

THE
EARLY ENGLISH
BAPTISTS, 1603–1649

Stephen Wright

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The orthodox opinion on the seventeenth-century Baptist movement is that it was divided from the first into two separate denominations, 'Particular' and 'General', defined on the basis of their differing attitudes to predestination and the atonement. This book challenges this view, showing the situation to have been far more complex. It describes how from the foundation of the 'Generals' in 1609 there were always two tendencies, one clericalist and pacifist, influenced by the Dutch Mennonites, and one reflecting the English traditions of erastianism and local lay predominance in religion. The baptised congregations which emerged from London Independency in the late 1630s were less hostile to high Calvinism but did not form themselves into a 'Particular' tendency on this basis. Immersion was adopted in 1641 by people of different congregations, including those which were later known as 'General' but who were not then differentiated by their theology: indeed the 'General' church contained prominent high Calvinists until 1644. The later denominational structure crystallised in response to external political pressures which led the seven London churches to issue a 'Particular Baptist' confession in October 1644; before that date controversy centred not on theology but on the question of who could initiate baptism. The author shows that although the 'Particular' Baptists tended towards social and political conservatism in England in 1647–9, some of their members, and even leaders, were influenced by the Levellers. The General Baptist church of Lambe, all of whose leaders were active Levellers, supplied the party with its chief organised religious support. After 1649, this tendency became less influential. Many Baptists rejected formal ordinances from 1647, when millenarian and ecstatic tendencies flourished; of these, General Baptists fell off towards a proto-Quaker 'seeking' and even 'ranting'. It was in the face of such difficulties that denominational lines tended to harden.

Stephen Wright received his PhD from the University of London.

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Abbreviations

Works of John Smyth are cited from Whitley, W.T., ed., *The Works of John Smyth* 2 vols (1915), represented as *Smyth I* and *Smyth II*. This two-volume collection contains, at the pages here indicated, all the known works by Smyth; most of their titles are also abbreviated in the references:

<i>The Bright Morning Starre:</i>	<i>Smyth I</i> , pp. 1–66
<i>A Patterne of True Prayer:</i>	<i>Smyth I</i> , <i>Patterne</i> , pp. 67–247
<i>Principles and Inferences of the Visible Church:</i>	<i>Smyth I</i> , <i>Principles</i> , pp. 249–68
<i>The Differences of the Churches:</i>	<i>Smyth I</i> , <i>Differences</i> , pp. 269–320
‘Certain Demaundes’ (appended to <i>Differences</i>):	<i>Smyth II</i> , pp. 321–6
<i>Paralleles, Censures and Observations:</i>	<i>Smyth II</i> , <i>Paralleles</i> , pp. 327–562
(Passages written in 1607 are distinguished from those of 1609 by inserting one of these dates)	
<i>The Character of the Beast:</i>	<i>Smyth II</i> , <i>Character</i> , pp. 563–680
Al Oxon	Foster, J., <i>Alumni Oxonienses: Members of the University of Oxford 1500–1714</i> , 4 vols (Oxford, 1891)
ARPB	White, B. R., ed., <i>The Association Records of Particular Baptists</i> (London, 1973)
Baillie, II, Baillie, III	Laing, D., ed., <i>Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie</i> , 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1841)
BHH	<i>Baptist History and Heritage</i>
BIHR	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BQ	<i>Baptist Quarterly</i>
Broadmead	Hayden, R., ed., <i>Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640–1687</i> (Bristol Record Society, 1974)
BRS	British Record Society
Burgess, Smyth	Burgess, W., <i>John Smyth the Se-Baptist</i> (London, 1911)
Burrage, I, Burrage, II	Burrage, C., <i>Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge, 1912)
CCAM	Green, M., ed., <i>Calendar of the Committee for the Advance of Money</i> , 3 vols (London, 1888)

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- CCC Green, M., ed., *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding*, 5 vols (London, 1889–93)
- CJ *Journals of the House of Commons*
- Coggins, JSC Coggins, J., *John Smyth and his Congregation* (Waterloo, Ont., 1991)
- Firth, CP Firth, C.H., ed, *The Clarke Papers: Selections from the Papers of William Clarke*
- CP, I, II vols 1 and 2, Royal Historical Society, London (1992) (single vol.)
- CP, III, IV Firth, C.H., ed., *Clarke Papers . . .* vols 3, 4: Camden Society, lxi (1899), lxii (1901)
- Crosby, I (etc.) Crosby, T., *History of the English Baptists*, 4 vols (London, 1738–40)
- CSPD Bruce, J., et al., eds, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic . . . James I*, 5 vols (London, 1857–73)
Bruce, J., et al., eds, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic . . . Charles I*, 23 vols (London, 1857–73)
- Dale, ‘Members’ Dale, T.C., (transc.) ‘The Members of the City Companies in 1641 as set forth in the Return for the Poll Tax’ (Society of Genealogists, London, 1935)
- Davies, EHCG Davies, G., *The Early History of the Coldstream Guards* (Oxford, 1924)
- Dexters, EHP Dexter, M. and H.M., *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims* (London, 1906)
- DNB Stephens, L., ed., *Dictionary of National Biography*, 63 vols (London, 1885–1900)
- DWL Dr Williams Library, Gordon Square, London
- EEB, I, EEB, II Evans, B., *The Early English Baptists*, 2 vols (London, 1862)
- ERO Essex Record Office
- F-D Firth, C.H. and Davies, G., *The Regimental History of Cromwell’s Army*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1940)
- Fenstanton Underhill, E.B., ed., *Records of the Churches of Christ gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644–1720* (Hanserd Knollys Society, London, 1854)
- Foster Foster, C.W., ed., *The State of the Church* (Lincoln Record Society, xxiii, Lincoln, 1926)
- Gang, I, II, III Edwards, Thomas, *Gangraena* (facsimile reprint of London 1646 editions), 3 vols (Exeter 1977)
- Gardiner, HGCW Gardiner, S.R., *History of the Great Civil War*, 4 vols (London, 1987)
- Gentles, ‘DMMP’ Gentles, I., ‘The Debenture Market and Military Purchase of Crown Land, 1649–60’, London PhD (1969)

ABBREVIATIONS

Gentles, NMA	Gentles, I., <i>New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645–1653</i> (Oxford, 1992)
G-Z	Greaves, R.L and Zaller, R., <i>Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals</i> , 3 vols (Brighton, 1983)
GLRO	Greater London Record Office: now Metropolitan Archives
HLQ	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
JEcch	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
Jordan	Jordan, W.K., <i>The Development of Religious Toleration in England</i> , 4 vols (London, 1938)
K-N, I, K-N, II	Keeble, N. and Nuttall, G., <i>Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter</i> , 2 vols (Oxford, 1991)
LAO	Lincoln Archive Office
Laurence, PAC	Laurence, A., <i>Parliamentary Army Chaplains</i> (Woodbridge, 1990)
Lightfoot	Lightfoot, John: Pitman, J.R., ed., <i>Whole Works of John Lightfoot</i> , 13 vols (London 1822–5), vol. xiii
LJ	<i>Journals of the House of Lords</i>
LRS	Publications of the Lincoln Record Society
LT	Haller, W. and Davies, G., <i>The Leveller Tracts</i> (New York, 1944)
Marchant	Marchant, R., <i>Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560–1642</i> (London, 1960)
M-S Minutes	Mitchell, A. and Struthers, J., eds, <i>Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, Nov. 1644 to Mar. 1649</i> (Edinburgh, 1874)
MINUTES	Maunde Thompson, E.: transcript of the minutes of the Westminster Assembly (Edinburgh University microfilm)
MQR	<i>Mennonite Quarterly</i>
Nott. Arch.	Nottinghamshire Archives
ODNB	Matthew, H.C.G. and Harrison, B., eds, <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , 61 vols (Oxford, 2004)
P&P	<i>Past and Present: A Historical Journal</i> (Oxford)
PRO	Public Record Office (now National Archives, Kew)
Reliq	Matthew, Sylvester, ed., <i>Reliquiae Baxterianae</i> (1696)
Scheffer, HFC	Scheffer, J. de. H., <i>History of the Free Churchmen Called Brownists</i> (Ithaca, NY, 1923)
Smyth, I Smyth, II	Whitley, W.T., ed., <i>The Works of John Smyth</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge, 1915)
TBHS	<i>Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society</i>

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Td	Date inscribed by George Thomason in tracts received
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
Thurloe SP	Thurloe, John, <i>A Collection of State Papers of John Thurloe</i> , 7 vols (London, 1742)
Tibbutt, ‘Dyve’	Tibbutt, H.G., ed., ‘Tower of London Letterbook of Sir Lewis Dyve’, in Bedfordshire Historical Record Society publications, xxxv (1958), pp. 49–96
Tibbutt, Luke	Tibbutt, H.G., ed., <i>The Letter Books of Sir Samuel Luke</i> (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society publications, xlii (1963)
Tolmie	Tolmie, M., <i>The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616–1649</i> (Cambridge, 1977)
VCH	Victoria County History
Venn	Venn, J. and J.A., <i>Alumni Cantabrigenses. A biographical list of all known students graduate and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, Part 1: From the Earliest Times to 1751</i> , 4 vols (Cambridge, 1922–7)
Wing	Wing, D., <i>Short Title Catalogue . . . 1641–1700</i> , 4 vols (New York, 1972–88)
Wood, Ath. Oxon	Bliss, P., ed., Wood, Anthony, <i>Athenae Oxonienses: An exact history of all the writers and bishops who have had their education in the University of Oxford: To which are added the fasti or annals of the said university</i> (Oxford, 1813–20)

Introduction

The period treated here runs from the accession of James I to the execution of his son, Charles I, the beginning and (temporary) end of the Stuart dynasty in England and Wales. In 1604, Richard Bancroft was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. It was during his drive against puritan non-conformity that there developed the separatist current from which a Baptist group led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys emerged in early 1609. Some review of this context is essential.

For many years, the leaders and institutions of the early Stuart Church of England found little favour amongst historians. The bishops were widely seen as wedded to luxury and laxity, their officials venal, and their courts incompetent and corrupt. This view owed something to the persistent influence of Victorian and post-Victorian non-conformity, both in Britain and the United States. Recently, however, research in diocesan and other archives has done much to undermine the older consensus, and it seems that ecclesiastical systems of justice were for the most part administered conscientiously.¹ It has been plausibly suggested that in many cases penalties were imposed on Protestant non-conformists only as a last resort, and that the tradition of early puritan martyrology, of which Samuel Clarke was the greatest exponent, tended to exaggerate their sufferings and blacken their chastisers.² Puritan or radical opponents of the bishops now often appear in a less appealing light, as a tiny and fanatical minority, bent upon cramping the broad and generous spirit of Anglican inclusivity with grim Genevan rigour.

So it is necessary to begin by recapitulating the core assumptions and practices upon which the Anglican church was based during our period, up to 1641. It was, of course, a state-established church, to which everyone, from baptism to burial, had to belong. Non-membership, or membership in other religious organisations, was not only forbidden by the Lords Spiritual; it was

¹ Perhaps most notably, R. Marchant, *The Church under the Law* (Cambridge, 1969); F. Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes* (Cambridge, 1980); Heal and R. O'Day, *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration in the Church of England 1500–1642*; M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987); and K. Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990).

² Samuel Clarke, author of many short lives of leading puritans; a good selection of these are in *A General Martyrology . . . Lives of Thirty Two English Divines* (London, 1677); for an account of Clarke, whose works were used extensively by him, see W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1957), pp. 102–8.

against the law of the land. Church attendance was compulsory in principle, though patchily enforced. The penalty of excommunication was not just a spiritual sanction: for the poor it meant financial penalties for non-attendance; for the better off it involved civil disabilities, such as the removal of trading rights or membership of town corporations; for pastors it could even mean death: the Protestant separatists Henry Barrow, John Penry and John Greenwood were executed on the orders of Archbishop Whitgift in 1593. Property owners who chose to emigrate in order to worship in their own way found that the crown was entitled by law to seize their estates. This appears to have happened in the case of Broxtowe Hall, near Nottingham, once owned by a gentleman, Thomas Helwys, but leased out by the state in 1610 after his illegal emigration to Amsterdam.

The Church of England did not seek by Index or Inquisition to impose a narrow orthodoxy upon its captive members. Liturgy and core doctrinal concepts were set out in the revised Book of Common Prayer (1559) and the Thirty Nine Articles (1562), but these were variously interpreted and sometimes flouted. In practice, doctrinal emphases varied, and on such matters as the administration (and withholding) of communion, attitudes differed. There was variation between dioceses, and between parishes, in the style and content of services; ministers differed in the relative prominence they allotted to preaching or ceremony, to formal or extempore prayer. Informal exercises, lectures, or events such as church ales, were not used or regarded uniformly across the country, and there was a rich diversity in visual style, of buildings, furnishings, decorations, vestments, and so on, in which puritans, who looked forward to a further reformation of the church, generally stood for a plainer aesthetic than conservative Anglicans rooted in its pre-Reformation traditions. Archbishops and bishops had ideas, sometimes very definite ideas, on the proper ordering of such matters, but were usually unable or unwilling to impose them successfully throughout their jurisdiction. Decisions on many important matters of local practice were determined (not necessarily without friction) by incumbents, town corporations, influential lay patrons, bishops and others, in a system whose decentralised nature reflected the array of earthly powers within it.³

The Church of England, however, was no democratic pantheon. Bishops did more than exert authority over subordinates; all commanded extensive rights of patronage, and the occupants of sees such as Winchester were very rich indeed. The church embodied a hierarchy of wealth and authority within a society similarly structured, and in matters of national import its rulers heeded the views of the lower clergy no more than landed aristocrats took

³ On the Church of England, see e.g. C. Cross, *Church and People, 1450–1640* (London, 1987); R. O'Day and F. Heal, eds, *Church and Society in England: Henry VIII to James I* (Leicester, 1976); P. Collinson, *Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982); K. Fincham, ed., *The Early Stuart Church* (London, 1993).

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notice of ploughmen. But the church did not occupy a parallel universe: its hierarchies interlocked with those of the secular world. Even after the sequestrations of the Reformation, its own properties were enormously extensive, and its office holders drew a tithe (tenth) of almost all revenues accruing from the agricultural property of laymen. Its intellectual interests and outlook dominated the two great universities. Its courts were vital regulators of family and social life, as well as of religious observance. They exercised jurisdiction in matrimonial and testamentary matters essential to the transfer of property. Bishops sat alongside the lay peers in the House of Lords, and discussed with them the political issues of the day.

The special brief of the Lords Spiritual was to act as guardians of the officially approved body of doctrine and practice of the Church of England. During the reign of Elizabeth, official Protestantism became increasingly bound up with the national identity, defined principally against that of Catholic Spain. The Anglican church was supported by the state in the defence of its monopoly of legitimate religious practice and belief, despite the variations to be found within it. Catholic and (increasingly) puritan religious activity in England was policed not only through the ordinary diocesan jurisdictions, but also through special commissions, of which the Court of High Commission is the most famous, crystallising into a permanent institution from the 1580s. In the realm of thought, the church supervised the publication of all books on religion or politics, through the monopoly of the Worshipful Company of Stationers. Readers were employed to vet English works for dangerous ideas, and agents kept a watch at the London docks for 'seditious' materials shipped from centres such as Amsterdam and Middleburg.

None of this was designed to create a Stalinist-style ideological monolith, for neither church nor state sought to prevent the dissemination of disagreements in principle. They sought instead to suppress ideas which might be used to undermine their political and religious legitimacy.⁴ Puritans found it impossible to publish works critical of the church, or of the legal or political status quo. In the 1590s even the ideas of such influential men as Robert Beale, clerk of the Privy Council, and James Morrice, clerk of the court of wards, remained in manuscript, or were published unlicensed, or abroad, often in the Netherlands.⁵ After the accession of James I, the works of the puritan William Bradshaw, and of Henry Jacob, founder in 1616 of the pioneering

⁴ For the Stationers' Company and the roles of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the Court of High Commission, see F. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England* (Urbana, 1952), pp. 138–43; C. Blagden, *The Stationers Company: 1403–1959* (London, 1960), pp. 70–2, 92; and L. Rostenberg, *The Minority Press and the Crown 1558–1625* (Nieuwkoop, 1971), *passim*.

⁵ See e.g. R. Beale, 'The unlawful Practises of Prelates against godly ministers', *A Parte of a Register* (Middleburg, 1593), pp. 280–303; J. Morrice, *Treatise of Oathes* (1593) also printed at Middleburg probably by Richard Schilders. Both were attacked in R. Cosin, *An Apologie of, and for sundrie proceedings by Iurisdiction ecclesiastical* (London, 1593).

semi-separatist London church later led by Henry Jessey, were published on an underground press. It is possible that John Smyth was associated with this group; his book, *Principles and Inferences*, was printed at Middleburg in 1607.⁶

Opposition to the bishops, however, came in many guises, under many labels, of which some, 'Presbyterian', 'non-separating congregationalism', 'separatist', 'Baptist' or 'anabaptist', though often organisationally inchoate, supplied later denominations with key concepts and practices, and provided scholars of all persuasions with rich seams of controversial material. The history of the Baptists in this period has generated particular heat, because it comprises some highly combustible ingredients. 'Who', asked Richard Overton rhetorically in 1646, 'writ the history of the Anabaptists but their enemies?' His Leveller colleague William Walwyn held these enemies responsible for 'that lying story of that injured people . . . the Anabaptists of Munster', a people with which he, though mild and secular minded, felt impelled to sympathise.⁷ The spectre of Munster haunted all those who baptised anew, however peaceful they were, or affected to be, throughout continental Europe and in Britain alike. Even in our own day, the passion aroused by the question of the influence of anabaptist ideas on the Anglo-Saxon Baptist tradition has been fuelled partly by the continuing resonance of propaganda accounts of this traumatic event, ruthlessly deployed by paedobaptists of various stripes.⁸

But it is hard to escape the conclusion that a certain national narrow-mindedness also became involved. By 1925, Whitley had come to the view that 'English Baptists have no kind of continuity with English Anabaptists or with foreign Anabaptists'. His balancing statement that, of course, neither English nor continental anabaptists should be 'ashamed of their history' was somewhat undermined by his characterising as 'very quaint in their practices' the surviving varieties of Baptist communities in the USA which had originated in continental Europe.⁹ The debate in the mid-1950s between W.S. Hudson, Ernest Payne and others is another case in point. Hudson was on safe empirical ground in many of his points, but what strikes the modern

⁶ M. Curtis, 'William Jones', *The Library*, series 5, xix (1964), pp. 38–66.

⁷ Both cited in C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 120.

⁸ For the abrupt change in the attitude of Anglo-American historians to continental anabaptism in the years before the First World War, see I. Sellars, 'Edwardians, Anabaptists and the Problem of Baptist Origins', *BQ* xxix(2) (1981), pp. 97–112. One factor behind their new hostility which he does not mention is the growing tension between Germany and Britain, which, together with the growth of the working-class movement, shaped intellectual life on a broad front; during the decline and the 'strange death of Liberal England', those desirous of acceptance in respectable circles found themselves drawn into dancing to patriotic tunes. As Sellars notes, interest in, and sympathy for, central European anabaptism was increasingly confined to radicals and socialists such as Walter Rauschenbusch.

⁹ W.T. Whitley, 'Continental Anabaptists and Early English Baptists', *BQ* ii(1) (1925), pp. 24–30, at pp. 30, 28.

reader is the harsh tone in which he seeks to deny that the national-spiritual Anglo-American descendants of Smyth and Helwys might have been contaminated in the smallest measure by continental anabaptism. Ernest Payne's responses, by contrast, relied heavily on comparing elements of the English Baptist tradition with earlier currents, such as Lollardy.¹⁰ He stressed the great variety amongst continental anabaptists and the obscurity of the origins of English separatism, pointing out that the General Baptists did absorb some continental ideas. Payne cannot be said to have won the argument, but his tone was more reasonable, his outlook both more nuanced and more generous. He stressed the richness of both traditions and tacitly appealed to an internationalist distaste for walling off one from the other.¹¹

Certainly, it would be misleading to suggest that England had had no experience of believers' baptism before Thomas Helwys returned to London about 1612. I.B. Horst sought to show the penetration of anabaptism into the south-eastern counties during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary, and parts of his case were accepted in Michael Watts's textbook.¹² However, it was widely felt that Horst stretched the available facts up to and beyond the permissible limit.¹³ There is doubt about the extent to which 'anabaptist' ideas imported by immigrants from Holland into the south-eastern counties were absorbed or 'naturalised' by the native English. The evidence of hostile sources should be treated with caution. Joseph Martin, in his well-documented account of religious radicals, rightly notes that the authorities (and the chronicler

¹⁰ See, e.g., W.S. Hudson, 'Who Were the Baptists?', *BQ* xvi(7) (1956), pp. 303–12; E. Payne, 'Who Were the Baptists?', *BQ* xvi(8) (1956), pp. 339–42; a fuller listing and useful conspectus is given in K.R. Manley, 'Origins of the Baptists: The Case for Development from Puritanism-Separatism', *BHH* xxii(4) (1987), pp. 34–46, and see also W. Estep, 'On the Origins of English Baptists', *BHH* xxii(2) (1987), pp. 19–26.

¹¹ The strongest statement of Payne's position seen by the present author is 'Contacts between Mennonites and Baptists', *Foundations: A Baptist Journal of History and Theology* iv (n.p., 1961), pp. 39–55.

¹² M. Watts (*The Dissenters* (Oxford 1978), pp. 7–8) invoked 'circumstantial evidence to suggest a link between Lollardy, anabaptism and the General Baptists of the seventeenth century', but this seems to have involved a combination of broad comparisons between their ideologies and a too ready acceptance of shaky evidence cited by Horst, ed., *The Radical Brethren* (Nieuwkoop, 1972), esp. pp. 49–53. G.H. Williams's account in *The Radical Reformation* (London, 1962, pp. 401–3, 778–90) also seems to have involved both these elements.

¹³ B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition* (Oxford, 1971), p. 126; neither he nor J.W. Martin (*Religious Radicals in Tudor England* (Hambleton, 1989), pp. 48–64) find evidence for Horst's characterisation of Henry Hart as an antipaedobaptist; the case against Horst is summarised by Joseph Ban in 'Were the Earliest English Baptists Anabaptists?' in his *In the Great Tradition* (Valley Forge, PA, 1982), pp. 91–106. Subsequently, D. Haury showed that Calvin's 'Briefve Instruction' was a response not to an English anabaptist confession (a key Horst claim), but to a request by William Farel ('English Anabaptism and Calvin's Briefve Instruction', *MQR* lvii(2) (1983), pp. 145–51).

John Stow) often employed ‘anabaptism’ as a term of abuse against radicals or dissidents in general.¹⁴ We can be sure there were some genuine anabaptists and these were not all Dutch or Flemish immigrants. But what is extremely striking is the apparent disappearance of credible references to them after about 1575.

Martin suggests that during Elizabeth’s reign ‘the aim of most of these dissidents continued to be reforming the national church, not leaving it’, and that those who did leave it, left as separatists. Indeed, G.H. Williams, whose monumental study of the ‘radical reformation’ cannot be charged with underestimating Anabaptist influence, concedes that ‘Between 1575 and 1580, English Anabaptism entered a new phase in which it was virtually succeeded by the indigenous Brownism and Barrowism.’¹⁵ It is interesting that Williams does not here suggest that the early anabaptists were *absorbed* into the separatist movement, and shaped its early views. Such ideological similarities as exist do not necessarily reflect the influence of one on another, or even common origins. As White remarked, whilst ‘both groups shared a desire for the restitution of the Apostolic pattern of the Church’s organization, it seems that the separatist concern may be more readily traced to the example provided by the first Admonition to Parliament than to any Anabaptist source’. And he thought the separatists’ stress upon the discipline (Matthew 18: 15–17) ‘echoes the continental radicals’ use of the ban, but is probably to be traced more to the influence of Bucer mediated through John Calvin than in any more direct way to the Anabaptists’.¹⁶

It would seem, therefore, that anabaptism left no mark on the puritan-separatists. Did it vanish altogether? Perhaps the current, though losing its specific identity during this period, became submerged in an undifferentiated radical lower-class background, or morphed into Familism.¹⁷ One difficulty in assessing such possibilities is the absence of any confession or other position document attributable to a Tudor English anabaptist. Still, the appearance in successive eras of broadly comparable currents confined to geographical areas such as Kent lends plausibility to the idea of a radical plebeian tradition, which survived underground during the long breaks in the evidential record. Features common to Lollardy, anabaptism and later General Baptism are certainly recognisable. They include free-will and Pelagian doctrines, ‘popular materialist scepticism and anti-clericalism’, and the belief that Christ was in

¹⁴ Martin, *Religious Radicals*, pp. 19–20, 133; the last anabaptist group mentioned, apprehended in 1575, was Dutch; those who recanted were handed over for supervision to the authorities of the Dutch church in London, *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27; G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 2nd edn (Kirkville, Mo., 1992), pp. 1191–1209, quoted p. 1207; in this discussion of English anabaptists in the reign of Elizabeth, Williams provides only references to Dutch and Flemish nationals.

¹⁶ White, *EST*, p. 162; and see L. Kliever, ‘General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence’, *MQR* xxxi(4) (1962), pp. 291–321, at pp. 297–8.

¹⁷ C. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550–1630* (Cambridge, 1994).

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every believer.¹⁸ It seems entirely likely that such ideas were never wholly extinguished, and reappeared in successive eras, in new forms and with new justifications.

But neither anabaptist congregations, nor even native individuals identifying themselves by their rejection of infant baptism, feature in England during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. It is simply not credible to regard the absence of detections in this period as merely anomalous, or to suppose that the evidence itself has perished, given the wide range of the surviving archival material available, including visitation records, act-books, minutes of quarter sessions, and so on. This break in continuity should not lead us to discount the earlier experience. But it is beyond dispute that those English people who were baptised in Holland in about January 1609 by their leader John Smyth were not inspired by, and did not take as their point of reference, any *native* English Baptist tradition. Their geographical and social roots can be traced with some degree of confidence, for we know the names and origins of most, even of the humblest members. They fled to Holland in 1607/8 from towns and villages in the border region where Lincolnshire meets South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire, in the same wave of emigration as the famous group, led at first by Richard Clyfton and then by John Robinson, which in 1620 was to set sail for New England on the *Mayflower*.

The evidence of their early relations with the English church, and their abandonment of their native country, strongly favours those who have found the roots of the English Baptists in the puritan and separatist traditions. As the record makes clear, their leader, John Smyth, bent his efforts in the period 1601–6 to surviving as a loyal, puritan member of the official church. Smyth's clerical connections and his contentions with the church authorities were set out by W.T. Whitley in his introduction to Smyth's collected writings, and more fully in B.R. White's concise but better-documented work *The English Separatist Tradition*. The account here adds detail to their findings, chiefly from court records, and offers evidence that Smyth was aware that his own troubles and concerns were part of the larger conflict between Richard Bancroft and the church's non-conforming minority of clergymen. His response to the conditions and challenges of this period (and not mere imitation of other separatist models) shaped Smyth's own style of separatism. Evidence is adduced to suggest that this should be distinguished sharply from that of the separatist Ancient Church at Amsterdam, which had originated as the congregation of Henry Barrow in 1592–3, and which evolved special peculiarities during the long years of its exile.¹⁹ Indeed I argue that the distinctive character of Smyth's

¹⁸ C. Hill, 'From Lollards to Levellers', in *Religion and Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (Brighton, 1986), pp. 89–116; idem, *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 25–38, quoted at p. 35.

¹⁹ See K. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism* (Leiden, 1982), pp. 45–76; White, *EST*, pp. 94–115.

separatism was important in impelling him towards believers' baptism, and helps to explain why he chose that path.

On arrival in Holland, Smyth, Helwys, Clyfton, Robinson and their friends shared a separatist rejection of the Church of England. In early 1609, Smyth and Helwys came to view the baptism of the Church of England as unwarrantable on the grounds of its falsity as a church, falsity which depended not merely or mainly on its defective ministry but upon its constitution through the institution of infants' baptism. Embracing the view that baptism was for believers only, Smyth chose to baptise himself rather than seeking his baptism from the Mennonites, a sufficient indication that he had not (yet) been influenced by Dutch anabaptism. Since there is no evidence either that he had contact with anabaptists in England or Holland before his rebaptism, the proponents of an undiscovered anabaptist influence upon him have tried to find the traces in Smyth's earlier writings. Thus, Smyth's continuing stress on the risen Christ in the church has been taken to reflect anabaptist influence in theology.²⁰ J. Coggins has argued that 'the Holy Spirit . . . is probably the most dominant theme' in Smyth's theology: although it is unclear whether this 'was borrowed from the Anabaptists or developed on his own', his own preference is clear, for he reminds us that 'emphasis on the Spirit is widely recognised as the chief characteristic of the Anabaptism that spread into England in the sixteenth century'.²¹ But it has been convincingly shown that the roots of all Smyth's emphases can be found in his own puritan-separatist tradition: thus, for example, his stress on the Holy Spirit reflects the fact that Smyth 'shared the experiential bent of Puritan piety' in the saints' emotional search for God.²²

Despite his lay status, Thomas Helwys has rightly been identified as a pioneer of the English Baptists, co-equal with the Cambridge-trained minister John Smyth, who had baptised himself, Helwys and more than thirty others in 1609. However, whereas Smyth soon sought membership with the Mennonite Baptists in Amsterdam and remained in that city till his death in 1612, Helwys returned to London with a few co-thinkers to begin the long

²⁰ D. Shantz, 'The Place of the Resurrected Christ in the Writings of John Smyth', *BQ* xxx(5) (1984), 199–303; to this, B.R. White replied that this stress stemmed from Smyth's 'understanding of the covenant as conditional in nature': 'John Smyth Revisited', *BQ* xxx(8) (1984), pp. 344–7, at p. 346.

²¹ J. Coggins, 'The Theological Positions of John Smyth', *BQ* xxx(6) (1984), pp. 247–64, quoted at p. 256.

²² S. Brachlow, 'John Smyth and the Ghost of Anabaptism', *BQ* xxx(7) (1984), pp. 296–300; idem, 'Puritan Theology and General Baptist Origins', *BQ* xxxi(4) (1985), pp. 189–204; he suggests that Smyth's views on church discipline reflect not anabaptist but puritan ecclesiology which 'tended toward a living understanding of the church, in which the visible institution came to be perceived as an organic communion of the saints'; the source of the mutualist covenant understanding held by Smyth and many others is to be found in the search for soteriological assurance through good works.

struggle which is the chief subject of this study. It has convincingly been argued that the split between the two men, though at first characterised by apparently obscure disagreements, marked a fundamental breach between a modified anabaptist tradition, associated with Smyth, which became naturalised in Holland, and the Baptist current represented by Thomas Helwys and John Murton in England. Kliever rightly pointed to the doctrine of succession in ordination, which Smyth embraced soon after his self-baptism, as the sole original locus of the disagreement with Helwys.²³ He showed that the Helwys group's *Declaration of Faith* embodied their rejection of the distinctively Mennonite positions which Smyth had come to embrace in his twenty Latin articles, 'Corde Credimus', in early 1610, positions expanded in de Ries's *Short Confession of Faith*, signed soon after by Smyth and thirty-seven others.²⁴

However, we should resist the temptation to presume on this basis that the two traditions thereafter continued on separate ways, in the hermetically sealed compartments favoured by Winthrop S. Hudson. In the world of ideas, national and denominational compartments *leaked*. There are many difficulties in proving or disproving ideological and organisational continuities, breaks and interrelations during the thirty years after Thomas Helwys returned to London. Supporters of anabaptist influence have pointed to the negotiations with the Waterlanders during the period 1624–30; opponents have retorted that the talks were unsuccessful. It is essential to insist that both the effort and its failure were important: the Waterlanders and the English Baptists were not so close as to achieve intercommunion in the 1620s, but not so alien to each other to forbear from trying. This study attempts to set out the lines of a possible explanation.²⁵

The evolution of the Baptists of London during the 1640s has been powerfully illuminated by Murray Tolmie's *The Triumph of the Saints*, a brilliant reconstruction, from fragmentary evidence, of the origins and development of the separate churches in the capital. But Tolmie, in the opinion of the present writer, was overconfident in his use of the known facts to infer continuity between the pre-war General Baptist tradition and the general redemptionist

²³ L. Kliever, 'General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence', *MQR* xxxi(4) (1962), pp. 291–321. His view that the 'doctrinal position that Helwys develops in his confession accurately represents that of the entire group prior to the split' (*ibid.*, p. 313) is plausible but hard to demonstrate; there was probably both ambiguity and confusion over the basis for Smyth's self-baptism.

²⁴ Amsterdam MS B1347, text trans. *EEB*, I, pp. 247–52, corrected names in *Burrage*, II, p. 178; MS B1352; C. Dyck, 'A Short Confession of Faith by Hans de Ries', *MQR* xxxviii (1964), pp. 5–19.

²⁵ Payne, 'Contacts', *Foundations*, iv (1961), pp. 39–55; Whitley, 'Continental Anabaptists', *BQ* ii(1) (1925), pp. 24–30; Hudson implies ('Who Were the Baptists', *BQ* xvi(7) (1956), pp. 303–12) that the English broke off contacts in 1611 for good: he omits the 1620s talks altogether.

groups which emerged during the 1640s.²⁶ The pattern of denominational continuity he sets out is also held to have involved a seismic shift in its core beliefs: the pre-war Baptists had at first been characterised by ‘dependence on the Waterlander tradition’ but by 1641 they had ‘adapted Anabaptist principles to English requirements’. The supposed dependence is at odds with both Helwys’s clear rejection of Waterlander positions and the failure of the negotiations with them in the mid-1620s. No evidence is provided for the adherence of the Helwys–Murton Baptists to ‘Anabaptist principles’ (however ‘adapted’), other than their general redemptionism, a doctrine misleadingly represented as a manifestation of their ‘Anabaptist’ past, even though Helwys had *both* embraced general redemption *and* rejected recognisably anabaptistical Waterlander positions, on succession, on christology, and on citizenship and the state.²⁷

The lack of evidence for anabaptist principles is not surprising, for there was little enough to present. There are several areas of belief and practice (such as the important area of church government) on which we have little information for the Baptists in Murton’s time and after. But the documents we do have suggest that the pre-war reception of distinctively anabaptist views in the key sphere of relations between church members and the state, on oaths, war, and in the rejection of Trinitarian orthodoxy expressed in Melchiorite christology,²⁸ was confined to the south London group led during the 1620s by Elias Tookey. This development should not be dismissed as merely anomalous. But, as far as we know, during and after the pastorate of John Murton, the rest of the English Baptists retained in this key area the core beliefs set out by Thomas Helwys, in which the boundaries between the godly and the profane were set between areas of human experience and not between institutions. Thus (1) the private conscience of the magistrate was separate from his role as enforcer of the law and of the state’s will in all matters other than the forcing of consciences; he could be a member of the church; (2) it was in the state’s interest to allow complete religious toleration; (3) it was the duty of all godly persons to act in support of the civil laws and of the nation state, in so far as these did not conflict with God’s law: oaths and military service were both

²⁶ Four men (Thomas Lambe, John Garbrand, Edward Barber and Henoeh Howet) are cited (*Tolmie*, p. 71) as exemplars of personal continuity between the 1630s and 1640s on the basis of their appearances in court records of 1639–40 which do not give any of them as Baptists. Of the four, only Howet and (perhaps) Garbrand seem likely to have been members of a Murton era church, and even this is not at all certain. Barber (almost certainly) and Lambe (probably) converted to believers’ Baptism in 1640/1.

²⁷ *Tolmie*, pp. 70–72; this confusion may stem partly from his mistaken belief that the English baptisms of 1609 were inspired by Waterlander influence; the importance of their modifications to traditional anabaptism is developed in Chapter 1 below.

²⁸ Melchior Hoffman’s standpoint involved the notion that Jesus, though human in some respects, did not take from Mary his mother her bodily substance, but was composed of ‘celestial flesh’.

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permissible and necessary. These were not anabaptist positions, so there was no need to revise them in or before 1640.

Rather different problems arise in establishing the pattern of evolution from that date, but here too there has been a strong tendency to exaggerate the fixity of divisions. 'General' and 'Particular' Baptists have traditionally been presented as separate branches of the same genus, like horses and zebras, on the tree of denominational evolution. This palaeontology reflects a lack of scientific caution. The problem centres on those Baptists who emerged from the Jessey circle of churches during the Laudian ascendancy. Tolmie's elegant and perceptive account suffers, in the opinion of the present writer, from undue attachment to the 'denominationalist' perspective of his Baptist predecessors in the field. This involved deriving from the theological beliefs of leading Baptist figures their 'membership' in, or 'allegiance' to the 'Particular Baptists' in such a manner that these views amount to evidence of this organisation (or at least of a tradition incorporating its defining features), in advance of the London confession which announced it in October 1644.²⁹ Whitley gave John Spilbury as one of the 'Calvinistic or Particular Baptists' (as if these were synonyms) from his baptism no later than 1637, and dates 'several Particular churches' to 1642.³⁰ Tolmie's approach was more subtle, involving the concept of a 'proto-denomination': this seems to be conceived as fully evolved ideologically, but organisationally incomplete, lacking the inter-congregational top-structure of a denomination proper. But he had Thomas Kilcop, a future 1644 signatory, as author of the 'first published Particular Baptist pamphlet' in 1642, and listed the even earlier Blunt and Spilbury churches as unproblematically 'Particular Baptist'. White was more cautious, noting that 'The Calvinistic Baptists first appeared as a self-conscious group with the publication of their confession in London in 1644', but he too treats them as a continuous (though unselfconscious?) current from 1633.

The tendency to tidy up Particular Baptist origins has been complemented and reinforced by a parallel approach to the General Baptists. Both Barber and Lambe have been treated as if they belonged to a General Baptist organisation even before the Civil War, but there is no direct evidence for Barber's affiliation before 1645. Many have drawn on evidence for Lambe's commitment to general redemptionism from 1642, but only Murray Tolmie has pointed to his complementary belief (disconcerting then as now) in particular election.³¹

²⁹ In this regard, the strictures of P. Collinson ('Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition', in C.R. Cole and M.E. Moody, *The Dissenting Tradition* (Athens, Ohio, 1975), pp. 3–38) and C. Hill ('History and Denominational History', in his *Religion and Politics* (London, 1989), pp. 3–10), against denominational teleology, though very often cited approvingly, have been honoured almost as much in the breach as the observance.

³⁰ W.T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists*, (London, 1932), pp. 60, 66; Tolmie, pp. 50, 243.

³¹ Tolmie, pp. 72–3; the testimony of the former Particular Baptist Luke Howard may very

Since the restoration of immersion in 1641–2 has been almost always represented as solely the work of the ‘Particular’ Baptists, and since Edward Barber is invariably taken to have been affiliated from the first to an opposed ‘General’ denomination, it has appeared logical to remark that he ‘assumed’ ‘quite oddly’ that immersion was the proper mode.³² In Chapter 3, below, it is proposed that, in London, the Baptists were indeed divided in the early 1640s, but that the lines of division were defined not by theology but by the proper method by which they should form and order their churches.

The purpose of Chapters 4–6 is to examine the interrelations between Baptists and to explore the connections between their evolution and the wider story of political and religious developments during the 1640s. Summary versions of the chief patterns are given at the beginning and end of these chapters. A few more general points must be dealt with here. One is the problem that there are very few Baptist records dating back this far. We rely almost entirely for our information upon hostile witnesses in the years before church books were kept. There was a recurrent tendency to use the term ‘anabaptist’ as a means of denigrating all manner of dissidents. The word ‘anabaptist’ itself was a loaded term in two senses: it implied that the first baptism had been legitimate, and it identified the person so labelled with insurgent movements of the Munster type. I have tried to treat this label with caution and to look for confirmatory evidence before accepting that a person so accused practised believers’ baptism, though I have generally used the word when reporting hostile deployment of it. I have employed the old dating system in use in England in this period, but have assumed that the year started on 1 January; the new system had already been adopted in Holland by the time Smyth and Helwys arrived there, but wherever using dates so calculated, I have indicated as much by referring to n.s., for new style.

well refer to later (*A Looking Glasse for Baptists* (London, 1672), pp. 3–6). A long time ago, W. Whitsitt showed a proper caution, suggesting that the reinstitution of immersion involved both tendencies and referring to Barber as a Baptist minister without further qualification: *A Question in Baptist History* (Louisville, Ky., 1896), pp. 90, 114–19.

³² White, *English Baptists of the 17th Century* (Didcot, 1996), pp. 58–60, 29; thus Lambe and Barber are dealt with in a separate chapter from the Calvinistic Baptists, and no possibility of any connection is mentioned; similarly, Whitley contrasted Barber and Lamb ‘from some Calvinists who must be studied separately’ (*History of British Baptists*, p. 57).

Puritans, separatists and Baptists, 1603–10

Early career of John Smyth

The person responsible for setting the English Baptists of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire along the path to founding their congregation in early 1609 was John Smyth, probably the fourth son of John Smyth of Sturton le Steeple, Nottinghamshire. In March 1586, he was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he studied under the future separatist pastor Francis Johnson, and took his MA in Midsummer 1593. Admitted to a fellowship in 1594, Smyth was well regarded by Samuel Ward, later Master of Sidney Sussex College; he was ordained by William Wickham, Bishop of Lincoln. In 1597, however, Smyth came into trouble for opposing use of the surplice, and in 1598 vacated his fellowship. This was the first of many contentions with the authorities. It will be suggested here that his separation from the Church of England arose not from new principles embraced 'spontaneously' but from his hard experience as a puritan within the official church. Smyth for long sought recognition as an Anglican preacher, but engaged with other radical puritans to resist the general thrust of ecclesiastical politics set in London.

On 27 September 1600, Smyth was elected town lecturer of Lincoln, but made powerful enemies there, including Alderman Leon Hollingworth. Before 13 December 1602 he was unseated for 'enormous doctrine and undue teaching of matters of religion' and preaching against 'men of this city'.¹ Uprooted from his tenure, Smyth sought redress at the common law. The tangled legalities were considered by the Assize judges, who passed the problem to Sir William Wray, and others. These having failed to agree, 'the whole was left to the umpirage of the Lord Sheffield'.² Meanwhile, on 9 December 1602, Bishop Chaderton of Lincoln had charged Smyth with unlicensed preaching, a charge upheld on 1 April. Smyth appealed, having held a licence from Whitgift himself, but the Archbishop revoked this in September 1603, on the grounds that it had been 'granted upon wrong information'.³ This may have had to do

¹ See my article in *ODNB* and the sources there cited; HMC 14th Report, VIII, pt ii, pp. 76, 78, 79; *Smyth*, I, xlv–xlvi; *Smyth*, I, pp. 44–5; Burgess, *Smyth*, pp. 45–54; F. Hill, *Tudor and Stuart Lincoln* (Stamford, 1991), pp. 110–13.

² John Beck (Mayor), Hollingworth and others to Bishop, 17 September 1603, LAO, Cor B/2, p. 4.

³ LAO, Cj14, fols 30v–41v; CSPD 1603–10, p. 24.

with larger issues. On May 1603 Whitgift wrote to Chaderton that he ‘did not think his majesty will suffer any disordered persons in the church’, and during the summer diocesan officials were in receipt of several letters from the bishop, often with enclosures from Whitgift. Names of preachers were sent to Chaderton on 20 September. Three days earlier Sheffield had ordered that Smyth’s opponents ‘should no further prosecute law against Mr Smyth’; if the bishop should find against him ‘we are to release to him all costs and charges of suit we have sustained through his doctrine and misdemeanours’. Chaderton’s sentence was certainly unfavourable, for Smyth remained unlicensed. But he was happy with the financial settlement, thanking Sheffield for having ‘wisely and charitably compounded the controversy on both parts to the contentment of either of us’.⁴

Smyth and his puritan friends in the area had other protectors, notably Sir William Bowes and his zealous wife Isabel. Sir William, from Barnard Castle, Durham, had for long been engaged in border duties and was from 1603 commander of the garrison, and then governor, of Berwick, where he was residing in both July and December 1606.⁵ But Isabel was probably the chief source of support; she ‘gave about a thousand pounds per annum to maintain preachers when there were none’. Her home at Walton near Chesterfield served as a venue for several local consultations, even as late as 1607 when some of those attending had left the church. Smyth dedicated his first book *The Bright Morning Starre* to Isabel’s brother, ‘the right worshipful religious and courteous knight, Sir William Wray, my approved friend and benefactor’. Thomas Helwys dedicated his book *A Short and Plain Proofoe* to her in 1611.⁶

At Gainsborough on 11 March 1604, John Smyth, a ‘preacher’, baptised a daughter, and in August the visitors of the town heard that he continued to preach there.⁷ On 18 April 1604, there appeared at Newark quarter sessions a ‘John Smyth clerk, Sowth Clyfton’, not far from Gainsborough. In August 1603, the visitors of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham were informed that the curate in North Clyfton was John Smyth, a ‘master of the Arts and a painful preacher of God’s word’ (unusual in a village curacy). Surely the three Smyths, of Gainsborough, and of Clyfton, North and South – were the same person. At East Retford sessions on 5 October 1604 John Smith, clerk, of Clyfton, and twelve others, were charged with ‘riot and rout’. Five were clergymen: Smyth, John Herring, Godfrey Pye, Henry Bannister and Richard Jackson.

⁴ Foster, li–lii, 245–9; LAO, Cor B/2, p. 4; Smyth, I, *Patterne*, p. 69.

⁵ *The Egerton Papers*, Camden Society XII (London, 1840), pp. 229–39; HMC Hatfield House, XV, pp. 335, 393; XVIII, pp. 215–16, 358.

⁶ Daughter of Sir Christopher Wray, a former Chief Justice (J. Hunter, *South Yorkshire* (London, 1828), pp. 58, 59, 163; G. Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, 14 vols (London, 1910–59), IV, p. 77; J.T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry* (London, 1969), pp. 99–100; Smyth, I, p. 2.

⁷ C. Foster, ed., *Gainsborough Parish Registers* (Horncastle, 1920), p. 47; LAO, Vi/18, fol. 167, printed in H. Brace, ed., ‘Minutes of the Gainsborough Monthly Meeting’, *LRS* xliv (1951), p. 125.

It seems implausible that this was an outbreak of clerical hooliganism. Probably it originated in a dispute over the rights of presentation to the vicarage of Marnham 'vacant by the resignation of John Hall, the deprivation of Henry Alred' to which Herring had been inducted on 28 January 1604.⁸

On 18 April, Aldred and four others had been charged at Newark with riot, imprisonment and assault; sureties were given that he would 'keep the peace especially with John Herring'. Pye and John Smyth, clerk, of South Clyfton, stood sureties of ten pounds each for Herring, who was also bound over to keep the peace. On 11 July, Aldred was again bound over, on Herring's petition. All this preceded the 'riot and rout' noted by the court in October. Both Herring and Aldred paid fines under protest, but Herring lost the living. On 1 March 1605, he was instituted to Basford, where Smyth preached unlicensed in early 1607, a connection which tends to confirm that the Smyth of South Clyfton was the future Baptist.⁹ The later careers of Smyth and Herring, cited for unlicensed preaching at Church Greasley, and the presence of another clerk, Richard Jackson, possibly the future separatist, suggest that the case was not just about property.¹⁰

In March 1605 Smyth provided more evidence of his difficulties in finding acceptance as a clergyman of the established church. He issued *A Patterne of True Prayer*, with a view to 'the clearing of myself from unjust accusations, and the satisfying of a few friends'; he hoped that Lord Sheffield, President of the Council in the North, would 'receive it into your Honourable protection'. Smyth had been 'strangely traduced' for his views on the Lord's Prayer, views argued 'before the magistrate ecclesiastical'. This may refer back to the 1603 hearings, but some passages suggest more recent troubles. He lamented that 'persecution is a great discouragement to a minister, and it driveth many a godly man to his dumps, and interrupteth his ministry, or at the least his cheerfulness in his ministry . . .', a passage resonant with sadness at his lot, which may also hint – 'interrupteth' – that he had been granted, but feared to lose, a preaching licence. A letter to the Lincoln authorities, sent on his behalf on 3 March 1606, protested that 'Mr Smyth is very loth to give you offence in regard to your former favour in sparing to suspend him'. It seems therefore that after preaching unlicensed at Gainsborough, Smyth had been granted a licence, but before March 1606, almost had it suspended. This was probably about the time of *A Patterne*.

⁸ A.C. Wood, 'An Episcopal Visitation, 1603', *Thoroton Soc.* (publications) xlv (1942), pp. 3, 10; H. Copnall, *Records of Nottinghamshire* (Nottingham, 1915), pp. 163–5, Nott. Arch., QSM 1/66/1, p. 34; Nott. Arch., Hodgkinson Typescript, II, p. 256.

⁹ Nott. Arch., QSM 1/66/1, pp. 15, 13, 23, 26, 34; K. Train, *North Notts Clergy*, Train, ed., *Thoroton Soc. R.S.* xx (1961), p. 15; Nott. Arch., Hodgkinson Typescript II, p. 286; Aldred was at Marnham again 1607/8 (*Marchant*, pp. 326, 302).

¹⁰ *Marchant*, p. 306; Jackson, given (Nott. Arch., C/QSM 66/1, p. 34) as clerk of Norwell, was perhaps Richard Jackson of Scrooby, for whom see *Marchant*, pp. 141–2, 161, 163; Burgess, *Robinson Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers* (London, 1920), p. 79.

Anyway, he clearly believed his future to lie within the established church. Though worried that formal prayers might encourage coldness of spirit, he was 'far from the opinion of them which separate from our Church, concerning the set form of prayer' and rejected their idea that it was 'unlawful to use the Lord's Prayer as a set prayer'. Smyth's sympathy with the puritan cause within the church found expression here. He prayed that the 'godly ministers may be preserved and kept from the persecution of tyrants and wicked men, whom the devil enrages against them especially, as we see by evident experience, that no sort of men is so much maligned and exposed to the despoight of malicious men, as the faithfull ministers . . .'. Given that this was published during the time of many suspensions and deprivations for non-conformity, it is remarkable that this passage escaped Bancroft's watchers. For who, in the view of the faithful ministers, outdid the new Archbishop in spite and malignity against them?¹¹

There are several indications that John Smyth was involved in efforts to resist Bancroft. Probably in 1605, during the height of the Archbishop's efforts to enforce conformity on the clergy, he attended a meeting in Coventry with other Midlands puritans, including John Barbon and John Dod.¹² Of course, many clergymen were soon induced to conform, at least in part. A few remained intransigent. From 1604 to 1609, there were published from the secret press of William Jones, of Red Cross St, London, fifteen unlicensed works, including Henry Jacob's *A Christian Modest Offer*, and William Bradshaw's *English Puritanism*.¹³ John Quick was told by Samuel Hieron of Feniton that his grandfather and namesake of Modbury Devon had written two of these, including *A defence of the Ministers reasons for refusal* (1606). On the copy of part of this work, 'A Dispute upon the question of kneeling' at University College Oxford, is written 'Jhones the printer; Smyth the maker'; Curtis thought the book's references to Devon suggested it was written by a minister of that county.¹⁴ But there may be a connection between Smyth and Hieron. Samuel Hieron of Modbury was the uncle of Walter Hieron, curate of Stapenhill (Derbyshire) between 1605 and 1616. It was at Newhall, in Stapenhill, that William Bradshaw, chief writer and coordinator of the literary campaign, was sheltered by his patron Alexander Redditch; perhaps the militant Devon ministers kept in touch with Bradshaw, whose business with Redditch often took him to London, through Walter Hieron.¹⁵ Hieron 'was

¹¹ LAO, Cor/B/2, pp. 19, 20; Smyth, I, *Patterne*, pp. 68–71, 81, 163; *ibid.*, pp. 83–4, 90, 178–82.

¹² At least six ministers from several counties attended. This meeting is not to be identified with any of the gatherings at Sir William Bowes's house, which was at Walton: J. Cotton, *Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared*, (London, 1648), p. 7; Smyth, II, pp. 331, 337, 534, 336, 542, 534–5; White, *EST*, p. 130.

¹³ M. Curtis, 'William Jones', *The Library*, series 5, xix (1964), pp. 38–66, 39–42, 48.

¹⁴ MSS Quick, *Icones Sacrae Anglicanae*, DWL, RNC 38.34, pp. 55–90 at 85.

¹⁵ S. Clarke, *A General Martyrology* (London 1677), pp. 43–6.

well esteemed of Mr Hildersham and his hearers'. Arthur Hildersham was a deprived minister with whom Smyth was associated. Another was Richard Bernard, former vicar at Lord Sheffield's seat at Epworth, and then holder of the vicarage of Worksop, from which he was deprived on 9 April 1605; Bernard then discussed with Smyth the propriety of staying within the English church. Puzzlingly friendly references by Smyth to 'Mr B' about Autumn 1607, after Bernard's desertion of the separatist cause, might actually refer to Bradshaw, and 'Mr Hi' could refer either to Hildersham or to Hieron.¹⁶

Smyth himself experienced a nine-month period of doubt over separation, perhaps triggered by new setbacks in the church courts from spring 1606.¹⁷ On 18 March 1606, at the Archdeaconry Court, he agreed that on 2 March he had preached 'being suspended by my Lord' at Gainsborough in the place of Jerome Phillips, the absent minister. He had not worn a surplice, but had said 'a prayer for the king's majesty'. On 26 March, Smyth failed to appear, but two letters in his favour were received, explaining that he had taken service reluctantly at the insistence of the signatories, William Hickman, Francis Willoughby, E. Willoughby, Gervase Helwys, Thomas Darrell and Robert Somerscales, all substantial citizens. The first, dated 3 March, noted that 'Mr Smyth is very loth to give you offence in regard to your former favour in sparing to suspend him'. The second, dated 24 March, reported that in his sermon he had not uttered 'one word tending to the disturbance of the perfect estate of the church'. It explained that his failure to attend arose from the illness of his wife, pleading on behalf of this 'humble petitioner' that 'his absence in this case be not reputed contumacy'. Sentence was deferred till the feast of John the Baptist, 24 June 1606, but there is no trace of further action then.¹⁸

Clearly Smyth's friends were anxious to paint him in moderate hues, but their attitude must surely reflect his own desire to appear compliant. In November/January 1606–7, he was in trouble again, for practising as an unlicensed physician: for the court, he was not a separatist but an errant member of the English church. The reasons for his failure to obtain a licence are not known. Perhaps in a period in which great pressure was being placed to make reformers conform the history of friction between himself and the authorities simultaneously stimulated their distrust and his defiance. Despite his academic qualifications, he had not been able to secure a ministerial post

¹⁶ Notes on Lichfield diocesan records kindly provided by Dr Richard Clark of Tonbridge School; R. Porter, *The Life of Mr John Hieron* . . . (London, 1691), p. 1; 'Letter to A.S.', Smyth, II, pp. 547, 556.

¹⁷ Smyth, I, pp. lvi–lvii; Smyth, II, pp. 337, 534; White, EST, pp. 120–1; Brace, ed., LRS xlv, p. 125, transcriptions of LAO Vi/18, fol. 167 and LAO Cj/16, fols 32, 97; LAO Cor/B/2, pp. 19, 20.

¹⁸ Philips listed as vicar 1607, Foster, p. 430; LAO Cor/B/2, pp. 19, 20; Foster, ed., *Gainsborough Parish Registers*, I, pp. 49, 127, 187; A. Stark, *History and Antiquities of Gainsburgh* (London, 1843), p. 458.

in the diocese.¹⁹ Smyth was absent in November, but attended when the case reopened on 13 January, admitting the offence but pleading in extenuation that he had taken no money for his services. Perhaps his original absence was caused by illness rather than defiance. About this time, recalled Bernard, God had chastised Smyth with ‘sickness nigh unto death, to consider better with himself yet of his course’; during this illness, Smyth stayed with Thomas Helwys at Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire, near Basford, scene of his preaching in February 1607. He was fined 2/6d, and suspended, apparently having held onto his regained Lincoln preaching licence. All this suggests most strongly that Smyth cannot have founded his separate congregation before January 1607.²⁰

The separation of 1607

On 25 February 1607, John Herring was admonished for having allowed Smyth to preach in Basford church. The churchwardens testified that the sermon was given ‘Monday last’, 19 February. If Smyth was still a member of the English church, he must have known that the action, coming so soon after his fine and suspension, would invite serious retribution. It marks a break with his earlier compliance with the court – perhaps triggered either by his suspension a month before the Basford sermon, or the narrow escape from the pursuivant which may have resulted.²¹ Richard Clyfton, deprived of his rectory of Babworth on 12 April 1605, soon followed, having been converted by Smyth.²² Cited before the Chancery Court at York, 6 March 1607, as the ‘pretended curate of Bawtry’, he did not attend, and was excommunicated on 20 March. Though reprieved temporarily, after 24 April, Clyfton ‘lapsed into his former excommunication’: clearly he had now declared for the separatists.²³ Having perhaps delayed in the hope, now disappointed, of carrying the influential Bernard with him, Smyth renounced his ordination by ‘Wickham prelate of Lincoln’, and entered into a Church covenant with the Gainsborough group. Bernard reported this as ‘a company gathered (as they say) into the name of Christ by a covenant made, to walk in all the ways of Christ known unto them’. As Bradford recalled, ‘they shook off this yoke of antichristian bondage and as the Lords free people joined themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all His ways made known, or to be made

¹⁹ LAO Cj 16, fol. 32: no fine recorded here or at *ibid.*, fols 47, 58 (18 June, 3 July); LAO Cj/16, fol. 97.

²⁰ Smyth, II, pp. 534, 759; R. Bernard, *Christian Advertisements* (London, 1608), p. 37; LAO, Cj 16, fol. 97.

²¹ Nott. Univ., A15; Marchant, pp. 156, 159, 301; Smyth, II, pp. 522–5, 534.

²² R. Clyfton, *The Plea for infants and elder people* (Amsterdam, 1610), pp. 225–6.

²³ Marchant, p. 155; Burgess, *Robinson*, p. 83.