

ABSTRACT

One Christian's Plea: The Life, Ministry, and Controversies of Francis Johnson

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Francis Johnson (1562-1618) served as pastor of the English Separatist congregation that became known as the "Ancient Church" from 1592 until his death in 1618. The congregation was first gathered in London under the guidance of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood before its members fled to Amsterdam in 1593 under Johnson's leadership to escape persecution by English civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Johnson joined his flock in 1597 after being released from prison. His ministry was filled with strife and conflict as he sought to implement the Separatist ecclesiological ideal of a congregational polity. Despite the turbulence of his early years in Amsterdam, Johnson's Ancient Church finally enjoyed a period of relative peace and growth from 1604-1608. Johnson caused a split within his own congregation in 1610. This fissure was created by his determination to pursue a more congregational rather than presbyterian polity in response to external conflicts with his former Cambridge pupil, John Smyth. After a self-imposed period of exile from 1613-1617 at Emden, East Friesland, Johnson returned to Amsterdam in 1617 to publish his final polemical work. He died at Amsterdam in 1618.

In this research project, the author explored the evolving theological views, career, social context, polemical exchanges, controversies, and writings of Francis Johnson with two primary objectives. The first of these objectives was to analyze the course of Francis Johnson's ecclesiological views as he transitioned from an early presbyterian position to congregationalism and back to presbyterianism before he finally came to moderate his original hard-line Separatism. The second major objective of this project was to assess Johnson's contributions to the religious and social context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Even though Johnson held such an important place in the development of English Separatism and Nonconformity, there has not been a major study of his ministry. Assessments of Johnson's career have been scattered throughout various general studies of English Separatism that have contributed much to our knowledge of Francis Johnson, but have not focused primarily on him. The purpose of this research project is to fill that unfortunate lacuna with a comprehensive treatment of Johnson's life, influence and theology.

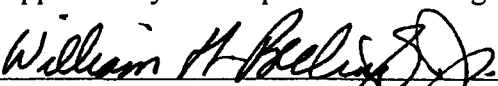
One Christian's Plea: The Life, Ministry, and Controversies of Francis Johnson

by

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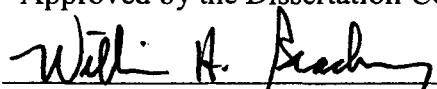
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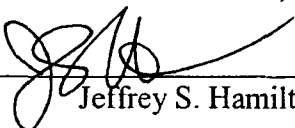

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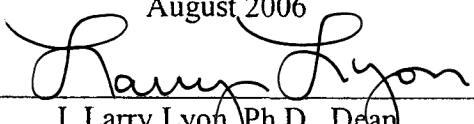
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter	
1. Johnson's Early Life and Cambridge Career	1
Introduction	
The Method, Matter, and Manner of This Research Project	
Why Francis Johnson?	
The Writings of Francis Johnson	
Matters of Historiography	
Francis Johnson, John Smyth, and the Problem of Baptist Origins	
Birth and Childhood	
Francis Johnson's Early Years At Cambridge	
Francis Johnson: Cambridge Puritan Radical	
2. Francis Johnson: London Separatist Pastor	68
Introduction	
Francis Johnson at Middleburg: Coercion and Conversion	
The London Congregation: A Purposeful People	
The London Congregation: A Peculiar People	
The London Congregation: A Persecuted People	
The Organization of Persecution	
William Cecil's déjà vu Experience	
Voyage To Freedom and Disaster	
3. My Brother's Keeper?: Family Strife and Dissent Within the Ranks	119
Introduction	
Escape and Reunion	
A True Confession	
Enter Henry Ainsworth	
The Ancient Church and Franciscus Junius In Dialogue	
An Alluring Wife, An Indignant Brother, and A Fashionable Hat	
Daniel Studley: Scandalous Elder	
Brother Against Brother	

4. The Spirit of Geneva and the Purity of the Church: Francis Johnson and the Reformed Tradition	170
Introduction	
Maister Francis Iohnson and Maister Henry Iacob	
Courting Royal Favor at Hampton Court	
An Arrow For the Separatists	
5. Against Two Errors: Baptists, Anabaptists, and John Smyth	214
Introduction	
Teacher and Student: Francis Johnson and John Smyth's Cambridge Years	
John Smyth's Curious Theological Formation	
Dissension and Deviation: John Smyth and the Ancient Church	
Baptism and the Kingdom of God	
Francis Johnson, English Separatism, and the Baptist Tradition	
John Smyth: Anabaptist, Arminian, or Baptist?	
6. One Christian's Plea	259
Introduction	
Tell The Church	
Exit Henry Ainsworth	
Judgment Day (almost) for Daniel Studley	
Emden Interlude	
A Christian Plea	
A Life and a Legacy	
7. Conclusion	302
Bibliography	308

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CHAPTER ONE

Johnson's Early Life and Cambridge Career

1. Introduction

Two sorts of adversaries, the Church still hath among men. The one, of such as be without: the other, of such as arise from within the Church it self. Both heaue enemies: but the latter, far the more grievous, many wayes. By both of them haue we (as others before vs) ben exercised, a long time, and in straunge maner. Yet in and against them all, hath the Lord by his power and of his mercy hitherto preserved vs, and I trust will so do vnto the end.¹

The quotation above, taken from the writings of Francis Johnson, provides an apt description of the perennial problem that shaped the contours of his pastoral ministry, polemical writings, and personal theological reflection. Francis Johnson (1562-1618) was conscious of those “adversaries” who dwelt outside the church, yet it was those potential enemies within who might seek to pervert the church who most attracted his attention. Like most English Separatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Francis Johnson had come to believe that the Established Church of England was a thoroughly corrupt compromise between the pure doctrine and practice of the Protestant Reformers, defined by Johnson as the Reformed tradition, and the idolatrous practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Questions of ecclesiology were not mere matters of opinion for Johnson and his ilk, but rather matters of eternal importance. The proper organization of Christ's church had been properly set forth by Jesus Christ Himself to His Apostles. Faithful adherence to that pattern of church order and discipline set forth by Christ, in

¹Francis Johnson, *An inquirie and ansvver of Thomas VVhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme*, (Amsterdam, 1606).

Johnson's opinion, was essential to the church's mission of bringing the message of salvation to the elect. Much of Johnson's career was spent on a quest to define the proper boundaries of the rightly ordered community of faith and bring that community into existence. Over the course of his life, Johnson's opinions regarding the shape of the ideal Christian community changed, but his zeal to bring that community into existence never waned. Toward the end of his life, a more generous Johnson defined the community of faith in broader terms than he had defined it previously and extended the boundaries of that community to incorporate a larger body of Christians.

2. The Method, Matter, and Manner of This Research Project

The purpose of this research project is to present a detailed analysis of the life, theology, context, and controversies of Francis Johnson, pastor of the English Separatist "Ancient Church" from 1592 until his death in 1618. Johnson's life and ministry are significant and warrant investigation for many reasons that are described in more detail below. The author of the current study proposes to provide a narrative account of Johnson's life in the context of the theological and social currents of his time as well as provide an analysis of the major historical and theological interpretive problems that attended Johnson's eventful life and controversial ministry. A final objective will be to analyze his influence on other important theological and ecclesiological movements tangentially related to his Ancient Church and its ministry that outlived and overshadowed the Ancient Church in the annals of ecclesiastical history.

Francis Johnson journeyed from a comfortable existence as a Cambridge Fellow and Tutor to a more meager existence as the leader of an outlaw religious movement in the years between 1588/89 and 1592. Convinced of the truth of his cause and the

importance of rightly ordering the body of believers, Johnson and his fellow Separatists stubbornly refused to compromise their convictions and paid the price with the loss of their liberty. Johnson himself spent four years in prison before he was able to rejoin his church in the Dutch Republic in 1597. In the Dutch Republic (present-day Netherlands), Johnson and his congregation found refuge in the cosmopolitan city of Amsterdam. After weathering a series of severe controversies within his church, the most painful of them involving the excommunication of his father and brother, Johnson's church began to thrive in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

The Ancient Church was still thriving in 1607/08 when it was joined by the Gainsborough and Scrooby Separatist churches of John Smyth and John Robinson. These two congregations contained among their number the founders of the General Baptists and the Congregationalist Separatists who journeyed to North America in 1620-21 to form the Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts. It is probable that at least once if not several times in the short time the two congregations interacted with one another Johnson could have assumed the pulpit in the presence of John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, John Robinson, William Bradford, and William Brewster. Their communion was short-lived. Smyth separated with his congregation to form the first proto-Baptist congregation while Robinson departed from Amsterdam for Leiden in 1609 because his mild and gentle temperament could not condone the theological disputes that were rife in the Ancient Church.

By 1610, Johnson's insistence on the primacy of church elders in discipline and leadership forced his gifted Teaching Elder, Henry Ainsworth, to split with Johnson. Johnson's remaining congregation lost their meeting house to Ainsworth's faction in a

legal dispute, leading them to relocate to Emden, East Freisland, in 1612. They returned to Amsterdam in 1617, where Johnson published his final treatise, *A Christian Plea*. *A Christian Plea* represented Johnson's mature thought, shaped by many years of ministry experience, polemical exchange, and painful controversy. Johnson acknowledged in his final treatise that both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church were valid Christian churches based on their adherence to the proper mode of baptism and reception of the ancient truths of the gospel, but still argued that both were Christian churches so tainted by sin and compromise that their effectiveness was minimal. Though these arguments were hardly cause for gratitude on the part of either Anglicans or Roman Catholics, they were a far cry from the radical separatism Johnson embraced most of his life in which he denied even the possibility that the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church could serve as conduits of salvation. He never extended this generosity to the Anabaptist and Baptist movements to his left. Johnson died in January 1617/18 in Amsterdam and was buried in the city. The members of his congregation eventually either left Amsterdam or were absorbed into the English Reformed Church.

Three interpretive theses will govern the course of this study and reoccur in both the narrative and the more analytical portions of the text. All three involve the changing shape of Johnson's ecclesiological and theological convictions. First among these is the importance of Francis Johnson as the foremost practical practitioner of the ideals of the English Separatists. He lived in practice what was only theory to his predecessors. How did his actual experience of Separatist congregational polity influence his course? The author of the present study will argue that Johnson emphasized the role of eldership over congregational rule in his later ministry as the result of his belief that the rule of the

congregation had failed to provide the necessary stability and candor to deal with the internal controversies of the Ancient Church.

Secondly, Johnson's resistance to cooperation with other Christian groups, even other Reformed Churches, continually led to further division, disagreement, and misunderstanding. The Separatist paradigm adopted by Johnson in his earlier years provided no effective means of uniting the Separatist enclaves with the larger Christian communion. While Johnson came to embrace a presbyterian style of church government within the local church for both theological and practical reasons, he was utterly opposed to any sort of attachment to other churches and strictly congregational in his opposition to any type of synod or governing authority to oversee the local church. Johnson's opposition to such denominational structures was probably partially due to his own need to maintain a tight rein on the leadership of his own church but also a function of his high view of the nature of the local covenanted community as constituted by God through Jesus Christ. This position, one Johnson held at least until 1611, led to the sad loss of spiritual resources that could have been gained by exchanges with other Christian churches and traditions.

The final interpretive link in the chain that connects this research project is related to the final stage of Francis Johnson's ecclesiology or doctrine of the church. Johnson did broaden his ecclesiology by 1617 in the manner described above to include the Church of England and Roman Catholics alongside the Reformed tradition as genuine Christian communions, though communions with glaring imperfections. The author of this project will argue that the primary impetus for both Johnson's change of heart in regard to the boundaries of Christian communion and his determination to strengthen the

eldership of his church was his apprehension that the radical Separatism he espoused would inevitably lead to Anabaptism and Arminianism if not tempered by a strong connection to the Reformed tradition and the larger Apostolic tradition of Christianity. The experiences of losing members of his congregation to the Anabaptist elements in Amsterdam were enough to provoke such concerns on Johnson's part. The defection of John Smyth, his former Cambridge pupil, in 1608/09 to proto-Baptist and then Anabaptist theology provoked a severe crisis of trust for Johnson. Smyth's decision to embrace the more general views of the Mennonites and the Dutch Remonstrants in terms of election and atonement awakened Johnson to the more serious threat posed by Anabaptist and Dutch Arminian theology. His final ecclesiological position was reached as much in reaction to his perception that a larger threat loomed on the horizon as it was by the mellowing influences of age and experience.

Having related the broad narrative of Johnson's life and indicated the theses that will govern this analysis of it, the author will now turn to the question of whether it is even valid to expend time and energy delving into this topic and then discuss the most important primary and secondary sources that pertain to this study. As part of the wider historiographical discussion, the problem of Baptist origins and Francis Johnson's contribution to the Baptists will be given special treatment. The issue of Baptist origins is the area that has generated most of the attention directed to Johnson in recent years and also raised the most concern regarding the use of the English Separatists, both responsibly and irresponsibly, to give historical validity to various Baptist factions attempting to establish themselves as the true expression of the Baptist tradition. Then the events of Johnson's early life and career as a student and Fellow at Cambridge

University will be explored. The account of those early years will conclude with Johnson's first brush with the law and his departure from Cambridge.

2. *Why Francis Johnson?*

Why another study of English Separatism? To both the modern and postmodern minds, the ecclesiological concerns of the English Separatists seem pedantic at best and grossly intolerant at worst. An intense theological discussion of the proper attire for worship or the propriety of using "read prayers" for worship is not likely to be first on the agenda of prominent theological concerns today. Yet these theological and ecclesiological debates shaped the circumstances that gave birth to dissenting movements in England and Holland which eventually also shaped the contours of religion in Colonial America. Almost four hundred years later, their spiritual descendents continue to negotiate the acceptable boundaries of cooperation between adherents of various Christian polities and theologies.

The English Separatist story needs to be investigated continually or reinterpreted because their story serves as precursor to that of Christian traditions as diverse as the Congregationalists, the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists, and some of the English Dissenters who were prominent leaders during the English Revolution and Civil Wars. To understand their story is to understand the issues and circumstances that produced these other movements which have become so important to the continuing Christian movement in Great Britain and North America. However, a word of caution is in order at this point. While it is important to note the influence of Johnson on these other movements, such an assessment only rightly comes at the end rather than as a presuppositional beginning to a study of Johnson. Examples will abound throughout this

study illustrating how an obsession with the English Separatists as a means to a polemical end can cloud the facts and distort their actual views. While the question of Johnson's historical contribution is vital and one of the primary justifications for this study, allowing the twenty-first century denominational conflicts of any of these groups to dictate our interpretation of Johnson would not do justice to those factions, Johnson himself, or the cause of academic integrity.

The English Separatist story must be retold and reinterpreted for each new generation because Christians continue to grapple with some of the same issues that inflamed and divided the English Separatists. To cite one example, Southern Baptists in the United States are currently debating the desirability of leadership by elders versus a pure democratic/congregational polity.² Many facets of this debate remarkably resemble the cataclysmic exchange between Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth that shattered the unity of the Ancient Church in 1610. Like Ainsworth, many Baptist opponents of the adoption of eldership fear that the power of elders could choke the voice of the congregation when major issues are decided.³ Advocates of the adoption of elders in SBC churches insist, as did Francis Johnson, that elders best serve the church and the pastor by allowing the pastor to be *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and therefore able to draw on a support system that compensates for his personal inadequacies.⁴ The

²The most recent expression of this conflict is the opposition to adopting elder rule by members of the Germantown Baptist Church in Memphis, TN. See Hannah Elliott, "Elder Rule Is Increasing In Baptist Life, and So Is Controversy Over The Role," Associated Baptist Press, May 4, 2006. Ken Camp, "Even Among Elder-Led Churches, the Buck Stops In Different Places," Associated Baptist Press, May 4, 2006. For a polemical piece arguing in favor of the reintroduction of elders into Baptist life, see Phil A. Newton, *Elders In Congregational Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005).

³Hannah Elliott, "Elder Rule," ABP, May 4, 2006.

⁴Newton, *Elders In Congregational Life*, 61.

continuing existence of a plethora of denominations and nondenominational traditions demonstrates that polity and practice are still matters that divide Christians and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. While again emphasizing the caveat that history cannot be used as a proof text to resolve these modern controversies, lessons can be gleaned from the way similar concerns were approached by earlier generations.

The English Separatist quest for ecclesiastical purity is instructive not only for the manner in which these issues were treated both in the heat of debate and in the life of the various Separatist congregations, but also because even a convinced Separatist like Johnson ultimately realized that he could not close himself off from large segments of the Christian population who agreed with him on many matters of theology and the essentials of the Christian faith. An examination of the continuing degenerative effect of a constant attitude of factional exclusivity by the English Separatist churches is an instructive lesson of the danger of radical separatist tendencies within Christianity and particularly in American society in the early twenty-first century. As the threat of international terrorism looms and the quest for inter-religious dialogue becomes not only a potential breath of fresh air but a life and death necessity, the ways these sixteenth and seventeenth century Christians dealt with or failed to deal with the problems of religious conflict with their contemporaries may also prove to be instructive.

Now to an even more difficult question: why Francis Johnson? If English Separatism itself is one of the most controversial of topics, Francis Johnson has been considered one of the most controversial of English Separatists. In a less than shining moment for historical objectivity, Edward Arber, Fellow of King's College in London, wrote:

We then come to this judgment as to Francis Johnson. That by October 1602, he was a dead Christian; that, by then, he was an utter disgrace to our sacred Faith; and that what he afterwards said, preached, or wrote, is not deserving of serious attention, from a spiritual point of view.⁵

Arber's assessment of Johnson was the most scathing assessment of his character in a secondary source, but even those scholars of English Separatism who attempt to portray Johnson in the best light have some unfortunate barriers to overcome. Several troubling issues have discouraged scholars from pursuing studies of Johnson in his own right. The man was a curious mix of the noble and ignoble. While he could write detailed and exhilarating descriptions of the grace of God manifested through His gift of the properly ordered congregation, Johnson was not above manipulating the guiding machinery of that blessed gift for his own purposes. He was tenacious in defending the truth once he was convinced of the truth. The accuracy of the above statement will be borne out in great detail by the end of this first chapter when the author recounts Johnson's defiance of every authority at Cambridge in resistance to their demand that he take a simple oath. Examples of his inspired tenacity, some might say his stubbornness, abound throughout the pages of this research project.

Francis Johnson could be unfailingly loyal in the realm of ideas and ideals, yet he was also prone to turn against the people closest to him if his relationship with them was disrupted by their refusal to follow his interpretations of scripture or the best interest of his intimate circle. In the most infamous public act of his ministry, Francis Johnson excommunicated his brother, George, from the fellowship of his congregation and then allowed his congregation to inflict the same sentence on his father when the elder Johnson refused to cease communicating with his younger son. The course of Francis

⁵Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers 1606-1623 A. D.*, (London: Ward and Downey Lmtd., 1897), 112.

Johnson's life left in his wake a number of broken relationships that once represented his closest friends. Johnson's acerbic break with Henry Ainsworth, for twelve years his friend and Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church, has already been cited. Johnson also entered into conflict with John Smyth, another friend and former student under his tutelage at Cambridge University. Their conflict became bitter after Smyth left the Ancient Church and formed the first proto-Baptist congregation in 1609/10. With the exception of his wife, Thomasine Johnson, and the irascible Elder Daniel Studley, no one within Johnson's sphere of influence could be sure of the security of their position once they set themselves in opposition to Johnson's conception of the proper order and arrangement of the congregation. Johnson presents an odious picture to many potential students of his life because he does not allow the idyllic hagiographical picture of a Christian saint, but rather that of a minister who often valued his ideals more than his friends and his personal prerogatives over the voice of his congregation.

A further difficulty is presented to the scholar who dares enter the study of Johnson's life. Johnson is not the direct exponent of any one Christian tradition and in fact is difficult to classify in terms of his views on church polity, making even his tenuous distinction as one of the founding lights of Congregationalism slightly problematic. Champions of pure congregational polity might be shocked to find on closer examination of Johnson's thought that he embraced a more presbyterian polity as his ideal conception of the leadership structure of the local congregation towards the end of his life. As indicated above, Johnson's ecclesiological transformation and demands for a strong eldership in 1609/10 was the wedge that eventually divided a congregation that had enjoyed a settled and prosperous existence from 1603-1609. He was very

congregational in terms of his rejection of all governing structures above the local church, to the extent that he refused to confer even with like-minded Reformed churches or allow them to arbitrate any of the disputes that arose within his congregation.⁶ Of the three religious movements most often associated with Johnson, only Congregationalism can trace its beginnings back to a direct positive influence by Johnson. John Smyth's early proto-Baptist movement was defined primarily in opposition to the Reformed theology of Johnson. Johnson's primary positive contribution to the early Baptist story was convincing Smyth through his teaching and example to break with the Church of England. Once Smyth had accepted Separatism, he concluded that Johnson had not gone far enough and defined his new movement negatively in opposition to the Ancient Church.⁷ Therefore, Johnson's connections with the origins of the General Baptists are more tangential and less heroic than the hagiographers require. The Particular Baptists adopted Francis Johnson as one of their early influences through his *Trve Confession* and his influence on Henry Jacob, a Congregational Independent who founded a church at Southwark in 1616 that served as the parent church for the first Particular Baptists.⁸ Several interpreters, such as Fuller Seminary ethicist Glenn Stassen, locate the locus of

⁶George Johnson, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam, 1603).

⁷Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003).

⁸For a popular treatment of this thesis see David Gay, *Battle for the Church, 1517-1644*, (Castro Valley, CA: Brachus, 1997), 390-93.

Johnson's influence in the adoption of the Ancient Church's 1596 Confession of Faith as a model for the Particular Baptists.⁹

So again the question bears asking: why Francis Johnson? Despite the complexities of his character and the inherent difficulty of tracing his contributions, it is this author's conviction that a detailed study of Francis Johnson's life and thought is not only feasible and defensible, but long overdue. Prominent among the reasons for devoting the time and attention to study Johnson is the fact that this man stood in the midst of several developing Christian ideologies like a spoke in a wheel and exerted both positive and negative influences on them all. As expressed above, Francis Johnson's story is important because it is an integral link between so many other important historical narratives and religious traditions of his time. Secondly, Francis Johnson is the consummate example of English Separatism incarnated in actual practice. Barrington R. White, Emeritus Principal of Regents Park College at Oxford University, expressed this sentiment better than any other author could hope to express it in his study of the *English Separatist Tradition*. White wrote:

Nevertheless, the importance of the part played by Francis Johnson must not be overlooked. Just because he led his congregation for a quarter of a century and so endured the impact of tensions and temptations which for Browne, and even more for Barrow, were largely theoretical, his story is worth telling. In his own experience Johnson first felt the force of some of the conflicts which were to mark the experience of the Baptist and Independents who followed him. In fact, his career gains much of its interest from his having to face three of the major questions, unresolved to this day, which beset the 'gathered Church': those concerning the right exercise of discipline, the true nature of its baptism, and the authority of its ministry. It must also be remembered that it was partly his influence

⁹Glen Stassen, "Opening Menno Simon's *Foundation-Book* And Finding the Father of Baptist Origins Alongside the Mother-Calvinist Congregationalism," *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Spring 1998).

which moved such men as John Smyth, John Robinson, and Henry Jacob towards a Separatist position.¹⁰

Francis Johnson's continuing Separatist ministry served as a "laboratory" for testing the principles of Separatism in practical life and ministry.

A third reason Johnson's life bears scrutiny and analysis arises from the curiosity of the student of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Francis Johnson was every bit a man of his times. He was a devoted Cambridge scholar and tutor whose duties were cut short by his endorsement of the radical opinions sweeping Cambridge in the 1570's and 80's. His theological and intellectual commitments, his attitudes, his prejudices, and his hopes for the future were all indicative of the Tudor mind and the complex terrain of Tudor religion left in the wake of Henry VIII's usurpation of papal prerogatives and Elizabeth I's propensity for pragmatic compromise. The English Separatism he practiced and Congregational Independency he influenced laid the foundation for Stuart religion during the seventeenth-century, particularly during the period of the English Revolution and Civil Wars.

Fourthly and finally, Francis Johnson's life and character were not wholly devoid of the stuff that creates heroic legends. He courageously faced imprisonment and the threat of death many times for his views. He embraced exile rather than submission and fought for twenty years to shepherd his flock in a strange land. Even though the price his devotion to his ideals exacted on those close to him has been evidenced, Johnson's faithful pursuit of the will of God as he interpreted it, however marred by moments of compromise, refutes in this author's mind any cynical assertion that Francis Johnson was

¹⁰B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 91.

only concerned with his personal power. It was indeed the case that he could be quite autocratic, but the basis for his conviction that he should exercise authority was Johnson's fervent conviction that God had elected and called him for the purpose of protecting and preserving the true form of the church in a fallen world. It would be instructive and possibly disturbing to speculate whether contemporary disgust with the English Separatists' preoccupation with ecclesiology says more about their excesses or the relative apathy toward matters of ecclesiology or the importance of the church itself that often characterizes both the academic subculture and popular culture in the twenty-first century Western world. In short, Francis Johnson was not without his vices, but also not without his virtues, thus reinforcing the value of his life as an object of both academic and inspirational study.

4. *The Writings of Francis Johnson*

An attempt to describe all of the primary sources that will be utilized for this study in detail at the outset would be tedious and untenable. All of the English Separatist leaders wrote a variety of treatises in dialogue with Johnson at one point or another. Each of these treatises will be described in turn as they relate to Johnson. For now, Johnson's own writings will be described as the most important primary source materials for his life and thought.

Johnson's first full length work that survived was his first salvo against the Established Church. *A treatise of the ministry of the Church of England Wherein is handled this question, whether it be to be separated from, or joyned vnto* was published

in 1595 while Johnson was in prison.¹¹ Though it would not seem that an explicit written list of grievances and arguments against the establishment would be the best way to secure one's freedom, Johnson hoped by the force of his argument to win the Queen and country to his cause. Winning the favor of the authorities was actually the secondary cause of his decision to write *A Treatise*. The immediate cause was a request by a Mrs. "N", another Separatist prisoner, for Johnson to offer a scholarly reply to a letter she had received from Arthur Hildersham, an Anglican minister, crafted to persuade Mrs. "N" to renounce her separation. Johnson's reply to Hildersham attracted the attention of many Puritans who desired to confer with Johnson on his Separatist views.

One of these Puritan visitors was Henry Jacob, who held a conversation with Johnson in his cell at the infamous London Clink in 1596.¹² Jacob was troubled by Johnson's argument for separation and wrote a treatise entitled *A Defense of the Churches and Ministry of England* in 1599.¹³ Jacob was pastor at Middleburgh when he published this treatise, the successor twice removed to Johnson himself. Johnson responded to Jacob's work with *An answer to Maister H. Iacob his defence of the churches and minstery of England* in 1600.¹⁴ Their debate and its possible influence on both men will be the subject of chapter four.

¹¹The copy of the treatise used in this study is housed at the Harvard University Houghton Library, STC 14663.5. Houghton Francis Johnson, *A treatise of the ministry of the Church of England Wherein is handled this question, whether it be to be separated from, or joyned vnto. Which is discussed in two letters, the one written for it, the other against it*, (London or the Low Countries? 1595).

¹²See Francis Johnson, *An answer to Maister H. Iacob his defence of the churches and minstery of England. By Francis Iohnson an exile of Iesus Christ*, (Amsterdam, 1600). The manuscript copy used in this work is housed in the British Library, 4103.b.37.

¹³Henry Jacob, *A Defense of the Churches and Ministry of England*, (Middleburgh: 1599).

¹⁴Francis Johnson, *An answer to Maister H. Iacob his defence of the churches and minstery of England. By Francis Iohnson an exile of Iesus Christ*, (Amsterdam, 1600).

Johnson was probably the author of the Ancient Church's *Trve Confession* of 1596. This confession later appeared in a work coauthored by Johnson and Henry Ainsworth in 1604 entitled *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvnists against such imputations as are layd vpon them by the heads and doctors of the Vniversity of Oxford, in their Ansvver to the humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certayne ceremonies and abuses of the Church*.¹⁵ This document was intended for the eyes of King James I. It represented the Separatist's supplication for clemency and permission to return from exile, delivered by the two authors to the Hampton Court Conference in 1603/04. It is unknown whether James actually saw the document or heard it read.

During the more settled years of the Ancient Church from 1603-1609, Johnson produced other works critical of the Church of England and responded in print to various criticisms of the Ancient Church. *Certayne reasons and arguments proving that it is not lawfull to heare or have any spirituall communion with the present ministerie of the Church of England* was written in 1608 as a further exposition of Johnson's views on the ministry of the English Church expressed in seven syllogistic statements.¹⁶ It largely contained a repetition of views expressed in his earlier writings. *An Inquirie and Ansvver of Thomas VWhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme* (1606) and *An advertisement concerning*

¹⁵Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth, *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvnists against such imputations as are layd vpon them by the heads and doctors of the Vniversity of Oxford, in their Ansvver to the humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certayne ceremonies and abuses of the Church*, (Amsterdam, 1604). The manuscript copy used in this work is housed at Cambridge University Library, Reading Room, 9900. b. 272.

¹⁶The manuscript copy used in this work is housed at the British Library, 4135.b.44. Francis Johnson, *Certayne reasons and arguments proving that it is not lawfull to heare or have any spirituall communion with the present ministerie of the Church of England*, (Amsterdam, 1608).

a book lately published by Christopher Lawne and others, against the English exiled Church at Amsterdam (1612), which was coauthored by Francis Johnson and Richard Clifton, were both responses to adversaries of the Ancient Church.¹⁷

Three polemical works rounded out the corpus of Johnson's published works. *A brief treatise containing some grounds and reasons against two errors of the Anabaptists* (1609) was addressed to John Smyth and served as a response to Smyth's Anabaptist leanings.¹⁸ *A short treatise concerning the exposition of those words of Christ, Tell the Church, &c. Mat. 18. 17* was written after the departure of Ainsworth's faction as a polemic in favor of the primacy of elder rule in the church.¹⁹ As noted above, *A Christian Plea conteyning three treatises. I. The first, touching the Anabaptists, & others mainteyning some like errours with them. II. The second, touching such Christians, as now are here, commonly called Remonstrants or Arminians. III. The third, touching the Reformed Churches, with vvhom my self agree in the faith of the Gospel of our Lord Iesus Christ* reflected the broader ecclesiology embraced by Johnson toward the end of his life.²⁰ In 1657, a manuscript was printed by one "J. C." for a Thomas Wall. The

¹⁷The manuscript copy used in this work is housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, STC (2nd ed.) / 14662. Francis Johnson, *An Inquirie and Ansvver of Thomas VVhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme*, (Amsterdam, 1606). The manuscript copy used in this work is housed at the British Library, STC 1093.17. Francis Johnson and Richard Clifton, *An advertisement concerning a book lately published by Christopher Lawne and others, against the English exiled Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam, 1612).

¹⁸The manuscript copy used in this work is housed in the British Library, E.1181.(7.) . Francis Johnson, *A brief treatise containing some grounds and reasons against two errors of the Anabaptists*, (Amsterdam, 1645).

¹⁹The manuscript copy used in this work is housed in the British Library, 698.g.41. Francis Johnson, *A short treatise concerning the exposition of those words of Christ, Tell the Church, &c. Mat. 18. 17*, (Amsterdam, 1611).

²⁰The manuscript used in this study is housed at British Library, 707.a.34.(1.). Francis Johnson, *A Christian plea conteyning three treatises. I. The first, touching the Anabaptists, & others mainteyning some like errours with them. II. The second, touching such Christians, as now are here, commonly called Remonstrants or Arminians. III. The third, touching the Reformed Churches, with vvhom my self agree in the faith of the Gospel of our Lord Iesus Christ*, (Amsterdam, 1617).

manuscript was entitled *A seasonable treatise for this age occasioned by a letter written by one Mr. Woolsey prisoner in Norwich, to the then-exiled Church at Amsterdam; in which he endeavours to prove it unlawful to eat blood, things strangled, and things offered to idols, now in the times of the Gospel* and purported to be a letter written by Johnson and the leaders of the Ancient Church that had never before been published.²¹ The subject matter of the letter was thoroughly explained in its title. The topics under consideration seem a strange segway from the usual ecclesiological concerns of the Seapratists. While the author will refer to the document in the course of this study, its late date of publication makes its authenticity suspect, though the style is similar to that employed by Johnson and his fellow Ancient Church leaders. It will be cautiously acknowledged as part of the Johnson corpus for the purposes of this study.

5. *Matters of Historiography*

Having surveyed the major primary source materials that Johnson himself produced, the author will next turn to the most significant secondary sources that have attempted to interpret Johnson and his English Separatist milieu. The earliest assessments of the life and ministry of Francis Johnson emerged in the heat of controversy as Johnson sparred with his various detractors during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The critiques leveled at Johnson by a wide array of opponents will appear with regularity during the course of this research project, especially in the final four chapters. Critics who remained loyal to the Church of England or returned to it from

²¹Francis Johnson, *A seasonable treatise for this age occasioned by a letter written by one Mr. Woolsey prisoner in Norwich, to the then-exiled Church at Amsterdam; in which he endeavours to prove it unlawful to eat blood, things strangled, and things offered to idols, now in the times of the Gospel*, (London, 1657). Manuscript housed at Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Peterborough.K.3.16

Separatism such as Christopher Lawne and Thomas White seized upon every hint of controversy within the Ancient Church in a tireless crusade to invalidate Johnson's ministry.²² George Johnson, Francis' younger brother, aired the congregation's dirty laundry for all to see in his *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam*.²³ *A Discourse* only served to feed the anti-Johnson frenzy of Lawne and White's supporters. In addition, Francis Johnson did not enjoy the best of relationships with the English Reformed Church of Amsterdam. John Paget, the foremost English Reformed leader in Amsterdam, vigorously opposed Francis Johnson and the Ancient Church on the grounds that their Separatist tendencies went too far, even to the exclusion of cooperation with like-minded Reformed believers.²⁴ The names of John Smyth and Henry Ainsworth, both at one time devoted friends and followers of Johnson, can also be added to the number of those persons who joined in the polemical exchanges of the early seventeenth century in Amsterdam, exchanges that left an indelible stain on the historical memory of Francis Johnson.

Kinder assessments of Francis Johnson appeared later in the seventeenth century, primarily due to the efforts of first generation Congregational Separatists at Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts, to articulate their historical and theological heritage for the growing second and third generations. William Bradford, one time governor of the colony and a personal acquaintance of the early Separatist leaders, made one of the most enduring attempts to recount the developing "Pilgrim" historical tradition in his

²²Christopher Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists*, (Amsterdam: 1612).

²³George Johnson, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam: 1603).

²⁴John Paget, *An arrowv against the separation of the Brownists Also an admonition touching Talmudique & rabbinical allegations*, (Amsterdan: George Veseler, 1618).

Dialogues, published in 1647-48.²⁵ The first of these *Dialogues* deals most directly with the early Separatist churches in Amsterdam. Bradford's treatment of Johnson, given the measured influence of time and greater objectivity, is much kinder and more balanced than the assessments of his character that coalesced during the scathing critiques of the early seventeenth-century doctrinal debates.

The author will cite Bradford's *Dialogue* several times during the course of this research project for two reasons. First, Bradford, though very young when he knew them, was drawing on personal experience when he described the character and personality of Francis Johnson, Henry Ainsworth, and John Smyth. He knew them well and was part of their fellowship for a short time before the removal of John Robinson's congregation to Leiden in 1609. Secondly, Bradford was not only a contemporary witness; he was a contemporary witness with no compelling obligation to be kind. One might cynically observe that Bradford needed Johnson to establish a clear chain of descent from the Plymouth Separatists to the heroes of the Marian persecutions. The nature of Johnson's influence on John Smyth and John Robinson's congregations negates the absolute necessity of William Bradford reforming Johnson's character in print to bolster the spiritual heritage of the Plymouth Separatists. While the author will argue later in this project that Smyth, and by extension Robinson as well, were motivated by Johnson's example to break with the Church of England, they had established their own independent churches prior to joining Johnson in Amsterdam. The length of their communion with the Ancient Church has been debated, with the longest estimates being about two years and the shortest a matter of months. The actual length of Robinson's

²⁵William Bradford, "Dialogue," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Vol. 22, Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859*, (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 138-142.

stay at Amsterdam was probably six months to a year before his removal to Leiden.²⁶

Bradford did not need Johnson to validate the authenticity of the Separatist movement under Robinson; it would have been convenient to omit controversial figures such as Johnson and Ainsworth from the Plymouth typology and then be left only with the embarrassing defection of John Smyth. Bradford's refusal to do so and his magnanimous treatment of Francis Johnson revealed Bradford's acknowledgment of a theological debt to Johnson by the Separatists at Plymouth.

Johnson not only benefited from the generosity of Robinson's American progeny at the well spring of their development, but also centuries later as they again were attempting to restate and reinterpret their history for new generations. This time they were also using new methodologies and resources to accomplish that goal. By the end of the nineteenth century, New England Separatists had become Congregationalists and were the dominant denominational manifestation in New England. At the same time, the new German approach to historical studies inspired by the work of Leopold van Ranke (1795-1886), a professor at the University of Berlin, had begun to influence American historians. Ranke's approach emphasized the use of primary source research in archives, study of original source documents, and historical writings to reconstruct the past.²⁷

It was only a matter of time before denominational historians utilized these tools to study their own heritage. Henry Martyn Dexter (1821-1890), Congregationalist minister and denominational newspaper editor, applied modern historical methodology to

²⁶Timothy George, *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982), 86-88.

²⁷George G. Iggers, *Historiography In The Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 23-30.

his study of early Congregationalism when he presented a series of lectures on the subject at Andover Theological Seminary from 1877-79.²⁸ Dexter was probably the first person to devote comprehensive attention to the Separatist writings in decades if not a century. His investigation of neglected Separatist treatises enabled him to construct a chronological and theological narrative of early Separatism that still serves scholars well.

Dexter was aided in his work by the publication of source documents relating to Separatism from special collections at the British Museum and Library as well as published collections of Tudor government documents. Foremost among these was the multivolume collection of Elizabethan documents published by John Strype entitled *Annals of the Reformation And Establishment of Religion And Other Various Occurrences In The Church of England During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: Together With An Appendix Of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters*.²⁹ Strype's work was especially helpful in reconstructing the story of Johnson's controversy with the Cambridge Heads. He reprinted several documents pertinent to the case which had not previously been extant in published form. These documents included a description of Francis Johnson's sermon at St. Mary's that initiated the controversy, the petition sent to Lord Burghley³⁰ by a number of Cambridge students and fellows to support Johnson's

²⁸Henry Martyn Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, As Seen In Its Literature: With Special Reference to Certain Recondite, Neglected, or Disputed Passages*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1880), title page, v-xvii.

²⁹John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation And Establishment of Religion And Other Various Occurrences In The Church of England During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: Together With An Appendix Of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters*. Vol. III, Pt. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824).

³⁰William Cecil (1520-1598) was Secretary of State and Lord Higher Treasurer (from 1572 to 1598). He was also given the title Lord Burghley by Queen Elizabeth in 1571. Burghley's path often crossed Johnson's in his roles as Chancellor of Cambridge University and Lord High Treasurer. See B. W. Beckingsale, *Burghley: Tudor Stateman: 1520-1598*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

defense, and exchanges between the heads and Burghley regarding the case.³¹ The author of the present research project found Strype's reproduction of Johnson's sermon description most helpful and unique among the published sources for Cambridge Puritanism.

Dexter's interpretation of Johnson was not the only appraisal of his life in the late nineteenth century. Edward Arber, Fellow of King's College in London, published The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers 1606-1623 in 1897.³² While Arber's primary goal was to treat the Robinson group, he devoted some attention in his study to the other Separatist groups as a necessary antecedent to his study of the Robinson congregation. One of his more acerbic assessments of Johnson's ministry and character was quoted earlier in this chapter. Arber derived his view of Johnson wholesale from George Johnson, Christopher Lawne, and Thomas White. Ironically, Arber's work bears evidence of little academic detachment and is sprinkled with more devotional references and arbitrary spiritual judgments than any section of Dexter's work. This comparison is ironic because it was Dexter who was the preacher while Arber was supposedly the scholar. Arber seized on every possible opportunity to emphasize the terrible things that Johnson had done and often quotes uncritically from the writings of the three men mentioned above. Some of his distortions of the historical data will be addressed throughout the course of this study.

The most glaring of these distortions was Arber's contention that Johnson had made a "death-bed recantation" of his commitment to Separatism and Reformed Theology. The phrase, "death-bed recantation," was printed in bold as part of a subtitle

³¹Strype, *Annals*, 610-625.

³²Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers 1606-1623*, (London: Ward and Downey Limited, 1897), 101-130.

lest anyone miss it. Arber's evidence for this "death-bed recantation" was derived from a letter written by Matthew Slade to Sir Dudley Carlton, Royal Ambassador to the Dutch Estates General, in January 1617/18 in which Slade communicated the death and burial of Johnson. Slade referred to a book published shortly before his death in which Johnson repudiated his former "singularities" and included a refutation of the "Five Articles."³³

Arber wrote in a footnote:

This book was probably published in the previous December, and therefore would bear the date 1617. It is certainly not *A Christian Plea* & c., which Johnson published in that year. Even the Title of this Recantation is not known, so utterly has the book perished. – E.A.³⁴

Arber's conclusion struggled under the weight of two problems, one technical and one logical. The technical problem is that the manuscript that Slade described resembled the text of *A Christian Plea* in every respect. Johnson did modify his Separatism in *A Christian Plea* to the degree that he accepted people in communion with the Church of England and the Roman Catholic as fellow Christians, though he continued to assert that their churches were corrupt and should be adapted to the Separatist polity to faithfully discharge the service of God.³⁵ Slade agreed with this view and had enjoyed reconciliation with Johnson shortly before Johnson's death. Arber assumed that Slade's allusion to the five articles meant the Articles of the Synod of Dort and that Johnson was refuting them.³⁶ *A Christian Plea* contained quotations of the Remonstrant Articles of

³³Arber, 129-30.

³⁴Arber, 129.

³⁵Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, (Amsterdam, 1617).

³⁶Arber, 129.

1610, and Johnson did attack them.³⁷ However, the Synod of Dort did not meet until November 1618, eleven months after Johnson's death.³⁸ Hence the technical fallacy of Arber's argument, the document in question probably was *A Christian Plea* and Arber exaggerated Slade's account of the extent of Johnson's reversal of his former positions. Arber even went so far as to say that Johnson expressed the sentiment that "his whole life had been one long mistake."³⁹ He did not support this statement with a direct citation and the statement by Slade that he quoted immediately afterwards does not support the statement either even when interpreted in the worst possible light.

The logical fallacy in Arber's argument is quite simple to expose. Arber hinted that a secret recantation, the title of which is not even known, lies buried somewhere to be discovered. By the time readers have completed their examination of this research project, it will be obvious that Johnson's enemies would never have allowed such a document to disappear. It would have been published in every possible venue and celebrated as definitive proof of Johnson's corruption. Henry Ainsworth wasted little time in publishing his response to *A Christian Plea, A reply to a pretended Christian plea for the anti-Christian Church of Rome: published by Mr. Francis Iohnson a0. 1617 Wherin the weakness of the sayd plea is manifested, and arguments alleaged for the Church of Rome, and baptisme therein, are refuted; by Henry Ainsworth.*⁴⁰ It is beyond

³⁷Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*,

³⁸Thomas Scott and Samuel Miller, *Articles of the Synod of Dort*, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1856).169-173.

³⁹Arber, 129.

⁴⁰Henry Ainsworth, *A reply to a pretended Christian plea for the anti-Chistian Church of Rome: published by Mr. Francis Iohnson a0. 1617 Wherin the weakness of the sayd plea is manifested, and arguments alleaged for the Church of Rome, and baptisme therein, are refuted; by Henry Ainsworth.* (Amsterdam, 1618).

the bounds of reason to assume that if Henry Ainsworth had been aware of any writing or statement on the part of Francis Johnson discrediting the Separatist position that he would have allowed such a document to go unanswered. Arber's work, more than the writings of any other nineteenth-century student of Separatism, enabled many negative stories about Johnson to survive into the twentieth century despite the more careful earlier analysis of Dexter.

The cause of Separatist scholarship was advanced during the early twentieth century by several scholars who determined to publish primary source materials so that they might be more readily available to scholars who had not had the opportunity or resources to visit the British archives where they were housed. One of the foremost representatives of this group was Champlin Burrage, professor of History at Oxford University. Burrage published a two-volume work on English Dissent entitled *The Early English Dissenters* in 1912.⁴¹ The first volume consisted of a narrative treatment of English Dissenting movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the Separatist movement. The second volume contained reproductions of important primary source materials relating to that story. Burrage's second volume included several useful sources that described the life of the Barrow/Greenwood congregation that became the Ancient Church during their London period from 1587-1593. Two of the most important of these resources for any study of Francis Johnson are a collection of Barrowist depositions, mostly written in March and April of 1592/93, and a series of Separatist petitions sent to the authorities by Johnson and his fellow prisoners in an attempt to gain

⁴¹Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, 2 Vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).

clemency.⁴² Burrage's narrative was a valuable contribution and went a step further toward clarifying the chronology of the Ancient Church's development, though there were some aspects of that chronology that have been disputed by later scholars of the English Separatists. His most valuable contribution was his reproduction of the primary sources, not only for their own intrinsic value, but also because he inspired other scholars to do the same. For the next several decades, these other scholars combined their efforts to provide the writings of prominent Puritan and Separatist leaders in an accessible published format.

In the wake of Burrage's contribution, Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson continued the task of publishing primary sources related to early English nonconformity that he had begun. Their most extensive undertaking was realized in 1951 with the publication of a collection of Thomas Cartwright's works entitled *Cartwrightiana*.⁴³ This volume was the first in a series of published nonconformist texts. Carlson edited and published *The Works of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne* in 1953, providing a complete collection of the first significant English Separatist writings.⁴⁴ The texts in the series that had the most bearing on the story of Francis Johnson were the third and fourth volumes in the series, *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590*⁴⁵ and *The Writings of*

⁴²Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. II, 25-125.

⁴³Thomas Cartwright, *Cartwrightiana*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson and Albert Peel, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1951).

⁴⁴Robert Browne and Robert Harrison, *The Works of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1953).

⁴⁵Henry Barrow, *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1962).

John Greenwood, 1587-1590.⁴⁶ These two texts contained not only the writings of the first London Separatist leaders, but also documents in the appendices that pertained to the Separatists' depositions and appeals in the early 1590s. Some of these were, rightly the author believes, attributed by Carlson to Francis Johnson. Carlson's final volume, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1590-91*, dealt with the critical years when both men were imprisoned and the London congregation was harried from place to place as they struggled to continue meeting while evading both the political and ecclesiastical authorities.⁴⁷ The texts edited by Carlson provided a ready means to access the writings of all the major Separatist leaders before Johnson for researchers and other interested persons. Interestingly and unfortunately, Carlson never moved beyond Barrow and Greenwood to Johnson and Ainsworth; it is not clear whether he ever intended to treat these later Separatist leaders. While the importance of an edited edition of Johnson's and Ainsworth's writings might be less crucial with the advent of electronic resources such as *Early English Books Online*, it is an omission that left the Separatist story incomplete for those scholars not familiar with the Johnson writings extant at the British Library and Cambridge University.

While scholars had engaged in the study of all of the issues and personalities surrounding Johnson, Francis Johnson himself did not receive a great deal of attention again until the publication of Barrington Raymond White's, *The English Separatist Tradition: From The Marian Martyrs To The Pilgrim Fathers*, in 1972.⁴⁸ White was the

⁴⁶John Greenwood, *The Writings of John Greenwood, 1587-1590*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1962).

⁴⁷John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1590-1593*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1970).

⁴⁸White, *The English Separatist Tradition*.

principal of Regent's Park College at Oxford University when he published *The English Separatists* (he has since retired). Regent's Park was founded by Baptists and continues to be distinctly Baptist in its orientation. White himself was primarily an historian of English Baptists. Though White was himself a Baptist, his approach to the English Separatist story was not framed by the issue of Baptist origins that so often conditions the interpretations of Baptist historians who have devoted time and ink to the English Separatists. For that reason, White has been included in the general survey of English Separatist secondary literature rather than in the section dealing with Baptist interpretations of the English Separatists.

White traced the origins of the English Separatist tradition to the early Reformed churches that met secretly in London during the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558). In White's opinion, the Puritans who later embraced Separatism were looking back to their protest against the imposition of a false religious settlement to support their own separation from the Established Church.⁴⁹ White dedicated a chapter to Browne and Harrison before proceeding to tell the early story of the London Congregation under Barrow and Greenwood. Dr. White shared the opinion of earlier scholars such as Burrage and Carlson that Browne's influence on Barrow and Greenwood was indirect rather than genetically linked.⁵⁰

White's chapter on Johnson was entitled "The Leadership of Francis Johnson" and structured according to White's assertion quoted earlier in this research project that Johnson's importance lay in his attempted incarnation of Separatist principles in actual

⁴⁹White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 1-43.

⁵⁰White, 70-73.

practice. He provided the best chronology of Johnson's life since Champlin Burrage with minor disagreements at specific points with Burrage, Dexter, and Carlson. One of the pivotal interpretations White issued was his determination that Francis Johnson's decision to risk all by asserting his views on the priority of eldership in church discipline was influenced by his dismay over the defection of his former student, John Smyth.⁵¹ In Dexter's view, Johnson's decision to assert the primacy of the eldership in his *Tell It To The Church*⁵² was a gradual change that took place from 1595 to 1610 as Johnson worked through the practical implication of his congregation's decision to enshrine a democratic congregational polity in its 1596 confession of faith.⁵³ White's assertion was set in contrast to the view of Henry Martin Dexter that Johnson had always harbored an inclination toward the presbyterian system in local church government as evidenced by his heavy handed approach to leadership.⁵⁴ The historiographical and theological questions surrounding this issue will be addressed in chapters five and six of the present study. For now, it must suffice to note that this question is one of the major threads that must be pulled to unravel the mystery of Johnson's view of the church in the last decade of his life.

One of the seminal achievements of White's study is that White does not treat the English Separatists as an appendage to the study of English Baptists nor as a bludgeon to use in Baptist theological controversies over Baptist origins, a historiographical *faux pas*

⁵¹White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 142-145.

⁵²Francis Johnson, *A short treatise concerning the exposition of those words of Christ, Tell the Church, &c. Mat. 18. 17.*, (Amsterdam: 1611).

⁵³White, 142-43.

⁵⁴Dexter, 324-27.

to which most Baptist interpreters of the Separatist tradition are particularly prone. While the link between John Smyth, founder of the first proto-Baptist congregation and generally acknowledged as the closest thing to a founder of the General Baptist tradition, and the English Separatist tradition had long been suggested by some Baptist and other scholars, White provided one of the best demonstrations of how that link could be traced back through the Ancient Church to the early Marian separatistic congregations.⁵⁵

White's choice to emphasize Smyth's debt to the English Separatists displayed his bias in the debate over Baptist origins, as will soon be evidenced, but the primary thing that sets White's work apart is that his Baptist identity does not control his overall interpretation of the English Separatists, allowing him to treat them as a distinct theological tradition unto themselves rather than simply a conduit for explaining Baptist origins.⁵⁶ The author of the present study will strive to follow his example.

White's position at Regent's Park College provided him with the opportunity to influence the studies of masters and doctoral students. One of his prime projects continued to be the exploration of the Separatist tradition. One former White student who embraced his mentor's enthusiasm was Stephen Brachlow, currently Professor of Spirituality at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond. Brachlow's doctoral dissertation and first book was entitled *The Communion of the Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625*.⁵⁷ Brachlow's study focused on the context and

⁵⁵White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 1-70.

⁵⁶B. R. White believes strongly in the connection between the early Baptists, both General and Particular, and the English Separatist Tradition. B. R. White, "The Doctrine of the Church In The Particular Baptist Confession of 1644," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19, (October, 1968), 571-90.

⁵⁷Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of the Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

contours of radical ecclesiology during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. His discussion of the idea of covenant in Puritan and Separatist ecclesiology was a valuable contribution that will appear throughout the course of this study as the writer traces Francis Johnson's own understanding of the covenant concept. Brachlow also sharpened our understanding of English Separatism by convincingly demonstrating that the theological differences between the English Separatists and the more moderate Puritans, despite their animosity toward one another, were primarily confined to the realm of ecclesiology. The Separatists were in agreement with the Puritans in their basic Calvinistic view of the nature of sin and salvation. Even their differences in ecclesiology were primarily a matter of degree rather than of substance, though there did exist between them the issue of congregational versus presbyterian polity.⁵⁸ In a nod to the Separatists, Brachlow's title was a phrase often used to describe their fellowship and adopted by Henry Ainsworth as the title of one of his treatises on the nature of the church.⁵⁹

Other general studies also provided new insights and interpretations concerning the ministry of Francis Johnson. Keith L. Sprunger, Professor of History at Bethel College in Kansas, has been the foremost contemporary student of the English Separatists from the standpoint of the Anabaptist tradition. Sprunger's *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches In The Netherlands In The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* provided a detailed description of the context in which the Ancient Church lived and worshipped in Holland. His extensive use of resources from the Dutch archives and state church records illuminates the nature of the English expatriate community in

⁵⁸Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, 1-20.

⁵⁹Henry Ainsworth, *The communion of saints A treatise of the fellowship that the faithful have with God, and his angels, and one with an other; in this present life*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1607).

Amsterdam.⁶⁰ Sprunger also wrote *Trumpets from the Tower: English Puritan Printing In The Netherlands, 1600-1640*, a study of the network of printers who reproduced Puritan and Separatist tracts for distribution in Amsterdam and England.⁶¹ Both works were valuable contributions to the study of English Separatist life in Amsterdam and the communication networks that provided most of the treatises that serve as primary source materials for much of this study.

6. *Francis Johnson, John Smyth, and the Problem of Baptist Origins*

Most of the studies that have been noted in the previous historiographical overview were conceived due to an interest in the ecclesiological contributions of Francis Johnson and the English Separatists. Baptist and Congregationalists have been the denominational historians most interested in studies of Separatism because of the affinities of their traditions with Separatism and some of the genetic connections that can be traced between their denominations and the Separatist movement. For Congregationalists, any disagreement over Johnson's role has been light because they are much more interested in John Robinson's congregation as their direct progenitors. Baptists, on the other hand, have been engaged in heated debate for a century concerning the nature of their origins. Pivotal to every theory that has been advanced to explain the origins of the Baptist movement is John Smyth, Francis Johnson's Cambridge pupil. Because of his association with Smyth, Johnson and the Ancient Church play a role in the

⁶⁰Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches In The Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982).

⁶¹Keith L. Sprunger, *Trumpets From the Tower: English Puritan Printing In The Netherlands, 1600-1640*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

determination of Smyth's theological development and the ecclesiastical milieu that gave birth to the Baptists.⁶²

The two most popular theories of Baptist origins among scholars are the Anabaptist "kinship" theory and the influence of Puritanism through the English Separatist tradition.⁶³ Bill J. Leonard of Wake Forest University Divinity School in his *Baptist Ways* is balanced in his assessment that both the Anabaptists and the English Separatists played a role in Smyth's conversion to something resembling a Baptist position and that the debate over origins is a conflict that has no foreseeable end. That does not stop anyone from trying.

Adherents to the Anabaptist "kinship" school come from both the Baptist and Anabaptist traditions. Prominent among the Baptist proponents of this idea was William R. Estep, former professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Estep was a strong proponent of Anabaptist influences on the Smyth congregation, though he did revise his *The Anabaptist Story* for its third edition to weaken the overstatements he made regarding Anabaptist "kinship" in earlier editions.⁶⁴ James Coggins, a Mennonite scholar and editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, sought to establish the case for a stronger Anabaptist influence on John Smyth's congregation in his *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite*

⁶²Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 2-23.

⁶³Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 10-15. Leonard was indebted to Robert G. Torbet for his categories, particularly the term "Anabaptist 'kinship'." Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1963), 18.

⁶⁴Estep revised his book largely in response to critiques of his work among Baptist historians, notably W. S. Hudon at Colgate Rochester. Nevertheless, an array of Southwestern Theological Seminary graduate students followed Estep's example. Estep's students insured that his questionable assertions would become popular Southern Baptist historical dogma. William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 200-201. Compare with 1996 edition.

Influence, and the Elect Nation. While Coggins added little new to understanding Johnson's role, he did correct the excesses of accounts that completely negated the importance of the Mennonite influence on Smyth.⁶⁵ Glen Stassen advanced the theory that Menno Simon's *Foundation Book* was a primary theological source for the *First London Confession* in 1644 and played an important role in the founding of the more Calvinistic Particular Baptist Tradition.⁶⁶ While Stassen primarily argued for the *Foundation Book* as the source for Particular Baptist theology, he also acknowledged English Separatism as the "mother" of the Particular Baptists through the Ancient Church's 1596 confession of faith. Stassen's work, though provocative, fails in the author's opinion to establish Simon's *Foundation Book* as more than one possible source for Particular Baptists' ecclesiology and that primarily on the issue of believer's baptism by immersion. The Particular Baptists adhered to Calvinist orthodoxy in every particular except believer's baptism and local church organization, both issues of polity rather than theology. It can even be argued, as will be in chapter five, that the theological resources for developing the congregational polity of Particular Baptists can be found in the English Separatist and Independent Puritan traditions. The Particular Baptist children resembled their mother more than their father.

B. R. White's *English Separatist Tradition* argued the case for the exclusivity of English Separatist influence on Baptist origins. White felt the burden of proof was on advocates of Anabaptist influence to demonstrate any link between their tradition and that

⁶⁵James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991).

⁶⁶Glen Stassen, "Opening Menno Simon's *Foundation Book* And Finding the Father of Baptist Origins Alongside the Mother-Calvinist Congregationalism," *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Spring 1998). See also Glen Stassen, "Anabaptist Influences On the Origins of Particular Baptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (Vol. 36, No. 4, October 1962), 322-48.

of the Baptists.⁶⁷ While not completely excluding Anabaptist influence, William H. Brackney of Baylor University recognized the theological debt of the early Baptists to the English Separatist tradition in his *Genetic History of Baptist Thought*.⁶⁸ Winthrop S. Hudson, professor of church history at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, fervently denied any strong connection between Anabaptists and Baptists in an article entitled “Baptists Were Not Anabaptists.”⁶⁹ He delineated in six points the reasons he believed that Baptists were primarily the product of English Puritanism rather than continental Anabaptism. Lonnie Kliever, former Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University, wrote an article entitled “General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence” in which he emphasized the distinction between theological influence and direct continuity.⁷⁰ While Kliever believed that Anabaptist theological influence could be demonstrated in the case of John Smyth, direct continuity could best be demonstrated through the English Separatist milieu. Kliever’s analysis of the matter was accurate, and his exploration of Arminian influences on the General Baptists, an issue that had not received much attention in the debate, was especially valuable.

⁶⁷White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 164.

⁶⁸William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 13-14.

⁶⁹Hudson indicated that six theological differences made the connection between Baptists and Anabaptists tenuous. They were Hofman’s Christology, Anabaptist rejection of original sin, Anabaptist rejection of the world, Anabaptist views of succession, biblical literalism, and their different understandings of justification. Winthrop S. Hudson, “Baptists Were Not Anabaptists,” *The Chronicle*, (Vol. 16, October, 1953), 171-79.

⁷⁰Lonnie Kliever, “General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (Volume 36, No. 4, October, 1962), 291-321.

Other surveys and studies by Baptists have included Johnson and the Ancient Church as precursors to the Baptist tradition, but have not explored the question more fully. Prominent among these was a survey text by Leon McBeth, former Professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which recounted the story of Baptist history from a dominantly Southern Baptist perspective.⁷¹ McBeth, as a colleague of William Estep, was respectful of the Estep tradition of Anabaptist Influence but also indicated that the Particular Baptist tradition could be genetically traced through Henry Jacob and his “JLJ” church. The designation “JLJ” was an invention of McBeth and based on the names of the three pastors of the congregation (Jacob, Lanthrop, Jessey). This author believes that McBeth is correct in identifying a genetic relationship between the “JLJ” church and the Particular Baptist movement, but drawing a direct line of theological descent between the two obscures the complexity of Particular Baptist development. While the Particular Baptists were the recipients of many theological and ecclesiological gifts from Jacob’s congregation, they also rejected the predominant Calvinistic view of infant baptism and corresponded with Anabaptists on the continent.

One developing trend among Baptists is the reemerging strength of Calvinism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Calvinistic Baptists are especially interested in establishing the links between Puritanism and the early Particular Baptists, which they tend to view as the true Baptist tradition because they were the first Baptist group to practice baptism by immersion. The dissertation studies of Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, explored the early origins of the Particular Baptists and offered some compelling arguments in

⁷¹H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, (Nashville: Broadman Publishers, 1987).

favor of indirect influence by the Puritans and Separatists on the Particular Baptists.⁷²

Thomas J. Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote his doctoral dissertation exploring the ecclesiological themes in the writings of Francis Johnson, John Smyth, and Roger Williams. Nettles' work rather woodenly interprets Johnson's ecclesiology and does not adequately describe the nuances that developed over the course of his career, but he does also place Johnson firmly as an antecedent to the later Baptist tradition.⁷³ David Gay's *Battle for the Church* takes the interesting position of arguing for Separatist influence on the Particular Baptists through the agency of Francis Johnson's influence on Henry Jacob.⁷⁴ While his argument was somewhat overstated, it will be demonstrated in chapter four of this study that Johnson did influence Jacob to accept the proposition that church government had been specifically determined by God. Ironically, both men arrived at similar positions before the end of their lives in regard to their stance on the legitimacy of the Church of England.

Debate concerning Baptist origins is framed not only around the poles of Anabaptists and English Separatists, but also surrounds the issues of General versus Particular Baptists. Jason K. Lee's recent book on John Smyth is an excellent work that traces Smyth's theological evolution and includes discussion of Johnson's and Smith's positions, though his treatment of Johnson's position omits particular reference to

⁷²Richard Land, *Doctrinal controversies of English Particular Baptist (1644-1791) as illustrated by the career and writings of Thomas Collier*, (Unpublished D. Phil. Dissertation, Oxford University, 1979).

⁷³Tom Nettles, *A comparative study of the historical stimuli contributing to the ecclesiological views of Francis Johnson, John Smyth, and Roger Williams*, (Doctoral Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976).

⁷⁴David Gay, *Battle for the church : an account of the epic struggle to recover the New Testament pattern of church life in England, 1517-1644, or : how the church in England was delivered from the gross darkness endured through twelve hundred years of Popery, brought into Puritanism and from thence to the rise of the Particular Baptists*, (Lowestoft, UK ; Castro Valley, CA : Brachus, 1997), 188-194.

Johnson's own growing ecclesiological understanding.⁷⁵ Lee is currently a faculty member at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The question of Baptist origins becomes even muddier when one attempts to determine whether Smyth was even actually a Baptist. Lee asserted that Smyth went through a distinct "Baptist" period.⁷⁶ William Brackney, however, indicated that he was still unconvinced that Smyth's "Baptist period" was long enough for Smyth to achieve a mature baptistic position on any theological issue beyond that of baptism.⁷⁷

Even this cursory survey indicates the difficulties of dealing with the issue of Baptist origins. Chapter five of this study will deal with Francis Johnson and John Smyth's relationship and its possible impact on Baptist origins. While Johnson's contribution to both the Baptists and Congregationalists is an important element of this study, it will first be necessary to establish in both instances who Johnson was, how he was influenced by others, and what he did in fact profess before assessing his contributions to other theological traditions. Taking this as the dominant methodology of the study, one can hopefully avoid the risk of interpreting the facts to fit the conclusions and also avoid the use of history to gain support for contemporary preferences and practices. Having established the methodology, historiography, and thesis behind this study, the time has now come to turn to the study proper and the narrative of Francis Johnson's life.

⁷⁵Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003).

⁷⁶Jason K. Lee, 71-84.

⁷⁷Brackney was not convinced of the tight compartments or periods that Lee employed. Brackney, *Genetic History*, 15.

7. Birth and Childhood

Francis Johnson was born in March 1562 and baptized on March 27 at St. Mary's Church in Richmond, Yorkshire.⁷⁸ His father, John Johnson, was a wollen draper of some local prominence who served at least one term as Alderman or Mayor of Richmond. No mention is ever made in any of Johnson's extant writings of his mother, who likely died when he was young. The omission of his mother's name is not surprising since he does not mention his father often in any of his writings. If it were not for George's *Discourse* and the writings of his opponents, little would be known about John either. John was a minor aristocrat and small landowner evidenced by the fact that his eldest son signed as a pensioner, the typical designation for sons of the lesser landed gentry, when he matriculated at Cambridge University in 1579.⁷⁹

Francis Johnson had only one male sibling. George Johnson was two years younger than Francis.⁸⁰ The strained relationship between the two brothers became a source of division and strife within the Ancient Church in the late 1590's, but there is no indication that the two brothers did not relate well before the then. There were four Johnson sisters. George mentions one sister in his *Discourse* who had married Thomas Bishop, a deacon of the Ancient Church. Michael Moody, a Ph.D. student at Claremont Graduate School and student of Leland H. Carlson, identified four Johnson sisters. They

⁷⁸Michael E. Moody, *A Critical Edition of George Johnson's Discourse of Some Troubles And Excommunications In The Banished English Church At Amsterdam 1603*. (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Claremont Graduate School, 1979), 592. Michael E. Moody, "Johnson, Francis (*bap.* 1562, *d.* 1617)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14877> (accessed June 19, 2006). Parish Register of St. Mary's Church, Richmond, I (1556-1632).

⁷⁹John Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College, 1505-1905*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 150-51.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 160. Parish Register of St. Mary's Church, Richmond, I (1556-1632).

were Anne, Elizabeth, Mary, and Dorothy Johnson. Moody noted that Elizabeth married William Latham at Amsterdam in 1600 and that Anne and Mary also accompanied the Ancient Church to Amsterdam.⁸¹ Elizabeth's marriage to Latham was recorded in *Puiboken der Stadt*, a volume in the Amsterdam Archives that recorded marriage records from 1567-1617.⁸² Either Anne or Mary would have been the sister married to Thomas Bishop. Francis Johnson was the oldest of the Johnson children.

Richmond was an old Norman city founded in the year 1071.⁸³ An ancient Norman keep overlooked the city and marked it as an integral part of William the Conqueror's northern defense. The keep remains today and would have been a prominent feature of the landscape in Johnson's time. The other significant landmark that bordered the town of Richmond, this one to the east, was the river Swale. The name of the river is taken from the Old English term *suala*, which comes from the same root as the term "to swallow." The name may well have referred to the river's swift current, said to be the swiftest in England.⁸⁴

One aspect of life in Elizabethan Richmond that greatly benefited the career of Francis Johnson was the endowment of a Free Grammar School on former monastic lands contested between local landowners and the crown. A school had existed in Richmond since the 1390's, but the charter of incorporation granted on March 14, 1567

⁸¹Michael Moody, *Critical Edition*, 592. Parish Register of St. Mary's Church, Richmond, I (1556-1632).

⁸²Herny Martyn Dexter and Morton Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, (Baltimore, MD: Geaneological Publishing Society, 1978), 431-32. Moody, 521.

⁸³Jane Hatcher, *The History of Richmond North Yorkshire: From Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, (Pickering, Yorkshire: Blackthorn Press, 2000).

⁸⁴Hatcher, 4-5.

provided for a corporation to oversee the education of Richmond children. The grammar school was a one-room structure with desks for the students and a desk on a raised dias for the master. It was likely at this school that Francis Johnson learned the basic rudiments of English grammar and composition. He may also have first encountered some of the classical authors that would occupy much of his time as a student at Cambridge.⁸⁵

8. *Francis Johnson's Early Years At Cambridge*

Francis Johnson journeyed from his home in Yorkshire to Cambridge University in 1579 to begin studies in preparation for a vocation in ministry. As noted previously, Johnson registered as a pensioner, a student who paid the fees for his studies rather than work to pay them and support himself.⁸⁶ This status allowed Johnson more freedom to study and preach unhindered by service to a Fellow. His brother George, also enrolled as a pensioner, joined him in 1580. It was also indicative of their father's prosperity that he could pay fees for both sons simultaneously.

Cambridge University had come into its own during the sixteenth century. After two centuries of struggling under the shadow of Oxford, Cambridge had begun to match the influence of the older university during the Tudor period. The early years of the sixteenth century were a period of growth and consolidation for the university under the able administration of John Fisher. Under Fisher's guidance, Cambridge became a center for the study of classical languages that even attracted the noted Dutch scholar Desiderius

⁸⁵Hatcher, 80-81.

⁸⁶Peile, *Register of Christ's*, 150-51.

Erasmus for a short time in 1516.⁸⁷ Despite his contributions to the university and the intellectual life of England, Fisher was executed in 1535 for his refusal to recognize the royal supremacy.⁸⁸ After Fisher's death, Thomas Cromwell, Lord High Chancellor and architect of the royal supremacy, assumed direct control of Cambridge University.⁸⁹ Cromwell was also executed in 1540 and replaced by Stephen Gardiner.⁹⁰

Following the ascension of Queen Elizabeth to the throne in 1558, one of her priorities was to strengthen her two universities. Elizabeth conducted a grand processional to Cambridge in 1564 and appointed William Cecil, Lord Burghley and her Lord High Treasurer, as Chancellor of the university in addition to his other responsibilities. It was later Lord Burghley and John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, who were behind the composition of a new set of university statutes to govern the academic and social life of Cambridge University in 1570.⁹¹

These articles were composed in part as a response to the emergence of Puritan sympathies within the Cambridge University faculty. In 1570, Thomas Cartwright, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, challenged the Elizabethan religious settlement and its Episcopal trappings in a series of sermons and lectures that provoked a heated debate with Archbishop Whitgift. Though Cartwright himself was forced to leave Cambridge, the Puritan sympathizers among the faculty and student body continued to grow

⁸⁷H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction In Tudor Cambridge*, (Cambridge: Archon Books, 1972), 21-32.

⁸⁸Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 60.

⁸⁹Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47.

⁹⁰ Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 48.

⁹¹Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 56-57.

throughout the 1570s and 80s. Cambridge soon gained a reputation as the most notorious intellectual seedbed of Puritanism.⁹²

This atmosphere of religious conflict and reforming zeal was the setting that young Francis Johnson entered as a student at Christ's College in 1579. Christ's was one of the newer Cambridge foundations in the late sixteenth century. Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII, had arranged for the old foundation of Godshouse to be reorganized and refounded as Christ's College, a school for the study of the arts and preparation for ministry.⁹³ The students of Christ's enjoyed a rich tradition of internal lectures in the arts and theology. They were required to enter the priesthood a year after entering the college.⁹⁴ Johnson's enrollment at Christ's offered him an excellent preparation in arts, theology, and practical ministry.

Francis Johnson fully availed himself of all of these opportunities. He earned his B.A. in 1581/82. Johnson engaged in more specialized studies for the M. A. and was awarded that degree in 1585. He had also been ordained as a Deacon at London on April 16, 1584. His ordination to the priesthood soon followed on April 28, 1584. Johnson had already begun to preach frequently at Bourn and Fen Drayton, gaining some measure of practical experience to complement his academic preparation.⁹⁵

Francis Johnson was also elected a Fellow of Christ's before Michaelmas 1584.⁹⁶ His duties as a Fellow were twofold. A Fellow was responsible first of all for delivering

⁹²Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 146-163.

⁹³Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 40.

⁹⁴Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 40.

⁹⁵Peile, *Biographical Register*, 150-51.

⁹⁶Peile, *Biographical Register*, 150-51.

the internal lectures of their college. In the case of Christ's these were primarily lectures on the arts and theology. A second responsibility of the Fellow was to serve as a Tutor for younger students. The Tutor was responsible for the academic, intellectual, and spiritual welfare of his charges. They plotted the student's program of study, including the particular readings the students would undertake. The money for payment of funds and the student's general upkeep were entrusted by their parents into the hands of their tutors. The Tutor might also sometimes accompany his charge on a journey home during the summer.⁹⁷ As Tutor, Francis Johnson was in a position to exert a profound influence on the lives of his charges.

One of Francis Johnson's students at Cambridge was John Smyth, who matriculated as a sizar in 1586.⁹⁸ A sizar was a poorer student who was unable to pay his fees and hired out to a Fellow to earn funds for his education and maintenance.⁹⁹ Smyth's relationship to Johnson would have been as intimate as the typical Tutor/Student relationship with Johnson literally responsible not only for Smyth's education but for making sure that he paid his bills and said his prayers. While the date of Smyth's B. A. degree completion is uncertain, John Peile estimated that the degree must have been awarded in 1589/90 in his *Biographical Register of Christ's College*. If that were the case, Smyth's final year of study for the B. A. was complicated by Johnson's imprisonment in 1589. Fortunately, Smyth would have reached a stage in his studies where he was attending lectures at the larger University and not as dependent on Johnson.

⁹⁷Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 40.

⁹⁸Peile, *Biographical Register*, 185-86.

⁹⁹Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, 62-64.

Smyth seemed to respect his Tutor, but did not elect to follow his theological commitments while they were at Cambridge. Smyth's name does not appear among the sixty-eight signatories on a petition for Johnson's release from prison in December 1589.¹⁰⁰ Smyth continued his studies after Johnson's departure from Cambridge, receiving the M. A. in 1593; he was elected fellow of the university in 1594 and served in that capacity until 1598¹⁰¹. The influence of Francis Johnson on John Smyth and the evolution of Smyth's own theological understanding will receive further scrutiny in chapter five of this research project.

Francis Johnson served as a Cambridge Fellow at a time when the Puritan currents unleashed by Thomas Cartwright were spreading throughout the university. Laurence Chaderton, former Fellow of Christ's and Master of Emmanuel after 1584, was a formative Puritan influence on Johnson. William Perkins, the great Puritan divine and author of the *Golden Chain*, was elected as a Fellow the same year as Johnson.¹⁰² These influences refined Johnson's thinking regarding theology and ecclesiastical polity. Johnson, true to his nature, eventually took his concerns about ecclesiology to a more public forum. This decision led to the disruption of his academic pursuits at Cambridge and the first of many clashes with both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

¹⁰⁰“The Masters of Arts to Lord Burghley,” *Cambridge University Transactions*, 564-566. British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 16.

¹⁰¹Peile, *Biographical Register*, 185.

¹⁰²Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 238.

9. *Francis Johnson: Cambridge Puritan Radical*

On January 6, 1588/89, Francis Johnson mounted the pulpit of St. Mary's Church at Cambridge University and began an exposition on 1 Peter 5:1-4 that would unsettle his comfortable Cambridge existence and change the course of his life. The chosen text contained an admonition to the "elders" of the congregation receiving the epistle to rightly minister to the needs of the congregation. In this sermon, Johnson not only asserted that eldership was an integral part of church government, but also indicted the comfortable lifestyle of the ministers at Cambridge. According to his own testimony, Johnson framed his remarks based on the following articles that were drawn as a summary of his sermon by the Cambridge Heads and the Consistory Court:

The articles. 1. The necessity of elders. 2. This form of government commanded. 3. No other to be allowed of. 4. Neglect hereof cause of ignorance, &c. 5. We have not this discipline and the reason why. 6. Ministers should keep continually at their charge: university ease, quiet, wealth, the cause why some do not continue. 7. That there should be equality among ministers and elders: which the popish hierarchy and all of that sort so dislike of. 8. Amaziah forbad Amoz to preach at Bethel. 9. Ours do not exhort to feed, but stay them that would.¹⁰³

The eldership as described by Johnson would consist of "teaching and ruling elders."¹⁰⁴ The system Johnson advocated in 1588/89 was a two-fold system of eldership that came to fruition under his leadership in 1592 when Daniel Studley was appointed Elder and John Greenwood Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church. The imperative importance Johnson placed on eldership was extreme. He identified the lack of eldership

¹⁰³Francis Johnson, "Francis Johnson's Account of His Sermon" reproduced in John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation And Establishment of Religion And Other Various Occurrences In The Church of England During Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign: Together With An Appendix Of Original Papers of State, Records, and Letters*, Vol. III, Part II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 611-15.

¹⁰⁴Strype, *Annals*, 612.

in the Established Church of England as the source of all manner of spiritual and social ills:

Touching the fourth, speaking of the necessity of the elders, I said, I doubt not in the fear of God to affirm, that the want of these (want of ordinary means appointed by God) is the cause of ignorance, atheism, idolatry, profanation of the sabbath, disobedience to superiors, &c. too lamentable experience proves it.¹⁰⁵

Johnson especially emphasized the need of Teaching Elders to nourish their congregations on the teachings of scripture. In response to the anticipated objection that there were not enough qualified people to fill the posts, Johnson responded, “First, that so many as are fit are not employed. Secondly, I asked where the fault was.”¹⁰⁶ For Johnson, the fault lay with the church rather than with the Lord who was “most ready” to “set watchmen” on the walls of His city, the church.¹⁰⁷

Johnson’s strongest words were contained in his sixth, eighth, and ninth points and concerned the spiritual life of the educated clerical elite at Cambridge University:

Touching the sixth, after proof that the Elders were to be with their special flock, and to feed them, over whom the Holy Ghost, by the mediate calling of the church, had made them overseers: because that as Christ had purchased them, so also he would have of the elders, whom he had set over them, an account for their souls. In application I exhorted those that had special flocks committed to them, and yet lived still among us here, [in the university], that they would enter into their chambers, and herein examine their hearts before the Lord. And if university ease, quiet, wealth, or any other sinister thing were as dear unto them as father and mother; yet in this case of the glory of God, for the feeding of his people committed to them, to say with Levi, *I know you not*. Yea, if they were as dear as the parts of our own bodies, yet to follow Christ’s counsel, rather to cut them off, than with them to be cast into hellfire.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Strype, *Annals*, 613.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸Strype, *Annals*, 614.

His ninth and tenth articles could be taken to apply equally to Bishops and moderate Puritans. Johnson compared some Cambridge ministers to Amaziah, who forbade the prophet Amos to preach at the sanctuary of Bethel in Amos 7:12-13. Amaziah was the classic illustration for Johnson of a minister who not only refused to speak the word of truth himself but also attempted to silence others who were willing. If one was a moderate Puritan at Cambridge in the late 1580's, trying to restrain the volatile rhetoric of younger adherents to the cause, Johnson's final statement could easily be taken as a direct challenge to their attempts to moderate the rhetoric of fellow Puritan preachers. Johnson stated:

Touching the eighth and ninth, speaking of that that the apostle Peter exhorted the elders to feed the flock, which depended on them, I shewed, that as it was the duty of all Christians, so also the ministers of the word of God, to exhort and stir up one another. And that this practice of the Apostle did condemn them that are so far from exhorting others to feed, as that they stay those that would feed. The Spirit of God hath noted it, as a thing to be taken heed of, which we read of Amaziah, that he forbad Amoz to prophecy at Bethel. We are rather to follow the example of James, and Cephas, and John; of whom it is set down by the Spirit of God, that they gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas; joining and strengthening themselves to the work of the ministry. That his own company should preach to the Gentiles, and the other to the circumcision.¹⁰⁹

Johnson was brought before the Cambridge Heads to be deposed soon after his January 6 sermon. The Heads would customarily congregate on the porch outside of Great St. Mary's to discuss the acceptability of the sermon and other business of interest.¹¹⁰ Their conversation must have been an angry chorus on January 6, 1588/89.

In addition to Johnson's offense, the Heads also expressed concern regarding a sermon preached by one Cuthbert Bainbrigg, another Fellow of Christ's, the day

¹⁰⁹Strype, *Annals*, 615.

¹¹⁰Elizabeth Leedham-Green, *University of Cambridge*, 59.

before.¹¹¹ Bainbrigg matriculated as a pensioner at St. John's College in 1578. He had been elected as a Fellow of Christ's in 1583.¹¹² Bainbrigg was accused of slandering persons in authority. The Heads listed as the articles of his sermon:

1. That some seek preferment; themselves pay money for it; and pay their money before hand. 2. That there be, that have a bar, that stands between them and the fire; if need shall be, to strike the fire out of their hand which do bring it. And the bar to be your statutes and positive laws. 3. Extremity used, in execution especially. 4. The fire put out, by stopping their mouths that be bringers thereof. 5. If you mind indeed to awake. [As though he had irreverently reflected on the sleepiness of the doctors at sermons.] Base eloquence. 7. Ceremonies no sooner spoke of, but snatched at.¹¹³

Bainbrigg denied in his defense that he had used the word "your" in reference to the laws and statutes of the university. His text was taken from Luke 12:49 where Jesus says he has come to "send fire on the earth," hence the references to fire in the articles that would be cryptic indeed if taken out of context. Bainbrigg made a concerted attempt to convince the Heads that his words had largely been distorted by "these that secretly did accuse me."¹¹⁴ For every article, Bainbrigg responded by indicating what he really said or intended to say. His defense is quite interesting when contrasted with Johnson's. Johnson did not appear to feel that his words had been distorted in any way by the Cambridge Heads or his accusers and expounded on each point without apology. Either Bainbrigg was an unfortunate soul whose words were invested with more heat than he

¹¹¹Cambridge Heads, "The Heads to Lord Burghley Regarding Bainbrigg and Johnson," *Cambridge University Transactions During the Puritan Controversies of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Collected by James Heywood and Thomas Wright, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854). Original in the British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Art. 6. For the date see Cambridge University Archives, Registry Guard Books, Vol. 6, No. 6.

¹¹²Peile, 149.

¹¹³Strype, *Annals*, 608.

¹¹⁴Strype, 610.

intended at a time when passions were aflame or he was a timid soul who was attempting to put the best possible spin on a sermon he had preached without realizing the extent of the possible negative ramifications that would ensue. One is tempted to embrace the latter view when reading his response to the most humorous remark among the articles of indictment, his alleged reference to the “sleeping doctors”:

To the fifth I answer; I said thus, directing my speech to the doctors, If you desire indeed (I speak it with reverence) that they should awake from their sleep, (meaning the townsmen,) if you would have them forsake the works of darkness, and that Christ Jesus may be heard, provide that Christ Jesus may speak more often unto them.¹¹⁵

After an initial exchange with the Cambridge Heads and the Consistory Court in January 1588/89, Johnson and Bainbrigg engaged in a series of examinations and appeals in the hope of gaining their freedom and retaining their status as Fellows. The two men were brought before the Consistory Court at the instigation of the Cambridge Heads and the Vice-Chancellor, who was Thomas Nevile of Magdalene, on the basis of Article 45 of the 1570 University Statutes.¹¹⁶ Article 45 gave the Vice-Chancellor the authority to order any lecturer or preacher who challenged the religious authority of the university to publicly recant with the support of a majority of the College Heads. This article was, not coincidentally, passed in 1570 and reaffirmed in 1571 at the height of Thomas Cartwright’s conflict with Archbishop Whitgift.¹¹⁷ The initial interviews of the two Fellows were unsatisfactory to the Consistory, but they were not sure how to proceed.

¹¹⁵Strype, 610.

¹¹⁶H. C. Porter, *Reform and Reaction At Tudor Cambridge*, 156.

¹¹⁷Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 156-57.

Their lethargy was broken by a letter from Archbishop Whitgift prompting them to action. Whitgift and five ecclesiastical commissioners threatened to bring Johnson and Bainbrigg to trial in London before their own tribunal if the Cambridge authorities did not deal with the problem themselves. His letter strongly implied that their failure to properly dispose of Johnson and Bainbrigg would be detrimental to the university's reputation.¹¹⁸

Nevile reconvened the court on January 22, 1588/89. He determined that the usual procedure of calling witnesses would not be feasible because all of the potential witnesses who heard the sermons were afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal. He therefore required Bambrigg and Johnson to state the contents of their sermons under oath for the record. Neither man wanted to comply with this order because this oath, the oath *officio mero*, would require both Johnson and Bambrigg to incriminate themselves by giving evidence contrary to their best interest. They refused to incriminate themselves by taking the oath.¹¹⁹ Johnson explained their stance in an appeal written in his hand to Lord Burghley:

And first may it please your honor to understand that we were not committed for anything uttered by us in our sermons; but onely because we did not yeeld to take a corporall oath to deliver the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, of that we spake in our public sermons, and thereby to accuse our selves (whereas the whole audience affoorded sufficient witness) if in any thing we had offended. Without oath we have already openly in the consistory (according to your honours first letters) aunswered to whatsoever we were charged withal; which notwithstanding we still continew imprisoned, onely because we refuse to take this unlawfull oath.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 157.

¹¹⁹Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 158.

¹²⁰“Bambrigg and Johnson to Lord Burghley,” *Cambridge University Transactions During the Puritan Controversies of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Collected by James Heywood and Thomas Wright, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 553. Original in the British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts No. 16, Article 10.

As Chancellor of Cambridge University, Lord Burghley took a personal interest in the case. He obviously had a compelling motivation to keep the university's affairs tidy and out of the jurisdiction of Whitgift. The two Fellows had been committed to the Tolbooth, the local city prison, but Burghley intervened to insure that they received proper care. Francis Johnson acknowledged Burghley's generosity in "keping from us that extremity which we greatly feared."¹²¹ Johnson viewed Burghley as his best hope for acquittal and sent at least three appeals to the Chancellor.

The Cambridge Heads appealed to Burghley in April 1589 for clarification of his intentions regarding the necessity of the prisoners taking the oath. Burghley had sent a letter discussing the situation with the Heads. In this letter, Burghley did not mention the issue of the oath. Johnson and Bainbrigg seized the opportunity to confuse the process by playing the Cambridge authorities against one another. The Heads, stymied by the clash of authorities implied by Johnson, wrote plaintively:

may it please your honor to be advertised that the sayed parties have now been fower or fyve tymes dealte withal, not in rigorous sorte, but in civill and courteous wise, with offer of conference, as of intent to perswade them and not to force them; and that they mighte the rather be moved to have due regard of there doinges, it hathe beene thoughte not amisse to acquainte them with the tenour of your lordships lettres; wherein for that your lordship hath not made anie expresse mencion of receaving there aunsweres upon there oaths, they seeme to take advantage and make construccion as thoughe your lordship would not have them sworne at all. Now albeit this conceipt of thers seemed straunge and contrarie to the understandinge of such as waited on your lordship aboute that matter, by whome your lordship was plainly informed, that the cause of there committinge to safe custodie hath hitherto been onlie for refusing to sweare; yet for that they so confidentlie affirme your lordships meaneinge to be as they

¹²¹"Bambrigg and Johnson to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions During the Puritan Controversies of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Collected by James Heywood and Thomas Wright, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 553. Original in the British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts No. 16, Article 10.

saye, we took it apperteyninge to our dueties, as well not to conceal this from your lordship, as allso to attend your lordships further pleasure therein.¹²²

It would seem odd that the Cambridge Heads would be so concerned about defining the terms of Burghley's instructions to the satisfaction of Johnson and Bainbrigg when they knew themselves that his intentions were "plainly" imparted to them. Their desire to observe the utmost propriety in protocol may have stemmed from an awareness of the importance of handling the case well. They may also have been divided among themselves.

Peter Lake, Fellow of Claire College at Cambridge University, published an illuminating article in 1978 that provided a helpful analysis of the moderate Puritan dilemma in dealing with cases like that of Johnson and Bainbrigg.¹²³ Puritan college Heads such as Laurence Chaderton of Emmanuel, William Whitaker of St. John's, and Roger Goad of King's were placed in a situation where their Puritan sympathies were in conflict with their duty to support the health of the university. All three of these men agreed with Johnson and Bainbrigg in principle but feared that their tactics would do the Puritan cause more harm than good. They were placed in the unenviable position of playing the "Amaziah" to Johnson's Amos in the debate concerning church polity. This situation was doubtless doubly hard for Chaderton because he had been intimately involved with Christ's during Johnson's tenure, knew Johnson well, and was surely instrumental in influencing him to explore the presbyterian view of church

¹²²"Bambrigge and Johnson to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions During the Puritan Controversies of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Collected by James Heywood and Thomas Wright, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 553. Original in the British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts No. 16, Article 10.

¹²³Peter Lake, "The Dilemma of the Establishment Puritan: the Cambridge Heads and the case of Francis Johnson and Cuthbert Bainbrigg," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1978, 23-35.

government.¹²⁴ They were spared the necessity of making a declaration supporting or refuting the content of the sermons by Johnson and Bainbrigg's decision to construct a defense on the basis of the immorality of taking the oath. This situation left the Puritan Heads free to support the Vice-Chancellor as a matter of respect for authority while attempting to influence the other Heads to treat the offenders with leniency.

To their credit, the Puritan Heads placed themselves on the record in opposition to the manner in which the proceedings were conducted. A document entitled "Answers to the Informations" was sent to Burghley to argue the Puritan view of the prosecution. These "Answers to the Informations" were of unknown authorship but purported to speak for the supporters of Johnson and Bainbrigg who were not represented among the Heads. The author or authors indicated that the moderate Puritan Heads had mounted their own petition for the prisoners. The document stated:

5. Yt is conceived that the greatest part and best disposed of th' universitie mislike greatlie this manner of proceadinge, as may partelie appeare by D. Goade, provost of Kinges Colledge, and Mr. Chaderton, master of Imanuell Colledge, protesting openlie, and Mr. D. Whitakers, master of St. Johns Colledge, privatlie protesting, they wolde not be privie or partie thereunto¹²⁵

This document was dated June 12, 1589. The authors felt that Lord Burghley was not getting an accurate account of Johnson and Bainbrigg's treatment.

Two major grievances against the Head's treatment of the prisoners were related in the "Informations." The first was the decision of the heads to deny bail to the prisoners. A petition for bail had been made six weeks after Johnson and Bainbrigg were taken into custody by Henrie Knevett and William Bowes, knights and later among the

¹²⁴Lake calls Chaderton "an avowed Presbyterian." Lake, "Establishment Puritan," 23.

¹²⁵"Answers to the Informations," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 558. Original in British Library, Lansdowne, Article 6, No. 12.

sixty-eight signers of a petition to reinstate Johnson as a Fellow. The men additionally challenged the Vice-Chancellor's procedure, which provided two lawyers named by the Vice-Chancellor to arbitrate the case and advise the tribunal on legal matters. Knevett and Bowes argued that justice would better be served if two lawyers were appointed to represent each side and that the prisoners should have an opportunity to provide input concerning their advocate. The Vice-Chancellor and Heads could render a decision on those points of law on which the two sides disagreed; this suggestion was also rejected by the Heads.¹²⁶

The second cause of concern for the composers of the "Informations" was the nature of the *ex mero officio* oath that was demanded of the prisoners. To coerce a minister to proclaim his guilt to obtain release when his conscience did not convict him of guilt was a grievous crime in the eyes of these supplicants. They wrote:

Yt is unconscionable to tye the conscience of a man to take the holie name of God in witness of that which himselfe knowethe, before he speake, he can not performe. Besides the temptinge of God to hazarde the creditt of their mynisterie upon fraile mermorie; and it is prejudiciall to the commandment of God in the person of a preacher forbidding to muche care what shalbe uttered, but to rest uppon thinformation of Godes spirit, provided that his ordinarie meanes be used therein.¹²⁷

The third article challenged the legal precedent for the ecclesiastical authorities to demand the oath and the civil authorities to levy imprisonment as the penalty for refusing

¹²⁶"Answers to the Informations," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 556. Original in British Library, Lansdowne, Article 6, No. 12.

¹²⁷"Answers to the Informations," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 555-56. Original in British Library, Lansdowne, Article 6, No. 12.

to take it. In a fourth article, the Vice Chancellor's failure to demonstrate the precedent properly supported their course of action toward Johnson and Bainbrigg.¹²⁸

Lord Burghley was a sympathetic recipient of this petition, as his actions prior to its composition had demonstrated. Though Burghley at first felt the offense of Johnson and Bainbrigg should cost them their Fellowships, he soon changed his mind and became concerned for their welfare. A report from the Heads to Burghley dated May 4, 1589, noted that Burghley had expressed to them in a letter his feeling that the disposition of the case was "a verie hard course taken."¹²⁹ On May 15, the Heads wrote to Burghley noting his concern that Bainbrigg's long imprisonment had impaired his health. Eager to appease the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor secured the services of a physician to assess Bainbrigg's condition. They reported:

Our verie humble duties remembered: upon the receipte of your honours letters for thenlargement of Mr. Banbridge, one of the two fellowes of Christes Colledge, committed by us unto prison, we sendinge for the said Banbridge, and findejnge as well by his owne relation as by the viewe and judgment of Mr. Doctour Ward and Barro, phisitions, that there nether was nor is anie such cause of sicknes, that by his continuance in prison may hazard him in his lyfe (as to your honour hath bene reported), have thought good there to continue him, untill the truth should be certified, and we might heare more of your honours pleasure. And yet we do not so restraine him, but if that may benefitt him in his healthe, both he and the other with him may have the libertie of the common feildes, or anie exercise ells them selves shall thincke fitt for there recreation.¹³⁰

Despite these assurances from the Heads, Burghley continued to receive reports that the prisoners were not being allowed the proper means for their physical and spiritual

¹²⁸“Answers to the Informations,” *Cambridge University Transactions*, 555-58. Original in British Library, Lansdowne, Article 6, No. 12.

¹²⁹“Heads to Lord Burghley- May 4, 1589,” *Cambridge University Transactions*, 549-51. Original in British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 8.

¹³⁰“Heads to Lord Burghley- May 17, 1589,” *Cambridge University Transactions*, 552. Original in British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 9.

well being. Johnson and Bainbrigg themselves, in a letter probably drafted by Johnson, informed Burghley that they were not being treated as well as the Heads claimed. This letter is dated May 22, five days after the letter drafted by the Heads insisting that they would grant appropriate liberties to the captives. Johnson and Bainbrigg pleaded:

we are agayne bold to fly unto your lordship of our relief, desiring your honour to consider of our longe imprisonment, nowe by the space of seventene weeks, onely for refusing to take the oath. Whereby we are greatly restrained of that liberty which other schollers do enjoy; our bodily health is so indaungered, as th'one of us hath bene constrayned, very inconveniently in this place, to take physick; our duties also to our pupils, whom their parents have committed unto us, very much hindered; besides our common duties as fellowes of our colledge and schollers of the University, all the benefits wherof we want, together with the hearing of the Word of God preached, and participacion of the sacrament administered; our private studyes in this tyme of our preparacion for the ministry of the gospel long interrupted and much disappoynted; our good name among our frends abroad and straungers every where, that heare of our imprisonment, but not of the cause, greatly impaired; our exhibicion, that should have bene employed to the maintenance of our studyes, excessively wasted in the charges of the prison.¹³¹

This description of their life in prison is followed by an appeal for clemency and for release. Johnson and Bainbrigg's contention that their physical needs were still not being met was supported by the authors of the "Informations" who claimed that Bainbrigg's physician could testify that he had in fact been ill. It was also claimed that:

7. The contrarie wilbe proved in that taking a small libertie to goe to their colledge upon speciall occasion, their keaper was checked for it by Mr. vice-chauncellour; and for their resort for exercises, he denied their earnest suite for lieve to resort to the sermon at St. Maries with their keaper on Sondaye, which was the first of this instant of June, saying, You shall pardon me; I neither can nor will.¹³²

¹³¹Cuthbert Bainbrigg and Francis Johnson to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 553-54. Original in British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 10.

¹³²"Answers to the Informations," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 555-58. Original in British Library, Lansdowne, Article 6, No. 12.

One can almost sympathize with Burghley, removed as he was from the situation, yet bearing direct responsibility for its successful conclusion. The interplay of charges and countercharges from both sides continued throughout the course of Johnson's imprisonment, creating a situation that must have taxed Burghley's patience.

The Heads offered in June to alter the language of the oath to make it more amenable to the prisoners, but they still insisted that any acceptance of the oath on their part would lead to self-incrimination. They were finally released on bail on September 13 after spending the entire summer in prison. It was determined that the two men would be formally put to trial under Article 45 of the University Statutes unless they recanted. Two formal recantations were drafted in October. Bainbrigg, wearied by his long imprisonment, agreed to read his recantation publicly at Great St. Mary's on December 14.¹³³ Bainbrigg was duly restored to his Fellowship, which he retained until his death in 1620.¹³⁴ There is no evidence that Bainbrigg was anything other than a cooperative and well behaved Fellow from 1589 onward.

The Heads had successfully managed to convince Bainbrigg to recant, but would find that Francis Johnson was an entirely different challenge. Johnson was the one they most wished to see recant because his sermon was the most problematic. Bainbrigg had challenged the conformity of the Cambridge community's practice of its faith, but Johnson had questioned the entire ecclesiastical system in demanding that the university recognize the necessity of an eldership in each gathered congregation. A growing presbyterian movement was known to exist at Cambridge and had included the likes of

¹³³Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 158-59.

¹³⁴Peile, *Biographical Register*, 149.

Chaderton and William Perkins among its members. A provincial synod had met at Cambridge in 1587 with Thomas Cartwright and Laurence Chaderton among the attendees. In 1589, a provincial gathering included Perkins as well as the other men who had been present previously.¹³⁵ These gatherings were occurring during the same period that Johnson was making his appeal. The Heads saw in Francis Johnson not only an unruly Fellow who demonstrated an unhealthy impertinence, but also evidence that the undercurrents of presbyterian ecclesiology would inevitably surface unless it was dealt a strong blow by the Heads. Ironically, Chaderton was in attendance at these synods even as he was trying to steer a moderate course with Johnson.

Wearied of Johnson's refusal to recant, the Vice Chancellor and the Heads at last expelled him from the university on October 30. They cited Article 45 of the Cambridge University Statutes as the justification for their action. Undeterred, Johnson refused to leave Cambridge and filed another appeal on the basis of Article 48 of the Statutes. Johnson appealed in part because of the advice of Lord Burghley. On December 18, Johnson learned that the Consistory Court had denied his appeal. Rather than leave, Johnson demonstrated the stubborn streak that would characterize his resistance in later battles by refusing to leave. Johnson was once again confined to the Tolbooth for his intransigence.¹³⁶

Johnson wrote dismally of the failure of his appeal on December 22. His letter was the potent expression of dismay by a young idealist who felt both persecuted for the sake of truth and betrayed by others who held that same ideal. Johnson had his first bitter

¹³⁵Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 190-93. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 385-405.

¹³⁶Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 160-61.

lesson in the school of political expediency when Chaderton's, Whitaker's, and Goad's signatures appeared on the final rejection of his appeal. As Heads of important colleges in the university system, they were ultimately forced to choose between protecting the stability of their colleges and their support for Johnson. They also had to weigh the question of whether risking all for Johnson was worth the possibility of closing the eyes and ears of the university to their Puritan ideals.¹³⁷ In this choice the moderate Puritan heads were in conformity to the larger Elizabethan Puritan movement, which ultimately accepted the impossibility of immediate adoption of their ideals and adopted a focus on personal piety rather than ecclesiastical purity.¹³⁸ Johnson saw from an outsider's perspective the difficulty if not impossibility of exercising a prophetic role when one is charged with the care of an institution or organization. He would later be on the other end of this dilemma as he was forced to contend with a dissonance between his ideals and his pragmatic concerns as a congregational leader.

Johnson's letter to Burghley was charged with all of these feelings of frustration and betrayal:

Right honourable and my very good lord: as I do unfainedly acknowledge my self to be infinitely bound unto your lordship for the great favour which I, beinge so meane a person, have found with your lordship, so having lighted upon most mercillesse adversayres (for so I am now constreyned to call them), with whom I have long wrestled in vayne, to my great charge and almost utter undoing in my living and small substance, besides the losse of almost one whole yeare which I have incurred in turmoyles among them, I am constrayned agayne to send unto your lordship (for come I can not) for the Lord Jesus Christes sake, to crave your lordships aid and succour in this my great extremity.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Peter Lake, "The Dilemma of the Establishment Puritan: The Cambridge Heads and the Case of Francis Johnson and Cuthbert Bainbrigg," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1978, 23-35.

¹³⁸Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritanism*, 464-67.

¹³⁹"Francis Johnson to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 561-64. Original in British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 15.

Johnson took pains to remind Burghley that it was his suggestion that Johnson appeal the decision. He recounted how he had gone before the Heads and demanded his right to appeal, based on Article 48. The Heads bluntly asked whether he intended to leave or make arrangements for more time to gather his things. His confinement to the Tolbooth was intended to last until he would let his appeal rest and yield his title to the university and his Fellowship.¹⁴⁰ Johnson suffered deprivations and hardship during his imprisonment in the Tolbooth that he took pains to describe to Burghley. Johnson reflected:

wher I did lye and continue three dayes in the tolebooth, in a close and cold corner, streightly kept, that none of my friends might come at me, nor comfort come to me from them: and now because of th'extremity of the weather am removed to the baylif of the tolebooth his house, with straight charge that none at all be suffered to come unto me. Neyther doth this their most violent dealing fall and rest onely upon me: for I beseech your lordship to consider whether that withall the soveraigne authority of our gracious queen (whom God long continew among us with much glory) be not impugned by making them selves (without, nay, against law and statute,) supreme judges and governors, not to be appealed from: the honorable protection of your lordship over us trampled under their feet by most straitly imprisoning me for that which your lordship permitted and advised me to do, the expresse statute and priviledg of our whole University by all violence broken and disanulled for the maintenance of their owne indirect and unlawfull proceeding.¹⁴¹

Johnson realized that his attempt to retain his Fellowship had failed and that the best he could anticipate at that point was release from prison. To this end, he petitioned Burghley to secure his release.

Johnson's language at the close of his appeal to Burghley closely resembled the same view of himself as God's persecuted vessel that was still present in his work when he wrote *A Christian Plea* in 1617:

¹⁴⁰“Johnson to Burghley,” *Transactions*, 562.

¹⁴¹“Johnson to Burghley,” *Transactions*, 562-63.

To God that judgeth right I committ my cause, being in my self persuaded and rejoycing that I have recyved to suffer for the truth of th'eternal God, which at first and now still they persecute in me, th'unworthiest of the servantes of God. O my God, look downe from heaven, stay the furye of men, strike thy feare into their hearts, that they may consider their last end.

Now of your lordship, I, a poor prisoner overthrown by the power of myne adversaryes in a just cause, being put out of doubt that here I shall fynd no more justice then I have, the proctour being checked for dealinge in my appeale, and threatned now to be called to his aunswer, do most instantly, on Gods behalf, that favoereth righteous dealing, beg and besech to take my cause to your lordshipes hearing, and to rescue me from this grievous imprisonment, which undeservedly the Lord of heaven knoweth I susteyne.¹⁴²

That day after Johnson wrote these lines, sixty-eight Cambridge Fellows and students signed a petition for the release of Francis Johnson. Among the signatories were Cuthbert Bainbrigg and William Perkins of Christ's. They compared Johnson to Jeremiah, who also endured seasons of imprisonment for the sake of the gospel. Johnson was labeled "our dear brother and faithfull servant of God."¹⁴³ The sixty-eight signatories wished to relate the story of Johnson's imprisonment again for Burghley's consideration. They were motivated in part by the fear that what had been done to Johnson might be done to any of them if his treatment were allowed to stand unchallenged.

We doe not denie but that our hearts are greatly mooved with this strange example of extraordinarie violence and extremity: and, but that we knowe there is a God in heaven that beholdeth and ruleth all things, and shall one day judge all men, as well high as lowe, and the Lord onlie knoweth how soon, who will also in his good time shew himself a terrible revenger of all the authors and patrons of injustice, we cold not but be utterly discouraged by this extreme dealing. We knowe we must glorify the Lord as well by suffering as otherwise. The Lord prepare us for it; the Lord prepare us for it; for that schoole is now opened, and we all look to come unto it.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Johnson to Burghley," *Transactions*, 562-63.

¹⁴³"The Masters of Arts to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 564-566. British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 16.

¹⁴⁴"The Masters of Arts to Lord Burghley," *Cambridge University Transactions*, 564-566. British Library, Lansdowne Manuscripts, No. 61, Article 16.

The comparison of Johnson to Jeremiah was an image that Johnson himself would cultivate over the course of his lifetime. In this instance, the comparison to the biblical prophet was intended to act as Ebed- Melech, the servant of the Judean King Zedekiah (r. 598-586 BCE), who interceded on behalf of Jeremiah when he was imprisoned to secure his release.

The petition for Johnson's release was accompanied by fractious protests as well. Henry Alvery, Fellow of St. John's and one of the sixty-eight signatories, led a group of fifty men from St. John's through the streets of Cambridge to Peterhouse in an attempt to gain a hearing for Johnson's appeal. Johnson supporters disrupted the proceedings convened to award Lancelot Andrews of Pembroke with the Doctor of Divinity degree. It was noted that Johnson did enjoy a great deal of popular support among the Fellows and students.¹⁴⁵

The general uproar caused by these demonstrations did not succeed in swaying the Heads to reinstate Johnson, though they eventually did secure his release. Though the exact date is uncertain, Johnson was probably released sometime in February 1589/90. He finally accepted the finality of his sentence and gathered his things to depart the university. His future lay not at Cambridge or even in England, but across the English Channel in the Netherlands.

10. Summary

Francis Johnson was born in 1562 to a relatively influential family in Richmond, Yorkshire. He matriculated at Cambridge University in 1579 as a pensioner and advanced to the B. A. by 1581/82. Johnson became a fellow in 1584 and a Master in

¹⁴⁵Porter, *Tudor Cambridge*, 209-12.

1585. As a Fellow of Christ's College, Johnson was responsible for the education and welfare of several students, among whom was counted the future "Se-Baptist" John Smyth. Johnson continued to prepare for the ministry during this period, teaching at Cambridge and preaching regularly at Bourn and Fen Drayton.

Johnson's fairly typical journey through the Cambridge system was disrupted in January 1588/89 when he preached a sermon at Great St. Mary's challenging the Episcopal form of church government. He advocated the adoption of a presbyterian system with a strong eldership to be erected in its place. He suffered through a year of hearings and appeals with the result that he was deprived of his fellowship and forced to leave Cambridge. Despite the extremities he experienced, Johnson appeared to relish his role as a leader of the opposition.

Johnson's Cambridge years were a time for education and preparation in which he began to formulate his own understanding of church government at variance with that of the Established Church. His first brush with both civil and ecclesiastical authority revealed both Johnson's ability to work the system and his attraction to the cult of martyrdom. Many of the characteristics that were to be noted in years to come as vintage Johnson were evident and emerging during this early period of Johnson's life and ministry. In the Netherlands, Johnson's ecclesiology would continue to evolve, and he would discover that even the most radical niche within the Church of England was too much of a compromise for his puritan heart.

The seeds of separation had already been sown in Johnson's determination to go beyond moderate Puritans in advocating the immediate institution of their ideals. He had only to make the final break that was the logical outcome of his thought thus far.

Ironically, Johnson would abandon both his insistence on presbyterian polity and his belief that the Church of England was a truly Christian church only to gradually return to them both in the final decade of his life.

CHAPTER TWO

Francis Johnson: London Separatist Pastor

1. Introduction

Now therefore let me exhort all, both Preachers and people, high and low, to compare together the Scriptures of the Prophets and Apostles concerning the work of God and the fall of Babylon past and to come; and to take heed vnto themselves, that they harden not their hearts, but whiles it is called To Day, to hearken vnto the voice of Lord, who sayth vnto vs concerning the spirituall Babylon & all her assemblies and worship, *Go out of her my people, that ye partake not with her sinnes, and that ye receive not of her plagues:* as of old he sayd to the Iewes concerning Babylon in Chaldea, *Go out of the middes of her my people, and deliver ye every man his soule from the fierce wrath of the Lord.* Rev. 18:4 with Ier. 51:45¹

Francis Johnson finally accepted the reality that his continuous appeals to Lord Burghley were not going to relieve his situation or gain his reinstatement to his Cambridge fellowship. Despite the general uproar caused by student disapproval of his treatment by the Cambridge heads, Johnson was simply too headstrong and uncontrollable to be retained. This opinion was shared, as evidenced, even by the Puritan elements among the Cambridge heads. Johnson's opinions at the end of his Cambridge sojourn already were reflecting a radical tint too bright for more moderate Puritans. It is likely that Johnson himself had no inkling of his final theological destination, though at the time he was already moving toward the Separatist views that would place him beyond the pale of his most radical Cambridge colleagues.

¹Francis Johnson, *Certayne reasons and arguments proving that it is not lawfull to heare or have any spirituall communion with the present ministerie of the Church of England*, (Amsterdam, 1608), preface.

2. Francis Johnson at Middleburg: Coercion and Conversion

Johnson's movements after his final appeal and dismissal from Cambridge in early 1590 are somewhat shadowy. He reappeared in late 1590 as the pastor of the Merchant Adventurer's congregation at Middleburg, Holland. The Merchant Adventurers were English entrepreneurs who facilitated the flow of English goods to and from the busy ports of Amsterdam. One of the primary goods they handled was cloth. Their congregation was established as a means for both religious instruction and social cohesion during their absence from their native land. Though the congregation was most certainly an English establishment, officially affiliated with the state church, many of their pastors were drawn from the Puritan wing of the Church of England. Most notably, Johnson was following in the footsteps of Thomas Cartwright, who had led the church in the early 1580's.² After two short terms by other pastors, Johnson was succeeded in the late 1590's by Henry Jacob (1563-1624), a Puritan preacher and polemicist who has been credited by historians as the ideological founder of the Independents and the Particular Baptists.³ While the details of Johnson's appointment to the post have not survived, it is probable given the tenor of the other men who led the church that his Puritan friends at

²J. De Hoop Scheffer's work on the English Separatists is an invaluable resource because he utilized documents relating to the life of the Middleburg congregation that were lost during the Second World War. This circumstance is unfortunate not only because the sources are not available to contemporary scholars, but also because it would be useful to check Scheffer's account against the originals. J. De Hoop Scheffer, *History of the Free Churchmen Called the Brownists, Pilgrim Fathers and Baptists in the Dutch Republic, 1581-1701*, (Ithaca, New York: Andrus & Church, 1922), 10-11.

³H. Leon McBeth, former professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, identified Jacob's London congregation as the JIJ Church (Jacob, Lanthrop, Jessey) after its three pastoral leaders in the mid-seventeenth century. McBeth clearly portrays Jacob's church as a precursor to the Particular Baptist movement. While the point of McBeth and other scholars that there was a link between the Particular Baptists and the Jacob congregation is well taken, it must be remembered that they broke with Jacob's congregation and sought counsel from other traditions as well in their establishment. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 42-48.

Cambridge assisted Johnson in securing the post. His ministry at Middleburgh would provide him a living and an opportunity to continue his proclamation of puritan principles at a safe distance from the Anglican bishops.

Johnson's ministry at Middleburgh provided him with a rich opportunity to interact with a cosmopolitan society that surpassed both his rural upbringing in Richmond and the somewhat insular intellectual world of Cambridge. The Dutch Republic of the Netherlands was quickly becoming the intellectual and financial leader of Western Europe.⁴ Ships arrived in Amsterdam daily from ports around the world; therefore, Johnson's congregation consisted of men who interacted daily with people from various social and cultural contexts. Scholars traveled from distant countries to study at the university at Leiden. The toleration of all religious views attracted people of all theological persuasions, including Jews, to seek refuge in the Netherlands.⁵

One group in particular whose religious views had caused them to seek refuge in the Dutch Republic was of special interest to Francis Johnson. His interest in them was partially due to their common English origins. The second reason for his interest in them was the fact that they had been established in Middleburg since 1581, and therefore proclaimed their aberrant views on his field of ministry.⁶ The English Separatists were Puritans who, in the words of Robert Browne, desired "reformation without tarrying for anie."⁷ Despairing of the possibility that the English church would repent and embrace

⁴Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: It's Rise, Greatness, and Fall*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 50-95.

⁵Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice In The Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565-1641)*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 75-81.

⁶De Hoop Scheffer, *History of the Free Churchmen*, 10.

⁷Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarrying For Anie*, (1582).

Puritan ecclesiology, Browne and his followers had covenanted together to form their own community of faith separate from the established Church of England. Their congregation had been forced to flee to Middleburg when the inevitable official reaction against their ecclesiastical rebellion became too difficult for them to bear. Due to a conflict with his friend, Robert Harrison, and his faction of the congregation, Browne abandoned his congregation and fled with a small number of supporters to Scotland in January 1583-84.⁸ The Middleburg Separatists continued to worship in exile under the leadership of Robert Harrison. Browne returned to England in 1585 and repented of his separation. He was received back into the Anglican Communion and died within the arms of that church.⁹ Browne's name became a by-word for later Separatists synonymous with the taint of treachery and apostasy. Later Separatists so fervently despised Browne's act of apostasy that they rejected any connection between their movement and his, though the ideological affinities between Browne's congregation and the Separatist congregations in London are obvious. Despite these obvious theological connections, any genetic inheritance from Browne gained by the London Separatist congregations has generally been disregarded by most historians of Separatism due to the stridency of the Separatists' denials of that connection.¹⁰

Puritans tended to despise the Separatists as much, and perhaps more, than the Anglicans. In their view Separatists had abandoned the field to the enemy. Rather than enduring hardship and remaining within the Church of England to affect its

⁸B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs To The Pilgrim Fathers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 44-50.

⁹White, 44-6.

¹⁰White, 67-77.

transformation, Separatists claimed that the Church of England was so thoroughly corrupt and infused with papal ceremonies that no spiritual benefit could be derived from its ministry. The schismatic tendencies of the Separatists served to make the Puritan cause more difficult because their decision to challenge the hierarchy of the Church of England only served to prejudice the Queen and the bishops against Puritan ideals.

Francis Johnson apparently felt that it was a crucial aspect of his role as pastor of the Merchant Adventurer Church at Middleburg to keep a critical eye on Harrison's congregation. They posed a possible threat to his own congregation by spreading teachings about separation contrary to his church's accepted doctrines. His diligence in opposing their views also held the possibility of allaying some of the suspicion that still clouded his reputation in the minds of the Cambridge heads and Anglican leaders.

Johnson was presented with an opportunity to deal directly with the Separatists at Middleburg in the spring of 1591. He received word that the Middleburg Separatists were planning to have copies printed of a polemical work by Henry Barrow and John Greenwood entitled *A plaine refutation of M. Giffards booke, intituled, A short treatise against the Donatistes of England*. Primarily authored by Henry Barrow, this treatise was intended to counter the charge of Donatism by George Gifford, a Puritan minister of the Church of England serving at the time in Maldon, in a systematic fashion, explicitly expounding the reasons for Greenwood and Barrow's Separation. Barrow wrote:

6. And now that our forsaking & vtter abandoning of these disordered assemblies as they generally stand in England, may not seeme strange nor offensive to any man that will iudge or be iudged by the word of God, we alledge and affirm them heinously guiltie in these 4 principall Transgressions.

1. THEY worship the trve God after a false manner, their worship being made of the invention of man, euen of the man of sinne, erronious and imposed vpon them.

2. FOR that the prophane ungodly multitudes, without exception of any one Person, are with them received into, and reteined in the bozome of the Church.
3. FOR that they have a false and AntiChristian Ministrie imposed vpon them, reteined with them, and maintained by them.
4. FOR that these Churches are ruled by, and remaine in subjection vnto an AntiChristian and ungodly goeurnment, cleane contrarie to the institution of our Savior Christ.¹¹

Johnson's eagerness to destroy the fruit of Greenwood's and Barrow's labors indicated their growing prominence as leaders of the Separatist movement in the popular mind. The two men had led a small, but growing Separatist congregation in London since 1587, but the origins of this congregation are murky at best. Henry Barrow (1550-93) was the elder of the two men and hailed from Shipham, Norfolk. He was born into a family of some means. Fred Powicke, an English Congregationalist minister and biographer of Barrow, demonstrated Barrow's distant relation by marriage to Lord Burghley and possibly John Aylmer, Bishop of London.¹² The lack of information about Henry Barrow preserved in the family histories probably is indicative of the family's shame at Barrow's separatist status.¹³ Barrow's early years are a mystery. He first came to historical record in 1566 when he arrived at Clare Hall, Cambridge. Barrow graduated from Clare with his B. A. in 1569-70. Clare had been founded for the purpose of theological studies, though there were rumors that it was easily one of the most unruly of the Cambridge Colleges during the Elizabethan era.¹⁴ Unruly or not, Clare experienced steady growth during the Elizabethan Era and was in good condition during the early

¹¹Henry Barrow, "A Brief Svmm of the Causes of Our Separation", *A plaine refutation of M. G. Giffardes reprochful booke, intituled a short treatise against the Donatists of England*, (London, 1591), 1-2.

¹²Powicke, Fred. J., *Henry Barrow Separatist (1550?-1593) And The Exiled Church of Amsterdam (1593-1622)*, (London: James Clarke and Co., 1900), 3.

¹³*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 3-5.

years of James I.¹⁵ Barrow did not remember his days at Cambridge fondly in later years. Like Robert Browne before him, Barrow denounced the poor spiritual condition of Cambridge in general and identified the university as a principle breeding ground for the weak examples of ministerial competence currently troubling the English Church. In one particularly venomous diatribe, Barrow wrote of Oxford and Cambridge:

Heere they wil with one voice answer, that the Vniuersities are the seminaries of religion, of the ministerie of the land; the schooles and the colledges of learning, wherein the soones of the Prophets are trained vp, as they were in Naioth, in Bethel, Ierico, Ierusalem, & Corinth.

If the tree be knowne by the fruite, the Cockatrice by the poisoned eggs, the Viper by the spawne, the nest by the birdes; then let the religion and the priestes of the land shew what kind of seminaries and colledges these Vniuersities are. . . Yf also these your vniuersities be compared to these cities whither these faithful men repaired (because of these famous prophets) to be instructed in the lawes of God, we shall find them more like to the Sodomitical colledges and fellowships of the idolatrous monkes and Friars, brethren of a birth, euen by both parents; than vnto the holy assemblies of the Prophets. And this will appeare if we compare them, either in the persons assembled, or in the manner and endes of their education and training.¹⁶

Barrow continued his comparison of the English colleges with the schools of the Prophets by noting the general “idolatrie, confusion, and disorder” of the students at Cambridge.¹⁷ In Barrow’s opinion, the college heads and their progeny spent their lives in arrogance and idleness. While Barrow’s seamy underside of Cambridge life probably had a grain of truth, his hindsight was probably colored by his own experiences and the puritanical fervor of post-conversion convictions. It bears remembering that Bainbrigg and Johnson gave a similar assessment of the colleges and heads at a time when some of the greatest luminaries of the Puritan movement were in residence. Barrow himself had fallen into a

¹⁵James Bass Mullinger, *The University of Cambridge From The Royal Injunctions of 1535 to The Ascension of Charles The First*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1884), 494.

¹⁶Henry Barrow, *A brief discouerie of the false church*, (London?: 1590-91), 175.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 176.

serious gambling addiction and other cavalier habits during his residence at Cambridge, a probable reason for his scathing assessment of the University's moral atmosphere.

Barrow spent some time as a courtier at the court of Elizabeth I, a place of frivolity where a young man could hope to get ahead by winning the notice of the Queen. He also began legal studies at Grey's Inn in 1576 but was never officially adopted by the London Bar.¹⁸ He was converted about 1580-81 when he entered a London church after being drawn by the words of the minister he had overheard in the street. He soon left London and retired to the countryside to study scripture, think, and determine his future course. It was soon widely rumored to everyone's surprise that Barrow had become a Puritan.¹⁹

John Greenwood (1560-93) was a student at Corpus Christi College at the same time that Robert Browne was proclaiming his Separatist ideology at Cambridge from 1578-81.²⁰ Even though both Barrow and Greenwood were living in relative proximity to Browne at various times, Barrow at Norwich and Greenwood at Cambridge, there remains no evidence to demonstrate conclusively that their paths crossed.²¹ Corpus Christi was a hotbed of Puritan activity during Greenwood's B. A. studies at Cambridge (1577-81). Greenwood's experience at Cambridge would have been much more similar to that of Francis Johnson than Henry Barrow's.²²

At what point Barrow and Greenwood united their efforts and began their London congregation remains a mystery that will probably remain unsolved due to the paucity of

¹⁸Powicke, 6-9.

¹⁹Powicke, 6-9.

²⁰White, 70-71.

²¹Powicke, 12-13.

²²Powicke, 11.

sources for the earliest days of the London congregation's life. It is possible that Greenwood had some influence on Barrow's decision to become a Separatist due to the proximity of Cambridge and Norwich.²³ The two men and their congregation first came to public attention when John Greenwood was arrested at a conventicle in 1587. The public record of the arrest stated that Mr. Greenwood was a "preacher" and had been "deprived of his benefice in Norfolk about two yeres past."²⁴ Greenwood was committed to the Clink, a notorious London prison, along with his companions. The conventicle was meeting at the home of one Henry Martin in St. Andrews at the "Wardropp" (wardrobe). St. Andrews at the Wardrobe was south of St. Paul's and Carter Lane near the north bank of the Thames.²⁵ Barrow was arrested on November 19, 1587, when he went to visit Greenwood.²⁶ They were both eventually released but were back in prison by May 1589.²⁷ While their congregation was probably not the only Separatist conventicle meeting in London at the time, their writings and their stature as imprisoned saints for the cause garnered a great deal of attention for the Separatist movement.

Francis Johnson determined to stamp out the branch of their movement at Middleburg in the spring of 1591. Possibly alerted to the printing of Barrow's treatise by an informant among the Separatists or at the printer's shop, Johnson hurried to the Hague to share the news with the English ambassador. The ambassador empowered Johnson to

²³Powicke, 12.

²⁴John Greenwood, *The Writings of John Greenwood, 1587-1590*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1962), 307.

²⁵Greenwood, 306.

²⁶White, 71.

²⁷Greenwood, 1587-1590, 307-310.

deal with the Separatist printing as he saw fit. Johnson saw fit to wait until all the copies of the treatise were nearly finished. With the weight of the ambassador's authority behind him, Johnson persuaded the local Middleburg magistrate to order the public burning of all the Separatist materials. The printers were taken by surprise, and all the copies of the offending books were confiscated. All copies of the text were supposedly burned except for two, both of which were retained by Johnson. His intention in preserving the two texts was to equip himself to defend more ably the English establishment against the Separatists. He later printed copies of the treatise in 1604-05 from the master copy that he saved from the fire.²⁸

As so often happens when one sets oneself to critique another's work, the critic became the convinced. Johnson set about the task of reading and analyzing *A Plaine Refutation* soon after the other copies were consigned to the flames. *A Plaine Refutation* was designed by Barrow to counter the argument of George Gifford that English Separatists were no different from the fourth century Donatist movement, a movement characterized by an elitist separation of some Christians from other Christians they viewed as inferior because they had received sacraments and ordination at the hands of bishops who had allegedly lapsed during the persecution of Diocletian (303-305). The Donatists had proved to be such a great cause of disruption that the Latin church father Augustine of Hippo had advocated the use of violent force to suppress them.²⁹ By casting Barrow's congregation in the Donatist mold, Gifford hoped to label them as

²⁸ William Bradford, "Dialogue" *Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859, Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 22, (Boston,: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 121-22. De Hoop Scheffer, 46-47.

²⁹W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest In North Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 227-74. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 652-59.

dangerous to society as well as unorthodox theologically. Barrow masterfully turned this argument on its head by intimating that the Separatists were choosing to abandon an establishment they felt to be founded and built on sin, while the Donatist argument rested on the fact that there were impure individuals corrupting a pure ecclesiastical system. The Donatist rebellion against impure members of the hierarchy, while retaining the same hierarchy, seemed to Barrow more akin to the rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church by the Church of England. Even granting that this was a primarily semantic argument, Barrow's line of thought was still an amusing turn that brought to bear on his Anglican opponent the spiritual ambiguity of the Anglican Church's founding. This argument was especially damning because Gifford, as a Puritan, had often made some of the same criticisms against the established church as the Separatists. Barrow also returned the favor of Gifford's Donatist label by labeling the Church of England as the domain of Antichrist, a designation somewhat more odious than that of Donatist.³⁰

Francis Johnson found something in the text of Barrow's argument that moved him to realize that he was not taking his own convictions to their ultimate end. What phrases moved him to embrace separation from the established church and adopt the form of polity and church discipline endorsed by Barrow and Greenwood were never recorded. Always less like Augustine and Luther and more like Calvin in his level of personal disclosure, Johnson never discussed his own adoption of Separatism in his writings. William Bradford, governor of Providence Plantation and acquaintance of Johnson, provided the most substantive and often quoted description of Johnson's "conversion"

³⁰Barrow, *A Plaine Refutation*, 10.

experience. In the context of a discussion regarding those clergy who opposed the early English Separatist movement, Bradford wrote:

. . . and which is more strange Mr. Johnson himself whoe was afterwards Pastour of the Church of God att Amsterdam; was a preacher to the Companie of English of the Staple att Middlebery at Zealand and had Great and certain maintenance allowed him by them and was highly Respected of them and soe Zealous against this way as that Mr. Barrows and Mr. Greenwoods (Greenwood's is crossed out in the original text) Refutation of Gifford was privately in Printing in this Cittey hee Not onely was a Meanes to discouer it but was made the Ambassadors Instrument to Intercept them at the presse and see them burnt, the which Charge hee did soe well performe as hee let them Goe on vntill they were wholly ffinished; and then surprised the whole Impression Not suffering any to escape; and then by the Magistrates Authoritie Caused them all to be openly burnt himselfe standing by vntill they were all Consumed to Ashes onely hee took vp two of them; one to keep in his owne Studdy that he might see their errorrs and the other to bestow on a speciall ffrind for the like vse; But Marke the Sequell; when hee had don this worke; he went home and being sett down in his Studdy; he began to turne ouer some pages of this book; and Superficially to Read some thinges heer and there as his fancy led him; att length hee mett with something that began to work vpon his sperit which soe wrought with him as drew him to this Resolution seriously to Read ouer the whole book the which hee did once and againe, In the end hee was soe taken and his Conscience so troubled soe as hee could haue Noe rest in him self vntill hee Crosed the seas and Came to London to Confer with the Authers whoe were then in prison and shortly after executed; after which Conference hee was soe satisfyed and Confeirmed in the truth as hee Neuer Returned to his place any more at Middleburrow but adjoyned himself to theire societie att London and was afterwards Comitted to prison and then banished; and In Conclusion Comeing to Liue att Amsterdam hee Caused the same bookes which hee had bin an Instrument to burne to be New printed and sett out att his owne Charge; and some of vs heer present Testify this to be a true Relation which was heard from his owne Mouth before many witnesses;³¹

While Johnson obviously attributed great significance to his encounter with Greenwood's treatise, (the story being repeated often enough that Bradford heard it) it is uncertain how radically different Johnson believed Greenwood's views were when compared to his own at the time. When questioned about his views and ministry in April 1593, Johnson responded that he could not definitely state how long he had held his opinions. The

³¹ William Bradford, "Dialogue" *Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859, Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 22, (Boston,: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 121-22.

public record stated, “Item beinge asked how long he hath held his opinions sayeth he cannot definitely answer, but sayth he was committed to prison iiij yeres agoe, vpon the makinge of a Sermon in St. maries Church.”³² Johnson’s lack of response may have been evasiveness, or it may also have been born of the fact that Johnson did not see a radical discontinuity between his Puritan convictions at Cambridge and his acceptance of Separatist ideals. Such a qualification in 1593 will become more pertinent in later chapters as the nature of Johnson’s commitment to Congregational polity is assessed. The primary impetus for Johnson’s acceptance of Barrow and Greenwood’s teaching lay with the extent to which their teachings resonated with Johnson’s understanding of scripture. As Johnson himself wrote in the introduction to his 1604-05 reprint of the

Plaine Refutation:

Good Reader, the treatise here insuing (being some while since intercepted) are now republished for thy good, together with a few observations of Mr. Giffard his last *Reply*, not printed heretofore. Read and ponder them with judgment and indifferencie, and as thou findest them to accord with the word of God, so acknowledge and accept them: but not in any thing wherein they do erre therfrom; as al men’s writings are subject to errour. It shal bee thy parte therfore in these, as in al the writings of any men, to examine and consider them by the scriptures and word of God, which is alone the word of truth; and so far to receive them, and no furdur but as they agree therwith. The Lord give thee understanding and grace to to follow the truth in love, to the salvation of thy soule, by Jesus Christ. Amen. 1605.³³

While Bradford had Johnson immediately traveling to London to inquire of the Separatist sages in his account, Johnson operated in a more Pauline fashion. Before going to meet the London Separatist leaders, Johnson tried to restructure his church at

³²Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 56-57.

³³Henry Barrow, *A plaine Refutation, The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1590-91*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1966.

Middleburg along Separatist lines. In October 1591, he presented a proposal to the Middleburg congregation that a confession be adopted by each person accepted to the church. Johnson was opposed vehemently in this pursuit, particularly by one Thomas Ferrers, who was credited with preserving the copy of the confession now residing at the British Museum.³⁴ The confession itself was not overtly Separatist in its doctrinal assertions, but the very concept of covenanting together as a congregation by creating one's own statement of faith implied a view of the individual congregation apart from the larger body that was inconsistent with fidelity to the Church of England. It was at some point soon after October 1591 that Johnson left his pastorate at Middleburg and traveled to London to seek counsel from Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, both of whom were in prison at the time. The outcome of their conversation was Johnson's decision to remain in London and share communion with the Separatist congregation.

3. The London Congregation: A Purposeful People

In order to understand better this congregational body, which Johnson eventually came to lead, it is necessary to examine their theological emphases, the composition of their membership, and their early response to threats of persecution by the authorities. The broad outlines of their theological emphases have already been demonstrated to some degree by the writings of Barrow against Gifford. The points cited by Barrow were the reasons the Separatist leaders found it impossible to remain in communion with the Church of England. On the surface they can appear rather pedantic at best and pharisaical at worst to the modern reader of their works. The basic principle at stake for the Separatist was complete reform of the church. By allowing the masses to be received

³⁴White, 92-93. British Library, Additional MSS 23571, f 169a.

into the Church of England and retaining the forms of Catholic ritual, the Church of England had failed, in their estimation, to overthrow the remaining vestiges of Roman Catholicism within the structure. That such a perceived compromise militated against Christian fellowship is a conviction with which the modern reader might well argue. Before one dismisses their concerns too lightly, one must remember the “Separatist” mentality that pervades both the ecclesiastical and political discourse today. Those in both the secularist and religious camps who would suggest that voters relocate to new states in order to create new voting blocks in particular states or that Christian fellowship should be constrained by secondary theological concerns are not as far removed from the Separatist mentality as they might like to think. Ultimately, one must take their concerns and their dedication to the Separatist position seriously because they were willing to give their lives for their interpretation of scripture, not a risk one takes lightly.

Henry Barrow and John Greenwood’s conception of proper congregational order is enshrined in their *Trve Confession* of 1589, the first statement of faith written by the Separatist congregation in London. This first confessional statement of 1589 was later replaced by the 1596 confession authored by Francis Johnson. The similarities between the two confessions are predictable. The differences are quite interesting, especially in light of Johnson’s later departure from some of the principles outlined in his own confession. In order to understand better the ideal congregation as envisioned by the London Separatists under Barrow and Greenwood’s leadership, it is necessary to look more closely at the exact provisions of the *Trve Confession* for church order and discipline:

And surely if this church be considered in her partes, it shal appeare most beautifull, yea most wondrefull, and even ravishing the sense to conveive,

much more to behold, what then to enjoy so blessed a communion. For behold her King and Lord is the King of peace, & Lord himself of all glorie. She enjoyeth most holie and heavenlie lawes, most faithfull and vigilant Pastours, most sincere and pure Teachers, most careful and vpright Governours, most diligent and trustie Deacons, most loving and sober Releevvers, and a most humble, meek, obedient, faithfull, and loving people, everie stone living elect and precious, everie stone hath his beautie, his burden, and his order. All bound to edifie one another, exhort, reprove, & comfort one another lovingly as their owne members, faithfully as in the eyes of God.³⁵

This paragraph of the *Trve Confession* set forth the basic leadership structure of the church as it remained under Johnson and was endorsed by the church of John Robinson as well. More detailed description of each office with the responsibilities and qualification for the various officers follow. In essence, the leadership structure was guided by the Pastor, who served to administer the ordinances of the congregation and instruct them in truth. The Teacher aided the Pastor in his ministry of exhortation by instructing the people in the teachings of scripture. The teaching office of the Barrow/Greenwood congregation and later of the Ancient Church might be compared to the work of an educational minister in the context of a contemporary Protestant congregation. The body of Elders, called “governors” in the paragraph cited above, was intended to serve as arbiters of congregational disputes and as assistants to the Pastor in the governing of the church body. Deacons were lay ministers who were to attend to the material needs of the congregation. They were assisted in their service by the Relievers or Widows, women over sixty who cared for the sick and served as matronly guides to the younger women of the congregation.³⁶

³⁵Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 34.

³⁶Walker, 34-37.

Two of these officer descriptions are necessarily of special interest in a study focusing primarily on Francis Johnson. The first of these is the description of the office of Pastor, which naturally bears importance for a discussion of Johnson because he eventually assumed it and must have borne the virtues and qualifications described for the office in the eyes of the congregation. Secondly, the description of the role of the Elders, in particular their authority over the congregation, is significant for its similarity to the views adopted by Johnson later in his ministry that eventually caused his separation from Ainsworth and the division of the Ancient Church.

In the estimation of the congregation as constituted in 1589 under Barrow and Greenwood's leadership, the prospective Pastor of the congregation was described as follows:

Their Pastour must be apt to teach, no yong Scholer, able to divide the worde Aright, holding fast to that faithful word, according to doctrine, that he may be able also to exhort, rebuke, improve, with wholesome doctrine, & to convince them that say against it: He must be a man that loveth goodness: he must be wise, righteous, holy, and temperate: he must be of life vnreprovable, as Gods Steward: hee must be generally well reported of, & one that ruleth his owne houshold vnder obedience with al honestie: he must be modest, meek, humble gentle, & loving: hee must be a man of great patience, compassion, labour, and diligence: he must alwaies be carefull and watchfull over the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer, with al willingness and chearefulness, not holding his office in respect of persons, but doing his duetie to everie soule, as he wil aunswer before the Chief Shepheard,³⁷

This rather idealistic description of the congregation's desired Pastor, followed by the obligatory listing of scripture references to give authoritative weight to the substance of the description, served as the "job description" for the role that Francis Johnson assumed in the fall of 1592.

³⁷Walker, 35.

The office of Elder was seen as a supporting corollary to the roles of Pastor and Teacher. In the words of the confession, they are to “bee readie assistants to the Pastour and Teachers, helping to beare their burden, but not intruding into their office.”³⁸ They were responsible for assuring that the Congregation was “holily and quietly ordered, and no way disturbed, by the contentious and disobedient forward and obstinate, not taking away the libertie of the least, but vpholding the right of all, wiselie judging of times and circumstances.”³⁹ This last statement is curious because it appeared to invest the authority to discipline recalcitrant members with the Elders. Barrow and Greenwood must have at least intended that the Elders have a supervising role in the process. In their more direct comments on church discipline later in the confession, they write that an offending brother or sister must be brought before “the church” prior to their expulsion from the community.⁴⁰ In addition to this ambiguity concerning the role of the Elders in the process of church discipline, it is clear that Barrow and Greenwood were asserting that the Elders should be viewed as members of the congregation with authority, even though they were originally chosen by the congregation. They were to see “the lawes of God kept in the church, and that not onlie by the people in obedience, but to see the Officers do their dueties.”⁴¹ In light of Barrow and Greenwood’s conception of the office, Francis Johnson’s own preference for the greater authority of the eldership does not seem quite as unusual. It is in fact more unusual that Johnson chose to adopt a more Congregationalist structure that provided checks on the power of elders in his 1596

³⁸Walker, 35.

³⁹Walker, 37.

⁴⁰Walker, 39.

⁴¹Walker, 36-37.

confession.⁴² That Johnson chose to do so was likely due to the influence of his brother and the growing desire of the congregation to insure that their concerns would be heard. The fact that Barrow and Greenwood's conception of church polity did indeed favor the rule of Elders was indicated by Henry Martin Dexter in his history of Congregationalism. Dexter went so far as to label their system of polity as "Barrowism" in contrast to Robert Browne's more purely congregational system of church government.⁴³ B. R. White took issue with Dexter's conclusions in his own study of the Separatists. White contended that Barrow and Greenwood's view of church government was parallel to Browne's when one takes into consideration the checks and balances prescribed by them.⁴⁴ The greatest difference between the two positions posited by White was the route by which they reached their conclusions about the nature of church government.⁴⁵ There were certainly strong similarities between the intended result of both Browne and Barrow's systems, a congregational polity in which the voice of the people constituted and ordered their congregation as led by the Holy Spirit. However, the author of the present study is not as prepared as White to discount the possibility that Dexter may have been correct when he posited that the London Separatists were attempting to fashion a different system. Their system provided a medium between pure Congregationalism as expressed by Browne and the Puritan ideal of a more Presbyterian system.⁴⁶ It would seem that if Barrow and

⁴²Walker., 49-74.

⁴³Henry Martin Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years As Seen In Its Literature*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1880), 106, 107, 235-239, 351.

⁴⁴B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 73.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Dexter, *Congregationalism*, 235-239.

Greenwood were more concerned with the protection of the congregation against the rule of the Eldership, they would have provided some of the clear expectations and qualifications that are present in the 1596 confession of the Ancient Church that will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter of this study. Nothing inherently presents itself in the 1589 confession that would prevent the Eldership from ruling as what White calls a “Presbyterian session.”⁴⁷ In fact, the 1589 confession gave the Elders the authority to regulate the elected officers of the church as well as the people.⁴⁸ Ultimately, it is hard to know exactly how the Eldership under Barrow and Greenwood’s confession would have functioned in practice because it was not constituted until 1592 and never functioned normally due to the imprisonment of the Elders. Would the system of checks and balances as they stood in the 1589 confession have served to weaken the power of the Eldership and render the polity more Congregational? This writer is less certain than White that this would have been the case. More importantly, the primary is how these ideas eventually came to fruition under Francis Johnson’s leadership because the polity of Barrow and Greenwood never received a practical test under their leadership.

Browne’s own conception of Congregationalism was a short-lived experiment under his leadership and more properly was espoused by Robert Harrison. Latent in the early ambiguities regarding church polity that appear in the thought of Barrow and Greenwood lie the same seeds of ambiguity that attended Francis Johnson’s approach to the issue. Johnson’s vacillation between strong congregationalism and semi-Presbyterianism may have resembled a similar ambiguity in the thought of his two predecessors. This author intends to demonstrate as this study progresses that Johnson’s

⁴⁷White, 73.

⁴⁸Walker, 36-37.

most sincere view of church polity was Congregational in terms of the independence of the single covenant community from any higher ecclesiastical authority, but he moved toward a Presbyterian polity with regard to the internal structure of the single congregation. Francis Johnson would have nothing to do with Synods or ecclesiastical councils, but this author is convinced that he came to feel, based on his experiences with a fractious congregation in Amsterdam, that a strong Eldership was the only bulwark against factionalism and schism within the covenant community. His thoughts on the pros and cons of the two approaches to church polity may well have been stimulated to further exploration by the ambiguity he inherited from Barrow and Greenwood.

4. The London Congregation: A Peculiar People

Who were these humble saints and godly cornerstones described so eloquently in Barrow and Greenwood's confession? Their identities would probably have remained a mystery were it not for the determination of both the ecclesiastical and secular authorities to drive them out of existence. Through lists of imprisoned Separatists that survive in court documents historians know not only who they were, but their occupations and sometimes addresses as well.

Tudor London was a market society that facilitated the flow of goods and services. England was still highly dependent on an agricultural economy, enabling the land owning classes to retain much of the cultural and aristocratic supremacy that they had enjoyed throughout the late medieval period in England. Their position at the top of the social hierarchy would gradually shift as British society became more attuned to the services provided by the town merchants. The British class system was much slower to acknowledge this shift, and merchants could still be recognized as part of the middling

classes as late as the nineteenth-century, even though their wealth far surpassed many members of the titled aristocracy. Alan Dyer, historian and lecturer at the University of Wales, has identified five typical groups of tradesmen that served the needs of towns such as London during the Tudor period. The first group consisted of those merchants who dealt in imported goods such as silks, fabrics, or medicines. They were the wealthiest of the trading class and included haberdashers and apothecaries. Secondly, there were those laborers who had mastered some trade and marketed it, such as fishmongers and bakers. The third group of merchants consisted of tailors and barbers, people who supplied services. They did not typically produce their own goods. The fourth subset of these town traders was people who traded their labor such as builders and brick layers. Fifthly, there were the skilled professions such as doctors, lawyers, and clergymen, most of whom had the benefit of a university education.⁴⁹

The London Congregation had a fair sampling of representatives from all of these categories. Fifty-two Separatists were examined by the court during the months of March and April 1593. Among their number were the more elite members of society such as Barrow, a lawyer, and Greenwood, listed as a clergyman. One Arthur Bellot, who was examined on April 5, is described simply as a scholar. James Forwrestier, arrested in 1589 and examined on March 19, was identified as a physician. Several haberdashers are listed among their number, including Edward “Boyse” or Boyes, whose wife would later become Francis Johnson’s spouse after Boyes’ death. There was also a strong assortment of people from the second and third categories such as shipwrights, tailors, and interestingly one lone farmer named John Clarke, who was dispatched to do manual labor

⁴⁹Alan Dyer, “The Urban Economy,” *A Companion to Tudor Britain*, ed. by Robert Tittler and Norman Jones, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 330-345.

and would be George Johnson's traveling companion on the *Chancewell*.⁵⁰ Barrow and Greenwood's congregation appeared to be primarily made up of tradesmen and working people associated with the mercantile interests of the city rather than the pastoral interests of the country. The wealthy tradesmen from category one and the specialized professions from category five tended to make up the leadership of the Ancient Church. The first class of merchants had an advantage over the others in terms of their greater wealth, but the discrepancy was not so glaring as to cause a great deal of unrest or prejudice. The most glaring differences were between the skilled professions and the other members of the congregation due to their educational level. Typically a problem did not exist due to these differences, but as shall be shown, Francis Johnson angrily insisted on several occasions during his rift with George that the congregation abide by his wishes because they were not as educated as he.

Shipwrights were often employed directly by the crown, a fact that must have made their profession of Separatism even more precarious for men like William Marshal, William Mason, and Henry Wythers who were numbered with the examinees of 1593.⁵¹ Mason is later recorded as one of nine Separatists who were bailed after promising to conform.⁵² The Haberdashers represented the growing merchant classes who dealt in retail goods; they often dealt primarily with clothing or with accessories for clothing including such items as ribbons, thread, and bows. Edward Bouys' involvement in this

⁵⁰John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1970), 292-294.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²British Museum, MS Harley, 6848, fol. 210.

trade made him a wealthy man and was probably also instrumental in developing his wife's taste for fine apparel that would cause George Johnson so much consternation.

5. *The London Congregation: A Persecuted People*

The first arrest of Separatists in London took place, as stated above, on October 8, 1587. Among their number was John Greenwood. They were arrested while meeting in the home of one Henry Martin. Twenty-one prisoners are listed. Margaret Maynard, a widow who was arrested with them, stated under examination that she had not attended a service of the state church in ten years.⁵³ The imprisonment of Barrow on his aforementioned visit to Greenwood in October impaired the development of a leadership structure. Barrow and Greenwood spent most of the next six years in prison except for a short period when Greenwood was allowed to be bailed in 1592. In addition, others of their number suffered imprisonment in the early period of the church's existence before Johnson came to join them. Under the rigorous examinations of the authorities, these Separatists often revealed valuable details regarding the faith and practice of the congregation. One Clement Gamble confessed that:

In the somer tyme they mett together in the feilds a mile or more about London. There they sitt down vppon a Banke and diuers of them expound out of the Bible so long as they are there assembled . . . In ye winter tyme they assemble themselves by 5. of the clocke in ye morning to that howse where they make there Conventicle for ye Saboth daie men and women together there they Contynewe in there kind of praier & exposicion of Scriptures all that daie. They dyne together, After dinner make collection to paye for there diet & what monie is left somme one of them carrieth it to the prisons where any of there sect be committed.⁵⁴

⁵³Champlain Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters In Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 19-20. S. P., Dom., Elizabeth, Vol. 204 (10), Public Record Office, London.

⁵⁴Burrage, Vol. II, 27. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 83 recto-84 recto.

Gambell also confessed that his congregation refused to say the Lord's Prayer, but rather preferred to pray extemporaneously. Another prisoner, John Dove, described a typical prayer time among the London Congregation. Dove told the authorities that "In there praier one speaketh and the rest doe grone, or sob, or sigh, as if they wold wringe out teares, but . . .not after . . .that praieth, there praier is extemporal."⁵⁵ The most interesting tidbit for the authorities to hear was the clear encouragement of the congregation and its leaders not to attend the services of the established church.⁵⁶

Prominent in the description of the services as conducted in the early years of the London Separatist congregation is the absence of the administration of baptism or communion. This omission existed because the London congregation did not believe that these ordinances should not be observed apart from the presence of a qualified Pastor to administer them. One interesting case illustrating this point was included among the series of Separatist depositions preserved at the British Library. The case concerned one "Widow Vnyon" who is probably the same woman whose complaint over the distribution of funds among the Congregants in Amsterdam would create so much bad press for Johnson among his adversaries. Widow Unwin had refused to have her child baptized in the Anglican Church, a common Separatist stand. She had been waiting for a Pastor to be chosen who could baptize her child. The authorities stated:

They held it vnlawfull to baptise Children amongst vs but rather chewse to let them goe vnbaptised as in Somer 1588 A Childe of one of theres beinge xij yeres of Age was knowne not to haue ben baptised And when the pore infant desired the mother often that it might be baptised she and it was borne of faithfull

⁵⁵ Burrage, Vol. II, 27. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 83 recto-84 recto. G. Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology In England: I. From Cranmer to Hooker, 1534-1603, II. From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 325-45.

⁵⁶ Burrage, Vol. II, 27. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 83 recto-84 recto.

parentes which was enough for it which Child was by the Chauncelor of london caused to be publicly Baptised, at a sermon made for that purpose the last sommer and the mother ranne awaie for feare of punishmente.⁵⁷

Widow Unwin's case is illustrative of both the sufferings borne by the early London Congregation and the uncertainty that plagued a congregation without a leader.

Francis Johnson became an integral part of the life of the London Congregation soon after his arrival in the fall of 1591. The congregation continued to exist throughout most of 1592 in the state it had endured since its foundation. Johnson probably lived with members of the congregation and survived through their charity since he was described in the depositions of 1593 as being "of no certeine abode."⁵⁸ He was thirty-one years old in the fall of 1592 when he was chosen to be the long-awaited Pastor of the London Congregation.⁵⁹

The primary impetus for the choosing of church officers in the fall of 1592 was probably the temporary release of John Greenwood. Now that Greenwood was free to take part in the deliberations, the general consensus was reached that it was time to appoint officers for the congregation. Once again, the depositions serve as a primary source of information. Robert Abraham, a leather dresser and servant to a Mr. Rooks of Southwark, provided his interrogators with details of the church's leadership structure in April 1593. According to the deposition record:

He saith that at ther meetinge in St. Nicholas Lane, when Mr. Yonge did take them ther, the(y) did then there make Choyce of their Doctor Teacher Deacons and elders, and that Iohnson theelder then was chosen Pastor, Greenwood teacher, Studley and knyfton Elders, Lee and Bowman Deacons./

⁵⁷Burrage, 31. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 83 recto-84 recto.

⁵⁸Burrage, Vol. II, 43.

⁵⁹Ibid.

He saith that their Doctor and Pastor were mayntained by Contribucion from amongst them euery one as his abilitie was, by Weeklie colleccion,/ and that he for his parte hath yielded his contribucion this yere and this halfe,/ and that the collection beyng gathered was deliuered to the Deacons to be distributed amongst those of that congregacion, which they said Deacons did think good and most to stand in neede.⁶⁰

Abraham's testimony revealed the revolving nature of the church's meeting time and place. In addition to the Nicholas Lane gatherings, Abraham also indicated that he was present at a meeting in Southwark (at an unidentified home), the home of Roger Rippon in Southwark, Smithfield (where they received communion at Johnson's hand), in the fields near Detford and in the woods near Islington.⁶¹

The owner of the Nicholas Lane meeting location is not identified in the documents, though it is known that the Fox home was one popular Separatist meeting place on Nicholas Lane. Two other popular Nicholas Lane Separatist haunts were the personal dwelling and schoolhouse of George Johnson, Francis' younger brother. Following his graduation from Cambridge, George apparently settled in London where he worked as an educator. In the introduction to his deposition, George is identified as the "late Scholemaster in St. Nicholas Lane. London" and his age was given as twenty-nine years, confirming the aforementioned estimate that George was three years his brother's junior.⁶² George Johnson was evidently already an emerging leader among the London Separatists when his brother returned from London. Rather than identifying his brother as the catalyst for his conversion to Separatist principles, George stated that he "was drawne thereto, by the worde of god, and by the hearing of mr. Egerton preacher, at his

⁶⁰Burrage, Vol. II, 49-51. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 41.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Burrage, Vol. II, 46-47. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 63.

Sermons.”⁶³ George’s role as a leader of the group is illustrated by the fact that he was the person delivering the sermon when fifty-six of the Separatists were arrested on March 4, 1593.⁶⁴ The cooperative Mr. Abraham stated that George was preaching because his brother was in “troble,” meaning that Francis was retained as a guest in the Clink at the time.⁶⁵ George Johnson remained in prison following his arrest at Islington until 1597. His relationship with his brother up to 1593 does not appear to have been acrimonious. The events of the next few years ultimately shattered their relationship and threatened to divide the congregation as well, a story that will be examined in more detail in chapter three. The supposition that George Johnson’s schoolhouse served as the meeting house of the Separatists on Nicholas Lane was further confirmed in the April 2, 1593 deposition of John Nicholas, a glover who was estimated to be about thirty-six years old.⁶⁶ The record of his interrogation stated: “he sayeth that one of his sonnes named nathaniell and beinge five yeres of age was baptized by Francis Iohnson in St. Nicholas lane in the Scolehowse ther about Christmas last, and that he was never baptized before that tyme.”⁶⁷

Johnson’s election as pastor of the congregation meant that they had not only a leader to teach them the scriptures, but also to conduct baptism and lead the congregation in the administration of communion. The testimony of Daniel Bucke, a scrivener from Southwark arrested on March 9 1592-93, confirmed the circumstances of Johnson’s

⁶³Burrage, Vol. II, 46-47. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 63.

⁶⁴Burrage, Vol. II, 49-51. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 41. White, 94-95.

⁶⁵Burrage, Vol. II, 49-51. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 41.

⁶⁶ Burrage, Vol. II, 46. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 63.

⁶⁷Ibid.

election as pastor, named those individuals in attendance, and described the first administration of the church ordinances by Johnson. The court recorder noted:

And further beinge demanded who was their pastor and by whome he was Created saith that mr. Francis Iohnson was chosen pastor, and mr. Greenwood doctor, and Bowman and Lee deacons, and Studley and George Knifton potticary were chosen elders in the house of one Fox in St. Nicholas Lane, London/ about halfe a yere sithence all in one day by their congregacion, or at Mr. Bylsons house in Crechurche he remembereth not whether/ and that the sacrament of Baptisme was (as he called it) deliuered there to the number of vij (seven) persons by Iohnson, but they had neither god fathers nor godmothers, and he tooke water and washed the faces of them that were baptised: the Children that were there baptised were the children of mr Studley mr Lee with others beinge of seuerall yeres of age, sayinge onely in thadministration of this sacrament I doe baptize thee in the name of the father of the sonne and of the holy ghost withoute vsing any other ceremony therein as is now vsually observed according to the booke of Common praier Beinge then there present the said Daniel Studley: William Sheppard, william marshall, Iohn Beche, Roberte Bray Thomas Lee. Arthur Byllet, Edmund Thompson Roberte Jackson william Mason, George marten, Thomas michell, Robert Abraham, henry whythers, Thomas digson, peter farland; william weber, duay Bristoe, Iohn Nicholas, Iohn Barnes. George Smell, Christofer Raper, Christofer Sympkins, Christofer diggings, Roger Rippon Christofer Boman, Thomas Settell, Iohn Grenewood, aforesaid Edward Graue, william Collins, Abraham pulbery, Nicholas leye aforesaid George manners George Knyfton, aforesaid mrs. Settell, katherine Onnyon (Unwin), mrs Boyes [the future Mrs. Johnson], margery daubin Ellyn Rowe, Avis Allen, An homes, Iohn pulbery, nicholas lee his wife, frauncis Iohnes, An Bodkyn, Elizabeth moore, Barbara Stampford, and others whose names he doeth not remember.⁶⁸

The absence of some notable figures such as George Johnson and Edward Boyes from the list may be explained by Bucke's caveat that he did not remember some of those in attendance, or it may also have been the case that the Separatists did not all meet together at once in case they were discovered.

Concerning the administration of communion, Bucke was also helpful in regard to providing specific information. Bucke reported that five or more loaves of bread would be placed on the table, presumably a regular household table in lieu of any sort of special communion table. Johnson would then break the bread and pass it to some members of

⁶⁸Burrage, Vol. II, 34-36. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 61.

the congregation. It is unclear if the first recipients of the bread were members of the congregation in general or the deacons. Bucke initially stated that Johnson “deliuered yt vnto some of them,” yet he later described the deacons as delivering it to the rest. Johnson likely distributed the bread to those members he could reach and then passed the remainder to the deacons for them to distribute to the rest of the congregation. Johnson then blessed the cup, drank from it, and passed it to the individual next to him who then passed it to his neighbor. According to Bucke, the ceremony was conducted according to the form and with the pronouncements recorded in I Corinthians 11: 23-24.⁶⁹

Johnson’s personal administration of the supper was to be curtailed by the unwelcome arm of the state. He was arrested at the Fox home at Nicholas Lane in October 1592.⁷⁰ His imprisonment must have been short because he was free and active again in November 1592. Though Francis Johnson was set at liberty for a short time, he was not able to evade the authorities for long. He was taken into custody again at the home of Edward Bouys on December 5, 1592. The story of his capture and the subsequent capture of Daniel Studley and Thomas Settle was recounted in a petition made by John Penry to the Privy Councilors at the Court of the Star Chamber. The appeal was written by Penry in January 1593 and delivered unsuccessfully to the court in February. Regarding the capture of Johnson, Penry wrote:

Now againe about a moneth since their purseuants late in the night entered in the Queene’s name into an honest citizen’s house upon Ludgate Hill. Where after they had their pleasures searched and ransaked all places, chests, etc., of the house, they there apprehended two of our ministers, Francis Johnson without anie warrant at all, and John Greenwood; both whom, betwixt one and two of the clock after midnight, they with bylles and staves led to the Counter of Woodstreete.

⁶⁹Burrage, Vol. II, 34-36. British Library, MS Harley 6848, fol. 61.

⁷⁰White, 94-96.

Taking assurance of Edward Boyse, the owner of this house, to be true prisoner in his owne house, until the next day that he were sent for. At which time the archbishop, with certain doctors of his associates, committed them all to close prison; two unto the Clynke, the third againe to the Fleet, where they remaine in great distresse. Since this they have caused Thomas Settle and Danyell Studley (lately taken in Nicolas Lane upon a Lord's day in our assembly by Mr. Richard Younge and committed to prison, but afterward bayled by the sheriff's of London) to be now againe called for, and committed close prisoners to the Gatehouse.⁷¹

Greenwood was returned to the Fleet with Barrow while Johnson was confined with Boyes to the Clink, an infamous London prison located in Southwark which had been founded for the disposal of heretical persons in the thirteenth century.⁷²

With Johnson, Barrow, and Greenwood confined in the Clink and the Fleet respectively, John Penry became their primary advocate. Penry was a Welshmen who had matriculated at both Oxford and Cambridge. He emerged in 1587 with Puritan views shaped by his experiences at the universities. He was one of the group of Puritans who set up the press that published the infamous *Martin Marprelate* tracts that attacked the structure of the Church of England in a satirical style. Penry had escaped to Scotland in 1590 when his associate, John Udall, was imprisoned for printing seditious writings. Penry has been credited, probably correctly, with being the primary author of the *Marprelate* tracts. Penry's identification with Johnson, Barrow, and Greenwood began about 1592 after he had secretly returned from Scotland. His advocacy for their release and defense of their position would eventually lead to his execution.⁷³

⁷¹John Penry, "To The Right Honorable The Lords And Others of Her Majestie's Most Honorable Privie Counsell," *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591-1592*, ed. by Leland H. Carlson, (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1970), 395-401.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 401.

⁷³John Waddington, *John Penry; The Pilgrim Martyr (1559-1593)*, (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1854), 150-201. Donald J. McGinn, *John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1966), 126-132.

Having secured the arrest of Johnson and most of the other elected leaders of the Congregation, Archbishop John Whitgift began to pursue the other members with dogged tenacity. The group mentioned previously in Abraham's testimony was arrested in the woods near Islington on March 4, 1592-93.⁷⁴ The interrogations immediately following their arrest were designed to secure basic information about the congregation and its leadership. These interviews were conducted on March 6, 7, 8, and 9. Daniel Bucke's informative description of the leadership and worship of the congregation was recorded during these examinations. One set of questions that continually resurfaced during the interrogations were questions regarding the whereabouts and status of John Penry.⁷⁵ If Whitgift suspected Penry of being Martin Marprelate, he surely had very specific designs for the man who had cavalierly ridiculed his clergy. His tenacity was rewarded on March 22, 1592-93 when Penry was arrested at Stepney in the home of a Mr. Lowes. The vicar of Stepney, Anthony Anderson, had been lampooned by Martin Marprelate and was seeking to avenge himself by betraying Penry to the authorities. George Knyvton, Edward Grave, and Arthur Bellot were with Penry at Lowes' and also taken prisoner.⁷⁶

With the arrest of the bulk of their congregation, Barrow and Greenwood increased their ongoing efforts to secure a fair hearing from the authorities. Barrow had been condemned to death on March 23, 1592-93, but the sentence was lifted on the 24th. Barrow then petitioned for a fair hearing where he could freely argue his case. This request was answered by the Archbishop of Canterbury on March 28 with a series of

⁷⁴White, 94-95.

⁷⁵ John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593*, 292-293.

⁷⁶John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593*, 314-15.

twelve reasons why the Archbishop deemed it “not equall, safe nor fitte” to allow Barrow to have his conference. Prominent among these reasons was the acceptance of the English Church by the continental Reformed churches “for a sister.” The Archbishop further stated his fear that there would be “no ende of disputations” if Barrow opened the floodgates.⁷⁷ The floodgates would remain closed, and the Separatists were to be accorded no more appeals. Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry all three went to the gallows in April 1593 and sealed their witness with their lives.

*6. The Organization of Persecution:
The Elizabethan State and the London Separatists*

With the death of Barrow and Greenwood, Francis Johnson assumed the primary role in petitioning for the Separatists’ release. Though he was the elected pastor of the congregation, he had appeared to defer to Barrow and Greenwood as the senior leaders of the congregation and the men most experienced in dealing with the London authorities. Their deaths placed Johnson at the fore of the imprisoned Separatist group as well as those members of the congregation who were still at liberty. Johnson himself was also in a precarious position. No reason existed to expect that his treatment would differ substantively from Barrow and Greenwood’s. The weeks of April and early May 1593 must have been quite tense for Johnson as he awaited the decision of the authorities.

Johnson had given his interrogators ample grounds for any guilty verdict that might be rendered. His responses to their questions confirmed their suspicions that his beliefs deviated dangerously from their conception of proper doctrine. The examiners adopted the routine practice of asking each prisoner if they would take an oath of

⁷⁷John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593*, 284-286.

allegiance, though they surely tired of asking the question after so many negative responses. If they were fully aware of Johnson's earlier refusal to take the oath at Cambridge, the interrogators would have been wise to forego the question and save their time. Johnson roundly refused to take the oath at each of his depositions. Ever the diplomat, he bluntly stated "that is the power of their Churche that they may excommunicate the Queen vntill shee acknowledge & confesse her selfe, and this is done to save her soule."⁷⁸ One suspects that Elizabeth would have been less than grateful for Johnson's concern for her soul. Johnson also made it clearly known that he rejected the use of the Lord's Prayer in worship. He reveals curious views on other matters in his recorded comments:

Item he confesseth he hath baptised dieurse children in their congregacion, and saieth for marriage he doeth not accompt that an ecclesiasticall matter, nor laid vpon the minister of god as a dewetie of his ministerie, and also sayth they are not bound nor tied to the wordes of the Lordes praier, and touchinge the Communion of the Lordes supper he saieth it maye be received, at any tyme of the daie or night, when the congregacion is assembled and prepared therevnto⁷⁹

Johnson's examiners were primarily representatives of the state, though they were working in concert with Elizabeth's ecclesiastical government as well. The Dean of Westminster, Dr. Gabriel Goodman, was present for Johnson's deposition in April 1593. There was also a Dr. Cesar present for the deposition who was probably also schooled in theology.⁸⁰ The strategy adopted by the state for these interviews apparently was to commission representatives of the secular courts to accuse the prisoners and interrogate

⁷⁸Burrage, Vol. II, 42-43.

⁷⁹Burrage, Vol. II, 56-57. British Library, MS Harley 6849, folder 181 recto and verso.

⁸⁰Burrage, Vol. II, 56-57. British Library, MS Harley 6849, folder 181 recto and verso.

them based on state ordinances levied by Elizabeth's parliament against the Separatists. At least one ecclesiastical representative was also present to lend their expertise in ferreting out the theological nuances of the Separatist's arguments and determining if they did in fact merit sanction. As has been determined above, there were two ecclesiastical representatives in Johnson's case. In addition, "mr Barne and mr Yonge" were identified as the two state representatives. Richard Young's name appeared often in the depositions. He was a justice charged with securing the depositions for trial and overseeing the prosecutions. Young became infamous among the Separatists as one of their primary visible tormentors. Though Young was one of their most prominent antagonists, he had behind him the whole weight of the Elizabethan judicial machinery.

Examinations were also conducted on March 10, 11, and 13, 1593 by Sir John Popham, Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench, Sir Edmund Anderson, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, Thomas Egerton, the Attorney General, and Edward Stanhope, the Chancellor to the Bishop of London.⁸¹ The lofty positions occupied by these men and the mixture of representatives from church and state revealed the extent of everyone's concern that the Separatists be quickly and appropriately handled. Thomas Egerton shared his own frustration with Sir John Puckering, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, after a particularly grueling interview with Barrow. His written observations disclose the time and energy expended by the church, the state officials, and Parliament to deal with the Separatist problem. A frustrated Egerton wrote on March 29, 1593:

I have spent this whoale afternoon at a fruytles ydle conference, and am but now returned both wearye and weake. Yf my healthe will serve me I will wayte vpon your Lordship to morowe morning and make report of this daye's exercyse. I have sent to your Lordship herewith, *viz.*, an abstracte of the bille

⁸¹Barrow and Greenwood, 292-293.

in the Lower House (commons) agaynst recusants, reformed as the committees have brought it agayne into the House. Howe it is in any thinges changed in substance, from the bill as it was fyrst exhybyted, doeth appeare in the marginall notes, which to morowe I will more fullye declare to your Lordship, yf it shall please your Lordship to gyve me leave. And so rest in all thinges at your Lordship's commandment, this 26th of Marche, 1593.

Your Lordship's most humble command,
Thomas Egerton⁸²

A further communication from Egerton to Puckering on March 28 related Barrow's request for a disputation, a request that was denied. Egerton also mentioned in this second communication that he had dispatched a copy of Barrow's request to William Cecil, Elizabeth's Lord Treasurer.⁸³ William Cecil was, of course, the same Lord Burghley who served as the Chancellor of Cambridge University and had entertained Johnson's appeals in 1588-89. He was to have the dubious pleasure of dealing with Johnson again as Johnson's appeals to save the imprisoned Separatists became more strident. Though Cecil and Puckering were not personally involved in the Separatist prosecutions in March 1593, Egerton's concern that they be informed to the letter indicated more than a passing interest in the fate of the Separatists on their part. The unfortunate Egerton apologized that "this weaknese of health falleth vnto me at this tyme."⁸⁴ Egerton's weakness may have been attributed to a penchant for poor health, but the stress of dealing with Barrow and Greenwood coupled with the importance of the men who were looking over his shoulder would be enough to weaken anyone's health.

The primary point of law at issue in the prosecution of the English Separatists was the "Statute of 35 Elizabeth, Chapter I, Made to Retayne The Queen's Majestie's

⁸²Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 280-281. British Library, MS Harley 7042, folio 34.

⁸³Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 282-283. British Library, MS Harley 6849, folio 195.

⁸⁴Ibid.

Subjects In Theyr Due Obedyence.” This statute was approved by the Queen on April 10, 1593. It is probably the final form of the legislation mentioned by Egerton that was making its way through the House of Commons in late March 1593. The Statute of 35 Elizabeth was intended to strengthen the language and scope of a previous statute, Statute of 23 Elizabeth. John Penry had written a petition to Lord Burghley before his execution attempting to demonstrate that he was not in violation of 23 Elizabeth. Francis Johnson wrote a similar deposition once the new law was passed to demonstrate that the substance of his writings did not violate the new statute. Johnson may have been indebted to Penry’s previous petition in the composition of his own.⁸⁵

The statute of 35 Elizabeth expressly forbade anyone from encouraging the Queen’s subjects to absent themselves from the services of the state church. Johnson included quotations from the statute in his petition:

If any above sixteen yeares, which shall obstinantly refuse to repayre to some churche to heare devyne service, established by Her Majestie’s lawes, etc., shall by printing, writing, or expresse words or speeches, advisedly and purposely practize, or goe aboute to move or perswade any of Her Majesty’s subjectes to deny, withstand, or impugne Her Majestie’s power and authority in causes ecclesiasticall . . . being thereof lawfully convicte, shall be committed to pryson . . .⁸⁶

Johnson considered his posed eleven points in his petition to be ample evidence that he could not be tried under the Statute of 35 Elizabeth. His most persuasive argument to that effect was Johnson’s insistence that he could not be tried *ex post facto* based on a law that was passed several months after his imprisonment. Unfortunately for Johnson, this argument only protected him to a point. The statute also provided a penalty for those persons who continued to refuse to take an oath of allegiance to the crown and the state

⁸⁵Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 458-459. British Library, MS Lansdowne, Item 25, 52-53.

⁸⁶Ibid.

church. The longer Johnson remained obstinate in his refusal to take the oath, the more likely it would be that he could be prosecuted for that infraction alone. Johnson also contended that his opposition to the prelacy did not necessarily entail a repudiation of Elizabeth's authority to regulate religion as specified in the Statute of 35 Elizabeth. Johnson rather saw himself as petitioning the Queen to use her power for the proper ends. He wrote "it will appeare the he is not within danger of the statute aforesayde, by demanding this question of the prelates and ministers, to witt, whether Her Majestie with consent of the parliament may suppress and abolish this present prelacye and ministrie of the lande, and tranferre their revenews and possessions to her owne civill uses, as her father of famous memorye, King Henry the Eight, did with the abbotts, monckes, etc., and with their lyvings."⁸⁷ Johnson's proposal that Elizabeth help herself to the revenue of the church for her own purposes was a shrewdly calculated statement to remind Elizabeth that she might have a vested personal interest in further reform. Such a statement ran the danger of offending the Queen even more than she was already at Johnson's obstinacy.

In a maneuver that the Separatists often employed in their polemical writings, Johnson reminded the Queen of the theological and ecclesiological affinities between the Separatist movement and the continental Reformed tradition. He also identified the common ground that the Separatists shared with the Church of England in opposing the Roman Catholic Church. Johnson used the legalese of the two ecclesiastical statutes to argue that he was not technically guilty of transgressing the law. In his ninth reason, Johnson intimated that though he may have encouraged people not to attend Anglican worship, it was not with the motive of impugning the Queen's power, a necessary

⁸⁷Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 458-459. British Library, MS Lansdowne, Item 25, 52-53.

provision of 35 Elizabeth if one chooses to read the law with a stronger bent toward motive than toward the act itself. Johnson played the same game in his tenth reason, in which he argued that he did not absent himself from the public worship of the Anglican Church “obstinately and without cause.” Rather, Johnson absented himself for conscience sake.⁸⁸ Johnson hoped that his tactic of relying on the language and variant interpretations of the statute might buy him time to secure an appeal or immunity from prosecution. It is unlikely that Elizabeth ever actually read Johnson’s petition or any of the others that were sent by the Separatists. The Separatists realized during Penry’s attempts to secure their release that their requests were not making it past the lower tiers of government and church. Johnson decided to counter this problem by sending a petition directly to his family friend and patron, Lord Burghley.

*7. William Cecil’s déjà vu Experience:
Francis Johnson’s Appeals on Behalf of the Separatists*

It is beyond the realm of possibility to expect that William Cecil was the least bit surprised when he first learned that Francis Johnson was at the center of all the Separatist problems. Based on the dispatches sent by Egerton, Cecil apparently played a limited role in the initial state dealings with the Separatists. Most of the petitions intended for Cecil must have reached him because they have been preserved in the Lansdowne Collection of his papers at the British Library. It is unknown how many of these requests Cecil relayed to the Queen.

Francis Johnson felt that it was absolutely necessary that Cecil become personally involved in the case if the Separatists were to have a chance for freedom. Unable to go to Burghley himself, Francis sent three separate letters by the hand of his father. John

⁸⁸Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 458-459. British Library, MS Lansdowne, Item 25, 52-53.

Johnson was clearly identified in the text of the final letter, dated January 8, 1593-94, as the bearer of that epistle.⁸⁹ It is unclear whether John Johnson had come to London after he learned his sons were in prison or if he had taken up residence in London himself. John's relationship with Lord Burghley gave him ready access to the Lord Treasurer's person that would never be gained by anyone directly involved in the case. Since he is the bearer of the last letter and the most likely person within Johnson's reach to have delivered any of them successfully, it is possible that John delivered letters from Francis to Burghley on June 2 and June 12, 1593 as well as the letter of January 8, 1593-94.⁹⁰

In the opening paragraph of his first letter, Johnson clearly indicated that he had not received any communication from Burghley throughout the tense spring of 1593, even though Egerton's reports reveal that Burghley was apprised of the situation.

Johnson wrote:

Right Honorable, I verily suppose you can not be ignoraunte of our cause and estate, in so great havocke as is made of us at this day, unless you doe beleewe the false and sclauderous reportes which daylie and every where are spread against vs, unto which I am persuaded your Lordship giveth no credite, bycause I am sure that you knowe that this is the lott of the truthe and servuantes of God to be persecuted and evill spoken of amonge the children of men.⁹¹

Johnson described to Burghley the tenor of the Separatists' demands and reminded Burghley that the Separatists agreed with the Queen touching everything except the organization of her church. He again made the often stated contention that the Separatists did not wish to challenge the Queen's authority. Johnson requested that Cecil "would consider of our lamentable and wofull estate, and put to your helping hand for our

⁸⁹Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 449-457. British Library, MS Lansdowne 75, 50-51.

⁹⁰Ibid., 436-457.

⁹¹Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 436-441. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 145.

succor and delyveraunce, in the midst of this fiery triall and most subtle persecution.”⁹² Once again disregarding the fine art of diplomacy, Johnson warned Burghley of the coming wrath of God should there be found no one who would stand in the gap for the nation in reference to Ezekiel 22:30. Johnson ended his first appeal to Burghley with a more personal request that he and George receive help. Francis wrote:

For my selfe and my brother in particular (who are knowen and many wayes bounde unto your Lordship) I only desyre this, that we may by your Lordship’s meanes, either by your selfe or by the Right Honorable the Earl of Essex, the Lord of Hunsden, the Lord Gray, or whome your Lordship thinketh Beste, obteyne this favor and helpe, to be freed owt of prison eyther simply (there beinge now a new statute made) or under bayle for four or five monnethes. We have beene detayned in severall close prisons this longe tyme, so as our friends can not have access unto us. The cause I have before sett downe as in the presence of God. My selfe have bene sicke and weake, since the beginning of August last, now of late it hath pleased God to beginne to recover my former Strength, even in this straight and harde usage. For the contynuaunce and increase of which recovery, I hope my liberty may the sooner be obteyned. If not, the will of God be donne. I am assured there shall not a haire of our heades perish without God. And therefore seinge by the mercye of God we suffer for welldoeinge, we committe our selves to him as a faithfull creator. Neither need we fear the malice and opposicion of our adversaries (thought it be to the sheddingde of our bloude) which is to them a token of perdition but to us of salvacion, and that of God.⁹³

Johnson closed his first letter to Burghley with a comparison. He intimated his desire that Queen Elizabeth and Lord Burghley model their actions on those of Queen Esther and Mordecai in the biblical account of Esther. As Mordecai and Esther risked their lives and position to save the people of God, so should Elizabeth and Burghley strive to release God’s people.

Johnson’s second letter, sent on June 12, 1593, was more demanding than the first and was accompanied by two enclosures that placed Cecil in an awkward position.

⁹² Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 439. British Library, MS Harley, 6849, fol. 145.

⁹³ Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 436-441. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 145.

Those enclosures were two documents by John Penry, his “Confession of Faith and Allegiance” and “Apologie.”⁹⁴ Both documents had been declared subversive and possession of them was illegal. Johnson had refused to disclose whether he had access to any writings by Barrow, Greenwood, or Penry during his interrogation.⁹⁵ Technically, Johnson could not have been accused of perjuring himself because he had refused to take any oath. Even so, possession of the documents would have been a further nail in Johnson’s coffin if it became public knowledge. Knowing this was the case, Johnson requested that Burghley “not to make knowen from whome you recyved it.”⁹⁶ He knew of no one to whom Burghley could show the documents who would not reveal their existence to the Archbishop of Canterbury (Whitgift) who would then “either contynue my restreinte in prison or hasten the ende of my dayes in this lyfe.”⁹⁷ Cecil must have been frustrated if not angered by those conditions. For a court officer of his position to remain silent regarding such an infraction was a dangerous choice. It is not at all clear that he followed Johnson’s instructions.

Johnson’s second petition to Burghley heightened the prophetic themes of the first petition. Several comparisons are made by Johnson between the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah and the situation of the London Congregation. The theme of comparison to Jeremiah pervades the contents of the letter. This second petition to Burghley was also significant because the possibility of exile for the imprisoned Separatists is first mentioned. Johnson pleaded:

⁹⁴Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 442-443. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 143.

⁹⁵Burrage, 57.

⁹⁶Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 447. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 143.

⁹⁷Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 447. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 143.

And here againe on my knees I beseech your Lordship by your selfe, or the Earl of Essex, the Lord Graye, or such others, to be a meanes that this our petition may be delyvered to her Highnes' handes, that we finding favor through Her Majestie' eyes thorough the blessing of God, this heavy chaine layde upon our loynes may be removed, and that we be not still forced to goe into fire and water, as hitherto we have bene, and that only for our obedience of the commandments of Chrstie, but that we may be suffered together with peace, eyther to lyve under Her Majestie's government, in obedience of the gospel, in any place of her dominions (which we moste desyre), or ells to departe withersoever it shall please God to bringe us, and to gyve us a resting place for the service of his name in peace and tranquillyte. Thus shall the prayers of these poor saintes, and the blessings of our God, who proveth and tryeth us, be powred owt for and upon your Lordship through Jesus Christe, to whom be prayse for ever. Amen.⁹⁸

By the time this letter was composed, the first group of Separatists from London was already preparing to depart for the Dutch Republic; possibly one group had left before the composition of Johnson's letter. Johnson's hope was to secure permission for them to stay in England and to open the way for him to go into exile with them if he failed to obtain permission for them to stay. Johnson remained in prison, and the London Congregation was forced to migrate to the Dutch Republic without their pastor or most of their officers in the summer and fall of 1593. Their adventures and misadventures there in the interim between their departure and Johnson's arrival in 1597 will be related in the next chapter.

The London Congregation must have taken the name "Ancient Church" shortly after their departure from London. No one referred to the London Congregation by any name from 1587-1593. Just as the congregation had remained unstructured for so long, it had also remained unnamed. Once the congregation was no longer in London and one among many other groups who had sought refuge in the Dutch Republic, the need arose for a distinguishing label. Because there were no writings by any church members in the

⁹⁸Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 447. British Library, MS Harley 6849, fol. 143.

Dutch Republic until Johnson's arrival in 1597, it is difficult to determine if the name was used before he arrived or if Johnson himself determined that it would be the general description of the church used in his writings. Johnson more often used the phrase "exiled English church at Amsterdam" to describe his congregation in his writings. Johnson's usage of the term "Ancient Church" was not necessarily intended as a proper name, but rather as a description of the type of church he led, a church dedicated to the ancient precepts of the Apostles and the form of church government Johnson believed was described by Christ to the Apostles.⁹⁹ "Ancient Church" was probably chosen by Johnson as the label for the church based on a passage in Jeremiah 6:16. That scripture reference was printed on the title page of Johnson and Teaching Elder Henry Ainsworth's *An Apology or Defense* in 1604. It read, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand in the wayes & behold, & aske of the ancient paths, which is the good way, & walk therein, & ye shall find rest for your soules: But they said, we will not walk (therein)."¹⁰⁰

Johnson's final appeal to Burghley was dated January 8, 1593/94. Johnson wrote Burghley again because he had heard that two of the imprisoned Separatists had been indicted. No evidence survives that this was the case, but Johnson was sufficiently alarmed by the rumor to contact Burghley. He reminded Burghley of the length of his detainment (fourteen months) and that George had been confined for eleven months in "a

⁹⁹Francis Johnson, *A Christian plea conteyning three treatises. I. The first, touching the Anabaptists, & others mainteyning some like errours with them. II. The second, touching such Christians, as now are here, commonly called Remonstrants or Arminians. III. The third, touching the Reformed Churches, with vvhom my self agree in the faith of the Gospel of our Lord Iesus Christ. Made by Francis Iohnson, pastour of the auncient English Church, now sojourning at Amsterdam in the Low Countreyes*, (Amsterdam, 1617).

¹⁰⁰Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth, *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvvnists*, (Amsterdam, 1604), Title page.

noysome chamber of the common gaole of the Fleet.”¹⁰¹ Their “poor olde father” (John) had almost been imprisoned himself when he petitioned the court to allow his sons to be released.¹⁰² Johnson reiterated his plea that Burghley intervene to obtain a proper hearing for them and practical assistance. He added:

And of these things we are bold to write to your Lordship, being perswaded that it is high tyme for your Honors with speed to consyder hereof, specially now that the Lord hath allready begunne to pleade against this cuntrye and people by so contagious and deadly a plague, as in wonderfull manner hath bene brought upon this lande and the inhabitants thereof, since the shedding of the bloude of those faithfull servants of Christe this last year past. And consydering that her Majestie (as we heare), in a gracious and tender compassion of our distressed estate, hath given commission to discharge us all. None of which things seem to be regarded of our adversaries, at least not so as they ought.¹⁰³

Having seen little positive result from the executions of Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry, Elizabeth and her government now deemed it more expedient to rid themselves of the Separatists by exile rather than create a Separatist cult of martyrdom. Leading Separatists were slowly released throughout 1594-95. Unfortunately for Johnson, the list of Separatists to be sent into exile did not include four of their members. Francis and George Johnson, Elder Daniel Studley, and John Clarke were to remain in prison for the foreseeable future. Burghley probably appreciated at least some expression of gratitude for Elizabeth’s leniency on Johnson’s part, though he certainly was not as “perswaded” that the plague’s periodic return had anything to do with Johnson’s suit.

¹⁰¹Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 453. British Library, MS Lansdowne 75, ff. 50-51.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid.

8. *Voyage To Freedom and Disaster*

Francis Johnson and his companions remained in prison for five years. Contact with the church in Amsterdam was limited during this period and conducted primarily by secret messengers. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Johnson was secretly married to Thomasine Bouys while he was imprisoned, though the marriage was not long kept secret. Their relationship caused a rift between Francis and George that made their five years of imprisonment all the more stressful.¹⁰⁴

Queen Elizabeth and her ministers obviously felt that exile to the continent would still leave the Johnsons and Studley in such close proximity that they would continue to be a threat. Francis set himself to discern a way the Separatists could convince her to allow them to leave England, but not remain in a neighboring country from which they might quickly return. Possibly inspired by stories of Sir Walter Raleigh's initial unsuccessful attempts to establish English settlements in the New World, Johnson proposed to overcome her resistance to their release by suggesting that he and his companions sail to the New World and establish a settlement. This proposal was made by Johnson a full ten years before the first successful English settlement at Jamestown in 1607. It is remarkable to reflect on the possibilities had Johnson been successful in this venture. Successful or not, the text of the following petition finally secured their long coveted release:

Whereas wee Her Majestie's naturall borne subjectes true and loyall
nowe lyving many of us in other countries as men exiled Her Highnes' domynions,
and the rest which remaine within Her Grace's land greatlie
distressed thorough imprisonment and other great troubles sustained onlie
for some matters of conscience, in which our most lamentable estate, wee

¹⁰⁴See George Johnson, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam Published for sundry causes declared in the preface to the pastour of the sayd Church*, (Amsterdam, 1603), 90-112.

cannot in that measure performe the dutie of subjectes, as wee desire. And also whereas meanes is now offered for our beeinge in a forraigne and far countrie which lieth to the west from hence in the Province of Canada where by the providence of the Almightye, and Her Majestie's most gracious favor, wee may not onlie worshippe God as wee are by conscience perswaded by his Word, but also does unto Her Majestie and our country great good service, and in tyme also greatly annoy that bloodie and persecuting Spaniard about the Baye of Mexico. Our most humble suit is that it may please your Honors to be a meanes unto her excellent Majestie that with her most gracious favor and protection wee may peaceablie depart thither, and there remayning to bee accounted Her majesties' faithfull and loving subjectes, to whom wee owe all dutie and obedience in the Lord. Promising heerebie, and taking God to record who searcheth the hartes of all people, that wheresoever wee be come we will, by the grace of God, live and die faithfull to Her Highness and this land of our nativitie.¹⁰⁵

This request was granted in 1597, and the Separatists made preparations to depart England for Canada.

French Canada was little more than wilderness with a few isolated trading posts in 1597. John Cabot, an Italian explorer in the employ of the English, landed at what is now Newfoundland in 1497 and claimed the island for the English. In 1534, Jacques Cartier had claimed the region for France after he sailed into St. Lawrence Bay and up the St. Lawrence River. Cartier failed to discover the wealth his sovereign, Francis I, had hoped to gain from the venture. He did, however, discover that money was to be made through fur trading and fishing. Francis I granted special rights for fur trading and commercial fishing to reward members of his court.¹⁰⁶

When Johnson proposed the possible settlement on the St. Lawrence to Elizabeth I, there was still no organized French settlement. All French fur trading companies at the time were private ventures. Johnson hoped to entice his Queen with the possibility of

¹⁰⁵Barrow and Greenwood, 1970, 470. The National Archives, Col. State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, Volume 246, Item 56.

¹⁰⁶W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier: 1534-1760*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 1-18.

reasserting Cabot's claim to Newfoundland for the English. The English would then establish a beachhead directly off the coast of Canada. The Gulf of St. Lawrence was bordered on the East by Newfoundland and on the West by Acadia (now Nova Scotia). If the English could take Newfoundland, they might be able also to establish a settlement at Acadia before a stronger French presence arrived. Even if they were unable to take Canada, they would still have access to the St. Lawrence River and the pathway to the Canadian interior it provided. They would also be in a perfect position to harass any French attempts at trade and settlement. Had Johnson been successful in this venture, he would have established a settlement seven years before French Port Royal was established as a trading post at Acadia in 1605.¹⁰⁷

Francis Johnson, George Johnson, Daniel Studley, and John Clarke were released with the provision that they would not return unless they were willing to live "according to the Queen's laws."¹⁰⁸ In order to insure their compliance, the prisoners were placed in the custody of the two captains of the ships that were to transport them to Canada. Charles Leigh was the captain of the *Hopewell* (a 120 ton vessel) and took responsibility for Francis Johnson and Daniel Studley.¹⁰⁹ Leigh was a secret member of the London Congregation and a cousin of Thomasine Boyes Johnson. Abraham van Herwick, captain of *Chancewell* (a 70 ton vessel), was responsible for George Johnson and John Clarke. They set sail on April 8, 1597.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 19-25.

¹⁰⁸*Acts of the Privy Council*, Vol. 27, 5.

¹⁰⁹Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 50.

¹¹⁰White, 97.

The trip was filled with unexpected trials. The two ships first became separated by bad weather. The *Chancewell*, in contrast with her name, proved to be the less fortunate of the two vessels. The ship was wrecked off the coast of Cape Breton, a small island separated from Acadia only by the narrow Strait of Canso. They had passed Newfoundland and were in alarming proximity to French traders and fishermen. The wreck resulted in a few very uncertain moments for George Johnson and John Clarke. Stranded on the beaches of a wild frontier, the captain intimated that they had three choices. They could choose to try to survive and “be subject to be devoured by the wilde,” be sold to the French who occupied the area, or accompany the crew into the “shallows” in an attempt to find rescue.¹¹¹ George and John put themselves in the captain’s hands. Deciding that he could not leave them in good conscience, the captain allowed them to continue with the crew into the shallows. As they trekked along the beach, George wrote that he saw a distant speck on the horizon that proved to be Captain Leigh’s *Hopewell* with Francis and Daniel Studley aboard. The *Hopewell* immediately brought the *Chancewell*’s crew aboard.¹¹² One of the most moving and pitiful sections of George Johnson’s *discourse of some troubles* is his description of the reception he received from the relieved Francis and the “familiarity” that existed between them immediately following their reunion.¹¹³ George appeared to be longingly looking back to the last time the two brothers shared a tuly fraternal bond.

¹¹¹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 110.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³George Johnson, *Discourse*, 110.

The reunited crews determined that it would be best, given the limited number of supplies and the addition of more crew members, to return to England for supplies. They were able to reach the Isle of Wight on September 5, 1597.¹¹⁴ Having arrived in the British Isles once again, the Separatists determined to jump ship and join their fellow Separatists in the Dutch Republic. Their actions raised the question of whether they had actually intended to take up their colonizing venture in earnest, or whether the voyage was a subterfuge to use as a cover for their journey to Amsterdam. If the voyage were a subterfuge, they did not count on the ferocity of the weather or the damage incurred by the *Chancewell*. It is more likely that Johnson and his friends had accepted their fate and were pleasantly surprised when their route took them homeward.

9. *Summary*

Francis Johnson experienced a plethora of tremendous changes within the span of five years. Rejecting the possibility of an acceptable church settlement within the Church of England, Johnson joined the Separatist cause he had previously persecuted. His decision made him subject to the same intense persecution that had confronted his new brethren since 1587. He was able to provide pastoral leadership to the new congregation for a very short time in the fall of 1592 before he was seized himself and placed in prison. The time Johnson languished in prison was fraught with dangers and disappointments. When it became clear that he would not suffer the fate of Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry, Francis Johnson actively pursued an appeal that freed him after five years of imprisonment. At great risk to his life and the lives of his companions, Johnson braved

¹¹⁴White, 97-98.

the storms of the Atlantic only to find himself in a perfect position to escape and join his congregation, an opportunity which he seized readily.

While his escape may have seemed like the end of a long, dark night, it was only the beginning of sorrows. The most difficult task still lay ahead. Now that the Separatists had achieved freedom to worship and live as they pleased, what would they do with it? What would the ideals of the London congregation look like as they took on flesh in the form of the Ancient Church? As all flesh is corruptible, so the pristine ideal also became corrupt as it took on the properties of reality. Johnson would find when he arrived in Amsterdam that the real work was only beginning and that the challenges he would face would no longer be only external and alien, but rather internal and familiar.

CHAPTER THREE

My Brother's Keeper?: Family Strife and Dissent Within the Ranks

I. Introduction

How true (brother) have both of us (by lamentable experience) found that which I often wrote to you many yeares since a A brother offended is harder to winne than a strong citie: and their contentions are like the barr of a palace and what counsell I gave you may remember, namely b to leave of, ere the contentions were medled with: But whether disdeyne and skorne to take counsel of your younger brother or conceptednes of your own graces and gifts with desire of mimon (mammon) or the malice of Satan who envied the blessings of God vpon us or what sinister thing stirred you up to neglect it the Lord knoweth and let your conscience tell you as also what worke the Lord hath and will bring to passe by these troubles I refer to His infinit and divine wisdom desiring his merciful maiestie to give mee always to hold and mainteyne a good and and iuste cause to carrie it as I ought to endure and walke worthy the trails thereof to wayt and in due tyme to find a good issue with is blessings.¹

The tumultuous seas that buffeted Francis Johnson as he attempted to sail west on the *Hopewell* could easily be interpreted as an omen of the tumultuous years that would follow his arrival at Amsterdam. The seeds of dissent and strife were already planted in the form of two of his traveling companions, one his trusted associate and the other his younger brother. If the account George Johnson published in 1603, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam*, is to be trusted, he had long distrusted Daniel Studley and already suspected him of some of the improprieties that would make him infamous in Amsterdam.² Johnson, on the other

¹George Johnson, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam: 1603), 4.

²Ibid., Also see Christopher Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists*, (Amsterdam: 1612), 22-24.

hand, seemed to prefer the counsel of Studley to that of his brother and overlooked many of the deficiencies in Studley's character. Studley's lapdog loyalty to Johnson earned him a place in Francis Johnson's personal esteem that was a mystery to Studley's detractors.³

1. Escape and Reunion

For the time being, these personal grievances were ignored as the foursome returned to England and sought refuge in the Netherlands. It is questionable whether they actually intended to settle at Newfoundland. George Johnson stated that Captain Leigh was a Separatist sympathizer and may possibly have hatched a plot with his passengers to journey toward the Gulf of St. Lawrence and return them to England on some pretext that would make it possible for the Johnsons and their companions to join their congregation in Amsterdam. Whether that was the plan or not, Leigh did not report in his log that his passengers had disembarked on English soil, even though it was his duty according to the terms of the agreement the Separatists made with the authorities for their release that he report any such infraction.⁴ By the time they returned to England, the possibility of attempting a return voyage to Newfoundland would surely have been unthinkable.⁵

The journey of the Separatist leaders south to London was filled with intrigue and the persistent fears that at some point their presence might be revealed to the authorities. Francis Johnson, George Johnson, Daniel Studley, and John Clerk traveled from Southampton to London, stopping along the way to speak to some friends of Studley.

³George Johnson, *Discouse*, 4-6.

⁴B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 97.

⁵George Johnson, *Discouse*, 108-112.

George Johnson sourly commented in his *Discourse* that “they would not be content that G.J. speake to his frends.”⁶ George noted that the company rode through towns occupied by his friends and that he was able to “put up at their hands” as a greeting to them. In a comment and an episode that may put some of George’s later complaints against Johnson and Studley in the context of his character, George noted that he was “greeved to see such partiall dealing.”⁷ George’s complaints against Mrs. Johnson had borne the fruit of contention between the congregation’s leadership, and it was certainly natural for George to feel often slighted due to the rift that had opened up between them. While it would seem immature to be concerned about such matters on George’s part and equally immature on the part of his companions to punish him by neglecting to greet his friends, it is quite remarkable that at this point the company was still together and that Francis Johnson had chosen to tolerate his brother’s complaints.

The four Separatist leaders finally returned to London where they lodged in separate places so that the others could escape if one of their group was revealed to the authorities. George Johnson related how Thomas Bishop came and communicated to him that the authorities were aware that the Separatist leaders were in the city. Interestingly, George identifies Bishop as “his sister’s husband” and cited this fact as the basis for his trust in Bishop’s message.⁸ The reference is slightly ambiguous grammatically and “his” could possibly modify Studley, whom Bishop indicated George should meet at Grave’s End. The most natural reading of the grammatical construct seems to support the

⁶George Johnson, *Discouse*, 112.

⁷George Johnson, *Discouse*, 112.

⁸Ibid, 113.

interpretation that “his” is a pronoun intended to indicate George himself, not Daniel Studley. If that is the case, the sister married to Bishop was either Anne or Mary as stated in chapter one of this study. This reading is confirmed by a reference on the next page in which⁹ George lamented his situation when he arrived at Grave’s End only to find that Francis and Studley were not present to greet him:

He waited one day/ they came not/ he waited a second day/ they came not:
then G. J. began to suspect that they dealt craftely with him/by such a devise
to get him to go out of the city/ and was mvch greeved/that his sisters husband
should so hle him/ he having told him how litel money he had¹⁰

George’s comment would only make sense if the sister were his. The comment is somewhat disturbing because it seems to indicate a paranoid tendency on George’s part to assume that everyone was arrayed against him. George gauged the persuasive potential of Francis and Studley to be so powerful that they could turn his own sister against him.

George deeply resented the fact that he was left to wait with no financial resources. He wrote that he was forced to borrow ten shillings from a local man. The other Separatist leaders arrived on “the third or fourth day” and commenced preparations to leave Grave’s End. George greeted their arrival with an acrimonious demand for an explanation of their motives in leaving him waiting without proper funds. Francis responded that he expected George to stay with “a brother” who lived three or four miles from Grave’s End. George was sure to note that though they had “disappointed” him “God had provided for him.”¹¹

⁹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 113.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 113.

Despite their continuing hard feelings toward one another, the Separatist leaders boarded ship the next day and sailed for Amsterdam.¹²

Francis Johnson and his companions were finally reunited with their church in the Dutch city of Amsterdam in 1597. The little church had faced trials of their own during the time they were separated from their pastor. They had originally settled at Kampen in 1593, largely due to threats of harassment from Dutch ministers in Amsterdam. By October 1595, they had moved to Naarden.¹³ Naarden was a trading post in closer proximity to Amsterdam, which allowed the English Separatists to move closer to the heart of the Dutch Republic. The congregation lived on the edge of poverty and lost some members to local Anabaptist groups.¹⁴ The situation of the church was so desperate that they were given assistance by the city fathers of Naarden. Christopher Lawne, in his later writings against the Ancient Church, cited the case of Christopher Bowman, one of the two deacons who were leading the church at the time, who abused the funds that were distributed to the Separatists by the city fathers of Naarden. Lawne claimed:

But their Deacon Christopher Bowman, for his deceiving of many poore, even of their owne companie, of halfe that which the Magistrats of Narden had given them weekly was thereupon, when it came to light through Widow Colgate's meanes, called Iudas the Purse-bearer in Narden for so doing: not to speake of many such like instances that by him may be given.¹⁵

Lawne's source for this information was Thomas White, a disgruntled former member of the congregation who had returned to the Church of England and contributed a great deal

¹²George Johnson, *Discourse*, 113.

¹³Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 47-48.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵Christopher Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists*, (Amsterdam, 1612), 27.

of negative public attention for the Ancient Church concerning the rift between the Johnson brothers.¹⁶ Francis Johnson responded to White by indicating that Bowman and George Kniften, the other deacon leading the congregation at the time, gave the funds to the members of the congregation they felt to be most in need of assistance:

Whereof because Goodwife Colgate (the woman of whom he speaketh) had not a part therevpon by her meanes it seemeth was this report raised of Mr. Bow. which it seems this fellow hath now published: and for which his many such like instances he is by Mr. B called before the magistrates as a selanderer.¹⁷

Johnson also stated that the assistance from the city of Naarden was sent only once and not weekly as Lawne and White claimed.¹⁸ This incident was illustrative not only of the types of aspersions that were cast on the Ancient Church by their detractors, but also the poor estate of the church in their early years at Amsterdam.

By the summer of 1596, the congregation was meeting at the home of Jean de l'Ecluse in Amsterdam. L'Ecluse was an Englishman who had lived in France for a time and been a member of the Reformed Church at Rouen. The Dutch Reformed consistory in Amsterdam resented the entrance of the "Brownists" into Amsterdam and requested that action be taken by the Amsterdam Burgomasters. The Burgomasters refused to take action and offered the Separatist refugees the religious toleration that they would have denied to others if given the opportunity to shape public policy.¹⁹

¹⁶C. Lawne, *Prophane Schism.*, 26. Francis Johnson, *An inquirie and ansvver of Thomas VWhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme. By Francis Iohnson Pastor of the exiled English Church at Amsterdam in Holland*, (Amsterdam: 1606), 28.

¹⁷Francis Johnson, *An Inquirie*, 46.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 48-50.

It was in Amsterdam that Francis Johnson found his little congregation in 1597. The congregation that remained at the time may well have been as few as forty people,²⁰ far less than the three hundred members indicated by William Bradford when he arrived with John Robinson's congregation in 1608.²¹ Bradford's "ancient men" described the Amsterdam congregation of 1608 as an admirable example of God's mercy:

Truly thee were in them many worthy men and if you had seen them in their bewty and order as wee haue don, you would have bin much affected therewith wee dare say; Att Amsterdam; before their deuision and breach they were about three hundred Communicants and they had for their Pastour and Teacher those two eminent men before named (Francis Johnson and Henry Aisnworth) and in our time four Graue men for Ruleing elders and three able and Godly men for deacons, one ancient widow for a deacones whoe did them seruice for many years though shee was sixty yeers of age when shee was Chosen shee honored her place and was an ornament to the Congregation shee vsually sate in a Convenient place in the Congregation; with a little birchen Rode in her hand; and kept little Children in Great awe from disturbing the Congregation shee did frequently visit the sicke and weake especially weomen and as there was need Called out maids and young weomen to watch and doe them other healpes as therire Necessitie did Require and if they were poor shee would Gather Relieffe for them of those that were able; or acquaint the deacons and shee was obeyed as a mother in Israell and an office of Christ.²²

The contrast between the beleaguered church of 1596-97 and the idyllic picture of 1608-10 presented by William Bradford is strong. In the decade, between 1597 and 1608, Francis Johnson and his associates were able to lead the Ancient Church to the strong and settled existence portrayed by Bradford. Unfortunately, the "diuision" indicated by Bradford was only two years away in 1608.

The only time in the life of the Ancient Church comparable to the stress engendered by the 1610 split between Johnson and Ainsworth was the years that

²⁰Francis Johnson, *An Inquirie*, 63.

²¹William Bradford, "Dialogue," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Vol. 22, Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859*, (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 139.

²²Bradford, *Ibid.*, 139-40.

preceded the more settled period described by William Bradford. Before Francis Johnson would see the Ancient Church at its strongest, he faced several challenges, both internal and external that threatened to destroy the Ancient Church. Upon his arrival in Amsterdam, Francis Johnson was faced with three primary challenges that would shape the possible future of his congregation. The first of these challenges was the necessity of crafting and propagating a new statement of faith that set forth the firmer positions of the Ancient Church regarding church polity and reform in England as they had developed since the original statement of the church in 1589.²³ A second challenge that was part and parcel of the first was setting forth a clear program of reform that moved the Separatist churches from primarily criticizing the English establishment to proposing the form of a positive ecclesiology that could be adopted by the mother country should they choose to repent. Sections 32 through 40 of their “True Confession” set forth such a program.²⁴ Finally, and most painfully, Francis Johnson was forced to confront the growing division and strife within his congregation. In order for the Ancient Church to survive, Johnson deemed it necessary to deal with the primary source of that disorder, his brother George. These matters were the challenges that confronted Johnson upon his arrival at Amsterdam in 1597 and will form the structure for the discussion of his early years there that follows.

²³Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 28-74.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 67-72. Henry Ainsworth, *The confession of faith of certayn English people living in exile, in the Low countreyes. Together with a brief note of the speciall heads of those things wherein we differ from the Church of Engla[n]d*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1607).

3. *A Trve Confession*

Johnson's first task, the composition and propagation of a new confession of faith, was already underway when he arrived in Amsterdam. The *Trve Confession* of 1596 has been generally recognized as the product of Francis Johnson, though it has also at times been attributed to Henry Ainsworth.²⁵ George also claimed to have taken part in writing the preface to the confession.²⁶ The tone of that preface was stern and intended to list the persecutions that Separatists had endured at the hands of the authorities. They denied the accusation of some that they were guilty of "heresie, schisme, pryde, obstinancie, disloyaltie, sedicion, &c."²⁷ The Separatists also noted the executions of Greenwood, Barrow, and Penry in their preface.²⁸

The primary difference between the confession authored by Johnson in 1596 and the confession issued under Greenwood and Barrow in 1589 was the specific program for reform laid out in 1589. After stating all of the Separatists' previous concerns about prayer books, vestments, and popish ceremonies, Johnson went on to suggest the manner in which the English people should proceed if they were determined to repent of their sin and embrace church polity as defined by the Separatists' interpretation of scripture:

32. That by God's Commandment all that will be saued must with speed come forth from of this Antichristian estate leaving the suppression of it vnto the Magistrate to whom it belongeth. And that both al such as haue receyued or exercised anie of these false Offices or anie pretended function or Ministrie in or to this false and Antichristian constitution are willingly in God's feare,

²⁵Walker, 28-45, B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to The Pilgrim Fathers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 103-109.

²⁶George Johnson, *Discourse*, 110.

²⁷Walker, 49.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 52.

to giue ouer and leaue those vnlawfull Office, and no longer to minister in this manner to these assemblies in this estate. And that none also, of what sort or condition soever, doo giue anie part of their Goods, Lands, Money, or money worth to the maintenance of this false Ministrie and worship vpon anie Commandment or vnder anie color whatsoever.²⁹

Francis Johnson's injunction was that the people of England forsake all support of the Church as it was established in England at the time in order to make way for a better establishment.

Before addressing the positive side of Johnson's platform for change in England, it is important to take the opportunity afforded by the explicit references of the confession to note the Separatists' interesting and seemingly contradictory views on the relationship between church and state. William Haller, former Professor of English at Barnard College of Columbia University, noted in his *Rise of Puritanism* (1938) the Puritan paradox of challenging the authority of the state establishment in the name of a better establishment. The great irony was that in their years of waiting to assume a position in society where they could enforce their ecclesiastical program, they perfected the tools of dissent and survived largely due to the toleration of various governments. Haller rightly noted the historical paradox that occurred when the Puritans actually came to power in the 1640's, only to find their authority challenged by a host of divergent religious traditions that had learned the method and means of opposing the establishment by the example of the Puritans.³⁰ Haller made this observation at the beginning of his chapter on the Separatists and identified them as one example of the unintended consequences of the challenge presented to the establishment by the Puritans.

²⁹Walker, 69.

³⁰William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 173-176.

The Separatists had their own political ironies. Primary among these was their continued endorsement of the magistrates' proper role in suppressing heretical teachings, even though they themselves profited from the religiously tolerant atmosphere of Amsterdam. In article thirty-nine of the confession, Johnson crafted a statement that would have made Henry VIII's and Thomas Cromwell's hearts swell with joy. The Ancient Church proposed:

That it is the Office and Duty of Prince and Magestrates, who by the ordinance of God are supreme governors vnder him over all persons and causes within their Realmes and Dominions, to suppress and root out by their authoritie all false ministries, voluntarie Relligions and counterfeyt worship of God, to abolish and destroy the Idoll Temple, Images, Altares, Vestments, and all other monuments of Idolatrie and superstition and to take and convert to their own civile vses not only the benefit of all such idolatrous buyldings & monuments, but also the Revenues, Demeanes, Lordships, Possessions, Gleabes and maintenance of anie false ministries and vnlawfull Ecclesiastical functions whatsoever within their Dominions.³¹

In addition, Johnson intimated that the supreme governor should positively support the true church by leading “a godly lyfe in all peace and loyalltie” and “enforcing” all their subjects to “do their dutyes to God and men.”³² This arrangement, while apparently yielding great authority to the state, was tempered to some degree by the qualification that the magistrate was to maintain good and restrain evil as “God commandeth, whose Lieutenants they are heer on earth.”³³ This qualification stipulated that the conscience of the sovereign was subject to the teaching of the church regarding what was evil and what was good in the sight of God. In essence, Francis Johnson and the English Separatists of Amsterdam were not far removed from the contradiction that had challenged the church

³¹Walker, 71-72.

³²Ibid., 72.

³³Walker, 72.

throughout the medieval era. How can the political leader be the head of the church and also one of its members? Who holds the supreme authority, clergy or secular rulers? Johnson further muddied the waters by stating in article forty-four that while the Separatists were loyal subjects of the queen, they followed Christ's injunction to offer to God what is God's and Caesar what is Caesar's.³⁴ In their views of the relationship between the church and state, the English Separatists were not far removed from their fellow Englishmen or the magisterial reformers. It was the form of church establishment enforced by the state, rather than the right of the secular rulers to enforce an establishment that was the issue for Johnson.

Following their exodus from the counterfeit churches, people were "willingly to joine together in Christian communion and orderly couenant."³⁵ They were to unite themselves as a covenanted body through "confession of Faith and obedience of Christ."³⁶ Article thirty-four delineated the process in which those gifted with the "exercise of prophecy" should be chosen and allowed to teach publicly the Word until the time when the congregation is spiritually prepared to elect their leaders. No sacrament was to be administered until the Pastor and Teachers had been chosen and ordained.³⁷ This prohibition enshrined as law the practice of the London congregation prior to Johnson's arrival. The proper form of the sacrament was presented in the thirty-fifth article as communion in both kinds. Johnson explicitly rejected any concept of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. He instead endorsed Calvin's symbolic

³⁴Walker, 73.

³⁵Ibid., 69.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 70.

Reformed view that the sacraments of baptism and communion were “signes and seales of God’s euerlasting couenant.”³⁸

In an ironic addendum for a congregation forged in the furnace of controversy and separation, the confession stated in article thirty-six that it was not proper for a person who joined themselves to a “rightly ordered” covenant community to separate from that community but rather “by due order to seeke redress thereof” when inevitable conflicts occurred. The distinction between the act of separation that formed the Ancient Church and those potential acts of separation addressed in the confession hinged on the phrase “rightly ordered.”³⁹ The Church of England, as a false church, had no spiritual authority to demand allegiance, whereas the covenanted communities of the separatists were formed on the true biblical model and therefore had a right to claim unshakable loyalty because of its spiritual authority.

While it was understood that a person might well break fellowship with the Ancient Church due to gross sins or strife within the congregation, Johnson’s expectation was that there would be no need for separation in these cases because the Ancient Church had instituted the correct method of church discipline as well as the correct polity. The English Separatists’ obsession with proper church discipline can seem both pharisaical and draconian to the modern observer. It in fact was rather draconian and vulnerable to terrible abuses. As stated in the introduction to this study, one is forced to admire the dedication of the Separatists to purity in their fellowship while recognizing that this ideal of a purified membership was never actually realized in the Ancient Church, partially due

³⁸Walker, 70

³⁹Walker, 71.

to Francis Johnson's own uneven application of the principle.⁴⁰ Whatever the actual reality on the ground, Francis Johnson's idyllic vision consisted of a covenanted community where the grievances of the members would be mediated by the congregation. In those cases where a member had transgressed too far or persisted in an obstinate refusal to bow to the judgment of the congregation, Johnson believed the covenant community had the right to excommunicate the accused individuals:

24 That Christ hath given this power to receiue in or to cut off any member, to the whole body together of euery Christian Congregation, and not to anie one member aparte, or to moe members sequestered from the wholl, or to anie other Congregation to doo it for the^r: yet that ech Congregation ought to vse the best help they can vnto, and the most meet member they haue to pronounce the same in their publick assembly.⁴¹

In 1596, it was explicitly clear in the confession that Francis Johnson was advocating a congregational polity in which the entire congregation regulated the spiritual and administrative life of the congregation. While officers, elders, and deacons exercised authority, it was an authority delegated to them by the congregation and could be rescinded by the congregation in the event that the ministers were failing to conduct the duties of their office or carry themselves with the proper spiritual deportment.⁴² All members of the congregation were equally subject to the possible censure of the collective body:

25 That eury member of ech Christian Congregation, how excellent, great, or learned soeuer, ought to be subiect to this censure & iudgement of Christ; Yet ought not the Church without great care and due advise to procede against such publick persons.⁴³

⁴⁰One need look no farther than the case of Daniel Studley, though other examples can easily be cited. Lawne, *Profaine Schism*, 26-27.

⁴¹Walker, 66.

⁴²See articles twenty-three and twenty-six in Walker, 66-67.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 67.

Every indication prior to the publication of Francis Johnson's *Tell The Church* in 1611 was that the Ancient Church was intended to embrace a congregational polity in which the power of the pastor, elders, and deacons was checked by the influence of the gathered congregation. *Tell The Church* contained Johnson's public endorsement of private convictions that probably had been developing over the course of his time as pastor in Amsterdam. Johnson reversed his congregational position of 1596 to embrace a more Presbyterian view of church discipline that placed the authority to hear and determine the outcome of disciplinary problems in the hands of the elders rather than the congregation.⁴⁴ His decision to endorse this position, its wisdom, and its consequences will be the subject of chapter five in this study. For the purpose of the issues presently under consideration, it is sufficient to note that Francis Johnson was at least publicly endorsing the ideal of a congregational polity and discipline, though George Johnson contended that Francis never embraced it in practice.⁴⁵

Johnson's composition of the 1596 confession gave the Separatists a document that reiterated all of their formal complaints against the Church of England while also setting forth a program for the institution of their ideals that promised to refute the charges of their enemies that their only focus was negative criticism of the establishment. After successfully completing his journey to Amsterdam, Johnson's first concerns were to make the Ancient Church's confessional statement known and also to reconstitute the full leadership structure of the church. The introduction of a gifted young scholar into the

⁴⁴Francis Johnson, *A short treatise concerning the exposition of those words of Christ, Tell the Church, &c. Mat. 18. 17. Written by Francis Iohnson, pastor of the English exiled Church at Amsterdam in the low Countreyes*, (Amsterdam, 1611).

⁴⁵George Johnson, 112-114.

life of the Amsterdam congregation mere months before Johnson's own arrival there provided him with a capable associate who could assist him in both matters.

4. Enter Henry Ainsworth

The exact date of Henry Ainsworth's arrival among the Johnsonian Separatists is shrouded among the general complexities attending the life of the congregation prior to 1597. It is likely that Ainsworth arrived either in 1595 or early in 1596. It is absolutely certain that he was actively ministering to the Ancient Church by 1598.⁴⁶ Ainsworth was born at Swanton Morely in Norfolk in 1571 and was educated at Caius College, Cambridge.⁴⁷ He had embraced Puritan views at Cambridge and traveled to Amsterdam when the Elizabethan reaction against the Puritans reached its height in the early 1590's. He arrived in Amsterdam in 1593 and found work as a porter to a local bookseller. The bookseller was impressed with Ainsworth's knowledge of Hebrew and introduced him to many of the prominent scholars in Amsterdam. Ainsworth apparently joined with the Ancient Church immediately after their removal from Naarden to Amersterdam.⁴⁸ He was elected as Teaching Elder of the church to replace the martyred John Greenwood.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Henry Ainsworth, *The confession of faith of certayn English people living in exile, in the Low countreyes. Together with a brief note of the speciall heads of those things wherein we differ from the Church of Engla[n]d*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorpe, 1607).

⁴⁷ Caius was founded in 1557 by John Keys (Italian form Caius), a former Fellow and student of Gonville. Gonville was founded in 1348 by Terrington Rector Edmund Gonville. Caius represented a refounding of Gonville and was given a generous endowment and facilities by Keys. Caius/Gonville is currently located at the center of Cambridge physically and occupies an important role in the life of the university. Gonville & Caius College Web Site, Cambridge University (<http://www.cai.cam.ac.uk/college/past/index.php>, accessed on May 24, 2006).

⁴⁸ Michael E. Moody, "Ainsworth, Henry (1569–1622)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/240> (accessed June 19, 2006).

⁴⁹ Henry Ainsworth, *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brownists against such imputations as are layd vpon them by the heads and doctors of the University*

The office of Teaching Elder was the only vacant office at the time, but most of the other officers of the church still languished in London prisons. Ainsworth, while not necessarily providing firm leadership, did bring a sense of direction and spiritual guidance to the congregation in their time of need.

Ainsworth's reputation as a scholar was solid and established by most accounts.

William Bradford extolled the virtues of Ainsworth to his young men in the first

“Dialogue.”:

A man of a Thousand was Teacher of this church at Amsterdam att the same time when mr. Johnson was Pastour, two worthy men they were and of excellent prtes, . . . A very learned man hee was an a Close student which much impaired his health wee haue heard some eminent in the knowlidge of the tongues of the vniversitie of Leiden say that hee had not his better for the Hebrew tongve in the vniversitie Nor scarce in Europa.⁵⁰

Bradford's assessment of Ainsworth's skill with biblical languages is validated by numerous surviving treatises by Ainsworth dealing with the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹

Ainsworth's annotations of the Psalms alone were a virtual treasure trove.⁵² His skills in argumentation and debate were as sharp as his ability to translate and expound the scriptures. He contributed several apologies for the separatist cause in concert with

of Oxford, in their Ansver to the humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certayne ceremonies and abuses of the Church, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorpe, 1604); White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 99.

⁵⁰Bradford, “Dialogue,” 136-137.

⁵¹Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations vpon the second booke of Moses, called Exodus Wherein, by conferring the holy Scriptures, comparing the Chaldee and Greeke versions, and other records of the Hebrewes; Moses his words, lawes, and ordinances are explained*, (London: Iohn Haviland, 1622).

⁵² Henry Ainsworth, *The booke of Psalmes: Englished both in prose and metre with annotations, opening the words and sentences, by conference with other Scriptures by H. A.*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorpe, 1612).

Johnson before he found himself at odds with his pastor.⁵³ William Bradford quoted a statement he claimed was made by John Smyth, Johnson's Cambridge student, regarding the forensic gifts of both Johnson and Ainsworth:

Wee hear mr. Smith vpon occation say that hee was prswaded noe men lieuing were able to maintaine a Cause against those two men, meaning mr. Johnson and mr. Ainsworth if they had not the truth on their side.⁵⁴

Bradford also noted Ainsworth's irenic spirit:

hee was man very Modest, Amiable, and sociable in his ordinary Course and Carriage of an innocent and vnblamable life and Conversation of a meeke spirit and a Calme temper void of Pasion and Not ezely and not ezely prouoked and yet hee would be something Smarte in his style to his opposers in his publicke writings.⁵⁵

Ainsworth's accommodating personality and great ability were an attractive combination for Francis Johnson. He was a capable teacher who garnered great respect among the congregation. Yet Ainsworth's calm demeanor and desire for unity within the congregation appeared to militate against the possibility that he would ever challenge Francis Johnson's authority. This assessment was true until Francis Johnson diverged from his former views on church discipline, a breach of trust that Ainsworth believed justified opposition to Johnson.⁵⁶ The combination of skill and pliable personality

⁵³See Henry Ainsworth, *An Apologie; the confession of faith; and The communion of saints A treatise of the fellowship that the faithful have with God, and his angels, and one with an other; in this present life. Gathered out of the holy Scriptures*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorpe, 1607).

⁵⁴Bradford, *Dialogue*, 134.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion to Mr Richard Clyftons advertisement Who under pretense of answering Chr. Lawnes book, hath published an other mans private letter, with Mr Francis Iohnsons answer therto. Which letter is here justified; the answer therto refuted: and the true causes of the lamentable breach that hath lately fallen out in the English exiled Church at Amsterdam, manifested, by Henry Ainsworth*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorpe, 1613).

rendered Ainsworth a perfect subordinate for the increasingly authoritarian style of Francis Johnson.

Ainsworth's mild temperament did not earn him respect from all quarters. George Johnson took an immediate dislike to the young teacher that only grew as his disagreement with his brother became more heated. George viewed Ainsworth as a weak "cipher" of his brother and Daniel Studley.⁵⁷ He also leveled accusations of apostasy against Ainsworth that he claimed invalidated Ainsworth as a church officer.⁵⁸ Apostasy in the Separatist context was not rejection of the faith but visitation at an established church after one had made a commitment to separation. The final act that made Ainsworth unacceptable in George's eyes was his apparent indecisiveness during the controversies that erupted within the Ancient Church. Though George claimed that Ainsworth expressed his concern regarding the heavy-handed manner in which George was handled by the leadership of the church, Ainsworth did little to oppose it:

2. Though a man may see and hear by his speeches privately that he greveth at these dealings yet wil he not speak openly to help against the mighty in battell but rather ioineth with them and pronounceth that which my accusers and the offenders (who I have reprov'd) set down against me.⁵⁹

George's accusations against Ainsworth prompted a defense of Ainsworth's character by William Bradford, who appeared to anticipate the possibility that questions regarding Ainsworth's character might still be asked almost fifty years after George Johnson made his initial charges.⁶⁰

⁵⁷George Johnson, *Discourse*, 63.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹George Johnson, 184.

⁶⁰Bradford, *Dialogue*, 135.

Although Ainsworth's election as Teaching Elder would be the source of some controversy, his skills in scriptural exegesis and exposition were a source of tremendous spiritual benefit to the Ancient Church in 1597. Johnson also saw in Ainsworth a useful resource for reproducing his confession in a form that could be more readily disseminated to university professors throughout Western Europe. Johnson's goal in sending his confession to the universities was to gain the endorsement of at least a few Christian intellectuals who could give the English Separatist cause some credibility through their support. In order to effectively share the confession with European academics, Johnson first determined that the confession should be translated into Latin, the *lingua franca* of the academy and church. While he was a competent master of Latin himself, Johnson turned to Ainsworth as the more experienced linguist to translate the confession. Ainsworth produced a Latin version of the confession of 1596 in 1598.⁶¹ It was this version that was sent to the university leaders of Europe for their appraisal and approval. While the confession was largely ignored by the leading scholars of Europe, one prominent scholar did take the time to respond to the Ancient Church.

5. *The Ancient Church and Franciscus Junius In Dialogue*

While the reaction of most of the university leaders who received the confession from the Ancient Church has not been preserved in written form, the lack of an official endorsement by any of the recipients was testimony enough to either their total disagreement with the Separatist position or the general lack of desire on the part of the European scholars to get involved in what seemed to them an English dispute. The one exchange that has survived between the Separatists and a European scholar was their

⁶¹Walker, 41.

correspondence with Franciscus Junius (1545-1602), a French Huguenot who had been named professor of theology at Leiden in 1592. Junius was best known for publishing updated Latin versions of the Old Testament and his *La Paisible Chrestien*, which related his views on achieving peace in the church based on Calvinist ecclesiology. He championed an irenic approach to the theological conflicts of his day and sought to bring contending parties together under the common banner of Reformed theology. Junius was widely respected as an arbitrator in ecclesiastical conflicts and therefore was the person most likely to respond to the Ancient Church in an attempt to heal their divisions with the Anglican Church.⁶²

The correspondence between the Ancient Church and Junius was published by an unknown individual who identified himself with the initials “R. G.” in the preface to the collection. “R. G.” stated in his preface that his purpose for gathering and publishing the correspondence was to encourage supporters of the Church of England in their opposition to Separatism by making the arguments of Junius available to them.⁶³ It was unknown by the Ancient Church whether Junius had given his permission for the correspondence to be translated and published. The leaders of the Ancient Church were understandably upset that the reply from Junius had been published while their answer to his assertions had not. Despite his strong opposition to Separatism, R. G. was obviously a kinder adversary than Johnson originally suspected. In the second edition of the letters (1602), R. G. included a statement sent to him by the Separatists stating their position and

⁶²Christiaan de Jonge, *De irenische ecclesiologie van Franciscus Junius (1545-1602): with an English summary*, (Nieuwkoop : B. de Graaf, 1980), 186-91.

⁶³Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters, translated into English, being first written in Latine. Two, by the reverend and learned Mr. Francis Iunius, divinitie reader at Leyden in Holland. The other, by the exiled English Church, abiding for the present at Amsterdam in Holland. Together with the confession of faith prefixed: where vpon the said letters were first written*, (1602), translator’s preface.

objections to the publication of the letters. He also reproduced their original response to Junius. The indignation of Johnson and his elders is evident in their statement:

More specifically they dedicated that litle book to al Christian universities neer about to be discussed, approued, or reprocued by the godly learned in them. And sending one in particular to Mr. Fr. Iunius, a man of great learning and godliness dwelling near unto them to be by him and the rest of his brethren of the universitie of Leyden judged of then received from him a letter lately by one R. G. translated and printed in English whether with the author's consent or not is unkown, but the copy (as the publisher sayeth) was given out by the author himself who might have done wel to give a copy of the answer likewise or if he did the translator hath not dealt indifferently to publish one and not an other.⁶⁴

The Separatist position was well represented in the statement included by R. G. and stated the concerns that prompted the Ancient Church to send their confession to the universities. They desired to publish to the “world” their convictions regarding church order.⁶⁵

The leaders of the Ancient Church were not nearly as kind to R. G. They suggested that the published letter had been altered, apparently suggesting that Junius' original response was more congenial to their position in places than the published letters indicated. It was possible that this was a printer's error, or it could possibly have been “the translator's euil mind for his mother churches' advantage.”⁶⁶ They also claimed that the intent of the church fathers and leaders of the Reformation were not fairly represented in the version of the letter printed by R. G. One interesting aspect of this argument rested in Johnson's assertion that such notable ecclesiastical heroes as George Fox and Hugh

⁶⁴Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “The Answer to R. G. his Epistle prefixed before Mr. Junius Letters.”

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “The Answer to R. G. his Epistle prefixed before Mr. Junius Letters.”

Latimer would have sympathized with the Separatist position, an assertion that rested on dubious grounds.⁶⁷

Not only did R. G. reproduce these rather acerbic personal attacks, he also included the entire unaltered text of the 1596 confession. Even without the reply from Johnson, the Separatist position would have been fairly well represented by their confession. R. G.'s willingness to include both marked the attacks of bias leveled at him by the Separatists as unfair.⁶⁸

Junius' first response to the Ancient Church was written in 1599 and began with a sincere expression of his desire not to be drawn into a matter he did not feel equipped to settle. Junius did not want to play the "busie body", but rather desired that "we embrace a holy silece, if there be any thing, wherein we be offended."⁶⁹ It was enough for Junius that persons so offended should "commit our cause to the Lord."⁷⁰ Recognizing that he would not be able to escape a more substantive reply that easily, Junius challenged the motives of the Separatists for airing their grievances while maintaining throughout his disappointment that the Separatists would choose to air the problems of the English church publicly where people outside the Christian fold might be discouraged from entering if they saw the disorder of the church. His chief concern was the motivation behind the publication of the confession. Had the Separatists published the confession to unburden themselves or purge their own consciences? If so, they do a disservice to the

⁶⁷Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, "The Answer to R. G. his Epistle prefixed before Mr. Junius Letters."

⁶⁸Ibid, "Confession."

⁶⁹Ibid., "First Letter."

⁷⁰Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, "First Letter," 32.

church by creating an opportunity for “deadly enemies of God and the Church, who thirst after nothing so much as the blood of the church of God.”⁷¹ Were they hoping to bring the controversy into the public eye with the hope of gaining popular approval? Junius expressed his doubts that a public controversy fueled by popular enthusiasm would yield the sober judgment needed to deal with theological controversy. Junius warned, “Yee knowe that the publicke voice is neither a iuste iudge oftentimes, nor at any time almost a lawfull Iudge, so greatly doth evil preuaile and beare sway in the publick.”⁷² In Junius’ estimation, the Separatists “doe with suspition and prejudice burhen your own cause.”⁷³

Franciscus Junius frustrated the hopes of the Separatists by refusing to issue a direct opinion regarding any specific point of contention between their party and the Church of England. Like a good academic, Junius charted a steady course between the two positions, determining that any attempt to state his opinion as the definitive answer to the controversy would do an injustice to the other great leaders whose opinions had been sought.⁷⁴ His most passionate words were reserved for the Separatists, who seemed to him to be fruitlessly pursuing reform even after they had achieved peace and freedom to order their communion as they willed in Amsterdam. How could they hope to achieve reform in England after they had left its shores when they had been unable to achieve it while they were there? Would it not be better for them to turn their attention to their immediate context rather than worrying about what might have been?⁷⁵ As indicated by

⁷¹ Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “First Letter,” 32.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁴ Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “First Letter,” 36-37.

⁷⁵ Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “First Letter,” 34-37.

the accusations later made by George Johnson, Francis Johnson may have been convinced either by Junius or his own perceptions that it was indeed vain to expect radical transformation in England.⁷⁶

The Separatists responded with a letter defending the necessity of publishing their creed. They indicated that others had publicly aired various theological concerns before them and that they were simply standing in the Reformation tradition by addressing doctrinal and practical problems in the Church of England. The letter is dated February 19, 1599, though this dating is according to the old style, and it was in fact written in 1600 according to the Julian calendar. Johnson and his congregation stated plainly their hope that through their example “papists” and “Anabaptists” might be shown the way of truth. The Ancient Church also confronted Junius’ contention that their protest served only to divide and not to edify the universal church:

Finally, pity the whole Church of Christ which verily it is not meet nor expedient neyther indeed ought among so many and grievous wounds of hers universally inflicted to be further galled with this particular wound that you should not take it in good part to have by us the true faith of Christ published and the remnants of Antichrists apostasy discovered.⁷⁷

Johnson had also been disheartened that Theodore Beza,⁷⁸ with whom the church had also corresponded, had failed to be more supportive in his reply to their letter. The ecclesiastical leaders of Europe, even those who might agree with the Ancient Church in

⁷⁶George Johnson, *A Discourse*, 62-64.

⁷⁷Franciscus Junius, *Certain letters*, “The Answer to Mr. Junius,” 46.

⁷⁸Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was John Calvin’s successor as leader of the Genevan Reformation. He was often more dogmatic about Calvin’s theological emphases on predestination and election. Jeffrey Mallinson, *Faith, reason, and revelation in Theodore Beza, 1519-1605*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-20.

principle, were loath to stifle what progress the Elizabethan settlement had accomplished in England by engaging in criticism of the regime.⁷⁹

The signatories to the letter drafted in response to Junius reflected the leadership of the Ancient Church as it stood in 1600. Francis Johnson held the office of Pastor and Henry Ainsworth the office of Teaching Elder. Daniel Studley and Stanhall Mercer each held the office of Elder; Christopher Bowman and George Knifton continued to serve as deacons.⁸⁰ It was this group who coordinated the response to Junius and the earlier submission of the confession to the academic leaders of Europe.

Junius expressed his disappointment that the Separatists had reacted so strongly against the counsel he had given them when he wrote his second epistle. In his mind it was more beneficial for the Separatists to receive his wisdom regarding the extremity of their course rather than his theological musings concerning their doctrinal differences with the Church of England. Junius felt that the Separatists had by-passed proper ecclesiastical channels by dealing with churches and scholars at a distance rather than with those who dwelt in the same region. Interestingly, Junius focused more attention on the disagreements between the Separatists and the local Dutch Reformed Churches rather than their case with England:

The end, which is the clearing of your selves (although I knew nothing of you) you shall sooner attaine in one day by dealing with the church wherein you are, than in a hundred yeare (if you should live so long) by writing to other churches hither and thither. You do not yet perswade me that you have dealt orderly: If we sticke constantly to order and you dislike it, at least bear with vs. For whereas you say that you are euerywhere proclaimed heretikes, & c. I knewe nothing of

⁷⁹Franciscus Junius, *Certayne letters*, “The Answer to Mr. Junius,” 45.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 46.

you, neither should yet have knowne anything if you had held your peace, so strongly are my eares stopped against al rumors.⁸¹

It is difficult to say whether Junius' rebuke for their schismatic tendencies or his utter ignorance of their existence prior to their literary exchange was more hurtful to the collective egos of the Ancient Church leaders. Junius had adopted a view of the Ancient Church that was to become typical. He viewed them as fractious and potentially dangerous for the Reformed tradition because they were unwilling to submit to any sort of proper ecclesiastical channels.⁸² Junius intimated that he himself did not set himself as the judge of anyone and urged the Separatists to be cautious in their judging if they thought themselves worthy of the role.⁸³ He also urged the Ancient Church not to speak ill of Beza, who was also replying to their letter with little direct knowledge of the circumstances that prompted it to be sent. Junius again refused to comment on the specifics of their theology or the confessional statement.⁸⁴

The final letter from the Ancient Church to Junius began with an unusual note of triumph from the Separatists. In their estimation Junius' silence on the specifics of their confessional statement meant that he and his colleagues at Leiden had been unable to find any deviations from proper faith and practice in its pages. They replied:

In that you did nothing in this matter, without the knowledge of your brethren and Colleagues, we therefore give you thanckes: for now you habe had consultation together, yet shew you not any one error in our fayth and cause. Touching that we rested not in your counsel, we had many and waighty reasons so to remove us which we signifyd to you in our former letters, but you habe here in silence passed by them. Untyll you take them away, we think it cannot be (unintelligible)

⁸¹Junius. *Certayne Letters*, "Second Letter," 48.

⁸²Ibid., 48-49.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Junius., 49.

that in this matter we have done anything otherwise then in good manner and order meet and needfull. Publick infamy requireth publick apology.⁸⁵

While the Separatist argument for a victory from silence rested on dubious grounds, they stood firm in their resolve to continue living and worshipping according to their confession despite the misgivings of the scholars they had contacted. Their reluctance to maintain close ties with the Dutch Reformed congregations in the city, a matter that will be discussed in chapter five, and their own internal strife caused observers to believe that their problems with the Church of England reflected more than a specific disagreement with one particular church. Rather, their congregational polity and constant infighting were viewed as symptomatic of a dangerous spiritual anarchy that defied all ecclesiastical accountability and threatened to yield only disorder and further disagreement. Francis and George Johnson did nothing to soften this impression when their simmering disagreements finally erupted openly during the same period in which they were corresponding with Junius.

5. *An Alluring Wife, An Indignant Brother, and A Fashionable Hat*

The corrosive roots of the conflict between Francis and George Johnson, as indicated above, were the result of seeds planted in England. The foremost initial cause of the conflict was George's disapproval of Francis' wife, Thomasine Leigh Boyes Johnson. Thomasine was the widow of Edward Boyes, the Fleet Street haberdasher who had joined the London Separatist congregation as early as 1587.⁸⁶ Boyes was deposed by

⁸⁵Franciscus Junius, *Certain letters*, "Second Reply to Junius," 51.

⁸⁶The name is rendered "Boyce" in the official arrest documents, but is definitely the same person. Champlin Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 19.

the authorities along with Johnson and several other Separatist prisoners in April 1593.⁸⁷

Daniell Bucke indicated in his deposition that Thomasine was present at the meeting in which Francis Johnson was chosen as the pastor of the Ancient Church.⁸⁸ Edward died sometime between April 1593 and the summer of 1594. In August or September of 1594, rumors began to circulate that Francis Johnson, who was imprisoned in the Clink at the time, had presented himself as a potential suitor to Thomasine Leigh Boyes. George Johnson was also imprisoned at the time in the Fleete. Francis wrote to his brother confirming the rumors and requesting that George give his opinion of the match. George's reply was not to his brother's liking. George, and obviously other members of the congregation as well, felt that Mrs. Bouys had grown too accustomed to her station as the wife of a wealthy haberdasher. In particular, George was offended by her ostentatious dress. He did not consider this mode of dress or air of aristocracy appropriate for the wife of a persecuted pastor. George informed his brother in writing that if he pursued his relationship with Mrs. Bouys "many offenses would follow."⁸⁹

Francis responded with a flurry of letters protesting the fitness of Thomasine Boyes to serve as a pastor's wife. It is obvious that his desire had been to gain George's assent, not necessarily to solicit his advice. A series of letters passed between the two brothers, neither of whom was at liberty to leave the confines of his cell. George gradually began to realize that Francis was absolutely determined to marry Mrs. Boyes and dreaded the consequences.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Champlin Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, Vol. 2, 43.

⁸⁸Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, 46.

⁸⁹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

⁹⁰George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

In an attempt to persuade George to reconsider his position, Thomasine visited him in prison a few weeks after his first correspondence with Francis. She would have been well advised to wear sack-cloth and ashes when visiting her future brother-in-law. Any good will that she might have gained by her attempt to discuss George's objections rationally was threatened by George's attention to her dress. George asked that if Thomasine intended to marry his brother that she "would reform herself in her apparel according to his estate and calling."⁹¹ According to George's account, Thomasine agreed to this condition. She later denied that she had ever said these words, prompting George to threaten in his *Discourse* that he could have proved that Thomasine had made the promise if necessary.⁹²

George next received a visit from Francis himself. He had been able to secure mobility about London in the company of a "keeper." Francis had come primarily to inform George that he intended to marry Thomasine and asked again if George had any objections. George informed his brother that all of his objections had been stated in his letters and that Francis appeared to be ignoring his counsel. Having been pressed to state his objections, George reiterated his reasons for opposing the match. At this point, George wrote that Francis had become angry and suggested that he might proceed without George's consent. George responded that he then "would pray God to passe over the offense and to give a blessing if it were his will."⁹³

⁹¹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

Francis and Thomasine were married in secret shortly afterward. The marriage probably took place either during one of her visits to Johnson's cell or at her home during one of his outings. It is more likely the former rather than the latter because of the practical problem of distracting his "keeper" long enough to perform the ceremony, though the "keeper" might be persuaded with the right financial incentive. There also may have been little ceremony associated with the marriage. Johnson equivocally stated his position that he did not view marriage as an "ecclesiastical matter."⁹⁴ Such a view of marriage was common among the Separatists due to their rejection of the sacramental status of marriage in Roman Catholicism. It also presents a problem for historians attempting to trace the marriages of Separatists in London because their marriages were not recorded in the official church registers like those of other citizens.

Having secured her marriage to Francis, Thomasine made a second visit to George, arrayed in grander apparel than in her first visitation. She challenged him to demonstrate to her from scripture that there was inherent wrong in her decision to wear fine clothing. George noted that she appeared much better equipped to debate him:

She againe gave him good words: yet coming afterwards he saw not amendment/ Wherevpon he was now the more earnest with her/ they being now married. But she now changed her answer (taught I fear by her husband) and said that if G. J. could prove them to be unlawful by the word of God: she would leave them/he perceiving this dealing in her/ so to change her former words to dissemble and not keepe promise (like the sonne who said he would go and did not) and was grieved.⁹⁵

George attempted to convince Thomasine that her apparel was indeed a matter of concern, but her discussion of the matter with Francis had fortified her conviction that she was not in the wrong, and she refused to accept his interpretation of the passages he

⁹⁴Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, 56.

⁹⁵George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

presented.⁹⁶ While George was surely right to rebuke Thomasine for lying if she did indeed make the promise and then deny it, it is likely that she made the promise due to her unfamiliarity with the theological contours of the issue at hand and her desire to gain George's blessing. The source of her later resolve was probably Francis. Offended that his brother would dare to dictate his wife's manner of dress and bind her to an oath, Francis sent her back with the exegetical ammunition to counter his brother's view.

Francis had no choice but to send his wife to George because he had again been barred from leaving his cell. The Archbishop of Canterbury became aware that Francis had married while he was sentenced to prison, and he had compounded his sin by doing so outside of the Anglican episcopacy.⁹⁷ The action of the Archbishop brought the marriage to the attention of the public. George took the opportunity afforded by their knowledge to write to members of the Ancient Church urging them to speak with their pastor about his wife's clothing. They refused to do so, some disagreeing with George and others not wanting to presume to instruct their pastor. George mounted a vigorous writing campaign from prison to both Francis and Thomasine. George went so far as to compare Thomasine's apparel with that of the Bishop of London's wife and claim that they were "joined together" in their vanity.⁹⁸

The conflict between George and his sister-in-law was a dangerous one for the Ancient Church not only due to the theological concerns involved, but also the class consciousness it created within the congregation. Though the London Separatists were generally people who engaged in laboring professions, it has been demonstrated in

⁹⁶George Johnson, *Discourse*, 95.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸George Johnson, *A Discourse*, 96.

chapter two of this study that they also enjoyed representation from the merchant class as well. These two groups seemed to coexist in harmony beneath the umbrella of the Ancient Church. George threatened to set them at odds with one another by highlighting their differences. To make this potential problem even worse, Thomasine was not an outsider. She had been a member of the group for some time, and her husband had been a respected leader of the congregation. George risked the possibility of offending all people of her station and social circle that had joined their congregation.

George, undeterred by these concerns, continued to critique both Mrs. Johnson's clothing and her character. He noted in his correspondence with Francis that Edward Boyes had left her 300 pounds at his death and probably had provided her with 200 pounds of "ready" money regularly. Such a sum would have rendered her reasonably affluent in those times, though certainly not wealthy by aristocratic standards. George disdained her clothing not because it was too revealing or because she could not afford it (there is no compelling evidence that she spent beyond her means), but rather because her exotic tastes offended his puritanical sensibilities. He pointed to her four or five gold rings, "codpiece breasts," whalebones in her petticoats which accentuated her curvaceous figure but were "hinderers of conceiving or procreating children," and her "copper-crowned hat with a twined band, as young merchant's wives and damsels use."⁹⁹ George accused Thomasine of "gazing . . . in shop doors," stated that she had "quaffed wine" to such a degree that a "Papist" remarked on the excess, stayed in bed on Sunday until nine o'clock, and was compared to the Bishop of London's wife by some who called her a

⁹⁹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 97. Michael Moody, *A Critical Edition of George Johnson's Discourse of Some Troubles*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Claremont Graduate School, 1979), 347-48.

“bouncing girl.”¹⁰⁰ Thomasine Johnson was in her mid-twenties at the time and probably did bear evidence of her privileged upbringing and recent status as a haberdasher’s wife. She may also have been a little frivolous and immature. Even though these characteristics probably gave some substance to George’s charges, his constant attacks on his sister-in-law’s propriety and purity were brutal and unrelenting. There was some evidence that Thomasine eventually did grow into her role and gain wisdom to match.

Like most of his other accusations, George’s attacks on Mrs. Johnson survived in the memory of the Separatists who colonized Massachusetts. William Bradford felt compelled to render a defense of Mrs. Johnson in one of his Dialogues:

In our time; his wife was a Graue Matron and very modest both in her apparell and all her demenor; Reddy to any Good worke in her place and healpfull to many especially the poor; and an ornament to his calling Shee was a younge widdow when hee Married her and had bin a marchants wife by whom hee had a Good estate and was a Godly woman and because shee wore such apparel as shee had bin formerly vsed; too; which were Neither excessive nor Imodist, for theire Chieffest exceptions were against her wearing of some whalebone in the bodies and sleiues of her Gowne Corked shooes and other such like thinges as the Citizens of her Ranke then vsed to were; and although for offence sake shee and hee were willing to Reforme the ffashions of them soe farr as might be without the spoyling of theire Garments yett it would not Content them, except they Came full vp to theire sise such as the strictness or Ridgedness (as now the tearme Goes of some in those times as wee Can by experience and of owne knowledge shew in other Instances we shall for breiuitie sake only shew one . . .¹⁰¹

Bradford placed the whole debate in context by relating the story of one member of their congregation who was often noted for his great piety and suffering under persecution.

This venerable saint was accosted by a Separatist woman who accused him of impiety in regard to the manner of his dress. In Bradford’s view, the woman was being overly harsh and irresponsible in her judgment to accuse such a revered spiritual leader of ungodliness

¹⁰⁰Moody, *Critical Edition*, 349.

¹⁰¹Bradford, *Dialogue*, 135.

simply because his taste in manner of dress differed from her own in the slightest degree. Bradford sagely made the point that proper dress, like so many other aspects of Christian faith and practice, is a matter of perspective and exegetical preference. George was correct in his concern that his sister-in-law needed to conduct herself in a manner consistent with her husband's ministry. William Bradford's testimony to the virtue of her later conduct militates against the idea that she had a character wholly unfit to be a pastor's wife, even allowing for the definite fact that she had time to grow into her role as pastor's wife by 1608. Considering that William Bradford was an infinitely more dispassionate witness than George Johnson and that George had several other axes to grind with his brother, the objective reader has to accept George's characterization of Thomasine with a critical eye.¹⁰² Neither George or Thomasine, or Francis for that matter, emerged from the controversy without spot or blemish. They illustrated the humanity and fallibility of people with even the loftiest of spiritual ideals. Before the controversy reached its explosive conclusion, all three of them would take actions to protect their self-interest that were ethically questionable and always couched in the theological justification of protecting the church. Before the controversy reached its crisis in Amsterdam, Thomasine was forced to undergo examinations that would be humiliating for any woman of any age in which her apparel was displayed before the church so that the congregation could judge its appropriateness. Before relating the details of those events and their consequences, it is important at this juncture to finally

¹⁰²Michael Moody attempted to rehabilitate George's reputation in his critical edition of *A Discourse*. While George does deserve kinder treatment than he has received in the past, his obsession with his sister-in-law's dress and Studley's relationship to his brother appeared to stem from more than just religious fervor. George, though genuinely devout, often also appears jealous and may have had a bit of his brother's autocratic streak without the power to realize his ambitions. Michael Moody, *A Critical Edition of George Johnson's Discourse of Some Troubles*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Claremont Graduate School, 1979

and fully identify the problems that existed between George and another Francis Johnson intimate, Daniel Studley.

7. *Daniel Studley: Scandalous Elder*

The regard Francis Johnson directed toward Daniel Studley has been noted previously in this study. Whether this regard was born of deep affection or the pragmatic usefulness of Daniel Studley is difficult to determine. Francis Johnson was always a man who guarded his private thoughts in his writings and seemed little disposed to literary displays of emotion. He wrote at great length and passionately in defense of his theological views but never wrote a surviving line describing his feelings toward his intimates. The fact that he completely refused to reply in writing to George's *Discourse* at its publication probably reflected at least partially his aversion to sharing his deepest feelings publicly. Based on the interaction between the two men and the evidence one can glean from various comments of Johnson, it is likely that they shared a deep affection and friendship that was encouraged and reinforced by their shared purpose, but which eventually transcended purely pragmatic concerns. The greatest evidence that their relationship was not based on purely pragmatic considerations was the very non-pragmatic decision of the puritanical Johnson to defend his Elder and friend against an accusation that was certainly true and potentially damaging to the Ancient Church.¹⁰³ Ultimately Johnson's rigid stance on church discipline was tested and found to be inconsistent when he refused to deal with Studley under conditions that would have caused the excommunication of any other member of the congregation. While there was ample reason for George to oppose Studley based on the merits of the case itself, there

¹⁰³Francis Johnson, *An Inquire*, 44.

was likely at least a hint of jealousy that his brother had forged a bond with Studley as friend and adviser that George felt should properly be his own.

What were Daniel Studley's offenses? George Johnson, Thomas White, and Christopher Lawne were only too happy to list them in their treatises. George's treatise appeared in 1603 and Thomas White's in 1606. Christopher Lawne, who had been a member of the Ancient Church, published a treatise in 1612 entitled *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists*. Lawne provided the most comprehensive summary of Studley's various alleged infractions:

Certain Articles against Dan. Studley, given to Mr. Iohnson in their publike Congregation before their Elders, to desire his deposition from his office of being an Elder.

First, for his filthiness vsed towards his wiues daughter, with that most vngodly allegation of Scripture for the defence thereof. This particular is of old knowne vnto their Eldership, and modestie forbids vs to set downe the manner of it, it is so impudent.

Secondly, for writing a most vngodly letter, containing in it many vile and vngodly speeches, not meet to proceed out of any Christian's mouth, much lesse to be written by an Elder of the Church of Christ, in as much as writing is more aduised & deliberate than speech: also, this letter being so long, that it is supposed that it cost him more than a moneths worke to copie and recopie the same, being about 300 lines close ruled; some of this letter being in most abominable veses.

Thirdly, for teaching many wicked and vngodly songs and rimes unto children when he kept schoole, instead of catechising them, and learning them to know God, hee taught them vaine, idle, and wicked songs.

Fourthly, for disclosing the counsaile of the Eldership to Marie May in some particulars, as wee can plainly proue in due time and place. This was a principall alleged to depose M. de Cluse.

Fifthly, for his many lasciuious attempts to a young maid now of late, with his beastly behauior to entice her to satisfy his owne lust, vnmeet to be named. . .

Sixth, there were brought sixteene articles against him, to proue the tenor and course of his life to be partiall; whereof two were proued and acknowledged by him, and the residue of sixteene were also confessed in generall.

Seuenthy also, at the same time it was proued, that he took part with Iudith Holder in knowne euill.

Eightly, for counsailing Marie May to lye with her husband before they were married.¹⁰⁴

Though Christopher Lawne was listed as the principle author, the title page listed three other men who had left the Ancient Church and were attempting to reveal the alleged hypocrisy of its leaders to the public.¹⁰⁵ The accounts of Studley's incestuous relationship with his wife's daughter and fornication with other women were personal affronts that were shocking in their own right. The addition of charges that he had loosely observed his responsibilities to the children and actually counseled a woman to have intercourse with her fiancée before marriage indicated that his sins were not only a detriment to his personal witness, but also beginning to influence his duties as Elder. The addition of allusions to a letter in which Studley expressed himself with profanity and indecency presented the total picture of a man who surely did not have the discipline or self-control to serve as an Elder, much less the integrity of character to claim the respect of his congregation. Adding to the family scandals of Studley, George Johnson revealed that he not only had inappropriate sexual relations with his wife's daughter but also beat her mother.¹⁰⁶ Studley's lascivious conduct was the cause of scandal when he was supposedly discovered in bed with Judith Holder, a married woman.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists With the impietie, dissensions, levvd, and abhominable vices of that impure sect. Discouered by Christopher Lavvne, Iohn Fovvler, Clement Sanders, Robert Bulvvard. Lately returned from the companie of M. Iohnson, that wicked brother, into the bosome of the Church of England, their true mother*, (London : Printed by William Stansby, 1612), 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ The others were John Fowler, Clement Sanders, and Robert Brevard. Lawne, Title page.

¹⁰⁶George Johnson, *Discourse*, 59.

¹⁰⁷Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography, or, A discription of the hereticks and sectaries of these latter times*, (1645).

Christopher Lawne and his coauthors intimated that the Elders of the Ancient Church had “of old knowne” that Studley had an improper relationship with his stepdaughter.¹⁰⁸ George Johnson confirmed their suspicion in his own criticism of Studley. Studley had attempted to persuade George to endorse the union of Francis and Thomasine Johnson, an endorsement that George saw as nothing less than betrayal of truth and the gospel. He noted that Studley would have him compromise in imitation of Studley’s own compromise. George observed:

And here I desire that part of M. Stud., manner of dealing may be obsurued, who having himselfe failed and flinched, would have other do the like, and when he could not prevaile, then to abuse the censure to bring his enterprise to passé and surely since those daies he hath much abused the holy censures in his owne, his wives, and her daughter’s case against M. Ony and B. W. and likewise in his Brother Martin’s case against Mrs. Gr which the Lord in parte judged, and required at his hands and wil further require if he repent not.¹⁰⁹

George at least had his suspicions that things were not as they should be in Studley’s household and was convinced that Studley did not have the best interest of the church at heart before they departed from London. According to George, the Johnson brothers had reached a truce in their conflict concerning the marriage about a year after it took place. Studley was angered by the possibility that George would be allowed to make such pointed criticisms of Mrs. Johnson without serious consequences. As George noted, Studley later was able to use the tool of censure to attack George, but for the time being he was restricted to writing to Francis in order to “stir him in this matter.”¹¹⁰ George noted that Francis refused to be stirred, though that would not be the case forever.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Lawne, 15.

¹⁰⁹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 101.

¹¹⁰George Johnson, *Discourse*, 101.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

Two more unsavory aspects of Studley's character emerge from these comments. First, he was more than willing to use the disciplinary machinery of the Ancient Church to defend his position. The fact that Studley was willing and able to abuse the disciplinary procedures of the church in this way compounded the inconsistency of that system as revealed in the treatment of Studley by Johnson. Secondly, George's distrust of Studley was probably based on more than paranoia. Studley viewed George as more than a threat to the unity of the church. George's independent personality and willingness to be frank with his brother were the greatest challenges to Studley's personal influence with Francis. Studley would need to circumvent George's relationship with Francis to insure that he maintained his position in the Ancient Church. It is apparent that he was quite successful before the four companions began their journey to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.¹¹²

What of the truth of these accusations? It seems inconceivable that Francis Johnson would tolerate such a blatant contradiction of the principles he expounded daily to his congregation. Those principles had caused his congregation to abandon their homeland and their comforts to begin anew in a strange land. Yet he apparently tolerated them and even defended Studley. Johnson's answer to the entire corpus of critics that confronted him in his early years at Amsterdam was addressed to Thomas White. His *An inquirie and ansvver of Thomas VWhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme* (1606) was intended to silence finally various critics who had used the controversy with George and various smaller controversies that followed it to criticize the church and Johnson personally.¹¹³ Johnson answered many of their critiques of the Ancient Church with ease and

¹¹²George Johnson, *Discourse*, 102-112.

¹¹³Francis Johnson, *An inquirie and ansvver of Thomas VWhite his discoverie of Brovvnisme*, (Amsterdam, 1606).

demonstrated that they were based on falsified or exaggerated accounts. One example was the case of the charitable contributions from the Naarden city fathers cited above.

There were other areas that Johnson did not answer satisfactorily.

One of the primary problems that Francis Johnson addressed inadequately was the accusations against Studley. Lawne wrote that Johnson's first response to the accusations of George and others within the church was to claim that Studley's personal conduct was not an issue to be debated among the congregation because it pertained to his personal life rather than his congregational service:

A consideration of the common defenses and excuses made for the retaining of Dan. Studley in his office.

First, it is pleaded often by M. Iohnson, That the offences committed by Dan. Studley are his personal sinnes, and not the sinnes of his administration.¹¹⁴

It is difficult to accept the reality of this assertion given Francis Johnson's dogged argument for congregational purity in all of his writings. The separation between personal conduct and congregational service would not seem to fit with Johnson's approach to other problems. In another striking statement, Lawne asserted that Johnson not only accused his adversaries of unfairly delving into the personal life of his associate, but also disrespectfully uncovering the sins of a father in the faith in imitation of Ham when he uncovered the nakedness of Noah.

Further, it is obiected vnto vs by maister Iohnson, That by our dealing against *Dan. Studley We do (with Cham) uncouer the nakednesse of our Father, and therefore are in danger of the Curse* that was laid vpon him by Noah.¹¹⁵

Johnson's suggestion that Studley's accusers should mind their own business and respect their spiritual father is a bizarre reversal of his scathing critique of impurity within the

¹¹⁴Lawne, 16.

¹¹⁵Lawne, 17.

Church of England. His belief that a high premium should be placed on the purity of the church's ministry wavered when faced with the personal application of his views.

While Johnson's defense of Studley quoted by Lawne is subject to doubt based on its second-hand nature, the defense that flowed from his own pen was hardly an adequate answer to charges of the magnitude of those leveled against Studley. Johnson's defense of Studley sounded almost maudlin in his attempt to invoke a reverent picture of Studley as a faithful martyr for the cause of the gospel. Johnson first attacked Thomas White in his defense of Studley, claiming that White's primary prejudice against Studley resulted from the hard treatment Studley was forced to mete out against White and his wife, Rose.¹¹⁶ White was a former Church of England clergyman who had left his post and converted to Separatist principles. He joined a Church in Western England and later emigrated to Amsterdam to join Johnson's congregation. Rose was already a member of the congregation and married White after his arrival at Amsterdam.¹¹⁷ The couple apparently caused no end of problems for Johnson and his leaders. Johnson cited one case in particular to illustrate the fractious nature of the couple:

After this dealing with sundry of our officers (the allegations against Bowman and Knifton) in particular, the adversarie commeth to speake of the Elders jointly. Against whom he objecteth, *that we called R. W.* (that is Rose White, his wife) *before us in the first place for a private thing.* But it was for that her child was kept vnbaptized, and for that we had heard that she had entertained Mr. Sl. at her table, who is a man excommunicated by our church, whereof she was then a member. For these things onely was she called before the Elders: and for the first together with her apostasie from the truth: which before tyme she professed with vs, she was a while after excommunicated by the whole church.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 43.

¹¹⁷White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 106-107.

¹¹⁸Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 46.

Johnson succeeded in demonstrating that Thomas and Rose White were prejudiced witnesses to say the least. He indicated that Christopher Bowman and other members of the congregation slandered by the couple had filed suit with the city magistrates of Amsterdam against the Whites. The suit was won largely on the refutation of White's contention that the church supported divorce and such exaggerated stories as the one leveled against Lawne and Knifton that could easily be proved untrue.¹¹⁹ The civil charge was slander, and the proof in defense of the Ancient Church was obviously compelling enough to silence the couple's public accusations.

White's accusations also included the uneven disciplinary practices of the church. He highlighted tales of adultery and sexual promiscuity that were shocking for a congregation that embraced the standards set forth in the 1596 confession. In one instance, White contended that a certain "R. B." was accused of sneaking through the window of a married man's house to have sexual intercourse with him. She was eventually excommunicated by the eldership and the congregation for her scandalous conduct. According to White, the man was never dealt with and continued to participate in the life of the congregation.¹²⁰

The accusation of uneven discipline applied directly to the Studley case. For each of his associates that were accused of various imperfections by White, Johnson gave a list of reasons to support their claims to innocence. His defense of Studley again raised the question of the distinction between the public and private sins of his membership:

¹¹⁹Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 46.

¹²⁰Thomas White, *A discoverie of Brownisme: or, a brief declaration of some of the errors and abominations daily practiced and increased among the English company of the seperation remayning for the present at Amsterdam in Holland*. (Amsterdam: 1605), 10.

The third thing is, *about the governing of his house*: for which he referreth to that he hath *elsewhere cited*, and so do I to that which is there said. Yet let himself take this withal that if the things are true which be reported and observed concerning his won family, he might have found work ynough at home and cause ynough to cast a beame out of his own eye. But I will not follow his course in this manner (however it be iust) to deal with him as he deals with others.¹²¹

The focus in this passage is on Thomas White and the inconsistencies of his family, and not Daniel Studley and the serious accusations against him. Francis Johnson's refusal to deny Studley's infidelity spoke volumes. His comparison of White and Studley's situations by allusion to Christ's admonition to remove first one's own beam before doing the same to one's brother could hardly be construed as a denial. The maudlin part of Johnson's defense occurred at the beginning of his list in support of Studley. It appeared in the context of his defense of Studley against White's assertion that Studley was not imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit. White insisted:

The first is, *of being indued with the Spirit of God*: Of which we haue seen many and great testimonies in Mr. St. from tyme to tyme. He hath bene an auceint disciple in the faith of the Gospell this many yeares. He hath given vp his life for the name of the Lord: being adjudged to death, & to remaining many yeares vnder the sentence and daily expectation thereof, till he was banished. He now liveth still an exile for the same truth of Christ; And in the government of the Church hath had to deale with so many causes, persons, and dispositions (yea oppositions also of sundry people) as if he had not bene indued with the Spirit of God, & that in great measure, he had never bene able so to have endured, & wandered through them all as he hath done.¹²²

In his most public comment on the accusations concerning Daniel Studley and the compromise of his Eldership, Francis Johnson's polemical tactic was to defame the accusers, argue that there was a distinct difference between dealing with public and private sins, and assert that there was no basis to question Daniel Studley's godliness on

¹²¹Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 44-45.

¹²²Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 44.

the strength of his suffering and exile for the Separatist cause. Francis conveniently ignored the fact that his brother George also suffered the same deprivations that Studley shared, yet he was excommunicated. George's claim that the greatest offense of a member of the Ancient Church was to question the authority of its leader carried considerable weight when one assesses Francis Johnson's handling of the Studley case.¹²³ Studley eventually did deny the charges, though his denials revealed a problem with carnal desires if not carnal actions. His denials and their implications for the Ancient Church will be addressed in chapter six of this research project.

8. *Brother Against Brother*

Having discussed the major protagonists that prompted George Johnson to rebel against his brother's authority, it is now time to return to his situation and its sad conclusion. After the uneasy passage with his brother that was noted at the beginning of this chapter, George continued to feel slighted as they set up house at Amsterdam:

Being come to Amsterdam, the Pastor and especially M. Stud. could not so carry Themselves (how cunning as they were) but their countenance was discerned by some brethren to be against G. J. and within 14 daies of their coming (by want of showing brotherly love/ wherein they might wel have done it) they gave occasion to the brethren to iudge that there was a privy grudge in them towards G. J. because they huring a great house/ and having sundry rooms to spare/ suffered G. J. in necessity to go up an down seeking a place/ and not once offered one corner of their superfluity. Wherevpon some brethren took occasion to speake with G. J.¹²⁴

¹²³George Johnson, *Discourse*, 111-118.

¹²⁴George Johnson, *Discourse*, 113-114.

George related his concerns about Thomasine to the “brethren,” but supposedly encouraged them to continue striving for peace. They in turn found a place for him to live with which he was “quite satisfied.”¹²⁵

The truce did not last long. Several issues aggravated the concerns already existing between the brothers. The primary issue was that of apostasy and the converse problem of people serving as officers who had committed apostasy. An apostate, in George’s estimation, was anyone who had returned to visit an established church after they had declared sympathy with the Separatist cause.¹²⁶ The problem with this definition was two-fold. First, there were many preachers in Anglican pulpits who were Puritan and endorsed the same basic theological propositions that characterized separatism. Was it just as wrong to visit their churches as it was to visit the church of a minister who fully supported the latitudinarian Elizabethan settlement? Most of the people George accused of this infraction had committed their apostasy at a church led by a Puritan minister. Secondly, most of these people had only committed the offense once and had not ever stated in any way their intention to return to the Church of England. Was it fair to punish them for simply returning to visit family and friends? Did such a visit forever ban them from Christian service?

It has already been noted that Henry Ainsworth was among those members that George identified as apostates. The issue came to a head with the election of two deacons on January 29, 1598. Stanshal Mercer and Jacob Johnson (not be confused with Francis and George’s father) were the favorite candidates of Johnson and Studley. George opposed them on the basis of their alleged apostasy. He drew up a document

¹²⁵George Johnson, *Discourse*, 113-114.

¹²⁶George Johnson, *Discourse*, 151-159.

opposing their election. When Studley and Francis Johnson proposed to elect Jacob Johnson over his objections in June 1598, a member of the congregation named William Asplin, journeyed to England to ascertain the truth of the charges leveled against Johnson. His report revealed that reliable witnesses in England affirmed that he had indeed committed apostasy. The judgment of the congregation was accepted that Johnson was not fit to continue in service due to his apostasy.¹²⁷

Having caused Francis and Studley's defeat on this issue, George now proceeded to continue his criticism of Thomasine. Francis Johnson and Daniel Studley seized this occasion to deal with George firmly and finally. George had earlier referred to Thomasine as a contemporary example of the prophet Jeremiah's contention in Jeremiah 3:3 that Israel had "a whore's forehead." This remark could not have been taken well by either husband or wife. In an attempt to bring their conflict with George to a climax, Francis and Studley proposed to present George as a candidate for Elder if he would publicly apologize for this affront to Thomasine. George refused.¹²⁸

Their relationship further soured in 1599 as George continued to mount his campaign to invalidate his brother's leadership and his sister's-in-law piety. Shadows of Franciscus Junius' pessimistic outlook on the possibility of ecclesiastical transformation hovered beneath the surface of George's contention that Francis had abandoned the brethren in England, even going so far as to encourage people to leave England to strengthen the Ancient Church in Amsterdam.¹²⁹

¹²⁷George Johnson, *Discourse*, 151-160.

¹²⁸George Johnson, *Discourse*, 110-115, 15-37.

¹²⁹George Johnson, *Discourse*, 205.

The denouement of George's battle with Thomasine was destructive for the congregation and humiliating for her. There had already been one such conversion in London before the Separatist's left for Amsterdam. George claimed that Thomasine had pledged to reform in London, though Johnson and Studley never related that fact to the Church in Amsterdam. In order to test the propriety of her dress and conduct in that London meeting, her garments were passed around the room as the congregation judged whether they were appropriate for their pastor's wife. These garments included dresses and the fashionable hat that George had criticized.¹³⁰ Only a woman could imagine the feelings of shame and embarrassment such a display must have caused for Mrs. Johnson. The affair had become ugly, and Francis had tolerated as much of his brother's opposition as he would bear. He bluntly refused to allow the congregation to examine Thomasine's clothing further in Amsterdam and preached the next Sunday from Psalms 52, comparing George to the enemies who opposed David.¹³¹ George wrote that Francis had called him "childish/crackbrained/ weak/ and a babbling fellow."¹³² Francis had finally decided that George would have to go. George appeared to indicate in his *Discourse* that Francis eventually turned the tide against him by intimating to the congregation that they must either choose him or George.¹³³ The congregation was loath to loose their pastor, giving Francis the opening to pursue his final official action against George.

¹³⁰J. Dee Hoop Scheffer, 68.

¹³¹Ibid., 69.

¹³²Ibid., 56.

¹³³George Johnson, *Discourse*, 29, 37, 74.

With the support of the Eldership, Francis Johnson moved to excommunicate his brother. The battle between the two brothers raged for a year and consumed much of the congregation's energy. The basic details of the case involved wrangling over the issues already stated in this chapter with neither side gaining ground. In the final analysis, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. The power differential was weighted in favor of Francis and Daniel Studley. They finally secured George's expulsion from the Ancient Church in late 1598 or early in 1599. The entire congregation sat in silence for an hour during the meeting convened to decide George's fate until Francis finally stood in rage and declared that he would motion for the excommunication if no one else would do it.¹³⁴

Hearing of his sons' conflict, John Johnson journeyed to Amsterdam in an attempt to mediate. The venerable mayor of Richmond was now in his seventies and hardly fit to make such a difficult journey. For love of his sons, he braved the dangers of the journey and arrived in Amsterdam sometime in 1599 or 1600. The most grievous part of the entire episode occurred in 1602, when Francis, tired of his father's attempts at mediation, allowed the same sentence of excommunication to be passed against his father that he had leveled against his brother. This measure was taken because the confession of the custom of the Ancient Church dictated excommunication for all who refused to disavow fellowship with an excommunicate.¹³⁵

Johnson's enemies rejoiced at this decisive proof that Johnson was indeed a man of contention. The image projected through this conflict was that of an uncaring brother and an ungrateful son. His image was not improved by the fate of George. Despite all of

¹³⁴Hoop Scheffer, 70-71

¹³⁵Hoop Scheffer, 70-71

his unsavory characteristics and critical demeanor, George was the one who eventually sealed his witness with blood. Following his own advice to Francis, George returned to England to facilitate the repudiation of the Church of England and the revival of his nation in 1603. It was from England that he probably published his *Discourse*, though it was surely circulated in Amsterdam for the benefit of his brother and former congregation. George was arrested and confined in the Gaol at Durham, where he died in 1604.¹³⁶

George's martyr's death made him glorious fodder for the attacks on Francis by Thomas White and Christopher Lawne. His pathetic circumstances prior to that death only served to increase his usefulness as an example of Francis Johnson's contentious nature:

We read that his brother George being in extreame want, liuing vpon bread and water onely, Master Iohnson did then hide his face from his poore brother, and shut vp the bowels of compassion against him, whilest others insulted against the afflicted, and bad him sell his Bookes, his Couerlet, and his Cloke also, as others witnesse. Doth excommunication brake the bonds of nature, and dissolve the duties of kindred and brotherhood?¹³⁷

Lawne had read this fact from George's own account of his troubles. The pathetic death of Francis Johnson's brother only served to compound his guilt.

9. Summary

The early years of the Ancient Church in Amsterdam were filled with strife and internecine conflict. The conflict the church experienced only served to reinforce the opinion of observers like Junius that the Ancient Church was an unstable element.

¹³⁶Francis Johnson, *An Inquiry*, 61.

¹³⁷Lawne, 22.

Francis Johnson was faced with the need to demonstrate to people both within and without his congregation that he could build a healthy church on the basis of Separatists' principles. Ironically, the final conflict with George and the exodus of many of his detractors left Johnson in a position to do just that. With his congregation relatively united, his critics largely outside the church, and a new king on the throne of England, Francis Johnson had reason to anticipate the future with hope in 1604.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Spirit of Geneva and the Purity of the Church: Francis Johnson and the Reformed Tradition

1. Introduction

If the Spirit of God account them to be departers from the faith and (consequentlie no true Christians) who though they hold other truthes of the Gospel, yet forbid to marry, and comaund to absteine from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving: Then such account must needs be made of the Estate of the Church of England, which not onlie these things, but withall forbidith the true Ministerie and worship of God, and commandeth a false: Whose Ministers and people also do all of them partake therein. (For proof Whereof, besides their practice of these, and persecution of the truth, see their own Canons, Articles, Statutes, Injunctions, & c.)¹

Francis Johnson faced the task of establishing and fostering healing in his congregation after the conflicts that raged during their early years at Amsterdam. George's exit and the decision of other dissidents such as the Whites to leave provided a temporary end to the internal struggles of the congregation. The Ancient Church continued to face critiques from without, and Johnson would sporadically be forced to contend with them. Johnson's primary preoccupation during the years from 1603-1608 was the building of the Ancient Church. That task involved a continuing dialogue with churches of other Reformed traditions in an attempt to persuade them that the English Separatist stance was the most logical for them to take.

Francis Johnson interacted with several other Reformed leaders and theologians through his writings and personal disputations. Through an examination of his polemical discourses on ecclesiology and looking at the practices of the Ancient Church, a better

¹Francis Johnson, *An Answer to Maister H. Iacob His Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England*, (Amsterdam, 1600).

understanding of Francis Johnson's theological conception of the Reformed tradition and his place in it will be gained. There is no doubt that Johnson and his congregation were thoroughly Reformed in their basic doctrinal orientation. The first twenty articles of their *True Confession* clearly indicated a Reformed understanding of original sin, atonement, election, and God's divine decrees.² They also agreed to some extent with the order and church structure advocated by the Puritans.³ The agreement between Puritans and Separatists was less pronounced during the Ancient Church's congregational stage, but increased as Johnson advocated a stronger eldership in 1609/10.⁴ In the significant matters of salvation and the sovereignty of God, Francis Johnson and the Ancient Church agreed with the Reformed tradition.

Since the Ancient Church agreed with other Reformed churches on most doctrinal issues, the focus will be on the emphases within the Separatist tradition as defined by Francis Johnson that set them apart from other Reformed churches. These differences necessitated exchanges between Johnson and other Reformed leaders that provided a context for sharpening his own understanding and weighing his ideas in the arena of debate. The Separatists most often emphasized their differences with the Reformed non-separating Puritan tradition in England. Johnson's disagreements with the Puritan expression of the Reformed tradition were two-fold. He was unwavering in his insistence that one must separate from impure churches. Johnson would define an impure church as

²Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 59-65.

³Stephen Brachlow has provided a strong argument in favor of this statement. Brachlow indicated that the differences between the Puritans and English Separatists were matters of timing and degree rather than substance. Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Separatist and Puritan Ecclesiology, 1570-1625*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11. See also William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1938), 180-81.

⁴Francis Johnson, *A short treatise concerning the exposition of those words of Christ, Tell the Church, &c. Mat. 18. 17*, (Amsterdam, 1611).

any congregation not properly constituted according to scripture, meaning his interpretation of scripture. That definition included the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church as well as any Protestant tradition that neglected the appointment of elders and representation for the people in decision making. Secondly, Francis Johnson was an opponent of ecclesiastical controls beyond the local congregation. His wariness toward the other Reformed and Separatist churches in Amsterdam was indicative of his inclination to guard the autonomy of his own congregation. Even the congregation of John Robinson, which agreed with him on the matter of John Smyth's defection in 1608/09, was not allowed to arbitrate the dispute that arose between Johnson and Henry Ainsworth because of Johnson's distrust of ecclesiastical hierarchy and the taint of those who continued to recognize aberrant religious traditions.⁵

In this chapter, Francis Johnson's polemical exchanges with Henry Jacob regarding the justification of separation, the Ancient Church's petition to King James I at the Hampton Court Conference, and the rather acrimonious relationship between the Ancient Church and the English Reformed Church that was established at Amsterdam in 1607 will be examined. These conflicts provide windows permitting an analysis of Francis Johnson's view of the Reformed tradition and the church prior to the seismic changes, based on their consequences rather than their novelty, which took place in his thought beginning in 1609/10. During these crucial exchanges, Johnson defended the reasonableness of Separation with some success. The categories of religious belief among the Separatists and Puritans became much more complex as the Hampton Court Conference and the ecclesiastical measures levied by King James I in its aftermath forced

⁵B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrims Fathers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 149.

formerly moderate Puritan ministers to embrace conformity or separation. This dilemma laid the foundation for a rising Independent movement led by men like Henry Jacob who realized the necessity of Separation, but had not completely given up on the reform of the Established Church. Also during this period, the Ancient Church experienced a period of growth and vitality. However, the very debates that Johnson seemed to carry so successfully raised an ambiguity in his theology that would soon become an unavoidable issue. If the Church of England were not a valid church, why had the Separatists not been baptized again? To set the context for their interaction, it is necessary to return to the period from 1593-1597 when Johnson was in prison to understand his debate with “Maister H. Iacob.”

2. *Maister Francis Iohnson and Maister Henry Iacob: To Separate or Not to Separate*

One of the problematic and interesting omissions in the corpus of surviving literature produced by the Ancient Church was the omission of any sort of catechetical tools or teaching texts addressed to the congregation itself. The closest thing to such a document that survived was the *Trve Confession* of 1596, and it was really intended for external consumption as well. It is evident that the concept was not foreign to Separatists because John Robinson produced them for his congregation at Leiden.⁶ Henry Ainsworth’s *The Communion of Saints*, which had its polemical passages as well as its instructional ones, possibly was composed as an instructional treatise on the nature of the

⁶John Robinson, *An appendix to Mr. Perkins his six principles of Christian religion. Touching the more solemn fellowship of Christians, (the church of God) as being a divine institution. Very fit and necessary to be learned by all sorts of people, in these perilous times*, (Printed by J.L. for N. Bourn, and are to be sold at his shop, at the south entrance of the Royal Exchange in Cornhill., 1656); John Robinson, *A briefe catechisme concerning church-governemnt. By that Reverend Divine Mr. Iohn Robinson, and may fitly be adjoynded to Mr. Perkins six Principles as an appendix thereto*, (London, 1642).

church.⁷ The writings of Francis Johnson and other leaders of the Ancient Church tended to address polemical concerns and external opponents rather than the congregation themselves. The Ancient Church exemplified the truth of Columbia University professor William Haller's statement concerning Robert Browne in his *Rise of Puritanism*. Haller wrote, "Browne's writings betray the weakness that was for a long time to beset the outpouring of the sectaries. They are directed against the author's enemies; they are not directed to the reader for the inspiration and edification of the weak and as yet unawakened."⁸ All of Francis Johnson's writings generally fall into this category.

The first of these writings was a treatise entitled *A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England Wherein is handled this question, whether it be to be separated From, or Ioynd Vnto*.⁹ Responding to the arguments of one "Mr. H." in defense of the Church of England, Johnson delivered his own view of the nature of the Church of England and the case for separation from its ministry. "Mr. H" was Arthur Hildersham, then Vicar of St. Helen's at Ashby. Hildersham had been influenced by some of the same Puritan leaders, especially Laurence Chaderton, who had influenced Johnson. Hildersham came from a Roman Catholic family who were constantly attempting to persuade him to return to Roman Catholicism. He was also later one of the leading Puritans who presented the

⁷Henry Ainsworth, *The communion of saints. A treatise of the fellowship, that the faithfull haue with God, and his angels, and one with an other; in this present life*, (Amsterdam: R. Plater, 1607, reprinted in 1618).

⁸Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 182.

⁹Francis Johnson, *A treatise of the ministry of the Church of England Wherein is handled this question, whether it be to be separated from, or joynd vnto. Which is discussed in two letters, the one written for it, the other against it. Wherevnto is annexed, after the preface, A brief declaration of the ordinary officers of the Church of Christ. And, a few positions. Also in the end of the treatise, some notes touching the Lordes prayer*, (Place of publication unknown, 1595).

Millenary Petition to James I.¹⁰ Hildersham will appear in chapter five in conversation with John Smyth.

The method of discourse Johnson adopted was to publish Hildersham's letter against separation and his own in response. In the context of this debate, Johnson also revealed his belief in the continuity of the English Separatist tradition represented by the Ancient Church and the earlier separatistic congregations of the Marian period. Johnson countered:

1 And first where he sayth *he is perswaded the Lord had a true Church in this Realme at the beginning of her Majestyes raigne &c.* it would be knowen whether he speak of invisible or of a visible Church of God. If he speak of invisible, he speaketh not to the poynt in question: besides that they could not be counted an invisible Church, and yet be knowen to be assembled together in Parliament. If he speak of a visible Church (as he must if he will speak to the purpose, and as it seemeth he meaneth because he sayth they were then assembled together) then how doth he prove this to be so? In deed we deny not but God had his flock and Church even a true visible Church in this Land at the beginning of her Majestyes raigne: For we have heard and read that in Queen Maryes dayes there was here a Congregation of faythfull people separated from the rest of the Land and gathered into fellowship together to serve the LORD according to his word, and to keep themselves pure from the abominations of Antichrist: That this Congregation also chuse them Ministers, Elders, and Deacons, to instruct guyde and serve them in the Lord: and that they had theyr holy meetings, and showed notable testimonies of their faith and love. So long then as they kept communion in this way, we deny not but they were a true visible Church: though (it may be) in some defects through want of further light and instruction. The like we think also of our countrey men that were then at Frankford, Geneva, and other where beyond seas. But when Queen Mary dyed, and Queen Elizabeth (whom God long preserve) came to the Crown, then the Masse and some other superstitions of popery being abolished, agaynst which these Congregations had witnessed the truth in much affliction, they herevpon dissolved, and the severall members scattered themselves to theyr parishes here and there throughout the Land: commingling themselves in confusion with the rest of the land that were Idolaters and repented not: and submitting theyr soules to the Prelates and to the Ministry receyved from and executed vnder them: as also to theyr courts, canons, excommunications, and other Antichristian jurisdiction retayned in the Land: And so have continued in apostasy from the way of Christ vnto this day. Now these Congregations being thus dissolved, and the

¹⁰Bryan D. Spinks, "Hildersham, Arthur (1563–1632)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13256> (accessed June 1, 2006).

members there of thus standing: they were not now any longer true visible Churches in the order of Christ, but fallen into confusion with the world and into spirituall bondage to the Prelates and other Clergy the limmes of Antichrist. So as from hence for the poynt in hand M^r H. can derive no help for himself.¹¹

With this rather lengthy response, Johnson summarized the central differences between the separated churches and the Church of England that he had discussed in the treatise.

Johnson also provided a three page discourse on the topic of the Lord's Prayer as a tool for worship entitled "Some notes towching that formé of prayer commonly called the Lords prayer".¹² He argued that the model prayer of Jesus was intended as a "most perfit forme and rule of" proper prayer.¹³ By imparting that perfect form of prayer, Jesus enumerated to whom one should pray, with what affection one should pray, for what things one should pray, what difference should be made of the things for which one prays, and the end of all things for God's glorification.¹⁴ Johnson made the seemingly obvious but still clever observation that the Lord's Prayer was recorded in two different versions, one in Mathew 6: 9-13 and the other in Luke 11:1-4. If the efficacy of prayer was in repeating the exact words of the Lord's Prayer, which version should be chosen for worship? Johnson wrote, "I aunswer first that the Scripture showeth his (Jesus) meaning was not at all to bynd vs to the vse of these syllables, but that in prayer and thanks giving we should follow this direction and patterne which he gave."¹⁵

¹¹Francis Johnson, *A treatise of the ministry of the Church of England*, 124-25.

¹²Francis Johnson, *A treatise of the ministry of the Church of England*, 138-40.

¹³Francis Johnson, *Church of England*, 138.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

Johnson's use of the word "patterne" was interesting because John Smyth published a treatise entitled *A Paterne of Trve Prayer* in 1605.¹⁶ Smyth published this treatise as a response to accusations that he shared Separatist views on the use of the Lord's Prayer in worship and by extension the use of the Book of Common Prayer in worship. Johnson and his followers had been accused of denying the primacy of the Lord's Prayer as a model for prayer by his refusal to encourage its public recitation in the services of the Ancient Church. Johnson wrote:

15. Finally therefore all such as have framed or receyved any other forme of Prayer but this onely which Christ hath taught, offend against this rule and commaundement of Christ. And thus (not we, but) they who have devised and follow other formes and books of prayer, are those which deny and (as much as lyeth in them) disanull *the Lords prayer*."¹⁷

With this paragraph Johnson defended his own appreciation for the prayer while accusing those who made use of read prayers from the Book of Common Prayer of rejecting the biblical pattern set forth by Christ.

John Smyth had been accused of harboring Separatist sympathies in 1605 because he also did not believe that recitation of the Lord's Prayer was required. Unlike Johnson, Smyth did not believe such a recitation of the Lord's Prayer was potentially harmful, merely optional. He took great pains to disassociate himself from Separatist views in his treatise. In his preface to the reader, Smyth wrote:

. . .but my intent was none of these, when I intended to publish the treatise: onely the cleering of my selfe from uniust accusations, and the satisfying of a few friends moved me therto: but whatsoeuer it be, and howsoeuer uttered, I pray thee of charitie to construe (a thing indifferently done) to the better part: especially those few questions resolued in the latter end of the treatise. I doe here

¹⁶William T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth: Fellow of Christ's College, 1594-98*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 68-247.

¹⁷Francis Johnson, *Church of England*, 140.

ingenuously confesse that I am far from the opinion of them which separate from our Church, concerning the set forme of prayer (although from some of them, I receiued part of my education in Cambridge) for I doe verily assure my selfe vpon such grounds as I have delivered in the treatise, that a set form of prayer is not vnlawfull . . . ¹⁸

Smyth's opaque reference to Johnson probably was indicative of the latter's views expressed in *A treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England*. Smyth's statement here, written in 1605, demonstrated he had not yet followed his Tutor's example into Separation. Smyth did become a Separatist in 1606/07, though he would again disagree with Johnson over the use of the Lord's Prayer as shall be evident in chapter five of this research project.

Johnson's publication of *A treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England* gave his views a wider circulation. During his imprisonment in London, various persons visited him in prison with the intention of learning more about Separatist views and encouraging Johnson to recant. Henry Jacob (1563-1624) was one of those visitors who took the opportunity to converse with Francis Johnson. Jacob was born at Kent in 1563; he earned his B. A. in 1583 while a student at St. Mary's Hall, Oxford University. Jacob received his Master of Arts from St. Mary's Hall in 1586. He had been appointed precentor at Corpus Christi College, Oxford in 1584.¹⁹

Jacob was ordained in the Church of England and likely held an ecclesiastical position at Cheriton near Folkston in Kent until 1591.²⁰ His movements during the

¹⁸W. T. Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, Vol. I, 71.

¹⁹Slayden A. Yarborough, *Henry Jacob, A Moderate Separatist, And His Influence On Early English Congregationalism*, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1972), 28-29. Henry Martyn Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, As Seen In Its Literature: With Special Reference to Certain Recondite, Neglected, or Disputed Passages*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1880), 635.

²⁰Yarborough, *Henry Jacob*, 30.

1590's have been disputed by various scholars. The Congregationalist historian, Henry Martyn Dexter, believed that Jacob migrated to the Low Countries in the early 1590's. He led the Church of English Adventurers at Middleburgh that had formerly been served by Johnson and was influenced by John Robinson.²¹ Stephen Wright argued in his article for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* that the printing of Jacob's tract in Zeeland against Johnson and Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, was not decisive evidence that Jacob had actually been ministering in Zeeland.²² Whatever Jacob's permanent residence, he was in England during 1596 for his interview with Johnson.²³ David Gay theorized in his *Battle For the Church: 1517-1644* that Jacob had his treatise, *Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England* printed in the Netherlands in 1599 because his primary audience was the English Separatists in Amsterdam. Jacob himself remained in London until 1600, when he assumed the pastorate of the Merchant Adventurer's congregation in Middleburgh.²⁴ It is unlikely that a definite answer to this question will ever be found, barring the discovery of new primary source evidence. What can be known for certain is that Jacob was in London in 1596 for his interview with Johnson, published his *Defence* in the Netherlands, that he may have ministered at Middleburgh, and was definitely present in London for the Hampton Court Conference in 1603/04.

²¹Dexter, *Congregationalism*, 635.

²²Wright, Stephen. "Jacob, Henry (1562/3–1624)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004.<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14566> (accessed June 1, 2006).

²³Francis Johnson, *An Answer to Maister H. Iacob His Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England*, (Amsterdam, 1600).

²⁴David Gay, *Battle For the Church: 1517-1644*, (Castro Valley, CA: Brachus, 1997), 389-91.

Jacob's initial discussions with Johnson are all described in the past tense in their two respective treatises on the ministry of the Church of England. Jacob's *Defence of the Ministry and Church of England* (1559) was actually the result of written arguments formulated by Jacob that had been requested by Johnson to clarify the terms of the debate.²⁵ Both Jacob's treatise and Johnson's in reply (1600) quoted their opponent's arguments and then provided text beneath in response to each point.²⁶ Their very precise style of debate in what most people would have considered a rather informal dispute was an indicator of a level of erudition and discipline in ecclesiastical debate that completely eludes the present generations.

A preface to Jacob's treatise was provided by the publisher, a person who identified himself as "D B."²⁷ Fortunately, a clue to the identity of "D B" exists in Johnson's treatise. Johnson angrily charged:

These two letters, D. B., I found to be set for Dr. (Richard) Bancroft now Prelate of London in a shameless book of his, not long synce sparsed abroad. In which respect as also considering many as godless things here agayne published, albeit some might think it was therefore to be ascribed vnto him, yet for other causes appearing in this book, partly knowen of the man, I thinck this Preface was not made by him: but rather by another "D. B." a Scrivner of London, a man that hath turned his coat and forsaken the truth, as often as D. P. (Dr. Perne) the old turncoat did if not also oftener. He it was, that by letters desired of me, to aunswer Mr. Jacobs Argument: as here is said: being himself at the tyme separated from the false worship and ministry of England, to which vomit he is now againe returned, wallowing in that myer from which then he was washed.²⁸

²⁵Henry Jacob, *A defence of the churches and ministry of Englande Written in two treatises, against the reasons and obiections of Maister Francis Iohnson, and others of the separation commonly called Brownists. Published, especially, for the benefitt of those in these partes of the lowe Countries*, (Middelburgh: Richard Schilders, 1599), 3-6.

²⁶Francis Johnson, *An Answer to Maister H. Iacob His Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England*, (Amsterdam, 1600).

²⁷Henry Jacob, *Defence*, 3-6.

²⁸Francis Johnson, *An Answer*, Preface.

Johnson identified “D. B.” in a marginal note on the same page as none other than the informative Mr. Daniel Bucke, whose deposition in London provided so much intimate detail regarding the early meetings of the London Separatist Congregation. Johnson observed that Bucke had been one of the foremost people to urge Johnson to write a reply to Jacob. He had then betrayed the Separatist cause and intended to use Jacob’s treatise to prevent conversions to Separatism in Middleburgh.²⁹ The American Baptist historian, Champlin Burrage, theorized that Bucke had joined Jacob’s congregation in Middleburgh and was overseeing the publication of Jacob’s work in that capacity. While the historiographical issues concerning such a theory have already been presented in this chapter, Burrage was probably correct in his assessment that Jacob had relocated to the Netherlands at this point and that Bucke was a member of his congregation.³⁰

Johnson also argued that Jacob’s motives for producing his treatise were impure. He reminded his readers that Jacob possibly had more than academic interest or the conversion of the English Separatists in mind when he drafted *A Defence*. In Johnson’s treatise, he wrote:

There came out of late (good reader) two books, from one Mayster Henry Iacob, a priest of the Orders of the Prelates. The furst was agaunst his lord, Mr. D. Bilson, now Prelate of Winchester, concerning Christ’s sufferings and descending into Hell. The latter agaynst me by name, And others like mynded, tovyching the Church and Ministry of England. Now although the Prelates could not well be offended at him, for publishing the former agaynst the doctrine of their church, seing (long before him) Mr. Carlill a learned man had both publikly disputed in Cambridge and printed a book, agaynst that error of Christs descension, and that with great approbation of the most godly and learned at that tyme: Yet he like fearing the worst, and knowing the hatred of the Prelates how deadly it is, he did presently afterward send forth his other book, defence of the Churches and Ministry of

²⁹Francis Johnson, *An Answer*, Preface. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 282-83.

³⁰Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, 280-84.

England, So as whatsoeuer displeasure his Lords of the Prelates conceyved agaynst him for the former, there was now some hope that they might sooner be appeased vpon view of the latter. Or howsoever it shall fall out, yet what likelier way could he take to make all sure on his side then by the first book to get the forward preachers and professors to take his part against the Prelates, and by the other to have both them and the Prelates themselves to stand with him agaynst vs.³¹

While Johnson's assessment of Jacob's motives for publication were somewhat cynical, it was true that Jacob had published the treatise in question to the potential displeasure of some "Prelates."

The dispute to which Johnson alluded was one that raged in the Church of England in the 1590's. John Calvin had rejected the article in the Nicene Creed that described Jesus as descending into Hell after his crucifixion. As Johnson stated, Calvin's view had been defended at Cambridge in 1552 by Christopher Carlile (d. 1588). Carlile, a proctor of Cambridge University since 1548 and a noted Hebrew scholar, published his arguments in support of Calvin in 1582 under the title *A Discourse Concerning Two Divine Positions*.³² He had written his treatise as a response to critiques directed at him by an English Roman Catholic scholar in exile named Robert Smith.³³

Thomas Bilson had become Bishop of Winchester in 1597 and had emerged as an avid defender of the traditional understanding of Christ's descent into Hell. Bilson published several sermons he had preached on the subject under the title *The effect of*

³¹Francis Johnson, *An Answer*, Preface.

³²Christopher Carlile, *A discourse, concerning two diuine positions The first [ef]fectually concluding, that the soules of the faithfull fathers, deceased before Christ, went immediately to heauen. The second sufficiently setting foorth vnto vs Christians, what we are to conceiue, touching the descension of our Sauour Christ into hell: publicquely disputed at a commencement in Cambridge, anno Domini 1552*, (London: Roger Ward, 1582).

³³Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age: A Survey of Printed Sources*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 164.

certaine Sermons touching The Full Redemption of mankind in 1599.³⁴ Before Bilson's sermons could make it to press, Henry Jacob's *A Treatise of the Sufferings and Victory of Christ* appeared.³⁵ Jacob directly challenged Bilson by writing:

To declare faithfully the sufferings of Christ our Sauior which for vs he endured, & how he conquered the power of Hell and Sathan to free vs therefrom, is a matter for all Christians (if any other) most worthy of handling and necessarie to be known. Especially now seing of late great iniury hath bene done by no meane Prelate, to this point of christian veritie, in such wise as no Protestant hath ever done the like heretofore, neither hath brought more offence to the godly, or disquietnes to the Churches in England.³⁶

Bilson added material attacking Jacob to his treatise before it went to print.³⁷ In his "Conclusion to the Reader for the clearing of certaine obietions made against the doctrine before handled," Bilson provided an acerbic critique of Jacob's treatise. Bilson wrote:

I Promised thee (Christian reader) in y^e preface of this booke, to giue thee a ta[...] in the conclusion how rashly & weakly the doctrine, which thou hast now read, was confuted, before it was printed, by one that professeth He could not forbear but imploy his talent to cleare the holy cause (*as he calleth it*) from all the corrupt fancies and vaine imaginations of men: which, God willing, I meane now to performe. Thou must not looke that I will wast time and paper to settle a giddie head, or stoppe a running rounde; but when by some particulars I haue made it appeare how vnfit he is to bee refuted, or so much as regarded by mee; I will leaue him to the depth of his follies. For though he point plainlie to my sermons, in directing his treatise: *contrary to certaine errors publikly preached in London*, and sticketh not to *name me*; yet because he flyeth from the state of the chiefe Question

³⁴Milward, *Religious Controversies*, 166.

³⁵Henry Jacob, *A treatise of the sufferings and victory of Christ, in the work of our redemption declaring by the Scripturs these two questions: that Christ suffered for vs the wrath of God, which we may well terme the paynes of hell, or hellish sorrowes. That Christ after his death on the crosse, went not into hell in his soule. Contrarie to certaine errours in these points publikly preached in London: anno 1597.* (Middelburg : Richard Schilders), 1598.

³⁶Henry Jacob, *A treatise of the sufferings and victory of Christ*, 3.

³⁷Thomas Bilson, *The effect of certaine sermons touching the full redemption of mankind by the death and blood of Christ Iesus wherein besides the merite of Christs suffering, the manner of his offering, the power of his death, the comfort of his crosse, the glorie of his resurrection, are handled, what paines Christ suffered in his soule on the crosse: together, with the place and purpose of his descent to hel after death: preached at Paules Crosse and else where in London, by the right Reuerend Father Thomas Bilson Bishop of Winchester. With a conclusion to the reader for the cleering of certaine obiections made against said doctrine*, (London: Peter Short, 1599).

which I impugned, and taketh the paines to ouer skip all my authorities with silence, if not with contempt, and in reporting my reasons forgetteth and dissembleth what pleaseth himselfe, as also in the defence of his holie cause he roueth as he listeth, neither kéeping himself to any order, nor bringing any matter of moment, but confusedlie powring out the hastie resolutions of his owne braines, spiced euerie where with ignorant & absurd positions: neither my leasure nor my liking suffer me to seeke him out, that hath so farre lost himselfe, nor to vouchsafe him an answer, that so prouddie despiseth all authoritie and antiquitie, which sorteth not with his fansie. I will therefore shew thée (good Reader) some examples.³⁸

Despite Johnson's charge that Jacob was merely playing to both sides by engaging in controversies that would appease them both, Jacob continued his dispute with Bilson even after he published his treatise against Johnson. Jacob levied another assault against Bilson's position in his *A defence of a treatise touching the sufferings and victorie of Christ* published in 1600.³⁹

Returning to Johnson's accusation regarding Jacob's motivation for publishing the argument, one can accept his contention that the publication was likely done with the approval if not at the consent of Bilson. However, Jacob's willingness to carry on his controversy with the Bishop afterwards was indicative of a personality that was not inclined to compromise truth when he felt he had grasped the truth. Bilson remained as Bishop of Winchester in Southwark until 1616, the same year that Jacob established his Independent congregation at Southwark.⁴⁰

³⁸Thomas Bilson, *The effect of certaine sermons touching the full redemption of mankind*, 225.

³⁹Henry Jacob, *A defence of a treatise touching the sufferings and victorie of Christ in the worke of our redemption Wherein in confirmed, 1 That Christ suffered for vs, not only bodily griefe, but also in his soule an impression of the proper wrath of God, which may be called the paines of Hell. 2 That after his death on the crosse he went not downe into Hell. For answers to the late writings of Mr Bilson, L. Bishop of Winchester, which he intitlesh, The effect of certaine sermons, &c. Wherein he striueth mightly against the doctrine aforesaid*, (Middelburg : R. Schilders, 1600).

⁴⁰William Richardson, "Bilson, Thomas (1546/7–1616)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2401> (accessed June 2, 2006).

Daniel Bucke probably was the publisher of Jacob's treatise and wrote in a preface to the work a summary of the written debate between Jacob and Johnson to 1599.

Bucke wrote:

About three yeeres since, Maister Iacob hauing some speach with certen of the separation before mentioned, concentering their peremptory & vtter separation from the Churches of England, was requested by them, briefly to sett down in wryting, his Reason for defence of the said Churches, And they would either yield vnto his proofes, or procure an answer vnto the same. Wherevpon the argument following this Preface, was set downe in wryting by Maister Iacob: which the said parties did send to Maister Fr. Iohnson, being then prisoner in the Clinke in Southwark, who made an answer vnto the same, conteyning 3. Exceptions and 9. Reasons in denyall of the Assumption: Wherevnto Maister Iacob Replied. Afterward Maister Iohnson defended his said Exceptions and Reasons: And finally Maister Iacob replied againe as by the particulars themselves appeareth.⁴¹

Bucke's preface outlined the course of the debate in the fashion above and also gave his unflattering opinion of Johnson and the English Separatists.

Jacob had a personality that was flexible enough to debate Bilson in an area on which they disagreed, while cooperating with him in their common struggle against the Separatists. The fact that Johnson viewed this as rank opportunism provides a window into the personality of each man. Whereas Johnson's rigidity would not permit him to cooperate with persons who differed on the smallest of points, Jacob was open to finding common ground and consensus. That personality difference was probably why both men were talking past one another in the debate that ensued. Ironically, both men would arrive at similar conclusions regarding the Church of England and its ministries by the end of their lives. Jacob's turn to more Separatist or Independent views began soon after his dialogue with Johnson and was probably influenced by a combination of issues raised by Johnson and the untenable position Puritan leaders faced within the Church of

⁴¹Henry Jacob, *Defence of the Churches and Ministry*, 3.

England after Hampton Court.⁴² Johnson never accepted the Church of England to the degree that Jacob did. Jacob was unsuccessful in persuading Johnson, though he raised several good arguments against separation. Ultimately, Jacob failed to convince Johnson because he was burdened with his own doubts about the Church of England. These doubts caused him to focus his arguments on the feasibility of remaining within the Established Church even when the order and ordinances were corrupt. If Jacob had focused on the theological problem that John Smyth would bring to the fore, continuing Separatist acceptance of persons baptized in a church they claimed was false without a requirement for rebaptism, he might well have provoked Johnson's thinking further toward his ultimate ecclesiological end.

Johnson's first exception to Jacob's views concerned his perception that hypocrisy reigned in the Church of England because they did not practice what they professed. The immediate object of this attack was Article 19 of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Johnson insisted:

First let here be considered the 19. Article of that doctrine and booke (the Book of Common Paryer), which is alleged by themselues for their defence, and see if their profession and practize be not contrary one to an other: Yea whether euen by their owne doctrine and confession, conteyned in that booke, it be not manifest, that they have not a trve uisible Church of Christ.

The words of the Article are these

The visible Church of Christ is a Congregation of faithfull men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be doely ministered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things, that of necessitie are requisite to the same.

These are their owne wordes and doctrine: Now if they cannot proue their assemblies to be such, they may see that their own witness, (euen their own doctrine and book alleadged) giue verdict against them. If they can proue them

⁴²Edward Bloomfield, *The Opposition To The English Separatists: 1570-1625*, (Washington D. C.: University Press, of America, 1981), 116-17.

*to be such: where and what are their proofes, touching the particulars, mentioned in this their owne description of a usible Church of Christ.*⁴³

Johnson's first exception revealed his greatest perplexity regarding Jacob's position. He reasoned that if he could get Jacob to confess that the Church of England had glaring imperfections, then Jacob would naturally see the wisdom of separation. As the argument developed, it became obvious that Jacob was well aware of the issues Johnson perceived as problems within the Church of England. The aforementioned personality difference was highlighted in the fact that for Johnson corruption equaled separation while Jacob did not see corruption as a factor that ruled out cooperation. Jacob defended the Church of England by asserting:

Secondly note further: Our Article saith, A Church is where the word is preached & sacraments ministered according to all things that of necessitie are requisite. Where we plainly insinuate, that many errors may be added, & truthes wanting in a visible Church: but nothing which is absolutely necessary: Now what doth our practize, n Preaching, or Sacraments, want, that is absolutely necessary, without which, there cannot be any true preaching or Sacraments at all, shew it is vs because we see it not our selues I assure you; vntill then, your first reason hath no reason in it.⁴⁴

Johnson accepted Jacob's invitation by listing ninety-one unscriptural practices he saw in the Church of England's worship and ministry. Edward Bloomfield, professor of political philosophy at Cerritos College in California, attributed this list to Jacob in his *Opposition to the English Separatists*.⁴⁵ Bloomfield's mistaken attribution occurred because he read the italics text that designated Johnson's argument in Jacob's treatise as Jacob's own work. Some notable Separatist favorites reappeared in Johnson's list. Items

⁴³In both of these treatises, each author italicizes the words of his opponent to differentiate between the two arguments. I have chosen to retain the printing of the original text. Henry Jacob, *Defence*, 4-5.

⁴⁴Henry Jacob, *Defence*, 5.

⁴⁵Edward Bloomfield, *The Opposition To The English Separatists*, 116.

Two through thirty-five simply named the officers of the Church of England with no explanation. He noted the continuing use of the Apocrypha in the Established Church and also the use of prayer and liturgies that Johnson felt were copied from Roman Catholic ceremonies in item thirty-seven. Johnson did not neglect to indicate in item eighty-four, “*The Popish Vestments as Rochet, Horned Cap, Tippet, the Surplice in parish Churches & Cope in cathedral churches.*”⁴⁶

Johnson’s second exception addressed the issue of ordinances and betrayed his Calvinistic theology, not that Johnson could ever be accused of being a stealth Calvinist:

*Secondly let them tell vs, whether they hold & professe Iesus Christ to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church, to be obeyed in his own ordinance onely, and in no other. And if they doe, then let them shew vs how their practize agreeth with this profession.*⁴⁷

Jacob responded by affirming the Church of England’s commitment to honoring Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King in its ordinances, but made a distinction between the types of ordinances given by Christ. Jacob intimated:

This I say we generally professe and practize. Howbeit this note with all, we hold Christs ordinance to be of two sortes, written or vnwritten, the first necessary, the second arbitrary, The firste touching doctrine, that is, touching faith and the inward opinion only, such as these, The doctrine of God, his Nature, his Persons, his Properties, of the Messias Christ Iesus, of Iustification, of Sanctification, of the Resurrection, &c. Wherein standeth the foundation of sauing faith. All these must be in the written word or els to bee none of Christes. The second touching outward orders in the Church, which are truly called and accounted Christs own also, although particularly deuised and appointed by the Church, whom Christ hath authorized therevnto, euen as it shall be thought most fit and profitable for the present times, places and persons: such we hold all outward gouernement and ceremonies to bee, because they be not simply of the foundation, neither written, nor certen, nor perpetuall, but at the arbitrarie

⁴⁶Henry Jacob, *Defence*, 26-28.

⁴⁷Henry Jacob, *Defence*, 11-12.

appointment of the Church and Magistrate, and yet to be Christes own neuerthelesse, who hath left this libertie for the Church to vse; . . .⁴⁸

This statement by Jacob indicated another important difference in personality and theology that existed between him and Johnson at the time. Jacob saw the Church of England and any true church as invested with the delegated spiritual authority to fashion a workable, scriptural church government based on the “present times, places, and persons.” Johnson’s own rigid understanding of Christ’s establishment of church government did not leave room for the kind of control over church polity by the church that Jacob endorsed. For Johnson, Christ had established the polity of His church along indissoluble lines. There was no question about “times, places, or persons.” One pattern fits all. Johnson’s position was quite tenable in a uniform cultural context, but any introduction of other cultural contexts would challenge his ability to reach people from that other context. Johnson, unimpressed by Jacob’s distinction between the two ordinances, responded:

*In answere whereof, First we aske what scripture they have for this. Secondly, we alleadge against it, the Scriptures “quoted in the margent, whereunto manie other might be added. Thirdlie, let it be obsuered, that themselues here graunt and can not denie, but all the outwarde gouernement and ceremonies of their Church, are inuented and arbitrary at the pleasure of man, and not written in the worde of God. Whereupon it followeth that they are none of Christes, and therefore not to Be ioyned vnto in the worship of God, as afterwards more fully will appeare.”*⁴⁹

Johnson’s third exception challenged the method of ordaining ministers that had been adopted by the Church of England. This criticism focused primarily on Article thirty-six of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Johnson’s allusion to the ordination of ministers was actually a means to address a larger issue. The underlying sin of the ordination

⁴⁸Jacob, *Defence*, 12.

⁴⁹Jacob, *Defence*, 14.

process, aside from the fact that Johnson did not feel the offices to be ordained by God from the start, was the statement in article thirty-six that, “The Booke of consecrating of Archbishops and Bishops, and ordering of Priests and Deacons, doth conteyne all things necessarie to such consecration and ordering, neyther hath it any thing that of it self is superstitious or vngodly.”⁵⁰ This issue for Johnson was the confidence placed in an extra-biblical source to provide a foundation for such an important practice of the church. Johnson included in his third exception references to articles six and thirty-five that provided instruction for the reading of the Apocrypha and the Book of Homilies.

Jacob’s answer to this third exception revealed his flair for arresting images. His illustrations and allusions were picturesque and provocative in all of his treatises. Jacob must have been an interesting and entertaining preacher to hear by the standards of his day. The illustration he employed to answer the Separatist position espoused by Johnson in the third exception vividly highlighted the problem at the center of Separatist exclusivity. The issue in question for Jacob was determining when one’s brother was no longer a brother. Or in ecclesiastical terms, how much error must exist for a church to be considered no longer a valid expression of the Christian family. Jacob observed:

I answer, you should have said, those poincts destroy vtterly true Christianity, Ergo, & c. Else the Argument follweth not: But then we deny flatly the Antecedent or first part of the reason. But your Reason you will say shall goe as you have put it. Then mark these reasons euen as good as yours and all one. An Ethiopian is white of his teeth, therefore he is a white man. A Swanne is black of his bill, therefore a Swanne is black. My brother hath a an eye of glasse, or he hath a wodden legge, therefore my brother is no true man.⁵¹

⁵⁰Jacob, *Defence*, 22.

⁵¹Jacob, *Defence*, 22.

The debate continued in a similarly organized fashion so typical of the scholastic Protestantism of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Johnson's reply to Jacob's defense against the second exception included a list of at least twenty verses in opposition to Jacob's argument. The Separatist and Puritans alike brandished their proof-texting muscles with equal impunity.

Johnson felt compelled to publish a response to Jacob's treatise in 1600 under the title *An Answer to Maister H. Jacob His Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England*. He began with the aforementioned charge that Jacob was publishing their dialogue at the opportune moment when Bilson would have the most reason to be exasperated with his subordinate. Johnson condescendingly observed, "he hath dealt very simply in publishing so weak and raw a Treatise against vs."⁵² He continued, "I had thought in this case I should have never seen any more absurd writing than Mr. (George) Giffords and Mr. Bredwels. But now to Mr. Jacob they may well give place."⁵³

Johnson alluded to a further public disputation between himself and Jacob just prior to his voyage to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1597. Johnson reminded Jacob:

Now your doctrine and constitution erreth fundamentally, I have declared before, Pg. 22, 114, 147.

But now though you have no list to meddle with your Churches doctrine, yet let us see your next reply, if your list will be to deal with your owne. Your owne (I say) which I had from your self, and take to be private to your self. I had it from you, in a Conference which passed between you and me, in the presence of divers that can witness it. Yet for more certainty and better remembrance, I desyred and obtained of you to write it down your self. So you gave it to me then under your hand, in writing, which I have with me yet to shew.⁵⁴

⁵²Francis Johnson, *An Answer*, Preface to the Christian Reader.

⁵³Francis Johnson, *An Answer*, Preface to the Christian Reader.

⁵⁴Johnson, *An Answer*, 172.

Johnson noted in the margin that the date of this conference was April 3, 1597.⁵⁵ It must have taken place immediately before the Separatists set sail for the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Francis Johnson saw Henry Jacob's position on the ministry of the Church of England as paradoxical and inconsistent. He said as much in the conclusion to his *Answer*. Johnson wrote, "Therefore vntill you prove the contrarie (which will never be, mark what I say) the Paradox still remaineth vpon you and your Church."⁵⁶ Johnson reiterated his devotion to Reformed theology by looking to other Reformed theologians as support for his invective against Jacob:

Touching the reformed Churches, some of your selves (men of far better iudgement and learning than Mr. Iacob) have confessed and published, that you have all the best reformed Churches thourghout Christendom against you: And further, that you have an Antichristian Hierarchy and Popish ordering of Ministers, straunge from the word of God and the vse of all well reformed Churches in the world.⁵⁷

One must remember in reading this statement that Johnson wrote it during the period when the Ancient Church was sending its *True Confession* to other Reformed Churches throughout Western Europe. They were also engaged at the time in written debate with Franciscus Junius. Johnson would soon see, to his great disappointment, that the Reformed Churches were not as uniform in their support against the Church of England as he would have preferred. In fact, few other Reformed leaders were as scandalized by the Church of England as the Separatists.

Another difference of personality and temperament that is reflected in this written debate between Johnson and Jacob was their style of debate and attitude toward

⁵⁵Johnson, *An Answer*, 172.

⁵⁶Johnson, *An Answer*, 176.

⁵⁷Ibid.

opposition. Whereas Jacob tended to address Johnson seriously and weigh the points at issue with some degree of charity, Johnson's style of polemical engagement is a combination of rapier thrusts and condescending invectives. As exemplified in some of the quotations above, it did not appear that Johnson considered Jacob a worthy adversary, yet he took the time to respond. That paradox, a word that would probably have grated on Johnson's nerves, raised the question of whether Johnson's condescension was a genuine feeling or a debate strategy. While there is no doubt that Johnson genuinely felt some contempt for Jacob's abilities, Jacob could take comfort in the fact that a man like Johnson would not have wasted his time with Jacob if he considered the man to be as unskilled and insignificant as he claimed. This incident would not be the last time that Johnson adopted the strategy of intimidation and condescension to stifle the arguments of his opponents.

Francis Johnson usually entered the arena armed for battle, Jacob for conversation. Jacob saw Johnson as unyielding and unreasonable. Johnson saw Jacob as indecisive and hypocritical. Both men eventually acknowledged the validity of the Church of England as a true church with some glaring deficiencies, though Johnson never advocated the level of cooperation with the Church of England that Jacob would allow. Conversely, Jacob accepted eventually the reality that the Church of England would not change and separated himself. He continued to argue that his separation was not a rejection of the Church of England as a conduit of salvation, but an act to establish a more perfect polity. Jacob even offered to take an oath of loyalty to the crown if his church would be allowed freedom of worship. Jacob did finally come to the point where

he could no longer live within the limits of ecclesiastical practice espoused by the Church of England.

Jacob's theology underwent a shift in a more Separatist direction by 1604. This shift occurred partially because of Johnson's influence and partially in reaction to the dawning realization that the new monarch, James I, had no intention of granting a greater ecclesiastical role to Puritans. Though one does not want to err by attributing too much of Jacob's gradual acceptance of a form of Separatism to his exchange with Johnson, a drastic change in Jacob's thinking on a major issue discussed with Johnson indicated that there was some influence. Specifically, Jacob abandoned his argument that church government was a tangential and debatable matter. In his *Reasons Taken Out of God's Word*, Jacob listed four assertions on the first page that ran counter to his arguments against Johnson just four years earlier:

1. It is necessarie to reforme the Churches of England, their Ministerie, and Ceremonies.
2. For the space of 200. yeares after Christ the Visible Churches vsing gournment were not Diocesan Churches, but particular ordinary Congregations only: and the Bishops (as they were peculiarly called after the Apostles) were only Parishionall not Diocesan Bishops, differing from other Pastors in priority of order not in Maioritie of rule.
3. The Scriptures of the New Testaments do containe & set forth vnto vs (besides the gouernment by Extraordinary Offices, Apostles Prophetes Evangelists) and ordinary forme of Church-gournment vsed then.
4. The ordinary forme of Church-gournment set forth vnto vs in the New Testament, ought necessarily to be kept by us; it is not changeable by men, and therefore it only is lawfull.⁵⁸

Such a profound reversal of his thought on a major point at issue with Johnson was indicative of at least some influence by Johnson on Jacob's changing position. His

⁵⁸Henry Jacob, *Reasons taken out of Gods Word and the best humane testimonies prouing a necessitie of reforming our churches in England Framed and applied to 4. assertions wherein the foresaid purpose is contained. The 4. assertions are set downe in the page next following.*, (Middelburg : Richard Schilders, 1604), "The 4 Assertions."

position changed just in time for Jacob's participation in the Hampton Court Conference, an event also seen by Francis Johnson and the Ancient Church as an opportunity to gain acceptance by the new monarch. Unfortunately, they were all destined to be disappointed.

3. *Courting Royal Favor at Hampton Court*

The death of Elizabeth I in 1603 raised new possibilities for Puritans and Separatists alike. The Puritans, who had largely brushed aside their political aspirations in the 1590's, now saw their opportunity to see their ideals become reality. Their new King, James I of England and James VI of Scotland, was coming from a region that had championed the Reformed cause during the Reformation and enjoyed an established Reformed church. James ascended the throne on March 24, 1603/04. While he journeyed to London in April 1604, he was met by a delegation of Puritans who presented him with a document called the Millenary Petition. The name was derived from the assertion of its bearers that it was endorsed by a thousand ministers, though only eight hundred had signed the actual document.⁵⁹ The formal title of the document was *The Humble Petition of the Ministers of the Church of England, desiring Reformation of certaine Ceremonies and abuses of the Church*.⁶⁰ The petition addressed the form of worship with a specific focus on the wearing of the surplice, the necessity of ensuring

⁵⁹Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age: A Survey of Printed Sources*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 1. Alister E. McGrath, *In The Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible And How It Changed A Nation, A Language, And A Culture*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 149-150. Alan Stewart, *The Cradle King: The Life of James VI & I, the First Monarch of a United Great Britain*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 191-201. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1938), 55.

⁶⁰*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England desiring reformation of certain ceremonies and abuses of the Church with the answer of the vicechancellor, the doctors, both the proctours, and other the heads of houses, in the Vniversity of Oxford.*, (Oxford: 1603, reprinted 1641).

that worthy persons entered the ministry of the Church of England, reforms of church livings and maintenance with special concern directed at pluralism, and the matter of church discipline with an insistence that excommunication be levied only with care.

The petitioners prefaced their provisions by intimating that they were trying to help the new King better understand the ills of his people so that he might better provide the cure. The petitioners wrote:

The King as a good Physician, must first know what peccant humours his patient naturally is most subject unto before hee can begin his cure: And although divers of us that sue for Reformation, have formerly in respect of the times subscribed to the book, some upon Protestation, some upon exposition given them, some with condition, rather than the Church should have beene deprived of their labour and Ministry: yet now we, to the number of more than a Thousand, of your Maiesties Subjects and Ministers, all groaning as under a burden of human rites and Ceremonies, do with one joynt consent humble our selves at your Maiesties feet, to be eased and relieved in this behalf. Our humble suit then unto your Maistey is, that these offences following, some may be removed, some amended, some qualified.⁶¹

This paragraph perfectly captured the cautious strategy of the Puritans during the latter years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The four areas of abuse they indicated, with the exception of the clerical dress, were not radical ideas in comparison with some of the injunctions of the Separatists. James was well aware of their larger agenda and knew there would be more changes to come. Lest he forget, there were ample representatives of alternative views to remind him.

A response to the Millenary Petition was soon published by Oxford and Cambridge Universities in 1603. The response was actually written at Oxford and endorsed by Cambridge. This document also represented the first public printing of the Millenary Petition itself. It had only been presented to James and select scholars up to

⁶¹*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England*, 2. Haller, *Puritanism*, 55. Stewart, *Cradle King*, 191-201.

that point.⁶² The response of the Established Church to the Millenary Petition was aptly summarized when they asked the rhetorical question, “Why doe they trouble both Church and Commonwealth, in respect of matters which in duty and conscience they may well, and ought willingly to submit themselves unto?”⁶³ They also implied a thinly veiled threat in their observation that the petitioners were ungrateful for the graciousness of the King that allowed them to enjoy the right of petition. The Oxford dons wrote, “Were other men as little inured to peace and subjection, it might occasion some inconvenience.”⁶⁴

The primary problem both King James and the Oxford dons saw was the probability that the Puritans would not be satisfied with a compromise reform. No matter how little they demanded initially, they would desire more. They need look no farther than the Separatists to demonstrate the radical implications of Puritan ideals. The Oxford response to the Millenary Petition read:

Howsoever in words they decline the imputation of seditious men affectin popular purity in the Church, and of Schismaticks ayming at the dissolution of the state Ecclesiastical: yet it is too well known in this Kingdome, and by experience it hath been felt in that of Scotland, what manner of men they be, as also, what have been the lamentable effects of their Reformation there, and would have been likewise here, had not the prudent foresight and constant resolution of our late gracious Sovereigne continually repressed their attempts.⁶⁵

Their reference to “Schismaticks” was certain to attract the attention of Johnson and Ainsworth. The assessment given by the Oxford dons of the Millenary Petition’s opening

⁶²Milward, *Jacobean Controversies*, 1.

⁶³*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England*, 7.

⁶⁴*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England*, 9.

⁶⁵*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England*, 9.

paragraphs would have met with Francis Johnson's approval to the extent that it opposed the hypocrisy he saw in the moderate Separatist position:

6. That divers of them have formerly subscribed to the booke (as they scornfully tearme it) doth manifestly evince, that either our Liturgie is justifiable, themselves being Judges; or else that they did liberally dispense with their own consciences, which is not that part of honest men. To doe that *in respect of the times*, which in it self is not lawful, proveth little less than hypocrisie to alledge unknown *Protestations, expositions, and conditions* in their subscription; doth argue no sincerity; and upon due examination; will fall out to be nothing but mere falsitie.⁶⁶

In order to deal with the Millenary Petition and its provisions, King James decided to call a conference at his Hampton Court Palace west of London on January 14, 1603/04. James hoped to conciliate both parties, but probably did not anticipate the plethora of "Schismatics" that emerged from the woodwork to request clemency from the King and concessions by the Established Church. The conference itself was carefully managed. The official Episcopal faction was led by Richard Bancroft (1544-1610), then Bishop of London. Bancroft was presiding in place of Archbishop Whitgift, who was too ill to attend.⁶⁷

The Puritan representatives to the Hampton Court Conference were carefully chosen by King James's advisors. James' decision to give an audience to the Puritans had raised their hopes; Queen Elizabeth had never consented to such an audience. It also alarmed the Episcopal Bishops. They feared James might give away too much in an attempt to conciliate the Puritans early in his reign. Bancroft determined not to allow James to make such a mistake and orchestrated events to demonstrate to him that only the Episcopal party would allow James the prerogatives he felt were his by divine right.

⁶⁶*The Humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England*, 10.

⁶⁷Milward, *Jacobean Controversies*, 3.

Their fears were unfounded because James had despised the Scottish Presbyterianism of his homeland and wanted no such system erected in England. The Puritans selected for the Conference, in keeping with that goal, were those who tended to be more flexible and willing to compromise. Their number included John Reynolds, President of Corpus Christie College at Oxford; Laurence Chadderton of Emmanuel at Cambridge, John Knewstubbs of St. John's at Cambridge, and Thomas Sparke, a minister at Bletchley in Buckinghamshire. The proceedings were recorded by William Barlow, Dean of Chester.⁶⁸

While the conference met inside Hampton Court Palace, various petitioners from more radical Protestant groups hoped to gain admittance, or at the very least to have their petitions read by the king. Henry Jacob's written supplication to King James has already been mentioned. Jacob had embraced a more congregational paradigm and asserted the immutability of Christ's decrees concerning church government by January 1603/04. Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth also began work on a document that would argue convincingly their case for congregational polity as the paradigm for English churches. The resulting work was entitled *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvnists*.⁶⁹ The Pastor and Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church departed Amsterdam in January 1603/04 to deliver their petition to the King.⁷⁰ It must have been a surreal experience for the two men to arrive in London

⁶⁸McGrath, 155-56.

⁶⁹Francis Johnson, *An apologie or defence of such true Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvnists against such imputations as are layd vpon them by the heads and doctors of the Vniuersity of Oxford, in their Ansvver to the humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certayne ceremonies and abuses of the Church..* (Amsterdam, 1604).

⁷⁰Michael Moody correctly related in his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* article the fact that Johnson and Ainsworth traveled to Hampton Court, but incorrectly wrote that they only composed *An*

knowing that the temporary reprieve from arrest secured by the tentative ecclesiastical situation allowed them a freedom to move about that they had not known in their homeland for some time. They joined the throng of petitioners who had arrived to submit their concerns to King James.

An Apology or Defence of Svch Christians as are commonly (but vnjustly) called Brownists was written “against such imputations as are layd vpon them by the Heads and Doctors of the Vniversity of Oxford, In their Answer To the humble petition of the Ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certayne Ceremonies and abuses of the Church.”⁷¹ For the first time, the verse from Jeremiah 6:16 calling all peoples to “stand in the wayes & behold, & aske of the ancient paths, which is the good way, & walk therein” was placed prominently on a treatise that was intended to define the essence of this Ancient Church’s doctrine.⁷²

Johnson and Ainsworth stated their purpose and reason for delivering the petition in an opening address to King James containing all the requisite flattery. Johnson and Ainsworth wrote:

Forasmuch as many have sollicitd your Maiestie with their causes of religion, and that not in private suit onely, but publick view of the world: it seemed needful vnto vs also (most gracious Soueraigne) to publish the cause that we profess and are persuaded to be the truth of God; both for defence of the faith which we witness, and clearing of our selues the Lords unworthy witnesses, from error schisme, heresie, and the like, imputed vnto vs. True it is, that our base contemptible estate, whom God hath allotted to prophesie in sackcloth, and not to speake at home but from a strange cuntry; and most of all, our own

Apology after their return from England in response to an attack written specifically against them. The title of the treatise reveals that it was actually composed beforehand and in response to the Oxford document directed at the Millenarians. Michael E. Moody, “Johnson, Francis (*bap.* 1562, *d.* 1617),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14877> (accessed June 3, 2006).

⁷¹*An Apology*, Title Page.

⁷²*An Apology*, Title Page.

vnworthiness and insufficiencie to ménage such a cause, might discourage us from publishing, especially to your Maiestie, this our defence and apologie: nevertheless relying vpon the assistance of the Alimightie, and hoping also of your Highnes clemencie, we have thus done: for the love of Christ constraineth vs, and the importunacie of our adversaries inforceth vs also herevnto.⁷³

Johnson and Ainsworth reproduced the *Trve Confession* and imbedded it in the body of the text to give King James an overview of their basic theological concerns. After an introductory essay and the confession, they proceeded to set forth a series of “positions” that served as their requests for particular actions to the King. The first of these, as one might expect, concerned the offices that Christ had given to the Church. A series of ten supporting statements followed in which texts from scripture were given as additional evidence.⁷⁴

The second proposition was significant because it strongly endorsed the Congregational ideal of the particularity of the local or single congregation. The theological paradigm shift was significant in an age which was accustomed to monolithic church structures that presided over the smaller church units. The Separatist leaders wrote:

That every particular Church hath like & full interest & power, to enjoy and practice all the ordinances of Christ, given by him to his Church to be observed there perpetually . . . 1. Because every particular Church is the body of Christ, the Kingdome of God, the ground & pillar of truth, the house of the living God, & c.⁷⁵

This comprehensive view of the congregation as the sum total of the Kingdom of God was one of the foremost propositions that set radical Separatists such as Johnson and Ainsworth apart from more conservative Separatists such as Jacob and Robinson. While

⁷³Frances Johnson and Henry Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 2.

⁷⁴Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 42-43.

⁷⁵Johnson and Ainsworth, 43.

Jacob and Robinson, who are often described as “moderate” Separatists, did not want to reject the idea that the Established Church was still a viable expression of the Kingdom of God given reformation, Johnson and Ainsworth felt no necessary compulsion to see the Kingdom of God as a larger ecclesiastical structure.

The third proposition dealt with the Established Church as a societal expression of Christianity. Here there is a bit of ambiguity in Johnson and Ainsworth’s thought. It has been explained that the *Trve Confession*, rather than overthrowing the Constantinian concept of the ruler’s responsibility to maintain a godly state, endorsed such a proposition fully when the ruler’s power was used to support the “proper” church order. Yet they also struggled with the idea of a national church where everyone was made a member at birth. This inconsistency was a real problem that John Smyth would later exploit to demonstrate that the Separatists were not following their ideas to their logical conclusions. How can one establish a “church of Saintes” if the entire society is allowed to participate? In support of this third proposition, Johnson and Ainsworth indicated that it was obvious that those who keep “communion with open wicked among them are all defiled.”⁷⁶ What would the Separatists have really advocated if they had ever been granted the opportunity to shape their world in the manner the Puritans would in the 1640’s and 50’s? It would seem impossible to reconcile the positions articulated by the Separatists without some separation of the prerogatives of church and state, yet this was precisely what they did not finally endorse. They rather envisioned a system, as demonstrated from the *Trve Confession* in chapter three, that allowed them to have authority over the conscience of the ruler in ecclesiastical matters while the ruler ensured

⁷⁶Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 44-45.

the purity of his or her state. It was unworkable. To the absolutist James I, it was unthinkable.

Their fourth position made provision for a sort of lay preaching ministry for those who had not been ordained yet had the ability, knowledge, and calling to preach.⁷⁷ Their fifth position, if none of the others had served the purpose, was definitely the proverbial deal-breaker for King James I. In this position the Separatists listed the offices they had suggested were ordained by Christ in the first position. Unhappy images of John Knox must have floated through James' mind as he read or heard the list. The list should be quite familiar at this point, consisting of Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, and Helpers.⁷⁸ To add insult to injury where James was concerned, the Separatists proceeded to also excoriate the "Antichristian Hierarchy" of "Popes, Archbishops, Lord-bishops, Suffraganes, Deanes, Arch-deacons, Chauncelors, Parsons, Vicars, Priests, Dumb-ministers . . ."⁷⁹ The Separatists insisted that "no such like be set over the spouse and Church of Christ, nor retained therein."⁸⁰

The sixth position again muddled the waters of the Separatist view of church and state by declaring that clergy should minister the word of God rather than bear civil offices. The nature of these offices was not what many were accustomed then or now to consider civil affairs. The two examples cited by Johnson and Ainsworth were the celebration of marriage and burial of the dead, both affairs that had traditionally been the province of the Church. The Separatist attitude defining these ceremonies as primarily

⁷⁷Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 45.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 46.

⁸⁰Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 46.

civil in nature was a perplexing issue. Their reasoning can be extrapolated to some degree from the justification they gave in *An Apology*, though each student of their theology must keep their own council regarding the Separatist's consistency or reasonableness in these matters.

One reason that might be anticipated from the Separatists was that marriage was nowhere given in the New Testament as a prescribed duty of the minister or ordinance of the Church. Johnson and Ainsworth cited 2 Timothy 3: 16,17, to indicate that God had called the minister to the preaching of the word and attendance upon civil ceremonies such as marriage provided an unwelcome distraction from the minister's central task. Their second reason revealed a surprisingly mature understanding of a pluralistic society for English Separatists to hold. Though they had not reconciled the dichotomy, they were dealing with the tension between the Constantinian ideal and the reality of pluralism in the church and the larger society. Recognizing this problem of societal plurality, Johnson and Ainsworth wrote:

4. Because these things are such, as in the very nature of them, belong not to the church alone, but to all people of whatsoever Religion, estate, & c. I Cor. 7. 2 12.13. Luke 9.60. Heb. 13.4.

5. Els, where there were not the Ministerie & Church of Christ, there could be no lawfull marriages, & c., as among the Heathen, Turks, Papists, &c. Whereas the scripture showeth otherwise, approving svch to be lawfull man & wife notwithstanding. Gen. 39. I. 9. I King 14.2. Ester 1.9. Math. 27. 19.⁸¹

The entertaining misfortune of the Separatists was their penchant to sound harsh even when they were being uncharacteristically gracious to their adversaries. The term "Heathen" probably dispelled any warm feeling that might have arisen in the breast of a person outside the fold of Christ who read the confession. It also would not have been amenable to the "Papists" to see themselves listed among such company.

⁸¹Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 57.

There were fourteen of these positions in total, none reflecting anything not already enumerated as a canon held dear by the Ancient Church earlier in this research project. Johnson and Ainsworth neglected no point of doctrine, however minute, in their comprehensive demands for reform. The contrast was glaring between the tentative and cautious approach of the Puritans and the very open manner in which Johnson and Ainsworth propounded their own views. There was nothing of the politician in either man, including the sense of finesse, openness to compromise, and appreciation for decorum that attended the political mindset.

Johnson and Ainsworth concluded the treatise with another extended plea defining the terms of their suit. Accepting that they would not gain the ability to steer the course of the nation for the foreseeable future, the Separatists instead hoped to gain in England the freedoms they enjoyed in Amsterdam. They pleaded:

That it would please his Maiesty, that we may be suffered to live here in peace, professing and practicing the truth of the Gospell by vs now witnessed, without molestation; as the French and Dutch Churches are, notwithstanding the differences from the hierarchie & worship of the church of England: we carrying our selves as loyall subiects, and leaving the suppressing, abolishing or reforming of the abuses that we wisse against to his Maiestyes discretion.⁸²

Johnson and Ainsworth then reprinted some materials from the Separatist martyrs of 1593 that argued their innocence of the charges that had sealed their fates. A letter from Henry Barrow, written shortly before his execution, was reproduced in its entirety. A section of that letter was interesting because it demonstrated another Separatist ambiguity that would cause Johnson to ultimately reassess his position on baptism and its relation to the position of a visible church in relation to the kingdom of God. Barrow had been accused of teaching that Queen Elizabeth had never been baptized because she had

⁸²Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 82.

received her baptism from the Established Church. Barrow was quick to deny that he had made such a statement:

More particularly, to the first, concerning the Queen's baptism; I answered, that it was utterly mistaken, both contrary to my meaning & to my expresse words in that place of my book, as manifestly there appeareth to any indifferent reader: That I purposely defended her Maiesties baptism received, against such as hold the baptism given in Popery to be no baptism at all; where I proved, that it needed not to be repeated: yet there I also shewed such baptism given in Poperie, not to seall God's covenant to the church in that estate: & therefore that the abuse ought by all that had there received it, to be repented.⁸³

Barrow's dilemma extended to the population at large. Most of them had been baptized into either the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church. The Separatists themselves had not required adult members to be baptized again. They only required the children to be baptized for the first time in a rightly-ordered Separatist congregation. Barrow's argument that the baptism itself was efficacious in an aberrant congregation, but the baptism itself did not sanctify the practices of that church was somewhat disjointed. Though Jacob himself increasingly gravitated toward a more independent position after Hampton Court, his point to Johnson regarding the latter's total rejection of the Church of England still lingered. How much corruption could a congregation suffer before it became no longer a congregation before God? Was a congregation any less a Christian congregation if it had some flaws but remained true to the essentials of faith in Christ? The question of baptism and its relation to questions of church identity and purity became a major issue in the years following the Hampton Court Conference for Francis Johnson.

The aftermath of the Hampton Court Conference was a disastrous experience for the Puritan wing of the Church of England. The Royal proclamations of 1604 required

⁸³Johnson and Ainsworth, *An Apology*, 82.

Puritans to take an oath of allegiance to the royal supremacy in the ecclesiastical realm, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer. Action against nonconforming ministers was to be swift and uncompromising.⁸⁴ Puritan ministers were now brought to an even more difficult choice in a church that allowed little latitude for dissent. Many of them finally accepted the inevitability of separation. Some of them settled in Amsterdam and caused an explosive conclusion to the story of the Ancient Church.

A new category of Reformed English Christians emerged from the Hampton Court Conference and the Royal Pronouncements of 1604. This group of people was so elusive that they are difficult for historians to classify. The difficulty emerges because they, like the more radical Separatists represented by the Ancient Church, were not as uniform in belief and practice as a cursory examination of their history might indicate. The terms “Independents”, “semi-Separatists”, and “moderate Separatists” have all been used to describe them. Henry Jacob was one good example of their trajectory from Puritanism to a Separatist stance independent of the English Church but still open to dialogue and cooperation. For the purposes of this study, the author prefers to use the term “Congregational Independents” for the reasons stated below.⁸⁵ Their story and the

⁸⁴Milward, *Jacobean Age*, 4-5.

⁸⁵Slayden Yarborough proposed the term “moderate Separatist” to describe the new position of Henry Jacob in relation to both English Separatism and Puritanism. Yarborough was reacting negatively to the use of the term “semi-Separatism” by many scholars of Jacob. He also did not agree with Champlin Burrage’s term, “Congregational Puritans.” Both terms indicated a conviction that Jacob and his ilk had never really Separated from the Church of England. I agree with Yarborough that there is ample evidence that a genuine separation took place between churches like Jacob’s and the Established Church, but I prefer the term “Congregational Independents” because they embrace Separation as a necessity rather than a virtue. Their heart was still hopeful of better things for the Church of England. Yarborough, *Henry Jacob*, 18-28. Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, 280.

complexity their arrival caused the Ancient Church will be discussed through the balance of this chapter and in chapter six.

Johnson returned from Hampton Court more convinced than ever that the Church of England was an apostate communion. In 1608, Johnson wrote his last exhaustive treatise focusing on the Church of England. *Certayne reasons and arguments proving that it is not lawfull to heare or have any spirituall communion with the present ministerie of the Church of England* contained a series of seven statements or propositions arguing many of the same points Johnson had already advanced in print elsewhere.⁸⁶ This treatise was drafted as a restatement of the essential values of the Ancient Church to distinguish the congregation from another church that had recently been established in Amsterdam.

4. *An Arrow For the Separatists: John Paget and the English Reformed Church At Amsterdam*

Before leaving the discussion of Francis Johnson's interaction with other persons holding to a Reformed theological view, the acrimonious relationship between Francis Johnson's Ancient Church and John Paget's English Reformed Church at Amsterdam must be presented. Just as Johnson's dialogue with Jacob began a few years before the chronological placement of this chapter, Johnson's conflict with Paget extended to the end of his life. In all the controversies that will be discussed in chapters five and six, Paget was constantly observing from the wings and always ready to cast a critical aspersion on his rivals.

⁸⁶Francis Johnson, *Certayne reasons and arguments proving that it is not lawfull to heare or have any spirituall communion with the present ministerie of the Church of England*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1608).

The Ancient Church enjoyed the distinction of being the sole English language church in Amsterdam for a few years. As other Separatist groups began to arrive from England, they also provided an outlet for persons who wanted to worship in the English language and style. These churches were still predominantly Separatist churches. Mathew Slade, the excommunicated former elder of the Ancient Church who served as rector of the Amsterdam Latin School, was the chief promoter of this venture. He filed a written complaint with the Dutch Reformed Consistory against the Separatists in 1605. Slade implored them to establish an English language church for English people residing in the city who also were not Separatists. The English Reformed Church was constituted as an English language ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1607. John Paget (d. 1638), an Englishman from Leicestershire, was chosen as the church's first pastor. Paget was a nonconformist Puritan who was radically devoted to the Presbyterian system as the God-ordained form of church government. He had been educated at Trinity College, Cambridge and had received his Master of Arts in 1598. He was forced to leave England after Hampton Court; he served as a chaplain to English troops in the Netherlands, he and finally arrived at Amsterdam to assume the leadership of the newly constituted English Reformed Church.⁸⁷

Paget's most direct attack on Separatism was directed at Ainsworth in 1618. In that year Paget wrote a treatise entitled *An Arrow Against the Separation*.⁸⁸ He and Ainsworth shared a love for the study of the Bible in the original languages and often

⁸⁷Keith L. Sprunger, "Paget, John (d. 1638)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21114> (accessed June 4, 2006). Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 63, 91-122.

⁸⁸John Paget, *An arrow against the separation of the Brownists Also an admonition touching Talmudique & rabbinical allegations*. (Amsterdam : George Veseler, 1618).

debated points of doctrine at their leisure. They differed radically on matters of church organization. Paget's rigid Presbyterianism was completely inflexible. He wrote in his *Defence of Church Government* that the Presbyterian system was "appointed by God."⁸⁹

Though Paget's writing was directed at Ainsworth long after he and Johnson had gone their separate ways, Paget and his church were a constant presence putting more pressure on the Ancient Church at a time when the controversies with both John Smyth and Henry Ainsworth were threatening to split the Ancient Church into isolated Separatist enclaves. John Paget's church offered a Reformed alternative to the Separatist churches in Amsterdam. The exiles coming from England in the wake of Hampton Court and the measures that followed could find Reformed theology in a context governed in a fashion more in keeping with their background and preferences.⁹⁰

Paget's *An Arrow Against the Separation* was actually being written during the conflict between Ainsworth and Johnson from 1609-12. He was responding to a work critical of his own ministry published by Henry Ainsworth in 1611 entitled *An arrowv against idolatrie Taken out of the quiver of the Lord of hosts*.⁹¹ Paget was highly critical of the congregational style employed by the Separatists. A few members of his congregation were people who had left the Ancient Church during the various conflicts experienced by the church and had joined Paget's congregation. Paget sometimes

⁸⁹John Paget, *A defence of church-government, exercised in presbyteriall, classicall, & synodall assemblies, according to the practise of the reformed churches touching I. the power of a particular eldership against those that plead for a meere popular government, specially Mr Ainsvorth in his Animadversion to Mr Clyft, &c. II. the authority of classes and synods, against the patrons of independencie, answering in this poynt Mr Davenport his Apologeticall reply*, (London : H.A. for Thomas Vnderhill ..., 1641).

⁹⁰Alice Clare Carter, *The English Reformed Church in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century*, (Amsterdam: Scheltema and Holkema NV, 1964), 52-56.

⁹¹Henry Ainsworth, *An arrowv against idolatrie Taken out of the quiver of the Lord of hosts*, (Amsterdam, Giles Thorp, 1611, reprinted 1624).

struggled with former Separatists who hesitated to submit to the strong eldership of Paget's church or the governing authority of the Classis of Amsterdam and the Synod of North Holland.⁹²

Ainsworth had accused Paget of idolatry due to the strong eldership of his congregation, their observance of holidays, and use of the Lord's Prayer in worship. The place where the English Reformed Church met, the Begynhof (or Begijnhof) Chapel, had formerly been used for the celebration of the Roman mass, making it unclean in Ainsworth's estimation.⁹³ The Chapel was originally a foundation of the Beguines in the fourteenth century. The Beguines were deprived of their chapel after Roman Catholicism was overthrown in Holland in 1578 but retained their private homes in the same courtyard. The chapel was given to Paget and his church by the city of Amsterdam in 1607.⁹⁴ Ainsworth attacked Paget chiefly on the issue of endorsing ecclesiastical structures above the local church:

19 So is it in all other religious ordinances of humane invention: as when Antichristians set forth new Sacraments to seal up Gods grace and remission of sins; what is it, but as if some falser should make conveyances of crown land, seal them with a signet of his own counterfeit making, and call it by the name of the Kings privie seal. When they make a new form or frame of Churches, as to be Provinciaall, Nationall, Oecumenicall, with Arch-preists and Prelates to over-awe them: mought they not with as good right alter the form of the Common-wealth, making new Ditions and Iurisdictions, with Curions, Decurions, and other new Magistrates to controul them? When they make solemn daies of assembly, and call them *holy*; when they make new books, canons, constitutions, ceremonies, and call them *Ecclesiasticall, sacred*.⁹⁵

⁹²Alice Clare Carter, *English Reformed Church*, 54-56.

⁹³Alice Clare Carter, *English Reformed Church*, 56-57. Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 92-92.

⁹⁴Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 92-94. http://www.begijnhofamsterdam.nl/index_engels.html, (June 6, 2006).

⁹⁵Henry Ainsworth, *An Arrow*, 14.

Paget's reply to Ainsworth in 1618 revealed his mature understanding of Separatism as it had developed in the early seventeenth-century. Paget replied, "Of those that separate from the Church of God, there are many sorts: Though the Brownists assume unto themselves the title of Separation, and call themselves the Churches of the Separation, yet is not this title sufficient to distinguish them." His reply to Ainsworth addressed the matters between them, especially in defense of his church's polity. Johnson himself never wrote in reply to Paget largely because he was too preoccupied with the controversies with Smyth and Ainsworth. Ironically, Paget and Johnson found themselves on the same side of the eldership issue, though Johnson would never have endorsed the synodical structure of the Dutch Reformed Church. Paget and his church will return to take their place in the controversies discussed in chapter six.

5. *Summary*

The years from 1603-1608 were a time of growth and consolidation for Francis Johnson and the Ancient Church. Johnson had the opportunity in his debate with Jacob and his petition to King James I at Hampton Court to expound his views on separation and church order to a wider audience. They benefited numerically from the continuing stream of religious exiles fleeing from James' England. Johnson also appeared to be vindicated theologically by the frustration of Puritan hopes for a reformation under King James. The foundation of John Paget's English Reformed Church at Amsterdam portended the coming of days when the Ancient Church would have to fight for its position as the most prominent beacon for English exiles in Amsterdam. The beginnings of Congregational Independency exemplified in the career of Henry Jacob insured that the debate concerning degrees of separation and cooperation would continue.

Francis Johnson continued to exhibit a congregational view of church polity in his treatises during this period of his life. Although charges to the contrary were being made by dissidents, the official stance of the Ancient Church was devoted to rule by the congregation and an eldership subject to the power of that ruling congregation. Johnson had always had Presbyterian tendencies but had subsumed them under the consensus forged by the congregation's leaders to end the ecclesiological ambiguity left by Barrow and Greenwood. Johnson had no inkling that all of his doubts about the wisdom of congregational rule and new vexing questions would be provoked by the arrival of his former pupil, John Smyth. Smyth's example horrified Johnson and caused him to reunite eventually with his Puritan roots, convinced that the twin enemies of Arminianism and Anabaptism were far more dangerous than any set prayer or the wearing of a surplice. Johnson's struggle against these two errors lasted until his final days.

CHAPTER FIVE

Against Two Errors: Baptists, Anabaptists, and John Smyth

1. Introduction

Of which common lot and wonted condition of the CHURCH, we for our part have had our common portion and experience, many times and sundry wayes: And now of late (as also sometime heretofore) by that which hath fallen out among us, in such as forsaken the truth of Christ, and are seduced with the error of the Anabaptists. A case wofull and lamentable, in many respects: yet such as the Lord (I trust) who worketh all things for the best to them that love him, will turn to great good, both for the good, both for the truth it self, in the clearing of it; and for the Churches of Christ, in the more freeing us from the imputation of Anabaptistry, which hath most unjustly been laid upon us, and are like to cause further manifestation of these and other things by divers of us.¹

Francis Johnson had reached the zenith of his influence by 1607. Having defended Separatist principles in debate with Jacob and in *An Apology*, Johnson was widely recognized as the most significant Separatist leader. Puritan ministers within the Anglican Church who had been forced to reconsider their stance in the debate concerning Separation naturally looked to the Ancient Church as a guiding influence as they sought to constitute and define their own covenant communities. Henoeh Clapham (1585-1614), a former member of the Ancient Church who led a rival congregation in Amsterdam for one year before returning to the Church of England in 1598, noted Johnson's growing

¹Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise Containing Some Grounds and Reasons Against Two Errors of the Anabaptists*, (London: M. S for B. Allen, 1645), Preface to the Reader.

influence in both the Netherlands and England.² In a statement defending the validity of church hierarchy, Clapham insisted:

The Bishop of *Brownisme* (Johnson) must needs in this, ioyned with mee, seeing his Established Church at *Amsterdam* in *Netherland*, exerciseth authoritie ouer some assemblies in *England* and elsewhere; which is a Bishoppricke of more length, by many hundred myles, then any Bishop in *England* hath: besides that, betweene him and some of his Sheepes dwelling plots, there is a large Sea, if not Seas, by the which he is not like to ride, somuch as once in a yeare through the Suburbes of his Church, for keeping Visitations. But what doe I following that squeaking Lapwinge?³

A congregation led by Johnson's former pupil, John Smyth, counted themselves among the number of Johnson's "sheepes" who were dwelling across the "Sea." Smyth and his followers decided to join Johnson in Amsterdam in 1607/08 when persecution against their church demonstrated the impossibility of comfortable practice of their religious preferences in England. They arrived in Amsterdam with the expectation of cooperation with the Ancient Church. The length and extent of their fellowship with the Ancient Church was uncertain, but the causes of its end were highly publicized and have been fervently debated. John Smyth and Francis Johnson had been intimately associated since Smyth's early days as a student at Christ's College, Cambridge. Smyth's defection from Separatism and scandalous act of "Se-baptism" proved embarrassing and personally painful for his former Tutor.

Johnson had grappled with his tendency to claim firmer control of the congregation throughout all the terrible disputes of the congregation's early years in

²Alexandra Walsham, "Clapham, Henoah (fl. 1585–1614)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5431> (accessed June 7, 2006).

³Henoah Clapham, *A chronological discourse touching, 1 The Church. 2 Christ. 3 Anti-Christ. 4 Gog & Magog. &c. The substaunce whereof, was collected about some 10. or 11. yeares since (as may be gathered by an epistle prefixed before a tractate, called, The visible Christian) but now digested into better order; and first published, by the author himselfe*, (London, 1609), Ch. 12, 5.

Amsterdam. He was so affected by his former pupil's rejection of the Separatist way and the lack of discipline it seemed to indicate within the Separatist fold that he actively began to promote a stronger eldership. Johnson's great fear was that Separatism might logically lead to Anabaptism if proper controls were not in place. Those controls were firm congregational control by Ruling Elders and sound doctrinal instruction by Teaching Elders. In order to prevent further losses to Anabaptism and Arminianism, Johnson asserted a stronger view of Eldership. That decision would prove to be quite costly. In attempting to insure his congregation stayed together, Francis Johnson tore it apart.

2. *Teacher and Student: Francis Johnson and John Smyth's Cambridge Years*

Francis Johnson was appointed a Fellow of Christ's College in 1584.⁴ As described in chapter one of this study, his duties were quite extensive and included the responsibility to serve as Tutor for at least three or four students housed at the College. The Tutor directed his student's readings, kept watch on their monetary situation, sometimes rode home with them during the summer, and was charged with fostering the student's devotional life. Parents could often petition for their child to be placed with a particular Tutor. Colleges even catered to students from certain geographical regions.⁵

John Smyth matriculated at Christ's College in March, 1586. Smyth was classified as a Sizar, a designation that indicated Smyth's parents were probably not people of great means. A Sizar was a student who worked for Fellows and Tutors of their

⁴John Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505-1905 And of the Earlier Foundation, God's House 1448-1505*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 150-51.

⁵Elisabeth Leedham Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63-64.

college as a servant in order to pay expenses. These students were generally not able to afford to pay tuition and fees without such a vocation.⁶

W. T. Whitley of King's College provided a more detailed portrait of how that relationship worked from the student point of view in his biographical introduction to *The Works of John Smyth*. Whitley described a typical day for a student who was attached as pupil to a Fellow. The description he shared revealed how intimate these relationships could become after several years. Whitley attributed some details of the description to John Peile, former Master of the College:

A sizar would awaken his tutor, valet him and tidy the chamber in time for chapel at five o'clock, when morning prayer was often followed by an address from a Fellow. Then he would get the bevers, or morning-draught of ale for his tutor, with perhaps a manchets from the buttery. As each Fellow had recently had his allowance for commons increased to three shillings a week, there would be more left for the sizar. . . . For a sizar, the preparations for dinner would be important, to spread the high table, to fetch one of his tutor's two napkins, provided lest he be tempted to misuse the tablecloth, to hang the towel and fill the bowls for ablutions after the meal. The Fellows gathered on the Regent Walk, from the gate to the Hall, marched in at ten o'clock for the chief repast of the day. When they had finished and the sizars, like stewards on a liner to-day (1915), had satisfied their appetites as far as the leavings permitted, the hall was cleared for more work. This time the seniors were set to oppositions in philosophy and theology, the juniors listening. Some afternoons were spent at more general sophisms, or discussions, or lectures on philosophy and logic.⁷

Whitley further indicated that the students would gather at 6 o'clock for the morning lectures, which would have been delivered by Johnson and his colleagues. Logic, dialectic, philosophy, and poetry were the subjects most emphasized in these lecture periods. If the students excelled in their studies, they might be given free afternoons to enjoy more physical pursuits. Sizars might sometimes be sent into town to run errands

⁶Peile, *Biographical Register*, vii-viii, 185.

⁷W. T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth: Fellow of Christ's College 1594-8*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), xix-xx.

for Fellows of the College. They might also sometimes be invited on excursions with their Tutor. For instance:

His tutor might occasionally want a walk in the country and might take along his sizar to carry the herbs and flowers he plucked; and so a native of fen-land would learn to scale the heights of the Godmagog Hills. Perhaps in some fit of generosity he might be taken to see a rarity such as a crocodile brought for exhibition. Such diversions are duly noted in the diary of Samuel Ward a few years later.⁸

One could reasonably envision excursions into the country to escape the regimented pace of life at Christ's. These trips could easily become teaching moments in themselves as Tutor and Sizar observed the glories of nature and discussed the meaning of life and creation. The close association of Johnson and Smyth in such an insular system raised so many possible points of influence between the two. The student of their lives and works is sadly left to speculate on the specifics of their time together and long for a diary or set of personal references that have not been found to exist at this point.

Having spent the day in readings, lectures, and debate, the typical Christ's student closed the day with worship. Whitley wrote:

As evening drew on, chapel filled again, and the old organ led the praise. At five o'clock all assembled for the second meal, and when all was cleared away in hall, and the fire was replenished for the Fellows and Scholars, the sizar must withdraw to his cold chamber for study as prescribed by his tutor; unless he had made friends with the cook and could nestle in the warm kitchen. By nine in winter the curfew at Great St. Mary's gave the signal for bed, though an hour's grace was allowed in summer.⁹

After Smyth's third year, he would have been taken by Johnson to the larger University Schools, incorporating students from all the colleges. After a year of university training, the student would prepare for examinations and receive the Bachelor

⁸Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, xxi.

⁹Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, xx-xxi.

of Arts on successful completion of the examinations. The fourth year would present the Christ's College students with an opportunity to meet with students from other colleges, something not possible while they were largely sequestered in their particular colleges.¹⁰ It is fortunate for Smyth that primary responsibility for his education by his final year shifted to the larger university. Peile estimated that Smyth received his B. A. in 1589/90, while his former Tutor was incarcerated.¹¹

Smyth was immersed in the same Puritan context as Johnson. He was also under the direct influence of Johnson, whose Puritan and Presbyterian convictions have been abundantly demonstrated earlier in this research project. Despite these atmospheric influences, Smyth did not appear to be deeply attracted to Puritan ideals. Following the completion of his B. A. in 1588/89 and M. A. in 1593, his career did not reflect any radical views or challenges to authority until he was dismissed from his lectureship at Lincoln in 1602.¹² Smyth was elected a Fellow of Christ's and served in that capacity from 1594-1598.¹³ There was no record of any major disturbances on Smyth's part during his service as a Fellow either. He was a typical Cambridge scholar and obviously planned a career as a priest in the Church of England. If Smyth had any inclinations toward radical Puritan views at the time, it is likely that the example of Johnson and Bainbrigg discouraged any open demonstration of those views.

¹⁰W. T. Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, xxi.

¹¹Peile, *Biographical Register*, 185.

¹²Peile, *Biographical Register*, 185-86.

¹³Peile, *Biographical Register*, 185-86.

3. John Smyth's Curious Theological Formation

What John Smyth was and when he became whatever he became is the interesting dilemma that irritated his contemporaries to no end and fascinates historians. The most recent treatment of his theology by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Jason K. Lee provides a glimpse into Smyth's changing theological views. *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite* represented Lee's attempt to categorize the different theological stages Smyth passed through before reaching his final stage as a petitioner for admittance to a Mennonite congregation in 1612.¹⁴ Lee's work is a fine attempt to deal with a subject who was not at all conducive to easy classification. It will be necessary to interact with Lee's book throughout the course of this chapter. While the overall work is solid and Lee's categories are well drawn, there will be occasion to question what his classification of Smyth as a "Baptist" really means and how it relates to the astonishing theological transformations Smyth initiated in a very short span of time.¹⁵

To further illustrate the complexity of defining who this man was, one needs look no further than a series of journal articles that appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1984. James Coggins, editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* and author of a study of Smyth entitled *John Smyth's Congregation*, published an article in a spring issue devoted to Smyth entitled "The Theological Positions of John Smyth."¹⁶ His essay and the use of

¹⁴Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth: Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003).

¹⁵Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 71-83.

¹⁶James R. Coggins, "The Theological Positions of John Smyth," *Baptist Quarterly*, 30 (April 1984, p. 247-264. James R. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991).

the plural served as a perfect illustration of the problem they were addressing in the form of John Smyth. The scholars who contributed to the issue each had their own opinions of Smyth's organizing theological emphases. Douglas Shantz, Assistant Professor of Western Religions at the University of Calgary, determined that the dominant theological theme in Smyth's thought was the resurrected Christ.¹⁷ Stephen Brachlow, then of the North American Baptist Seminary, did not offer a definitive center for Smyth's theology in his "John Smyth and the Ghost of Anabaptism: A Rejoinder." Brachlow's purpose was to reinforce the view that John Smyth's primary influences were Puritan and Separatist, not Anabaptist.¹⁸ B. R. White, emeritus principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, offered the concept of covenant as the most likely center for Smyth's theology.¹⁹ Later, Jason Lee provided an analysis of these articles and their contribution to the study of Smyth in his *The Theology of John Smyth*.²⁰ Lee captured the essence of the question when he chose to divide his theological assessment of Smyth into categories based on Smyth's theological positions. One does not approach Smyth by asking for a center for his theology, rather one must determine what his theology was at certain points as he was developing and discover what was central to his theology at those points. It will be beneficial to the study of Francis Johnson to attempt to navigate the rather turbulent waters of Smyth's theological development in recounting the story of his first theological

¹⁷Douglas Shantz, "The Place of the Resurrected Christ in the Writings of John Smyth," *Baptist Quarterly* 30 (April 1984), 199-203.

¹⁸Stephen Brachlow, "John Smyth and the Ghost of Anabaptism: A Rejoinder," *Baptist Quarterly* 30 (April 1984), 296-300.

¹⁹B. R. White, "The English Separatists and John Smyth Revisited," *Baptist Quarterly* 30 (April 1984), 344-47.

²⁰Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth*, 151-56.

transition. This transition began with his assumption of the leadership of a Separatist congregation in England, his congregation's arrival in Amsterdam, and their decision to pursue other theological directions.

Smyth was granted a lucrative lectureship in the city of Lincoln in 1600. He was appointed to the office for life by the Mayor Edward Dynnys of Lincoln in 1602.

Unfortunately, the mayor was engaged in a power struggle that resulted in Smyth's appointment being revoked. Smyth was accused of preaching against the Lord's Prayer at Lincoln in 1604.²¹ This accusation was the occasion for Smyth's defense of his views on the Lord's Prayer that was mentioned in chapter four of this research project. Smyth's association with Johnson at Cambridge could not have been a positive contribution to his defense against these charges. Lee correctly affirmed that Smyth's position expressed in *A Pattern of True Prayer* (1605) was clearly that of a Puritan minister who was faithful to the Established Church.²²

Smyth preached without a position in Lincoln until he was granted permission to preach in the province of Canterbury on March 23, 1602. Lincoln was located in the ecclesiastical province of Canterbury, giving Smyth the opportunity to continue preaching in the city from time to time. Archbishop Whitgift revoked Smyth's license to preach in June 1603, in response to a complaint from Bishop William Chaderton of Lincoln. Smyth began preaching at Gainsborough to a congregation whose minister, Jerome Phillips, was often absent. Smyth received a reprimand for his efforts and was

²¹Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth*, 43. Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, Vol. I xliii-xlvi. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 32.

²²Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 44. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 32-33.

forced to defend himself again against charges of separatism. In addition to his preaching, Smyth had begun to practice medicine to earn a living.²³

Smyth and his fellow Puritan ministers were forced to face the prospect of separation after the Hampton Court Conference. Two of the most influential aristocratic patrons of the Puritan faction within the Church of England were Sir William Bowes and his wife, Isabel, of Coventry. Sir William Bowes was one of the men that petitioned for Francis Johnson's release on bail and offered to pay it while he was imprisoned at Cambridge. Lady Bowes invited prominent Puritan ministers to her home to discuss their course of action in light of the new ecclesiastical situation. Arthur Hildersham, Johnson's disputant while in the Clink, was among them. Hildersham's agenda was likely to convince the ministers to continue serving the Church of England.²⁴ The date of the conference is uncertain but it most likely took place some time in 1606.²⁵

The conference at Sir William Bowes' house in 1606 was the first time that Smyth began to exhibit evidence of separatist tendencies. A serious discrepancy existed between Smyth's memory of what he said at the conference and the recollections of other attendees. Smyth's reference to the conference appeared in his *Parallels, Censures, and Observations* which was written as a response to charges made by Richard Bernard, minister at Worksop.²⁶ Bernard had been present at the conference and had chosen to remain affiliated with the Church of England though he continued to criticize staunchly

²³Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 44-46. W. T. Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, liv-lvii.

²⁴Whitley, lvi-lix.

²⁵B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 121-22.

²⁶Whitley, 331, 534.

the ecclesiastical abuses of the Church's hierarchy. Bernard reiterated the original charges he had made against Smyth in a work entitled *Plaine evidences The Church of England is apostolicall, the separation schismaticall. Directed against Mr. Ainsworth the Separatist, and Mr. Smith the Se-baptist: both of them seuerally opposing the booke called the Separatists schisme* published in 1610.²⁷ Bernard accused:

Fourthly, hee fell to it againe, and went vnto diuers Ministers, godly and learned, in conferring with whom hee came resolu'd of the trvth against the way of the Separation: of his Prayer, of his solemne thanksgiving, of his purpose to go to Amsterdame to reclaime his Tutor Mr. Iohnson, I have spoken in my booke (the *Separatist Schisme*), page 37. the truth whereof will be confirmed by the oathes of Mr Hi (Hildersham): Mr. N., and Mr. Ho: of whom I haue heard these things with their protestation of the truth, whatsoever he affirmith in his owne priuate cause to the contrary.²⁸

Bernard accused Smyth of duplicity in stating that his purpose for going to Amsterdam was to reclaim Johnson for the Church of England when he in fact planned to join Johnson. Smyth denied these repeated accusations and claimed that he had not yet made up his mind what course he would pursue when the conference met in 1606. Smyth insisted:

But in this Likelyhood you have a fling at me in particular Mr. Ber, charging me With diuers vntruths, which I wil manifest.
That I doubted 9 months I acknowledge: but that ever I did acknowledge the Separation for truth, & separated from the English assemblies, & then returned again vnto them (which you do say) I do vtterly deny, & I appeale to the towne of Ganesbrugh, & those there that knew my footsteps in this matter: & therfor herein I indite you as a publique slaunderer.
2. Whereas you say I became satisfied at Coventree after conference had with certayne Ministers, and herevpon kneeled downe and praisd God: I answer:

²⁷Richard Bernard, *Plaine evidences The Church of England is apostolicall, the separation schismaticall. Directed against Mr. Ainsworth the Separatist, and Mr. Smith the Se-baptist: both of them seuerally opposing the booke called the Separatists schisme*, (London: Printed by T. Snodham for Edward Weauer, 1610), 18-19.

²⁸Richard Bernard, 19.

I did not conferre with them about the Separation as you & they know wel enough in your consciences: but about withdrawing from true Churches, Ministers, and Worship, corrupted: Wherein I received no satisfaction, but rather thought I had given instruction to them: and for kneeling downe to praise God I confesse I did, being requested to performe the duty at night after the conference by the Ministers: but that I praised God for resolution of my doubts, I deny to death and you also are a slaunderer: I praised God for the quiet and peaceable conference, & such like matters, and desired pardon of the L. for ignorance, & errors, & weaknes of judgment, & any disordered caryage: if the ministers that heard my prayers & praises of God did misconstrue my meaning let them look vnto it.²⁹

If one accepts Smyth's account as sincere, his conversion to Separatist ideals would have been complete by 1607. It is difficult to assess whether Smyth actually made those comments Bernard indicated or something to the effect that was misconstrued by the other attendees. It is probable that Smyth, if he was indeed undecided, may have been inconsistent in what he said regarding Separatism or misunderstood by the others.

Smyth determined to form his own company of followers into an organized congregation. He wrote his *Principles and Inferences of the Visible Church* in 1607 to describe the proper organization of a Christian church.³⁰ His congregation's church covenant was similar to the covenant Francis Johnson had drawn up for his congregation at Middleburgh in 1591.³¹ Smyth may have corresponded with Johnson or visited him in Amsterdam in 1606/07.³² While such a visit or correspondence was possible, Smyth also needed nothing further than a copy of *An Apology* or the *Trve Confession* to discern the shape of Johnson's ecclesiology. The congregation was divided into two groups due to the distance between the members. John Smyth was the pastor of one group at

²⁹Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, Vol. II, 534-35.

³⁰Lee, *Theology*, 47. Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, 249-68.

³¹Lee, 47, White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 124.

³²Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, lxi. Coggins, *Congregation*, 34.

Gainesborough while John Robinson (1575-1625) and Richard Clifton (1553-1616), two nonconforming ministers, led another branch of Smyth's congregation at Scrooby. Some doubt concerning which of the men, Robinson or Clifton, was the chief minister of the Scrooby group exists. They may have shared responsibility as co-pastors.³³

Smyth demonstrated a strong affinity with the Ancient Church and its leaders in his *Principles and Inferences of the Visible Church*. Smyth affirmed the offices of Pastor, Teacher, Elders, Deacons, and Widows.³⁴ He included provisions for church discipline that prescribed excommunication and shunning of excommunicated persons.³⁵ Like the Ancient Church at the time, a sentence of excommunication could only be enforced after the case had been presented to the entire congregation. Smyth's congregation was constituted on the basis of a covenant that expressed faithfulness to God and mutual faithfulness to the faithful.³⁶ While Smyth's statement of church order was structured differently, he appeared to be familiar with the *True Confession* and adhered to the substance of Johnson and Ainsworth's views.

Smyth was fortunate to have among his congregation an affluent Nottinghamshire attorney named Thomas Helwys (1575-1614).³⁷ His home at Broxtowe Hall in

³³Proponents of Robinson's sole leadership are Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 92-92. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 35, and Timothy George, *John Robinson and The English Separatist Tradition*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982), 84-85. W. T. Whitley speculated that Robinson and Clifton may have shared leadership responsibilities in an informal sense and saw themselves as part of a single congregational unit under Smyth. Whitley, lxvi-lxvii.

³⁴Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, 260-63. Coggins, *Congregation*, 35.

³⁵Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, 262.

³⁶Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, 254.

³⁷Stephen Wright, "Helwys, Thomas (c.1575–c.1614)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12880> (accessed June 6, 2006).

Nottingham served as an early meeting place for Separatist leaders, and his wealth supported their aspirations. Smyth lodged with Helwys in 1606 while recovering from an illness, and Helwys had known Richard Clifton for several years. Helwys probably joined Smyth's congregation in 1607. His leadership, financial backing, and connections were an invaluable help when the group was forced to leave England in 1607/08.

Intensified persecution directed at his congregation forced Smyth to consider the possibility of leaving England. The logical destination for the congregation was Amsterdam, where they might find support and fellowship from the Ancient Church. The arrest of Joan Helwys, Thomas' wife, and several other members of the Smyth congregation in June 1607, convinced Smyth that the time had come to make serious plans to leave the country.³⁸

The congregation's immigration to the Netherlands most likely took place in stages from the fall of 1607 to the spring of 1608. Their initial expectation surely must have been to join either with the Ancient Church or exist in close communion with them. It would seem strange that Smyth would be going to Amsterdam with the intent to establish a rival congregation. While many scholars have expressed legitimate doubts concerning whether Smyth's group ever actually joined the Ancient Church, there is little doubt that Smyth expected a harmonious relationship between his congregation and the Ancient Church. There is no reason to expect that Smyth would have anticipated not joining the Ancient Church. There were several other cities, Leiden being only one of them, Smyth could have chosen if he intended to replicate a separate congregation like Johnson's. Whatever his intentions, Smyth discovered upon his arrival that there would be little harmony or cooperation between the congregations.

³⁸Lee, 49.

4. *Dissension and Deviation: John Smyth and the Ancient Church*

It would be helpful at this point to take stock of the condition of the Ancient Church in 1607/08 when Smyth and his group were first arriving. William Bradford, a member of the Robinson/Clifton wing of the congregation, was probably among the last members of Smyth's group to arrive in Amsterdam. His description of the Ancient Church early in 1608 served to illustrate the success Johnson and his congregation had achieved in Amsterdam. Bradford wrote:

Truly thee were in them many worthy men and if you had seen them in their bewty and order as wee haue don, you would have bin much affected therewith wee dare say; Att Amsterdam; before their deuision and breach they were about three hundred Communicants and they had for their Pastour and Teacher those two eminent men before named (Francis Johnson and Henry Aisnworth) and in our time four Graue men for Ruleing elders and three able and Godly men for deacons, one ancient widow for a deacones whoe did them seruice for many years though shee was sixty yeers of age when shee was Chosen shee honored her place and was an ornament to the Congregation shee vsually sate in a Convenient place in the Congregation; with a little birchen Rode in her hand; and kept little Children in Great awe from disturbing the Congregation shee did frequently visit the sicke and weake especially weomen and as there was need Called out maids and young weomen to watch and doe them other healpes as therire Necessitie did Require and if they were poor shee would Gather Releiffe for them of those that were able; or acquaint the deacons and shee was obeyed as a mother in Israell and an office of Christ.³⁹

Despite the harsh criticism the Ancient Church had endured, they seemed to be doing well and looking forward to improved future prospects in 1608.

The duration of Smyth's connection with the Ancient Church in whatever capacity could not have been long. Smyth published *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation* in 1608 for "the satisfaction of every true lover of the truth especially the Brethren of the Separation that are doubtful" and "removing of an Vnjust clumnie cast

³⁹Bradford, 139-40.

vppon the Brethren of the Separation of the second English Church at Amsterdam.”⁴⁰

Smyth’s use of the phrase “second English Church at Amsterdam” must have irritated Paget. While Smyth’s use of such a description for his congregation could possibly indicate that they never considered themselves part of the Ancient Church, it could also merely reflect their new status upon their separation from the Ancient Church. Smyth and his congregation would not have needed to formally join the Ancient Church to participate in its worship. Smyth’s detailed knowledge of the Ancient Church’s worship practices indicated that he had been in attendance for at least a few services. The available evidence indicated that Smyth and his congregation originally met with Johnson’s congregation in worship. Finding that they did not agree with the practice or spirit of the Ancient Church, Smyth’s congregation declined to join formally and established their own “second English congregation.”

Smyth set forth six principles that distinguished his congregation from the Separatists of the Ancient Church. These included:

1. Wee hould that the worship of the new testament properly so called is spirituall proceeding originally from the hart: & that reading out of a booke (though a lawful ecclesiastical action) is no part of spirituall worship, but rather the invention of the man of synne it being substituted for a part of spirituall worship.
1. Wee hould that seeing prophesying is a parte of spirituall worship: therefore in time of prophesying it is vnlawfull to have the booke as a helpe before the eye.
2. Wee hould the seeing singing a psalme is a part of spirituall worship therefore it is vnlawfull to have the booke before the eye in time of singinge a psalme.
3. Wee hould that the Presbytery of the church is vniforme; & that the triformed Presbyterie consisting of three kinds of Elders viz. Pastors Teachers Rulers is none of Gods Ordinance but mans devise.
4. Wee hould that all the Elders of the Church are Pastors: & that lay Elders (so called) are Antichristian.
5. Wee hould 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 Prayers & Thanksgiving.

⁴⁰W. T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, Vol. I, 269.

Smyth and his congregation had rejected the entire church structure that Johnson and the other Separatists advocated. In its place Smyth intended to erect a group of pastoral leaders and deacons who would serve the spiritual and material needs of his congregation. Smyth had clearly ceased to be a Separatist in the tradition of Barrow, Greenwood, and Johnson. Had he also ceased to be in the Reformed tradition theologically by 1608/09? There was no mention in this treatise of Smyth's views on original sin, election, or predestination. He seemed consumed in 1608 with defining his congregation in contrast to the Ancient Church in terms of ecclesiology.

Johnson did not attack Smyth initially on the issue of his ecclesiological views. He stated his reasons in the preface to *A Brief Treatise Containing Some Grounds and Reasons Against Two Errors of the Anabaptists*. Johnson wrote:

Wherefore (leaving the answer of the books which they have set forth , to such as are specially interested and imployed therein) I have thought good now to publish this Treatise following: wherein are contained some Grounds and Reasons written heretofore, against their errors about Baptisme. Whereunto, if he that challengeth all, shall make answer directly to the reasons and confirmations here set down, I shall have occasion (as others already have) to write further, and more particularly hereof, and by the assistance of God, to maintain this faith once given to the Saints, against any opposition hee can bring thereabout.⁴¹

Johnson's reasons for leaving the Separatist challenge to Smyth's attacks on the Ancient Church's polity to "such as are specially interested and imployed therein" are unknown. He certainly was as well qualified as anyone to debate Smyth in that area. Johnson may have felt that he had argued every issue of polity that needed to be addressed to Smyth in *An Answer to Maister H Iacob and Certayne Reasons and Arguments*. For whatever reason, Johnson entrusted the defense of the Ancient Church's polity to Henry Ainsworth

⁴¹Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, Preface to the Reader.

and occupied himself with the question of baptism in his controversy with Smyth in 1609.

Johnson did respond to Smyth's ecclesiological ideas in 1617 when he published *A Christian Plea*. By that time Smyth was dead, and his church had been absorbed into the Mennonite community. Jason Lee highlighted some of the points Johnson emphasized in *A Christian Plea* that appeared to be refutations of positions Smyth had formerly held.⁴² It was true that some of the areas Johnson emphasized in his discussion of polity were points of disagreement with Smyth, but he does not mention his former pupil by name. Were it not for our knowledge of Smyth's positions on these issues, it would be difficult to discern the object of Johnson's comments. Johnson made them in the third section of *A Christian Plea* which he described as "Of some things which concern the worship of God, and order of the Church: especially of the Reformed Churches."⁴³

Johnson's ideal church government included a plurality of ministers to the end. He reasserted the need for both teaching and ruling elders to instruct and govern the church. Whereas Smyth had advocated a situation where several "pastors" served as leaders of the congregation, Johnson stated, "who may all of them (Elders) generally be called Pastors: yet so, as one of them shall be specially distinguished from the rest, in respect of his place & function, to be the Pastor (as more particularly called) under Iesus Christ the Archpastor."⁴⁴ Johnson related his polemic against plural leadership to

⁴²Lee, 56-59.

⁴³Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, (Amsterdam, 1617), 245.

⁴⁴Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 262.

Smyth's views on administering the sacraments. Smyth had been willing to allow any member of the congregation to administer communion if a minister was not present.⁴⁵

Johnson remained convinced that the Ancient Church's earlier practice of allowing only the minister to serve the Lord's Supper was valid. The role should be shared with no other persons in the congregation.⁴⁶

Other Separatists, Puritans, and Anglicans all responded to John Smyth's ecclesiological views. Their contributions will be considered in the next two sections of this chapter. They will be discussed later because most of them were composed after a pivotal turn in Smyth's theology that shaped the contours of their polemical approach to his ideas. In order to allow them to present their case in its proper context, it is necessary to describe first that pivotal turn.

5. Baptism and the Kingdom of God: Johnson, Smyth, and the Issue of Proper Baptism

While John Smyth's initial conflict with the Ancient Church merely proved to be a nuisance to Francis Johnson, his next act shocked almost everyone. Henry Ainsworth, still Johnson's loyal attack dog, composed a scathing indictment of Smyth's *Differences* entitled *Defense of the Holy Scriptures* in 1609. Ainsworth related the disturbing development that had occurred in Smyth's congregation since his publication of *Differences* in 1608. Rejecting Smyth's aspersions cast on the Ancient Church's worship, Ainsworth indicated that Smyth's practice proved that he was unfit to judge the quality of worship. The Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church responded to Smyth:

⁴⁵Whitley, *Works*, Vol. I, 315.

⁴⁶Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 287.

But I wil turne his owne weapon against him thus. Mr. Sm. anabaptised himself with water: but a child could have done the like unto himself, who cannot performe any part of spirituall worship: therefore Mr. Sm. anabaptising himself with water, did no part of spirituall worship: and consequently it was carnal worship, and service of the Divil. If he answer, that a child though he could cast water on himself, & utter such words as he heard Mr. Sm. speak withal; yet could he not preach or open the covenant as Mr. Sm. did: I answer in like manner, though children may read the scriptures perfectly wel; yet can they not preach nor open the covenant as did the Preists and Levits, Nehem. 8. 8. and as Christ himself did when he read in the synagogue, Luk. 4. Wherefore reading and preaching being joyned together, as baptising with water & preaching: he that condemns the one outward action because a child can doe it, condemneth also the other by the like reason. And Mr. Sm. having thus written of children, and doon to himself; the babes and sucklings whose soules he would murder by depriving them of the covenant promise and visible seal of salvation in the Church; shal rise up in judgment & shall condemn him in the day of Christ.⁴⁷

Ainsworth's accusation that Smyth had practiced a "Se-baptism" or "Self-Baptism" was the first time the charge had appeared in print. Richard Bernard also wrote a treatise, *Plaine Evidences*, condemning Smyth's act of self-baptism in 1610 and first used the label "Se-Baptist" to describe Smyth.⁴⁸ Ainsworth indicated by his illustration of a child "casting" water on himself that the novelty was the presumption to baptize oneself and rebaptism rather than the mode. The mode would surely have attracted a comment from Ainsworth if it had been anything other than affusion. John Robinson, whose congregation had probably already broken with Smyth's by the time the "Se-baptism" occurred, also described the act from accounts delivered by some participants. Robinson recalled:

⁴⁷Henry Ainsworth, *A defence of the Holy Scriptures, worship, and ministerie, used in the Christian Churches separated from Antichrist Against the challenges, cavils and contradiction of M. Smyth: in his book intituled The differences of the Churches of the Separation. Hereunto are annexed a few observations upon some of M. Smythes censures; in his answer made to M. Bernard*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1609).

⁴⁸Richard Bernard, *Plaine evidences The Church of England is apostolicall, the separation schismaticall. Directed against Mr. Ainsworth the Separatist, and Mr. Smith the Se-baptist: both of them seuerally opposing the booke called the Separatists schisme*, (London: Printed by T. Snodham, 1610).

I have heard from themselves on this matter: Mr. Smyth, Mr. Helwisse, and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former church state and ministry, came together to erect a new church by baptism . . . And after some straining of courtesy who should begin . . . Mr. Smyth baptized first himself, and next Mr. Helwisse, and so the rest, making their particular confessions . . . These things thus being, all wise men will think that he had small cause either to be so much enamored of his own baptism, or so highly to despise other men's for the unorderedly or otherwise unlawful administration of it.⁴⁹

Robinson's account confirmed Ainsworth's own charges, thus establishing the story based on the accounts of two sources who were in close enough proximity to know what Smyth's congregation was doing.

The historicity of Smyth's "Se-baptism" has been accepted by most contemporary historians of Baptists. That has not always been the case. Several notable early histories of Baptists did not accept the story of Smyth's "Se-Baptism" as historically reliable. In a nineteenth-century work on Baptist history, John Mockett Cramp, professor at Acadia College in Nova Scotia, Canada, stated, "But the probability is, that one of the brethren baptized Mr. Smyth, and that he then baptized the others."⁵⁰ His sentiments were shared by other Baptist historians of the nineteenth-century, many of whom still regarded Baptists as a religious expression stretching back to the dawn of the Christian church rather than a Reformation Era phenomenon.⁵¹ Baptists were not only concerned about the issue of "Se-baptism," but also the possibility that the first "Baptist" baptism might have been performed by affusion rather than by immersion. Baptists who deviated from

⁴⁹John Robinson, *Works of John Robinson*, Vol. III, ed. by Robert Ashton, (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851), 168-69. Quoted in Lee, 73.

⁵⁰John Mockett Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1869), 287.

⁵¹Some examples include Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of King George I*, (London, 1738-40), I, lvii-lxi and II, 2. John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1922), 5-6.

the accepted orthodoxy could face serious ramifications. William H. Whitsitt, Professor of Church History at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, faced strong criticism after he published *A Question In Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptists In England Practiced Immersion Before the Year 1641?* in 1896.⁵² Despite these early objections to the historical reliability of the accounts of Smyth's baptism, Baptist historians have generally acknowledged its validity in most reliable survey texts of the twentieth century.⁵³

The fact that Smyth endorsed believer's baptism was not the most shocking element of his act, though it was problematic in its implication of sympathy for the Anabaptists. Smyth's presumption to assume the spiritual authority to baptize himself was the facet of the "Se-Baptism" that took Smyth even beyond the pale of the Anabaptists. Even the Anabaptists had not presumed to self-baptize. The Swiss Brethren were reputed to have baptized one another in acts of believer's baptism in January 1525. According to their testimony, Conrad Grebel, leader of the Swiss Brethren, requested baptism by George Blaurock, a former minister from Chur. Blaurock in turn then baptized the entire congregation.⁵⁴ There was no known precedent in the Mennonite

⁵²William H. Whitsitt, *A Question In Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptists In England Practiced Immersion Before the Year 1641?*, (New York : Arno Press, 1980), Rosalie Beck, *The Whitsitt Controversy: A Denomination In Crisis*, (Waco, TX: Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Baylor University, 1984).

⁵³Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1950), 64-65. B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, (Oxford: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 19. William H. Brackney, *The Baptists*, (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 3-5. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 36., Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 23-25.

⁵⁴Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel c. 1498-1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes Called Anabaptists*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1950), 136-37. George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962), 122-23. William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 3rd edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 13-14.

tradition for such a self-baptism. This contrast begs the question of whether Smyth's act of "Se-baptism" was motivated by Mennonite influence or by a series of conclusions he reached due to his further exploration of Separatists' ideals. The following account of Johnson and Smyth's debate concerning baptism will illustrate how one could arrive at the rejection of infant baptism through only the inherent difficulties within the Separatist conception of the doctrine. The timing and nature of Smyth's conversion to Anabaptism will be the topic of the final section of this chapter.

Francis Johnson was not about to allow such a heinous act as the "Se-baptism" to go unanswered. He could not ignore especially the fact that these ideas were propagated by his former student who had recently been connected with the Ancient Church. The Separatists had constantly battled the public perception that they were Anabaptists. Now Smyth provided justification for the charges through his actions and ideas. The Separatists moved quickly to distance themselves from Smyth and attack the grounds of his theology. While Johnson relied on Ainsworth to provide the most extensive challenges to Smyth, Johnson himself contributed to the attack on Smyth's views in 1609 with his *A Brief Treatise Containing Some Grounds and Reasons Against Two Errors of the Anabaptists*. This book, published within a year of the infamous "Se-baptism," was written to deal with Smyth's views on infant baptism and the "Anabaptisme of elder people."⁵⁵ Here one is reminded of William Bradford's comment that:

Wee hear mr. Smith vpon occation say that hee was prswaded noe men lieuing were able to maintaine a Cause against those two men, meaning mr. Johnson and mr. Ainsworth if they had not the truth on their side.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, Title page.

⁵⁶William Bradford, "Dialogue," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Vol. 22, Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859*, (Boston, MA: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920), 134.

Smyth had reason to pray fervently that the truth was on his side.

Johnson's view of baptism depended heavily on his belief that the signs and seals of the New Covenant given in the New Testament were similar to the types of the Old Covenant in the Old Testament. For Johnson, there was a parallel between the rite of circumcision as an initiation into the Abrahamic covenant and the rite of baptism as initiation into the body of Christ. The act of circumcising infants represented Ancient Israel's belief that the covenant established by Yahweh (or Jehovah) extended to them and their seed. Consequently, Johnson argued that those under the covenant of grace should bring their children to participate in the covenant as a recognition that the promise of grace was to them and their seed. The similarity between the two covenants was a major factor for integrating Gentiles into the New Testament church. Johnson insisted, "And otherwise Gentiles should not with the Jewes be made co-inheritors and joint-partakers of the Promise of God in Christ, by the Gospel: as the Scripture teacheth, Matt. 28.18, 19. and Mark 16.15. with Gal. 3.8."⁵⁷

Johnson's understanding of original sin demanded the protective practice of pedobaptism to insure the eternal security of an infant should the child of a Christian family die before they reached an age where they could reasonably make their own decision to follow Christ. He reasoned:

Because Baptisme is the Lords signe of his washing away of our sins, receiving of us into the Church, and incorporating us into Christ, for salvation by his death and resurrection. Whereof the children of Believers are partakers, as well as they which be of yeeres: and therefore can no more be deprived of baptisme, then of remission of sins, entrance into the Church, ingraffing into Christ, and salvation by his means. Neither is there anything required in the ministration of baptisme (nor was heretofore in circumcision) whereof young Infants are not capable, as

⁵⁷Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, 2.

well as elder people: whereas in the ministration of the Lord's Supper, all may see it to be otherwise. For in baptisme, the Minister is (I speak of the outward agent) the agent alone, and the person baptized (whether old or young) is only a patient, and not an agent: but in the Lords Supper, besides the actions laid upon the Minister, there are also divers actions required of the receivers; . . .⁵⁸

While the necessity of administering baptism to infants was important to Johnson, he quickly moved into a discussion of the central issue raised by Smyth's act, the rebaptism of adults.

To use the term "Anabaptist" or insist that a "rebaptism" had taken place, as Johnson did in his treatise, implied that the person considered their first baptism invalid. Baptism was an initiatory rite of the Christian church. A person who felt the need to be baptized again was generally understood to be indicating that they did not feel that their first baptism had initiated them into the true body of Christ. Johnson explicitly acknowledged this at the beginning of the second section of his *Brief Treatise*:

2. That Baptisme received in the apostaticall Churches of Christians, as of Rome, and the like is not to be renounced, and a new to be repeated again . . . Because there is one Baptisme, as there was one Circumcision. And circumcision, being once received in the apostasie of Israel, was not repeated again at their returning to the Lord, and leaving their Idolatrous wayes to serve him according to his Word: but they that were so circumcised, were (without any new circumcision of the flesh) accepted at Jersusalem, and admitted to the Passover, of which none might eat that was not circumcised.⁵⁹

Johnson saw the Passover celebration and the requirement of circumcision for participation in it as types of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. In making this argument, Johnson provided a challenge for Smyth to provide some justification or point to some authority that justified his baptism wholly apart from the larger Christian communion. We know that Smyth was experiencing some anxiety about

⁵⁸Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, 5.

⁵⁹Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, 8- 9.

this whole issue and desired to find a means to tie his position on believer's baptism to a larger Christian tradition. He discovered that tradition in the Mennonite/Anabaptist family. It may well be that Johnson's assertions prompted Smyth to seek fellowship with the Mennonite community.

Whether he realized it or not, Johnson's assertions were creating some complexities for himself as well. Johnson wrote:

Because the Church of Rome was espoused to Christ in the Covenant of Grace by the Gospel of salvation, having Baptisme with the rest of Christ's Ordinances in the Apostle's dayes; and hath ever since retained it with other grounds of Christian Religion, notwithstanding all of her adulteries and apostasie, whereinto shee is fallen. As may be seen both in that church it self, and all other Churches which are the daughters threof in their constitution. And hereunto, in all cases and questions of this nature, due respect is always to be had; as may appeare by these scriptures . . . Because God hath his people in the Romanish Babylon; and when he calleth them out from thence, doth not enjoyn them to leave whatsoever is there had, but requireth of them that they have no communion with her sins; but (as the Prophet teacheth) plead with their mother, that she take away her fornications out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts.⁶⁰

Johnson believed that baptism was not considered one of the Roman Church's faults, but rather Christ's ordinance.

That statement provided a central clue to the theological problem that prevented Johnson from rejecting the baptism practiced in the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. His seventh "ground and reason" stated the problem clearly:

Because else by such like reasons as the baptisme is renounced which is there received, men might also urge (as some have done) not to retain, use or regard as we should, the Articles of faith the learning of Scripture, or the translations thereof, had and acknowledged in those Churches. And likewise might perswade to the dissolution of such marriages as have been made by their Ministry; with other as strange consequences, that by like manner of reasoning would be inferred thereupon.⁶¹

⁶⁰Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, 11-12.

⁶¹Francis Johnson, *A Brief Treatise*, 13.

The problem Johnson faced if he rejected the baptism of Rome and Canterbury was the same problem faced by all primitivist theological movements. They shaped their church according to a scripture that was the product of the early church and defined their theology often in accordance with creeds that had been adopted by ecumenical councils centuries after Christ. The most alarming examples of people who had chosen this route could be found among “Spiritualist” Anabaptist groups who had rejected the authority of the creeds and scripture to pursue their own understandings of God.⁶² Johnson did not intend to be one of them. Yet he had placed himself on the record arguing that the baptism of the Roman Catholic Church must be necessarily accepted as valid if their endorsement of the scriptures and creeds was to be retained. But how could one legitimately accept the authority of baptism administered by an apostate church for any reason beyond pragmatic concerns? Johnson’s comments regarding marriage revealed that he was thinking about the practical implications of such a rejection. Johnson was not a pragmatist by nature. The dissonance between his acceptance of Roman Catholic baptism and rejection of the Roman Catholic Church as an apostate church would have to be resolved before he could have peace about the issue. He would express the resolution of that conflict in print, as will appear in chapter six.

Johnson’s thought on this issue was also provoked to consider the implications of baptism for Separation by the writings of Joseph Hall, Anglican Bishop of Exeter. Hall wrote *A common apologie of the Church of England against the vniust challenges of the ouer-iust sect, commonly called Brownists* in 1610 to incorporate the latest struggles

⁶²Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 821-28.

among the Separatists into the Church of England's defense of its polity.⁶³ He saw plainly the problem Johnson faced regarding Baptism and Separatism. The treatise was addressed primarily to Smyth and Robinson. Hall wrote:

No lesse then a yeare and a halfe is past (Reuerend, Deare, and holy Mother) since I wrote a louing monitory letter to two of thine vnworthy Sons; which (I heard) were fled from thee in person, in affection, and somewhat in opinion: Supposing them yet thine in the maine substance, though in some circumstances their owne. Since which, one of them hath wash't of thy Font-water as vnclean, and hath written desperately both against thee, and his owne fellowes: From the other, I receiued (not two moneths since) a stomakful Pamphlet; besides the priuate iniuries to the monitor, casting vpon thine honourable name blasphemous imputations of Apostasie, Antichristianisme, Whoordome, Rebellion.⁶⁴

Eager to press his point, Hall admonished Robinson, "I Wrote not to you alone: what is become of your partner, yea, your guide? Woe is me, he hath renounced our Christendome with our Church: and hath wash't of his former water, with new: and now condemnes you all, for not separating further, no lesse then we condemne you for separating so far."⁶⁵ He also charged:

To shut up your Constitution, then, there is no remedy: either you must go Forward to Anabaptism, or come back to us. All your Rabbis cannot answer that charge of your rebaptized brother: If we be a True Church, you must return: if we be not (as a False Church is no Church of God) you must rebaptize. If our Baptism be good, than is our Constitution good.⁶⁶

⁶³Joseph Hall, *A common apologie of the Church of England against the vniust challenges of the ouer-iust sect, commonly called Brownists. Wherein the grounds and defences, of the separation are largely discussed: occasioned, by a late pamphlet published vnder the name, of an Answer to a censorious epistle, which the reader shall finde in the margent.* (London, 1610).

⁶⁴Joseph Hall, *A common apologie of the Church of England*, The Epistle Dedicatory.

⁶⁵Joseph Hall, *A common apologie of the Church of England*, 7.

⁶⁶Joseph Hall, *A common apologie of the Church of England*.

If Johnson read this treatise, and there is no reason to imagine that he would not have been aware of its existence, he would have seen the incongruity of the Separatist position toward baptism set forth in print.

Smyth did not wait long before offering his own reply to his former brethren. Smyth's *The Character of the Beast* was published in 1609 and exhibited clearly Smyth's new baptismal views.⁶⁷ The work was a collection of letters that passed between Smyth and Richard Clifton, a former member of the Robinson congregation who had elected to remain with the Ancient Church after Robinson's group moved to Leiden. Clifton replaced Ainsworth as Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church in 1610 after Ainsworth's departure. On behalf of the Ancient Church, Clifton wrote, "And therefore the Anabaptists in rejecting that baptisme of Christ, wherof they were partakers in the Apostate Church: & devising a new, do bring in a new covenant and a new gospel, taking vpon themselves to baptize themselves without warrant from the word."⁶⁸ Clifton tied his defense of baptism to the same Old Testament precedent of circumcision that Johnson used. Clifton further extrapolated that the practice of circumcision had been continued in the Christian church.⁶⁹

Smyth had been persuaded that the tension between acceptance of the Church of England's baptism and rejection of her polity were untenable. Either adults needed to be baptized again or Separatists had to acknowledge the Church of England's validity.

⁶⁷John Smyth, *The character of the beast, or, The false constitution of the church discovered in certayne passages betwixt Mr. R. Clifton & Iohn Smyth, concerning true Christian baptisme of new creatures, or new borne babes in Christ, &nd false baptisme of infants borne after the flesh : referred to two propositions, 1. That infants are not to bee baptized, 2. That antichristians converted are to bee admitted into the true church by baptisme*, (Middelburg : R. Schilders, 1609).

⁶⁸Whitley, *Works*, Vol. 2, 658.

⁶⁹Whitley, *Works*, Vol. 2, 651-58.

Several striking features of Smyth's thought ran counter to Separatist views. Smyth rejected the seamless tapestry of the old and new covenants that Johnson and the Ancient Church had woven, and Smyth placed greater weight on the New Testament and challenged the use of circumcision as a justification for infant baptism. Smyth wrote:

As in the former point for baptizing of infants you were compelled to run to the old Testament, & thence to fetch the chief cornerstone of your building viz from circumcision: So in this second point you vtterly forsake the new Testam. of Chr. & the true constitution Apostolique of the Church of the new Testament, & set vs againe to Schoole to Moses, as if Chr. had not been faithful enough to teach vs his new Test. but we must go learne the new Test. of the old Testament: Chr. of Moses: The Gospel of the Law.⁷⁰

Having established the difference between his reading of the Abrahamic covenant and Johnson's, Smyth stated his most compelling argument for his decision to baptize his flock:

So in the New Testament the Church cometh by succession of carnal Genealogie through the Church of Rome to our dayes: & then as the matter of the Church, viz infants descending of baptized parents is by Genealogie, & the forme of the church viz.: baptism vppon these infants is by descent: & therefore the Church is by succession: I demaund why may not the ministry be by descent and succssion aswel as the Church? & then why is not the Church of Rome or England a True Church, the ministry of the Church of Rome or England a true ministry? & so why may you not returne back againe into England, and take vp your former ministry, & renounce your schism which you have made? & so I heare that some are mynded to doe: & truly for my part I hold it as lawfull to retained the Church & Ministry of England, as to retain the baptisme: & when I shal yeeld to the truth of the baptisme of England I wil yeeld to the truth of the Church and ministry of England: & I wil confesse I have been a Schismatique, & returne & acknowledge my error: but bicause I know the Church & ministry of England is false, therefore it must needes be that the baptisme which is the forme of the Church is false essentially: & therefore having Separated justly from the Church and Ministry of England for the falsehood of them, I must needes also Separate from the baptisme which is false.⁷¹

⁷⁰Whitley, *Works*, Vol. 2, 662-63.

⁷¹Whitley, *Works*, Vol. 2, 664-65.

Smyth had posed a series of questions that would continue to plague the uncompromising Johnson. Did a corrupt hierarchy indicate a corrupt baptism as well? If so, why not encourage adult baptism? Johnson must have begun to contemplate these questions if he had not been contemplating them already. It is unlikely that Johnson ever would have followed Smyth into a total rejection of infant baptism, but Smyth's next theological transition insured that Johnson would not follow any of his examples. It also convinced Johnson that a solution had to be found for the dichotomy between Separation and baptism that did not include rejection of infant baptism or acceptance of baptism of adults. Smyth's example began to pose an even greater threat than the threat posed by the Church of England. At some point in 1610, John Smyth and his congregation had begun to make overtures to the Mennonites and bear witness to a very Arminian theology.

6. *Francis Johnson, English Separatism, and the Baptist Tradition*

The initial controversy with John Smyth over church polity and believer's baptism was a prelude to an even more significant shift in John Smyth's thought. The argument of *The Character of the Beast* was still focused on the ecclesiastical issues between Smyth and the Separatists. Smyth included a confessional preface to that work that hinted at some possible Anabaptist or Mennonite influences on his views of the parity of both biblical Testaments, Sabbath observance, and the authority of secular authorities over religious matters.⁷² Had Smyth also rejected original sin and embraced a general atonement at this point?

⁷²William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 15. Whitley, 564-573.

In 1610, Smyth issued a confession of faith written in Latin. “Corde Credimus” (or “we believe with our hearts”) included twenty articles of faith. Helwys and his faction of the church produced another statement of faith entitled “Synopsis Fidei” or summary of the faith. Both statements bore the impression of either Mennonite or Arminian influence. They affirmed free will and a general atonement.⁷³

With this confession of faith, Smyth appeared to be initiating his quest for acceptance into the Mennonite fold. The issuance of two separate confessions of faith indicated that Smyth and Helwys had already parted over the issue of joining the Mennonite fellowship. In 1610, Helwys and his followers sent a letter written in Latin to the Waterlander Mennonites urging them to reject Smyth’s application for membership. The Mennonites were not convinced by the letter and continued to entertain Smyth’s application.⁷⁴ Helwys and his congregation eventually returned to England where their influence established the General Baptist tradition. Smyth and his congregation remained in the Netherlands, seeking admittance to the Waterlander Mennonite communion. They achieved their goal but only after Smyth’s death of tuberculosis in 1612.⁷⁵

Smyth and Helwys have generally been credited as the founders of the General Baptist tradition and therefore as the genetic ancestors of all Baptist groups throughout the world. As noted in chapter one, some Baptists of a Calvinistic predisposition have preferred to focus on the emergence of the Particular Baptist tradition in the 1630’s and 40’s. One of the first proponents of this view was John H. Shakespeare, a British Baptist

⁷³William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History*, 16. William H. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought: A Sourcebook*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 23-29. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 97-142.

⁷⁴Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 102.

⁷⁵William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History*, 16. Torbet, 38-39.

clergyman. Shakespeare identified the English Particular Baptist tradition as the unbroken train of Baptist witness. He argued that the General Baptist tradition had floundered in Unitarianism and only rejoined the main tradition of Baptist life when they merged the General Baptist's New Connexion with the Particular Baptists in 1891.⁷⁶

In more recent times, Fuller Theological Seminary ethicist Glen Stassen has stated that the Particular Baptists were, "the fathers of present-day Baptists."⁷⁷ Stassen has insisted that it was the decision of the Particular Baptists to baptize by immersion, not Smyth's by affusion, that gave birth to the Baptist movement. Stassen traced the influence of English Separatism on the Particular Baptists through Johnson's *True Confession*. In establishing the Particular Baptists as the primary Baptist tradition, Stassen hoped to demonstrate that a genetic Baptist link to the Mennonites could be demonstrated through either the General or Particular Baptists.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, his attempt to demonstrate strong Mennonite influence through Menno Simon's *Foundation Book* floundered. At best, Stassen convincingly demonstrated that the Particular Baptists had looked to the continental Anabaptists for clarification on the issue of believer's baptism, but he did not offer any compelling argument that the congregational government of the Particular Baptists was born of any influence other than the English congregational tradition mediated through the Separatists and the Congregational

⁷⁶John H. Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*, (London, 1905), 179-80. McBeth, 154-56. Torbet, 20-21.

⁷⁷Glen Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence In The Origin of the Particular Baptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (October, 1962), 322-348.

⁷⁸In what must have been the most convoluted title since the seventeenth-century, Stassen left everyone with a rather odd image of Menno Simons and John Calvin as parents. One suspects Calvin might take issue with being assigned the role of the mommy. Glen H. Stassen, "Opening Menno Simons' Foundation-Book And Finding the Father of Baptist Origins Alongside The Mother-Calvinist Congregationalism," *Baptist History and Heritage*, (Spring, 1998), 42-43. Glen H. Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence In The Origin of the Particular Baptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (October, 1962), 322-348.

Independents. B. R. White of Regent's Park College, Oxford, and William L. Lumpkin, Southern Baptist pastor in Norfolk, Virginia, and collator of confessional statements, also tended to emphasize the affinities between the *True Confession* and the 1644 Particular Baptist Confession "First London Confession."⁷⁹

Conservative elements within the North American Southern Baptist Convention have also attempted to secure a place for the Particular Baptists as the most significant progenitors of the Baptist tradition. They have been encouraged by the work of Reformed Baptist and Strict Baptist organizations based in the United Kingdom such as the "Founder's Ministries" and the Calvinistic "Banner of Truth" publishing/reprinting house. These Calvinistic Baptists have provided a forum for adherents of the Baptist Tradition who desire to locate themselves in genetic and theological continuity with the Reformed tradition.⁸⁰ Several Calvinistic Baptist leaders produced dissertations on Particular Baptist or English Separatist themes though they did not publish them.⁸¹ Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University, published his Harvard doctoral dissertation on *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition* in 1982. George is a supporter of Founder's Ministries and serves as an editor for their

⁷⁹Lumpkin, 146. B. R. White, "The Doctrine of the Church In The Particular Baptist Confession of 1644," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19, (October, 1968), 571-590. John Briggs, "The Influence Of Calvinism on Seventeenth-Century English Baptists," *Baptist History and Heritage*, No. 2, (Spring 2004), 8-25.

⁸⁰ Founders Ministries, <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/>, (June 8, 2006). Banner of Truth Trust, <http://www.BANNEROFTRUTH.org/pages/home.php>, (June 8, 2006).

⁸¹The two most prominent examples are Richard Land and Tom Nettles, though Land is more moderate in his Calvinistic tendencies. Land was a student of B. R. White at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Nettles studied with H. Leon McBeth at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Richard Land, *Doctrinal controversies of English Particular Baptist (1644-1791) as illustrated by the career and writings of Thomas Collier*, (Unpublished D. Phil. Dissertation, Oxford University, 1979). Tom Nettles, *A comparative study of the historical stimuli contributing to the ecclesiological views of Francis Johnson, John Smyth, and Roger Williams*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976).

journal.⁸² In order to assess Francis Johnson's contribution to the Baptist Tradition, it is necessary to understand who these Particular Baptists were.

The Particular Baptists emerged out of the milieu of English Congregational Independency in the Jacob tradition.⁸³ Samuel Eaton, Richard Blunt, and John Spilsbury were among a group of Congregational Independents who rejected the validity of infant baptism in the 1630's and 40's. While they did consult with continental Mennonites concerning the mode of baptism, they did not embrace Mennonite views on the issues of general atonement, original sin, or Christology. The "London Confession" of 1644 was written primarily as a defense against charges that the Particular Baptists were following the Mennonite example in theology as well as in baptism. The desire on the part of the Particular Baptists to disavow any hint of theological conformity to Arminian or Mennonite ideas beyond believer's baptism and immersion would appear to militate against Stassen's argument that Menno Simon could claim to be their father. Maybe he was a distant cousin that dropped in for a visit once.⁸⁴

Concerning Francis Johnson, it matters little whether the true fathers of the Baptist tradition were Smyth and Helwys or Eaton and Spilsbury. Francis Johnson can be demonstrated to have influenced both Baptist traditions in different ways. One could argue that the congregational polity of both General Baptists and Particular Baptists, though not always their structure of officers or pastors, was derived directly from the

⁸²Founder's Ministries, <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/editors.html>, (June 8, 2006). George's mentor at Harvard was G. H. Williams.

⁸³Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. I, 281-335. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 59-91.

⁸⁴Lumpkin, 143-170.

English Separatist Tradition.⁸⁵ That congregational polity was passed from the Ancient Church through the *Trve Confession* and Johnson's influence on Jacob to the Particular Baptists.⁸⁶ While Johnson was by no means the "father" of either movement, there is no question that Johnson and the English Separatist tradition were critical to the development of both Baptist traditions. Even though Smyth eventually defined himself theologically in contrast to Johnson, Johnson's influence on his English Separatist phase has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter. Even in his rebellion, Smyth was wrestling with Johnson and his followers. At those points when Johnson's influence was not positive, it was still Johnson's Separatism that Smyth defined himself against. The extent of that defiance carried Smyth and Helwys well beyond the Reformed tradition, as indicated earlier in this chapter. Having introduced Smyth's adoption of General Atonement, it is imperative to examine the extent and possible causes of that transition in Smyth's theology.

⁸⁵Lumpkin, 79-170. White, English Separatist Tradition, 164-166.

⁸⁶Lumpkin, 146. B. R. White, "The Doctrine of the Church In The Particular Baptist Confession of 1644," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19, (October, 1968), 571-590. Francis Johnson, *An Answer to Maister H. Iacob His Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England*, (Amsterdam, 1600). Henry Jacob, *A defence of the churches and ministry of Englande Written in two treatises, against the reasons and obiections of Maister Francis Iohnson, and others of the separation commonly called Brownists. Published, especially, for the benefitt of those in these partes of the lowe Countries*, (Middelburgh : Richard Schilders, 1599), 3-6. Henry Jacob, *Reasons taken out of Gods Word and the best humane testimonies prouing a necessitie of reforming our churches in England Framed and applied to 4. assertions wherein the foresaid purpose is contained. The 4. assertions are set downe in the page next following.*, (Middelburg : Richard Schilders, 1604), "The 4 Assertions." David Gay, *Battle For the Church: 1517-1644*, (Castro Valley, CA: Brachus, 1997), 389-91.

7. John Smyth: Anabaptist, Arminian, or Baptist?

By 1610, John Smyth had rejected most of the basic tenants of Reformed theology. He probably had rejected these ideas by early 1610 when he wrote his twenty articles of faith or *Corde Credimus*.⁸⁷ The fact that Helwys also addressed a confessional statement to the Waterlander Mennonites in 1610 revealed that the two men and their respective followings had already begun to divide if in fact the division had not already taken place. Both of their statements of faith revealed an absolute rejection of the Reformed principles of original sin and particular atonement. Smyth's confession stated:

5. That there is no sin of origin, but all sin is actual and voluntary, viz., a word, a deed, or a design outside the law of God; and therefore, infants are without sin.

8. That the grace of God, through the finished redemption of Christ, was to be prepared and offered to all without distinction, and that not feignedly but in good faith, partly by things made, which declare the invisible things of God, and partly by the preaching of the gospel.

14. That baptism is the external sign of the remission of sins, of dying and of being made alive, and therefore does not belong to infants.⁸⁸

While Smyth endorsed the excommunication of members after the third offence, he wrote in article eighteen, "Those who are excommunicated are not to be avoided in what pertains to worldly business."⁸⁹ Thomas Helwys also included an emphasis on human free will in his fifth article and supported the view that God, "hath foreseen and ordained in him (Christ) a medicine of life for all their sins, and hath willed that all people or

⁸⁷Lumpkin dated this "Short Confession" in 1609 while Brackney dated it in 1610. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 100-101. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought*, 25-26.

⁸⁸Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought*, 25-26. Lumpkin, 100-101.

⁸⁹Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought*, 26.

creatures, through the preaching of the gospel, should have these tidings published and declared unto them.”⁹⁰

Despite the strong protest of the Helwys group, the Waterlander Mennonites were open to accepting Smyth's congregation. Hans De Ries, one of their members and a medical practitioner like Smyth, drew up a confession of faith in 1610 for Smyth's congregation. Smyth and his congregation were to indicate their agreement with the confession by signing it; they signed the statement by 1611. Smyth was forced to defend the confession against an unnamed Reformed critic in *Defence of Reis's Confession*. Smyth died in 1612, and his church was absorbed into the Waterlander Mennonite fellowship. Helwys and his congregation returned to England the same year to become the founders of the General Baptist tradition in England.⁹¹

Why did John Smyth take such a drastic turn away from Reformed theology? Three influences have generally been proposed as the possible determining factors.⁹² The first of these was the influence of Cambridge Arminian teaching propagated by Peter Baro (1534-1599), a professor of French origin who argued that humanity could reject the grace of God. Baro had preached a sermon on January 12, 1595/96 against the Calvinistic elements of the Thirty-Nine Articles and engaged in a debate with Archbishop Whitgift. Baro was brought up on charges, but survived, thanks to the clemency of

⁹⁰Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 104-105.

⁹¹Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 88-91. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation*, 77-116. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 140-41.

⁹²Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 88-89.

Whitgift and Baro's death in 1599.⁹³ The Baro controversy took place while Smyth was a Fellow at Christ's and could have influenced him, but the problem with that theory is that there was no noticeable effect of any Arminian influence on Smyth in his ministry until 1609/10. While Baro's ideas provided an initial impetus for Smyth to reflect on the possibility of human free will and general atonement, there is no evidence that such reflection yielded any fruit until long afterwards.

The second possible influence on Smyth was the teachings of Jacob Arminius and the Remonstrant Party in the Netherlands. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) was a professor at the University of Leiden who had begun to question some of the tenets of Calvinistic orthodoxy embraced in the Swiss, French, and Dutch Reformed Churches.⁹⁴ He had debated more conservative Reformed theologians on the faculty at Leiden, including Francisus Junius, the Ancient Church's correspondent. Junius was concerned about increasingly rebellious tendencies that he saw developing in the younger generation of Dutch Reformed theologians. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, had made concerted attempts to strengthen the influence of the Swiss Reformed churches over the Dutch Reformed Church. Junius perceived the ideas of Arminius as youthful rebellion against the authority of Geneva which threatened to lead to all manner of aberrant theological speculation.⁹⁵ The exchange between the two men occurred in 1597 and was described as a "friendly discussion," the only type that one would expect from a person

⁹³C. S. Knighton, "Baro, Peter (1534–1599)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1492> (accessed June 9, 2006).

⁹⁴Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 252-316.

⁹⁵Bangs, *Arminius*, 198-205. Johnathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 393.

with Junius' tolerant disposition. The subject of this friendly discussion was the doctrine of predestination. Arminius indicated that he had serious doubts regarding the doctrine of predestination and its corollary, the concept of original sin. Arminius wrote to Junius:

For there is no place for punitive justice except in reference to the sinner; there can be no act of that mercy, of which we treat except towards the miserable. But man, considered in his natural condition is neither sinful nor miserable, therefore that justice and mercy have no place in reference to him. Hence, you, my brother will see that the object of predestination, made according to those attributes, cannot be man, considered in general, since it requires of its object, the circumstance of sin and misery, by which circumstance man is restricted to a determinate condition, and is separated from a general consideration. I know, indeed, that, if the general consideration is admitted, no one of those particular considerations is excluded, but you also know that if any particular relation is precisely laid down, that universal relation is excluded.⁹⁶

After Junius died in 1602, Arminius was appointed to his chair in theology at the University of Leiden the following year. From Leiden, Arminius continued to expound his view and attract followers to his cause. Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), a Flemish refugee and also a professor at Leiden, began to defend Calvinistic Reformed principles when he heard that Arminius had been propounding alternative views to his students. The conflict between them, initially an internal matter, soon involved the city of Leiden and spread throughout the Netherlands.⁹⁷ After Arminius' death in 1610, his followers, calling themselves Remonstrants, issued a series of five statements that challenged traditional Calvinism and attacked the basic tenets of Calvinism.⁹⁸ Their assertions and Francis Johnson's response will appear in chapter six.

⁹⁶James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, Vol. 3, ed. W. R. Bagnall, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1956), 73.

⁹⁷Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 393. Samuel Miller, "Introductory Essay," *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. Thomas Scott, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 5-55.

⁹⁸Samuel Miller, "Introductory Essay," *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. Thomas Scott, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 5-55.

When the label “Arminian” is used in reference to Smyth and his contemporaries, it denotes the seminal thought of Arminius himself and his early Remonstrant followers, not the more developed “Arminian” theological views characteristic of the Wesleyan and Pentecostal traditions. It is significant that John Smyth’s decision to assert a more “Arminian” view of original sin and atonement coincided with these events. While Smyth was not in Amsterdam long before he left the Separatist fold, he surely must have been aware of the debate raging in Reformed circles regarding the matter of predestination, election, and atonement. The Remonstrant Petition of 1610 was released at the same time that Smyth and his followers were petitioning the Mennonites.

The final option was Smyth’s association with the Mennonites, which has already been discussed earlier in this section. Smyth was definitely in close contact with the Mennonites and eager to join their fellowship by 1610. They certainly had adopted views of congregational polity, baptism, and church government that would have been amenable to Smyth.⁹⁹ They were also abundantly present in the Netherlands and in the vicinity of Amsterdam. There can be little doubt that there was some Mennonite influence on Smyth and that Helwys was not unfavorably disposed to them, though he saw no need to join them.¹⁰⁰ Lonnie D. Kliever, former professor of Religion at Southern Methodist University, attempted to demonstrate that Mennonite influence on Smyth occurred after Smyth had made his break with his Reformed views. Kliever’s agenda was to explain how Helwys and his congregation could adopt Smyth’s views on general

⁹⁹Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, (Beacon Hill, MA: Starr King Press, 1958), 82-94. George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 387-401.

¹⁰⁰William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History*, 16. William H. Brackney, *Baptist Life and Thought: A Sourcebook*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 23-29. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 97-142.

atonement and free will without Mennonite influence.¹⁰¹ Jason Lee critiqued Kliever's article in his *Theology of John Smyth*, arguing that Kliever placed too much emphasis on Helwy's *Synopsis Fidei*.¹⁰² Lee also cited James Coggin's comparison of Smyth's views and the views of the Remonstrants in his *John Smyth's Congregation*, making several helpful critiques.¹⁰³ Lee correctly demonstrated that a comparison of their articles with Smyth's thought did not show as radical a disjunction between them as Coggins had postulated. In the final analysis, Lee also attributed a great deal of Mennonite influence to Smyth's adoption of "Arminian" principles, but did not totally rule out the possible influences derived from English Separatist and Arminian sources.

Inherent in the discussion of the influences that moved Smyth to adopt a more "Arminian" theological orientation has been the enshrinement of Smyth as the co-founder of the General Baptist tradition. Stephen Brachlow of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond sought to demonstrate that a mutual covenant view could be identified within the Puritan and Separatist movements. The influence of this mutual covenant theology provided the impetus for Smyth's break with Johnson and was the basis for his "Baptist" phase.¹⁰⁴ Lee also indicated a distinct "Baptist" phase for Smyth and tried to establish the "Baptist" position Smyth adopted in each of theological issues he

¹⁰¹Lonnie D. Kliever, "General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (October 1962), 291-321.

¹⁰²Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 85.

¹⁰³Lee, *Theology of John Smyth*, 85. James Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 138-40.

¹⁰⁴Stephen Brachlow, "Puritan Theology and General Baptist Origins," *Baptist Quarterly* 31, (July 1984), 296-300.

discussed.¹⁰⁵ There is an inherent assumption by Baptist historians that Smyth had to have a “Baptist” phase. Yet Smyth’s transition from English Separatism to Mennonite views was so fast that there was barely time for him to be anything else. It would seem that the issue would be less complicated if historians of Baptist life acknowledged that Smyth was a complex and controversial character and served the origin of Baptists in much the same way that Johnson served Smyth’s congregation, as an influence prompting their separation, but not the definitive influence that shaped their final position. Kleiver was correct in addressing Helwy’s thought, though *Synopsis Fidei* was probably not the best place to start, as the most important issue for Baptist origins. It does not seem necessary to locate Smyth as a “Baptist” to respect his influence on the tradition.¹⁰⁶ The whole discussion is complicated by the incredible diversity of Baptists around the world, creating difficulty in comprehensively defining the distinctive attributes of Baptists.

John Smyth’s doubts about the leadership structure of the church may have been forming when he wrote his *Parallels and Censures* in 1607. His personal experience with the Ancient Church solidified those views. Either through Arminian influence or Mennonite influence or a combination of both, Smyth baptized himself and adopted views more congenial to the Anabaptist understanding of redemption. The greatest problem with Mennonite influence in 1609 was the “Se-baptism.” Why would Smyth have baptized himself if he already recognized his affinity with the Mennonites? He later regretted his presumption in baptizing himself and recognized the authority of the

¹⁰⁵Lee, 71-84.

¹⁰⁶William H. Brackney has expressed his doubts that Smyth adopted a clearly formed baptisitic position. Brackney, *Genetic History*, 15.

Mennonite communion as the true unbroken chain of influence from the early church.¹⁰⁷

Smyth most likely came to his baptismal convictions due to the problem of baptismal theology inherent in English Separatism, doubted the basic elements of Reformed theology by extension of his views on baptism, may have seen those doubts reinforced by Arminian doctrines, and completed his acceptance of general atonement under the influence of the Waterlander Mennonites.

Why does all this matter for the study of Francis Johnson? Johnson was deeply affected by Smyth's conversion. In 1610, he was struck simultaneously by Smyth's profession of affinity with the Mennonites and the appearance of the Remonstrant Petitions declaring the views of Jacob Arminius and his following. The thought of losing a former pupil of Smyth's stature and the fact that he could so easily slip into the Mennonite fold was disconcerting. It is necessary to ask why Smyth took the course he did because Francis Johnson asked why. The possible answers to the question were keys to understanding Johnson's obsessions and preoccupations for the rest of his life. In reaction to the challenges to his congregation, Johnson became convinced that a stronger eldership was a necessity. His insistence on this view led to a splinter with Ainsworth, also in 1610, which divided his congregation. Following a much publicized battle with Ainsworth, Johnson retreated to Emden, Germany with the remnants of his congregation. Whereas at one time he was consumed with the corruption of the Church of England, Johnson became increasingly aware of the twin dangers of Arminianism and Anabaptism. He emerged with a renewed vision of the nature of the church and a desire to do battle with the twin dangers of Anabaptism and Arminianism.

¹⁰⁷Whitley, *Works*, 751-60.

8. Summary

The Separation of the Separatists began in earnest with the arrival of John Smyth and his congregation. The fears of the bishops of the Established Church that Separatism would only result in endless division appeared to be well founded. By 1611, Johnson, Ainsworth, Smyth, Robinson, and Helwys had all led their own factions to form separate communities of faith.

The case of John Smyth merits special note because he was a student of Francis Johnson at Cambridge and appeared to be following Johnson in the path of separation in 1606/07. His defection to Anabaptism removed Anabaptism from the realm of the distant “other” for Francis Johnson. Johnson began to see Anabaptism as a personal threat that could engulf Separatist leaders as well as unwary church members. Smyth’s General Atonement position and the views of the Remonstrants convinced Johnson that a grave threat was being fashioned against the Calvinistic underpinnings of his theology. These events led Francis Johnson to change his polemical priorities and probably led to the most valuable literary contribution of his life, *A Christian Plea*. In chapter six of this research project, Johnson’s decision to protect his flock through the imposition of a stronger eldership will be addressed. That decision led to his break with Ainsworth, the loss of his worship facility, and eventually self-imposed exile in Emden, Germany. Johnson’s years at Emden gave him an opportunity to reflect on his experiences and the theological controversies of the last two decades. When Johnson returned to Amsterdam in 1617, he did so with the manuscript of *A Christian Plea* in hand. This manuscript represented the fruits of his reflection at Emden and the culmination of his theological contribution.

CHAPTER SIX

A Christian Plea: Division, Exile, and Clarity

1. Introduction

And what things further are befallen vs, which I rather should be buried and amended, then published by me, or continewed and increased by any. My care and desire (I thanke God) hath bene, and I trust shall be always, to receive and followe the trueth in love with peace and holiness: and to that ende (as our age and tymes occasion vs) to search out and discover to others (what in mee is) both the Apostasie of Antichrist on the one hande, and the erroneous courses of the Anabaptists on the other hande: that we may by the mercie of God, stande free and safe from both, and grow vpp daily in the sounde knowledge and holy obedience of the trueth and Gospell of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This indeed I haue done with much weaknes, and have in some things been overtaken both in my writings and in our practise divers wayes. But my righteousness and saluation is of the Lorde: whose grace is sufficient for me. And to whose grace I commend thee Christian Reader: Beseeching the Lorde to guyde thy heart and feete in the way of trueth and peace to immortalitie. Amen.¹

The troubles visited on the Ancient Church by the congregation of John Smyth were only a prelude to more devastating conflicts. Johnson, concerned that he had been too lax in protecting the leadership prerogative of the Elders, determined to strengthen their hand in late 1609 or early 1610. His new emphasis was opposed by Henry Ainsworth. Even the mild-mannered and loyal Ainsworth could not accept what he saw as a radical deviation from the congregational polity of the Ancient Church. As their struggle continued, it became obvious that congregational polity was an essential of Separatist ecclesiology for Ainsworth, while Johnson, reflecting the ambiguity of Greenwood and Barrow and his earlier presbyterian leanings, did not agree that such a polity was essential. Johnson instead became convinced that it was lax and potentially

¹Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1611), Preface to the Reader.

harmful to the spiritual well-being of his congregation. Their dispute split the Ancient Church into two opposing factions, with Ainsworth's faction committed to the congregational polity of the *True Confession* and Johnson's endorsing a more presbyterian form of rule by Elders. By 1613, Johnson and his following had departed Amsterdam for Emden, East Friesland (contemporary Germany). During his self-imposed exile in Emden, Johnson apparently continued to wrestle with the questions raised by Smyth, Ainsworth, Bernard, and Jacob.

Johnson returned to Amsterdam in 1617, shortly before his death. He published the work entitled *A Christian Plea* that same year. *A Christian Plea* surprised both his former friends and opponents with Johnson's new openness to accepting the Christian validity, though not the ecclesiastical purity, of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Johnson's primary reason for this shift in theological focus was his realization that Bernard and Smyth were correct in saying that one must acknowledge the Christian character of an ecclesiastical body if one accepted its baptism. He also fired another salvo against the Anabaptists by reproducing his argument of 1609 within the text of *A Christian Plea* and included a section denouncing the Remonstrant Petition and its five articles. Johnson's response to the Remonstrants resembled the five articles that were endorsed at the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1618 and 1619. Francis Johnson died in 1618 and was buried at Amsterdam. His congregation either attempted to immigrate to North America or was absorbed by the English Reformed Church at Amsterdam. In the final chapter of this research project, Francis Johnson's final contributions and legacy will be assessed.

2. *Tell The Church*

Francis Johnson was concerned deeply for the doctrinal and ethical integrity of the Ancient Church in the wake of Smyth's decision to oppose him and then to join the Waterlander Mennonites. Desiring to prevent future incidents, Johnson began to examine his congregation for weaknesses that left them susceptible to the influences that lured Smyth to Anabaptism. The most important issue that presented itself to Johnson was the Ancient Church's decision to protect the prerogatives of the congregation in matters of church discipline and decision-making. The congregation's predisposition to self-rule would have grown strong during the imprisonment of its leaders from 1587-1592. Johnson, a newly-minted Separatist when he accepted the pastoral office of the Ancient Church in 1592, likely anticipated that his ideas on church order needed to be amended in addition to his views on separation. No evidence exists that Johnson contested the congregational direction of the Ancient Church before 1609. He even enshrined it as part of the *Trve Confession*.

Some scholars of English Separatism have insisted, due to Francis' autocratic leadership style and the accusations of George Johnson, that Francis Johnson adhered to a presbyterian polity from the beginning of his leadership of the Ancient Church.² F. J. Powicke, Congregational minister at Hatherlow, England, was one of the leading proponents of this view. Quoting the account of William Bradford, Powicke claimed:

Bradford tells us that the pastor (Johnson) was weary of the "many dissensions" which were traceable, as he thought, to popular government. But probably he had never wholly abandoned his earlier Presbyterianism. If George Johnson can be credited, this had influenced the government of the Church long before 1609.

²George Johnson, *A discourse of some troubles and excommunications in the banished English Church at Amsterdam Published for sundry causes declared in the preface to the pastour of the sayd Church*, (Amsterdam, 1603).

Referring to so early a date as 1598, he says: “The elders end and determine Matters, yet they will pretend that the church doeth it; whereas, in truth, they give the Church the title and name, but they usurp the power.”³

Such a proposition cynically labeled Johnson’s endorsement of a congregational position prior to 1609/10 as an act of expediency to maintain his control of the congregation rather than a genuine conviction.

Henry Martyn Dexter, American Congregationalist pastor and historian, was convinced that Johnson had genuinely undergone a gradual return to a more “High Church” theory of church government due to “the various experiences of trial through which the church had passed.”⁴ Dexter attributed the shift in Johnson’s ecclesiology to Daniel Studley’s influence based on William Bradford’s assessment of the situation. Dexter recognized an inherent ambiguity in the earlier confession of faith authored under the leadership of Barrow and Greenwood. This ambiguity has been cited in chapter two and Dexter’s identification of it commended. Dexter, however, believed that the ambiguity also existed in the *True Confession*. As the author indicated in chapter two of this research project, the *True Confession* was actually more explicit regarding the authority of the eldership than the Confession of 1589. Dexter’s position on Johnson’s ecclesiological change in 1610 permitted the possibility of a gradual change that culminated with Smyth’s decision to join the Mennonites.

While Dexter was correct in his estimation that Johnson probably always experienced an undercurrent of tension with the Ancient Church’s congregational polity

³F. J. Powicke, *Henry Barrow Separatist (1550?-1622)*, (London: James Clarke & Co., 1900), 255.

⁴Henry Martyn Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years As Seen In Its Literature*, (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1880), 324-25.

due to his authoritarian personality, the tension existed because Johnson really did accept for a time the scriptural validity of congregational government. Therefore, Johnson's break with his congregational views, while certainly not completely out of continuity with his earlier presbyterian stance, was more painful and abrupt than Dexter allowed. The primary problem with Dexter's assessment was that he portrayed Johnson as either out of control, preferring a presbyterian system but chafing under a congregational polity, or as uncertain, unable to settle the ambiguity of "Barrowist" polity in his own mind.

Neither interpretation of Johnson was supported by the primary source material, especially Johnson's own writings. Both the *Trve Confession* and *An Apology* are unambiguous in their statements regarding the importance of congregational polity and the congregation rather than the eldership as the proper tribunal for church discipline. Francis Johnson clearly viewed his new theological orientation as completely at odds with *An Apology* to the extent that he used quotations from that work to provide a foil for his arguments in favor of a strong eldership.⁵ Henry Ainsworth clearly saw Johnson's new direction as a definite break with his earlier views and continued to defend the views expressed in *An Apology* for the rest of his life.⁶ In 1613, Ainsworth's faction won the Ancient Church's worship building, located on the Vloomburg in the Lange Houtstraat

⁵Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*.

⁶Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion to Mr Richard Clyftons advertisement Who under pretense of answering Chr. Lawnes book, hath published an other mans private letter, with Mr Francis Iohnsons answer therto. Which letter is here justified; the answer therto refuted: and the true causes of the lamentable breach that hath lately fallen out in the English exiled Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1613).

outside St. Anthony Poort, on the basis of the court's judgment that Ainsworth's faction was the legitimate continuation of the original congregation.⁷

While George Johnson soundly condemned his brother's authoritarian tendencies, it would seem obvious that those very tendencies would militate against Johnson's willingness to live with a system he did not believe at the time could potentially be effective. Playing a part would profit Francis Johnson very little, especially when George Johnson and Thomas White were ready and willing to expose his authoritarianism to the world. It was more likely that Johnson was a pragmatist at times and followed his personality to the contradiction of the official statements of his congregation, though he genuinely believed in those statements at the time.

B. R. White, at Regent's Park College, Oxford, also recognized a change in Johnson's ecclesiology and attributed that change to Johnson's external interaction with John Smyth rather than internal challenges within the Ancient Church. White's answer to Dexter's position that Johnson secretly entertained a steadily growing disposition toward presbyterian polity was well crafted. White responded:

Undoubtedly, as was seen in Chapter V, this explanation does contain part of the truth- Johnson's earlier practice must have made it easier for him to adopt his final position- but it does not contain the whole answer. It does not, for example, explain why, if he already possessed the reality of power, he felt it necessary to turn his back on the virtually unanimous voice of the Separatist tradition and to press his view about his theoretical right to it to the point where he destroyed his own Congregation. It seems almost certain that he would not have taken this unexpected step except in response to some new threat to his authority, yet there is no evidence of such a threat arising within his Congregation at the time. As will later be seen, Ainsworth was moved most unwillingly to protest by Johnson's

⁷Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 50-51. J. De Hoop Scheffer, *History of the Free Churchmen Called the Brownists, Pilgrim Fathers, and Baptists In The Dutch Republic*, (Ithaca, NY: Andrus & Church, 1922), 132-33. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 168-69.

insistence on his new position, and there is no evidence to suggest that Johnson earlier felt threatened by Ainsworth. Indeed, all the available evidence supports George Johnson's views, though without justifying his contempt for Ainsworth, about the mildness of the latter's disposition.⁸

White indicated that Johnson's change was more dramatic than any of the other historians cited above. He was convinced that Johnson did seriously entertain adherence to a congregational view of church government but changed his position as a result of the circumstances of his congregation.⁹ White's view that Johnson was sincere in his attempt to follow a congregational polity stands as the best interpretation of the evidence, especially in terms of Johnson's contributions to *An Apology* and *A True Confession*.

As stated in chapter two, the point where the author of this research project differs with White is in his assessment of H. M. Dexter and Champlin Burrage's assertion that Barrow and Greenwood were attempting to create a congregationalism that provided a moderate course between Robert Browne's congregationalism and Puritanism. White disagreed with their interpretation and suggested that Barrow and Greenwood's conception of church polity was the same as Browne's, though they arrived at their ecclesiology through different means.¹⁰ While Burrage and Dexter were overstating the case in their view that Barrow and Greenwood were intentionally setting out to craft a middle way between the two views, the Confession of 1589 does invest the Elders with a great deal of authority, though White is correct in saying that church discipline is theoretically invested in the church under the Confession of 1589.

⁸B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs To The Pilgrim Fathers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 142-43.

⁹White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, 142-43.

¹⁰B. R. White, *English Separatist Tradition*, 72-72. Dexter, *Congregationalism*, 212. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. 1, 129.

Despite the fact that Barrow and Greenwood invested the congregation with a role in church discipline, White did not give enough attention to their description of the Elder's duties. At the risk of repeating some information presented in chapter two of this study, it is necessary to indicate the distinctions between the Confession of 1589 and the *True Confession of 1596*. While the former sought to provide congregational autonomy while also providing protective checks to preserve the power of the leadership, the latter was crafted to maintain the leadership's accountability to the people. Barrow and Greenwood invested the Elders with authority "to see the statutes, ordinances, and lawes of God kept in the Church, and that not onlie by the people in obedience, but to see the Officers do their dueties."¹¹ Barrow and Greenwood's intentions are difficult to assess, especially since they never had the opportunity to administer their church government. The inclusion of their statement on the Elder's responsibility could be construed to conflict with the priority of the "Church" in matters of discipline and appeared to be a check on the congregation's authority in the matter of discipline. The *True Confession of 1596* contained statements focused on checking the powers of the leadership rather than the congregation. Article twenty-three of the *True Confession* stated that members of the Congregation should give loving reverence to their ministers, chosen by them, as long as the ministers "faithfully execute their office."¹² Should the ministers begin to neglect their office or in some other way violate their calling to ministry, the congregation was invested with the authority to "depriveth them of their ministerie" and "orderly cut them

¹¹Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 36-37.

¹²Williston Walker, *Creed and Platforms*, 66.

off by excommunication” if they “remayne obstinate and impenitent.”¹³ Every member of the Ancient Church, “how excellent, great, or learned soeuer” was subject to the “censure and iudgment of Christ” mediated through the congregation.¹⁴ Johnson had come to believe that this situation presented an unacceptable limitation to the authority of the Pastors and Elders, preventing them from properly monitoring the faithfulness of their congregation. Motivated by his assessment of the practical effectiveness and scriptural warrant for the congregational polity presented in the *Trve Confession*, Johnson did, as White noted, choose to challenge every precedent of the Separatist tradition. The risk Johnson chose to take in returning to his former ecclesiological convictions threatened to polarize and destabilize a fairly stable situation in which Johnson still held the power for all practical intents and purposes.

Johnson’s willingness to take this risk was undoubtedly because of Smyth’s actions. Johnson wrote as much:

This brief Treatise following, which now I publish, I have written about the vnderstanding and exposition of those wordes of Christ, *Tell the Church, & c. Mat. 18. 17.* The occasions that have moved me herevnto, are not vnknownen to many others besides my self: and I need not speake of them in particular. Onely twoo things there are, which for some causes I thinke needful to mentioned and observed.

The first is, that as the Papists by insisting vpon the letter of the Scripture, have misvnderstoode and perverted the meaning of those wordes of Christ, *This is my body, & c.* And as the Anabaptists pressing the letter, have erred in like manner about other words of Christ recorded by the same Evangelist, where it is saide, “*Teach all nations, and baptize them: Swear not at all: Resist not evil, & c.*” So have many of vs done like wise about these wordes of Christ *Tell the Church, & c.*

The other is, that the misvnderstanding hereof, and the practice ensuing therevpon, hath bene a great meanes and speciall occasion of straunge opinions, and aberrations, of lamentable contentions and divisions, of opposing and despising the Elders government, of emulation and debate among people, with sundrie other

¹³Walker, *Creed and Platforms*, 66-67.

¹⁴Walker, *Creed and Platforms*, 66-67.

evils arising and spreading them selves daylie, to the great dishonor of God, and our owne continuall grieffe, and trouble, and much reproach from others abroad.¹⁵

An asterisk was printed between the words “occasion of” and “straunge opinions” in the original copies of *Tell The Church*. The punctuation was placed there to indicate a marginal note by Johnson describing the source of these “straunge opinions” and “aberrations.” The marginal note read “For whiche see M. Sm. Differences, Parallels, character, & c.”¹⁶ Johnson’s reference to “much reproach from others abroad” indicated that he was painfully aware of the criticism directed at the Ancient Church by Richard Bernard and Henoeh Clapham.

No ambiguity existed in Johnson’s mind regarding the distinction between his ecclesiological position from 1592 to 1609/10 and the new direction he felt compelled to pursue. Johnson was fully aware that he was breaking with his public stance on the issue of congregational rule. He made this fact clear by using *An Apology* and *A Trve Confession*, both works he had either written himself or in collaboration with Ainsworth, to represent the fallacious view of congregational rule that he was seeking to debunk in 1611. Johnson quoted page 62 of *An Apology*, which stated, “*That the power of excommunication is in the body of the Church, whereof the parties that are to be cast out are members.*”¹⁷ Presenting his and Ainsworth’s strong endorsement of Christ’s literal meaning in his imperative to “Tell the Church,” Johnson proposed in *Tell The Church* to challenge his former argument in favor of a less literal interpretation. Rather than accepting the gathered body of believers as the “Church” in cases of congregational

¹⁵Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, Preface to the Christian Reader.

¹⁶Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, Preface to the Christian Reader.

¹⁷Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, The Allegation of Mat. 18. 17. in our Apologie against the D. of Ox., Pag. 63.

discipline, Johnson argued that Jesus was indicating instead the “congregation of Elders.”¹⁸ The congregational view presented in *An Apology* was, in Francis Johnson’s estimation, “vnfounde, and can not be warranted by the Scriptures.”¹⁹

Johnson set forth five reasons in *Tell The Church* to support his position on the role of Elders in the Ancient Church. He indicated his view that Scripture often used the term “Church or Congregation” for an “Assembly of Elders”, noted the cultural context of Christ’s statement in a Jewish world accustomed to following a body of Elders (the Sanhedrin), reminded his readers that the “Presbyterie or Congregation of Elders” was ordained by God for the very purpose of arbitrating inter-congregational disputes, warned that family members and friends were forced to judge their own loved ones when the term “Church” was interpreted broadly, and lamented that the congregational interpretation of the passage disturbed the harmony between the old and new covenant presented in the two Testaments.²⁰ Johnson provided further commentary on each of these points after listing them in the order above. Three of them in particular merit special notice because two of Johnson’s points, both involving the relationship of Ancient Israel to the New Testament Church, indicated a theological predisposition of Johnson’s previously noted in his *Brief Treatise*. The fourth point in Johnson’s list, the unenviable position of families that have to judge their own loved ones, was born both from his previous experiences with his own family and the impending necessity of finally addressing the Daniel Studley situation.

¹⁸Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, B.

¹⁹Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, B.

²⁰Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, B.

Points two and five in Johnson's list both referred to precedents set by Ancient Israel. Johnson's second point raised the issue of the cultural setting of Jesus' auditors and the original readers of Matthew's Gospel. According to Johnson, Jesus' words were directed to the "Jewes present estate." He used Jesus' reference to the "offended brother" in Matthew 18:15 to speculate that Jesus intended to describe the proper process for church discipline when he related that the "offended brother" took his debtor before the authorities. Whereas the Jewish authorities in ecclesiastical matters would be the Sanhedrin, the Elders would constitute the Christian equivalent.²¹

It was apparently quite important to Johnson that parallels exist between the old and new covenants. Johnson and John Smyth's differing estimations of the importance of the old covenant for determining the interpretation of the new on the issue of baptism and circumcision has already been described in chapter five of this study. A key to understanding this theological priority of Francis Johnson lay in his belief that a symmetrical system of complimentary practices and institutions was established by Christ that enabled the Jewish Apostles to comprehend the new role of the Church by reference to the worship and institutions of Ancient Israel. Johnson wrote:

And note here, that if Christ nowe had given a new rule of government that Israell not, the Disciples to whom it was spoken, could not have understoode it by these wordes, which were according to the Iewes receaved phrase and practice: and the Pharisees and other adversaries of Christ would have ben glad, if they could have such an exception against Christ, that hee had taught contrary to Moses, and had led the people from the way and order of government which the Lord him selfe had prescribed in his word.²²

²¹Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, B.

²²Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*, C.

Johnson described the role of the priests and judges in Ancient Israel as an authoritative example of precedents to be followed in judging erring members in a Christian congregation.

In light of his reliance on Jewish forms for interpreting Christian traditions, it is interesting that Johnson applied this rule to determining when a case could leave properly the confines of the Church and be determined by the civil authorities. This problem was more than a theoretical scenario for Johnson, who had already endured the civil case against Thomas and Rose White and soon would be faced with a civil challenge from Ainsworth concerning the proper ownership of their meeting house. Johnson took Christ's admonition to treat a disciplined brother or sister like a "Heathen and a Publicane" to indicate both a withdrawal of fellowship and permission to take that person before the civil authorities. His position was based again on his typological parallelism in regard to church institutions and Ancient Israel. Johnson posited:

Therefore also those wordes are spoken vnto him, where Christ saith, *Let him be to thee as an Heathen and a Publicane*. And thus in such cases, such of the Iewes which had occasion might without offence bring one another before the Romane Magistrates, as they might and would be an Heathen & Publicane: Which the Elders or other brethren of the Iewes might not doe, vnless when they had like cause of dealing with any, and had used like proceeding with them before.

And this exposition agreeth well with the circumstances of the text, and the Iewes estate, being then vnder the Roman government. For whereas offence might be taken amongst the Iewes, if one of them brought an other, about their causes and injuries, to the Romane Tribunall, as the Romanes allowed them to doe: Christ here sheweth how to prevent and avoid the scandal, what in them laye, by first vsing all meanes that among them selves they could.²³

Johnson's fifth reason indicated his view that the congregational view could not be scriptural in part because the Jews would not have been presented with the option to arbitrate their own disputes as a collective group. They lived under a system where such

²³Johnson, *Tell The Church*, B 3.

duties would be discharged by chosen authorities. Johnson intimated that the insistence of others that the term “Church” indicated the whole body of believers must demonstrate that their view was in concert with “the doctrines and rules of the Scripture given in the olde Testament, and not to be straunge or departing therefrom.”²⁴ He had noted an inconsistency in his democratic view of church polity and hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament and chose in favor of his hermeneutical approach.

Johnson also indicated his concern that allowing cases for church discipline to be constantly aired before the entire congregation placed the loved ones of the accused in an untenable position. His unstated secondary reason was probably the embarrassment such spectacles were to the leadership of the church and the ammunition they provided for opponents of the congregation. The Whites, George Johnson, John Johnson, and other Separatist dissidents had been telling their stories to the likes of Christopher Lawne, who proved only too willing to publish these negative tales in the wake of the split between Johnson and Ainsworth.²⁵ Confining deliberations concerning church discipline to the Elders would limit the number of persons who were able to share what they heard with outsiders. Johnson explained:

Fourthly, because if the multitude of men women and children of yeares be here vnderstood by the word *Church or Congregation*, (as some would have it) then should they be bound to be present in their owne persons to employe themselves and their labour in the hearing and iudging of the causes daily airing between a man and his brother. And when at any time it fell out, that a Maister, Father, Husband, or the like, should be deal withal for sinne, it would come to passe, that the Maister should be brought and compleyned of his servaunts, the Father to his

²⁴Johnson, *Tell the Church*, B 2.

²⁵Christopher Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists With the impietie, dissensions, levvd, and abhominable vices of that impure sect*, (London : Printed by William Stansby, 1612). Christopher Lawne, *Brovvnisme turned the in-side out-ward Being a paralell betweene the profession and practise of the Brownists religion*, (London : Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1613).

children, the husbände to his wife, yea Rulers & Governors to such as have no Authoritie or government committed vnto them by the Lord.²⁶

Johnson's desire to protect the "Ruler & Governors" extended more to the ecclesiastical authorities of the Ancient Church than civil authorities. Daniel Studley's misconduct was a major factor driving Johnson's reluctance to air the misdeeds of the Ancient Church's leaders before the full assembly of the congregation. In fact, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, Johnson's desire to protect Studley was also influencing his decision to support a more presbyterian polity.

2. *Exit Henry Ainsworth*

Henry Ainsworth was described in chapter three of this research project as a perfect complement to Francis Johnson. Ainsworth was an incredibly gifted individual whose intellectual acumen exceeded Johnson's; he was a riveting teacher and an avid student of scripture in its original languages, particularly the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. In addition to all of his talents, Ainsworth also was a man of remarkable humility for someone with his obvious ability. Ainsworth, like John Robinson, tended to be a gentle soul who avoided conflict. Unfortunately for Johnson, Ainsworth would overcome his hesitation and challenge Johnson's authority when the issue involved the issue of eldership.

To the surprise and chagrin of his supporters, Ainsworth did not immediately lead the charge against Johnson. True to his personality, Ainsworth was at first reticent in his challenge to Johnson. A group of Ainsworth supporters wrote to John Robinson at Leiden in 1610 to complain about Ainsworth's hesitancy. Ainsworth reproduced a document in his *An animadversion to Mr Richard Clyftons advertisement Who under*

²⁶Francis Johnson, *Tell The Church*.

pretense of answering Chr. Lawnes book, hath published an other mans private letter, with Mr Francis Iohnsons answer therto. Which letter is here justified; the answer therto refuted: and the true causes of the lamentable breach that hath lately fallen out in the English exiled Church at Amsterdam attributed to the Robinson congregation at Leiden. The document was entitled “The testimonie of the Elders of the Church at Leyden” and was solicited from them by Ainsworth as evidence of Johnson’s refusal to allow their arbitration of the conflicts dividing the Ancient Church. Robinson’s congregation wrote:

And first, Our special calling to intermedle in this vncomfortable busynes, was a letter sent vnto vs by some 30. of the brethren there. In which, mentioning in the beginning of it, their *long, and greivous controversy*, they signified how they had *oft desired of the Church to request our help* therin, and that *the Elders would no way aporove therof*: but would onely permitt our coming, eyther of our selves, or at their request. Wherin they also certified vs, how some of them *had charged the exposition of these words Tell the Church, Mat. 18, 17. Tell the Elders*, with some other particulars therupon depending, to be *errour*: and *so were to prove their charge*: and therefore *earnestly requested us to help in that great busynes*, that the truth *might be mainteyned, and not by their weaknes injured, and the innocent condemned: and that we would help the Lord against the mighty &c.* And the reason why they thus earnestly requested our help was, because M. Ainsworth was so sparing in opposing of Mr Iohnsons new doctrine (though alwayes misliking it) as they scarce knew how he was minded in the things: so loath was he to come to any professed, and publique opposition with him, whom he rather hoped to pacify by moderation, then by opposition to stop in his intended course. Besides he was careful not to give any encouragement to the too violent oppositions of some brethren, though minded as they were, in the things themselves.²⁷

According to their testimony, representatives from Robinson’s congregation traveled to Amsterdam of their own accord in response to the letter from the thirty members of the Ancient Church mentioned above. They returned at the request of Henry

²⁷Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion to Mr Richard Clyftons advertisement Who under pretense of answering Chr. Lawnes book, hath published an other mans private letter, with Mr Francis Iohnsons answer therto. Which letter is here justified; the answer therto refuted: and the true causes of the lamentable breach that hath lately fallen out in the English exiled Church at Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1613), 123-33.

Ainsworth.²⁸ They claimed that Johnson and Ainsworth initially appeared to accept their arbitration and arranged for a peaceful vote concerning the issue of separation.

Robinson's congregation was disappointed to learn later that both Johnson and Ainsworth had resorted to more acrimonious methods of resolving their conflict.²⁹

Ainsworth considered Johnson's new position on Eldership to be antithetical to the spirit of English Separatism and a betrayal of the principles they had fought together to defend. Searching for the most painful comparison possible, Ainsworth wrote:

I had experience, in former dealing vvith M. Smyth, of his unstayednes, that vvould not stand to the things vvwhich himself had vvritten: I mind the like in these Opposites, vvho are not settled for the constitution of their Church and Ministerie, upon any ground that I knowv of, unless it be popish succession. Their former vvritings about the Church and ministry, and their present estate, wil not stand together. Seing those books are unanswered by others, they should answer them (if they can) themselves; and shew us by Gods word what is allowable, vvhat disallovvable in them. Till they doo this, vvho vvould vvillingly deal vvith them? 3. Ther are 9. reasons in that our Apologie to confirm the povver of the Church novv in question: the foresaid Treatise dealeth but against one of them, leaving the rest there, and vvhatsoever is vvritten.³⁰

Ainsworth soundly reasoned that separation from the Established Church and the creation of a covenant community conveyed by their very nature an authority on the part of the gathered congregation to make those decisions. How could a congregation choose to covenant together if they had no inherent authority to make such a profession? Who had invested the leaders of the Ancient Church with their authority if not the congregation, acting out of the spiritual authority delegated to them by God? Rejection of their former position threatened, in Ainsworth's estimation, to invalidate the spiritual legitimacy of the Ancient Church. Ainsworth insisted:

²⁸Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion*, 134-35.

²⁹Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion*, 134-38.

³⁰Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion*, 6.

I held it my duty to shew the people the consequences of the former error, which though at first it may seem smal, yet is it as a strong fort in the mouth of a country, which if the enemy win, the whole land is soon lost. For if all the power of receiving in and casting out, were given to the Elders: then our Church which was first gathered and constituted, did receiv in and cast out members without Elders, was not planted by the power of Christ; neyther had they authoritie to set up Elders if they could not agayn vpon desert depose them, and if they had not power to judge their brethren, much less could they judge their Elders. And here came in the gathering of the church by vertue of popish baptisme, and of receiving the ministry from Rome, as wel as the baptisme, and the like, which our opposites were and must necessarily be driven unto, for defense of their errour. And as for the first gathering of this church, they sayd an error in the doing, overthroweth not the action: for Isaak erred in blessing Iaakob in sted of Esau, yet the action did stand. To which we answered, that it was doon by a person who had power from God to give the blessing, and the action was also confirmed by the evidence of Gods spirit afterward: but this people (upon our opposites doctrine) had no authority from God, to doo as they did, neyther could they shew any confirmation of the work by God, if our former grounds fayl us.³¹

Ainsworth intimated that he and his faction of the congregation (which must have numbered at least the thirty of the Robinson testimony) were content to live in peace with Johnson's faction. Ainsworth claimed that, "Moreover seing we offred much more, (which concerneth not onely *Mat. 18.17.* but al other scriptures,) that *we would notwithstanding our difference of judgement, have continued together, if our former practise might have been reteyned.*"³² Their proposition that Johnson could have his beliefs if he did not practice them predictably did not persuade Johnson.

As his title indicated, Ainsworth was responding in 1613 to a treatise written by Richard Clifton (1553-1616) in 1612. Clifton was the former rector at Babworth in the vicinity of Retford, Nottinghamshire. Clifton was a founding member of the Scrooby Congregation in 1606 and possibly its leader or one of two leaders, the other being

³¹Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion*, 5-6.

³²Henry Ainsworth, *An animadversion*, 5-7.

Robinson.³³ W. T. Whitley believed that Robinson and Clifton shared the dominant pastoral responsibilities for the church at Scrooby, which had not officially organized, while affirming Smyth's authority over the two congregations as a whole.³⁴ While Whitley theorized that John Robinson had formed his own congregation at Amsterdam separate from the Ancient Church in 1609, Clifton elected to remain with the Ancient Church. Following Ainsworth's departure, Clifton was selected as Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church.³⁵

As stated above, Clifton's treatise, *An advertisement concerning a book lately published by Christopher Lawne*, was a response to Christopher Lawne's publication of *The prophane schisme of the Brovvvnists* in 1612. Ainsworth was angry because Clifton had imprudently published a letter from Ainsworth to a friend in England describing the split between Johnson and Ainsworth.³⁶ Clifton had reviewed each of the various disputes that were chronicled in chapter three of this study to demonstrate that the accusations of impropriety and internal anarchy leveled at the Ancient Church by Lawne were groundless. After addressing the problems with George Johnson and Thomas White, Clifton turned his attention to the immediate cause of Lawne's attack on the Ancient Church, the split with Ainsworth. Clifton referred to the Ainsworth faction as "the persons who of late divided themselves from us" and indicated that "have since that

³³Stephen Wright, "Clifton, Richard (c.1553–1616)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5671> (accessed June 15, 2006).

³⁴W. T. Whitley, *Works of John Smyth*, Vol. I, lxviii-lxix.

³⁵Richard Clifton, *An advertisement concerning a book lately published by Christopher Lawne and others, against the English exiled Church at Amsterdam. By Richard Clyfton teacher of the same church*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1612), Title page.

³⁶Clifton, *An advertisement*, 23-24.

time given forth some exceptions and Articles of difference.”³⁷ He further charged that Ainsworth’s congregation “despises the holy government of Christ, which he hath set in his Church to be administered by the Elders thereof.”³⁸

Ainsworth’s cover letter was followed by the “Articles of Difference” indicated by Clifton. The “Articles of Difference” contained examples of articles taken from the *Trve Confession* that stood in contrast to Johnson’s new ecclesiological position.³⁹

Johnson had stated his own position in five articles transmitted in the aforementioned letter to Ainsworth. Based on Ainsworth’s answers and Clifton’s reproduction of them, these articles were the same five that Johnson delivered in his *Tell the Church*.

Ainsworth sought to answer each point in his *Animadversion*.⁴⁰ The conflict between the leaders of the Ancient Church had been exposed for everyone to read.

The formal break between Ainsworth’s faction and Johnson occurred on December 15-16, 1610.⁴¹ The two factions were popularly labeled “Franciscans” and “Ainsworthians.” Ainsworth’s faction, the minority group, began to meet in a building adjacent to the Ancient Church’s facility. John Paget took great delight in the situation because the building where they were meeting was a former meeting house for Jews before Ainsworth’s group determined to settle there. He was able to turn Ainsworth’s accusations regarding the impropriety of meeting in a former Beguinage on their head. The proximity of their new place of worship to the old one meant that the members of the

³⁷Richard Clifton, *An advertisement*, 17-18.

³⁸Clifton, *An advertisement*, 18.

³⁹Clifton, *An advertisement*, 23-40.

⁴⁰Ainsworth, *Animadversion*. Clifton, *Advertisement*, 23-40.

⁴¹Clifton, *Advertisement*, 93-94.

two congregations would pass one another on the way to Sunday worship. Ainsworth's faction filed suit against Johnson for possession of the Lange Houtstraat building. They were awarded possession of the building in 1613 as described above.⁴²

Deprived of his fine worship facility and betrayed by his lieutenant, Johnson was forced to consider the possibility of removal from Amsterdam. His only other course would be to erect another building and possibly continue the conflict with Ainsworth. Johnson chose to relocate his congregation to Emden in Friesland. From 1613 to 1617, Johnson's group settled in that region and practiced the church polity of Elder rule that had been adopted by Johnson. There was, however, one Elder who would end his career under a public cloud.

3. *Judgment Day (Almost) for Daniel Studley*

The constant attacks on the integrity of the Ancient Church by Christopher Lawne and his associates finally made it impossible for Francis Johnson to hide Daniel Studley's conduct any longer. Lawne supplied a litany of offenses that have already been recounted in chapter three.⁴³ While Lawne's charges were published in 1612 and 1613, they were referenced in chapter three of this study because Studley's improper conduct had been a matter of suspicion if not certainty soon after his arrival with Johnson in Amsterdam. The publication of Lawne's treatises placed the accusations against Studley

⁴²Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 50-51, 55-69. J. De Hoop Scheffer, *History of the Free Churchmen Called the Brownists, Pilgrim Fathers, and Baptists In The Dutch Republic*, (Ithaca, NY: Andrus & Church, 1922), 132-33. Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 168-69.

⁴³ Christopher Lawne, *The prophane schisme of the Brovvnists or separatists With the impietie, dissensions, levvd, and abhominable vices of that impure sect*, (London : Printed by William Stansby, 1612). Christopher Lawne, *Brovvnisme turned the in-side out-ward Being a paralell betweene the profession and practise of the Brownists religion*, (London : Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1613).

before the public and placed pressure on the Ancient Church to deal with Studley in order to demonstrate their sincerity.

Richard Clifton included Daniel Studley's own defense of his conduct and leadership in the *Advertisement*. Some of Studley's responses to these charges were mentioned in chapter three. In response to the charge that he had behaved unseemly with his wife's daughter, Studley acknowledged "that my behaviour towards her was sinfull and unseemly, yet for ought that I ever did to her, (howsoever some uncharitably, and other maliciously have written and spoken) was farre from carnal copulation."⁴⁴ As for his attempts to seduce various women, Studley admitted:

For my evill carriage to that mayde (about two yeeres since) I confesse to my owne shame, that I haue done foolishly once, yea twice, but I trust, through God's grace, I shall never doe so againe; yet as these enemies, both here and elsewhere in their book haue set it down, it is a false calumniation, for (speaking of it with sorrow and grief of heart, and unfaynedly repenting for it) I doe acknowledge, that though my behavior to her was bad and unseemly, yet not with any intention of the act, as these men intimate, neyther spake I so much as one unchaste word with her at any time. That which I did, and onely intended to doe, was clapping her onely. . . I have not knowne any woman young nor old, maryed woman, widow, or mayde, saue only my lawfull wives (having had two) and not them neyther until I was lawfully married to them.⁴⁵

Studley's confession revealed beyond a doubt that he had a problem with lascivious temptations even if he had not, as he claimed, had actual intercourse with any of the women. Lawne and his associates had also spoken "of the uncovering of my nakedness and the maydes seeing it."⁴⁶ To the charge of exhibitionism, Studley replied, "I testifie, it is more than I can saye for certain whether she did see me or no, but considering how our houses stood, with the windows and doors one over against the other, & knowing in

⁴⁴Clifton, *Advertisement*, 117.

⁴⁵Clifton, *Advertisement*, 120-21.

⁴⁶Clifton, *Advertisement*, 120-21.

what case, my selfe sometimes by occasion was in my owne house, it mought be she did so see me, & it mought be otherwise.”⁴⁷

One may well be forgiven for asking why it is necessary to revisit the muddy waters of Daniel Studley’s personal life that have already been related in chapter three. One reason is that while the subject appeared topically in chapter three of this project, the accusations were being made public chronologically soon after the split of the Ancient Church. Secondly, Daniel Studley was a pivotal influence encouraging Johnson in his assertion of the Elder’s role. His attitude toward congregational rule was partially shaped by his own problems. Fifteen members of the Ancient Church grew tired of Studley’s escapades and the resulting contempt for the Ancient Church. They framed a series of articles and submitted them for the church’s consideration. Studley wrote:

There were fifteen persons, that factiously had their meetings sundry times, to consult and plot against me, determining with and among themselves, to haue dismiss me from my office. Here was a beginning to tread the pathway to popular government, the very baine to all good order in church and common weale: and for the ground of their proceeding against me, they framed fourteen (not sixteen as these men (Lawne and his coauthors) untruly say) matters against me, some seven yeeres old; others of lesse time, some of them eyther ended in the church, or past by of the church, and others of them private matters, never dealt in by any.⁴⁸

While one would expect Studley’s actions finally to receive a proper hearing, the group of fourteen was instead commanded to reveal when they had met and how often. They were then urged to bring their concerns to the church through the proper processes. Studley did not provide a date for the incident, though it must have occurred before 1612 due to Lawne’s knowledge of the episode. Studley’s alleged impropriety with Judith Holder, related in chapter three of this study, was also a major topic of conversation

⁴⁷Clifton, *Advertisement*, 121.

⁴⁸Clifton, *Advertisement*, 122.

during the appeal of the fifteen. Contrary to Lawne's accusation, Studley maintained that he never confessed to any wrongdoing, that the fourteen articles were never proved, and that his only punishment was an admonition from Johnson to "take heed to the office I had received from the Lord."⁴⁹ Studley retained that office and supported Johnson against Ainsworth. He left Amsterdam with Johnson for Emden, after which he disappeared from public record. Studley's guilt or innocence remained a question never fairly tried. The one thing that was certain was that his conduct was at least somewhat to blame for the charges leveled against him and that they contributed to the continuing assaults against the Ancient Church by their enemies.

4. *Exile to Emden*

Johnson's congregation arrived at Emden in 1613. They had suffered a humiliating defeat in the loss of their meeting house and were looking for a congenial place to start over. Emden provided an atmosphere of religious toleration comparable to that of Amsterdam. It was also an area that had been controlled for some time by a Reformed government and ecclesiastical settlement.⁵⁰ Johnson had reason to hope for prosperity. Emden was the destination for many Dutch immigrants in the early seventeenth-century. The Dutch community at Emden brought their business acumen with them, promising to raise the level of prosperity in the region. Emden was also the place where the first Dutch bible was published. Johnson had found a place where his people could breathe freely and he could contemplate his future course.

⁴⁹ Clifton, *Advertisement*, 124.

⁵⁰ Heinz Shilling, *Civic Calvinism In Northwestern Germany and the Netherlands: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Studies Publishers, 1991), 11-40. Andrew Pettigree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

The years at Emden were the silent years for Johnson. No writings are known to have been published during this period of Johnson's life. It is likely that he had already begun the composition of *A Christian Plea* shortly before leaving Amsterdam or immediately after his arrival at Emden.

5. *A Christian Plea*

Francis Johnson returned to Amsterdam in 1617. What was his purpose in returning after such a long absence? Johnson's sudden return to Amsterdam shortly before his death has long been a mystery. Did he sense that he was dying and therefore feel compelled to return to the scene of his most prodigious labors and fruitful years of ministry? Or could it be that he had composed his final treatise and was ready for it to be disseminated? Johnson naturally would have wanted to submit his treatise to the network of Separatist printers in Amsterdam who had been so instrumental in spreading Separatist dogma throughout his ministry.⁵¹ Johnson's exile can be explained by his desire to remove his congregation from the terrible tempest that had arisen with Ainsworth. He also may have wanted time away from Amsterdam to reflect and to prepare his answer to all of his various critics.

That answer, *A Christian plea conteyning three treatises. I. The first, touching the Anabaptists, & others mainteyning some like errours with them. II. The second, touching such Christians, as now are here, commonly called Remonstrants or Arminians. III. The third, touching the Reformed Churches, with vvhom my self agree in the faith of the Gospel of our Lord Iesus Christ*, revealed Johnson's new position in regard to the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Johnson had already made some tentative

⁵¹ Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 69-75.

overtures toward a more positive view of the Christian tradition mediated through the Roman Catholic Church. His concern that the Anabaptist's rejection of all Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority would result in the loss of scriptural integrity and the creeds as well as baptism was indicated in his *Brief Treatise* of 1609. Johnson repeated this view while defending his decision not to ordain Richard Clifton after Clifton had become the Teaching Elder of the Ancient Church. Johnson responded to his critics that it made no more sense to repeat a former ordination than it did to repeat a former baptism.⁵² As Johnson expounded on this basic argument, he revealed the extent of the change that was beginning even at that point in his position toward the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church:

Furthermore, it is undeniable, and we have heretofore urged it much against the Anabaptists, that the Church of Rome was at first, set in the waie of God, & was not onely one of the Churches of God, but for their fayth and obedience was also very famous over the world. Since which tyme, shee is fallen into great apostasie and adulteries, as Israel did in former tymes. In all which her adulterate & apostate estate, she hath notwithstanding still kept (even to this day) sundrie truths and ordinances of God, & mixed with them her own inventions & traditions, as Israel also did. Which being observed aright causeth a twofold consideration of her estate as of Israels: one in respect of the truths and ordinances of God still retheyned among them; another in respect of the mixture of their owne inventions and abominations withal in regard of the one, to hold and acknowledge the truth & Church of God there, against the Anabaptists; in regarde of the other, to consider and observe their apostasie and Babylonish confusion, against Antichrist: and for this cause, mainly for this defection and mixture aforesaid, to separate from them and witness against them: being alway carefull in our testimonie and practise to retheyne and mayntayne everie truth & ordinance of God, which was in that Church before their apostasie, and is yet continued therein to this day . . . For it often cometh to pass, that the people doe on their part transgresse & break the covenant: when the Lord doth not so on his part, but still remembering his covenant, counts them his people, calls them to repentance, followes them sometymes with judgment, sometymes with mercie and compassion, & c.⁵³

⁵²Clifton, *Advertisement*, 50.

⁵³Clifton, *Advertisement*, 60.

While not quite a ringing endorsement of the Roman Catholic Church, Johnson's sentiments in 1612 clearly demonstrated that he had met the challenges of both Smyth and Clapham, deciding that the Roman Church still retained the seeds of true Christian faith and practice. Those foundational beliefs and practices had been covered by centuries of invention and adaptation until the deposit of truth held by the Roman Catholic Church was accompanied by a host of human inventions that obscured the pure gospel entrusted to the Church universal. Johnson had almost arrived at his final position in 1612, but had still come short of declaring the Roman Catholic Church to be a true spiritual communion and not even mentioned the Established Church. That omission was strange considering the fact that the Church of England had to be closer to purity than the Roman Catholic Church according to Johnson's standards. Johnson had invested too much energy into his critique of the Church of England to pardon her easily.

By the time Johnson published *A Christian Plea*, his position had been fully formed by four years of reflection and study. He had come to realize that presenting a united front against Anabaptists and Arminians required détente with the Church of England as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Johnson came much closer to the spirit of Henry Jacob and John Robinson by recognizing the two episcopal churches as Christian communions with serious defects, but Christian communions none the less. Johnson was still not likely to go hear a Puritan preacher at an Anglican Church or participate in a mass, but he was less likely to excommunicate those who had.

Whatever hostility Johnson had directed away from the Church of England was unleashed on the two great enemies of the Church, the Anabaptists and Remonstrants. The Remonstrant controversy had only grown worse in the years since Arminius' death

in 1609 and the composition of their petition in 1610. Even James I of England became concerned as the controversy became an international issue. James eventually supported a national council to resolve the points at issue. The Synod of Dort was convened in November 1618. The Synod of Dort was named for the Dutch city of Dordrecht where it met.⁵⁴

Momentum was already building for a Synod to be convened when Johnson published *A Christian Plea*. Johnson did not live to see the opening sessions of the Synod but would have been pleased with the resulting confessional statements. One can say this with certainty because Johnson mirrored the canons of Dort (memorialized in the popular TULIP⁵⁵ acrostic) in his own response to the Remonstrant controversy. One is forced to return once again to the ridiculous assertions by Edward Arber mentioned in the historiographical essay of chapter one. Arber's identification of the points contained in *A Christian Plea* as a possible "recantation" mentioned by Mathew Slade was indicative of someone who had not read the treatise or had no basic knowledge of the history of the Reformed tradition.⁵⁶ Sadly, Henry and Morton Dexter, Henry's son, also accepted Arber's claims, quoting him directly. One could easily assume that the quote was directly from Slade's letter if not for Dexter's inclusion of Arber's mistaken addition following Slade's allusion to the Refutation of Five Articles, "(of the Synod of Dort)."

⁵⁴Thomas Scott, *Articles of the Synod of Dort*, introductory essay by Samuel Miller, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 15-25.

⁵⁵The TULIP acrostic has been popularly accepted as a mnemonic device to enable theologians and students to remember the Articles of the Synod of Dort and the basic tenants of Calvinist thought. The T stands for Total Depravity (Original Sin), the U for Unconditional Election, L for Limited Atonement, I for Irresistible Grace, and P for Perseverance of the Saints. Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 7-20.

⁵⁶Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers 1606-1623*, (London: Ward and Downey Limited, 1897), 101-130.

They also buy and sell Arber's theory that the document Slade mentions was another unknown treatise of Johnson's when it is patently clear to anyone who has read *A Christian Plea* that this document is the one Matthew Slade was referencing.⁵⁷

Slade's letter was dated January 10, 1617/18, not the 20th as the Dexters claimed.⁵⁸ Matthew Slade was the man most responsible for the establishment of the English Reformed Church in Amsterdam as mentioned in chapter four of this study. In the passage that caused such a furor among students of Johnson's life, Slade reported:

This day we buried Master Francis Johnson, a man that hath, many years, been Pastor of the Brownists: and (having cast himself, and drawn others, into great troubles and miseries, for their opinions and schism) did, a few days before his death, publish a Book; wherein he disclaimed most of his former singularities and refuted them. To which he hath also annexed a brief Refutation of the Five Articles.⁵⁹

If Slade can be trusted, *A Christian Plea* was published not long before Johnson died and therefore circulated late in 1617. What Arber and the Dexters did not seem to take into consideration was the fact that Slade would not have eagerly announced Johnson's capitulation to Arminian principles as a Calvinist himself. He was gratified that Johnson had retreated from his hard-line approach to the Church of England and the English Reformed Church. Johnson's absolute rejection of the Church of England and communion with bodies larger than the local church were the primary "singularities" that separated Johnson from Slade.

⁵⁷Henry and Morton Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1978, originally published in 1906), 575-76.

⁵⁸Mathew Slade, Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Holland, United Kingdom National Archives, London, (S. P. 84, Vol. 82, fol. 34v.).

⁵⁹Mathew Slade, (S. P. 84, Vol. 82, fol. 34v.).

Having revisited the Arber debacle, the time has come to discuss what Francis Johnson really had to say in response to the Remonstrant Articles. “Touching such Christians as now are here, commonly called Remonstrants or Arminians” was the second of three separate treatises that made up the corpus of *A Christian Plea*. The first addressed the Anabaptists, and the third was addressed to other Reformed Churches. Johnson clearly identified the theological commonality of the Anabaptists and Remonstrants concerning their view of the general atonement. Johnson prefaced the second section of *A Christian Plea* by writing, “Hitherto of these opinions of the Anabaptists, and the assertions withall thereabout [possibly an allusion to Smyth’s congregation]. Now I come to some other points, which concerne not onely the Anabaptists, but such other Christians also, as are called Remonstrants or Arminians.”⁶⁰ Johnson did not mean his treatise to the Remonstrants to be a change of audience, but rather an extension of the previous discussion to the Remonstrants. Since Johnson’s arguments posed to the Anabaptists resemble his earlier contention with Smyth in *A Brief Treatise*, those particulars will be summarized later in this chapter.

Johnson focused largely on the importance of God’s election of believers and the consequences of elevating human free will at the expense of God’s sovereignty. After reminding the Remonstrants that the Bible spoke of elect angels as well as of elect people, Johnson proposed:

Seeing therefore the Scripture teacheth, that the election of God, is *according to the good pleasure of his own will*: seeing also it is grounded on God and not on Man; being certain and unchangeable; of the free grace and gift of God; to the glorie and praise of grace; causing and going before our faith and holiness of life; making Infants partakers of the kingdom of heaven; and having the like cause, as is of the choice of the elect Angels: let us therefore with the Scriptures, and

⁶⁰Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 220.

according thereunto, acknowledge that the fountaine and originall cause of our election is onely the will and good pleasure of God, to the praise of his Name and glorie of his grace for ever.⁶¹

For Francis Johnson, as for most Reformed opponents of the Remonstrants, the proposition that salvation depended on human choice was tantamount to diminishing the glory of God in salvation. Johnson insisted, “Then also part of the glorie of our salvation should be ascribed to man, & not the whole to God alone.”⁶²

Lest Johnson be misconstrued as anything less than a double-predestinarian, he clarified his views on reprobation as well as election in his treatise. Johnson clearly supported double-predestination or supralapsarianism, the view that God not only elects some to salvation, but others to reprobation or eternal damnation. In refuting human will or any other element as cause for God’s election, he rejects the same basis of human choice for reprobation. Johnson argued, “Neyther else should there be in general, one and the same cause of God’s decree, for election, and for reprobation: and that also both of Angels and of men: as there is one decreer of both, from all eternitie, to the glorie of his Name forever.”⁶³ Raising a common Remonstrant position asserting that “the doctrine of God’s predestination, especially Reprobation, should not be taught, or at least not taught unto the common people & c,” Johnson gave the simple reply, “Why then does the Scripture teach it, the Prophets, Apostles, and Christ himself?”⁶⁴

⁶¹Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 223.

⁶²Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 221.

⁶³Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 224.

⁶⁴Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 227.

On the subject of general atonement, Johnson believed, “Christ layd down his life onely for his sheep . . . and therefore not for all the world, seeing all are not his sheep.”⁶⁵ Salvation was not determined according to human will but rather “is wholly the free, gracious, and powerfull work of God within us.”⁶⁶ Johnson also addressed the subject of perseverance of the saints by the grace of God. The contrary Remonstrant opinion, that it was possible for one to lose or forfeit one’s salvation, seemed antithetical to personal assurance of salvation for Johnson. Johnson demurred:

Nether else could we (in this life) haue assurance of salvation in Christ: but should still be wavering and in doubt , and so be left without sound comfort, in the midst of manifold tentations and afflictions of this life. Like as come to pass by the erroneous doctrine of the Papists in this and other like points of their religion. Contrarie also to the assured promise of God, the true nature of faith, and the gracious testimonie of God’s spirit and the fruits thereof in us. (Besides the examples of such as are recorded in the Scriptures to haue had an assurance of salvation, and of perseverance to the end: As was shewed in some examples here before).⁶⁷

The divisions of Johnson’s middle section of *A Christian Plea* match very closely the topics under consideration at the Synod of Dort. Johnson’s section titles included: “Touching God’s election,” “Touching God’s Decree of Reprobation,” “Touching General Redemption,” “Touching Free Will, or power in our selves unto good, since the Fall,” “Touching the Perseverance of the Saints, that are truly godly, and sincerely beleieve in Jesus Christ.” Johnson’s treatise to the Remonstrants was broken into five sections, each of which matched the pivotal theological concerns advanced at the Synod of Dort. The main headings or chapter divisions of the “Articles of the Synod of Dort”

⁶⁵Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 232.

⁶⁶Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 234.

⁶⁷Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 235.

were “Of the Doctrine of Divine Predestination,” “Of the Doctrine of the Death of Christ, and Through it the Redemption of Men,” “Of the Doctrine of Man’s Corruption, and of the Method of His Conversion to God,” “Concerning the Perseverance of the Saints.”⁶⁸ The Articles of Dort were also divided into five chapters, though chapters three and four on man’s corruption and the method of conversion (original sin and unconditional election) were combined. Whatever catechetical sources influenced the contributors to Dort also influenced Johnson and were part of the common theological heritage of the Reformed churches in Western Europe. That Reformed heritage extended also to the Church of England. James I was intimately involved in calling for the Synod of Dort. James’ letter to the States General was sent in 1617 encouraging the convening of a national council to settle the Remonstrant issue.⁶⁹ If Johnson were aware of James’ letter, he may have been even more predisposed to see the Church of England as a potential ally against the Anabaptists and the Remonstrants.

Francis Johnson had spent most of his adult life warning people against the apostasy of the Church of England. He still believed there was apostasy in both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, but he had found new enemies and needed old allies. In the final chapter of his treatise to the Anabaptists, the first section of *A Christian Plea*, Johnson charged:

Now whereas our opposites hold also, that the church of England is not the church of God, nor hath the covenant of God; and the Baptisme there received is not true baptisme, but an idol, & lying signe, & c. their opinions are here again in many respect far more erroneous, and ungodly than before. For how ever some heretofore not regarding aright the faith there professed, and lothing the

⁶⁸*The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. by Thomas Scott, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 180-220.

⁶⁹Scott, *Articles of the Synod of Dort*, introductory essay by Samuel Miller, 20-22.

corruptions there retayned, haue misconceived some things concerning them and their estate: Yet now that there hath been longer time and more occasion further to consider thereof; seeing also into what extremities divers of our countrymen that are Anabaptists haue by this meanes the more run themselues; and specially considering the doctrine of faith which they profess in Christ alone unto salvation: it should teach al, more advisedly and heedfully to regard their estates in this behalf, & to acknowledge them to be the people and churches of God, having the covenant and baptisme of the Lord, & c.⁷⁰

The thought of Johnson referring to the Church of England as the “people and churches of God” was unthinkable for most of his ministry. He had pronounced the Church of England thoroughly reprobate and had encouraged all faithful Christians to separate fully from its corrupting influence. Though Johnson had not required the adult members of the Ancient Church to be baptized, members of his congregation had withheld their children from the ecclesiastical authorities until Johnson was appointed as pastor to baptize them. There was no doubt that Johnson’s ecclesiology had evolved drastically from total rejection to partial acceptance of the Church of England.

While Johnson’s stance would have been gratifying to the likes of Henry Jacob, John Robinson, and John Paget, his own former associates were not thrilled with the new openness of the “Bishop of Brownisme.” Henry Ainsworth was particularly angered by the contents of *A Christian Plea*. Ainsworth responded to Johnson in 1618 with a treatise entitled *A reply to a pretended Christian plea for the anti-Chistian Church of Rome: published by Mr. Francis Iohnson a0. 1617 Wherin the weakness of the sayd plea is manifested, and arguments alleaged for the Church of Rome, and baptisme therein, are refuted*. Johnson was dead by the time Ainsworth’s treatise was published, but Ainsworth desired to minimize the damage done to the Separatist cause, at least in his

⁷⁰Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 215.

view, by *A Christian Plea*.⁷¹ Ainsworth related the bitter history of his controversies with Johnson in the introductory paragraphs to *A Reply*. Ainsworth recalled:

Two things (good Reader) have been heretofore controverted between Mr. Iohnson and mee, the one concerning the Power of the Christian church, which he would have installed in the Ministerie thereof: the other concerning the Antichristian church of Rome, with the ministerie and baptisme thereof, which he hath pleaded to be true, though corrupted; I have proved to be false and deceyfull. These things have passed publikly (through mine Opposites occasion) in Mr Richard Cliftons *Advertisement*, and my *Animadversion* therto. The former of these two points, Mr. Iohnson hath left vnanswered; so the prudent may judge of the strife, by that which we both have sayd: the latter, he hath sought to mainteyne by a colourable Plea for the Romane church, cheifly underpropped by two reasons, 1. because Antichrist should *sit in the Temple of God*; 2. and because Apostate Israel (the figure of this Antichristian church,) was the church of God; as he pretendeth. These, with his other like reasons, I have laboured to refell, in this treatise folowing. His order of handling them, I have altered; beginning with the Church of Rome; then with the Baptisme of that church: for so I judge the trueth of the controversie wil soonest appeare. His often longsome repetitions, I seek to abridge; as being fruitlesse, & wearisome to the Readers: his bold and bitter taunts, I passe over; being not willing to answer any man (and least of all the dead,) to such things. As also his marching us among the Anabaptists, for our more disgrace: his dissembling of his own former judgment and accord with us, in the things now controverted; imputing them to us and others, when himself hath formerly spoken and written for the things which he now would pull down; but hath not taken away his owne grounds.⁷²

Ainsworth noticed that the appeal to recognize the Church of Rome and the Church of England was couched among the treatise to the Anabaptists, but also directed to his congregation, hence his reference to “marching us among the Anabaptists.” Ainsworth continued to take a very apocalyptic view of the Roman Catholic Church. Drawing material from the biblical book of Revelation, Ainsworth portrayed the Roman Catholic

⁷¹Henry Ainsworth, *A reply to a pretended Christian plea for the anti-Chistian [sic] Church of Rome: published by Mr. Francis Iohnson a0. 1617 Wherin the weakness of the sayd plea is manifested, and arguments alleaged for the Church of Rome, and baptisme therein, are refuted*, (Amsterdam: Giles Thorp, 1620).

⁷²Henry Ainsworth, *A reply*, Preface.

Church as the Satanic Beast of Revelation 13:11.⁷³ The corruption of the Church itself necessarily corrupted its sacraments as well, including baptism.

Interestingly, a great deal of the debate between Ainsworth and Johnson concerning baptism centered, both in 1612/13 and 1617/18, on Johnson's insistence that the rite of circumcision in Ancient Israel warranted the adoption of a similar baptism for children mediated through the tradition of Rome. Ainsworth used examples of Israelites who departed from the land or refused to return after the Babylonian Exile as cut off from the covenant of Israel. What of their circumcision?⁷⁴ Ainsworth revealed the extent to which their relationship had deteriorated when he protested, "He taxeth me as for error and contradiction, in seeking to perswade, *that God brake the covenant on his part with Israel, when all the tribes were together (Animadvers. p. 88) and yet after (in the same page,) say, that whiles Israel was one, they continued Gods church.* Answ. Herein he wrongeth me, (as he too often useth,) and keepeth not my words or meaning, neyther taketh away the reasons from the scripture which I there set down."⁷⁵

It was particularly strange that Ainsworth chose to focus on Johnson's allusions to the baptism of the Church of Rome. While Johnson had become even more convinced of his position in this regard, he had previously stated some of the issues challenged by Ainsworth's treatise in Clifton's *Advertisement*. Johnson's inclusion of the Church of England in his affirmation of Christian tradition and its support for the sacrament of baptism would have seemed to be the most disappointing statement for Ainsworth in *A Christian Plea*. Had Ainsworth and Johnson not stood together for thirteen years against

⁷³Henry Ainsworth, *A reply*, 3-5.

⁷⁴Henry Ainsworth, *A reply*, 80-81.

⁷⁵Henry Ainsworth, *A reply*, 78.

the church and ministry of England? Johnson's willingness to entertain the legitimacy of the Church of England's heritage, if not its practice, must have been a dangerous prospect for Ainsworth. Yet the Church of England received no mention in his reply to *A Christian Plea*. The issue was like a proverbial "elephant in the room" that no one wanted to mention. Ainsworth totally ignored the uncomfortable topic, possibly hoping that Johnson's treatise would not receive much attention once he debunked Johnson's views on Roman Catholicism.

Johnson also used apocalyptic imagery concerning the Church of Rome and compared the Roman Church to the Antichrist like Ainsworth. Johnson, however, had become convinced that the duty of the Christian witness who had avoided the apostasy was to bear witness to those churches caught in apostasy and sin. In a startling reversal of his former attitude of resignation concerning the Church of England and the eventuality of its repentance, Johnson now affirmed the possibility that Christian witness might one day even turn the Roman Catholic Church from its apostasy.⁷⁶ Despite the fact that the Roman Catholic Church formerly stood in the proper Apostolic tradition, Johnson did not advocate a return of the Separatist churches to either the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England. Pure worship should be practiced where possible, and returning would only dilute the power of the pure church's witness. Johnson still believed that "there is still but one way of truth, and of the true service and sincere worship of God."⁷⁷

⁷⁶Francis Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 321-22.

⁷⁷Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 323.

The final section of Johnson's treatise was addressed to the Reformed Churches of Europe. Johnson basically enjoined them to keep the faith and observe proper order. This proper order included Johnson's views on a strong Eldership. Johnson reminded his readers that, "All the particular members must obey the Elders in their lawfull instructions. . ."⁷⁸ Johnson's other views on congregational order were in conformity to his earlier views throughout *A Christian Plea*, making it unnecessary to describe them in detail.

Francis Johnson's final published words were anticlimactic. They indicated once again his belief that the history of Ancient Israel must necessarily provide a type for interpretation of Christ's intention for the New Testament church. Johnson wrote:

Now to conclude, let us in these questions, and the like, still obserue (what we can) what was prescribed and received in Israell of old, according to the writings of Moses and the Prophets: together with that which is recorded by the Apostles, toucing the Primitiue churches since. And let us withall carefully reteyne and follow that manner of reasoning, which is taken from the manner and estate of Israell, and often also used in the Scriptures of the New Testament, how ever it be rejected, or little regarded by divers, in respect of the use and account which all should make thereof.⁷⁹

One wonders whether Johnson knew that he would soon give the ultimate accounting when he penned these words. Was *A Christian Plea* intended to be his magnum opus? Or did Johnson envision *A Christian Plea* as a turning point, opening the door to a new phase of ministry? Francis Johnson, who had always been private about his personal dealings, remained silent about such matters until the end.

⁷⁸Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 323.

⁷⁹Johnson, *A Christian Plea*, 324.

6. *A Life and A Legacy*

Francis Johnson died sometime on or shortly before January 10, 1617/18 of unknown causes. Johnson was fifty-five at the time of his death. The primary source for his date of death was the aforementioned letter by Matthew Slade, which failed to mention the place of his burial.⁸⁰ The general timing of Johnson's death was confirmed by Ainsworth's reference to it in *A reply*.⁸¹ Contrary to the suspicions of Edward Arber and probably the wishes of Christopher Lawne, Johnson apparently died fairly content with his life and choices if *A Christian Plea* can serve as a guide to his state of mind at the time of his death.

What of those he left behind? Thomas Bellow Wyman's *The genealogies and estates of Charlestown in the county of Middlesex and commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1629-1818* recorded the arrival in 1632 of one John Green, his wife Perseverance, and their three children. Perseverance's parents were listed as Francis and Thomasine Johnson, indicating that the couple had at least one daughter, if not other children as well.⁸²

The Ancient Church did not fare well in the wake of Johnson's passing. According to William Bradford, some members of the Ancient Church sailed to America under the leadership of Francis Blackwell, an Elder of the Ancient Church, in 1621/22. They endured harsh seas and sickness before arriving in Virginia. Many of them died

⁸⁰Mathew Slade, Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Holland, United Kingdom National Archives, London, (S. P. 84, Vol. 82, fol. 34v.).

⁸¹Henry Ainsworth, *A reply*, Preface.

⁸²Thomas Bellows Wyman, *The genealogies and estates of Charlestown in the county of Middlesex and commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1629-1818*, (Boston, MA : D. Clapp, 1879), 563. Dexter and Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, 425.

during the journey.⁸³ Other members of the Ancient Church merged with either the English Reformed Church or Ainsworth's congregation, also claiming the name "Ancient Church" in Amsterdam. Ainsworth continued to lead this congregation until his death in 1622.⁸⁴ It had virtually disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century.

Those members of the Ancient Church who settled in Virginia dwelled at a place called Martins Hundred in the settlement of Wolstenholme Towne. This site was about nine miles from Jamestown at the present-day Carter's Grove Plantation. The settlement was founded in 1618 and consisted of a large number of Separatist colonists. The settlement was attacked by the Powhatan Indians in 1622. Only twenty of the colonists survived.⁸⁵

Excavations at the site in the late 1970's revealed several interesting artifacts from the early seventeenth-century settlement. In 1979, three female skeletons were discovered. One of the skeletons, which the excavators named "Granny" because she had lost her lower molars, was found in a shallow pit. She was estimated to be roughly forty years of age. Researchers were initially puzzled to find a metal band around the skull until experts in Elizabethan clothing informed them that the band was part of a hair piece typically worn by Elizabethan ladies of stature. The mystery of "Granny's" identity, the manner of her death, and the circumstance that would have placed a lady of such aristocratic dress among a group of Separatist colonists were matters of intense speculation. Ivor Noel Hume, the historical archeologist and author who uncovered the

⁸³William Bradford, *Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, 1606-1646*, ed. William T. Davis, (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1946), 59-63.

⁸⁴Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 67.

⁸⁵Ivor Noel Hume, *Martins Hundred*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 270-98.

site, speculated that “Granny” could have been a member of the family of Thomas Boise. The family was listed in the public records as “Master Tho: Boise & Mistris, Boise his wife, & a sucking Childe.”⁸⁶

In 1987, Ethel S. Rae, a retired Williamsburg Foundation Research Archivist, published her theory that “Granny” may have been Thomasine Boyes Johnson. Mrs. Rae based her theory on the Boise (Boyes) family list that mentioned a “Mistris” (widow) in addition to the wife, and the dress generally preferred by Mrs. Johnson. She believed that Thomasine had resumed her former married name when she went to live with her son to avoid troublesome questions. Her theory was challenged by Ivor Noel Hume. Hume stated that, “As far as we know, there is no connection between Thomasine Boys Johnson and Martins Hundred.” However, Mrs. Rae’s theory is an interesting possibility that bears further study.⁸⁷ It may well be that the “bouncing girl” ultimately came to rest in primeaval beauty of colonial Virginia.

Francis Johnson’s wider legacy has been discussed throughout the course of this research project. It has been demonstrated that he exerted a lasting influence on the General Baptists, Particular Baptists, Independent Congregationalists, and Non-Separating Puritans of New England. Although they may not have claimed direct descent from Johnson, they all owed their initial separation from the Church of England and experimentation with new forms of polity to the pastor of the Ancient Church. For the wider Reformed tradition, Johnson endorsed Calvinistic doctrines in the face of Remonstrant challenges to those views.

⁸⁶Ivor Noel Hume, *Martins Hundred*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 270-98.

⁸⁷Wilford Kale, “Retired Archivist Says ‘Granny’ May Be Thomasine Boys Johnson,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, May 17, 1987.

Johnson's influence extended throughout Europe, but the immigration of his coreligionists spread his influence across the sea as well. Henoah Clapham would have been dismayed to learn that the so-called "Bishop of Brownisme" wielded influence further beyond the sea than he thought. Despite his own qualms about voluntary religion, Christian leaders influenced by Johnson carried Separatist views to North America, where they became part of a dynamic religious mosaic.

7. *Summary*

The final decade of Francis Johnson's life was one of struggle and growth. Dismayed at the loss of his former student to Anabaptism, Johnson pursued the Ecclesiologically suicidal course of insisting on the rule of Elders in the Ancient Church. This stance resulted in the loss of Henry Ainsworth and at least thirty members of Johnson's congregation. Despite these losses, the Ancient Church continued to function while continuing dialogue with Ainsworth. The Ancient Church's split in 1610 was only the prelude to the even more disturbing loss of their worship facility to Ainsworth's congregation in 1613. Desiring to escape the center of controversy, Johnson and the Ancient Church moved to Emden in East Friesland.

In 1617, Francis Johnson left the quiet of his self-imposed exile to return to Amsterdam. He had in hand the manuscript for *A Christian Plea*, the longest and most comprehensive polemical work of his career. *A Christian Plea* restated many of the basic theological tenants Johnson had defended all of his life while also bearing evidence of a more open relationship to the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. While Johnson was able to make peace with Matthew Slade, his publication of *A Christian Plea* only served to antagonize Henry Ainsworth.

Johnson died in January 1617/18. His legacy survived, not in a single church built by him personally, but in a number of groups that had been influenced by his life, writings, and ministry. In a concluding segment, a final assessment and analysis will be given of Francis Johnson.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The title of Francis Johnson's last treatise, *A Christian Plea*, seems at the outset somewhat out of character for Johnson. The image one derives from his published works tends to remind one of an advocate making a case rather than a father pleading with his children. In a sense, Johnson's ministry was indeed one extended plea for truth and righteousness within the covenanted community of Christ's church. Like the prophet Jeremiah, from whom he drew so much inspiration, Johnson saw himself as a prophet pleading with a renegade Christendom to return to the truth. Rather than assuming the role of a weeping prophet, Francis Johnson was a pleading prophet. Like any skilled advocate, Francis Johnson desired to plead the cause of Christ before the courts of ecclesiastical opinion. That is why the chosen title of this present study is *One Christian's Plea: The Life, Ministry, and Controversies of Francis Johnson*. The context of Johnson's plea changed and its content evolved over time, but Johnson lived the balance of his life maintaining a steadfast certainty that his role was to proclaim the truth as he saw it to a people caught in apostasy.

It was true, as abundantly demonstrated in this study, that there were times that Francis Johnson seemed to love his mission and message more than his fellow persons. He could be strident and harsh in answering his critics. Johnson could also be brutally effective in silencing opposition. The darkest hour of his ministry involved the humiliation and rejection of both his father and brother, breaking filial ties in the name of spiritual ties, though probably more realistically for the sake of marital ties. Francis

Johnson emerged as a character that was totally human. He reflected in many ways the mixed motives and inconsistency that afflict all of humanity. The reality of life in the Ancient Church could never completely match the pristine picture Johnson held in his mind and heart. His own desire to protect those closest to him, particularly Thomasine Johnson and Daniel Studley, sometimes brought him into contention with other members of his congregation and forced him to consider how far he was willing to go and who he was willing to condemn for the sake of maintaining a pristine purity within the Ancient Church.

Though Francis Johnson certainly had his dark side and inconsistencies, Johnson also proved to be a more sincere and remarkable figure than many of his worst critics and interpreters have allowed. Johnson entered Cambridge University as a young idealist with a desire to serve God in ministry. Imbibing the Puritan spirit of Christ's College, Johnson quickly demonstrated that he was not predisposed to compromise or partial measures. His first defense of presbyterian polity taught him the lesson, one which he would painfully learn again the last time he defended presbyterian polity, that expediency and prudence often trumped idealism in the world of ecclesiastical power politics.

A convinced "Non-separating Puritan", Johnson assumed the pastorate of the Merchant Adventurer's Church at Middleburg. He converted to Separatist views and joined the London Congregation of Greenwood and Barrow in 1591/92. Assuming the office of pastor, Johnson led his congregation to emphasize the power of the congregation over all matters of discipline and administration. Their emphasis on congregational polity was likely due to their own conception of a covenant community and the practical reality that they were a persecuted congregation, never certain that their leadership

structure would remain stable. This ecclesiological emphasis intensified as the congregation moved to Amsterdam and was nourished by the ministry of Henry Ainsworth as Teaching Elder. Despite his willingness to accept a congregational polity, there were signs that Francis Johnson's own personality tended to challenge the congregational stance of the Ancient Church at those times when expediency would best be served by a stronger central authority.

Johnson's ecclesiological views underwent severe challenges and radical change due to the aforementioned controversies in the Ancient Church with George Johnson, Thomas White, and other dissident members. The greatest challenge to Johnson's congregational polity was the theological transformation of John Smyth, his fellow Separatist minister and former Cambridge student. Smyth's decision to petition for membership with the Waterlander Mennonites revealed the potential problems in the Separatist view of baptism and church covenant. Francis Johnson had stridently attacked what he perceived as the pharisaical apostasy of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church to the right, but came to identify an even more immanent threat to his left in the wake of Smyth's defection.

The final phase of Johnson's career involved a shift in ecclesiology and polemical priorities. Johnson was appalled by the weakness of Separatist ecclesiology implied by the acceptance of Anabaptist views by a Separatist leader of John Smyth's background and education. He returned to his former presbyterian views and asserted the need for a body of Elders that was strong enough to suppress dissention and strife by exercising proper discipline. Johnson's decision caused a rift with his friend and Teaching Elder, Henry Ainsworth. The dispute between them involved division, harsh polemical

exchanges, and the eventual loss of the Ancient Church's meeting house to Ainsworth's faction of the congregation. Tiring of the conflict and exhausted by several years of intense struggle, Johnson and the Ancient Church retired to Emden, East Freisland.

Realizing the need to retain a link to the ancient Apostolic traditions mediated through the Roman Catholic Church, Johnson eventually also accepted the proposition that the Christian tradition could be mediated through the Church of England as well. While he never endorsed the polity or practices of either church, Johnson did appear more accepting in his evaluation of them and more optimistic that they might respond to the prophetic call to repentance than he had been previously been. Johnson also saw a need to recognize all Reformed Churches, including the Church of England, as allies in the struggle against the Remonstrant Party in the Netherlands and their attempts to present alternative views to basic tenants of the Reformed Tradition.

Johnson provided a defense of all of these views in *A Christian Plea*. This treatise was Francis Johnson's last published work and appeared in late 1617 at Amsterdam. Johnson died at the age of fifty-five and was buried in Amsterdam. His Ancient Church struggled to survive in Amsterdam and Virginia, but eventually faded from existence.

Despite the loss of clear line of genetic descent from the Ancient Church, Francis Johnson's influence lived on. He influenced the Congregational Independency of Henry Jacob and John Robinson by composing arguments that persuaded both men that the ministry of a church was not an incidental matter, but rather a matter of divine command. While they tended to be more open to interaction with other Christian traditions than

Johnson, Jacob and Robinson's decision to separate from the Church of England and the results of that separation can be partially attributed to Francis Johnson.

Johnson also earned his place at the front of many survey texts dealing with the history of the Baptists. Without his interaction with John Smyth, Smyth may not have made the decision to break with either the Church of England or the Reformed Tradition. Through John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, Johnson can be indirectly credited with provoking, if not positively influencing, the formation of the General Baptist tradition. As demonstrated in chapter five, Johnson's *Trve Confession* served as one source guiding the Particular Baptists during their organizational period in the 1630's and 40's.

Francis Johnson's influence reached across the Atlantic through the migration of his own congregation to Norfolk, Virginia, and the settlement of the "Pilgrim Fathers" (and mothers) from Robinson's congregation at Plymouth, Massachusetts. The Congregational Tradition in both new and old England affirmed Johnson as a contributing, though somewhat inconsistent, influence on the formation of their ecclesiological tradition. The adherents of the New England Way traced their heritage back to Johnson, Ainsworth, and their Ancient Church. William Bradford, Plymouth's Governor and historian, extolled their virtues and chronicled their disputes.

The goal of this research project has been to recover and recapture one of the most fascinating figures in the history of English Dissent. It is intended to provide an interpretive treatment and synthesis begun by scholars such as B. R. White, Stephen Brachlow, Champlin Burrage, and Henry Martyn Dexter. While their studies of English Separatism, Congregationalism, and Dissent have been broader and focused on theological themes, the present research project proves a comprehensive interpretation of

Johnson that benefits from their earlier studies while also delving into sources and points of view not generally addressed extensively in earlier treatments of Johnson. In this research project, Johnson's personality and context have served as a guide to understanding his theological development.

This research project complements the work of Leland Carlson, Timothy George, and Jason Lee by providing a comprehensive interpretation of Johnson to stand with those of other prominent English Separatists and Dissenters. Francis Johnson had long been neglected as an object of study. This research project is an attempt to rectify that omission. The author intends to pursue further studies of Johnson and the English Separatist Tradition through publication of the findings in this work, further study of the role of Henry Ainsworth and his accomplishments, and pursuit of more information regarding the Emden context and its influence on the Dutch and English Reformed movements.

Francis Johnson's life, ministry, and controversies left a lasting impact on the development of Christian life and thought in England, the Netherlands, and North America. The paradigm of dissent the English Separatists modeled under Johnson's leadership inspired sectarian groups in England who took their dissent to places theologically, intellectually, and socially Johnson never dreamed of going. Johnson's Christian plea continues to reverberate through the centuries in the lives of those he influenced.

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