

IV. The Pilgrim Church in Holland

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

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One difficulty that was always present in these Separatist Churches was the fact that being based upon the conception of a Pure Church, they were constantly stirred unnecessarily by criticisms of the conduct of each other in the daily rounds of life. I cannot refrain from referring to one disturbance which is in the nature of gossip to be sure, but it throws a flood of light on the London Amsterdam Church and incidentally gives some clue to the cause of departure from Amsterdam of the Scrooby Pilgrims. While Francis Johnson was in Clink prison in London he was a suiter to a certain Mrs. Thomasine Boyes, a widow, evidently somewhat attractive in worldly ways as will appear. Francis Johnson in Clink prison writes to his brother George in Fleet for advice. He received it, but did not follow it, and married the woman secretly. After release, Mrs. Johnson apparently annoyed, for the purpose of overcoming the prejudices that existed, called upon her brother-in-law. But it was "in more garish and proud apparel than before he had seen her." Brother George "delt with her that she wd reforme it," and she in return "gave him good wordes."² So the dispute continued.

The solicitor George wrote to his brother a letter pointing out the defects of Mrs. Johnson,

¹ Earl C. Davis wrote a good number of manuscripts concerning the history of the church. All are hand-written dating them before 1907—so Pittsfield or Harvard. Some, including this one, are pretty clearly part of a series provided to a congregation—so probably Pittsfield.

² These quotations are all taken from H. M. Dexter (1821-1890) *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, Boston: Thomas Todd Congregational House, 1880, p. 272.

telling him that Mrs. F. J. and the Bishop of London's wife, "for pride and vaine apparel were joined together," and what scandal was abroad "because F.J. being in prison and the brethren in great necessity beyond the seas," she "wore 3, 4 or 5 golde rings at once." Moreover "her busks and her whalebones [in her brest]" were "so manifest" that "many of ye saints were greeued." He went on to advise that she pull off her "excessive deale of lace;" discontinue the whalebones, exchange the "schowish hat" for a sober taffety or felt;" ... quit "great starched rufs, ye musk and rings;" and "let sobrietie and modest be used."³

This quarrel came very near splitting the Church. But finally, the pastor's wife and her zealous brother-in-law made up, and, as a public recognition of the peace, held "a meeting of many as a love feast at the Pastor's house."⁴

This gives us some hint of the kind of people that made up the London Amsterdam Church, and the kind of Separatists that the Scrooby Separatists came in contact with after their perilous journeys and final arrival at Amsterdam in 1608 under the leadership of John Robinson. In comparing the Scrooby people with other Separatist Churches, Dexter says,

In Amsterdam ... their stay was brief. Although they could fight, they were men of peace. I think I may safely say also, not only that their leaders where endowed with broader minds than those of the "ancient" church, or of any other Separatist company known to us as at that time existent, but that the general membership of the

³ H. M. Dexter (1821-1890) *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, Boston: Thomas Todd Congregational House, 1880, p. 273. Earl Davis does not notate the ellipsis in the middle of this quotation. The words omitted are curious: "abolish the 'abominable and lothesome (I am ashamed to name it, & the Lord make her ashamed to wear it) cod-pece fashion in the brest;'"

⁴ H. M. Dexter (1821-1890) *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, Boston: Thomas Todd Congregational House, 1880, p. 276.

church had a better spirit, a wider outlook, and a more thorough culture. So that I fancy they could never have felt thoroughly at home with the great body of the brethren with whom they were thrown into contact in Amsterdam; ... (Dexter, p. 380.)

They remained in Amsterdam about one year. But they were not of the same opinion as the people whom they found there in regard to certain questions of polity, to wit, whether or not the elders had the final voice in questions of importance. Seeing the possibility of trouble ahead, they applied to [the] Burgomaster of Leyden for permission to remove to Leyden and settle there. Permission was granted them February 12, 1609, and they took advantage of it, and quietly removed to Leyden.

The Pilgrims had come to Holland just at the close of the Five-and-Twenty years' war. Motley says, "It is the epoch to which the greatest expansion of municipal architecture is traced. Warehouses, palaces, ... splendid streets and suburbs, were constructed on every side and still there was not room for the constantly increasing population." (John Brown, p. 113, cited Motley's *United Netherlands*, III., 25).⁵

Arrived in Leyden, they began to earn their living by various kinds of humble employment. Wm. Brewster, however, devoted himself to tutoring, and in time set up a printing press for publishing literature and sending it back to England. John Robinson, the Pastor, was the great personality of the Church, and was recognized by the people of Leyden as a man of great ability and learning.

In January 1611, Robinson and three others jointly purchased an estate on which was a large house. Here he

⁵ John Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, p. 113. The author, John Brown (1830-1922) was minister of the Bunyan Meeting in Bedford, England, and his historical works are still in print. Brown is quoting from John Lothrop Motley, *History of the United Netherlands*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871.

lived, and in this house they held their meetings during the remaining years of the 11 year sojourn in Leyden.

In the summer of 1615, Robinson registered in the University of Leyden. At this time there was a raging theological controversy between the new Armenians and the old Calvinists. Urged by the lectures of the University, he entered a public debate with Episcopius before the University. Bradford says in his *History*,

The Lord did so help him to defend ye truth, and foyle this adversarie, as he put him to an apparent non-plus, in this great and publike audience. And ye like he did a 2 or 3 time, upon such like occasions. The which as it caused many to praise God yt the truth had so famous victory, so it procured him much honour and respecte from those lerned men and others which loved ye trueth. (*History of the Ply. Plan.* p. 21; cited in Dexter, p. 388).⁶

The general impression that the Pilgrims made in Leyden, and a testimony to their worth and integrity, is seen in another quotation from Bradford's *History*:

Though many of them were poore, yet ther was none so poore, but if they were known to be of yt congregation, the Dutch (either bakers or others) would trust them in any reasonable matter when yey wanted money. Because they had found by experience how carfull they were to keep their word, and saw them so painfull and diligente in their callings; yea, they would strive to gett their custome, and to imploy them above others, in their worke, for their honestie and diligence. (*History of the Ply. Plan.* P. 21; cited in Dexter, p. 389).⁷

⁶ H. M. Dexter (1821-1890) *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, Boston: Thomas Todd Congregational House, 1880, p. 388. Dexter cites William Bradford's *History of the Plymouth Plantation*.

⁷ H. M. Dexter (1821-1890) *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, Boston: Thomas Todd Congregational House, 1880, p. 389. Dexter cites William Bradford's *History of the Plymouth Plantation*.

But conditions in Holland were not entirely satisfactory. Although the Church reached in point of members, a strength of 300 members, by incoming Separatists, yet they felt that to remain in Holland would be simply to have their little group gradually swallowed up and absorbed in the great city. Then, too, the troubles which resulted in the Thirty Years War were gathering, and they feared the effect that it might have on their little community, in which they saw a movement of worldwide importance. They were working not only for themselves, but posterity, that they might lay some good foundation or at least make some way thereto, for ye propagating and advancing ye gospel of ye kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of ye world; yea, though they should be but stepping stones unto others for yet performing of so great a work. (Hist. Ply. Plan. 24).⁸

Accordingly a plan was set on foot for part of the Leyden Scrooby Church to take up their fortunes in the New World. When the final preparations were made less than half had decided to go and under the leadership of Wm. Brewster, their Elder, they departed, leaving behind more than half of the Church under the care of their loved Pastor John Robinson. Their departure was so touching "that sundry of the Dutch strangers that stood on the quay as spectators could not refrain from tears."⁹ And the scene was remembered there for a quarter of a century after.

We are not to think that these people, who sailed in the Mayflower, were liberal in their thought or in their interpretation of historic Christianity. On the contrary, they were steeped in the most rigid Calvinism, and their Separation in no small degree represented the extreme defense of Calvinism, as opposed to the Catholic Church and the English Church. But the spirit of Free Inquiry and Universal Priesthood had been the power that had broken away from the Catholic Church and established Calvinism, and even though Calvinism be the shell, the real meat of the nut that came to New England in the Mayflower was that

⁸ William Bradford (1590-1657) *History of the Plymouth Plantation*. Boston: Privately Printed, 1856, p. 24

⁹ John Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, p. 194.

Spirit of Free Inquiry. To see the process by which this transplanted seed sprouted, broke its shell of Calvinism, and left it decaying on the ground behind will take our interest now.

The last thing of importance before we take up the life in New England is:

The Mayflower Compact:

In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid: And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience. In Witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape-Cod the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini, 1620.