

Roger Williams in Rhode Island (London,1636)

Nathaniel Morton

In the year 1634 Mr. Roger Williams removed from Plymouth to Salem: he had lived about three years at Plymouth, where he was well accepted as an assistant in the ministry to Mr. Ralph Smith, then pastor of the church there, but by degrees venting of divers of his own singular opinions, and seeking to impose them upon others, he not finding such a concurrence as he expected, he desired his dismissal to the Church of Salem, which though some were unwilling to, yet through the prudent counsel of Mr. Brewster (the ruling elder there) fearing that its continuance amongst them might cause division, and [thinking that] there being then many able men in the Bay, they would better deal with him than [than] themselves could . . . the Church of Plymouth consented to his dismissal, and such as did adhere to him were also dismissed, and removed with him, or not long after him, to Salem...

But he having in one year's time filled that place with principles of rigid separation, and tending to Anabaptistry, the prudent magistrates of the Massachusetts jurisdiction, sent to the church of Salem, desiring them to forbear calling him to office, which they not hearkening to, was a cause of much disturbance; for Mr. Williams had begun, and then being in office, he proceeded more vigorously to vent many dangerous opinions, as among many others these were some; That it is not lawful for an unregenerate man to pray, nor to take an oath, and in special, not

the oath of fidelity to the Civil Government; nor was it lawful for a godly man to have communion either in family prayer, or in an oath with such as they judged unregenerate: and therefore he himself refused the oath of fidelity, and taught others so to do; also, that it was not lawful so much as to hear the godly ministers of England, when any occasionally went thither ; and therefore he admonished any church-members that had done so, as for heinous sin: also he spoke dangerous words against the Patent, which was the foundation of the Government of the Massachusetts Colony: also he affirmed, That the magistrates had nothing to do in matters of the first table [of the commandments], but only the second; and that there should be a general and unlimited toleration of all religions, and for any man to be punished for any matters of his conscience, was persecution.

He persisted, and grew more violent in his way, insomuch as he staying at home in his own house, sent a letter, which was delivered and read in the public church assembly, the scope of which was to give them notice, That if the church of Salem would not separate not only from the churches of Old England, but the churches of New England too, he would separate from them: the more prudent and sober part of the church being amazed at his way, could not yield unto him : whereupon he never came to the church assembly more, professing separation from them as antichristian, and not only so, but he withdrew all private religious communion from any that would hold communion with the church there, insomuch as he would not pray nor give thanks at

meals with his own wife nor any of his family, because they went to the church assemblies . . . which the prudent magistrates understanding, and seeing things grow more and more towards a general division and disturbance, after all other means used in vain, they passed a sentence of banishment against him out of the Massachusetts Colony, as against a disturber of the peace, both of the church and commonwealth.

After which Mr. Williams sat down in a place called Providence, out of the Massachusetts jurisdiction, and was followed by many of the members of the church of Salem, who did zealously adhere to him, and who cried out of the persecution that was against him: some others also resorted to him from other parts. They had not been long there together, but from rigid separation they fell to Anabaptistry, renouncing the baptism which they had received in their infancy, and taking up another baptism, and so began a church in that way; but Mr. Williams stopped not there long, for after some time he told the people that had followed him, and joined with him in a new baptism, that he was out of the way himself, and had misled them, for he did not find that there was any upon earth that could administer baptism, and therefore their last baptism was a nullity, as well as their first; and therefore they must lay down all, and wait for the coming of new apostles : and so they dissolved themselves, and turned seekers, **keeping that one principle, That every one should have liberty to worship God according to the light of their own consciences; but otherwise not owning any churches or ordinances of God anywhere upon earth.**

From Morton's "New England Memorial," published at the request of the Four United Colonies of New England. Morton lived in the family of Governor Bradford and served as secretary of the court at Plymouth. This fact should be kept in mind when reading this account. (162-165)

Morton, Nathaniel. "Roger Williams in Rhode Island." *Great Epochs in American History: Described by Famous Writers from Columbus to Wilson. Vol. 2: The Planting of the First Colonies: A.D. 1562-1733.* Francis W. Halsey, ed. Fort Worth, TX: RDMcPublishing. 2007. Print.