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The Rise and Development of the Congregational Polity and Spirit in New England

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Lecture One: The Church at Scrooby

Earl Clement Davis

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Rise and sendofement of the Congregation of Polity and of init, I he Church at Scrooly. It has only here within a comfaralishy short time that me towe been able to go bock of 1620 when the Vilgrim church louder at Plymoth, and find any exhaustice watered on the history "ine and growth of the 1th church of Plymonth, form Minitanin), hor have been somewhat inclined to accept flower of the flort, but not to trace out the work, and chir : cover the soil in which they had formal worn: shunt. The frincifles you which the Protestant Reformation took its rise were two. Fuit Free inquiry, as of fored to the absolute author: ity of the cluvch, and I " Uninersal Presthall of all betieving men on offored to that of a derical costs of prints," non it is enident that the lights of the Reformation and their

followers did not see four your there frinciples

John Bern R. 16.

would lead them, or else they feared the results of this, for we some had they de: nied the authrity of the Church of Rome, when the basis of there two frincifles, the they substituted the authority of the Bible, and denied the right of free inquiry, and Alminenol Priesthood, and shut them = selves of within the shell of the Castertant Churches, But the frincifles of free inquiry and universal friestbook, once mented with such vign as to forduce the Reformation could not be recolled, and there runs a thread of a somewant from the Reformation on cloure to time when the Rilgins left Holland lengloved for Hollind, and the Purities hegen the sugarties to the here infortuly from tradition and Government refinsion These frincifles could work their way out She hirting of this womenent is the subject of there lessons, and its termines ad guen

is indicated by recognizing the fact that there two frincifles, the frincifle of free inquiry, and the frincifle of mineral friest lood are the very frincifles you which the Muilanin churches are based. In tracing out the rise and spear of this more ment, it seems best to begin at Secoly and find out what we can about that church. and then to s go bock of that and direcome what we are about the feriod from The Reformation to 1600, and bring accomplish. ech that to take of once were the fortunes of the Scooly Church, on it-fleck to another and to Leyden, and there to lywouth, The willage of Levoly where Plymonth church wor founded is situated 146 miles booth of fouday, men the in nothing for shire, near hiresh and york. During the latter half of the sixteenth Century There seems to bor heen a considerable influence of Puritien clergy in this section. Brack fuch in his history of the Plyworth

Plantation, distinctly traces the rise of the accordy church of which he himself was me of the forework menhers to the religions influence exercised by the Chinters daugy. HE Telk us that it was by the travail and diligence of some godly and yealm feachers and gooli blessing on their lobors, as in some other flores of the level, so in the north fants many become enlightened by the word of Gool, and had their ignorance and sins discovered unto them, and hegen by his grace to reform their lives, and woke conscience of their worp." One of there were were Richard Chyfton sector of a clunch le miles senth of being, and who wer exilect in 1603, is writty of mention. We Bradford used to worth from anterfield mine miles on Sunchy worning to hear him perch. Beachful soys of him. He was a grame and fotherly old were when he fint come to Hollond, having a great white beaul;

and fily it is That such a revenand all were should be forced to leave his country and at those years to go into exile. But it was his lot, and he bore it foliently The there we wother were Richard I smarch, attrigh he bol out the smarge or tenacity of these burr wer, get he must her had an influence. An example of his attitude is in this sentire, in which he flevels for frien reform. If there should be marine to at them on works they might git somewhat for food and sainent. They might so ferent the mireroble frito of sloth; their mincles would be employed, Their bochies fresened in health, and not fine any " Enfred lohn be soys world tenepie love vogrante, lagy wonderers, and the idle write from turing theres? the frismis when he sorp "a very ficture of hell such (when the fity, as to wow stouch, is wo less the a fregoration thereto; " whereas if frismens were treated on he suggests. They

would on their release become through Joch mertie worr frofitable members in the course mede after when when a vow they become twice wors the child of Beliol then they were hefters" Shit sounds like chuning, in spirit, if wat in form finding the divine amich the chago of society. This suggests the storeflere about Scooly in which Brewster, Broelfrel and others mere reared, "hot worch of a suggestin of sung fotestontion about it. It was the spirit of free inquiry at unk, But the Course of 1603 which Eliften would not sign, and ment into exile, Barond chil sign and become a wort archent conformat. But this spirit of face inquiry begon to toke form, and in 1602, a Seferatit church wor formed in Gainstrough, man Scooty. It is very forboble that this wonement win not entirely to the disting of the force

of the Town of Sains burgh at this hime, 7 who seems to for come from a forming whose nome had been colored by the taint of remean formity, futry he fostand the worewent, forten John Bungth, of Christs College, Combidge, wer forter of this new Clunch at Gainshrangh the too ment into exile for von - conformity. wel became a flyricion at amsterdam, For four year Willier God fuch, and Mullin Grensten and others from Scooly wolked from ten to twelve uiles on Surchy werning to hear John Sungth and french, and to join in the service of the Seferatit durch at Gainsborryc, until at length there feafle become two distinct bochin a churcher, and in regard of chitire of flace did congregate severally; for they mere of Swelly tours and villages, "I + Burn P.92.

Luss in 1606 the church at Sewoly wor organized, and met orclinarily at The Brenstein form on the First chy, and with great live he entertained them when they cime, woking porision for them, to his quot charge." Garently Richard Cliflin heure foster of this church at knowly, but this offer some fighter of Soles. However there was associated with him one for Robinson, who become fortor and followed the church to auster dum and then to Holloved Leyden, HE was a great wow, and his influence, in the Scrooly Church and his mide influence though his books has well him a great and dominating figure in langregotion history. He won bour fortotly ohr 1575 in hincohnshine. Combidge in 1592. It is interesting to wate that all worstall of there men come from limbile, and the

some thing way be said of the men who 9 in the 19th centry again tooks of the liberahing worrewart in English forme from Ux fuel. Ou leaving college Robinson took of the work of a minister in horfolk, but he could vot conform to the anglicon church , an he was surfended, and becoming findly a separatit he entered the work on forter of a large goting Church at Tormich. But gives and imprisonments soon durz himpern Termich, and he care to scroby, and become forth of Scroby. But his life here we vo les ditubed that it wil here at hownich. The entrie borly of Separatists at Scroby mene so fer = secretel by fines, infrissimment, and other means available, that it soon become wident that serve ractical line of action must 12 carried out. accordingly in the foll of 1607, they determined to leave this writing country for limstuchon, whither the

Jainsbrough feofle had alerchy give. But in conging out this flue, they by vo means found the way easy. the coned vot remain at tome, without becoming conconformists; and they could not leave without a license, which they corld vol hofe to get. But findly they chartered a nusel, and work revely, chiforing of whot ferferty they might, and toking with them what seemed needford. Their flows mere fully motived, when they discovered that the Coptain of the neucl had flyged their foke, and betryed them into the bruch of the bort. Their goods were con: fiscoted, and their winey token from and they mere averted and held in the Hour glostin, how it boffened that this Boston won a bothel of Puritonia

and so they fand withen better the cored" In exfectul. In fort from this some Bostin come the Purities often whom on Just what befored to these ferfle at the Borton is vouel. havele of the court is not know, for all the seench of that forticular year are dutiged. In the following spring a second attempt to escope wer wele. a butch nessel was chartned, and they were to meet it near Hull, and there to transfer their govels from the river boot to the neural. But agoin minforture mor with them. While they mere in the micht of transferring their goods from their boat which bod become stranded on the flots at how Ticle a twof of horseman come clown upon them, and coffned the women and chilchen. She coftain of the ship

become prightened, and toisted sail carrying off the men. after fourteen sugs of storm and mind, the men mare landed at australin. The women and childhen mere a torden to the Government, and finally they mere released, and worke their way to Hollend, So in the year 1008, The Scroop church of the Rilgins, Lehing in the frinciple of free inquiry, and uninerve Prierthood, come at length to Hollow where they sojonned for a

trine,

Rise and Development of the Congregational Polity and Spirit

I. The Church at Scrooby Earl C. Davis Pittsfield, MA No Date¹

It has only been within a comparatively short time that we have been able to go back of 1620 when the Pilgrim Church landed at Plymouth, and find any exhaustive material on the history of the rise and growth of the 1st Church of Plymouth (now Unitarian). We have been somewhat inclined to accept [the] flower of the plant, but not to trace out the roots and discover the soil in which they found nourishment.

The principles upon which the Protestant Reformation took its rise were two. First, "free inquiry, as opposed to the absolute authority of the Church," and 2nd "universal priesthood of all believing men as opposed to that of a clerical caste of priests."² Now it is evident that the lights of the Reformation and their followers did not see how far these principles would lead them, or else they feared the results of them, for no sooner had they denied the authority of the Church of Rome, upon the basis of these two principles, than they substituted the authority of the Bible and denied the right of free inquiry, and universal priesthood, and shut themselves up within the shell of the Protestant Churches.

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 An extremely rare footnote is found here in this manuscript with "John Brown, p. 16." On the foot of the page. The reference is to John Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895. The author, John Brown (1830-1922) was minister of the Bunyan Meeting in Bedford, England, and his historical works are still in print.

But the principles of free inquiry and universal priesthood, once asserted with such vigor as to produce the Reformation could not be recalled, and there runs a thread of a movement from the Reformation on down to the time when the Pilgrims left England for Holland, and the Puritans began their migrations to the New World, to establish here a republic where, comparatively free from tradition and government repression, these principles could work their way out. The history of this movement is the subject of these lessons,³ and its "terminus ad quem" is indicated by recognizing the fact that these two principles, the principle of free inquiry and the principle of universal priesthood, are the very principles upon which the Unitarian churches are based.

In tracing out the rise and spread of this movement, it seems best to begin at Scrooby, and find out what we can about that church, and then to go back of that and discover what we can about the period from the Reformation to 1600, and having accomplished that to take up once more the fortunes of the Scrooby Church, as it fled to Amsterdam and to Leyden, and thence to Plymouth.

The village of Scrooby, where [the] Plymouth Church was founded, is situated 146 miles north of London in Nottinghamshire, near Lincoln and York. During the latter half of the sixteenth century there seems to have been a considerable influence of Puritan clergy in this section.

> Bradford in his *History of the Plymouth Plantation*, distinctly traces the rise of the Scrooby Church, of which he himself was one of the foremost members, to the religious influence exercised by the Puritan clergy. He tell us that it was "by travail and diligence of godly and zealous preachers and God's blessing on their labors, as in some other places of the land, so in the north parts, many became enlightened by

³ Earl Davis' use of "these lessons" suggests that these manuscripts, together focused on the "Rise and Development of the Congregational Polity and Spirit" were intended for, and delivered to, a congregation. Hence they most likely date from 1905-06, Pittsfield.

the Word of God, and had their ignorance and sins discovered unto them, and began by His grace to reform their lives, and make conscience of their ways."⁴

One of these men was Richard Clyfton, rector of a church 6 miles south of Scrooby, and who was exiled in 1603, is worthy of mention. Wm. Bradford used to walk from Austerfield nine miles on Sunday morning to hear him preach. Bradford says of him, "He was a grave and fatherly old man when he first came to Holland, having a great white beard; and pity it is that such a reverend old man should be forced to leave his country and at those years to go into exile. But it was his lot, and he bore it patiently."⁵

Also there was another man, Richard Bernard, although he had not the courage or tenacity of these brave men, yet he must have had an influence. An example of his attitude is in this sentence in which he pleads for prison reform: "If there should be means to set them on work they might get somewhat for food and raiment. They might so prevent the miserable fruits of sloth; their minds would be employed, their bodies be preserved in health, and not pine away. ... Enforced labor," he says, "would, he thinks, terrify loose vagrants, lazy wanderers, and the idle route from turning thieves." The prison is now, he says, "a very picture of Hell and (more is the pity), as the case now stands, is no less than a preparation thereto."6 "Whereas if prisoners were treated as he suggests they would on their release 'become through God's mercy more profitable members of the Common-Weale afterwards; whereas now they become twice more the children of Belial than they were before.""7

⁴ John Brown, Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, p.76.
⁵ Bradford is quoted in John Brown, Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, p. 77.

⁶ Bernard is quoted in John Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, pp. 81-2.

⁷ John Brown, quoting Bernard, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, p. 82.

That sounds like Channing, 8 in spirit, if not in form, finding the divine amid the dregs of society.

This suggest the atmosphere about Scrooby in which Brewster, Bradford and others were reared. Not much of a suggestion of smug Protestantism about it. It was the spirit of free inquiry at work. But the canons of 1603, which Clyfton would not sign, and went into exile. Bernard did sign and became a most ardent conformist. But this spirit of free inquiry began to take form, and in 1602, a Separatist Church was formed in Gainsborough, near Scrooby. It is very probable that this movement was not entirely to the disliking of the Lord of the Manor of Gainsborough at the time, who seems to have come from a family whose name had been colored by the taint of non-conformity. Perhaps he fostered the movement.

John Smyth, of Christ's College Cambridge, was pastor of this new Church at Gainsborough. He, too, went into exile for non-conformity, and became a physician at Amsterdam. For four years William Bradford and William Brewster and others from Scrooby walked from ten to twelve miles on Sunday morning to hear John Smyth preach, and to join in the service of the Separatist Church at Gainsborough, until at length "these people became two distinct bodies or churches, and in regard to distance of place did congregate severally for they were of sundry towns and villages." (Brown, p. 92). Thus in 1606 the Church at Scrooby was organized, and met "ordinarily at Wm. Brewster's house on the Lord's day, ... and with great love he entertained them when they came, making provision for them, to his great charge."⁹

Apparently Richard Clyfton became pastor of this Church at Scrooby, but there appears some problems of dates. However there was associated with him one John Robinson, who became paster, and followed the Church to Amsterdam and

⁸ William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) foremost Unitarian preacher in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁹ John Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895, pp. 97.

then to Leyden. He was a great man, and his influence, in the Scrooby Church and his wider influence through his books, has made him a great and dominating figure in Congregational history. He was born probably about 1575 in Lincolnshire. Entered Corpus Christi College in Cambridge in 1592. It is interesting to note that almost all of these men came from Cambridge, while the men who in the 19th century again took up the liberalizing movement in England came from Oxford.

On leaving college, Robinson took up the work of a minister in Norfolk, but he could not conform to the Anglican Church, so he was suspended, and becoming finally a Separatist, he entered the work as pastor of a Congregational Church at Norwich. But fines and imprisonments soon drove him from Norwich, and he came to Scrooby, and became pastor of Scrooby.

But his life here was no less disturbed than it had been at Norwich. The entire body of Separatists at Scrooby were so persecuted by fines, imprisonment, and other means available, that it soon became evident that some radical line of action must be carried out. Accordingly in the fall of 1607, they determined to leave their native country for Amsterdam, whither the Gainsborough people had already gone. But in carrying out this plan, they by no means found the way easy. They could not remain at home without becoming conformists, and they could not leave without a license, which they could not hope to get.

But finally they chartered a vessel, and made ready, disposing of what property they might, and taking with them what seemed needful. Their plans were fully matured, when they discovered that the captain of the vessel had played them false, and betrayed them into the hands of the Gov't. Their goods were confiscated, and their money taken from [them] and they were arrested and held in the town of Boston. Now it happened that this Boston was a hotbed of Puritanism, and so they fared rather better than could be expected. In fact, from this same Boston came the Puritans after whom our Boston is named. Just what happened to these people at the hands of the court is not known, for all the records of that particular year are destroyed.

In the following spring a second attempt to escape was made. A Dutch vessel was chartered, and they were to meet it near Hull, and then to transfer their goods from the river boat to the vessel. But again misfortune was with them. While they were in the midst of transferring their goods from their boat which had become stranded on the flats at low tide, a troop of horsemen came down upon them, and captured the women and children. The captain of the ship became frightened and hoisted sail carrying off the men. After fourteen days of storm and wind, the men were landed at Amsterdam.

The women and children were a burden to the Government, and finally they were released, and made their way to Holland. So in the year 1608, the Scrooby Church of the Pilgrims, believing in the principles of free inquiry and universal priesthood, came at length to Holland where they sojourned for a time.