

JOHN ROBINSON  
A MODEL FOR MINISTRY

by

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a detailed biography of John Robinson. In the first place that effort would be incomplete, since the story of his early years is lost in the obscurity of unwritten history. Secondly, the effort would be redundant in that, while all admit to the lack of information on his youth, there are many available biographies of John Robinson already on library shelves.

The purpose of this paper is to take a look at John Robinson, the pastor, his unique and wonderful relationship to his congregation and the reasons for it, and to see what is there that we can draw on today as a model for today's ministry. In that endeavor, a biographical section seems necessary, if for no other reason than to enable the reader to have some reference points without having to run to the nearest library, because surely the qualities which made Robinson the great pastor that he was, were not suddenly turned on like a light switch one day in Cambridge or Scrooby or Leyden, but developed in the man over an extended period of time.

Roughly, this paper will be grouped into five areas of investigation, although there will be considerable overlap and reaching back for information from a previous section. The five general phases of the paper then are: a biographical sketch as mentioned above; an historical summary of the development of Robinson's convictions on theology and church polity; a look at Robinson's personal qualities; a longer look at Robinson the pastor; and finally, the implications of all this for today's ministry. Again, of necessity, there must be considerable interweaving between these phases so as to blur their boundaries, but each is essential if we are to be able to draw any valid conclusions which can then be summarized at the end.

So let's begin then with a biographical sketch.

## II. Biography

John Robinson was born in 1575<sup>1</sup>, (or 1576<sup>2</sup>, depending on whose history you read), in the small, self-contained village of Sturton le Steeple in East Anglia on the border of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, England. He grew up during a time that saw the threat of foreign tyranny lifted from England with the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Queen Elizabeth's "sea dogs", boldly leading her fledgling navy. It was a time of resurging national pride in Elizabeth's England. One wonders what the dreams of a twelve year old boy might have been at that time.

It is evident that John Robinson grew up in a healthy environment. John had at least three siblings that we are aware of, and perhaps at an early age began to develop instincts for getting along with others. The Robinson family survived the great plague which hit Sturton le Steeple in 1583, causing the deaths of many neighbors. Perhaps this was a foreshadowing of Robinson's later capacity for survival, and his evident ability to deal with tribulation and crisis.

Family ties were strong then, and it's almost certain that John's father read daily to his family from the Geneva Bible. In the England of that day, the head of the household was expected to be a teacher to his children and servants. Undoubtedly this daily reading filled the childrens' subconscious with a strong sense of ethics and moral judgment, and provided a substantial amount of common knowledge and familiarity with literary style, all of which would stand young John in good stead later. Puritan William Cooper called the family of that day "a little church and a little commonwealth."<sup>3</sup>

John's father was a substantial farmer - a yeoman - owner of home, land, livestock, and a renter of pasturage. John must have shared in the myriad labor of the farm life of the north country. The yeomen

were the backbone of English agriculture. They fraternized with the country gentlemen, and it was not unusual for there to be a great deal of upward mobility among the yeoman class. Many religious and secular leaders in England during this period were former yeomen or sons of yeomen.

One of the things this would mean was that young Robinson would be well educated for his time. The customs of the time would dictate that his early education be under the tutelage of the vicars of the village church in Sturton le Steeple, and from there to be sent to one of the nearby larger towns, (Lincoln, Gainsborough, or Retford), for preparation to enter the university at Cambridge.

Robinson's personal history becomes more verifiable with his enrollment at Cambridge in 1592, in the college of Corpus Christi; like many students of today, working for his college expenses. During this period, Cambridge was the chief center in England for creative thinking and liberal teaching - a breeding ground for the Puritan movement. By Robinson's time there was already a tradition of revolt there against the established order. Thomas Cartwright, Robert Browne, Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood, John Smyth, Richard Clyfton, John Perry, and William Brewster preceded Robinson at Cambridge, and all played a role in the Pilgrim story. Robinson's personal mentor at Cambridge was William Perkins, a distinguished Puritan scholar.

Receiving his B.A. in four years, Robinson was then elected to the rank of scholar, which gave him free quarters, an allowance, permission to attend lectures in various colleges, and to follow any line of study that he wished. He stayed on at Cambridge until 1603.

During university holidays, he would return to his home village, where he began to notice that the area was permeated by the reforms of Cambridge. Spearheaded by the Cambridge men who had preceded him, the churchmen of the area were preaching the precepts of liberalism,

reform, and in some areas, separation. Robinson's writings show a considerable internal struggle with the forces pulling at him, and he finally resigned his position at the university, after which he then married his sweetheart of some years, Bridget White, daughter of a prosperous farmer and landowner. Thirty days after the wedding, Queen Elizabeth died, and a new era for the Separatists, (the Stuart era), was about to begin.

Soon after his marriage, Robinson received a church assignment at St. Andrew's in Norwich. Due to his growing convictions on reform, which began to develop at Cambridge, and his realization that conditions were not about to improve under the new king, James I, Robinson became determined to find a way to liberate the church he loved. Serving as a Puritan in the Church of England, he held strong convictions against the vestments and ceremonies of that established order, and began to make changes and modifications on his own that soon got him into trouble with his bishop. When James I issued his proclamation requiring all ministers to accept and follow the new Book of Canons, Robinson's bishop was forced to crack down and bring all the clergy of his diocese into line. Since Robinson had placed conscience above obedience to his bishop, had taken liberties with the liturgy and the accoutrements of worship as noted above, had propounded from the pulpit what were viewed as subversive statements, and had questioned the authority of the bishops, he was suspended from his position and denied the privilege of preaching. When he assembled some friends for prayer and conversation, their names were reported and they were excommunicated from the Church of England.

Robinson did not split with the Church immediately, even though suspended. He hoped that he would be allowed to carry out his work in some private chapel or even a public hall, where he could expound his views on a simplified and revitalized church. He applied for a master-

ship at the hospital in Norwich and for a building he could lease, but was denied both. Coming to the realization that the Anglican Canon Law and the facts in the New Testament would not and could not be reconciled, and that church reformation was for all practical purposes hopeless, he finally and reluctantly, after much soul searching, resolved to separate from his beloved church.

His old Cambridge friend John Smyth had for some time now gathered around him several who were disenchanted with the established church. Seeking out his guidance, Robinson journeyed to Gainsborough, met with Smyth and his group, discussing what they believed and what they should do about it. Robinson was welcomed into the secret gatherings of the group, which included Richard Clyfton and William Brewster. Robinson also met later with a similar group at Scrooby Manor, gathered around Brewster who was ten years older than Robinson. When the Gainsborough group had grown too large for convenience and safety, the Scrooby group began to evolve as a separate congregation. When Clyfton, because of his separatist preaching, was deprived of his living in 1605, he was invited to Scrooby by Brewster.

After enduring persecution for a time, Clyfton, Robinson, Brewster, and their group finally decided, as the "Lord's free people", that they had the God-given right to withdraw from the established church and form their own congregation. So in secrecy, in 1606, the Scrooby church was formed. They adopted a covenant, then chose Richard Clyfton as pastor and John Robinson as teacher. About this time, young William Bradford, despite the chagrin of his relatives and the scoffing of his neighbors, joined the group and attached himself to Brewster and Robinson, becoming to them almost as an adopted son.

The warning signs were plentiful as the forces of constriction and oppression grew stronger and more threatening. The king's spies

were about, and the Scrooby congregation knew they were being watched. It became obvious that their only alternatives were to knuckle under to the establishment, surrendering all they believed, including the excitement of probing freely into newer revelations of truth, or holding to their chosen path by fleeing England. To these men there could be only one decision, and so Clyfton and Robinson began to plan the move to Holland.

As the weeks passed, more and more of the work of the arrangements for the move fell on the shoulders of the younger Robinson; this on top of leading Sunday worship, mid-week lectures, Bible study, and visitations. After many false starts and betrayals, delays, heartache, and suffering, they finally, piecemeal, got over to Amsterdam, Clyfton, Robinson, and Brewster all coming with the last contingent. They arrived strangers in a strange land, without supplies, and practically penniless, but were eventually caught up in the bustling life of this busy seaport.

Robinson quickly saw problems in Amsterdam. Their congregation were now foreigners who spoke a strange language, who were unemployed, and could hardly compete for the most menial labor opportunities. There were also problems in the existing Separatist church in Amsterdam - the Ancient Brethren Church - argumentation and scandal which shocked and disappointed Robinson, and probably many others of the harmonious Scrooby fellowship. Robinson also had a problem with the polity of the Ancient Brethren Church, which was developing along Presbyterian lines. So Robinson and Brewster met separately with their congregation and decided this was not for them. It must have been a disappointment for them to learn that Clyfton chose to remain with the Amsterdam group, most likely because he was older than the rest, tired, and the move to Holland had taken too great a toll on him.

In losing Clyfton, the Scrooby congregation drew closer to Robinson, who emerged as the leader and the glue that held them together.

Robinson, perhaps with his pleasant Cambridge memories still in place, began to discuss with Brewster the possibilities for moving to the nearby university town of Leyden. The prospect of another uprooting must have weighed heavy on many. But when the Leyden town officials approved the move, Robinson, Brewster, and about one hundred of the congregation moved fast, lest they become embroiled in the problems among the Ancient Brethren. So in 1609, the new move was made, and for a time it proved a very good move. They were well accepted, adapted pretty well, and enjoyed their new-found freedom in a free and tolerant Protestant society.

In Leyden, John Robinson was duly recognized and ordained by the congregation as their sole pastor, with William Brewster as their ruling elder. Their early guidance of the Scrooby congregation made them the acknowledged leaders, and the nucleus around which the Leyden fellowship community grew in peace and harmony.

It was in Leyden, in 1610, that Robinson published one of his most significant works, "A Justification of Separation", from which we shall quote later. This provocative book drew other exiled Puritan thinkers like William Ames, Robert Parker, and Henry Jacob to Leyden to try to convince Robinson to stay with reform and avoid separation. They were welcomed, and the discussions were animated but amicable, however Robinson, after honest reflection, maintained his position.

He became involved in the life of the University of Leyden, and his role in the Arminian controversy during his years there is well documented. Robinson became a close friend of Polyander, the avowed opponent of Episcopius and the Arminian movement. Reluctant at first, Robinson was drawn in to face-to-face debate with Episcopius, accounted himself well, and thereby brought recognition to the Separatist

community, and increased regard for him as its leader.

In 1614, events in England made Robinson hopeful of the dawning of a new era of tolerance there, and he held long talks with Brewster about a return to the homeland. But James I dashed these hopes when he dissolved Parliament and began ruling as an absolute monarch. It became obvious that the Leyden congregation must continue in Holland.

Amid all that was going on, Robinson found time to be a loving family man, watching his children grow, helping with their tutoring, and sharing with Bridget, plans and hopes for the family's uncertain future.

Since 1616, Robinson had been mulling over the difficulties his exile community faced in remaining in Holland. Each year the number of refugees decreased, while he and his people were growing older, death claiming a few each year. Holland's truce with Spain was due to end in 1621, and the future, in that regard, was problematic. Also, was the worrisome fact that their children were being caught up in the Dutch culture, and Robinson was astute enough to realize that by the third generation, they might well have forgotten their heritage. Robinson, Brewster, and other lay leaders like Carver and Fuller, with foresight and wisdom, discussed the problems that needed resolving and began to search for solutions. Their ultimate conclusion was that yet another move was necessary, and the place they set their sights on was the vast, unpopulated, and relatively unknown land of America. This would mean an upheaval from a great university town to a wilderness - another traumatic decision - but after much deep discussion, that dangerous course was agreed upon.

Without a financial base, it became necessary to begin a lengthy, complicated, and delicate sequence of negotiations for financial backing, political permission, and logistical arrangements for the voyage, the details of which are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say

that the arrangements with the sponsoring group known as the "Merchant Adventurers" were finally concluded, not without some skillful and tactful efforts by Robinson and Brewster.

Early in 1618, the Leyden church held a "solemne meeting and a day of humilliation to seeke the Lord for his direction."<sup>4</sup> Plans for the crossing were fully considered by the congregation. Since it was impossible for all to go on the first ship, certain ones were chosen. Pastor Robinson was to stay in Leyden with the majority, while Elder Brewster was to lead the expedition. Those that went were to constitute an "absolute church of them selves"<sup>5</sup> - a branch, as it were, of the Leyden church - and those who remained in Holland would cross over "as soone as they could."<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, the long discussed journey from Holland got underway for England and eventually New England. One hundred and two crammed into the Mayflower at Plymouth, and on September 16, 1620, the little ship, loaded to the gunwales, set sail into the unknown. John Robinson, his heart heavy with concern for their well-being, remained in Leyden to continue shepherding his now divided flock that would, in a few months, be separated by some 3000 miles.

He continued his pastoral duties in Leyden, communicating with his faithful people in Plimoth Plantation, and continuing to send them encouragement and advice, while all the time agonizing over their tribulations. Because of complications in Leyden, financial difficulties, and some manipulative scheming on the part of some of the Merchant Adventurers, Robinson's plans to go to Plimoth never materialized. In 1625 he was stricken with a sudden illness and within a week he was gone. The great defender, definer, and most probably the savior of Separatism had died in his fiftieth year, leaving his flock on two continents bereft of their beloved pastor.

Their shock and grief ran deep. The stronger congregation in Plimoth Plantation eventually found a new pastor, and with the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, became the fathers of our Congregational Way. The Leyden group, consisting of the older and weaker members, declined after Robinson's death and soon ceased to be a viable congregation.

### III. Theological Background

The customs of the time would indicate that John Robinson's religious training started at an early age. His boyhood years were a time of resurgent faith in England, as with the defeat of the Armada, the fears of a Spanish invasion or Roman Catholic rebellion were gone. Upon matriculation at Cambridge, he came under the influence of the ideas of a great number of Puritan thinkers, who constituted a mighty brain trust, not only religious, but literary as well. Robinson was awakening under the tutelage of this brain trust who were in the vanguard of the revolt against the union of church and crown. His mind was in turmoil as he struggled within himself to find where to make his doctrinal stand. He probed the New Testament, the work of Calvin, Zwingli, Beza, Luther, and very importantly the Jewish Scriptures to rediscover the basic truths. He was an insatiable seeker and learner. Among those at Cambridge who influenced him were Lawrence Chaderton, Paul Baynes, Arthur Hildersham, William Gouge, John Cotton, and a host of others.

As mentioned earlier, William Perkins, catechist at Christ's College and preacher at St. Andrew's, was not only a professor of his at Cambridge, but a mentor whom Robinson consulted often, even after he had completed his formal studies. Robinson heard him lecture and preach whenever possible, and in later writings indicated how much he owed to Perkins. It may have been Perkins who sowed the seeds of Congregational polity in Robinson, as Perkins constantly

emphasized conscience as the center of his theology, saying in effect that a man's belief was a matter between his own conscience and God; that by examination of Scripture, an individual can test his conscience, correcting it if it is in conflict with the Word. Robinson also learned from Perkins that every man must join the practice of his personal calling with the practice of the general calling of Christianity. Just because an individual is a member of a congregation, he is not necessarily a Christian, unless in his very personal calling, he shows himself to be so.<sup>7</sup>

For Robinson, religion also was a matter of personal relationship between his soul and God, rather than an official relationship with any ecclesiastical institution. "A man hath, in truth, so much religion, as he hath between the Lord and himself, in secret, and no more . . ."<sup>8</sup> In the prevailing Calvinist theology of his day, he described his relationship with God as a special grace bestowed upon him, which enabled him to be united with Christ in a covenant relationship. This change in his life Robinson described with reverence.<sup>9</sup>

The covenant was also for Robinson the all-important and the only foundation in which a church could stand. In 1608, he defined a church as follows: "A company of faithful and holy people, with their seed, called by the Word of God into public covenant with Christ and amongst themselves, for mutual fellowship in the use of all the means of God's glory and their salvation."<sup>10</sup>

In 1596, Robinson was drawn into a theological controversy when Peter Baro from Geneva was made a professor of divinity at Cambridge. His criticisms of Calvinism were similar to those put forth later by Arminius in Holland. A heated debate arose between Baro and Lawrence Chaderton, who had been a strong influence on Robinson, and who opposed Baro's views. This came at a time when Robinson was groping to evolve his own beliefs, and it raised for him the question of how

much Calvinism he could accept. It also proved a forerunner of the controversy he was later to face in Holland.

More important than Calvinism per se, was the scrutiny of the Scriptures. At Cambridge, history was measured and evaluated through the study of the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek, which tended to expose the shortcomings of institutional religion, and arouse the insightful to demand reform. John Robinson, earnest student that he was, dug deep into church history, the theology of the continent, and scriptural anecdotes for the same, poring for many hours over his Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament, so much so, and so skillfully, that in 1599 he was elected reader in Greek, and he passed on to his students his own enthusiasm for the Greek New Testament. Of course he also pored over his Geneva Bible, and yearned to carry its direct and powerful message to the people. The Geneva Bible stimulated his excitement for exploring the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures.

In 1610, Robinson classed himself with John Smyth and other Separatists as having "renounced our ministry received from the bishops, and do exercise another by the people's choice."<sup>11</sup> He did not reach his decision easily. Even when suspended, he still loved the church and wished to retain a connection with it. He moved very cautiously and reluctantly, shrinking from the final step of separation until he had exhausted every possibility of remaining in the Church of England without subverting his convictions on church communion, polity, and worship. He would never have broken "those bonds" (with the established church) "had not the truth been in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones."<sup>12</sup> He never complained of what he suffered, nor ever appeared driven by resentment. We can sense the regret in Robinson in his writing concerning the decision finally forced upon him by a state and church that demanded total conformity. He longed to preach and carry forward his call to pastoral care in a parish. "And for my-

self, as I would much rather have desired to have built up myself and that poor flock over which the Holy Ghost hath set me in holy peace, as becometh the house of God, . . . than thus to enter the lists of contention, . . ."13 But once having become convinced that separation should be made, he became the resolute definer and defender of the truth as he saw it.

Robinson had no quarrel with most of the doctrine of the established church, but for him, the order of the church was an essential part of any body of doctrine. ". . . since Christ Jesus, not only as priest, and prophet, but as King, is the foundation of his church; and that the visible church is the kingdom of Christ; the doctrines teaching the subjects, government, officers, and laws of the church, can be no less than the fundamental doctrines of the same church, or kingdom . ."14 For Robinson, polity was a part of a divinely given body of truth, inseparable from church doctrine, and as much an object of faith as any other point of that doctrine. It was fundamental, and worth risking one's life for.

Robinson was an Englishman, loyal to his king in the area of royal civil supremacy. But scripturally, the king is not the head of a national church holding a unique position. If the king happens to be a church officer, he is called to that office and may be deposed from it by the church. He denied the apostolic character of the national church, by showing how differently the original apostolic church was gathered in comparison to the way the Church of England was formed. "In the beginning, the Lord Jesus and his apostles by his Spirit, appointed none other true visible churches, but particular congregations of faithful people."15 For Robinson and the Separatists, it wasn't the mingling of bad and good in the national church which drove them to separation, but the fact that under the episcopal order, the power of the church to purify itself, given by God to the people, was lost. Robinson made

it clear that the separation is not from certain corruptions which show themselves in the rites and ceremonies of the church, but from the church itself, which is essentially corrupt because of the wickedness within, from which it is incapable of reforming. "And remaining irreformable, either by members of the same church as are faithful, if there be any, or by sister churches, . . . ceaseth to be any longer the true church of Christ. . . both the persons and sacrifices are abominable to the Lord."<sup>16</sup> Separation became necessary for Robinson in order to avoid personal sin.

Robinson made a distinction between the gathered church and the ordered church. Whenever two or more faithful separate from the world and unite by covenant into the true fellowship of the Gospel, they form a true church, empowered by Christ to choose and ordain their officers. Even without officers, a church has the power to receive members, to excommunicate, and to hold services. But for the full settlement of church order, officers should be chosen. Then the gathered church becomes the ordered or organized church.

John Robinson established no creed or dogmatic procedure for entrance into his church. He did not set up any test for admitting candidates into the church beyond the individual's confession of faith, his sharing in the covenant, and his good behavior. Robinson also stressed the preaching role of the church under educated ministers, and sharply criticized the Church of England on the lack of same.

He still accepted the baptism of the Church of England, and received a great deal of criticism for it, especially from Thomas Helwys, a Separatist turned Baptist. In "Of Religious Communion", Robinson made a considerable effort to justify his position. He said there was "an outward baptism by water and an inward baptism of the Spirit." An outward baptism, even if administered by an apostate church, had a spiritual significance when interpreted this way. This is how his

church and those who wanted to join it interpreted it, and they were never re-baptized.<sup>17</sup> While Helwys repudiated infant baptism, Robinson felt it was useful and of value to both church and parents. He argued that in the New Testament Church, it had evolved out of circumcision. He desired that all children be saved, yet given his nature and thinking, it's inconceivable that he could believe that an infant who died unbaptized was damned. His stand on this is not too clear, but infant baptism was a long-established practice in the church, and it may have been difficult for him to bring himself to oppose it without a clear Biblical mandate to do so. Burgess reasons that "To take this step would place him in the camp of the Anabaptists . . . He was already battling to throw off the derogatory label of Brownism and he did not want to become embroiled in other sectarian squabbles."<sup>18</sup>

As stated earlier, the prevailing theology of the Separatists and Puritans was Calvinist. In 1624, Robinson published "A Defense of the Doctrine propounded by the Synod of Dort". He upheld that synod's theological findings, but cautioned his readers that Dort had not spoken the last and final word. He was a champion of Calvinism - a defender of the sovereignty of God as understood by Calvin against the complete freedom of the will espoused by the Arminians. In doing so, he was willing to admit that there was mystery and dilemma in God's working.<sup>19</sup> He was humble and earnest in trying to handle the "high mystery of God's sovereignty and human freedom. He was a thoroughgoing 5-point Calvinist, but with a humble and gracious attitude, truly believing that God hadn't revealed to him all the answers yet. Robinson would have agreed with Karl Barth that "God has already spoken His Word in the sphere of the canonical witness, and that He has thereby promised to speak anew in this same sphere, this is something known by that congregation which lives under this witness."<sup>20</sup> Robinson was not the

stereotyped dour Calvinist. He believed in the limited atonement, but advocated fellowship with all men of good will. He believed in the depravity of man and confessed that the world is lost in sin, but he was no pessimist. The dark background of his beliefs on sin and judgment give way to the light of his ideal of salvation. His hope and joy in the glorious idea of human redemption show through his writing. His soul rejoiced in the thought of the life of God's saints on earth, which he saw as a foretaste of heaven. The little community of the faithful that he ministered to was filled with "the beauty of Zion and the glory of the Lord." To him, this overwhelmed any depression that his sense of the world's sin or any problems of ministry might have otherwise had on him, so that pastoral "burnout" would never be a possibility for him.

#### IV. Personal Characteristics

John Robinson's writings are not strongly biographical. He never boasts about his accomplishments or discusses his role in any controversies. But in his writings he reveals himself subjectively and we get an excellent portrait of Robinson, the man. His character is simple and always marked by its consistency. He was a man to be loved, and as one reads Robinson's works, one's admiration grows for this simple, sincere, and yet remarkable man.

His work ethic developed early, as noted on page 2, and continued to be nurtured at Cambridge. As a "sizar", i.e., a student who worked to pay his expenses, he had to have a considerable amount of moral fiber to stand up under the barrage of menial duties. Robinson would have had to awaken his tutor for morning chapel, serve his meals, polish his boots, and clean his lodgings. Fetching water, sweeping and scrubbing, making beds, and accompanying his tutor to the playing fields as his personal attendant, left him little leisure time. We can only guess at how he might have spent what little free time he

had, but certainly a good portion of that must have been spent in quiet reflection on where he was, both physically and spiritually, and where he was going. And in those trying days between Scrooby and exile, carrying the burdens of that entire harried congregation, he proved himself strong, compassionate, and a tireless worker.

Soon after his arrival in Leyden, Robinson was invited by the Ancient Brethren Church in Amsterdam to serve as an arbiter of another one of their many unfortunate disputes, this one between Henry Ainsworth and Francis Johnson. Robinson and his colleagues did their best to help, but were unsuccessful. The Amsterdam church was, at best, a sad playing out of family and church wrangling. Robinson was disappointed to the point of disgust. After long, kindly, and persistent attempts to help them find a middle road and settle their differences, Robinson and Brewster sent them a long letter which concluded, "How much better it would have been if they had admitted their faults rather than to blame their brethren, and this would have saved them, yea and us all, from being a by-word to the whole world."<sup>21</sup>

Although a sound theologian, Robinson was a pastor first rather than a controversy seeker, and when he was reluctantly drawn into the intense and often bitter controversy surrounding Separatism, he wrote, "The preaching of the gospel is a most excellent thing, and the fruits of it far better than those of Eden, and oh! how happy were we, if, with exchange of half the days of our lives, we might freely publish it to our nation for the converting of sinners."<sup>22</sup>

Robinson, in controversy and debate, was much more moderate, kindly, and conciliatory in comparison with most of the zealous leaders of Separatism. In an era when invective was commonplace, and opinions a matter of life and death, Robinson refused to play that way. He could be harshly critical, but even in his criticism, his temper was always gracious and his terms generous. His bitter opponent Richard Bernard

admitted that Robinson was "one yet nearest the truth unto us, as I heare, and not so schismatical as the rest."<sup>23</sup> Robinson defended his positions by upholding positive doctrine, rather than by a wholesale attack upon his opponents. Though intense in his arguments, he was never merely destructive.

Robinson realized fully the dangers of Separatism, made evident when Browne, Barrow, Johnson, Smyth, et. al., had failed to a great degree, endangering the whole Separatist movement. He believed that the basic convictions of the Separatists rested upon a deeper knowledge of the real teachings of the Scriptures, a larger freedom in their application, and a more abundant zeal for their embodiment in a community, than the principles underlying any other organized religious body. But he also knew, and stated very plainly, that if the above were unwisely applied, the result would inevitably be those very contentions of which their enemies accused them, (the trouble in the Amsterdam church being an example); those contentions which he personally deplored. Knowledge must be guarded with special alertness, lest it lead to strife; zeal must be tempered with "much wisdom, moderation, and brotherly forbearance . . ." And only those who really know liberty know how hard it is to use it right.<sup>24</sup> There's something in freedom that begets conflict if these principles are not mastered. This incisive and astute analysis wasn't merely an academic exercise on Robinson's part. He recognized the dangers and acted upon them.

As mentioned before, he was a staunch defender of Calvinism, and yet was very liberal for his day; liberal at least in the sense that he was of an open mind, willing to listen attentively to those with whom he discussed the issues, willing to admit error where Scripture and sound reason proved him wrong. In the last two pages of the preface to "Of Religious Communion", he admitted publically his changed stance on fellowship with the Anglicans, in a noble confession of error. Not

only did he admit it, but he proceeded to do something about it, seeking communication and exchange, and eventually urging his congregation departing for America to do likewise in the New World. Furthermore, he required no profession of separation from any church, (only from the world), from those who would join his church. He tried to bind no one to his own opinion beyond what the Word seemed to warrant. His reflection on Colossians 2:5 was for him, new light from the Word of God, and caused him to develop that broader view of Christian fellowship.

He was the most moderate of all the Separatists, and had an influence on Henry Jacob, considered to be the founder of English Congregationalism, as well as men like Ames and Parker, who respected his scholarship and gentlemanly Christian behavior. His whole attitude in these matters can be summed up in his statement, ". . . we should effect strife with none, but study, as far as we can to accord with all; accounting it a benefit, when we can do so with any . . . We ought to be firmly persuaded in our hearts of the truth and goodness of the religion, which we embrace in all things; yet as knowing ourselves to be men, whose property it is to err and be deceived in many things; and accordingly both to converse with men in that modesty of mind, as always to desire to learn something better, or further by them, if it may be."<sup>26</sup> His openness and refusal to claim any corner on wisdom showed again later on in his statement that "the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word."<sup>27</sup>

Robinson was extremely well-read, in secular matters as well as theology, and did not hesitate to jump with both feet into a tough academic or theological situation, in the hope that he could learn more. "I profess myself always one of them, who still desire to learn further or better, what the good wille of God is . . ."<sup>28</sup> Robinson also had a wonderful sense of humor - a light side that showed up particularly well in several of his "Essays".

In the preface to his "Essays", in which he surveys all of life from its religious significance, he demonstrated a truly universal mind, well steeped in all of the spiritual riches not only of Scripture, but of literature, and the writings and utterances of great men, all of which he "stored up as a precious treasure." The wide range of material covered in the "Essays" shows a wonderfully rich display of sharp observation, great practical insight, a great ability to use an apt and homely illustration, a highly insightful values system, and overall a breadth of knowledge together with kindness and earnestness that invokes in the reader nothing but admiration.

His stature, in the eyes of friend and foe alike, grew steadily during the years in Scrooby, Amsterdam, and Leyden. Puritan William Ames, with whom Robinson carried on a lively debate via letter, closed one of his with: "Wishing to M. Robinson the God of all grace, the same light and enlargement of heart for this, which he hath received for the other part of communion, I commend my epistle for your friendly censure and myself to your accustomed love."<sup>29</sup> William Bradford wrote, "He was never satisfied in himself"; and in his "Of Plimoth Plantation", gave a glowing tribute to Robinson:

In him there seem to be elements of the Apostle Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, and even Mother Theresa. The strength of his personality is emphasized by the impression he made on his contemporaries. There can be no question that Brewster and Bradford were strong men. For a man to hold their deep respect, their love, and their self-sacrificing loyalty, as Robinson did, is indicative of great personal strength on the part of their pastor. In fact, the whole history of the Leyden church is a tribute to his strength and character. When at times deeply hurt by the barbs of others, his gracious spirit always showed through, as witness this wonderful conclusion from his "A Just and Necessary Apology": "If in anything we err, advertise us brotherly

Err we may, alas! too easily; but heretics by the grace of God we will not be.", and in conclusion he wrote: "this alone remaineth, that we turn our faces and mouths unto thee O most powerful Lord, and gracious Father, humbly imploring help from God towards those by men left desolate . . . They who truly fear thee, and work righteousness, although constrained to live by leave in a foreign land, exiled from country, spoiled of goods, destitute of friends, few in number, and mean in condition, are for all that unto thee (O gracious God) nothing the less acceptable . . . Towards thee, O Lord, are our eyes; confirm our hearts, and bend thine ear, and suffer not our feet to slip, or our face to be ashamed, O thou both just and merciful God. To him through Christ be praise, for ever, in the church of saints; and to thee, loving and Christian reader, grace peace, and eternal happiness. Amen."

This prayer comes out of John Robinson's heart. It shows a sensitive, gracious, and proud spirit, trusting in God and doing his work without dejection.

#### V. Robinson, the Pastor

John Robinson was a remarkable pastor. We've already remarked some on his education. At Cambridge, in addition to logic and rhetoric, additional curriculum emphasis was placed on theology, which was basic in all fields of learning. And we've seen how this formal Cambridge education was really only a beginning, since he was continually reading, listening, debating, and seeking out new knowledge and truth at a prodigious rate all his life. His involvement with the University of Leyden and with the Pilgrim Press, and his role in the Arminian controversy were all outgrowths of his lust for learning, his keen mind, and his ability to convey in a gentlemanly way his deep, Biblically-based, and profound knowledge and logic.

His "Answer to a Censorious Epistle" (Leyden, 1610) - a response to a letter addresses to himself and John Smyth - exhibits consider-

able power of language, and is the product of a man of cultivated mind with strong conviction. His "Apologia", from which I've already quoted, which advocated the congregational type of church polity, was another very able and comprehensive statement written with moderation.

Robinson came to his ideas on polity early in his ministry in England. It was a question of which form would more greatly enable the church to realize its ideal as a communion of saints. His was a conception of the church as a body of men and women, united with Christ and in Christ with each other, and showing the visible signs of spiritual regeneration.

Robinson believed that baptism, both the water and the rite, even administered by what he conceived as a false church order, was still a sign of the inner baptism of the Spirit, and therefore a true spiritual ordinance, even though abased and abused by those administering it.

As a preacher, Robinson was very capable of stating the message and getting it across in a way that could not be misunderstood by the most humble listener. He was recognized as a preacher of power throughout the exiled English communities in Holland. Even in his early preaching days in Norwich, his break with the Anglican traditions, his clarity of thought and speech, his simplicity of style, gave him a new approach, a direction and daring that won him a growing and devoted audience. James Leynse says that "He (Robinson) could induce a soothing calm in his audience, and hold them spellbound by the power of his words for hours."<sup>30</sup>

Robinson preached three times per week - twice on Sunday and again on Thursday evening. He proclaimed and expounded on the Gospel. His sermons (which could go two and one-half hours), were steeped in the Calvinist beliefs he held so dear, but were also strong on harmony and brotherhood, practical, and in their references, fairly cosmopolitan. "Now, next after heavenly peace with God and our own con-

sciences, we are carefully to provide for peace with all men what in us lieth, especially with our associates. And for that, watchfulness must be had that we neither at all in ourselves do give, no, nor take offense being given by others."<sup>31</sup> He preached the repentance and the forgiveness of sin: ". . . whereas . . . sine being taken away by earnest repentance and the pardon therof from the Lord, sealed up unto a mans conscience by his spirite, great shall be his securitie and peace in all dangers, sweete his comforts in all distresses, with hapie deliverance from all evill, whether in life or in death."<sup>32</sup>

Much of what he preached showed up in his letters to the members of his congregation, as witness the two previous examples. In his preaching he sought to emphasize the essentials and eliminate the superfluous. He felt that whatever was done and said in worship was subject to the test of justification by the teachings of Jesus and the facts of the New Testament. If not, it should be eliminated. For this reason, most biographers are convinced that in Leyden he wore no vestments while conducting services. He sought to simplify, to disengage from the extraneous. This placed greater demands on the worshippers. They now had to seek and find God in their own mind without leaning on devices developed by a priesthood. Separating himself from all that was secondary, Robinson's worshipper had to reach out for the primary, the personal encounter of his own soul with God.

According to Leynse, the Leyden Sunday worship service began at 8:00 A.M. with a long prayer. During the opening prayer the congregation, (men seated on one side, women on the other, and children in a group by themselves), remained standing. Then Pastor Robinson read passages from the Bible and elucidated them. Next came the singing of a Psalm - a capella, since the organ was outlawed by the Separatists as "the bagpipes of the devil". Ainsworth's "Book of Psalms", published in Amsterdam in 1612, was adopted for their use in the singing. Robinson didn't

preach from a pulpit, but stood on a low platform with a simple little table to hold the large Bible. After the sermon, another hymn was sung, the deacons passed the offering plate, and the service ended about noon with a brief benediction. The congregation then went home for their noon meal and reassembled later for the afternoon meeting, devoted to Bible discussion. The afternoon session began with a short prayer, a chosen text was read, and then the discussion of that text was begun among the men. The Old Testament was used often, and Robinson's sermon as they met for the final decision to go to America, as well as his farewell address to those leaving on that venture, were both taken from the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

Bartlett, speaking of Robinson's style, states how pleasant it was for the people to sit in their quiet meeting place and listen to the reading of Scripture and hear its interpretation. Many carried their Geneva Bibles and followed along as Robinson or Brewster read. Bartlett remarks how comforting it was to hear prayers spoken in words they could easily understand, words that beseeched God for direction for the little colony in their precarious adventure. "There was always uplift in the eloquence of the pastor, who radiated courage. His winged words bore them far away in time to Abraham in Mesopotamia, Moses in Egypt, Amos in his vineyard, Ezekiel in his valley of dry bones, Daniel in the Persian court, and the Prince of Peace along the Galilean shores. He always brought them back to the canals of Leyden with replenished faith to face another day."<sup>34</sup> Robinson's preaching was directed to an active life in the real world, not a cloistered existence nor a church drawn in on itself. His communication to William Ames gives some illustration of this.<sup>35</sup>

He believed strongly in the preaching role of the church under educated ministers, a tradition that continues today in the churches of the Congregational Way. "Hereupon then it followeth, that since

the preaching of the gospel is no necessary part or property of the office of ministry, in the Church of England, that that ministry cannot be of Christ."<sup>36</sup> Robinson also believed that ministers should be chosen by their congregations, who were obligated to support them.

His memorable farewell to the Pilgrims contained a challenge to be ready to receive any new truth that God might reveal by any other instrument of His, and as Bradford recounts, Robinson was "very confident that the Lord had more light and truth yet to break forth out of his holy Word." Robinson bemoaned the fact that other Protestant denominations, (specifically Lutheran and Calvinist), would dare not go one step further than where Luther or Calvin had left them. God had not revealed His whole will to them, and Christians now living must be ready and willing to embrace further light.<sup>37</sup>

As already mentioned more than once, Robinson preached and practiced a great deal of tolerance, uncommon for the period in which he lived. In Leyden, he was building a new and enlightened community. Newcomers of good character were welcomed with no class distinctions or pharisaic doctrinal requirements. At its peak, his congregation grew to over three hundred people. A further proof that he practiced what he taught came in 1619, when he invited the Scottish Presbyterian fugitive David Calderwood to participate with the Leyden congregation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Robinson said on that occasion, "Reverend Sir, you may not only stay to behold us, but participate with us, if you please, for we acknowledge the churches of Scotland to be the Churches of Christ."<sup>38</sup>

Evangelism was a priority with Robinson. When charged with cowardice in fleeing from persecution in England, he replied in a way that clearly expressed his view on the supreme duty of preaching in exile. He claimed that no man was ever freed from his obligation to preach, not just throughout a long exile, but everywhere; even under the

most distressing conditions, the minister must be a preacher of the gospel. And Robinson never lost his missionary zeal. One of the compelling reasons behind the decision for America was the missionary purpose of bringing the gospel to the "savages in America". He severely chastized Bradford and Allerton when he received Bradford's letter informing him of the slaughter of some hostile Indians. He wrote: "Concerning the killing of those poor Indians . . . , oh! how happy a thing had it been, if you had converted some, before you had killed any."<sup>39</sup>

Robinson's practical administration of his church was always consistent with his teachings and writings. With his insistence on the functions and authority of the elders, together with the power and responsibilities of the congregation, and his wise avoidance of the word "democracy", which had a negative connotation in those days, Robinson successfully saved the Separatist movement from the extremes of autocratic rule by the few on the one hand, and dangerous anarchy on the other. In so doing, he steered the Separatist churches toward the Congregational Way as we know it today. He believed in and practiced the policy of letting laymen speak in church services by opening up the Sunday afternoon sessions mentioned earlier to what he referred to as "prophesying". It was all done decently and in order, a forerunner of today's Bible study groups. When there was business that required action by the congregation, it was taken up at the close of worship. Robinson believed this was all the Lord's work.

He achieved an unparalleled degree of harmony and unity amongst himself, his church's officers, (Brewster, Fuller, and Carver), and through them with his congregation. He was the dominant force in the church counsels, and the growth and strength of the Leyden church stemmed in great degree from the personal qualities of its pastor and his three associates. Bradford writes: ". . . if at any time,

differences arose, or offences broak out, . . . they were ever so mete with, and nipt in the head betimes, or otherwise so well composed, as still love, peace, and communion was continued."<sup>40</sup> Among the Separatist groups living in Holland, who were given to much internal strife, no higher tribute could have been given. Robinson's leaving Amsterdam for Leyden with his congregation was motivated not only by his own desire for peace and righteousness, but by fear for the welfare of his congregation.

His concern for that welfare and for the permanence of his people is evidenced in his leadership in the purchase, with a few of his members, of the "Green Gate" property, a place large enough to serve both as his residence and a meeting place for his church. Twenty-one small houses were built around the courtyard to house those families that were in greater need of help. This was not an Anabaptist style effort at communal living. The economics of the community were more those of a loving family. It was simply a glad, free, and domestic relationship of generous help and serving each other, modeled on New Testament principles. Pastor Robinson was a far-sighted, well-balanced man, not given to experiments at the expense of common sense. He was judicious, astute, steeped in brotherly love, and a very wise organizer.

His organizational wisdom and tact shows up strongly in a letter he and Brewster sent to Sir Edwin Sandys, when negotiating for permission to plant a new colony in America. Bartlett says that "Rembrandt could not have surpassed this self-portrait in words."<sup>41</sup>

Robinson stayed behind when the Speedwell left Leyden. As with the emigration from England, his responsibility remained to stay and tend the majority of the flock. Here too he had to wind up financial matters and follow through on the multitude of endless details of such a colossal venture. In the midst of this, there was a health problem with one of his children. The records show that early in 1621, the

Robinsons buried a child within the shadowed confines of the Pieterskirk.

Robinson was always deeply involved in the routine of his little flock outside of worship, one of the more daring ventures being his involvement with the Pilgrim Press, that clandestine (as far as the King and Church of England were concerned), productive publishing house run primarily by William Brewster. And individual members of his congregation sought his advice and counsel on all sorts of mundane matters. He was a conscientious and active pastor, watching over his flock, praying with them counseling them in their problems, finding jobs for the unemployed, caring for the sick, and teaching practical Christian concepts, while never neglecting his study or writing.

The practical organization of his congregation for mutual assistance was a beginning of those practical activities for the common good which made his congregation so unlike the other Separatist congregations, in the common sense they exhibited, and which served them so well in Leyden and in Plimoth Plantation. The corporate common sense of any organization is very often a reflection of that of its leader. The church in Leyden seemed to be wonderfully united in its purpose, and practical wisdom prevailed in all its counsels. They were men "valeur peace and their spirituall comferte above any other riches whatsoever."<sup>42</sup> In another place, Bradford wrote, "to the honour of God and without prejudice to any; that shuch was the true pietie, the humble zeale, the fervent love of this people . . . towards God and his waies, and the single hartednes and sinceir affection one towards another, that they came as near the primative patterne of the first churches as any other church of these later times have done."<sup>43</sup>

And Edward Winslow added this: ". . . never people upon earth lived more lovingly together and parted more sweetly than we, the church at Leyden did; not rashly, in a distracted humor, but upon

joint and serious deliberation, often seeking the mind of God by fasting and prayer; whose gracious presence we not only found with us, but his blessing upon us, from that time to this instant, to the indignation of our adversaries, the admiration of strangers, and the exceeding consolation of ourselves, to see such effects of our prayers and tears before our pilgrimage here be ended."<sup>44</sup>

Robinson bore his people on his heart, rejoiced in their successes, and sorrowed with their distress, tribulation, and persecution. His writings to his congregations and Christian friends bear a striking similarity to the more tender of Paul's letters to the congregations he had gathered, but from which he had been forced to separate. For example: "And for you, my Christian friends, towards whom for your persons I am minded, even as when I lived with you, be you admonished by me."<sup>45</sup> Even as early as his Norwich days, his pastoral qualities were evident. Henry Ainsworth referred to him as "a man revered of all the city for the graces of God in him . . . to whom the care and charge of their souls was erewhile committed."<sup>46</sup>

Busy with study, controversy, preaching, pastoral care and family life, John Robinson continued in Leyden until called to make his last great sacrifice for the Separatist movement, by sending the strongest part of his congregation out on a magnificent enterprise which he himself had helped plan for them - the exodus to America. This seemingly greatest sacrifice, was to prove to be the channel of his greatest power.

The day of departure from Leyden must have been a time of inexpressible anguish for him. To bid farewell to the flower and strength of the congregation he had built up and served so well, as they set out on a new endeavor laden with peril, must have brought trepidation and sorrow to the heart of this faithful pastor, beyond any personal disappointment over the decision to stay behind. The last prayer and

benediction were poured out from a great and sympathetic heart, which anticipated to a degree, and feared, the suffering which actually took place that winter in Plymouth. It had to have been a moment of sacrificial anguish for him.

The plan, just as in the flight from England, was for him to help the weaker members of his church to eventually get over, coming himself as soon as he felt free to leave; (Only this time he never made it). The plotters in the Merchant Adventurers group did all they could to throw roadblocks in the path of his going, a fact which was particularly upsetting to both he and William Bradford, the governor of the Plymouth colony.

Back in Leyden, Robinson worried about their voyage, the mismanagement of business in England, and what faced them in America. His farewell letter to the Mayflower contingent, plus his varied letters to Bradford and the "Church of God at Plymoth, New England", show vividly his continued pastoral care for the departed element of his congregation. Foremost in his thoughts each day, as he worked in his study or stood in the Green Gate pulpit, must have been the welfare of the Mayflower and its passengers. He could only pray and wait, until some word eventually came across that vast ocean from the unknown land on its other side. Once word did arrive, he continued as their pastor until the day he died. There are a number of factors involved here, not the least of which was Robinson's absolute convictions on church order. A new pastor had to be elected by the entire congregation, which was, of course, impossible until the rest got over. Only the pastor could administer the sacraments, so the Pilgrims in Plymouth went several years without them. Elder Brewster was quite competent, and that may have contributed to the continuation of the status quo, since he was, except in matters of highest pastoral authority, an extension of Robinson himself. Since

he was loved and respected by the Plymouth congregation, they were content in their worship and spiritual life. Brewster himself was a worthy alter ego for Robinson. Because the Plymouth congregation had complete faith that Robinson would eventually join them, there was no feeling for a change - he was still their pastor and that was that.

There is every evidence that Bradford, during his thirty-one years as governor in Plymouth, honored Robinson's recommendations, difficult as it was to do so at times. One reason the Pilgrims succeeded in New England was due to the fact that the community they sought to create was their third home. They were adept at adapting. Robinson had taught them to love two countries and to pray for and believe in a third. He was the soul and spirit of the whole enterprise, the presiding and far-seeing visionary genius. His leadership created a strong feeling of comradeship and idealism in the Pilgrim company.<sup>47</sup>

The hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of English people still in Holland at the time clung together and helped each other in all worldly and religious affairs because they believed in God and in John Robinson and in one another.

His death in 1625, after a brief illness, sent shock waves of grief through communities three thousand miles apart. As mentioned in part II of this paper, his congregations went two different ways. The stronger in Plymouth, tempered by tribulation and separation, became his great legacy to the Congregational spirit in America. His weaker group in Leyden, could not hold up without him, and it passed out of the historical picture. Robinson was mourned on both sides of the Atlantic, and Winslow, quoting comments by civic and university officials at Leyden, reported them saying that ". . . all the Churches of Christ sustained a loss by the death of that worthy instrument of the Gospel."<sup>48</sup>

## VI. A Model for Ministry

O. S. Davis vouches that in Holland, Robinson's name is still and forever linked with the ideals of "religious liberty, fidelity to principle, toleration, and loyalty to revealed truth."<sup>49</sup> Robinson's Calvinism, as it developed, stood for a sound and satisfying doctrinal system, an avoidance of legalism, the value of education, self-discipline, independent thinking, and enlightened government. He believed in enjoying the normal pleasures of living, and was dead-set against arrogance of mind and persecution, verbal or physical, of those who held alien convictions.

He was a man of simple and noble purpose, the whole trend of his life being religious, seeking, through preaching and pastoral care, to give unstintingly of himself to the well-being of his fellowman. He was such a spirit as we ought to expect to find expressing itself through the medium of the Christian ministry. In him, we have an ideal prototype for the Congregational ministry today. But we must also be realistic. Robinson lived and ministered in a different time, and he faced different problems. Also, since we are all unique individuals, none of us who are in or about to enter the Congregational ministry can be John Robinson - nor should we. It is our special personalities, faith, talents, and skills that we must bring to the ministry to which God has called us.

Nevertheless, if we would develop to the fullest the talents for ministry that we do have, we would do well to study this giant of ministry, to see where and how we can emulate him while remaining true to ourselves as unique persons. I'm not sure that as Congregationalists today we're as conscious of the great legacy of ministry that Robinson has left us, or of the debt we owe to him.

He has shown us several ways we could profitably strive to ap-

proach his example, qualities of this model for ministry, that we can work to develop further in our own ministry and/or preparation for same. These are discussed here in no particular order for the simple reason that all pastors are at different stages of personal development.

1. Desire to learn. An educated ministry is something on which Congregationalism has long been based. Robinson was an indefatigable student of Scripture, sacred writings, the works of the Reformers, secular writings, the works and thought of theologians, thinkers, authors, poets, and artists. His whole life was intentionally a never ending growth process. He was a seeker of truth before he was a defender of truth. Ministers owe it to God, their church, and themselves to be ever active and diligent in the search for truth and betterment. Like Robinson, he or she should be a life-long student.

2. A great listener. Robinson was always sincerely interested in the other person, whether he or she was the most ordinary member of his congregation, an educated fellow seeker of truth, or an opponent with whom he was locked in debate. He treated all with courtesy and respect, always preserving their individual dignity as a person. So much of ministry involves listening, a quality that can and must be developed and improved.

3. Deep personal convictions. He was Separatism's staunchest and ablest defender, and while always searching for areas of agreement, he steadfastly refused to compromise his beliefs. Even with his own congregation, he would not compromise what he sincerely believed to be scriptural truth. A clear example of this is his adamant refusal to allow Elder William Brewster, whom he loved and respected, and with whom he was of one mind and spirit, administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the Plymouth congregation, because of his

honest conviction that only an ordained minister was authorized to do so. Yet when confronted with new biblical evidence or sound reasoning that was not contrary to scripture, he could and did readily and openly admit error, and modify his thinking. Without such a deep sense of conviction in matters of spirituality, theology, and polity, it's hard to see how any pastor can exercise effective church leadership.

4. Openness. As has been already demonstrated in several places in this paper, despite his strong and solid convictions, Robinson never believed he had a corner on the market of knowledge of the things of God. His hand was always extended and open. His eyes, ears, and mind were always tuned to what the other person was saying, even to his harshest critics. Standing on his faith and beliefs, he was always ready for "new light and truth to break forth". As human beings, how many of us stubbornly cling to outmoded ideas because we cannot bear to admit we may be in error? Openness and honesty go hand in hand, and Robinson's relationships with all those with whom he came in contact was based on openness and honesty. The best relationship between pastor and congregation, just like that between husband and wife, teacher and class, or a coach and his team, must be based on complete openness and honesty.

5. A seeker of communion and fellowship. Despite his resolute stance on Separatism, Robinson was a peacemaker. He was ever looking for the grounds for communion with others, even those with whom he had strong disagreements. He never sought controversy, yet when drawn into it he didn't shy away, defending his beliefs with great skill, while still trying to see all the good in the opponent's position. He maintained an ecumenical mind without betraying his own beliefs. In these days of increased ecumenism, a minister must

be willing to recognize and respect the stance of others, (however much they may disagree), and, while maintaining the principles of the Congregational Way, still reach out in fellowship, seeking for areas of agreement as members of the Body of Christ.

6. Sincere concern for each member of the congregation. Robinson always placed the well-being of his congregation before any personal considerations. This is evident in his remaining behind to the last in the emigrations both to Holland and to America; in his purchase of housing for the less fortunate of his church; in his day-to-day activity with his people, including sharing the dangers of oppression and persecution at great personal risk; and in much of his motivation behind the removal of his people from the chaos of Amsterdam to the relative tranquillity of Leyden. A shepherd must care for his sheep, risking whatever must be risked: time, privacy, vulnerability, possessions, even life itself - but always out of a sense of commitment to loving care, rather than a self-imposed martyrdom stemming from a sense of duty or an attempt to please everybody.

7. Deep involvement with the congregation, on more than just a spiritual or intellectual level. Robinson got right down with them into the nitty-gritty of their daily routines, sharing their daily struggles and deprivations, as well as the happier times. He was their leader, teacher, father figure, neighbor, and inspiration, in the best sense of all these words. This quality could be considered part of #6, since it surely is an evidence of true pastoral care.

8. Time control. Robinson was able to do all of the above while still maintaining his prodigious schedule. There is a vast difference between a workaholic and a person who really knows how to budget and organize his or her time. Effective ministry demands mastery of the principles of time control. And that time must be organized with the

recognition of and allowance for the untimely interruptions with which loving pastoral care must constantly deal. Time control is an acquired skill, not learned without considerable effort.

9. Vision and far-sightedness. John Robinson was a sound planner and administrator, proving it over and over again. His vision and far-sightedness can be seen in his instructions to his flock departing for America, and the later results of those instructions. The decision to emigrate to America was based to no small degree on Robinson's experience in Leyden where, under his own preaching and ideas, the Separatists had made decided gains among the English-speaking residents. How much more would the success in Leyden be achieved under better conditions in America? Exactly what he expected to happen did in fact happen, when, in a sense, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay became Separatists in principle, when the hardships of life in Holland and England were removed. The pastor who is able to develop foresight is invaluable, because long-range church planning is essential for survival and growth in a rapidly changing society whose outlook is primarily secular.

10. Backbone - the ability to make the tough decisions. Robinson could do that. His action in returning to Leyden to take up his work again with the aged and feeble elements of his congregation was far more heroic than his sailing with the Mayflower would have been. Ministry would appear to be a spectrum of tough decisions. With all the preceding discussion of tender loving pastoral care, it must be remembered that there is such a thing as "tough love". Sometimes it becomes necessary to tell a congregation something they do not want to hear. Decisions to leave or stay are fraught with risk. And no small part of ministerial calling is teaching the congregation to make those tough decisions, and nurturing them through the process.

11. A deep personal relationship with God. This quality is the foundation on which the others are built and developed. Robinson's relationship with his God shines through all his writings, and in his great faith in what God was doing in his own life, in his church, and in the world, despite his Calvinist view of the depravity of humankind. He was an evangelist - his ability to look upward and forward in the midst of stress, difficulty, and tribulation, to that brighter tomorrow of God's promise, became ingrained in the spirits of his congregation and made them unique. This "Pilgrim spirit" was perhaps his greatest legacy to them. Without this deep personal relationship with God, it is inconceivable how any person can be honestly involved in pastoral ministry. It is the security against burn-out. And it must be nurtured, probably even more for the pastor than for the lay person.

To many who read his formal works, John Robinson may be initially regarded as a stern, rigid defender of Separatism. But he was first and foremost a pastor, and it is in that capacity more than any other that this hard-working giant of faith and practical good sense serves as a model for ministry.

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