

**Inventory to the
Baptists in the Netherlands
Collection**

AR 185



John Smyth

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I. Historical Sketch

In 1608, a group of English Separatists fled to Amsterdam to avoid persecution for their opposition to the Church of England. Led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys this group adopted Anabaptist practices and doctrines. Conflict arose, however, as Smyth faced heavy criticism also for his doctrine of self-baptism that developed after Smyth and his congregation rejected infant baptism. In order to correct what they then viewed as an erroneous act, Smyth baptized himself and then others in the congregation including Helwys. Later Smyth became part of the Mennonite tradition, which led to a split with Helwys, who returned to England in 1612. Once back in England, Helwys started the first Baptist congregation at Spitalfields. He also published *The Mystery of Iniquity*, an exposition of religious liberty addressed to King James I. Helwys was imprisoned for these views, and likely died in Newgate Prison around 1616.

Thomas Helwys was born in 1575 in Billborough, where he grew up as part of England's landed-gentry. Following his marriage to Joan Ashmore in 1595, Helwys ran his family estate at Broxtowe Hall. Helwys was a pioneer in Baptist thought as he argued for the separation of church and state and religious liberty. These ideas led him to other Church of England dissenters including John Smyth, who led a Separatist congregation in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. John Smyth was born in 1586, and trained as minister at Christ's College, Cambridge. As authorities started to persecute Separatists, many fled to Holland as did Smyth and Helwys. Smyth remained in Amsterdam where he died in 1612.

II. Scope and Content Note

The Baptists in Holland Collection (1609-1620) contains .25 linear feet of materials in one document box. Materials are copies of microfilmed manuscripts that include articles, confessions of faith, and correspondence, and are arranged alphabetically. The majority of the collection is in Dutch and Latin, with some English translations. When the collection was microfilmed, brief content description cards were included before each document, and these cards sometimes made a reference to where another copy and/or translation could be found. A copy of the microfilmed version of this collection is available in the Archives (MF 2091). See also MF 204-19 – 204-25.

The collection documents the development of religious thought among the English Separatists living in Holland in the early seventeenth century. Primary issues are religious liberty, infant baptism, separation of church and state, and the simplicity of worship. Correspondence also addresses the conflict between John Smyth and the other English Separatists that arose from his principle of self-baptism and alignment with the Mennonite church in Amsterdam.

Researchers should note that the original manuscripts were held by the Mennonite Seminary Library in Amsterdam, but now are held by additional repositories such as the

Bodelian Library at Oxford University and the National Archives in Amsterdam. Printed reproductions are also available in several publications such as Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the light of Current Research (1550-1641)* (BX 5203.B9), Benjamin Evans, *Early English Baptists* (BX6276.E8).

III. Folder Listing

Box 1

- 1.1 Articles – “Arguments Against Infant Baptism” – [1518?]
- 1.2 Articles – “Child Baptism” – n.d.
- 1.3 Articles – “A Dialogue Between Mr. Richard Clifton and Johannes Smith” – n.d.
- 1.4 Articles – Gerritsz, Lubbert and Hans de Ries – “A Short Confession of Fayth” – 1610
- 1.5 Articles – Helwys, Thomas – “A Synopsis of Faith of the True Christian English Church of Amsterdam” – 1609[1610?]
- 1.6 Articles – “Infant Baptism”
- 1.7 Books – *Persecution for Religion Judg’d & Condemned* and *An Humble Supplication to the Kings Majesty* – 1615 and 1620
- 1.8 Confession of John Smyth – 1610
- 1.9 Confession of faith by Richard Overton – January 20, 1615
- 1.10 Correspondence – Amsterdam Waterlander Church to Leeuwarden Waterlander Church – April 1610
- 1.11 Correspondence – Helwys, Thomas to Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonite Church – March 12, 1609
- 1.12 Correspondence – Helwys, Thomas to Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonite Church – 1609 [1610?]
- 1.13 Correspondence – Janszoon, Willem to Wybranstz, Reynier – May 8, 1610
- 1.14 Correspondence – Mathyszoon, Hans et al – May 5, 1610
- 1.15 Correspondence – de Rijneck, Yeme to Gerritsz, Lubbert – May 15, 1610
- 1.16 Helwys Latin Confession of Faith (Dutch Copy) – 1609-1610
- 1.17 Membership Petition to Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonite Church – n..d.