
Nonconformity

In the fall of 1633 John Davenport left London and embarked on a ship that would take him to the Netherlands. His relationship with William Laud certainly played a large part in this decision. Laud had objected to his preaching and chastised him for his efforts to support the Palatinate refugees. As early as 1629 Davenport had asked that his investment in the Massachusetts Bay Company not be indicated in the charter because of his concern about the bishop's reaction. He had been forced to answer to the charges lodged against him by Timothy Hood. Along with his fellow feoffees he had been dragged before the Court of Exchequer.

At the same time, new ceremonial initiatives of the church authorities raised anew questions about the price of conformity. Davenport had been wrestling with these issues since he was first ordained. Two incidents evidently led him to reach new conclusions. The first of these occurred shortly after the arrest of a number of London Separatists in April 1632. The group were members of what had been the semi-Separatist church founded by Henry Jacob in the 1610s. Following Jacob's departure for Virginia, the congregation had elected John Lathrop as their pastor and had adopted a more consistent separation from the Church of England and its London parishes. On Laud's orders forty-one members of the congregation, including Lathrop, were arrested as they worshipped in the home of one of their members. The event created a stir, and while the Separatists languished in prison, Davenport preached a sermon against separatism, presumably reiterating the arguments he had made years earlier in the exchanges he had had with Ralph Smith and Alexander Leighton. Notes of his sermon were brought to the members of the congregation in prison. Wishing to better understand the points he made, "they sent a letter to him desiring he would send them his