mean that the legacy of Smyth's congregation was entirely negative. For him, the idea of a church's being ordered

---

[11] Lee, 209-213. In their repudiation of infant baptism and the act of re-baptizing themselves and their re-constituted church, Smyth and Helwys earned the reputation for being presumptuous, if not outright "Anabaptists," and became isolated from the support of the other exiled English churches, both doctrinally and sacramentally, until Smyth admitted his error and sought baptism by the local Waterlander Mennonite Church, applying for acceptance of his congregation by them in 1610. Evans, I, 204-209.

[12] Coggins, 123-125, 154. Smyth's emphasis on right doctrine had been elevated to the point where it was implied that salvation itself was dependent upon subscribing to the right belief. Watts, 119.

according to a covenant was central to his ecclesiology, because, for Smyth, "in the covenant promise of the local congregation, the eternal covenant of grace became contemporary, and man's acceptance of it was actualized in history." He considered that the very foundation of the covenant community was obedience to God's will, even in the minutiae of doctrine and praxis, be that community as small as two or three gathered together in Christ's name.[13] He also regarded that the covenanted church community truly reconstituted the primitive Apostolic church in three aspects of a sacramental paradigm, viz.: "1) the true matter, which are sayntes only; 2) the true form, which is the uniting of them together in the covenant; and 3) the true propertie, which is communion in all holy things and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ for maintaining of the communion."[14] Smyth placed a high priority on congregational discipline that included the positive element of watching over, bearing one another's burdens, admonishing, comforting, and restoring each other to fellowship, precepts that found their way into both General and Particular Baptist confessions.[15]

The above assessment of failures and legacies has focused on the most well-documented congregations from which subsequent Independent and Baptist churches drew lessons, both positive and negative. Walter Wilson (1781-1847), an English biographer of Non-conformity, did extensive research into extant fragments of records of lesser-known congregations that sprang up in the 17th century, some of which survived and some of which failed. Wilson bemoaned the loss of many records to history, because the Dissidents had not been careful about preserving them, noting that, "in the infancy of

---

[13] White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 128-129.

[14] Burrage, *Church Covenant Idea,* 68-76.

[15] Smyth, *Principles and Inferences,* in which he based his discipline on Matthew 18:15-17.

their societies they were more particular; but as their discipline relaxed, they grew remiss in the registry of events, and their early records, having fallen into private hands, are, in most cases, lost. Most of our old churches know little more of their history than what is derived from tradition."[16]

Four churches that failed deserve notice for the clues they offer as to the causes of their demise. An Independent church at Crosby Square, gathered to hear the preaching of Thomas Watson, a Presbyterian minister ejected from his living in 1662 for non-conformity. He continued preaching in spite of being deposed, until after the 1666 fire of London, "when the churches were burnt and the parish ministers were unemployed for want of places to worship." Watson hired a hall in Crosby House, preaching there for several years until he died soon after the Revolution. The church that assembled to hear him did not survive his death.[17]

During the Long Parliament, an Independent Church was gathered by Sidrach Simpson, (1600-1655), graduate of Emanuel College, Cambridge, and former curate of St. Margaret's, Fish Street, London until, ejected by Laud, he went to Rotterdam where he joined the exiled church meeting there in 1638. Returning to London after Laud's removal, he gathered a London church near Cannon Street, Miles's Lane, and became one of the "Dissenting Brethren" appointed to the Westminster Assembly in 1643, co-authoring the *Apologetical Narration* (1644) with Philip Nye, Jeremiah Burroughs, William Bridge and Thomas Goodwin. Simpson served the Miles's Lane Independent

---

[16] Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster, and Southwark: including the Lives of their Ministers from the Rise of Non-conformity to the Present Time* I (London: n.p., 1808), xvi.

[17] Wilson, 331-332.

Church until his death in 1658, after which it survived for four years without a minister until Stephen Ford, ejected minister of a dissenting congregation in Oxfordshire became its pastor. With advancing years, as Ford's health declined, his congregation declined until Matthew Clarke (1664-1726) became joint-pastor for the final two years of Ford's life, 1692-1694. Clarke, a preacher

> held in high esteem among Dissenters of all denominations, filled so many lecture invitations that his health also broke within a few years. Distressed over doctrinal dissension that arose within the Independent congregations concerning the Trinity and the eternal deity of Christ, his attempts to broker peace between the parties made him the target of slanderous accusations as to his own stand, which was for orthodoxy. . . .
>
> Being advanced in years and depressed in his spirit, . . he mourned over the unhappy estate of the Dissenting interest, [and] lamented the divisions among his brethren. . . . When he found he could do but little service by his persuasions, he withdrew . . . resolving to spend the short remainder of his days in silence and solitude.

Shortly before his death in 1726, Clarke expressed the fear that the dissenting congregations, "without some remarkable appearance of God, would end in the loss of the vital power of religion from among them, the glorious Spirit of God, in his converting and sanctifying operations, being already in a great measure, departed from their assemblies." The record of Clarke's tenure stated that his church, being large and metropolitan,

> was composed of persons of different tempers and dispositions, he managed with great prudence and discretion. . . . He was extremely happy in composing differences, and in all the church debates, moderated with wisdom and pacific temper, . . and in all the controversies of the age, was careful to avoid extremes. Though he constantly preached the doctrines he believed, and practiced those forms of worship which appeared to him most consonant to the word of God, yet he never made his own judgment a standard of the faith and practice of his brethren. He soul was too generous, and his charity too extensive, to confine salvation within the limits of a single party; he was therefore willing to assist among societies of different denominations, and give the right hand of fellowship to all who held the same glorious Head with himself. He loved the image of Christ wherever

> he found it. . . . He was no less fearful less an ungoverned zeal for truth should make a shameful inroad upon Christian love.[18]

The account of this series of great men, culminating in a virtual hagiography of a Dissenting minister, is quoted in length because of the insights it affords the reader of the kinds of problems faced by Independents shortly after they gained toleration, and the kind of character that managed to hold a congregation together through those problems. Upon Matthew Clarke's death, the church did split over the choice of its next pastor(s), and a series of men were called, whose zeal served the interest of different parties rather than the cause of godliness. After 1795 the record ends with no further explanation of the demise of this church, after offering a specific testimony to the dangers inherent in Independency, even for a church begun on solid principles with excellent leadership.

Another Independent church was gathered in Miles's Lane in 1662 by Matthew Barker (1619-1698), ejected from St. Leonard's parish, Eastcheap, that continued meeting for over 50 years, consisting primarily of members from his parish church, who esteemed him so highly they left the Established Church with him. Barker was "a man of considerably learning, great piety, and universal candor and moderation. As he disliked controversy, he earnestly avoided it, laying but little stress upon points of inferior importance, in which he was sensible others were as much at liberty to differ from him, as he from them." After his death in 1698, he was succeeded by John Short, also an ejected Non-conformist who served the congregation until his death in 1718. Though a man of learning, piety and judgment, Short "had a misfortune of an impediment in his utterance, which . . . occasioned his not being heard with pleasure in the pulpit; so that the congregation sank under his administration." After his death, they dissolved their

[18] Wilson, 470-499.

church and dispersed to join with other congregations.[19] These three churches, which failed to survive, demonstrate two elements of Independency: First, the bond between a congregation and the minister it calls is apt to be so close as to be emotionally enmeshed, (more so than in the case of parish churches assigned a minister by a bishop or synod), so that loss of its leadership can undermine the ability of a congregation to continue. Secondly, even though the congregation may lose its identity, it does not necessarily die, but rather, may disperse to enrich other congregations with those committed to the faith and polity of Independency.

Wilson also recounts the history of a Particular Baptist Church in Thames Street that flourished from the 1660's, served by a succession of six pastors, but which, "being greatly reduced by deaths and removals," partly because of their strict adherence to closed communion, "were under the necessity of dissolving their church state in 1751, when their last pastor accepted a call from another Baptist church in Hertfordshire."[20] Many successful Baptist churches practiced closed communion. Unfortunately, Wilson failed to provide information as to the other factors responsible for the failure of this church. These examples of churches that flourished under suppression in the 17th century, but became extinct in the more tolerant atmosphere of 18th-century England, are cited to suggest that it was the internal dynamics of the congregations, rather than the external pressures of persecution that were responsible for their demise. Next we will look into some examples of churches that did survive to become new denominations

---

[19] Wilson, 462-467. This Miles's Lane Church is traditionally credited with being the source of the tune to which the hymn, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" is sung.

[20] Wilson, 527-532.

Early Independent and Baptist Congregations that Flourished

Puritanism's movement into Separatism and ultimate expression in Independency is typified in the experience of the "Pilgrim Church" served by John Robinson as pastor, and William Brewster as teaching elder, of which William Bradford, the future governor of the Plymouth Plantation, had been a member from its beginning. The conforming Puritans, in a compensatory reaction to the lack of preaching in the parish churches, had established lectureships adjacent to market-places throughout the land. These might have ameliorated the motivation to separate from the Established Church had they not been suppressed. Attempts by Elizabethan and Stuart bishops to prohibit these "nurseries of Non-conformity," and the conventicles that gathered around them, were met, not by conformity, but by resistance that impelled the more radical Puritans to become Separatists.[21]

The Gainsborough congregation of John Smyth in Lincolnshire, and the Scrooby Manor church of John Robinson and William Brewster in Nottinghamshire, were among the earliest to leave their mark and blaze the trail into Separatism, becoming the progenitors of Independent and Baptist congregations. Paul S. Seaver, formerly of Stanford University, assessed the strength of their motivation as being rooted in an apocalyptic worldview, noting that "the Puritans thrived on failure. They advertised their

---

[21] A confessional diary, composed by a non-separating Puritan minister of the Church of England, provides first-hand insights to the intensity of commitment to see the Church purified through preaching. This document was published in 1632, to encourage weak Puritan ministers to stand firm for further reformation, on the basis that "Papistry [and its external vestiges] remains in England because men do not walk worthy of the light given them." The author justified the English Reformation as a restoration of the Church to the will of God, and deplored the state of the Church in which "many present themselves for livings for the wrong reasons, with the result that there are many soules in danger, where an unable minister is." He exhorts weak ministers to improve their knowledge and preaching skills, and commit themselves to serve the Lord "in the zeale of his glory," and to be much in prayer, not limiting their prayer life to the Paternoster and Creed, because "Surely it is Poperie that hath brought the world to this senseless state, which leads not to the conversion of souls from sinne." Richard Kilby, *Hallelu-iah. Praise yee the Lord for the Unburthening of a Loaden Conscience* (London: n.p., 1632), 149-150.

defeats and issued dire warnings of the imminent demise of godly England, if not the end of the world." Seaver postulates that the fact that the lectureships survived for over 200 years was a testimony to the powerful drive among the laity to control the church, at least at the parishional level. In his opinion, the initial desire of the Puritans was to develop "an educated and confident laity who followed the thought of the preacher critically, and expected substantial emotional and intellectual fare from the pulpit." Attempts to suppress this movement on the part of the bishops came up against not a mere disagreement about church polity, but a social movement growing from the grassroots which aimed at gaining control over the religious milieu at least at the local level. When this movement was thwarted by the Church hierarchy, it morphed into Separation, which accepted exile if necessary for survival.[22]

From the beginning, those who accepted banishment never intended to remain in exile. They planned to return in force to take over the church and enact the reforms the state failed to carry out. The Established Church, functioning as an instrument of the government, failed to understand that the realm of religion was changing, along with the emergence of a better-educated socio-economic class of laypeople who wanted more control over their spiritual destiny. By the time the Scrooby and Gainsborough congregations left England for the Netherlands in 1607 and 1608, they were already committed to exercising Independent control over their spiritual life, no matter what the cost, motivated, at least in part, by the attitude they had inherited from the Puritan millenarian mind-set which had learned to thrive under duress, by translating defeats and threats as proofs that their dire interpretation of events was coming true.

---

[22] Seaver, 288, 290-292.

We have seen how spiritual autonomy degenerated in the Gainsborough congregation. The Scrooby congregation, led by Robinson, however, thrived to become the ancestor of New England Congregationalism. In addition to this "spiritualizing" of their experience of persecution, what factors in the Scrooby/Leyden congregation fostered its success, whereas other contemporary endeavors in Independency failed? One element seems to be that of their placing a higher priority on living out their covenant to abide in peace with others, in love for each other, and in obedience to the will of God, than on quibbling about personal differences of life-style or belief. According to the eye-witness account of William Bradford, they were "knit together as a body in a most stricte and sacred bond and covenant with the Lord, of the violation whereof we make great conscience, and by virtue whereof we do hold ourselves straitly tied to all care of each other's good, and of the whole by everyone, and so mutually."[23]

Theologically, Robinson, like Smyth also subscribed to a progressive revelation interpretation of scripture, as expressed in his parting exhortation to the company leaving to plant a colony in the New World. But in Robinson's church this did not degenerate into doctrinaire legalism because of the strength of his leadership, but was tempered by wisdom and love. As John Shakespeare (1857-1928), a noted Evangelical Free Church leader in England at the beginning of the twentieth century, wistfully observed about the dissolution of the Ancient Church, "Congregationalism had a weary path to tread before

---

[23] William Bradford, 76. See also, Young, 38-39. Young extracts his *Chronicles* from Bradford's account, noting that "such was the humble zeal and fervent love of this people (whilst they lived together) towards God and his ways, and the single-hearted and sincere affection one toward another, that they came as near the primitive pattern of the first churches as any other church of these latter times have done." He recounts that their reputation for diligence and honesty among the Dutch was such that they sought to employ them or lend them money. The magistrates of Leyden testified that "These English have lived amongst us now this twelve years and yet we never had any suit or accusation come against any of them."

it discovered the bond of church life, which consists not in knowledge, but in love."[24]

The Pilgrim Church faithfully pioneered that path of love, according to the personal testimony of William Bradford:

> They continued many years in a comfortable condition injoying much sweete and delightfull society and spiritual comfort together in the ways of God under the able ministrie and prudent government of Mr. J. Robinson and Mr. Wm. Brewster . . . in the place of an Elder. [Their original pastor, Mr. Clifton, had remained in Amsterdam.] So as they grew in knowledge and other gifts and graces of the spirit of God, and lived together in peace and love and holiness; and many came unto them from diverse points of England, so as they grew a great congregation. . . .
>
> Yae shuch (*sic*) was the mutual love and reciprocal respecte that this worthy man had to his flocke and his flocke to him. . . . His love was greate towards them, and his care was all ways bente for their best good, both for soule and body; for besides his singular abilities in devine things, . . he was also very able to give direction in civill affairs, and to foresee dangers and inconveniences by which means he was very helpful to their outward estates, and so was every way a common father unto them.
>
> If they were known to be of that congregation, the Dutch . . . would trust them in any reasonable amount when they wanted money, because they had found by experience how carefull they were to to keep their word, and saw them so painfull and diligent in their callings; yea they would strive to get their custome, and to employ them above the others, in their worke.[25]

John Shakespeare credited the fellowship enjoyed by the Leyden Church to

> the nobility and wisdom of John Robinson himself, and the leaders of the church, who followed a free and sagacious interpretation of Congregationalism. There was no autocracy or oligarchy. Robinson had no sympathy with the rigidness of Johnson or the elaborate order of Barrow. He even simplified the polity of Browne. His sympathies were with full publicity, the knowledge and consent of the people. Spirit was infinitely more to him than form. To Robinson the church meant the people, not the officers or elders. The government can never suffer by being in the hands of the people [who] alone must choose the man who is to stand to them in

---

[24] Shakespeare, 124.

[25] William Bradford, 41-42, 45.

> the sacred and affectionate role of Pastor; and the true church could not correspond to the mixed assemblies of the Church of England.[26]

Ozora S. Davis, who became president of Chicago Theological Seminary in 1909, offered a positive assessment of their intra-church dynamics, on the basis that their application for settlement in Leyden stated that they would not be a financial burden on the city. Davis concluded that, since they were not rich, Robinson had already "organized his congregation for mutual help in some way, and we may infer a beginning of those practical enterprises for the common good of the congregation which we shall see taking definite shape later, and which make the Scrooby Church quite unlike the other Separatist congregations of the time in the saving common sense they exhibited."[27]

Referring to the inter-church relationships of the mature Robinson, Young notes his hesitation to separate from any of the churches of Christ, in his

> professing and holding communion with the French and Dutch churches, yea tendering to the Scotch also . . . ever holding how wary persons ought to be in separating from a church. And till Christ the Lord departed wholly from it, any ought not to leave it, only to bear witness against the corruption that was in it. . . . He allowed the godly ministers of the Church of England to preach and pray in the public assemblies; yea he allowed private communion not only with them, but all that were faithful in Christ Jesus. . . yea honoured them for the power of godliness above all the other professors of religion in the world. . . .
>
> For schism and division, there was nothing in the world more hateful to him. . . . but for the government of the Church of England . . . the Episcopal way, the Liturgy, and stinted prayers of the Church . . . the constitution of it as National, and so consequently the corrupt communion of the unworthy with the worthy receivers of the Lord's Supper, these things were never approved of him.[28]

---

[26] Shakespeare, 159-161.

[27] Davis, 102.

[28] Young, 389-390.

Such was the legacy of wise and broad-minded leadership this church bequeathed to the future of Independency, best summarized in the concluding words of William Bradford:

> having thus briefly shewed that the foundation of our New England Plantations were not laid upon schism, division or separation, but upon love, peace and holiness; yea such love and mutual care of the Church of Leyden for the spreading of the Gospel and the welfare of each other, and their posterities to succeeding generations, as is seldom found on earth.[29]

In contrast to the Smyth congregation, the little band of followers led back to England in 1611/12 by Thomas Helwys set the precedent for a church that not only survived, but thrived to plant sister churches that became a viable denomination in spite of the most egregious persecution since the reign of Queen Mary. Helwys had become convinced that their departure had "left many brethren to suffer increased affliction and contempt, which caused some to fall back."[30] They subscribed to a theology of General Atonement, becoming known as the first General Baptist Church. Unlike the "Anabaptist" Mennonites of Holland, this church accepted the civil magistry as an ordinance of God, acknowledging both that civil governors might be members of the church of Christ, and that it was lawful to take an oath if necessary for settling strife. After the death of Helwys, the mother church at Spittalfields, London, was led by John Murton, whose 1620 *Description of what God hath Predestinated* stated their opposition to the Calvinistic Canons of the Synod of Dort, issued in 1619. It further asserted that every disciple that has the gift is authorized to preach, convert and baptize, as well as the pastor. This was an official articulation of what became known as the "mechanick preachers" who were largely responsible, in light of the lack of university-trained leaders,

---

[29] William Bradford, 45.

[30] Evans, I, 224-225.

for the rapid proliferation of these Baptists. Sister churches were soon formed at Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry and Tiverton. In 1624 the church divided over the issue of the right of Christians to participate in a just war, with Elias Tookey leading that faction. According to Barrington White, there is no evidence that the London church survived past the 1630's, but White believes the Bell Alley congregation in Coleman Street (1645), led by the soap-boiler, Thomas Lambe (1629-1661) was probably a successor of the London Church. Although successive congregations tended to split over issues of doctrine and practice (e.g., laying-on-of hands and foot-washing), the intense evangelistic activity carried on by Lambe and converts such as Samuel Oates (1614-1683), a weaver from Norwich, Henry Denne (1621-1661) from Kent, the founder of the Fenstanton General Baptist Church, Cambridgeshire, and William Jeffrey (1616-1693), who founded more than 20 congregations in Kent, added to their number rather than depleting them.[31]

The legacy of the Helwys congregation may be likened to a grain of wheat falling to the ground to bring forth a rich harvest. These newly-planted churches formed supportive associations from the outset, which provided for both accountability and mutual aid through a system of "Messengers" who met together and served as the channels of communication and assistance for the network. One purpose of this system was to keep members, alienated from the secular community because of their baptism, from becoming dependent upon former secular associations. It also demonstrated to the local magistrates that their own poor would not become a charge upon the parish. Inter-community watch-care also jealously guarded the reputations of members against

---

[31] White, *English Baptists of the 17th Century*, 22-44. One early convert, Edward Barber, (fl. 1620-1649) author of the above-mentioned *Petition to the King's Majesty* (1641), also authored *"A Small Treatise of Baptism or Dipping,* advocating baptism by immersion as early as 1642.

scandals, thereby keeping the secular community from intruding into the lives and business of the church. These cooperative efforts developed into the legacy of Associations adopted by both the General and Particular Baptist denominations, although in the latter, their role was more one of advisement than discipline.[32]

Perhaps the most admirable contribution of the returning General Baptists, is the suffering they willingly embraced in returning to England, upon Helwys's conviction that "fleeing on account of persecution hath been the overthrow of religion in this island: The best, able and greater part being gone and leaving behind them some few, who, by the others' departure have had their afflictions and their contempt increase, hath been the cause of many falling back, and of their adversaries rejoicing."[33] Their disregarding the threat of imprisonment as no excuse for failing to do the Lord's work, or helping their brethren who, "for want of their society and comfort are exceedingly weakened, if not overcome," exposed the General Baptists to great sufferings, "to lie many years in filthy prisons, in hunger, in cold and idleness, divided from wife and children—left in continual miseries so that death itself would be to many less punishment." They challenged persecution for religion, and appealed to the king and parliament, but did not compromise, because "all men must let God alone with his right, who is to be Lord and Lawgiver of the soul: and not command obedience for God when he commandeth none." In their treatise, *Persecution for Religion Judged and condemned* (1615 and 1620), a dialogue between an Antichristian and a Christian, Christian asserts loyalty and

---

[32] White, *English Baptists of the 17th Century,* 45. This care to relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren by free and voluntary contributions, so that they lack neither food or raiment was so important as to be included in their Confessions of 1611 and 1660. Adam Taylor, *The History of the English General Baptists* (London: n.p., 1818), 445-447.

[33] Quoted in Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of King George I,* Vol. I (London: T. Crosby, self-published, 1738), 271.

obedience to the king in civil matters only: "But further than that, they cannot go; because God is the Lord of men's consciences, and my Lawgiver in matters of religion."

> If I take, in another place, any authority from the King's majesty, let me be judged worthy of my desert; but if I defend the authority of Christ Jesus over men's souls which appertaineth to no mortal man whatsoever, then know you, that whosoever would rob him of that honour which is not of this world, he will be tread under foot—Earthly authority belongs to earthly kings; but spiritual authority belongeth to that spiritual King, who is King of kings.[34]

The General Baptists that sprang from the Helwys remnant of the Gainsborough congregation were not the only "sectaries" to embrace suffering, but their writings constituted a legacy that helped formulate a "theology of suffering" that sustained all those who remained or returned to endure and cultivate their evangelistic zeal until the cause of Christian was victorious over that of Antichristian. B. R. White has been cited above as contending that the theology of the General Baptists was not derived from that of the European Anabaptists. This also applies to their theology of suffering, although the Anabaptists did embrace the idea of a "suffering church," or the "church under the cross," as an inexorable consequence of their being in conflict with the world. Both traditions arrived at their spiritualizing of suffering independently, as a result of their experience of trying to be obedient to their interpretation of the Lord's calling upon their lives which placed them in the untenable position of defiance of ecclesiastical authority.[35]

One of the most complete records available for observing the success of a congregation that began in Puritan Separatism, became Independent, and finally emerged as a Particular Baptist Church is that of the Broadmead Church in Bristol, collected and

---

[34] Quoted in Taylor I, 89-90, 92.

[35] Robert Friedman, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), 130-131.

recounted by its faithful Elder, Edward Terrill (1634-1685). This record offers significant clues as to the congregational dynamics that fostered survival through half a century of harassment of its members and imprisonment of its leadership.[36] This church began by a simple commitment of one widow Kelly, and five friends to separate themselves from the world for prayer, seeking quietly to worship God according to the holy scriptures, for twenty years until John Canne, formerly minister of a Brownist Church in Amsterdam, arrived in Bristol in 1640, and "settled them in Separatist Church Order" according to his *Necessity of Separation from the Church of England* (1634). When the widow Kelly became the wife of the Rev. Mr. Hazzard, minister of a parish church in Bristol, Mrs. Hazzard attended his preaching, but continued to withdraw from formal liturgical worship, "as being of the beast of Rev. 14: 9-11." It was formally constituted as the Broadmead Independent Church in Bristol in 1640, with the help of the Welsh Llanvaches Church and Henry Jessey of Southwark, according to a covenant that resolved "to separate from ye world and times they lived in and that they would go noe more to it, and with godly purpose of heart, joined themselves together in ye Lord . . . covenanting that they would worship ye Lord more purely, persevering therein to their end." Without a pastor, under the leadership of gifted brethren, until the outbreak of Civil War in 1642, this church rapidly grew to 160 members, calling its first minister that year. During the Commonwealth years, they began to question the efficacy of infant

[36] Hayden, passim. See also John Latimer's *Annals of Bristol in the 17th Century* (Bristol: William George & Sons, 1900), 151, 209, 370-373 and 425. This document recounts the founding of and persecution suffered by the Broadmead Church in the context of its political and religious milieu.

baptism, calling on Henry Jessey to conduct believers' baptism, becoming an open-communion Baptist Church in 1653.[37]

The years after the Restoration were a time of persecution and arrests of their leadership and membership, as described in detail by Mr. Terrill, until the London fire in 1666, at which time, for lack of preaching in parish pulpits, public meetings for worship were permitted until 1670, when licenses for conventicles were revoked. During the ensuing years, the account describes the church functioning fully, (except for receiving the Lord's Supper), for months at a time without the services of its ministers and elders who were repeatedly incarcerated. This was the time when the above-cited occasion of prayer support for a brother who manifested "fitts" took place, when means were devised for hiding the person of the preacher during worship, and when four congregations decided to meet together while three of their ministers were imprisoned at the same time. The record recounts that the congregation itself carried out the examination and admission of new members, chose and ordained its own pastors and elders, and carried out discipline and the restoration of members. It paid fines for poor members, and paid a year's salary to the family of a school teacher during his tenure in prison.[38]

Undeterred by abuses, mockery and arrests, even of their women, this church met faithfully, carrying out its original covenant. Its pastor, Mr. Fownes, who died after several years in Newgate prison, conducted a conventicle there for the more than twenty members incarcerated there at the same time, while those who were still at liberty abandoned their meeting place and resorted to the woods and fields, some even laying

---

[37] Hayden, 85-99, 1-3, 112.

[38] Hayden, 139-141, 151-159, 196-202, 213-218, 252.

down their trades because of the harassment they experienced in their places of business, and the confiscation of their implements and home furnishings, to pay fines levied by the magistrates. Greedy informants were bribed by both the bishop's pursuivants and local magistrates in a lucrative occupation that motivated them to stake out country lanes, deep woods, and private cemeteries, to spot and report on those suspected of participating in an unlawful meeting for worship, or even a burial service. Still, the business of the church went forward, as its two Deaconesses continued to visit the sick and the elderly, placing themselves in jeopardy. One of the last entries for 1687, noted that the church again met at its former meeting place after "three years and five months interruptions of full assemblies partly occasioned by our violent Persecutors, and partly our own fears and Backwardness. At this meeting ye members were desired to bring in their Contributions for ye Poor to ye Deacons, who complained of great neglect on that account."[39]

This cursory treatment of the Broadmead Church in Bristol has been offered for two reasons: first, to illustrate for the interested researcher the wealth of material available in this resource; and second, to provide a glimpse of how this church continued to thrive in spite of all attempts by local, state and church authorities to eradicate it, from which insights may be gleaned that contribute to the answer to the question being addressed, viz.: It remained faithful to its 1645 covenant "that they would in ye Strength of Christ, keepe close to ye Holy Scriptures, . . and ye plaine truths and ordinances of ye Gospell, of Church fellowship, breaking bread, and Prayers; And to [be] Subject to one another, according to ye Discipline and admonition by ye Rules of Christ, in ye New Testament or ye Scriptures." The fact that the esteemed Edward Terrill was able to quote

[39] Hayden, 234-266.

verbatim the initial covenant entered into by the widow Kelly and five friends, reveals that they had remembered and revered their commitment, "to separate from ye world, and times they lived in . . . and with godly purpose of heart joined themselves together in ye Lord . . . that they would in ye Strength and assistance of the Lord, . . worship ye Lord more purely, persevering therein to their end."[40] For this church, "their end" was blessed by the Lord with the 1689 Act of Toleration that legitimized its faithfulness.

Another example of a church that not only survived, but generated a denomination was the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church. The account of its success has been provided above, so that it will suffice merely to observe that it was due to their faithful adherence to Henry Jacob's openness to public fellowship and private communion with other churches of Christ—including parish churches, whose leadership was pious, and preaching was pure—and other Independent and Baptist congregations whose communion was open. This principle culminated in its being respected for its integrity, and made its meetings appealing to the community, so that it enjoyed a social and spiritual context that prevented this Particular Baptist congregation from becoming encysted within itself, as it reached out to make converts and plant daughter churches.

An in-depth study of the literature provides several other examples of many of those congregations that did survive to become Independent, and General and Particular Baptist churches.[41] Their records demonstrate that their survival can best be accounted

---

[40] Hayden, 99, 90.

[41] Examples of some such churches may be found in Watts, 157-158: e.g., the Independent Churches at Bury-St. Edmunds, Suffolk, and at Bedford, both founded in 1646; See Humphries, 57-65 and Nuttall, *Visible Saints,*48-49. Wilson provides the accounts of several successful Independent London area churches: e.g., at Weigh-house, 150-156; and St. Mary Axe in Bury St., 254-281; and the Devonshire Square Particular Baptist Church of John Spilsbury, William Kiffin, and Thomas Patient, founded in the 1650's, 400-431.

for by their adopting the principles which made their parent churches viable: 1) Their ecclesiology accepted that, as they grew, their membership must be constituted of "living stones" built into the "living body of Jesus Christ"—*being* the church of Christ to each other, personally united to Him as their Head; 2) their polity mandated that they exist in association with other churches for support and accountability; 3) their theology embraced the expectation of being called to suffer to spread the gospel of Christ in an anti-Christian milieu; and 4) they had a strong, wise and stable leadership. The next section will address these constituents of viability.

Principles that Fostered Viability and the Development of New Denominations

The ecclesiology of the Church of England embraced all the inhabitants of society who had been baptized in it as infants. Thus, with the exception of some few, regarded as aliens and strangers, Church was concentric with all society. "Such a church might be constituted by human agencies; it was within human power to effect it"; and accordingly, the English Reformers sought to frame it without recourse to the operations of the divine Spirit. "Nor need they wait for living stones to build the temple of the Lord. The materials were at hand; an initiatory rite could easily be applied. Repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ could be promised by surety, or supplied by an assent to creeds." Thus, it was considered the duty of the secular magistrate to establish such a church, constituted of citizens and shaped by temporal powers. The Baptists, on the other hand, "said that the church could not be built until God had provided the stones, producing a holy people by the power of this Spirit, redeemed and built into a church that

was formed on the basis of his word, of stones, created anew in Christ Jesus by the faith that was the gift of God."[42]

In the Established Church, ecclesiology was firmly bound to polity in that the church itself was conceptualized as one arm of the political structure of the state. In Erastian England, since the "reform" of Henry VIII, monarchs appointed bishops, who would (with few exceptions, e.g., Edmund Grindal), administer the church in such a way that it supported the state, and thereby served the cause of unity of the nation. In this ideology, any severance of that unity, affecting its uniformity, constituted a dire threat, not only to the Crown and Convocation, but to the hierarchically-organized society itself.

It seemed inconceivable that the peace of the land, or its social values, could be sustained under circumstances of rebellion against established authority which kept everything and everyone in place, with control exercised from the top, and submission tendered from each successive level, down to the parishes—those vestiges of the Roman Church diocesan structure. Within the church, as well as the civil community, each layer of supervision had a vested interest in both the system that supported it, and the personal and financial security of the officers, civil or ecclesiastical, whose positions and livings were dependent upon it. Failure to understand this degree of integration between State, Church, and Society will result in making incomprehensible the prolonged and egregious reaction against every challenge that threatened the enmeshed authority and ecclesiology of the British social structure of the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is the contention of this researcher, that those reformers who articulated and acted out their challenge to the ecclesiology and polity of the church for the sake of

---

[42] Underhill, lxxv-lxxvi.

obedience to a higher authority and freer spirituality, did understand what they were confronting. They knew they were defying the very structure of their society. This is why they not only met clandestinely, but, when necessary, emigrated to foreign soil for safety, rather than compromise or conform. It also accounts for why they were so prolific in the production of literature, defining their stance and explaining their rationale for it. I contend that, beginning with Robert Browne's *Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie* (1582),[43] the separating Puritans understood that they were challenging a status quo that could not sustain diversity, and therefore had to be changed from the ground up. They saw that, in order to effect such a radical change, without participating in treasonable insurrection, England's *ecclesiology* must be severed from the existing *polity* of the Established Church, so that a new church polity could be implemented which would reflect an ecclesiology that was scriptural, rather than civil.

Sixteenth-century secular society was still evolving out of the Middle Ages, with a need for an educated laity to support a rising mercantile industry. That educated laity, having tasted economic and career independency, was amenable to taking up the reins of responsibility for their own spiritual estate—as evidenced by the popularity of prophesyings and lectureships which clamored for preaching that fed their souls. The realm of religion had to keep pace with progress in the secular realm, and there was no denying the thirst for spirituality by promoting the artifices and ceremonies devised by the Church in the Middle Ages to meet the needs of a semi-literate populace. Those practices, and the system that supported them, could no longer satisfy the people's desire to be united, not merely with the Church, but with the Lord personally. By the

[43] Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie* (Middleburgh: 1582).

seventeenth century, the paradigm of the Church as the mediator of spirituality, and its role, vis-à-vis vicars, had to yield to a radically new ecclesiology in which the Church was seen as the Body of Christ, constructed of "living stones," hewn, set apart and appointed by Him—i.e., individuals, called and consecrated to the service of God.

The most concise articulation of this ecclesiology was penned by the Cambridge scholar of biblical languages, Henry Ainsworth, in his *Communion of Saincts* (1628), and who lived out its implications in exile as teacher of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam. Those Puritans who separated from the Established Church to gather Independent congregations, on the basis of covenants and confessions, consciously constructed their churches founded upon an ecclesiology which stipulated that one does not merely join a church; one must commit to *being* the church to one another, under Christ, its only Head. This research has shown that those who lived out this commitment, were internally strong enough to survive the external pressures of persecution, deprivation, and even death. Those who failed to do so, fractured and eventually died.

I concur with Richard L. Greaves, well-known historian of 17th century dissent at Florida State University, that for the "Anglicans," the church was a non-living institution to which people belonged, as opposed to being a "living body . . . composed of living stones." Because "a living church could be composed *only* of living stones, this necessitated the formation of a covenanted community of the godly" on the part of those who saw the church as belonging, not to the State or to the people, but to Christ.[44] This radical and threatening concept of the church can be traced to the earliest writings of the separating Puritans. It can be found in Robinson's *Justification of Separation* (1610),

[44] Greaves, "The Puritan Non-Conformist Tradition," 459.

which he believed was a critical step, requisite to the further reform of the church that he described as "a temple, the body and dwelling of Christ," which must be "constructed of stones, hewn, set apart and appointed by him." Only such a church, gathered by separation from the world could be a true visible Church of Christ, "a visible communion of love." For Robinson, and subsequent reformers, polity and discipline followed from their ecclesiology, rather than vice-versa. For a church to be "a visible communion of love" necessitated that it be constituted of a community of people, gathered by their response to the preaching of the gospel, which wrought faith and repentance in them, "to the obtaining of forgiveness of sins and the promise of life eternal, and to the sanctification of obedience."[45]

The ecclesiology of Henry Ainsworth, as expressed in his *Communion of Saincts* (1628) was a practical implementation of Robinson's ideal. In this document, Ainsworth called on true believers to be joined together in a temple, the Body of Christ, to enjoy a loving community in the unity of the faith for mutual help and comfort,

> to be built and coupled together by faith that they grow unto his holy temple in the Lord; to be the habitation of God by the Spirit . . . set forth by the similitude of one bodie . . . in Christ . . . being by one Spirit all baptized into one body which is called by Christ a Church or congregation, because we are gathered together unto him our head.
>
> This fellowship ought all men to labour to come to, . . endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . . for their edification in the knowledge and fear of God, that they might better resist their adversaries, as well as mutually strengthen and console one another in their Christian duties. . . . Laboring together in the truth, admonishing the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, bearing with the weak, considering one another to provoke unto good works, rebuking for sinne and trespass,

[45] J. Robinson, *Justification of Separation*, 334, 346-351, 96. See also, Brachlow, who calls their covenant the horizontal dimension of the Temple of "spiritually hewn, lively stones," "Life Together," 115.

> confessing of faults one to another, and praying for one another, bearing one another's burdens, . . and distributing to the necessities one of another.[46]

In this document it is easy to see how the ecclesiology of Ainsworth engendered his church discipline, and culminated in a polity that supported it.

What had begun as a radical and unique concept of the church at the beginning of the 17th century had become the hallmark of Independency by mid-century. John Rogers reiterated the idea as being integral to a church's enjoying union with Christ as his "spiritual Temple, separated from the world and from the heap of dead stones, to make up one building, which is His body, as Israel was separated from the Nations to be God's people. Only so will He be our God, and dwell in our midst, if we have no fellowship with darkness, with unbelievers, or sinners, being separated and called out to Himself." Again, Rogers's ecclesiology informed his definition of the form of true church polity and fellowship, consisting of "separated saints, knit together and gathered into one Body, made up of Christ's members, . . to be the Lord's house, . . and His Kingdom, . . ruled by his law, under One Father, in Covenant, bearing his image, led by one Spirit, called to hope, joy and glory. This is the oneness for which Christ prayed."[47]

According to Rogers, a covenant was not essential to the form of a true church, "but fellowship, good will, watching over one another in love, comforting, counseling and assisting them in love and humility are necessary." The church fellowship to which the Saints are called is one of

> sweetest harmony, and most love . . . in Christian liberty, and no one is robbed by the Rulers of his or her right. . . . Where holiness is highest . . . and every Saint may walk according to his light (to be holy, humble, etc.) in

---

[46] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 249-250, 252, 255-261, 292-352.

[47] John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth Shemesh,* 81-87, 119, 116-117.

> self-denial, humility of minde and ready serving the other in order and Gospel decency . . . sympathy, and bowels of love and pity, where their union consists not in the unity of the form, but in the unity of the Spirit.[48]

It is gratifying to the researcher to find evidences of this ecclesiology consciously applied and expressed in the record books of contemporary churches. For example, the Particular Baptist Church at Hexham (Northumberland), referred to itself as "a living Temple, begun of these Living Stones, was the Church of Christ in Hexham."[49] This ecclesiology placed responsibility on each person to be the church to one another. It was also extended to the arena of inter-church relations, as an additional buttress for viability.

It has been noted that one of the factors which contributed to the demise of some early congregations, such as those of Robert Browne, Francis Johnson and John Smyth, was their isolation from a support system of other local churches. It is my contention that such a support system is crucial for accountability of a particular congregation, both for faithfulness to the standards committed to in its covenant, and the doctrines subscribed to in its confession, as well as for a source of spiritual counsel and material assistance under oppressive circumstances. Chapter Five demonstrated the importance of intra-church watch-care, as a positive function of church discipline, as it contributed to the survival of congregations under the duress of deprivation and imprisonment. So effective was this care that the sectarian churches were noted for taking care of their own poor, a factor

---

[48] John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth Shemesh,* 562, 212. According to Rogers, this spirit of unity in love extended to all members, including the sisters who "have a right to all church affairs," so that "Tell the church" means the women as well as the men, as proved by learned writers . . . and in scripture, the Gospel was spread by women as well as men. Some scholars, noting the similarity of ecclesiology with that of the *Gemeinde* brotherhood practiced by the continental Anabaptists, propose that the English Baptists derived from that tradition. However, for reasons stated above, based on the research of White, *English Separatist Tradition,* 162-163, and Yarbrough, "English Separatist Influence," 20-21, I hold that these constitute two parallel developments, arrived at under similar circumstances of duress, plus an intense biblicism which culminated in similar praxis, although John Smyth's theology may have been influenced by that of Melchoir Hoffman as acknowledged above, according to Lee, 209-213.

[49] *Churchbook of the Baptist Church at Hexham,* 1.

which may have attracted additional members to them.[50] Examples have been cited above of this intra-church watch-care in practice in congregations at Fenstanton, Warboys, Hexham, Bristol and Bedford.

It is lamentable that the parish church structure of the Church of England, which might have provided mutual support, to the end of building up the spirituality of its various congregations, failed to do so, except as those parishes became part of a network of vestries or classes, organized in defiance of the hierarchical system that sought to suppress them—e.g., those in the Dedham Conference, Essex, and the Minories in London—where advowsons were purchased by church members who thereby gained the right to call their own ministers, independent of the bishop's appointment. Under pressure from the State Church, such congregations, and those that began as conventicles, formed around lectureships in the late 16th century, established a precedent for participating in associations for mutual support. (See p. 31, note 69.)

The significance of alliances and associations which made a critical contribution to the viability and proliferation of some Independent and Baptist churches that did survive to generate entire denomination will be looked at next. With the advent of Separatism, Robert Browne's *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie* (1582) had advocated such a system of support amongst sister churches in this clarion call for particular church independence from state-church control. Unfortunately, no such support existed for his embryonic congregation, either in England or in the Netherlands. The Ancient Church of Francis Johnson had alienated those who might have rendered

---

[50] Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, 295-296, 438-442. Since the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century, the parish churches that had provided for the poor in their communities had increasingly relegated that segment of society to the care of the State under the auspices of the Poor Laws.

support, because of the irascible character of its eldership. John Smyth, likewise, alienated potential supporters such as Leonard Busher (b. 1571), and Thomas Helwys, who led groups that distanced themselves from his aberrations of theology and praxis.

On the other hand, Henry Ainsworth, having split from the Ancient Church, had observed the importance of such mutual care within a congregation, and enjoined communion between church and church on the same basis as within churches, on the basis that particular churches were sisters to each other in the "communion of saints." He noted that in the days of the Apostles, the churches had communicated with one another for spiritual and temporal blessings, and saw alliances between particular congregations as being a natural extension of the principle of mutual support.[51]

The need for help and counsel of congregations for each other found its way into the "True Confession" of the Ancient Church in 1596, probably authored by Ainsworth. Article #38 stipulated "that though congregations bee thus distinct and severall bodyes, every one as a compact City in it selfe, yet are they all to walk by one and the same rule, and by all meanes convenient to have the counsel and help of one another in all needful affayres of the Church, as members of one body in the common Faith, under Christ their Head." This Confession formed the model for the 1644 Confession of Seven Particular Baptist Churches, Article #47 of which reiterated the same principle, that congregations should have the counsel and help of one another for the sake of mutual support in a hostile environment. Thus, "associations became the characteristic units of organization, both for Particular and General Baptists from the 1650's."[52]

---

[51] Ainsworth, *Communion of Saincts,* 376.

[52] Lumpkin, 81, 94; White, *English Baptists of the 17th Century,* 62, 65-66.

One nineteenth-century General Baptist historian reported that "as soon as any number of General Baptist churches had been gathered in any county or district, they united to support periodical meetings, to consult for common welfare." Every quarter, or whenever convenient, two or more representatives elected from each congregation would meet to deal with issues of heresy, or immoral conduct, and to reconcile differences, give advice on difficult problems, recommend pecuniary support, and to promote the prosperity of religion in the world at large, so that "the strength of the church thus united is the most powerful means under heaven, through the virtue of Christ's promise to be with them as his church."[53] The principle of associating for mutual support was begun by John Murton, successor to Helwys at Spitalfields, London, who actively promoted fellowship with other General Baptist churches as soon as they were formed at Lincoln (Lincolnshire), Sarum (Wiltshire), Coventry (Warwickshire) and Tiverton (Devonshire) in the 1620's.[54] The Tiverton Record Book mentions that the Western Association was formed in 1653 by Baptist churches in Somerset and Devonshire.[55] Such associations thrived as Baptist churches proliferated during the Commonwealth. The account has been told above of how the Baptist Church at Hexham, Northumberland, was ministered to by the church at Newcastle in a crisis that threatened to split it, and how it in turn helped to rebuild the church at Dawson.[56]

The Gould Collection of manuscripts in the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford, contains the account of the formation of the Abingdon association of

---

[53] Adam Taylor, 457, 462.

[54] Walton, 69.

[55] Case, 4.

[56] *Churchbook of the Baptist Church at Hexham, 1651-1680,* 1-7.

Particular Baptist churches in Berkshire, in 1652, delineating in detail the reasons, purposes and means for sharing communion, advice, alleviation of want and poverty, for as Christ is but one, so in his body, every church "ought to manifest its care over other churches as fellow members of the same body of Christ . . . to watch over others for detection of scandals, . . to help in want, assist in counsel in doubtful matters," and so forth.[57] Such accounts provide graphic proof of associations functioning according to their purposes, as spelled-out by Winthrop S. Hudson, formerly of Colgate Rochester Divinity School and the University of Chicago, as being "the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ; and . . . to hold communion among themselves for their peace, increase of love and mutual edification. The chief work of the associated churches was to deal with whatever controversies might arise." None assumed authority to exercise jurisdiction or censure upon individuals or churches, but Messengers from the associated churches were to meet and offer advice.[58] They adopted two primary means of support: letters between distant churches, and "fraternal and voluntary union of churches in a given district, for mutual Christian intercourse and prayer." A letter to the Baptist Church at Hexham from the church at Weston, Herefordshire read: "We have judged it our duty to write unto you . . . and assure you of our readiness to assist you in anything that may tend to your edification, and to concur with you in any work of the Lord whereby the Kingdom of Christ may be advanced." [59]

---

[57] *Abingdon Association Minutes [Berkshire Association] according to the so-called Gould Collection,* 8th day, 8th month, 1652. Unpublished. Located in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Didcot, U. K.

[58] Hudson, *Baptist Concepts of the Church,* 45-46.

[59] Evans II, 221.

With the advent of the Restoration, these supportive networks became literal life-lines, vital to the survival of the young churches, although some of their associational meetings had to be suspended, as Non-conformity was a crime under the Clarendon Code, and large meetings attracted the unwelcome attention of the authorities. Though functioning as independent communities, they saw themselves as "united in a common brotherhood for the sake of the purity of Christ's church, the individuality of religion, and the freedom of conscience, held with a clearness found in no other community."[60]

Congregational church records from the time of the Commonwealth also reveal a network of ties between Independent churches, through which they exchanged advice, gave approbation to church covenants, practiced intercommunion, transferred members from one to another, and sent representatives to each others' churches for ordination of pastors. These churches in England were the inheritors of an ecclesiastical system that had been tried and developed in the Netherlands and New England during the previous decade. The ministers themselves formed local associations for fellowship and advisement. Unfaithful officers might be asked to resign, they might examine unknown candidates for a pulpit if requested, or turn a fellow minister out of the association for a bad reputation, irregularity of behavior, or looseness of life. They could not depose him as a minister, but his own congregation could withhold his salary from him. Larger Councils of Associations tried to meet bi-annually, but if necessary, any church might call a Council of representatives from other churches to advise or admonish sister churches, but, like the Baptists, might not assume authority over another church.[61]

---

[60] Evans II, 210-222, 284.

[61] Watts, 167-168; Dexter, *Handbook of Congregationalism,* 116-126.

One finds an example of such cooperation expressed in the *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting,* for the year 1658: "The latter part of the 12th month, there having been some meetings of the friends of the several adjacent congregations to confer of some things for the furthering of love and unity among us; another meeting [was] appointed for the fulfilling of some conclusions to that end." The next year, on the 28th day of the 2nd month of 1659, the record reads, "Whereas at the last church meeting it was agreed, according to the 8th proposal of our agreement with other congregations adjacent, viz: that in matters of difficulty . . . that the advice of other congregations should be had," in the case of Mr. Childe, it was requested that a meeting be had to consult what to do about him. They decided to send a joint letter to him asking his reasons for refusal to meet with the church. Mr. Childe had requested transfer of his membership from one congregation to another, but, since he refused to specify his reasons, the churches closed ranks and would not accept his request.[62]

In Cambridgeshire, the record for 1654 recounts that at a general meeting of elders of several congregations, "First it was desired, that for better attaining to, and retaining of, unity and order in the churches, that we should unite ourselves together into a strong combination to meet often together, at such times and places, as should be thought most convenient." The records of these meetings reveal how effectively they dealt with provision in the case of material losses, and questions of policy, e.g., such as whether it be lawful for a member of a congregation to marry outside that congregation—resolved in the negative—and whether laying-on-of-hands were an acceptable practice—resolved in the positive. In 1656, the churches gathered for the ordination of pastors and

---

[62] *Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting at Bedford*, 22-23.

elders. An entry for 1661 recounts that in spite of the king's declaration to suppress meetings for God's worship, "the church is in very good order again, blessed be God."[63]

These Dissenting Church record books are a resource that is very different from the parish registers in that they were "Minute Books" kept of actual meetings, recording the proceedings of the church, the election of officers, the admission and dismissal of members, the ordering of services, the destination of collections, the reprimand of erring brethren and sisters, and so forth, in addition to the record of baptisms, deaths and marriages. For example, a record may be found of the Old Meeting House, Norwich and Great Yarmouth Independent Churches, for 1675, that when the Norwich brethren decided to separate and form their own congregation, they felt it was necessary to apply to Yarmouth for permission, since they had been formed in covenant with that church in 1642 under William Bridge's ministry. This little glimpse provides an insight into how very seriously these associational bonds were taken, and protected against severance, even as the congregations grew too large to meet together safely in Norfolk.[64]

If there is one consistent dividing line that could be drawn between those Puritans who were willing to separate from the fold of the Established Church, and those who were not willing to risk all the losses commensurate with such a separation, it would be the line that re-defined what it meant to be a Christian. The "Reformation" of the English Church, begun by Henry VIII's usurpation of headship of the church had merely re-defined what it meant to be a Churchman. Conceptually, the sixteenth-century

---

[63] *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644-1720,* 126, 147, 156.

[64] *Churchbooks of the Old Meeting House, Norwich and Great Yarmouth Independent Church,* 1643-1705 Norfolk Society Record. Vol. 22 (Jan. 1952), 4-5.

interpretations of a church were hidebound within a dichotomous schema that presented only two alternatives: Caesaro-papism, or Erastianism. In the former, the church exercised ultimate hegemony over its constituent principalities. Charles V, nephew of Henry VIII's first Queen Catherine, was the political head of the Holy Roman Empire, that vestige of Roman Christendom of the Middle Ages. In that setting in England, Henry had qualified for the sobriquet of "Defender of the Faith" from the Pope himself, in his assault against the supporters of Luther's reform within his realm.

With the emergence of nation states, a second alternative for Church-State relations came into being, taking its name from Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), a German theologian who advocated the supreme authority of the state in church matters, thus making the Prince the head of the church in his own principality. It was this arrangement that the Reformers effected in the Swiss cantons and the Protestant princes imposed on German territories during the Evangelical "Lutheran" Reform under the slogan, *cuius regio, eius religio,* "whose region, his religion." In both of these paradigms, the church was firmly wedded to the state, differentiated by a mere reversal of hegemony.

When the Church in England no longer defended Henry's faith, which he deduced from a self-serving reading of scripture, his "reform" consisted primarily of reinterpreting what it meant to be a churchman in the Church of England, of which he declared himself the Head in 1534. The basic structure of the Church remained intact, with its prelatical hierarchy, liturgical practices, and operational processes, including mandated tithes, which now filled the coffers of England rather than Rome. Throughout the remainder of the 16th century, during rapid vacillations from a Henrician version of Catholicism, to Edwardian Presbyterianism, to Marian Roman Catholicism, then the Elizabethan *Via*

Media, the ecclesiology of the Church in England swung dramatically, like a Foucault pendulum, between the two competing concepts of the church, but always constrained within a circle that strictly defined Christianity as existing within a paradigm of a united, State Church. Being a faithful Christian was defined in terms of one's being a faithful participant in the church, whether as an ordained cleric or a baptized layman. There was one alternative role, described by exclusion from this paradigm: that of heretic, schismatic, insurrectionist, even traitor. Within the hidebound ecclesiology that bonded the Church to the State, and equated Christian with Churchman, anyone in defiance of that paradigm threatened to tear the entire fabric of ordered society. Anyone who, for whatever reason, felt constrained to believe or practice religion differently, understood that they had the option of voluntarily exiling themselves from their homeland, or remaining, to suffer the consequences of treasonable heresy.

By the beginning of the Stuart dynasty in the 17th century, a third alternative to that restrictive paradigm of Church-State unity arose. Those Puritans who wished to further reform the church from within, had long been confronted with the intransigence of the Magistrates and their prelatical minions, whose vested interest was in the preservation of a unity of the two institutions, which placed first priority on the goals of statecraft and obeisance to the Prince. To defy the paradigm was tantamount to defying the Prince. This was expressed succinctly by James I, as "no bishop, no king," in response to the Millenary Petition for liberty to worship according to conscience. Those Puritans who received that response recognized that the line between the status quo and reform had become a permanent fixture of established English religion. They also understood that

that line defined a choice for them between conformity and separation, because the king himself would defend it against any further attempts to reform the church from within.

If the choice had been merely one of joining a different form of State religion, there were alternative established churches in Germany, Switzerland and Scotland. If it were a simple matter of desiring freedom of worship, independent of all State control, the Netherlands afforded that opportunity. Many exiled Englishmen chose those options; but for many, the issue was deeper than simply finding an alternative way of worshipping within the established paradigm. The problem was the paradigm itself. The issue was not a matter of finding a way to be a faithful churchman within a different ecclesiology. The issue was how to be a faithful *Christian,* according to a scriptural model of the Church, articulated by Christ, propagated by the Apostles and mandated by conscience, in order to be obedient to a radically new paradigm, defined at the very beginning of Christianity, and rooted in a polity that promoted the ecclesiology of its Founders as they understood it.

These "radical" reformers were not seeking freedom to worship as they desired, but liberty to worship as the Lord required. For those who saw this departure from the Established Chuch paradigm as requisite to being a faithful Christian, as opposed to a faithful churchman, all issues became unequivocally re-defined: 1) Who would be obeyed as Head of the Church—the king, or Christ? 2) How would the Church be defined—geographically or confessionally? 3) How would the Lord be worshipped—liturgically, or spiritually? All these issues came down to obedience to the Lord's model they found in scripture. And, because obedience was their criterion for faithfulness, and faithfulness was the criterion for salvation, the salvation of one's own soul and those

entrusted to one's ministry, became more critically important than material possessions, temporal security, or life itself.

Thus it was that a commitment to obedience became expressed in a theology of suffering: a commitment to accept whatever suffering might be meted out at the hands of the "anti-Christian" forces, though those forces employ the machinations of the State and the Church itself. In other words, the Puritans who comprehended that obedience to the Lord meant separation from the Church and defiance of the State, embraced the ineluctable conclusion inherent in their new paradigm of Independency: a theology of suffering in order to obey God rather than man. In their acceptance of exile, they accepted alienation from their homeland with all the accompanying losses of homes, livings and status that meant, in order to establish a foothold of safety from which they might propound their radical stance, and smuggle their writings back to England in the hope of inspiring a large mass of the population to adopt it, and the suffering it would entail. Many who remained separated from the established churches in their places of exile were motivated by two hopes: to remain faithful Englishmen; and eventually to return to their homeland to effect the reform of its religion from outside the Church.

A theology of suffering was not the invention of the English Christians in exile. They had been exposed to it in the writings and examples of previous generations of martyrs that had articulated it and lived it out in prisons and at Tyburn, where the state executioner received their libations of blood. Prior to the 17th century, martyrologies had become standard inspirational literature in England. Many, whose names have now passed into obscurity were then well-remembered and quoted. For example, the "Free-willer," Henry Harte had exhorted his followers in 1548 to take up the cross of suffering,

"for only through self-denial in this life can beatitude be obtained in the next."[65] They had heard of Robert Harrison's *Treatise of the Church* (1583) in which this compatriot of Robert Browne in exile from Norwich to Middleburg had urged people to "chuse to suffer the cross, than to deny Christ by slavish giving over the authority and liberty which Christ hath given unto his people."[66] They knew about John Penry's final petition for mercy for his family which concluded that "if my death can procure any quietness unto the Church of God and unto the state of my Prince and her Kingdom wherein I was borne, glad I am I had a lyfe to bestowe in this service."[67] Another letter penned in prison shortly before his death, in which Penry offered his interpretation of suffering, as meted out by the hand of the Lord for redemptive purposes, was on record:

> This stamping and treading of us under his feet, this subverting of our cause and right in judgment, is done by him, to the end that we should search and try our ways and repent us of our carelessness, profaneness, and Rebellion in his fight; but he will yet maintain the cause of our Souls, and redeem our lives, if we return to him; yea, he will be with us in fire and water and will not forsake us if our hearts be only and especially of the building of Sion, whithersoever we go. Signed 24 Apr. 1593.[68]

John Udall (1560-1592), the Puritan lecturer at Kingston, Surrey, was sentenced to death for authoring a "seditious pamphlet" accusing the bishops of being "the cause of all ungodliness," for "You care for nothing but your dignities, be it to the damnation of

---

[65] Clement, 184, 211.

[66] Quoted in Dexter, *Congregationalism of the Last 300 Years,* 85.

[67] Quoted in Dexter, *Congregationalism of the Last 300 Years, 250.*

[68] *Examination of Henry Barrow, etc.,* 47. Benjamin Evans, the 19th century historian of British Baptists offers an insightful connection between the effects of the martyrdom of Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry, and its inspiration of early Baptists, stating that it "only made them grasp with more tenacity their great principles. Unabashed by the lofty bearing of their great foe, death had no terrors for them. They counted not their lives dear to them. Truth with them was everything. It was with them a living principle, more precious than a monarch's favour, more dear than life." So it was that, following in the train of those martyrs, being scattered like seeds as they were driven from place to place, their wanderings planted and reaped a rich harvest of Baptist Churches. Evans, II, 19.

your own soules, and infinite millions more." Given the option of prison, or taking the oath of allegiance to the Queen as Governor of the Church, Udall replied, "I had rather go to prison with a good conscience than be at liberty with an ill one." His theology of suffering was rewarded with imprisonment and execution in 1592.[69]

Another early document that put suffering in perspective was John Robinson's *Observations, Divine and Moral* (1625) in which he distinguished between afflictions which are deserved for punishment, and those received for testifying to the truth as a trial of faith. "All afflictions which Christians suffer are not afflictions of Christ; but some are the afflictions of Christ, if we be members of himself. . . . We are not to desire crosses, but they can work together with our election, calling, justification and sanctification, for our good."[70] For Robinson, acceptance of exile did not constitute fleeing from suffering, but a way of utilizing it to provide a harbor for others in jeopardy for their faith, and from which a colony of faithful Christians might be planted in the New World.

Thomas Helwys, who had also fled to the Netherlands with John Smyth, began to see suffering in a different light, having become convinced that his flight (and that of others such as Robinson), had been an expression of cowardice and abandonment of others who had remained behind. In 1611, he articulated his convictions and left the safety of life in Amsterdam to return to England to endure persecution and suffering in order to be obedient to Christ unto death, and calling on his compatriots to do likewise in his *Mistery of Iniquitie* (1612), in which he brazenly called on King and Parliament to grant Englishmen liberty of conscience to obey God rather than man. He saw his return

---

[69] Quoted in Marsden, 183-184.

[70] J. Robinson, *Essays, or Observations Divine and Moral for the furthering of Knowledge and Vertue* (n. p.: 1625), 177, 179-189.

with his small band of followers as being necessary to strengthen others in the cause of founding a true church of baptized believers in England.[71]

Thomas Crosby (1685-1750), son-in-law of Benjamin Keach, to whom Benjamin Stinton's collection of historical Baptist materials was entrusted for publication, explained Helwys's decision to return in terms of a theology of suffering:

> Mr. Helwisse and his friends began to suspect that in leaving their native country, and withdrawing into foreign parts, to avoid persecution, they had been activated by cowardice rather than prudence. . . . Fleeing on account of persecution, they say, hath been the overthrow of religion in this island. The best, able, and greater part being gone and leaving behind them some few, who, by the others' departure, have had their afflictions and their contempt increased, hath been the cause of many falling back and of their adversaries rejoicing.
>
> And there is no regard to be had therefore, as fear of a little imprisonment, or the like, may excuse any, both from the Lord's work, and for helping their brethren, that, for want of their society and comfort are exceedingly weakened, if not overcome.
>
> This open avowal of their sentiments, and steady continuance at the post of duty, as they esteemed it, exposed General Baptists to great sufferings. . . not uncommon to lie many years in filthy prisons, in hunger, in cold and idleness, divided from wife and children—left in continual miseries so that death itself would be to many less punishment.[72]

By 1640, Joseph Hall, Bp. of London, complained about "four score congregations of several sectaries . . . instructed by guides fit for them (cobblers, tailors, felt-makers and such like trash) which all are taught to spit in the face of their mother, the Church of

---

[71] Richard Groves, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612) by Thomas Helwys* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), xxxi-xxxii. *cf.*,Evans, I, 224-225.

[72] Thomas Crosby, *History of the English Baptists,* quoted in Adam Taylor, 87, 88, 89. An entry for 1614 in an anonymous *Account of Some of the Most Eminent and Leading Men among the English Antipaedobaptists* also addresses Helwys's determination to return "that they might bear a testimony for the truth in their own land where it may be in danger of being wholly extinguished, that they might encourage and comfort their brethren who were there suffering persecution for Christ's sake. . . . He removed to London where they continued their church as publickly as the evil times would permit," 7.

England, and to defy and revile her Government." He further complained that the Baptists were so steadfast in their opinions that "rather than turn, they would burn."[73]

A search of documents that range from sermons to letters to diaries and autobiographies across the rest of the 17th century yields many sources that testify to the theology of suffering subscribed to by both Independents and Baptists as they encouraged their brethren to hold firm, and interpret it as an integral witness to the rightness of their cause. In 1642, William Bridge (1600-1670), the pastor of the Independent Church at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, who was one of the Dissenting Brethren appointed to the Westminster Assembly, delivered "A Sermon Containing Some Comfortable Directions for Such as have been, or may be driven from their Houses, Goods or Country," exhorting his people and fellow ministers to be strong in the face of losses, and embrace suffering, because it forces a person to depend on God alone when deprived of worldly supports. In case evil should come upon them, they should commit themselves to humbly "accept the punishment of your iniquity, kisse the rod, and say the Lord is righteous in all that is come upon you, and practice praising the Lord for whatever is left, being mindful of the promises of God and how he kept those promises for his own, not saving them from troubles, but through them, as they remained faithful to him." He adduced examples from scripture to demonstrate that God's way of bringing people to mercies is by way of their opposites: i.e., to peace through war (Canaan), to prosperity through poverty (Job), and to a kingdom vis-à-vis a wilderness experience (David). If they are banished, he challenged them to consider for what cause they suffer loss—for God and his truth in your religion—and reminded them that God has both provided for his own in

[73] Quoted in Evans II, 111.

exile and restored them more than they lost. He charged them to retain a perspective of themselves as beloved of God whose grace toward them is greater than an earthly father toward his children, and that "the blood of Christ knows no nations; all are alike to him" so they cannot be exiled beyond the grace and care of God for themselves and their children. Using a maternal analogy, he asked them to recognize that "this is their weaning time, now if God calls you to lose your houses and liberties," and if he scatters them for their charge, "hee will keep our charge, if you keep the charge of God's house, he will keep the charge of your house." He concluded with the challenge, "either you doe trust God with your soules for your eternal mansions, or you do not. . . . If you doe, . . why should you not trust him with your children for a temporall mansion? . . . You have his bond that they shall never want [for] their daily bread." This sermon is representative of the fare with which the targets of persecution were prepared and buttressed with encouragement.[74]

Among those who suffered most egregiously for their Independent stance were William Prynne (1600-1669), John Bastwick (1593-1654), and Henry Burton (1578-1648) who were publicly pilloried and had their ears severed from their heads. Burton's own *Narration of his Life* (1643), expressed his personal theology of suffering that sustained him in his prison cell that was so cold he became ill. "But my good Keeper was with me, and I pleaded with Him, feeling that he had put me there for his cause, and had deprived me of all outward helps and comforts, he stood charged with me so as if I miscarried, it must be under his hand. Thus I lay pleading, till at length it pleased him by a strange way to remove the malady." Seeing the hand of God in all things, working out

---

[74] William Bridge, *A Sermon Containing Some Comfortable Directions . . . Preached at Great Yarmouth* (London: 1642), 10-22.

his good cause, Burton reported "ravishments" such as Paul had experienced in the third heaven.[75] A decade later, John Rogers articulated a theology of suffering as inevitable, because, "walking in the Light of the Word, the Saints must expect to be at war with those that walk in darkness; but let not the Saints be in the least discouraged at our sufferings which are a token to us of the Salvation and that we are of God," because "Such as are called to follow Christ must be ready to take up any Cross to follow him."[76]

This level of commitment to suffer explains why one churchman's entry in his diary for December 4, 1653 contained an observation referring to his first encounter with a "Phanatical Preacher" whom he designated a "Mechanik" tradesman in his own church, preaching on 2 Samuel 23:20 that "no danger was to be thought difficult when God called for shedding of blood, inferring that now the Saints were called to destroy temporal Governments, with such truculent [anabaptisticall] stuff: so dangerous a Crisis were things growne to."[77] With such a level of commitment, it is not surprising to find a theology of suffering expressed formally in the 46-Article English Independent Churches of Christ Associational (Somerset) Confession of Faith, issued in 1656, which alluded to its being the "portion of Christ's followers to suffer shame in this world for his sake, but they would rather be found faithful to him in things spiritual than suffer the shame of being found in the deckings of Babylon in inward or outward things."[78]

---

[75] Henry Burton, *A Narrative of he Life of Mr. Henry Burton. . . now published for the Benefit of all those that either doe or may suffer for the Cause of Christ* (London: 1643), 2, 14, 16.

[76] Rogers, *Ohel,* 114, 210.

[77] John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evely,* ed. John Bowle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 152.

[78] *A Confession of the Faith of Several Churches of Christ in the County of Somerset and some Churches in the Counties near Adjacent* (London: 1656), A4r.

The above-cited *Call to Archippus* (1664) by Joseph Alleine (1634-68), the Independent minister ejected from his living in Taunton, Somerset, like William Bridge's sermon, was issued to encourage other ministers to fulfill their ministry in spite of jeopardous circumstances. He reminded the recipients of this letter that "now is the time for you to approve yourselves to be ministers of God . . . in affliction, necessity, distress, imprisonment, labour, watchings, fasts, by long-suffering . . . by Love unfeigned," for such was their Office and calling as Shepherds of the flocks, who should not desert when they see the wolf approaching; as Stewards of the Mysteries of God who should not suffer the family to starve; and as Physicians of the Churches, nurses, fathers, and watchmen ordained by God to be Prophets to his people. Alleine asked, can they be blameless, when they see religion sinking and England dying of famine for lack of spiritual food, if they will not open the storehouse He has provided in His Word. If the people are willing to risk the danger of worship, they will be in great danger of seduction by false teachers if they do not step in. If fear of imprisonment hinders them, he asks "whether there be any place for Repentance in their prisons . . . or whether they are not for ever settled, strengthened and doubly confirmed in their resolutions, by their Prison-comforts and encouragements." Furthermore, "were it not better to Glorify God by a Prison . . . than to be an offense and Stumbling Block by sitting still?" His answer: "Better we were without liberty than that it should not serve Him."

Their choice, he charged them, was not whether they would be safe, but whether God would preserve their liberty and his glory "by your adventuring your selves for him; or else he will send you to Prison, and then you will more glorify him by suffering, lying there as the Public Hostages of the Churches and Witness of God's Truth." If forbidden

to preach, he reminded them they could write letters and sermons to be distributed among the people, and visit them privately in their homes, to "prevent starving people from joining schismatic groups to get their souls fed." To the objection that these activities would only imperil the people's safety, he asked, "Where does the Spirit of God and the Glory rest, but upon the suffering Saints? By whom is God Glorified so much as by his suffering witnesses?"[79] These extracts of this document, penned from prison, have been cited as an example of the boldness with which the Dissenters acted, and exhorted others to despise personal safety to serve the cause of spiritual liberty. The collection of Letters written to Allein's congregation through his wife offer evidence that in 1663 this same faithful and courageous pastor continued to minister to his congregation at Taunton, Somerset, throughout his imprisonment in the gaol in Juelchester. He urged them to "give up your selves and your All to the Lord, for "This is the way of the Kingdom: Persecution is one of the Landmarks: Self-denial and taking up the cross is the A B C of religion; you have learnt nothing that has not begun at Christ's cross."[80] One congregation that had learned this lesson well, was the one that met at Warboys, Cambridgeshire, the 1683 records of which recount that "meetings are broken up in many places of this nation, yet this noyse doth not trouble us with fears for we are content to suffer for Christ, knowing it is the lot of the Righteous . . . to suffer for his sake."[81]

To summarize, the documentation available provides three primary reasons as to the survival of those churches that left posterity with a record of their writings: First, they subscribed to an ecclesiology that saw the church, not as an institution, but a living

---

[79] Joseph Alleine, *A Call to Archippus,* 4-26.

[80] Alleine, *Christian Letters full of Spiritual Instructions,* ed., Theodosia Alleine (n.p.: 1672), 8-9.

[81] *The Book of Records of the Church at Warboys,* Manuscript (n.p.: last entry dated 1687).

body of Christ, constructed of "living stones," hewn, gathered and built into a Temple fit for the Lord's habitation. They saw themselves as being the church to one another, rather than merely belonging to an institution, and exercised their role as Christ's church through a discipline that included watch-care over each other's spiritual and material needs, in a way that defeated all efforts of the establishment to destroy them. Second, they extended this principle of watch-care to create a network of supportive associations for mutual advice, accountability and aid, without compromising their principle of the autonomy of each particular congregation. Finally, they embraced a theology of suffering by which they interpreted the worst the Establishment could visit upon them—deprivation, imprisonment, even death—as evidence that they were serving the Lord faithfully in righteousness, which not only purified their own souls, but spread their gospel to purify the land they cherished, extending the Kingdom of the Lord throughout the Kingdom of Great Britain. Wise, courageous, and faithful leadership was the integral means through which these responses found expression and preserved the congregations until they found relief, not through their success in reforming the entire Church of England, but through the reformation of society itself, which finally was able, through an act of Parliament, to extend toleration for dissent in religion while retaining the unity and integrity of the nation.

Suggestions for Further Research

The parameters of this study have been drawn broadly with respect to time covered (1550-1687) in order to cover the topic of Independency within its historical context as it emerged out of Marian recusancy, and took shape as an Elizabethan Puritan movement for further reform of the Church, which developed into non-separating and

separating expressions. The latter gave birth to various manifestations of Independency, some of which finally gained toleration at the time of the Glorious Revolution. Because this period was rife with ecclesiastical and political upheavals, accompanied by a multitude of concomitant expressions of Sectarianism, it was necessary to impose limitations on the aspects of that reform that would be addressed. Therefore, the choice was made to cover only two primary viable traditions—that of Congregationalism and the General and Particular Baptist traditions—and that these would be examined only with respect to the dynamics exercised within, and between those early congregations, in search of the answer to the question as to what fostered their survival through prolonged duress. This boundary necessarily excluded other manifestations of Independency, such as the Society of Friends, the Fifth Monarchists, Levellers, and many other forms it took, in order to keep the topic focused within manageable proportions. One topic for further research will be an investigation of the dynamics within those traditions, with a view to inquiring why, for example, the Quakers also survived, and eventually gained toleration, while other sectarian movements did not. This would be a church-state related project.

Allusions have been made to the plethora of material, published and unpublished, promulgated by the various Independents covered in this study. The decision was made to focus on those writings that promoted their cause and provided an apologetical witness for its justification. This material included treatises and petitions which presented the rationale of its proponents, as well as the covenants and confessions which stipulated their unique ecclesiology, polity, and discipline that facilitated separation, and, when adhered to faithfully, served to make the congregations cohesive enough to endure slander, suppression, and persecution. In order to present a sufficient sampling of these

most relevant documents that supported the thesis, it was necessary to limit the study to those that applied to the subject of intra- and inter-congregational dynamics, ignoring extraneous polemics. This meant that much polemical material that argued for or against a wide range of subjects produced by spokesmen and women for the evolving traditions was not included, such as, relationships between the newly-evolving traditions and the State, and the Established State Churches (both Anglican and Presbyterian); participation of Christians in civil government, and the use of the sword and oaths; the efficacy of paedo-baptism; and issues that involved theological considerations, ranging from the appointed day of worship, to the appropriate mode of baptism, and the valid use of the laying on of hands upon clerics for ordination, or laymen for the reception of the Holy Spirit, as well as the best way to conduct worship in obedience to the Spirit.

Each of these, plus many others, became issues that resulted in what was referred to as "the many-headed monster" of sectaries during the relatively tolerant atmosphere of the Commonwealth. Some of these issues generated denominational distinctions (e.g., Seventh-Day Baptists and Quakers). Some had an impact upon society in beneficial ways that eventually contributed toward greater equity for the common person (e.g., the Levellers). Others threatened the peace of the realm, confirmed the worst fears of the establishment, and culminated in a backlash against toleration for any dissent (e.g., the Fifth Monarchists). The dynamics within these movements, and the effect they had in frustrating the cause of Independency has been touched on by many scholars, such as Christopher Hill and Richard L. Greaves.[82] Further explication of the trove of primary

---

[82] Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), and *Puritanism and Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Richard L. Greaves, *Deliver Us from Evil, the Radical Underground in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and *Enemies under His Feet, Radicals and Non-conformists in Britain* (New York: Stanford University Press, 1990).

documents of the radical expressions of English Church reform would yield a rich resource for the historian and historical theologian who desire to understand the polemical issues, as well as the dynamics of sectarianism itself, which distracted from the agenda of the more moderate forms, such as those addressed in this study, which culminated in the viable Congregational and Baptist traditions.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Reasons for Separation Articulated by the Richard Fitz Elizabethan Church

1. Because of Gods commandement, to go forewarde to perfection . . . [Scriptural references follow each point.]

2. Because they are abominations before the Lorde our God . . .

3. I wyll not beautifie with my presence those filthy rages, which bring the heauenly worde of the eternall our Lorde God, in to bondage, subiection, and slauerie.

4. Because I would not communicate with other mennes sinnes. . .

5. They geue offences, both the preacher & the hearers. . . .

6. They glad [*sic*] and strengthen the Papists in their errour, and greue the godly . . .

7. They doo persecute our sauiour Iesus Christ in his members. . . . Also they rejecte and despise our Lorde . . . . Moreouer those labourers, whom at the prayer of the faithful, the Lorde hath sent furth in to his haruest: they refuse, and also reject . . .

8. These Popish garments, &c, are now become very Idolles in deede, because they are exalted aboue the worde of the almightie.

9. I come not to them because they shoulde be ashamed, and so leaue their Idolatrous garments, &c. . . .

God geue vs strength styl to stryue in suffryng vnder the crosse, that the blessed worde of our God may onely rule, and haue the highest place, to cast downe strong holdes, to destroy or ouerthrow policies or imaginations, and euery high thing that is eralted [exalted] against the knowledge of God, and to bring in to captiuitie or subiection, euery thought to the obedience of Christ. &c. . . .[1]

---

[1] "Covenant of the Priuye Churche of Richard Fitz." Original printed in black letter on one side of a small folio leaf. State Papers, Dom., Eliz., Addenda, Vol. xx (107.) ii). Quoted in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* II Illustrative Documents (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), 13-15.

APPENDIX B

Excerpts Taken from John Penry's *Treatise of Reformation &c.*

The Reformation of England amounts to a reading Gospel, and a reading ministry, a pompous Gospel and a pompous ministry: a Gospel and ministry that strengthen the hands of the wicked in his iniquity. . . . [It] never will trouble my conscience with the sight of my sins. . . [A 1verso]

But as for the gospel state either of the magistry or the ministry, or of the common people, [I] beheld nothing but a multitude of conspirators against God, against his truth, against the building of his house, against his Saints and children: and consequently against the wealth of their own souls, and the public peace and tranquility of the whole kingdom. Concerning the common people, their profane impiety, contempt of God and his religion, and their hatred unto his children, with all other their wickedness, may seem to deserve some excuse, because they never yet had any means to know God aright. . . . But these that would be accounted our Prophets and ministers of the sanctity . . . alas you can behold here no other sight but a multitude of desperate and forlorn atheists that have . . . endeavored to perswade in their own hearts that god's holy ministry, and the saving health of men's souls are matters not to be regarded. . . . A group of bloody soul-murderers, sacrilegious church robbers. . . . The whole endeavor of this cursed generation ever since the beginning of her Majesty's reign, hath tended no other way than to make a sure hand to keepe the church in bondage. . . . Of these men, . . proud and ambitious prelates, our Lord Abps. and Bps, godless and murdering non-residents, profane and ignorant idle shepherds or dumb dogs. [A 3 recto]

Because the Reformation desired is based on the Word of God, to bring the Church into accord with it, it is no danger to her Majesty's government, crown, or dignity. [B 2 r.] What we mean by reform is nothing else but removing of all those unlawful callings which are maintained in our church and ministry, contrary to the revealed will and written word of the Lord our God. . . . First, the rooting out of our Church of all dumb and unpreaching ministers, all non-residents, [B 2 v.] and Ld. Abps. and Bps. and all the rest of the wicked offices that depend on that ungodly and tyrannous hierarchy of Ld. Bishops. Secondly, we mean the placing in every congregation within England . . . of preaching pastors and Doctors, of governing Elders and ministering Deacons, and whatever health, comeliness and good order the Lord . . . would have brought into his church. These changes cannot be contrary to the welfare of princes and commonwealths, unless they will also charge the Majesty of God with the same accusation. [B 3 r.]

It is intolerable that the ministry of word and Sacraments and charge of souls be committed to men who do not know the Word. They are blind guides who uphold ignorance and blindness. [B 3 v.] Thus the people know not how to yield the Lord any part of his true worship, because the old idols are maintained under the profession of true religion. [C 1 r.]

Concerning true worship, it is inward and outward: Inward worship is of the Spirit when the heart and soule is by God's spirit directed . . . to yield to God, according to his word. Without this new worship it is unpossible to be saved, and without it no service can be acceptable to God. [C 1 v.] So that even the outward is never truly acceptable to God. [C 2 r.]

If the Magistrates have any Spirit of God in their hearts, they would joyne with us in this work which indeed you ought to be our foreleaders rather than hinder it. [D 4 r.]

The bane of our Church are nonresidents whereof all our Ld. Bps are guilty, which corruption is so great, that I do marvel that it is tolerated in a Christian state. [E 2 r.] It undermines the Kingdom of Christ and erects Antichrist's throne, for it allows governance by human L. Bps, not by the Spirit of Christ who is head of his body and hath not left his Church imperfect, but absolute and complete in all her members. . . . Because our Savior . . . giveth life only unto the members of his own appointment and making if you bring in those officers not ordained and appointed by the Word of God to be therein you bring in these things that appertaine not unto the Kingdom of Christ. [F 1v]

Ld. Abps. and Bps. who seek to rule in the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of the world at the same time are not true ministers after the manner of Christ [F 3 v.] whose weapons are not carnall, using the civil authority to imprison and tyrannize the messengers of Christ, [F 4 v.] as the Bishops exercising superiority and dominion in their rule over the church like secular lords. [G 1 r.]

Their corruption is in usurping the government of the civil Magistrate, . . claiming for themselves high names and titles which belong to worldly honors. . . . Lastly, in that lordlie preheminence (*sic*) and superiority which they usurp over the whole body of our Church, within their diocese, in general, and over their fellow ministers in particular . . . as abominable and odious in the presence of the Lord. [G 3 r.] In upholding this hierarchy, you uphold . . . tyranny and bondage of the church, together with a chief and especial portion of the Kingdom of Antichrist. [G 3 v.]

APPENDIX C

Exerpts from John Smyth's *Principles and Inferences Concerning The Visible Church* (1607) [Original pagination included in the text]

> A visible communion of Saincts is of two, three, or moe (*sic*) Saincts joined together by covenant with God & themselves, freely to vse all the holy things of God, according to the word, for their mutual edification, & God's glory. . . [P. 8]
>
> All religious societies except that of a visible church are unlawful. . . . the true visible church is the narrow way that leadeth to life which few find. . . Other religious communions are the broad way that leadeth to destruction which they may find. [P. 9]
>
> The outward part of the true forme of the true visible church is a vowe, promise, oath, or covenant betwixt God and the Saints. . . . This covenant hath 2 parts. 1. respecting God and the faithful. 2. respecting the faithful mutually. . . . The second part of the covenant respecting the faithful mutually conteyneth all the duties of love whatsoever.[P. 11]
>
> Weomen are not permitted to speak in the church in tyme of prophecy . . . If women doubt of any thing delivered in tyme of prophecy and are willing to learn, they must ask them that can teach them in private. [P. 14]
>
> The officers of the true visible church are al absolutely described in the word of god. . . . These officers ar of two sorts: 1. Bishops, 2. Deacons. . . The Bishops are also called Elders or Presbyters . . . The Bishops or Elders jointly together are called the Eldership or Presbyterie . . . [P. 17-18]

Excerpts from John Smyth's *Differences of the Churches of the separation*

express his differences of opinion from that of "the auncyent brethren of the Separation:"

> 1. We hould that the worship of the new testament properly so called is spirituall proceeding originally from the heart: & that reading out of a booke (though a lawfull ecclesiastical action) is no part of spirituall worship, but rather the invention of the man of synne . . . .
>
> 2. We hould that seeing prophesiing is a parte of spirituall worship: therefore in time of prophesiing it is unlawfull to have the booke [i.e., the Bible] as a helpe before the eye.

> 3. We hould that seeing singing a psalme is a parte of spirituall worship therefore it is unlawfull to have the booke before the eye in time of singinge a psalme.
>
> 4. wee hould that the Presbytery of the church is uniforme: & that the triformed Presbyterie consisting of three kinds of Elders viz. Pastors Teachers Rulers is none of Gods Ordinance but mans devise.
>
> 5. wee hold that all the Elders of the Church are Pastor: and that lay Elders (so called) are Antichristian.
>
> 6. wee hold that in contributing to the Church Treasurie their ought to bee both a separation from them that are without & a sanctification of the whole action by Prayer & Thanksgiving. [P. 34]

These excerpts are chosen to provide insight into the significant points of polity and worship that constituted the first Baptist congregation, and distinguished it from that of the congregational church of Johnson and Ainsworth. They are found in the Appendix of Burrage, *Early English Dissenters* I, 233 – 235, and go on to describe the order of worship used in the Smyth congregation. Note that at the time of publication of these documents, the issue of infant vs. believer's baptism had not yet arisen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Abingdon-Berkshire Association Minutes, according to the so-called Gould Collection (formerly the Longworth Book). Gould MSS.

An Account of Some of the most Eminent and Leading Men among the English Anti-Paedobaptists. n.p., n.d.

Ainsworth, Henry. *The Communion of Saincts: A Treatise of the Fellowship that the Faithful Have With God and His Angels and With One Another in this Present Life.* Amsterdam: n,.p., 1628.

_____. *Counterpoyson: Considerations Touching the Points of Difference between the Godly Ministers and the People of the Church of England and the Seduced Brethren of the Separation.* London: n.p., 1608.

Alleine, Joseph. *A Call to Archippus . . . to some Ejected Ministers . . . to take heed to their Ministry that they fulfill it.* n.p.,1664.

_____. *Christian Letters full of Spiritual Instructions.* ed.Theodosia Alleine. n.p., 1672.

Ames, William. *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof.* London: n.p., 1641.

_____. *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity.* London: n.p., 1643.

_____. *The Marrow of Theology.* Book I. ed. John D. Eusden. Translated from the 3rd Latin edn. 1629. Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968.

_____. *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Minister of Christ William Ames.* London: n.p., 1643.

Barber, Edward. *The humble Petition of many [sic] his Maiesties loyall and faithfull Subiects, some of which having beene miserably persecuted by the Prelates and Their Adherents, by all rigorous courses, for their Consciences, practicing nothing but what was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ, who was Lord of all Administrations, Math. 28.19. and practiced by the Primitive Christians; Submitting to his Maiestie and his Lawes; so far as concerns our Estates, Liberties, and Lives; and so, as we conceive, give to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God those things that are his.* Broadsheet. n.p., n. d.

Barrow, Henry. *A Brief Discovery of the False Churches; wherein the Rights of the Christian Church are further Asserted by the Holy Scriptures.* London: 1590.

_____. *The First Part of the Platform Which may serve as a Preparative to purge away Prelatisme: with some other parts of Poperie.* London: n.p., 1590.

_____. *A Plaine Refutation of Mr. Giffard's Booke, or The Pollution of University-Learning or sciences (falsely-so called) whereby most of the youth are so infected . . . that when they come to age, they prove either unprofitable or hurtful members to the Commonwealth.* London: n.p., 1591.

_____. *A True Description out of the Worde of God of the Visible Church.* Amsterdam: n.p., 1589.

Bartlett, William. *Model of the Primitive Congregational Way, or, Satisfaction offered and endeavored by unfolding what the right order of the Gospell, and Way of the Saints in the visible worshipping of God after the Congregational Manner and Way (so much opposed) is.* London: n.p., 1647.

Bastwick, John. *The Confession of the faithful witness of Christ, Mr. John Bastwick.* n.p., 1641.

Book of Records for the Church of Reading, County of Berkshire, beginning in the year Of the Lord God, 1656. Unpublished manuscript, Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U. K.

Book of Records of the Church of Worboys since the time of their first gathering together, with their proceedings and order of times. Unpublished manuscript, Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U.K.

Bradford, William. *History of Plymouth Plantation.* Vol. 1. 4th edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1912.

Bridge, William. *A Sermon Containing some Comfortable Directions for such as have been driven from Houses . . . Preached at Great Yarmouth.* London: n.p., 1642.

Broughton Church Book. Dated from 1660-1682. Unpublished manuscript, Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U.K.

Browne, Robert. *A Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of all True Christians.* 1582. In *The Writings of Robert Browne and Robert Harrison.* ed. Albert Peel and Leland Carlson. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953.

_____. *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie and the Wickedness of those Preachers which will not Reforme till the Magistrate Commande or Compell them.* 1582. In *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne.* ed. Albert Peel and Leland Carlson. 153-170. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1953.

_____. *A True and Short Declaration.* In *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne.* ed. Albert Peel and Leland Carlson. 329-431. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953.

Bullinger, Heinrich. *Decades.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849-1852.

Burton, Henry. *A Narration of the Life of Mr. Henry Burton.* London: n.p., 1643.

_____. *A Vindication of the Churches commonly called Independents.* n.p.,1644.

_____. *The Protestation Protested.* n.p., 1641

Busher, Leonard. *Religion's Peace, or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience . . . Presented To King James and the High Court of Parliament.* London: n.p., 1614. Reprint 1646. In *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward B. Underhill. 1-82. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). Translated from the Latin by John Allen. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936.

Canne, John. *A Necessitie of Separation Proved by the Non-Conformist Principles, Specially opposed unto Dr. Ames, his Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies, In the point of Separation only. By John Canne, Pastor of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam.* Amsterdam: n.p., 1634.

Carlson, Leland H. ed. *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962.

_____. *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1590-1591.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966.

_____. *The Writings of John Greenwood, 1587-1590*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962.

_____. *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591-93.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970.

Case, H. B. *The History of the Baptist Church in Tiverton 1607-1907.* London: Baptist Union Pub., 1907.

Churchbook of the Baptist Church at Hexham, 1651-1680. Unpublished manuscript, Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U.K.

Churchbook of the Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821 at Bedford—entituled "A Booke Containing a Record of the Acts of a Congregation of Christ in and about Bedford, and A Brief Account of their first Gathering." ed. G. B. Harrison. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1708.

Churchbooks of the Old Meeting House, Norwich and Great Yarmouth Independent Church, 1643-1705. Norfolk Society Record. Vol. 22 (Jan. 1952.)

Church Record Books of Corningsby, Counsby and Tattershall, 1654-1728. Unpublished Manuscript, Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U.K.

Clarke, Samuel. *A Brief Narrative of my life and the most remarkable acts of God's Providence in guiding and governing the same.* In *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this later age. , , , By Samuel Clark, sometimes pastor of Bennet Fink, London. . . . To which is added his own life. . . .* n.p., 1683.

Confession of Faith of Several Church in of Christ in the County of Somerset and Some Churches in the Counties near Adjacent. London: n.p., 1656.

Cook, John. *What the Independents would Have, or A Character Declaring some of Their Tenents, and their desires to disabuse those who speak ill of that they Know not.* London: 1647.

Cotton, John. *A Platform of Church Discipline of the Churches Assembled in the Synod of Cambridge in New England.* Boston: n.p., 1680.

Crosby, Thomas. *The History of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of King George I. Vol. I, Containing the History to the Restoration of King Charles II.* London: n.p., 1738.

Declaration of Several of the People called Anabaptists, In and about the City of London. London: n.p., 1659.

Dering, Sir Edward. A Briefe and Necessarie Catechisme very needful to be knowne of all Householders. In *Works of Edward Dering.* n.p. 1614.

A Dialogue between a Brownist and a Schismatick. London: n.p., 1651.

Evelyn, John. *Diary. Selections.* Selected and edited by John Bowle. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. Orig. pub. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.

The Examinations of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood and John Penry Before the High Commissioners Court. London: n.p., 1662.

Field, John. *A Parte of a Register, contayninge sundrie memorable matters, written by divers godly and learned in our time, which stande for and desire the reformation Of our Church, in Discipline and Ceremonies, according to the pure Word of God, and Lawe of our Lande.* n.p., 1593.

_____ and Thomas Wilcox. *An Admonition to the Parliament holden in the 13th yeare of the Reigne of Queene Elizabeth of Blessed Memorie. Begun Anno 1570 and ended 1571.* Imprinted Anno 1617.

Foxe, John. *Acts and Monuments.* 8 vols. London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside,1563.

Frere, Walter H. and C. E. Douglas, ed. *Puritan Manifestoes.* Reprint edition. New York:B. Franklin, 1972.

Goodwin, Thomas. *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory.* n.p., 1641.

Grantham, Thomas. *Christianismus Primitivitus, or The Ancient Christian Religion . . . Vindicated from the Many Abuses which have invaded the Sacred Profession By Humane Innovation, or pretended Revelation, Comprehending likewise, the General Duties of Mankind . . . and Particularly, the Obedience of all Christians To Magistrates, and the Necessity of Christian Moderation about things Dispensible in Matters of Religion.* Book II. London: n.p., 1678.

Greenwood, John. *A Brief Refutation of Mr. George Gifford, his consimilitude between the Donatists and us* (1591). In Leland Carlson, ed. *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593.* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.

_____.*A Collection of Certain Letters and Conferences* (1590). In Leland Carlson, ed. *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow (1587-1590)* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962.

_____. *A Few Observations of Mr. Gifford's Last Cavills about Stinted Read Prayers and Devised Leiturgies* (1591). In Leland Carlson, ed. *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow (1590-1593).* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.

Hanbury, Benjamin, ed. *Historical Memorials Relating to the Independents.* 3 Vols. London: Congregational Union of England and Wales,1839-1844.

Harrison, Robert. A Treatise of the Church. In *Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Brown.* Ed. Albert Peel and Leland Carlson. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953.

Hayden, Roger. *Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol 1640-1687.* Printed for the Bristol Record Society, 1974.

Helwys, Thomas. *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity.* London: Kingsgate Press, 1612.

_____. *A Short and Plain Proof by the Word and Workes of God that God's decree is not the Cause of anie Man's Sinne or Condemnation; and that all men are redeemed by Christ, as also that no infants are condemned* London: n.p., n.d.

Henry, Philip. *Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry, M.A. of Broad Oaks, Flintshire, A.D. 1631-1696.* Ed. Matthew H. Lee. London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1882.

How, Samuel. *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Human Learning.* London: n.p., 1683.

Howard, Luke. *A Looking Glass for Baptists: A Narrative of Their Root and Rice in Kent.* 1672.

Jacob, Henry. *An Attestation of many Learned, Godly and Famous Divines.* Middelburg: n.p., 1613.

_____. *A Declaration and Plainer Opening of Certaine Points with a Sound Confirmation . . . contained in a Treatise intituled the Divine Beginning and institution of Christ's true visible and ministerial Church. Written in a Letter by the Author of the said Treatise out of the Low Countreyes, to a friend of his in Englande. Printed Anno Dom. 1612.* n.p., 1612.

_____. *Defence of the Churches and Ministry of Englande.* Middleburg: n.p., 1599.

_____. *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ's True, Visible or Ministerial Churches.* Leyden: 1610.

_____. *An Humble Supplication for Toleration, and libertie to enjoy and observe the ordinances of Christ Jesus I the administration of his churches in lieu of humane Constitutions.* Middelburg: n.p., 1609.

_____. *Reasons Taken Out of God's Word and the Best Humane Testimonies. Proving a Necessitie of Reforming Our Churches in England.*Middelburg: R. Schilders, 1604.

Jessey, Henry. *The Lord's Loud Call to England.* London: n.p.,1661.

_____. *A Storehouse of Provision to further Resolution in Several Cases of Conscience.* London: n.p., 1650.

Jewson, C. B. *The Stalham Baptist Church, 1653-1953*. n.p., 1953.

Johnson, Francis. *A Brief Treatise Containing Some Grounds and Reasons Against Two Errors of the Anabaptists.* Amsterdam: 1609. reprint London: 1645.

Jones, Roger. *Mene Tekel, or Downfall of Tyranny by Laophilus Misotyrannus.* n.p., 1663.

Kiffin, William, Henry Den, Thomas Lambe, John Spilsbery, et al. *The Humble Apology of some commonly called Anabaptist, In behalf of themselves and others of the same Judgement with them.* London: Printed by Henry Hills: 1660.

Kilby, Richard. *Hallelu-iah, Praise yee the Lord for the Unburthening of a Loaden Conscience.* Cambridge: 1618. reprint London: n.p., 1632.

_____. *A Moderate Answer unto Dr. Bastwick's Book, called Independency not God's Ordinance.* London: n.p., 1645.

Latimer, John. *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century.* Bristol: William George & Sons, 1900.

Laune, Christopher. *The Profane Schism of the Brownists or Separatists with the impietie, dissensions, lewd and abominable vices of that impure sect.* n.p., 1612.

Liberty of Conscience upon its true and proper Grounds Asserted and Vindicated Proving that no Prince nor State, ought by force to compel Men to any part of the Doctrine, Worship or Discipline of the Gospel. *London: n.p., 1668.*

Mene Tekel, or Downfall of Tyranny by Laophilus Misotyrannus.[Roger Jones] n.p. 1663.

Murton, John. *A Description of what God hath Predestinated Concerning Man.* London: n.p., 1620.

Murton, John. *A Most Humble Supplication to the King's Majesty by Many of the King's Loyal Subjects Ready to Testify All Civil Obedience By Oath of Allegiance . . . Who Are Persecuted Only for Differing in Religion.* N.p.: 1620. In *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward B. Underhill. 181-232. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

_____. *Persecution for Cause of Conscience judged and condemned.* London: 1615. 4th edn. London: Wrightman & Cramp, 1827.

Overton, Richard. *An Arrow against all Tyrants and Tyranny: Shot from the Prison of Newgate into the Prerogative Bowels of the Arbitrary House of Lords and all Other Usurpers and Tyrants whatsoever.* n.p., 1646.

Owen, John. *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government.* London: 1688.

_____. *Two Discourses concerning the Holy Spirit and his Work.* n.p., 1687.

Parte of a Register Contayning Sundrie Memorable Matters for the Reformation of Our Church. n.p. 1593. In *The Remains of Edmund Grindal.* ed. William Nicholson. 201-216. Cambridge: n.p., 1843.

Pearce, William. *The Marprelate Tracts.* n.p., 1911.

Peel, Albert, ed. *Calendar of the Second Parte of a Register. Intended publication by Puritans about 1593, now in Dr. Williaims Library, London.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1915.

_____. *Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953.

Penry, John. *A Treatise of Reformation wherein is proved that Reformation, and those that sincerely favour the same are unjustly charged to be enemies unto her Majesty and the State. Written both for the clearing of those that stand in the cause, and the stopping of the scandalous mouths of all enemies thereof.* n.p., 1590.

Perkins, William. *A Golden Chaine, or the Description of Theology, containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation according to God's Word.* Cambridge: 1591 in *The Whole Workes of William Perkins.* ed. Ian Breward. 189-260. Berkshire, Eng.: The Sutton Courtney Press, 1970.

_____. *Six Principles of the Christian Religion.* in *The Whole Works of William Perkins.* In *The Whole Workes of William Perkins.* London: n.p., 1631.

_____. *The Whole Workes of William Perkins.* London: n.p., 1631.

Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned in a Discourse between an Antichristian and a Christian. . . . To which is added An Humble Supplication To the King's Majesty. N.p.: 1615 and 1620. Reprinted 1662. In *Tracts on Liberty Of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward B. Underhill. 83-180. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

Prisoner against the Prelate (The): Or, A Dialogue between the Common Goal and Cathedral of Lincoln. Written by a Prisoner of the Baptized Churches in Lincolnshire. n.p., 1650.

Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys, and Hexham 1644-1720. London: Edward Underhill, 1854.

Religion's Peace, or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience . . . presented to King James and the High Court of Parliament by Leonard Busher, Citizen of London (1614) reprinted 1646. In *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward Bean Underhill. 1-82. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprinted New York: Burt Franklin Press, 1966.

Remains of Edmund Grindal. Vol. 19. edited for the Parker Society by William Nicholson. Cambridge: The University Press, 1843.

Richardson, Samuel. *The Necessity of Toleration in Matters of Religion.* London: n.p., 1647. In *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* Ed. Edward B. Underhill. 233-286. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

Robinson, John. *An Appeal on Truth's Behalf . . . to the Church at Amsterdam.* Leyden: n.p.,1624.

_____. *An Appendix to M. Perkins, His Six Principles of Christian Religion.* London: n.p., 1641.

_____. *A Justification of Separation from the Church of England.* Amsterdam: 1610. in the *Works of John Robinson*. Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851.

_____. *A Letter to the Congregational Church in London.* Leyden: n.p., 1624.

_____. *New Essays or Observations Divine and Moral for the furthering of Knowledge and Vertue.* n.p.,1625.

_____. *Of Religious Communion Private and Public.* n.p., 1614.

_____. *A Treatise on the Lawfulness of Hearing Ministers in the Church of England.* (1634).

_____. *The Works of John Robinson.* Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851.

Rogers, John. *Ohel, or Beth shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun, or Irenicum Evangelicum. An idea of church-discipline, in the theorick and practick parts, . . . Declared for the most part in Christ-Church, Dublin in Ireland.* In *The Works of John Rogers.* London: n.p.,1653.

Sion's Groans for her Distressed, or, Sober Endeavors to Prevent Innocent Blood. London: n.p., 1661. In *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward B. Underhill. 343-382. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint Burt Franklin, 1966.

Smyth, John. *The Character of the Beast, or the False Constitution of the Church.* Early English Books, 1475-1640. Middleburg: n.p. 1609.

_____. *The Differences of the Churches of the Seperation* [sic]. Early English Books, 1475-1640. Middleburg: R. Schilders, 1608.

_____. *The Last Booke of John Smith, Called the Retractation of His Errours, and The Confirmation of the Truth.* In *The Works of John Smyth.* ed. Willliam T. Whitley. 751-760. Cambridge: The University Press, 1915.

_____. *A Patterne of True Prayer.* 1605. In. *The Works of John Smyth.* ed. William T. Whitley. 82-242. Cambridge: The University Press, 1915.

_____. *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church.* 1607. In *The Works of John Smyth.* ed. William T. Whitley. 250-268. Cambridge, 1915.

_____. *The Works of John Smyth.* ed. William T. Whitley. Cambridge, 1915.

Stevens, Walter, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford*. n.p.: Alten Press, n.d.

Stinton, Benjamin. *A Repository of Divers Historical Matters relating to the English Antipaedobaptists collected from original Papers of Faithful Extracts.* 1712. The Stiniton-Jessey MSS. Angus Library Collections, Regent's Park College, Oxford, U.K.

Strype, John. *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign.* 4 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824.

_____. *Ecclesiastical Memorials of the Church of England under King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary I.* 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1822.

Sturgion, John. *A Plea for Toleration of Opinions and Persuasions in Matters of Religion Differing from the Church of England.* London: n.p.: 1661. In *Tracts On Liberty of Conscience and Persecution.* ed. Edward B. Underhill. 309-342. London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

Taylor, Adam. *The History of the English General Baptists.* Vol. I. London: n.p., 1818.

True Confession of the Faith and Humble Acknowledgement of the Alegiance, which wee hir maiesties Subjects, falsely called Brownists, doo Hould towards God, and yield to hir Majestie . . . For the better & more easie understanding of those that shall read it: And published for the cleerinig of our selves from those unchristian slanders of heresie, schisme, pryde, obstinacie, disloyaltie, sedicion, etc. which by our Adversaries are in all places given out against us. By Henry Ainsworth's English Separatist Church while in Amsterdam Church, 1596.

Turner, G. Lyon, ed. *Original Records of Early Non-conformity.* 3 vols. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911-l914.

Udall, John. *A Demonstration of the Truth of that Discipline which Christe hath Prescribed in His Word for the Gouernement of His Church.* London:1588. Ed. Edward Arber. Repr. 1880.

White, Thomas. *A Discoverie of Brownism, or, a briefe declaration of some of the errors and abominations daily practiced and increased among the English company of The Separation remaining for the present in Amsterdam.* n.p., 1605.

Whitley, William T. *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594-1598.* Cambridge: 1519.

Williams, Roger, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution.* London: J. Haddon, 1848. First Published 1644. reprint Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001.

The Zurich Letters. ed. Hastings Robinson for the Parker Society. Cambridge: The University Press, 1846.

Secondary Sources

Arber, Edward. *The Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-23 as Told by Themselves, Their Friends, Their Enemies and Their Enemies.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1897.

Barclay, Robert. *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth.* London: Houghton and Stroughton, 1876.

Bebb, E. D. *Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life 1600-1800.* Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1935. repr.1980.

Borchert, Gerald L. "The Nature of the Church: A Baptist Perspective" *American Baptist Quarterly* I (Dec. 1982): 160-167.

Brachlow, Stephen, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625.* Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1988.

_____. "John Robinson and the Lure of Separatism in Pre-Revolutionary England." *Church History* 50 (Sept. 1981): 288-301.

_____. "Life Together in Exile. In *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Barrington R. White."* ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes. 111-125. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999.

Brackney, William H., ed. *Baptist Life and Thought: A Source Book.* Valley Forge, Pa., Judson Press, 1998.

_____. *The Baptists.* Westport Conn.: Praeger Publishing Co., 1994.

_____. *Christian Voluntarism.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1997.

_____, Paul S. Fiddes and J. H. Y. Briggs, ed. *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of B. R. White.* Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999.

Bradford, Amory H. *The Pilgrim in Old England.* London: James Clarke & Co., 1893.

Browne, John. *History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk.* London: Harrold and Sons, 1877.

Burgess, Walter H. *John Smyth the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England.* London: James Clarke and Co., 1911.

Burrage, Champlin, ed. *An Answer to John Robinson of Leyden by a Puritan Friend.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920.

_____. *Church Covenant Idea.* n.p. American Baptist Pub., 1904.

_____. *Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research.* 2 vols. Cambridge: The University Press, 1912.

_____. *The True Story of Robert Browne, Father of Congregationalism.* London: Henry Frowde, 1906.

Canipe, Lee. "The Most Damnable Heresy of John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Baptist Ideas of Freedom." *Baptist Quarterly* 40 (July 2004): 399-407.

Christiansen, Paul. *Reformers and Babylon.* Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978.

Clark, Peter. *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640.* Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1977.

Cleal, Edward E. *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey.* London: James Clarke and Co., 1908.

Clement, C. J. *Religious Radicalism in England 1535 – 1565.* Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology. ed. David F. Wright and Donald MacLeod. Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1996.

Coggins, James R. *John Smyth's Congregation. English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation.* Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1991.

Cragg, Gerald R. *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1688.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1957.

Crosby, Thomas. *History of the English Baptists.* 4 vols. London: n.p. 1738-40.

Cross, Claire. *The Elizabethan Religious Settlement.* Gwynedd: Headstart History, 1992.

Davie, Donald. *A Gathered Church. Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Davis, Ozora S. *John Robinson, the Pilgrim Pastor.* Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1903.

DeWeese, Charles W. "Deaconesses in Baptist History: A Preliminary Study." *Baptist History and Heritage* 12 (Jan. 1977): 52-57.

Dexter, Henry Martyn. *Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen In its Literature.* New York: Harper & Bros., 1880.

_____. *A Handbook of Congregationalism.* Boston: Congregational Publishing Soc., 1880.

_____ and Morton Dexter. *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims.* Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1978.

Dowley, T. "Baptists and Discipline in the 17th Century." *Baptist Quarterly London* 24 (Oct. 1971): 157-166.

Ely, A. B. "The Germs and Germination of English Congregationalism." *The Congregational Review* 2 (Sept. 1871): 440-452.

English Dissenters: Barrowists. URL: http://www.Exlibris.org/nonconformity/engdis/barrowists.html. Accessed March 3, 2006.

Estep, William R., Jr. "Thomas Helwys: Bold Architect of Baptist Policy on Church-State Relations." *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (July 1985): 24-33.

Evans, Benjamin. *Early English Baptists.* 2 vols. London: J. Heaton & Sons, 1862.

Fletcher, Joseph. *History of the Revival and Progress of Independency in England Since the Reformation.* London: J. Snow Pub., 1862.

Fowler, Stanley K. *More than a Symbol.* Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster Press, 2002.

Frere, Walter and C. E. Douglas. *Puritan Manifestoes.* New York: B. Franklin, 1972.

Friedman, Robert, *The Theology of Anabaptism.* Scottdale, Pa.: The Herald Press, 1973.

Garrett, Christina H. *The Marian Exiles.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1938.

Garrett, James Leo. "Restitution and Dissent Among Early English Baptists." *Baptist History and Heritage.* 12 (Oct. 1977):193-210, 251.

George, Charles and Katherine George. *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation.* Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961.

George, Timothy. *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition.* Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982.

Greaves, Richard L. *Deliver Us from Evil. The Radical Underground in Britain 1660-1663.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

_____. *Enemies under His Feet: Radicals and Non-Conformists in Britain 1604-1677.* Stanford: The Stanford University Press, 1990.

_____."The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought." *The Historian* 31 (1968): 21-35.

_____. "The Puritan-Nonconformist Tradition in England, 1560-1700: Historical Reflections." *Albion* 17 (1987): 449-486.

_____ and Robert Zaller, ed. *A Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals,* 3 Volumes. London: Harvester Press, 1982.

Groves, Richard, ed. *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611/1612) by Thomas Helwys.* Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998.

Haigh, Christopher, ed. *The English Reformation Revised.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Haller, William. *The Rise of Puritanism.* New York: Columbia Press, 1938.

Hanbury, Benjamin. *Ecclesiastical Memorials Relating to the Independents and Congregationalists from their Rise to the Restoration of the Monarchy.* 3 vols. London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1839-1844.

Hill, Christopher. *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714.* New York: Norton Pub., 1966.

_____. *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

_____. *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England.* New York: Schocken Books, 1964.

_____. *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution.* New York: Viking Press, 1972.

Hopkins, Norman. *The Baptists of Smarden and the Weald of Kent 1640-2000.* Canterbury, Kent: Mickle Print Ltd., 1999.

Hudson, Winthrop S. *Baptist Concepts of the Church.* Chicago: Judson Press, 1959.

_____. *John Ponet, Advocate of Limited Monarchy.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942.

Humphreys, Paul M. "John Bunyan's Church." *The Chronicle* 9 (April 1946): 57-65.

Hunt, William, *The Puritan Movement: The Coming of Revolution in an English County.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Ivimey, Joseph. *A Brief History of the Dissenters.* London: Wightman and Cramp, 1827.

_____. *A History of the English Baptists.* London: n.p. Vol. 1,1811. Vol 2, 1814.

Jewson, C. B.. *Stalham Baptist Church, 1653-1953.* n,p,, 1953.

Jones, R. Tudor. *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962.* London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1962.

Knappen, M. M., ed. *Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward. Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries.* Chicago: The American Soc. of Church History, 1933.

_____.*Tudor Puritanism.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939.

Knox, R. Buick,ed. *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent. Essays in honour of Geoffry Nuttall.* London: Epworth Press, 1977.

Latimer, John. *The Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century.* Bristol: Wm George's Sons, 1900.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity.* New York: Harper Bros., 1953.

Lee, Jason K. *The Theology of John Smyth.* Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2003.

Littell, Franklin H. *The Anabaptist View of the Church.* Boston: Starr King Press, 1958.

Lopez, David. *Separatist Christianity: Spirit and Matter in the Early Church Fathers.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Lumpkin, William L. *Baptist Confessions of Faith.* Chicago: Judson Press, 1959.

Lynch, James R. "English Baptist Church Discipline to 1740." *Foundations* 18 (April-June 1975): 121-135.

Marsden, J. B. *History of the Early English Puritans: From the Reformation to the Opening of the Civil War in 1642.* 2nd edn. London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1853.

Martin, J. W. "English Protestant Separation at its Beginnings: Henry Hart and the Free-Will Men." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 2 (Oct. 1976): 55-74.

McBeth, Leon. "Baptist Beginnings." *Baptist History and Heritage* 15 (Oct. 1980): 36-41, 65.

More, Ellen S. "Congregationalism and the Social Order: John Goodwin's Gathered Church, 1640-60." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (April 1987): 210-235.

Neal, Daniel. *The History of the Puritans or Protestant Non-Conformists from the Reformation in 1517 to the Revolution in 1688.* 3 Volumes. Boston: Ewer Pub. Pub., 1754. Repr. Harper & Brothers, 1858.

Nuttall, Geoffrey F. "Dissenting Churches in Kent before 1700." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (Oct. 1963): 175-189.

_____. *Visible Saints 1640-60.* Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1957.

Palliser, D. M. "Popular Reactions to the Reformation." In *The English Reformation Revised.* ed. Christopher Haigh. 94-113. Cambridge: University Press, 1987.

Paul, Robert S. "Henry Jacob and Seventeenth Century Puritanism." *The Hartford Quarterly* 7 (Spring, 1967): 9I2-113.

Paule, Sir George. *Life of Whitgift, Abp. of Canterbury in the times of Queen Elizabeth and King James I.* London: 1699.

Payne, Ernest A. *The Baptists and 1662.* London: Kingsgate Press, 1962.

_____. *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England.* S.C.M. Press, 1951.

Pearce, William. *The Marprelate Tracts 1588-1589.* London: J. Clarke & Co., 1911.

Peel, Albert. *The First Congregational Churches. New Light on Separatist Congregationsin London 1567-81.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1920.

Porter, Henry C. *Puritanism in Tudor England.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970.

Powicke, Fredrick J. *Henry Barrow, Separatist and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam, 1593-1622.* London: James Clarke & Co., 1900.

_____. *Robert Browne, Pioneer of Modern Congregationalism.* London: Congregational Union of Eng. And Wales, Inc., 1910.

Punchard, George. *History of Congregationalism.* Salem: John P. Jewett, 1841.

Robinson, H. Wheeler. *The Life and Faith of the Baptists.* London: Kingsgate Press, 1946.

Seaver, Paul S. *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560-1662.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970.

Shakespeare, John. *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers.* London: Kingsgate Press,1906.

Tolmie, Murray. *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1977.

Torbet, Robert G. *Baptist Ministry Then and Now.* Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1953.

_____. *The Baptist Story.* Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1957.

_____. *Ecumenism . . . The Free Church Dilemma.* Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1968.

_____. *A History of the Baptists.* Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1950.

Toulmin, Joshua. *An Historical View of the State of the Protestant Dissenters in England, and of the Progress of Free Enquiry and Religious Liberty from the Revolution to the Accession of Queen Anne.* London: Longman, Hurst, Reese Orme and Browne, 1814.

Trinterud, Leonard J. "The Origins of Puritanism." *Church History* 20 (1951): 37-57.

Underhill, Edward B. *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661.* London: Hanserd Knollys Soc., 1846. Reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1966.

Vedder, Henry C. *A Short History of the Baptists.* Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Soc., 1907.

von Rohr, John. "The Congregationalism of Henry Jacob." *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 19 (1962): 107-17.

Wagner, John, ed. *Historical Dictionary of the Elizabethan World.* Phoenix, Az.: Oryx Press,1999.

Walker, R. B. "The Growth of Puritanism in the County of Lincoln in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I." *Journal of Religious History* I (June, 1961): 148-159.

Walker, Williston. *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism.* N. Y.: Scribner, 1893.

_____. *A History of the Christian Church.* 4h edn. New York: Scribner,1985.

Walton, Robert C. *The Gathered Community.* London: The Carey Press, 1946.

Watkins, Owen C. *The Puritan Experience. Studies in Spiritual Autobiography.* New York: Schocken Books, 1972,

Watts, Michael R. *The Dissenters.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

White, Barrington R. *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century.* London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983.

_____. *The English Puritan Tradition.* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980.

_____.*The English Separatist Tradition.* London: Oxford U. Press, 1971.

_____. "Henry Jessey in the Great Rebellion." In *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent.* ed. R. Buick Knox. 132-153. London: Epworth Press, 1977.

Wilson, Walter. *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark, etc.* London: 1808-1814.

Yarbrough, Slayden. "The Ecclesiastical Development in Theory and Practice of John Robinson and Henry Jacob." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 5 (1978): 183-97.

_____. "The English Separatist Influence on the Baptist Tradition of Church-State Issues." *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (July l1985): 14-24.

_____. *Henry Jacob, A Moderate Separatist and His Influence on Early English Congregationalism.* Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1972.

Young, Alexander. *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth from 1602-1625.* Boston: Charles Little and James Brown, 1841.