

CONGREGATIONALISM AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE RADICAL REFORMATION:

A Study of Influences and Differences

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to examine first the sources, and where possible, the extent of anabaptist and "Radical Reformation" influence on the early development of Congregationalism. Secondly it will point out significant differences in perspective as Congregational thought and Radical Reformation thinking emerged as separate entities in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The subject is filled with traps and blind-alleys, for many of the primary sources are difficult to interpret, and secondary writers tend to agree only in their disagreements. Still, I hope my treatment of events gives some clarity and continuity to the development to the two intermingling stories.

The uneven texture, style, and focus of this paper stem from the obvious fact of this being a combination of two originally related but separate essays. I hope no apology is needed; there is no pretense to elegance. My only desire is that a line of intelligible progression runs throughout. Written for a church history seminar on the Reformation, the first part of this study covers its subject with an academic detail, even though I have omitted much of the elaboration of the argument present in the original paper. Following comes a brief section linking the two parts. The second part was the culminating project of an adult study group which I taught as part of a seminary program while working as a student assistant at a small Southern Baptist church in Manhattan. During the course of the semester we examined the topic "Freedom and Authority in the Free Church Tradition," which provided the impetus for much of the research in the second part of this historical survey. That seminar focused mostly on Southern

Baptist input into Free Church tradition. Though I have reduced its proportional importance in this study from that in the original I feel the minor presence here of another similar yet different American church tradition adds resonance and perspective to the consideration of anabaptist and "Radical Reformation" influences in the formation of Congregationalism. Let me say here that by Radical Reformation I mean the attempts toward restoration of the Church, made alongside the mainstream European Reformations, which led to the creation of numerous sects then called Anabaptists. These have become over 350 plus years the Brethren, Mennonite, Moravian, and several other bodies of churches based in Europe and America.

In spite of my warning that no hard and fast conclusions can be expected from the hisotrical evidence presented in the following it is my conviction that the very act of looking closely at these early movements is valuable. Contemporary scholarship in the field has tended either to emphasize the ecumenical dimensions of the "New England Fathers," thus down-playing the Separatist and sectarian nature of those who developed the embryo of "The Congregational Way"; or the scholarship has come from a particular confessional stance (such as National Association Congregationalists) determined to show how its own present formation is "really true" to the founding ideals of the tradition. In either case, whether one is presenting the New England Way as a for-runner to the National Council of Churches or as strict Congregationalists whose prime concern was the maintenance of a pure polity, justice is not done to the radical nature of the venture. Certainly the separatist settlers at Plymouth and to a considerable degree the Puritan settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony were burying their bridges behind them in a daring fashion. It is my contention that the very spirit of the adventure made them at least as close to the Radical Reformation's passionate ideal of true reform of the Church than to the old-world Genevan vision. This closeness

proved to be short-lived. Yet in our current understanding of ourselves it should not be completely forgotten, as so often is the case.

## PART ONE

Debate concerning the extent, if any, of continental anabaptist influence on the English Reformation, the rise of Puritanism, and the eventual toleration of the separatist tradition has waxed and waned for years without a real consensus yet occurring. Certainly I cannot deal with all aspects of this complex problem, nor create harmony where there is none. My goal is to examine in detail the beginning of anabaptist activity in England during the time span 1530-1575.

There are two major sub-divisions in this part of my paper. First, I consider the relationship of incoming anabaptist ideas to the continuing English tradition of the Lollards. Does the phrase "New Anabaptist...old Lollard"<sup>1</sup> (paralleling Milton's famous comparison of Presbyter and Priest) have any significant accuracy? Were anabaptists and Lollards separate but merging, sequential, or totally unrelated movements? Secondly, I focus on what records of anabaptist activity we have during this period. Who and where were anabaptists? Did they play a part in what we call today the English Reformation? Were they the same as continental anabaptists? Why were they persecuted?

Before going further, some attempt must be made to define what I mean by anabaptist. Anabaptist in the minds of most 16th and 17th century authorities, Protestant and Catholic alike, was synonymous with heresy and sedition,

the combination of evils represented so infamously by the Munster rebellion of 1534-35. More modern scholarship has tended to define it in terms of a separatist "gathered" church order and its doctrinal insistence on the necessity of believers' baptism or re-baptism. I.B. Horst in his important study, The Radical Brethren, defines anabaptism in England during this period in a generic sense as a "general non-conformity with one or more views characteristic of anabaptism"; by the "views characteristic of anabaptism" I understand him to mean characteristic "heresies" which the contemporary English authorities used in their understanding of the movement. This definition has been called into question by the scholar B.R. White as being misleading. However, Horst elsewhere in his book qualifies further the term anabaptist, stating that it was "above all else a revival of religion," and was primarily sacramentarian and antipedobaptist. If these additions are added to his above definition I think it is more adequate, but still vague.

There is a conceptual problem in defining anabaptist for this period which must be faced. The characteristics of anabaptist theology which are familiar to us - particularly believers baptism and a stance of nonresistance and non-participation in violence - did not come into a consistent pattern of adherence until a later time. My church history professor who read the original paper objected that Horst's definition seems to better describe a "Radical" than what we think of as an "anabaptist." He is right. But of course, to make this a study on "Radical influence" in England in this time period would create even greater difficulties of definition! Laying aside the obvious ambiguities of either "Radical" or "anabaptist," the question must be asked, "where did these people go - with which stream of Church History did they eventually merge?" If this question could be clearly answered it would be an easy matter to label these early 16th century English dissidents according to choices made years later (i.e.- we could call them "left-wingers"

if they or their children became Separatists/Independents/Congregationalists, or "proto-Mennonites" or something similar if they went in that direction.) But the question cannot be answered! So, since during this period in England these "Radicals" were, in fact, more often than not called "anabaptists," I will continue - cautiously - to use this generic description.

Information concerning the Lollards after the 1414 uprising under Sir John Oldcastle is exceedingly hard to find, especially since after John Wyclif's death in 1384 they had no theological scholar to give them leadership and notoriety. Most of the information available to us on this underground group in the 15th and 16th centuries comes from surviving ecclesiastical records of heresy trials, and of course, from the Lollard section of Foxe's Acts and Monuments. The picture this evidence gives of Lollardy indicates a continuous survival from the beginning of the movement through the 1530's (when it began to be blended in with other forms of imported Protestantism), especially in certain areas of England where the majority of Lollards appear to have lived. The chief pockets of Lollardy around at the beginning of the 16th century were in the Chiltern area in the diocese of Lincoln, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, several communities in Kent, and London. Moreover, while throughout the 15th century occasional trials of Lollards can be found in the records, the number of heresy trials near the end of the century and into the next increase noticeably. Something along the line of a Lollard "revival" can be said to have occurred. In 1511, Ammonio wrote Erasmus complaining (flip-<sup>5</sup>pantly, I assume!) that the price of wood was rising because the heretics were taking so much of it for burning, and that his servant's brother was himself starting a sect and gathering disciples!<sup>6</sup><sup>7</sup>

During the late Lollard period at the turn of the century anti-clerical attitudes were common and numerous kinds of "strange" beliefs were in the air. Thomson warns against using doctrine alone as a determinant of calling

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someone a Lollard. He believes that possession of English books, most notably the Scriptures, and association with others who held similar views are the safest criteria to distinguish Lollard from the malcontent at the tavern.<sup>8</sup> Lollards were known to pass the English Scriptures down from generation to generation, and to set great store by learning passages and whole books by heart. This was especially true among the illiterate. But generally speaking, the later Lollards as a whole tended to hold the following characteristic positions. They were anti-sacerdotal (as were many other disgruntled Englishmen tired of paying so much to support the Church), anti-authoritarian, and sometimes anti-sacramental, and combined a scriptural fundamentalist attitude with a common sense rationalism. They opposed the veneration of images, pilgrimages, and sometimes oath-taking. Due to their Biblical stance and their anti-authoritarian tendency they were usually negative toward aspects of religion not found in the Bible. Some denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. Their position in regard to baptism was that baptizing the parent was sufficient, and showed a hostility to infant baptism. This was due in large part to reluctance to pay the priest's sacramental fee.<sup>9</sup> It was common for a Lollard to state that an unspoken prayer was as good as a spoken one, and that a prayer in a field was as good as a prayer in a church. Some Lollards appear to have had pacifist principles (following Wyclif).<sup>10</sup> In terms of social status, they were normally common people, frequently being artisans. Their connections with crafts and trade gave them as a class more mobility than the mere laborer or farmer, and facilitated the spread of ideas. An occasional secular priest or school teacher is mentioned in the records, as well as merchants of a middle-class status in London.<sup>11</sup>

It seems from the available evidence that the Lollards played a significant role in preparing among the English citizenry the way for a new openness to Protestantism in general. Thomson found that the two most

enduring characteristics of Lollardy were its anti-papal emphasis and its pre-Puritan conservative, sometimes iconoclastic approach to worship and moral life.<sup>12</sup> Certainly this describes much of later English Protestantism.

If the Lollards helped prepare the way for the acceptance of Protestantism, did some of them have connections with those who would become anabaptist Protestants? By and large the answer to this remains clouded, as we do not know enough at present about activities of the late Lollards and early anabaptists to find a definite appraisal. However, there is at least one incident recorded which may well document an early union of Lollards and anabaptists in secret meetings at the house of one John Raulinges of London.<sup>13</sup> Probably in 1532, several English and Flemish persons were arrested for the importing and distribution of an alleged anabaptist book.<sup>14</sup> The deposition lists charges against Raulinges and eight other men, including one whose name was a common one among London Lollards at this time. Another man, Herman Bastian, was an anabaptist leader and printer who was later arrested in Hesse with 30 other anabaptists. The deposition refers to Bastian as "byshop & reder"; reader was typically a Lollard office, while the bishop was a common title held by Dutch Flemish anabaptists. Here there are signs of an amalgamation of Lollard and anabaptist traditional usages. Also, one man was said to hold the view that "no man expoundyng scripture shuld be beleued," which has a Lollard more than anabaptist ring to it.<sup>15</sup> While this sort of mingling between anabaptists and Lollards may not have been common (there are no other records of similar arrests), it does indicate that the Lollards were capable of responding to the anabaptist version of the new Protestantism, at least to some degree, along with other continental influences.

To what extent did Lollardy prepare the way for anabaptism? Horst states

The question about a causal relationship of Lollardy with anabaptism must remain open....The influence from abroad was of consequence, but the character of anabaptism in England was formed by the Lollard and other native

nonconformities which persisted at the time of the Reformation.

One such characteristic of English anabaptism formed by the old Lollards and dissenting tradition Horst believes to be the use of the name "brethren" as a preferred way for anabaptists to address each other. Of course, English anabaptists were not the only ones to use the term, but its adoption and use went back to the original Lollards.<sup>17</sup> Another characteristic of English anabaptism, one that was not so much formed as perhaps pre-dated and prepared for, was the belief that the sword of the temporal power should not be used by Christians. As stated earlier, some Lollards held to pacifistic ideas, and almost all were anti-authoritarian in temperament. In an anonymous tract, The Sum of Scripture, made known through the records of an episcopal synod convened by Archbishop Washam in May 1530, the author holds that

Jesus Christ hath not ordeyned in his spiritual Kingdom, which is all trewe cristen people, any sworde, for he himself is the King and governor without sworde, and without any outwarde lawe.

Christen men among themself have nought to doo with the sworde nor with the lawe, for that is to them nether nedefull nor profitable, the secular sworde belongeth not to Christes Kingdom, for in it is noon but good and Justice.<sup>18</sup>

Now one scholar attributes these thoughts to a Lutheran or an anabaptist. However, 1530 is very early for an anabaptist to be tried for heresy at an episcopal synod in England. I wonder if these words could not have been uttered by a theologically articulate Lollard - perhaps even one who had come into contact with some anabaptist thought.<sup>19</sup> If that were the case, then the anabaptist eschewing of the sword found precedent in native Lollard thought. After all, since the failure of the Oldcastle rebellion and a few brief after-skirmishes, the Lollards are not known to have taken an active part in any kind of rebellion.

I turn now to the subject of actual anabaptist activity in England. Again, information is spotty, and comes mostly from records of civil prosecution and heresy trials, along with several anti-anabaptist tracts and

decrees. There still probably is much information to be found in the records of local churches and dioceses on anabaptism in this period.

The first influx of anabaptists appears in the early 1530's, although it is possible that an unsubstantiated report of seven anabaptists from Holland being arrested in 1528 may be true. <sup>20</sup> The wool and textile trade between England and the Low Countries provided ample ways to the relative haven of England - haven, compared to the strong stirrings of continental persecution of anabaptists at this time. It has been estimated that by 1535 there were many Dutch anabaptists living in England. In 1562 Dutch residents (not all of whom were anabaptist by any means) in England numbered 30,000. However, the persecution under the Duke of Alva in 1567 and following drove many Dutch Protestants to flee their native land; between 50,000 and 100,000 came to <sup>21</sup> England. Another source estimates that by 1573 there were a total of 50,000 anabaptists in England, congregating especially in towns such as <sup>22</sup> London, Norwich, Dover, Sandwich, Canterbury, Colchester, and Hastings.

The record of official notice and dismay at anabaptist activities begins early and persists well into the later part of the 16th century. In 1528 Thomas Moore mentioned the "Anabaptistarum haeresis" of the continent in a letter to Erasmus, while in 1533 he charged William Tyndale with holding <sup>23</sup> heretical opinions found among the anabaptists. England's second public notice of the p<sup>u</sup>r<sup>s</sup>ence of anabaptists appeared in a royal proclamation of 1534 decried the influx of anabaptists and Zwinglians, warning them that he intended to "proceed against such of them as be already apprehended." At the end of the petition was the command that all anabaptists who remained un- <sup>24</sup> detected leave England within eight or ten days.

In late May of 1535 at least 20 anabaptists were captured and 13 or 14 were burned, the places of execution spread throughout the main towns of the <sup>25</sup> kingdom to gain the maximum exposure as an example to others. That this

was no minor matter to the officials can be seen by the urgency of proclaiming twice their abhorrence of the new sect and the necessity of setting a grim example throughout the land. In addition to the fear of a quick movement of this new odious sect across the land, there well may have been significant political motives to the timing of the executions. The Munster rebellion was occurring in the years 1534-35 as all Europe watched with horrified eyes. The English Court stayed in constant contact with its continental informants during this period. The officials were interested in events at Munster in particular. <sup>26</sup> All throughout Europe reaction to the Munster affair brought about a crack down on anabaptists; England was no exception. Anabaptism was connected in official minds with Munster, and that meant sedition. At a time when King Henry was fighting off Catholic rebels from the north and fearing a foreign French - Holy Roman Empire alliance against him, "sedition" from the left had to be kept in check.

In 1536-37, after the initial concern over the Munster affair and the spread of anabaptists had died down, England was once again a place of relative safe harbor, compared to continental Europe. At the town of Bocholt, in Westphalia, a conference of anabaptists occurred in August of 1536 to discuss strategy after the Munster tragedy and to try to work out a more united front. About 25 anabaptist leaders attended. The primary groups represented at the conference were the pacifistic followers of Melchior Hoffman, and the surviving Munsterite anabaptists. The initiative and finances to organize the conference came from an anonymous Englishman named Henry; the actual planning was carried out by the anabaptist Jan <sup>27</sup> Matthijsz, then living in England. Though the conference did not create great unity, it shows the remarkable degree of mobility anabaptists possessed. Also, England was very much a part of the anabaptist world scene.

A letter confiscated from the Melchiorite anabaptist Peter Tasch in 1538

fell into the hands of Philipp of Hesse and John Frederick of Saxony. In it Tasch commented about anabaptists in other countries, and first of all he listed England: "In England the truth grows quietly and is spreading steadily..."<sup>28</sup> Philipp and Frederick quickly sent a friendly warning to Henry, who responded by creating a commission including the Archbishop and two other bishops to look into the matter. Soon after this five anabaptist were seized and four were burned. Several proclamations followed, including in 1539 one pardoning all persons who had been seduced by anabaptists and sacramentarians.<sup>29</sup> The Act of Six Articles of 1539 made denial of the real presence in the eucharist punishable by death. Since there were many more sacramentarians in the land than just anabaptists it is quite difficult to distinguish the true anabaptists on the remaining court records. Foxe lists 21 persons burned under the Six Articles from 1540-46; some may well have been<sup>30</sup> anabaptists.

Under Edward VI's reign an atmosphere of greater tolerance existed than was found in the later days of Henry. The official purpose was to establish a definitely Protestant kingdom; persecution on the count of sacramentarianism ceased and persecution of nonconformists diminished. The Six Articles were annulled. Parliament declared in 1547 that royal proclamations would not have the force of statute law; no proclamations against anabaptists were issued under Edward in any case. Authorities attempted to deal with anabaptists in<sup>31</sup> general in terms of persuasion and/or deportation. The leniency during these years under Edward gave England even a better reputation among anabaptists, and a bad one among less tolerant continental authorities.<sup>32</sup> During this time of Protestantization of the land there was a relatively open debate of all current controversial ideas, including many anabaptist ones.

Events changed quickly when Queen Mary (1553-58) took the throne. The story of English anabaptism becomes very difficult to decipher from that of

orthodox reformed Protestantism, for both were subjected to great persecution. Foxe's record of the martyrs of this period does not often distinguish why the persons were imprisoned or executed, thus leaving open to question the identity of the victims as reformed or anabaptist. Several historians have estimated that the majority were anabaptists "whom the former group would probably have punished with equal severity had the power been vested in them."<sup>33</sup> About 300 persons went to death as heretics under Bishop Bonner's visitation articles and other decrees meant to take England back to Catholic conformity. About two thirds of this number were laymen, many of whom came from areas where anabaptism had been popular. That so many had the courage not to recant and avoid execution is reminiscent of the anabaptist acceptance of the cross as part of the Christian faith.<sup>34</sup> Since anabaptism had been on the rise in Edward's time, one wonders if the persecution did not prove conducive to its further growth. However, more cannot be definitely said about the numbers of anabaptists during Mary's reign.

Bishop Jewel, upon his return to England from exile under Mary complained to the Swiss:

We found, at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, large and inauspicious crops of Arians, Anabaptists, and other pests, which I know not how, but as mushrooms spring up in the night and darkness, so these sprung up in that darkness and unhappy time of the Marian times.<sup>35</sup>

Elizabeth decreed in 1560 and again in 1562 against anabaptist opinions, demanding conformity or banishment.<sup>36</sup> Another ecclesiastical commission was established to control the spread of anabaptism. While Jewel and Elizabeth worked to find a stable Anglicanism which would fit mid-way between the old faith and the Puritanism demanded by those returning from Genevan exile, anabaptists remained anathema and open game for attacks from both conservatives and reformed Protestants.

The late 1560's saw a rapid influx of anabaptists and Dutch in general

after the Duke of Alva took control of the Netherlands in 1567. In May of 1568 the Queen wrote to Archbishop Parker ordering him to set up an inquisition in London and any other place to root out the foreign-born and other natives who may be suspect, and examine them for heresy. The penalty for noncompliance was banishment within 20 days or death.<sup>37</sup> Toward the end of the third quarter of the 16th century records of activities against anabaptist ideas begin to decrease. However, this does not indicate an end of anabaptist ideas so much as a rapid rise of native separatist movements in Brownism and Barrowism, coupled probably with a decrease in immigration from the Netherlands.

What do we know about the characteristics of the anabaptist ideas? Is there any evidence to define what they did and did not believe, did and did not practice? Again, most of our factual knowledge comes from court documents, official proclamations, and pamphlets. Most of this is highly critical and likely to portray the anabaptists in the worst possible light. Also, sometimes officials based their knowledge of local anabaptist ideas and practices upon reports from distant lands; but anabaptism was far from a uniform dogma or practice, as any study of the many kinds of anabaptist sects active during the time of the Reformation will soon show.

With some qualifications, some factual knowledge of the beliefs of English anabaptists can be summarized. The July 1540 general pardon for anabaptists and sacramentarians contained a list of anabaptist views as the King had come to know them. The formulation, of course, is a listing of heresies rather than a positive statement of faith.

- 1) That infants ought not to be baptised and if they be baptised they ought to be rebaptised when they com to lawful age;
- 2) That it is not leafull for a Christian man to beare office or rule in the Common Welth;
- 3) That no mans lawes ought to be obeyed;
- 4) That it is not leafull for a Christian man to take an oth befor any Judge;
- 5) That Christ tok no bodily substaunce of our blissed lady;
- 6) That Synnes aftre baptism cannot be restored by repentaunce;

- 7) That every maner of Death, with the tyme and houre therof, is so certainly prescribed, appointed and determyned to every man of God, that neither any prynce by his sword can alte it, ne any man by his owne wilfulness prevent or chaunge it;
- 8) That all things be common and nothing be severall.<sup>38</sup>

First of all; it can readily be seen that the anabaptists were accused of having an unorthodox view of the incarnation, similar to that of Melchior Hoffman.<sup>39</sup> This idea (celestial flesh) that Christ did not receive his human body from Mary occurred among the group meeting at John Raulinges' house. The Forty-Two Articles of 1553 contain in definite language, in the article on the doctrine of Christ a clear definition of the ancient view of the incarnation, purposely refuting the anabaptist position. But how many of the English anabaptists held this unorthodox Christology is unknown.

The opinion concerning baptism centers on two questions, whether infants partake of original sin (and hence need baptism to impart grace) and whether the baptism of an infant is a true baptism since an infant is without faith. The former question is more especially peculiar to continental anabaptism, as was the opinion that even the infants of infidels shall be saved. However, this is not to say that these opinions were not found among Dutch anabaptists in England. The latter question over whether an infant baptism constituted a true baptism was more pertinent<sup>+</sup> to many people in 16th century England, and was the subject of a great deal of debate. However, one could withhold one's own infant from baptism until a later age; rebaptism was a more drastic step and implied a separation from the state church. In continental Europe where persecution was more severe anabaptists achieved separation and rebaptism early. In England, where there already was the tradition of non-separating Lollardy, and where the predominate type of anabaptism was related to the Melchiorite wing which recognized on the continent the practice of temporarily discontinuing rebaptisms, there was less separatism and very little rebaptism. Almost none of the trial records we have from this period actually accuse anabaptists in England of rebaptising their children. Occasionally there is mention of refusal to have

children baptised (this goes back to the Lollards, and as we shall see, was picked up by the separatists) but that is different than rebaptism. By far the most common charges against those suspected of anabaptist sympathies are on the holding the belief in the celestial flesh, and for doubts about the legitimacy of a Christian man taking an oath, serving as a magistrate, or taking up the sword. In regard to baptism, anabaptists in England did not start out to begin a new church but rather they intended to form a pure apostolic expression of the one Church.

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There are two other common anabaptist beliefs that appear to have been prevalent in England, which are mentioned in the already quoted official records. That a Christian should not serve as a magistrate seems to have been more of a widespread view on the continent where the separatism was greater and more absolute. Nevertheless, it was well represented in England. Connected with this was the refusal to take up arms in warfare. The removal of the sword from religion seems to have been a common desire among anabaptists and many other nonconformists of this period, going back to the Lollard tradition. No doubt it was this belief, the feeling that a person should not be compelled to believe a certain dogma, that the officials interpreted as a refusal to bear arms, perhaps in connection with reports from the continent. It would seem doubtful that anabaptists in England at this time had developed a full philosophy of Christian pacifism. Of the other charges listed, there is no pervasive evidence to indicate that many anabaptists in England held these views.

To conclude this section, it can fairly be said that anabaptists and Lollards were part of separate but somewhat similar movements, with different origins, which in the 1530's appear to have begun a gradual process of merging some of their members. Within 20 years anabaptism seems to have absorbed most of the Lollard tradition which did not become absorbed in state church

Protestantism. There is reason to believe that the beginning Lollard enthusiasm for Lutheran doctrines in the 1520's and 30's diminished as these views were taken up by the same old authoritarian clergy already so disliked.

Anabaptists in England from early on were primarily refugees from the Low Countries of Europe. They found England a relatively safe harbor and a fertile soil for spreading their beliefs. Although immigration of foreign anabaptists reached its peak forty years after it began, within a generation of its start English officials saw that it was inflicting considerable influence on native-born believers. Anabaptist ideas played a particularly noticeable part in the debate about Protestantism during Edward VI's reign. Several notable men espoused various anabaptist ideas in print, even though they themselves may not have been anabaptist to the extent of seeking out and meeting with others of like persuasion. It appears that anabaptists, in their courage to maintain their faith under the Marian persecution, significantly inflated the roles of Protestant martyrs and thus indirectly played a part in the great Protestant reaction under Elizabeth. More directly, they became a foil for both pro- and anti- "high" church order groups to criticize. Perhaps if the anabaptists had not been so much in public notice and the dangers of separation and fanaticism so often warned against, the Elizabethan settlement may have gradually come to have more closely resembled the Genevan order. Such a turn of events would have made the rise of separatism in England a much different, probably much less popular movement.

## BETWEEN OLD AND NEW WORLDS: 1575 - 1620

Because this is a conglomeration of two papers whose interests were pre-1575 anabaptist activities in England and post-1620 Free Church tradition in America, the crucial period in between these times cannot adequately be dealt with here. Indeed, the origins of Congregationalism which occurred in these years complicates and confuses the most erudite and scholarly of papers.

For the sake of continuity I will provide a brief sketch of events, and an interpretation of their significance, in the transition period between the English seedbed and the fruition in the New World.

While some authorities claim Richard Fitz and the Plumbers' Hall Congregation to be the first separatist group (discovered in 1567), the best authorities classify it as more nearly being an "independent, non-separatist Puritan"<sup>41</sup> inspired gathering than a true separatist one. The first influential true separatist thinker and leader appears to have been Robert Browne. Browne taught at Cambridge, was dismissed, returned a few years later to preach with great persuasive power, and refused ordination by the local bishop. He then went to Norwich where his thorough-going separatist views became confirmed. Browne led a separatist congregation of some forty persons in Norwich, until the authorities forced them to disband, Browne going to prison for a short term. Concluding that England was no place to practice separatism safely, Browne and his followers departed to Middelburg in the Netherlands, locating there by the winter of 1582. There dissensions soon troubled his group. Upon leaving Middelburg Browne went to Scotland, landed in jail, then returned to England to move in and out of conformity to the Bishop and magistrate the rest of his<sup>42</sup> life.

There is no evidence of any significant contact between Browne and his congregation with anabaptists, either in Norwich or Middelburgh. There are, however, two notable similarities of doctrine. First, church membership, according to Browne, was to be restricted to the personally committed, with the "unworthy" separated out, and errant church members disciplined through use of the ban. In actual practice this meant the Brownist congregation had to separate from the undisciplined Anglican parishes. The basis for this belief of his was the conditional interpretation he gave to the covenantal relationship between men/women and God.<sup>43</sup> Almost all Calvinist thought considered the covenant to be unconditional; a conditional covenant required the Church's obedience to the will and law of God for the gracious relationship between the Divine and those elected to be constantly renewed. Hence, true discipline was a mark of the true Church for Browne; the Church functioned as a "voluntary renewal of the covenant between God and his people," and each visible church must try to be worthy of such an renewal.<sup>44</sup>

Second, Browne advocated a limited separation of Church - State authority, in that he claimed the magistrate had no rightful power to "compel religion, to plant Churches by power, and to force submission to ecclesiastical government..."<sup>45</sup> Browne's covenantal theology and dislike of extra-biblical ecclesiastical authority led him to place responsibility with the civil magistrate for the judging of disputes within the church. This was to occur in cases of faction and heresy which constituted a major threat to order and true religion. Minor differences were to be "suffered" so long as they did not threaten order.<sup>46</sup>

A third important Brownist doctrine stemmed from his interpretation of Matthew 18:17, "tell the church," to mean not the elders (as was currently the common Puritan-Presbyterian understanding) but actually to refer to all members of the congregation. Browne developed this into a general belief that

the will of Christ (the risen Christ being the true head of the gathered Church) <sup>47</sup> was always best discerned by the greatest number of those concerned. Here is the conception and original theological justification for congregational rule within a church congregation. Browne also believed in synodical consultation among related churches.

After Robert Browne, the story of Congregational predecessors centers on the free church efforts of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and a little later, Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth.

About the lives of Barrow and Greenwood little is really known, though they wrote extensively during the seven years they were imprisoned together (1587-93) before their execution. Barrow, the more prolific writer, ~~was~~ a well-born courtier converted to a strict Puritanism, <sup>was</sup> ~~and~~ arrested at the Clink Prison while visiting the already imprisoned Greenwood. This latter, a Cambridge graduate (in school while Robert Browne was still allowed to preach in the town) and Puritan divine, had been arrested at a house meeting for his separatist views. <sup>48</sup> Barrow was apparently an active member of an underground separatist brotherhood/church in London. This group suffered severely from official persecution and was not able to appoint a pastor until Francis Johnson was appointed in 1592, perhaps five years after the church began to meet. Greenwood at that time was elected to the position of doctor (teacher?); whether or not he was temporarily out of prison then remains uncertain. It is important to note that one of the charges frequently brought against members of the London separatist congregation (besides the crime of meeting for worship outside a regular parish) was the refusal to bring their children for baptism, and their absenting themselves from communion. Since they considered the official church to be not a true Church, and as they went for several <sup>years</sup> without an ordained pastor or had one who was in prison, they chose to avoid these sacraments. 49

The polity this struggling church followed, designed and expounded by

Barrow and Greenwood in their prison writings, bears remarkable resemblance to the thought of Robert Browne. Scholars have debated the degree of influence Browne exerted on Barrow and Greenwood, and have never reached agreement on the matter. Briefly it can be said that they must have been familiar with his ideas, have read some of his tracts, and equally did they hotly deny any connection with this (as he appeared to them) hypocrite who made his peace with the Anglican authorities. While Browne began his theological analysis with emphasis on the covenant, Barrow and Greenwood started by a biblical/sociological condemnation of the existing church. To them it represented a state of total apostasy, such that the only thing to be done was for any true group of Christians remaining to band together and follow the New Testament instructions for running a Church. Their separation, then, came as a secondary principle, arising from their perception that the present ecclesiastical system was so evil that no cooperation whatsoever could be justified. They adopted a kind of "theology of persecution" which sought to be the faithful remnant, reminiscent of Protestant thinking in the Marian nightmare.

Francis Johnson, who began his pastoral career as a left-wing Puritan, came over to the separatist cause sometime in 1591 or 92 while he was minister to the Congregation of English Merchant Adventurers at Middelburgh, Netherlands. This was several years after Browne had departed; nevertheless it is obvious that Middelburgh must have been a hot-bed of tumultuous new Protestant ideas. He was influenced strongly by the writings of Barrow and Greenwood, and a personal interview with them in London. Johnson was imprisoned in 1593 along with 55 other members of the London separatist congregation. After the execution of Barrow and Greenwood they were banished and made their way to Amsterdam; however, the English authorities detained Johnson for an additional four years. In Amsterdam Henry Ainsworth was appointed teacher to the congregation; Johnson finally arrived there in 1597. For a few years the group prospered,

gaining members despite a bitter controversy waged between Francis Johnson and  
 52  
 his brother George.

In the Gainsborough region of Lincolnshire in England at this time separatist opinion flourished. Richard Clifton preached an essentially separatist doctrine from the pulpit at Babworth. More important for our purposes is John Smyth, a Cambridge graduate whose followers established a separatist church at Gainsborough perhaps as early as 1602, although Smyth himself did not join them there as a full-time pastor until 1604 (he was then involved in a lengthy dispute with officials over his authority to preach  
 53  
 at Lincoln prior to his removal to Gainsborough.) Smyth's original views

were a fairly standard version of the by then well-established separatist principles, though it should be noted that he went further than Robert Browne in defining the separation of the state from ecclesiastical affairs.

Speaking of the magistrates, he wrote in 1607, "They may doo<sup>o</sup> nothing  
 54  
 concerning the Church." The congregation at Gainsborough included many of

those leaning toward a separatist position from nearby Scrooby (10 miles distant); not until Smyth led his group to Amsterdam in 1606 did the remaining separatists join themselves into a congregation in the chapel of the (now famous) Scrooby manor-house. Chief among the covenantors at Scrooby were William Brewster, William Bradford, Richard Clifton - now gone from Babworth and the man who probably served the Scrooby church as ordained  
 55  
 pastor upon the departure of Smyth - and John Robinson. This latter,

another former Puritan divine from Cambridge, preached in Norwich between 1600 and 1604 when he was suspended for his nonconformity. He was a member of the Scrooby church by 1606, according to Bradford's history. How early he had joined these dissenters, and to what extent he had known John Smyth,  
 56

remains unknown. Pressure mounting against the Scrooby separatists, the group emigrated in small parties to Amsterdam in 1607 and 1608.

Thus, by August 1608, when the last detachment of the Scrooby group

reached safe asylum, there were three separatist churches going in Amsterdam. This situation did not last for long, however. Though John Smyth was much indebted to Francis Johnson and the example of the first separatist church in Amsterdam (called the Ancient Church), he began to quarrel with them soon after his arrival in 1606. His first dispute with the Ancient Church centered on his claims that (1) the English Bible should not be used but rather the scripture be translated orally from the original languages, (2) that books should not be used during the time for prophesying and singing, and (3) that there were not three kinds of ruling elders who had differing offices - the standard separatist practice - but rather there were only elders who did all offices; further, that by appointing elders the congregation as a whole gave up none of its own power for it could exist perfectly well without them. At the heart of Smyth's theology, as he gradually developed it, was the covenant. However, for him there was a strict and exact analogy between the everlasting covenant of God, offered to humankind, and the actual, historical act of a particular group of believers covenanting together. This was such a direct parallel that he could say the power of Christ's ministry and authority is directly wielded by "two or three" faithfully gathered together, ~~wherever~~<sup>wherever</sup> they may be. It was no sharp change in logical direction, then, for Smyth to conclude by 1609 that the sacrament of Baptism be identified as the act by which a believer visibly declares that he has entered into personal covenant with Christ - and it was obvious that no infant can do this. Thus he found infant baptism to be heretical, and since he was a true separatist he was willing to go on to rebaptize himself and several of his Amsterdam followers. This action shocked and outraged traditional Anglicans, Puritans, and separatists in equal degree. It should be noted here that although Smyth eventually joined an Amsterdam Mennonite congregation, at the time of his change of views regarding baptism he cannot be shown to have been influenced by them.

Francis Johnson reacted strongly to the, as he saw it, dangerous position taken by his former protégé. During 1609 he reversed his former opinion and declared that final church authority lay with the elders, interpreting Matthew 18:17 to refer to the elders ("tell the church")! This clearly contradicted English separatist tradition going back to Robert Browne. By 1610 this new emphasis created enough controversy to persuade Henry Ainsworth to secede from the Ancient Church with a group of followers. Legal controversy followed, and the Ancient Church never really recovered. <sup>59</sup>

In the midst of such acrimony the Scrooby church decided to move to Leyden. By May, 1609, the Scrooby Pilgrims were settled in their next-to-last home. Their eleven years in Leyden were not that prosperous, though they passed with relatively less turmoil and division than they had experienced in Amsterdam. They were consulted, of course, in the dispute between Johnson and Ainsworth, and John Robinson participated in the debate between Calvinists and followers of Arminius. These were the two highlights of their stay in Leyden. Beginning in 1618 they engaged the Virginia Company to negotiate on their behalf to secure official approval for them to remove to Virginia. Plans were concluded in 1620, when the group made its famous departure. <sup>60</sup>

Throughout their stay in the Netherlands there is no record of any significant intercourse between the separatists from Scrooby and Dutch anabaptists. Indeed, Robinson deplored the position taken by John Smyth, and argued strenuously (and reputedly with great persuasiveness) against the Arminian position representative of much anabaptist theology at the time.

On the other hand, the relative religious tolerance afforded them in Amsterdam and Leyden, amidst a background of great and passionate debate between Reformed and Arminian-leaning Dutch, must have made an impression on Robinson, Brewster, Bradford and company. In addition, while there is no

concrete evidence to show that any of the separatist leaders were consciously patterning themselves after the more defined of the continental anabaptist theories of the Church, there does seem to be enough similarity between the two developing polities that we may suspect that many dissenting English men and women saw and made connections between them.

It strikes me that there are three areas of near convergence of anabaptist with early separatist ideas in England during this latter ~~part~~<sup>part</sup> of the 16th century. I suspect that if anabaptist and separatist attitudes appear similar to me, they would also have appeared so to many disgruntled and/or truth-seeking persons of that age.

First, the anabaptists, and preceding them, the Lollards, combined an anti-authoritarian attitude, a prescriptive interpretation of biblical texts warning against making oaths and dividing sharply between God's and Caesar's kingdoms, with the beginnings of a theology of persecution and non-resistance. The outcome was a strong, and widely publicized belief that Christians should be separated from the magisterial power, and that the prince's sword should not be used to compel belief in a specific dogma. Now, Robert Browne and John Smyth especially grasped onto the idea that the magistrates must not compel belief in dogma; it must have been a concept "whose time had come" among progressive and anti-authoritarian thinkers of all molds. Browne used this concept in defining the importance of the covenant, i.e. - that faith is and should not be measured by obedience to an imposed creedal statement but rather by walking faithfully in Christian relationship to fellow believers and with God. Smyth, who really was a very close relation to the anabaptists despite what modern-day historians may claim otherwise, rather took the idea in a different direction. Browne was against abuse of authority; Smyth decided that authority could not be legitimately used by the civil authorities at all in religious affairs, and he was against any centralization of authority

or power in ecclesiastical matters. Browne, as far as we can tell from his writings, and the Scrooby-Leyden church (especially under the leadership of John Robinson), were intent upon keeping the separatist principle of all authority residing with "the church" in all of its members. But the normal exercise of power they delegated to the various kinds of elders, teachers, and pastors; in addition, a role was reserved for the state in the job of keeping the moral order.

Second, for different reasons anabaptists and at least some separatists refused to have their children baptized in the established church. Anabaptists, we recall, in England tended to merely refrain from baptizing their infants rather than emphasize rebaptism as was common practice among continental anabaptists. Separatists while they were in England and subject to pressure to conform to the dictates of the state church, often refused to baptize their children in what they considered an heretical institution. On the question of rebaptism there was a considerable difference of opinion among separatists, some believing that the Anglican/Roman baptism was not a true baptism, and many of these people adopted the understanding of this sacrament advocated by John Smyth; others, less extreme, regarded rebaptism as an action that challenged the very validity of all Church tradition and accepted authority, thus being a dangerous and fanatical activity. Anabaptists had doubts about the legitimacy of infant baptism itself, but on the whole did not feel forced to denounce the state church in the act of rebaptizing their children. They found that by simply withholding their children from baptism their consciences, for the most part, were satisfied. Many separatists denounced the established church, yet most (except those who followed Smyth) continued to accept the validity of infant baptism. Clearly these are different positions with different underlying justifications; the opportunity for confusion and interpolation seems to me to be obvious, though.

Third and finally, anabaptists and separatists shared a common desire for a pure Apostolic Church order and witness. Exhaustive theories concerning the signs of a "true Church" were in the making toward the latter parts of the 16th and early 17th centuries. Anabaptists and separatists differed from Puritans not in their concern for purity, but in their general assessment of how bad the situation really was. Thus they were willing to take more radical steps to try to restore to life what they considered a true Church.

The difference between what English anabaptists visualized as a restituted Church, and the strategy/polity which they eventually adopted, and the goals of the separatists, is quite difficult to explain. To do so I will have to over-generalize. As I understand it, anabaptism in England, for all its assimilation of Lollard sympathizers and periphery contact with English "Radicals," still remained primarily an internationally flavored, predominantly foreign religious revival. In English anabaptism the search for a return to purity began with an emphasis on individual discipline - and this gathered into a gradually distinct theological viewpoint, often including unorthodox ideas on Christology and free-will. It was only in response to persecution and out of frustration with official misunderstanding did anabaptism seek to change outward church structure. This was particularly true in England. Separatism, though it was grounded in a pietistic desire for individual revival, always focused more of its immediate energy on calls for structural reform. The distinctive theologies developed by separatist leaders, though they differed one from another to a considerable degree, were sparked by their concern about the established Church's impure and unbiblical constitution. Also, separatists, while willing to make radical sacrifices and embark on the lonely journey of exile, always kept their eyes on England as the center of their concern; they did not have the international flavor that distinguished both anabaptists and Reformed adherents.

So, there were notable differences underlying the anabaptist and separatist calls to recast the Anglican establishment into a faithful New Testament version of the Church. And to some extent they succeeded each other in time rather than co-existed, for the record of distinct anabaptist activity in England tends to whither away toward the end of the 16th century, as the separatist movement began to flourish. Yet the differences do not wash away the considerable similarities. For instance, both anabaptists and separatists called for the revival of the use of the ban in the Church as a means of establishing a greater degree of concrete purity. I think these similarities were apparent and influential in the minds of those late 16th century English men and women who doubted the adequacies of the Elizabethan-imposed "middle way." The record shows that the authorities were also of the mind that anabaptists and separatists were kindred souls.

## PART TWO

This second section seeks to analyse the development and practice of the Free Church ideal in American history during the crucial early colonial years when religion was founded in New England. The study will focus on Congregational, and to a limited extent Baptist, foundings "over-against" the Church ideals which generally evolved from the Radical Reformation in 16th and 17th century continental Europe. The chief concern is to understand how the Radical Reformation view of the church has and has not been fulfilled in the early development of the Free Church ideal in America. I use as my standard of comparison the full theology developed by the Radical Reformation, rather than just the thought of anabaptists in England, which was the focus in

Part One. This poses somewhat of a problem in that I haven't attempted to explore the relationship of English anabaptists to the continental Radical Reformation. Since this would entail a completely new undertaking, it cannot be included here. I can only suggest that the English anabaptists, for largely different reasons, may be said to relate to the more fully developed Radical Reformation turmoil and theologizing that occurred on the continent in <sup>way</sup> a similar to the relationship of the early English separatists to the great Congregational divines of late 17th century New England. The relationship is that of an early and not yet fully distinct movement to one which comes later and has established its own inner consistencies. English anabaptism, which had some marked interrelations with early separatism, stands as an odd little underdeveloped strand when compared to the full range of cohesive radical demands for reformation which occurred on the continent. To fully appreciate the similarities and differences between the American Free Church ideal and the anabaptist vision with which separatism intermingled, it is necessary to look to the fullness of developed thought which came from the Radical Reformation.

It will be helpful to begin with some definitions. First, what do I mean by "Free Church?" It certainly is a term used by many people to mean several different things. Personally, I have most often heard it used to define, in negative specificity, a church which has no presbytery or episcopacy or synodical hierarchy placed above the congregation with the power to order it about. Worded nicely, this would be a definition of congregational polity. There are at least four other common usages of the term, though. Sometimes a nonliturgical style of worship is indicated; sometimes it is meant to refer to non-credal bodies; occasionally Free Church means to its user a church with a liberal spirit or one which emphasizes individualism in matters of faith. Very often Free Church is used by persons living in nations with state churches to classify churches separate from state support and control.

Probably the best working definition of Free Church for our purposes here is a narrow historical definition; Free Church means those churches stemming directly from the Puritan/separatist thinkers of 16th century England, which are guided by congregational polity. This seems to conform fairly well with a description of Free Church ideals in the United States, though admittedly in England and other state church countries it is less good.

Second, the meaning of Radical Reformation must be more fully explained. The last two decades have seen a rapid increase in the amount of scholarship devoted to what George H. Williams has named the Radical Reformation, a fourth sectarian attempt to restore the Church, which occurred alongside of and in competition with the three magisterial state-church reformations of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism.<sup>62</sup> The disciples, and later the churches, formed from this fourth reformation have historically been called anabaptists. The lot of those called anabaptists has been one of persecution and slander from the time of Luther on, as they found themselves pursued to the death, accused of heresy, or contemptuously dismissed as fanatics. Even in the United States until recent years church historians and the general public have tended to ignore or dismiss the importance of this group of reformers.

Franklin H. Littell identifies the marks of the Radical Reformation restituted or true Church, marks which came to be widely accepted and practiced among anabaptists or anabaptist-related churches. These marks are concern for believer's baptism, a spiritual church government including discipline and use of the ban, the practice of community that stresses the surrender of acquisitiveness and a selfless sharing of economic necessities, opposition to the Catholic Mass but an emphasis on the importance of the Lord's Supper, an attitude toward the civil authorities that could be called nonresistant or passively obedient, and finally the placing of the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world at the center of the faith.<sup>63</sup>

Donald Durnbaugh in his research on the churches which have roots in the Radical Reformation (he refers to them as "Believers' churches") focuses on the theological development of the anabaptist sects into churches and denominations. From the characteristics of this development he generalizes the distinguishing marks of these churches today. The important distinguishing characteristics he finds in the Believers' churches are the centrality of discipleship, discipline, and the use of the early Apostolic Church as a norm for the believing community; the importance of being gathered (rather than territorially organized) churches dedicated to missionary evangelism all over the world; the necessity of keeping separate from the state, maintaining the principle of religious liberty, and often maintaining a Christian witness to the state; the need for maintaining a level of mutual aid and service, both in the community of brethren and for the needy and suffering in the "world"; and lastly, a sometimes seemingly contradictory tendency toward affirming both a separatist stance along with a strong desire for Christian unity.<sup>64</sup>

Littel's marks of the anabaptist Ideal Church refer more to the period of the Radical Reformation, while Durnbaugh's characteristics of the Believers' churches are concerned with the historical consolidation of the new thoughts and forms which accrued from the Radical Reformation. I find these two lists complementary; they are used here to illustrate representative traits essential to the Radical Reformation view of the Church.

Now I move on to discuss the American Foundings of the Free Church Ideal. Although I focus solely on New England, this is not a totally narrow picture of history for the first American exposure to these new thoughts on religion occurred there, and the early impression of these ideals on this New World were to have a lasting and far-reaching affect. Much has been written on the foundings of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colonies; obviously I cannot begin to synthesize this mass of opinion here. Some general points, and their significance for the development of Congregationalism, can be established, though.

The founding of Plymouth Plantation in 1620 and Massachusetts Bay in 1629 are not synonymous with the founding of Congregationalism in America, although the difference is subtle. Separatist Plymouth and non-separating but non-conforming Massachusetts Bay should be regarded as colonies first and foremost, not forerunners of a denomination or embodiments of a religious ideal. In fact these early settlements were more secular than most of us have been taught to believe by popular histories and traditions. Yet, William Bradford and his Mayflower compatriots came to this country because of their separatist stance, which can be seen as an early adoption of congregational polity. The Bay Colony was formed chiefly by Puritans arriving in the Great Migration; their sermons show them to have had a vision of the Church that had progressed beyond presbyterian concepts of order to something that can be called essentially, or at least proto-congregational. <sup>65</sup> Moreover, these Puritans brought with them a self-conscious understanding of themselves as a saving remnant leaving England to become a "citty on a hill" for all the world - but especially mother England - to ponder. The Pilgrims of Scrooby-Leyden came to America because it offered the best, if desperate, hope for them to live according to their principles, without sacrificing their nationality, and with some hope for prosperity. Others who came with the group who weren't church members went for profit and adventure.

The question of significant influence of one colony on another has interested scholars for years, and is too complex to dissect here. In general it seems safe to say that Plymouth influenced the Bay enough to be accepted into communion and fellowship with the larger colony; Massachusetts affected Plymouth to the extent that the original settlement came to resemble <sup>66</sup> the latter enterprise both in ecclesiological and civil structures. Neither Plymouth nor Massachusetts Bay began by demanding testimony of inward experience of Grace (God's effectual call), but by 1635 the Bay made this

normative for full church membership and voting rights; Plymouth churches  
 gradually did so, too.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, Plymouth appears to have never  
 legislated a religious test (church membership) as a prerequisite for an in-  
 dividual receiving the right to vote in civil affairs. In practice, however,  
 its franchise was limited to propertied men who exhibited stable and, of course,  
 orthodox views - just like its more specifically magisterial neighbor.<sup>68</sup>

Massachusetts Bay enacted its restriction of the franchise in 1631:

that for time to come noe man shall be admitted to the freedom  
 of this body politcke, but such as are members of some of the  
 churches...with<sup>in</sup> the same.<sup>69</sup>

This restriction stayed in effect until the colony's charter was annulled in  
 1684. A new charter in 1691 granted franchise on the basis of property owner-  
 ship, as in England. A third restriction in effect in the Bay Colony pertained  
 to heresy - what we today call religious toleration. The General Court made  
 church support mandatory, and enforced as civil concern the "first talbe of the  
 Decalogue," which included heresy. The civil punishment of heresy also came to  
 an end with the new charter, in which toleration was decreed.

This was all done by the action of the civil authorities, but it was  
 approved and justified by the influential New England clergy, who in fact  
 became the first generation of Congregational ministers in America. Puritan  
 Congregational leaders, in justifying this magisterial cooperation of church  
 and state which Calvin would have found admirable, adopted and elaborated upon  
 a Federal theology based in part on Calvin's writings and more immediately on  
 the work of William Ames.<sup>70</sup> Federal theology, mapped out in the "New England  
 Way," extended the concept of the covenant between the believer and God into  
 the theory that the entire colony was covenanted with the Creator. Hence,  
 Cambridge pastor Urian Oakes could say about the colony:

I look upon this as a little model of the glorious kingdom  
 of Christ on earth. Christ reigns among us in the commonwealth  
 as well as in the Church and hath his glorious interest

involved and wrapt up in the good of both societies respectively.<sup>71</sup>

With a covenant relationship between God and the commonwealth, it was reasoned that disobedience to divine Law surely would bring judgment upon the whole, so logically it was only natural that the magistrates should enforce its obedience.

On the individual level, Federal theology used a two-part covenant motif to modify strict Calvinism in a subtle but significant way. According to the theory, God initiated a covenant of Grace with Abraham and his seed. The human response was to be faith, as evidenced through obedience to the Law; this evolved into something known as "preparation for grace." Regeneration occurred whenever God initiated an effectual call to the man or woman walking righteously in a state of "preparation for grace"; then this recipient was well on the way to salvation.<sup>72</sup> An inner spiritual experience soon became the norm for establishing effectual calling. This theology saw baptism as an ordinance under which children were taken into the covenant of grace with God. Thus baptism functioned as one of the "keys to the kingdom of heaven," a means toward regeneration and incorporation into the body of visible saints. Since those members of the colony outside the church would most likely enter into "preparation for grace" and possible regeneration through the one "key to the kingdom" available to them, the sermon (they were excluded from the Lord's Supper, and their children from baptism), the logic behind the mandatory church attendance enforced by the magistrate can readily be acknowledged. Perry Miller remarks on how this early form of Congregationalism was in theory a remarkable system for attaining a virtuous gathered group of saints without sacrificing community cohesiveness.<sup>73</sup> Later events brought to the forefront the innate tensions in such a system. It seems to me that this tension arose not between latent conflicting polity tendencies - congregational versus presbyterian - as some maintain, but rather between the contradictory theories

of a gathered church and a state church.

One final thing to note about the early Congregationalism of the two colonies is its inwardness. It cannot be described as an especially missionary doctrine. Missionaries were not inspired very often, or very persistently, to challenge the dangers of the unknown wilderness in search of heathen tribes to evangelize - and civilize. <sup>75</sup> Although for both pilgrims and Puritans missionary zeal was listed as one of the reasons for their departure, realistically it does not appear to have been a very high priority, judging from their activities. Several Indian missions were established and some progress was made in John Eliot's lifelong work of evangelism and translation of the Scripture into Indian languages; yet on the whole the losses through warfare and conflicts over land seem to have cancelled out the missionary gains.

Although the Scrooby-Leyden-Plymouth <sup>church</sup> properly can be said to be the first Congregational church in America, it was the Salem church, formed in the summer of 1629, that had the honor of being the first Congregational church founded in America. Three Puritan ministers arrived in June 1629 with the early vanguard of the Great Migration; an election was held to decide who would be pastor and who would fill the office of teacher. Samuel Skelton and John Higginson were duly elected to these respective posts. Though they had received ordinary ordinations in the established church in England they requested to be ordained again by the congregation they were to serve. This congregation officially came together on August 6, 1629, when thirty persons covenanted to form the Salem church. The words of this covenant are now famous:

We covenant with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his blessed word of truth.<sup>76</sup>

A delegation from the Plymouth church was sent to extend the "right hand of

fellowship to the new church."

Perhaps the Salem church should be considered the founding event of American Congregationalism. But at least brief mention must be given to the Cambridge Synod of 1646-48. It was this event more than any other which self-consciously crystallized the actual practice of the New England churches during the previous two decades into an established, prescriptive format.

The immediate setting for the calling of the Synod by the General Court was the threat of a petition produced by some dissatisfied, non-franchised colonists calling for immediate relief, or an appeal to England's increasingly Presbyterian Parliament would be made. After two lengthy meetings of delegates from Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven, the Cambridge Platform was produced. This seventeen chapter document accepted the Westminster Confession as authoritative in regard to doctrine; most of its energy went toward defining matters of polity, many of which were meant as definite replies to questions sent to the Bay Colony churches by inquiring English Puritan divines. Not surprisingly, the Platform opposed toleration and vested the magistrates with the authority to restrain heresy, disobedience, and schism. The civil authority also was given the responsibility of seeing that new churches were not formed without the approval of neighboring-church elders and the local magistrates, that ministers received the proper certification of orthodoxy by a council of neighboring churches before their ordination, and that no new meeting houses were built without permission from the "freemen" of the town or the General Court. <sup>77</sup> Although many restrictions were built into it, the Platform's most lasting legacy was the affirmation of the primacy of the covenant as the essential means by which called saints may gather a church and submit themselves to authority, the explicit communion of churches with one another, and the autonomy of the local church from coercive ecclesiastical <sup>78</sup> authority outside of that church.

Baptist beginnings in America were neither so organized nor so self-consciously systematic as the established Congregationalism of New England. The first Baptist churches in America seem to have been the product, in about equal proportions, of immigration from England and internal dissent within the New England settlements.

The first Baptist church in America was formed by Roger Williams and several of his followers in March, 1639. Williams and the rest of this group left Salem in the Bay Colony because of his banishment by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1635 for "threatening the order" of the colony by demanding that his Salem church separate from the other Massachusetts churches. Earlier he had argued that the magistrates did not have the right to enforce the Decalogue on the general population. This group fled to the wilderness area around the Narragansett Bay where they purchased land from the Indians. In 1638 Williams and twelve others joined a social pact promising to work together to incorporate a township, and to submit in obedience to majority agreements, but "only in civil things." This was the founding of Providence and of religious toleration in America.<sup>79</sup> The Baptist church at Providence came together as the result of Williams being baptized by Ezekiel Holliman, and then Williams in turn baptizing Holliman and ten others. Thus, a Baptist author seems historically correct when he distinguishes between Congregational and Baptist churches in the colonies:

In the minds of the Baptists the church was not built upon the covenant by which members agreed to walk together in all the ways of God. Rather it was built upon the baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup>

Roger Williams stayed in the Providence church only a little while before he broke with the group and went on to an even more radical separatist stance. The church continued on, however, drawing to it new converts to Baptist beliefs from the other colonies. A controversy between General Baptists (who had an

essentially Arminian theology of the general atonement of Christ) and the Calvinistic Particular Baptists split the congregation in 1652. Both General and Particular Baptists traced their beginnings back to early seventeenth century England and the separatist followers of John Smyth. After 1640 they experienced a great increase in numbers, with much of this strength located among the soldiers in Cromwell's army. <sup>81</sup> Theological differences between the two groups caused many schisms, especially in the early years when members adhering to both positions were more likely to be in the same congregation because of the newness and scarcity of Baptist churches. This proved to be a source of spreading their faith and creating new churches!

Dr. John Clarke, a separatist who came from London to Boston, and then eventually went to Newport where he was the leader of a Particular Baptist church formed in 1644, is remembered for his Ill News from New England, written in 1652 to publicize the religious intolerance and punishments meted out to dissenters in Massachusetts. He, of course, wrote from personal experience. <sup>82</sup> Henry Dunster, Harvard College's first president, was forced to resign in 1653 for his espousal of Baptist beliefs. He later was influential in forming a Baptist church in Boston in 1665. However, this group was banished by the courts and withdrew until 1680, when it returned to Boston and was tolerated. <sup>83</sup>

A summary of Baptist American foundings can reach no very organized conclusions for the very movement itself was not organized. Its smallness, tendency to disperse through schism and evangelization, and persistence in the face of intolerance are probably the most significant features to remember. I will also add the comment that despite his short duration as a Baptist, Roger Williams' influence was deeply felt. He deserves more credit than he sometimes receives for establishing early in the history of American Baptist churches an urgent concern for separation of church and state. Williams was a key worker in the securing for Rhode Island <sup>ct</sup> an official charter which

guaranteed religious liberty. This was an important achievement. His thinking, shaped by millennial speculations and an interpretation of Christ which saw the event of his life/death as a radical break in history, led him to develop the plea for the Church's complete separation from political power. No wonder he was viewed as a threat to a New England society where both individual and political relations were interpreted to be in covenant with the Almighty.

What, then, can be said about Congregational and Baptist foundings compared to the Radical Reformation ideals of the Church? Most noticeably faithful to the anabaptist vision of the Church were both Congregational and Baptist emphases on the gathered group of visible saints as the body or their churches. Church membership was not considered an easy, taken-for-granted relationship; rather, members were gathered to a church by their faithfulness to God's Word and God's call. While neither Congregationalists nor Baptists preached a doctrine of Christian holiness or perfectability, and "free will" was by and large rejected (except by General Baptists), churches were considered to be visible representatives of the saints. Obedience to the Law and upright living were stressed in the relationship to true piety. Perhaps Congregational and Baptist piety never, or seldom reached the depth that stirred continental (and English) anabaptists to face death for the sake of the Spirit's calling. In general it can be fairly said that Congregationalism tended toward a more intellectual faith than that of most anabaptists. One reason for this may well have been simply that many more Congregationalists -especially those who came over in the Great Migration and were of a non-separating left-wing Puritan persuasion- seem to have had a university education. Massachusetts Bay may have been the most highly literate society in the world at that time. Baptists, along with the Plymouth colonists and other dedicated separatists usually were from a lower class background than the settlers in the Bay Colony, and tended to have less highly educated men among their followers.

Standing out as the most glaring divergence from the Radical Reformation

Ideal was the Congregationalist theology of the colony **covenanted** with God. This in practice meant the continuation of the state church and the attempt to enforce religious intolerance and oppression of dissenters. The persecutions in the New England settlements cannot be compared to the continental slaughter during the great uproar against anabaptists, it is true. Nor was New England the only colony which persecuted dissenters. Most of the punishments were public whippings and other devices meant to shame and intimidate. Only in the Salem witch hunt and in the execution of four Quakers between 1659 and 1661 (before King Charles II ordered that all Quakers be tried in England, thus putting an end to the carnage) were people killed. The clean slate of Baptists in America in regard to their lack of persecution and belief in the separation of church and state appears to have much more closely approached the Radical Reformation Ideal. Nevertheless, it seems that neither group had much of a sense of the typical anabaptist insistence on the importance of separateness from the state for Christians (i.e., refusal to swear oaths, the belief that Christians should not be magistrates), or any real principled disinclination to the bearing of arms. Baptists in England, for example, played an influential role in Cromwell's army after 1640; several served in high positions of state.

Both Congregationalism and Baptists shared a high regard for church discipline and the attempt to make the church as visible a group of holy saints as possible. Both groups used the ban, or excommunication from church fellowship, to enforce this discipline, although again it must be reiterated that Congregationalists also used magisterial suasion. It seems to me that the Baptists came closer to the anabaptist emphasis on individual discipleship than did the Congregationalists, whose covenantal theology saw the role of discipline more from a corporate understanding of church and society. Baptists often came to their new position on their own, and were forced to break apart

from New England society because of their beliefs. Often they tried to convince others - in fact they had to evangelize in order to escape complete isolation. It was this individualism that seemed so much a threat to the established Congregational order.

Like the anabaptists, both religious groups in New England believed in the idea of the Fall of the Church and the necessity of reforming it by going back to the example of the Early Church. Neither group carried out this idea as far nor as logically as the Radical Reformation believers attempted, however. For example, there does not seem to be the same emphasis on communality and sharing among 17th century Congregationalists and Baptists as was found among anabaptists, and perhaps the Early Church. Certainly in New England the ostentatious show of wealth was generally avoided, but wealth itself was regarded as a blessing from God and an obviously good thing. The obligation to help one's neighbor Congregationalist or Baptist was different than a community based on sharing and giving to any members who had need. Likewise, neither group took the Great Commission as seriously and literally as did the anabaptists. Baptists were more missionary-minded than Congregationalists, though.

It is difficult to find much parallel of either group to the Radical Reformation Ideal, developed in the Believers' churches, of an extreme separateness mixed with an avowed openness to all ecumenical forms of practical unity. At best, Congregationalists can claim pastor John Robinson's farewell statement to the Pilgrims that "the Lord has more truth and light to break forth out of his holy word" as a leaven within their tradition which eventually opened them to change. <sup>87</sup> Baptists have a history of promoting toleration toward all faiths on a civil level, but not much to say about Christian unity.

To summarize Part Two **II** will point out the obvious. Congregational theology's covenantal concept, as it materialized in Massachusetts Bay Colony especially, has had a lasting influence on American history in establishing

this country with a sense of "chosenness." Many historians have pointed out that America has been on a national "errand into the wilderness" ever since. The Baptists' stance on separation of church and state and on civil religious toleration has become national policy, so much so that it has commonly been read back into interpretations of the colonies' earliest history, when it was not present. Covenantal theology slowly died, as it did not prove to be a viable framework for interpreting a changing age, with its inevitable lessening of enthusiasm and the growth of a pluralistic society. Congregational polity survived among both Congregationalists and Baptists. One can only speculate what might have happened had the New England founders come and acted out a less parochial notion of corporate covenanting, a vision which could have grasped that they were only a part of the corporate covenant, and not God's only chance to establish a visible New Israel.

#### CONCLUSION

In the course of 41 pages I have skimmed a chain of events covering over 100 years' history. In doing so there have been inevitable simplifications, and in my treatment of the rise of separatism especially, possibly whole important ideas and persons inadvertently omitted. In addition, by focusing solely on influences from anabaptist and Radical Reformation sources, I have not meant to imply that 16th and 17th century Puritanism was unimportant. Rather, I have assumed as a given its already well-acknowledged guiding hand in the development of Congregationalism.

For all its faults, though, I hope this paper has succeeded in isolating

and unravelling a connecting historical thread, interwoven in the larger fabric, between Congregational and Radical Reformation/anabaptist thought. This thread springs up out of the incubus of foreign ideas mixing with a lengthy native radical tradition, winds its way for a few years in a confused, half-invisible, yet formative intermingling with separatism, and gradually fades as the two traditions develop in their different ways. We see that the fully formed Congregationalism of mid-17 century New England holds a couple essential traits in common with the Radical Reformation ideals, but by that time the dissimilarities appear far more significant.

I believe the study of anabaptist/Radical Reformation ideas and their influence on early Congregationalism has some import for Congregationalists today. At a period in our history when we are once again a tiny minority (as a denomination on the American scene) seemingly stubbornly determined to pursue an unpopular idea as a matter of principle - we might learn from history a thing or two. The instruction obviously will not pertain to persecution and martyrdom. These are not the point. We could profit, though, by examining the stories and thoughts of those who lived before us in our tradition, separatist and anabaptist alike, for guidelines on the best ways to achieve self-identity, stability, and growth in an environment that is at best indifferent. Though we will choose different solutions, many of the problems are quite similar. Certainly the temptations toward extreme disharmony and acrimony are present. And even in the very act of looking backward with a view to comparison, we will help shape a confidence in our future and in our still-emerging self-identity, because the "differentness" of Congregationalism in its genesis will have been understood in a new light.

## NOTES

1. Horst, p. 37. Taken from E.G. Rupp's sentence, "In the high matter of the Sacrament of the Alter new Anabaptist waa but old Lollard writ Dutch..." p. 1, Studies in the English Protestant Tradition.
2. Ibid., p. 32.
3. White, in a book review of Horst's The Radical Brethren in History, vol. 24, 1973, p. 309.
4. Horst, pp. 30, 38.
5. Dickens, pp. 47, 48, 51.
6. Ibid., p. 53.
7. Nuttal, p. 248.
8. Thomson, p. 242.
9. Ibid., pp. 244-247.
10. Nuttal, p. 246.
11. Dickens, pp. 51-52. See also his Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, a very important study.
12. Thomson, p. 248.
13. Horst, pp. 49-53.
14. What this book was is an interesting question. Horst claims to present evidence that John Calvin's Brieve instruction pour armer tous bons fideles contre les erreurs de la secte des Anabaptistes (1544) was written to combat this anabaptist book, and that the book was no other than the Schleithem Confession, the first systematic statement of beliefs and principles by continental anabaptists! B.R. White in his review mentioned in Note 3 finds this assertion most unbelievable, doubting that the Confession could have traveled to England so early.
15. Horst, p. 51.
16. Ibid., p. 56.
17. Ibid., p. 57. There is considerable debate among scholars as to who "brethren" referred to at this time. See E.G. Rupp, Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition, pp. 6-11, and G.H. Williams, The Radical Reformation, p. 401, for contrasting views.
18. Lecler, vol. II, p. 341.
19. Burrage, vol. I, p. 42; he believes the book to be an English translation of a book written in Basle in 1523 by a Roman Catholic. If that is the case, then who in 1530 England would be reading such a tract? That it might be a Lollard or Lollard sympathizer seems quite possible (but of course, not necessary) to me.
20. Bax, p. 333.
21. Lumpkin, p. 13.
22. Torbet, p. 26.
23. Williams, p. 401.
24. Smithson, p. 194
25. Heriot, p. 260.
26. Horst, pp. 66-73.
27. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
28. Ibid., p. 82.
29. Heriot, pp. 263-264.
30. Horst, p. 92.
31. Ibid., p. 100.

## NOTES cont.

32. Horst, p. 100.
33. Ibid., note, p. 157. Since only two anabaptists were burned under Edward it is doubtful that the "former group" would have used equal severity. The purpose of Foxe's writing is to emphasize the Marian terror, and thus he tended to include indiscriminately in his list of Protestant martyrs persons whom many upright Protestants would have considered unorthodox.
34. Ibid., pp. 157-158.
35. Smithson, p. 200.
36. Heriot, p. 314.
37. Ibid., pp. 314-315.
38. Horst, pp. 91-92.
39. Keeney, pp. 89-90.
40. Horst, p. 174.
41. Burrage, pp. 83-85.
42. Ibid., pp. 94-117.
43. White, pp. 54-57.
44. Ibid., p. 54.
45. Ibid., p. 59.
46. Burrage, pp. 118-119, note #1.
47. White, p. 61.
48. Dexter, pp. 199ff.
49. Ibid., p. 203; White, pp. 78-79.
50. White, p. 75, 69.
51. Ibid., p. 93. See the note on p. 93 for William Bradford's account of the meeting.
52. Ibid., pp. 99ff.
53. Dexter, p. 380.
54. Ibid., p. 383.
55. Ibid., pp. 386ff.
56. Ibid., p. 400.
57. White, p. 127; Dexter, pp. 447-448.
58. White, pp. 129-135.
59. Ibid., pp. 142-153.
60. Dexter, pp. 466-467; 504; 514-590.
61. Durnbaugh, pp. 5-8. His first chapter is extremely helpful in limiting and expanding the traditional understandings of "Free Church."
62. Williams, The Radical Reformation, in general.
63. Littell, pp. 79-113.
64. Durnbaugh, Part Three, pp. 207-299.
65. Ahlstrom, vol I, p. 193.
66. Ibid., p. 192.
67. Ibid., pp. 194, 192.
68. Ibid., p. 187.
69. Atkins and Fagley, p. 78.
70. Ahlstrom, p. 177.
71. Ibid., p. 198. Quotation is by Urian Oakes, New England Pleaded With, p. 49.
72. Ibid., pp. 177-178.
73. Perry Miller, p. 442.
74. Atkins and Fagley, p. 82: "Two conceptions were in opposition which could not finally be reconciled in one church body: government from the top by the clergy and assisting authorities - the elders - or Congregational control."

## NOTES cont.

75. Perry Miller, p. 442.
76. Ahlstrom, p. 191.
77. Atkins and Fagley, pp. 80-85.
78. Butman, pp. 61-70.
79. Ahlstrom, pp. 217-218.
80. Stewart, p. 18.
81. Hudson, p. 43.
82. Ibid., p. 44.
83. Ahlstrom, p. 227.
84. Glenn T. Miller, p. 42.
85. Ahlstrom, p. 232.
86. Hudson, p. 43.
87. Atkins and Fagley, p. 60.

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