

A detailed historical illustration in a woodcut style. In the center, a crowd of people in 16th or 17th-century attire is gathered around a guillotine. A person is being prepared for execution. In the foreground, a boat with several people is on the water. The background shows a town with red-roofed buildings and church spires under a cloudy sky.

PROTESTANT PERSECUTION

OF BAPTISTS

eBook Series:
Issues Facing the Churches
David Cloud

Protestant Persecution of Baptists

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Way of Life Literature

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Introduction

The following is excerpted from *Rome and the Bible: The History of the Bible Through the Centuries and Rome's Persecutions* and *A History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective*, both of which are available from Way of Life Literature.

Though the Protestant Reformers of the 16th to the 18th centuries demanded religious liberty from the Roman Catholic Church, in many cases they did not give liberty to others. That the Protestants of the Reformation era persecuted Baptists and others who differed from them is a fact rarely told in church histories and therefore little known.

There is absolutely no biblical justification for persecuting those who hold to a different doctrine.

The Lord taught His people to be harmless of doves (Mat. 10:16). Believers are likened to sheep, which is an animal that does not kill and devour. It is false teachers that are likened to ravening wolves.

The Lord's churches are authorized to contend for the faith and to reprove, reject, and separate from those who hold to false doctrine.

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should

earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3).

"A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

But in this present dispensation God's people are not authorized to attack, incarcerate, inflict bodily harm upon, or kill those who are "heretics."

The Protestants brought the a vile practice of persecution out of Rome. Though they claimed to be the Lord's sheep, they often acted the part of ravening wolves toward Baptists and other "dissidents."

The false spirit of persecution began early in the shameful history of the Roman Catholic Church. It began with Jerome and Augustine, two of Rome's "fathers."

Jerome

Jerome (A.D. 340-420) had a hateful attitude toward those that followed the simple apostolic faith and refused to accept false doctrines and practices. His writings against these men, whom he falsely labeled "heretics," were characterized by the most vicious sort of language. He was "engaged in many violent and bitter controversies" (James Heron, *The Evolution of Latin Christianity*, p. 58).

Vigilantius, Jovinian, and Helvidius were some of the men upon whom Jerome railed. These men rejected the false traditions that were being added by the early leaders of the Roman Church, including infant baptism, enforced celibacy, worship of martyrs and relics, and the sinlessness and perpetual virginity of Mary. Jerome heaped upon these men angry labels, calling them dogs, maniacs, monsters, asses, stupid fools, two-legged asses, gluttons, servants of the devil, madmen, “useless vessels which should be shattered by the iron rod of apostolic authority.” He said Helvidius had a “fetid mouth, fraught with a putrid stench, against the relics and ashes of the martyrs.”

“The pen of Jerome was rendered very offensive by his grinding tyranny and crabbed temper. No matter how wrong he was, he could not brook contradiction” (Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, I, p. 207).

It is no wonder that a man with such a vicious tongue justified the death penalty for “heretics” (James Heron, *The Evolution of Latin Christianity*, p. 323).

It is interesting to note that Vigilantius, one of the men against whom Jerome railed, was identified by George Faber, diligent historian of the Waldenses and Albigenses, with the Waldensian Christians of northern Italy. In the year 406 Vigilantius published “a most uncompromising and decisive Treatise against the miserable growing superstitions of the age.”

“In this Treatise, he attacked the notion, that Celibacy is the duty of the Clergy: censured, as idolatrous, the

excessive veneration of the Martyrs and the idle unscriptural figment that they are potent intercessors at the throne of grace: ridiculed the blind reverence, which was paid to their senseless and useless relics: exposed the gross folly of burning tapers, like the Pagans, before their shrines in broad day-light: detected the spurious miracles, which were said to be wrought by their inanimate remains: vilified the boasted sanctity of vainly gratuitous monachism: and pointed out the useless absurdity of pilgrimages, either to Jerusalem or to any other reputed sanctuary" (Faber, *History of the Ancient Vallenses and Albigenses*, 1838, pp. 291, 292).

Jerome composed a reply to Vigilantius "in which, it is hard to say, whether illogical absurdity or brutal scurrility is the most predominant."

Faber made the following important remarks about the conflict between Vigilantius and Jerome:

"To the ecclesiastical student, the sentiments of Vigilantius are familiar: and their complete identity with those of the Vallenses, in all ages, cannot have escaped his notice. ... He wrote from a region, situated between the waves of the Adriatic and the Alps of King Cottius ... Now this district, on the eastern side of the Cottian Alps, is the precise country of the Vallenses. Hither their ancestors retired, during the persecutions of the second and third and fourth centuries: here, providentially secluded from the world, they retained the precise doctrines and practices of the Primitive Church endeared to them by suffering and exile; while the wealthy inhabitants of cities and fertile plains, corrupted by a now opulent and gorgeous and powerful Clergy, were daily sinking deeper and deeper into that apostasy which has been so graphically foretold by the great Apostle: and, here, as we learn through the medium of an accidental statement of Jerome, Vigilantius took up his abode, at the beginning of the fifth century, among a people,

who, Laics [laity] and Bishops alike, agreed with him in his religious sentiments, and joyfully received him as a brother. ... Jerome, nurtured in the adulterate Christianity of opulent cities and fanatic monks and lordly prelates, is amazed, yea horrified, at the alpine audacity of Vigilantius. ... 'What,' cries Jerome, scandalized to the last pitch of endurance, 'does the Roman Bishop, then, do ill, who offers sacrifices to the Lord over the bones of dead men; the bones, I trow, of Peter and of Paul: bones, in our estimation, venerable; bones, in thy estimation, a mere worthless portion of dust? Does the Bishop of Rome do ill, who deems their tombs the altars of Christ? Are the Bishops, not merely of a single city, but of the whole world, all mistaken: because, despising the huckster Vigilantius, they reverently enter into the stately cathedrals of the dead?'" (Faber, *History of the Ancient Vallenses*, pp. 293, 94, 98).

We would gladly answer Jerome's question. Yes, a thousand times, yes. Vigilantius and his Christian friends in the Alps were correct, and the apostate bishops were wrong! We do not believe Vigilantius was a huckster. It is more likely that he was a sincere man of God who was being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and the faith once delivered to the saints.

This is a fascinating bit of information. New Testament prophecies describe two separate streams of "Christianity" operating side-by-side through the church age. First, there will be sound churches, that hold to the faith once delivered to the saints. They will be persecuted, hated, despised, yet Jesus promised, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). Second, there will be apostate churches that will grow worse and worse as the centuries pass (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:13; 4:3-4).

In the battle between the Bible-believing Vigilantius and the pre-Romanist Jerome in the early fifth century, we see the two aspects of prophecy pertaining to the course of the “church age” being fulfilled side-by-side: On the one hand, there were New Testament Christians, seeking to maintain the apostolic faith and standing boldly against apostasy. On the other hand, there were apostates, fearlessly adding their extra-biblical traditions to the Word of God and persecuting those who resisted their heresies.

It is obvious that Jerome had imbibed the false teaching and attitude that eventually became the entrenched dogmas and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and that was carried out of Rome intact by Protestant leaders.

Augustine

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was “in a true sense” the “founder of Roman Catholicism” (Benjamin Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p. 22). The Roman Catholic Church itself acknowledges Augustine as one of its “major Church Doctors,” and canonized him as a saint.

Augustine was a persecutor and the father of generations of persecutors.

“Augustine of Hippo did not shrink from giving a dogmatic basis to what had come to be the practice of the church, and even professed to find warrant for it in Scripture. ‘It is, indeed, better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment, or by pain. But because the former

means are better, the latter must not therefore be neglected. Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering, before they attain the highest grade of religious development. ... The Lord himself orders that guests be first invited, then compelled, to his great supper.' And Augustine argues that if the State has not the power to punish religious error, neither should it punish a crime like murder. Rightly did Neander say of Augustine's teaching, that it 'contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition.' Nor was it long before the final step was taken in the church doctrine of persecution. Leo the Great, the first of the popes, in a strict sense of that term, drew the logical inference from the premises already provided for him by the Fathers of the church, when he declared that death is the appropriate penalty for heresy" (Henry Vedder, *Our New Testament*, pp. 97, 98).

The bitter persecutions poured out upon the Donatists were largely at the instigation of Augustine.

The Donatists contended for pure New Testament churches comprised only of those who evidenced personal salvation. They practiced a congregational form of church government. They baptized those who came to them from churches they considered to be heretical, arguing that baptism at the hands of men and churches that did not follow the New Testament faith is invalid.

They were labeled "rebaptizers," but their leaders argued that they believed in only *one* baptism: one true baptism. Donatist Pastor Petilian stated: "He who accuses me of baptizing twice, does not himself truly baptize once. ... The apostle Paul says there is one Lord, one faith, one

baptism; this one baptism we openly profess, and it is certain that they who think there are two, are insane” (David Benedict, *History of the Donatists*, 1875, p. 49).

Augustine opposed these people, arguing for a lax church discipline that allowed unregenerate pagans to be church members and immoral men to be church leaders. Augustine demanded that the Donatists submit to a centralized church system.

Because they refused to submit to these heresies, the ecclesiastical authorities joined hands with the secular powers to persecute them. Many of their church leaders were put to death and great numbers of them were forced into exile.

David Benedict, who labored for 10 years on his history of the Donatists, working largely from ancient Latin texts, gave the following summary:

“The Novatians and Donatists were called Puritans because they held that the visible church of Jesus Christ does not, and ought not to, consist of any but those who are free from spots and falls, and that all others should be cast out. When the Catholic church was notoriously full of bad members, it was said by Augustine, the Donatist discipline would split it into a thousand schisms. The reforms of North Africa, unlike the reformers of later times, did not leave their work half done. Having repudiated the head of the church which they left, they also disowned its members, its baptisms, its ordinations, and all its official unctions; and all who came to them from the old body, whether bishops, elders, deacons or lay members, were required to be rebaptized, reordained and reappointed

in their new connection, in their different stations" (Benedict, *History of the Donatists*, pp. 186, 187).

Though we would not agree with the Donatists on every point of doctrine or practice, we have included this testimony because these ancient Christians have been either ignored or libeled in many church histories.

And also because they were among the first Christians to be persecuted by the spirit of error represented by Rome.

Had the Bible truly been their "sole authority," every Protestant leader would have plainly and consistently renounced Rome's persecuting spirit, but they did not.

Huldreich Zwingli

Huldreich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland, was a persecutor.

Before adopting Baptist principles, Anabaptist leaders Conrad Grebel (1498-1526), Felix Manz, and George Cajacob were associated with Zwingli in the beginning of his work in Zurich.

Unlike Zwingli, they moved beyond Protestantism and state churchism to a true New Testament faith and practice.

By the end of 1524, Grebel and Manz had taken a position against infant baptism and wanted to establish a true church composed only of regenerate baptized members with a simple Lord's Supper as a memorial meal.

On January 17, 1525, a disputation between Zwingli and those opposed to infant baptism was conducted in Zurich before the city council.

The decision was not long in coming. The next day the council decreed that all infants must be baptized within eight days of birth, and those who did not baptize their infants would be banished from the city. Another decree on January 21 forbade all opponents of infant baptism to meet together or to speak in public.

The day of the first city council proclamation, Grebel, Manz, Cajacob, and others of like mind met together in defiance of the decree.

Though they defied a man-made decree, they were not rebels or heretics. They determined to form a church based upon biblical principles as they saw them. Cajacob was first baptized by Grebel upon confession of his faith in Christ; Cajacob, in turn, baptized the others. The baptism was by pouring, but they later adopted immersion. Within a week, 35 more were baptized.

In March of that year, the Zwingli-influenced city council issued a strong edict against the Anabaptists, which was ratified in November:

“You know without doubt, and have heard from many that for a long time, some peculiar men, who imagine that they are learned, have come forward astonishingly, and without any evidence of the Holy Scriptures, given as a pretext by simple and pious men, have preached, and without the permission and consent of the church, have proclaimed that infant baptism did not proceed from God, but from the devil, and, therefore, ought not to be practiced. . . . We, therefore, ordain and require that hereafter all men, women, boys and girls forsake rebaptism, and shall not make use of it hereafter, and shall let infants be baptized; whoever shall act contrary to this public edict shall be fined for every offense, one mark; and IF ANY BE DISOBEDIENT AND STUBBORN THEY SHALL BE TREATED WITH SEVERITY; for, the obedient we will protect; the disobedient we will punish according to his deserts, without fail; by this all are to conduct themselves. All this we confirm by this public document, stamped with the seal of our city, and given on St. Andrew’s Day, A. D., 1525.”

The Anabaptists and their leaders, including Grebel and Manz, were thrown into prison.

In December 1527, Felix Manz, Jacob Falk, and Henry Reiman were put to death by drowning.

The council had decreed, *Qui mersus fuerit mergatur*, or “He who immerses shall be immersed.” The Protestant leader Gastins wrote, “They like immersion, so let us immerse them” (*De Anabaptiami*, 8. Basite, 1544, cited by Christian). The Baptists were delivered to the executioner, who bound their hands, placed them in a boat and threw them into the water. Some Protestants mockingly called this the “third baptism.”

The Baptist martyr Felix Manz (or Mans, Mentz) (1498-1527) was a very learned man, skilled in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. As he was led through Zurich to the boat, he praised God that he was going to die for the truth of the Word of God. His old mother and faithful brother exhorted him to be steadfast unto death. After declaring, “In thy hands, Lord, I commend my spirit,” he was cruelly drowned. Protestant leader Henry Bullinger in Geneva wrote an account of Manz’s execution and supported it (*Reformations Geschichte*, II. 382, cited by Christian).

Balthasar Hubmaier

Another Baptist that was tormented by those influenced in Zwingli’s Zurich was Balthasar Hubmaier..

He was a very learned man and had been a close friend with Zwingli in earlier days, and they had fought together against Roman Catholicism. But Hubmaier desired to follow the Bible in all matters and he rejected infant baptism and became a Baptist.

He wrote powerful books in defense of his faith and one was in defense of believer's baptism. He said, "The command is to baptize those who believe. To baptize those who do not believe, therefore, is forbidden." He was right.

He also wrote one against persecution, titled "Concerning Heretics and Those That Burn Them." He taught that it is not the will of Jesus Christ to put men to death for their beliefs, that the churches are in the business of saving men, not burning them.

He was thrown into prison by the Zurich Protestants in January 1526 and kept there for four months. His appeal to his old friend Zwingli was ignored. His wife also was in prison and his health was broken. He had just gotten over a sickness that was almost unto death.

In this sad and discouraged condition, he was tortured on the rack by the Protestant authorities; and on April 6, 1526, the broken man agreed to recant his beliefs.

The people of Zurich were summoned to the cathedral to hear the recantation of this well-known Baptist preacher. Zwingli first preached a sermon against the heretics. Then every eye turned to Hubmaier, who went forward to

read the recantation. As he began to do so in a trembling voice, he broke down weeping. As he swayed to and fro in agony, he was suddenly strengthened by the Lord. He shouted, “INFANT BAPTISM IS NOT OF GOD, AND MEN MUST BE BAPTIZED BY FAITH IN CHRIST!” Pandemonium broke out! Some screamed against him while others shouted applause. The Zurich authorities quickly took him back to the dungeon.

There he wrote these blessed words of prayer to God:

“O, immortal God, this is my faith. I confess it with heart and mouth, and have testified it publicly before the Church in baptism. I faithfully pray thee graciously keep me in it until my end, and should I be forced from it out of mortal fear and timidity, by tyranny, torture, sword, fire or water, I now appeal to thee. O, my compassionate Father, raise me up again by the grace of thy Holy Spirit, and suffer me not to depart without this faith. This, I pray thee from the bottom of my heart, through Jesus Christ, thy most beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour. Father, in thee do I put my Trust, let me never be ashamed.”

That prayer was answered, because Hubmaier went on for the Lord and was faithful unto death. After he was allowed to leave Zurich, he moved to Moravia, where he had a very fruitful ministry and a harvest of souls were brought to the Lord.

On March 10, 1528, in Vienna, he was burned to death at the stake, and he died in the faith that he preached. His faithful Christian wife was drowned eight days later.

About that time, Zwingli wrote a vicious book against the Anabaptists.

It was called *Elenchus contra Catbaptistas*, or *A Refutation of the Tricks of the Catabaptists or Drowners*.

He called Anabaptists “wild asses” and other insulting terms and said their immersions were from Hell and that the Anabaptists themselves would go to Hell.

About that time, persecution was instigated against Baptists in St. Gall, Switzerland.

Baptist preachers such as Konrad Grebel and Eberle Polt were preaching with great success at St. Gall and thousands from throughout that part of the country were confessing Christ and taking believer’s baptism.

At the instigation of Zwingli. the St. Gall city council determined to persecute them by drowning if they refused to leave the territory. On September 9, 1527, they issued the following decree:

“In order that the dangerous, wicked, turbulent and seditious sect of the Baptists may be eradicated, we have thus decreed: If any one is suspected of rebaptism, he is to be warned by the magistracy to leave the territory under penalty of the designated punishment [to be drowned]. Every person is obliged to report those favorable to rebaptism. Whoever shall not comply with this ordinance is liable to punishment according to the sentence of the magistracy. Teachers of rebaptism, baptizing preachers, and leaders of hedge meetings ARE TO BE DROWNED. Those previously released from prison who have sworn to

desist from such things, shall incur the same penalty. Foreign Baptists are to be driven out; if they return THEY SHALL BE DROWNED. No one is allowed to secede from the [Zwinglian] church and to absent himself from the Holy Supper. Whoever flees from one jurisdiction to another shall be banished or extradited upon demand”

The decree on March 26, 1530, was even more severe:

“All who adhere to or favor the false sect of the Baptists, and who attend hedge-meetings, shall suffer the most severe punishments. BAPTIST LEADERS, THEIR FOLLOWERS, AND PROTECTORS SHALL BE DROWNED WITHOUT MERCY. Those, however, who assist them, or fail to report or to arrest them shall be punished otherwise on body and goods as injurious and faithless subjects.”

This Protestant inquisition was very similar to the Roman Catholic one.

The Protestants required that every citizen submit to their doctrine and practice upon pain of death. They required that every citizen become a spy to report on the presence of dissidents. Not only were the dissidents persecuted, so were those who helped them in any way, including those who even failed to report them.

Zwingli was a hypocrite in the matter of persecution.

He spoke against the Catholics when they persecuted Protestants, but he supported the persecution of Baptists. In his sixty-seven theses against Rome, Zwingli had said: “No compulsion should be employed in the case of such as do not acknowledge their error, unless by their

sedition conduct they disturb the peace of others.” Yet, he ignored his own rule and compelled others to believe as he did. The Baptists were not seditionists. They were not trying to overthrow the government. They merely desired to practice their own faith in peace.

Protestant persecutions in Switzerland continued in the 17th century.

“At the council of Geneva, 1632, Nicholas Anthoine was condemned to be first hanged and then burned for opposing the doctrine of the Trinity; and at Basil and Zurich, since the Reformation, heresy was a crime punishable with death, as the fate of David George and Felix abundantly prove” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, p. xxviii).

As late as 1671, seven hundred persons, homeless and destitute, were driven out of Berne.

Great was the suffering of old and young (Richard Cook, *The Story of the Baptists*, 1888, p. 65).

John Calvin

John Calvin in Geneva was a persecutor.

1. Calvin established a church state in Geneva and enforced his doctrine and principles at the point of the sword.

In *The Right to Heresy*, Stefan Zweig describes the tyranny of Calvin's regime:

"Once a month, rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, had to submit to the questioning of professional '*police des mœurs*.' for hours (since the ordinances declared that such examination must be done in leisurely fashion), white-haired, respectable, tried, and hitherto trusted men, must be examined like schoolboys as to whether they knew the prayers by heart, or as to why they had failed to attend one of Master Calvin's sermons. But with such catechizing and moralizing, the visitation was by no means at an end. The members of this moral Cheka thrust fingers into every pie. They felt the women's dresses to see whether their skirts were not too long or too short, whether these garments had superfluous frills or dangerous slits. The police carefully inspected the coiffure, to see that it did not tower too high; they counted the rings on the victim's fingers, and looked to see how many pairs of shoes there were in the cupboard. From the bedroom they passed on to the kitchen table, to ascertain whether the prescribed diet was not being exceeded by a soup or a course of meat, or whether sweets and jams were hidden away somewhere. Then the pious policeman would continue his examination of the rest of the house. He pried into bookshelves, on the chance of there being a book devoid of the Consistory's *imprimatur* ... The servants were asked about the behaviour of their masters, and

the children were cross-questioned as to the doings of their parents. ...

“Prohibited were theatres, amusements, popular festivals, any kind of dancing or playing. Even so innocent a sport as skating stirred Calvin’s bile. The only tolerated attire was sober and almost monkish. The tailors, therefore, were forbidden, unless they had special permission from the town authorities, to cut in accordance with new fashions. Girls were forbidden to wear silk before they reached the age of fifteen years; above that age, they were not allowed to wear velvet. ... Lace was forbidden; gloves were forbidden; frills and slashed shoes were forbidden. Forbidden was the use of litters and of wheeled carriages. Forbidden were family feasts to which more than twenty persons had been invited ... No other wine than the red wine of the region might be drunk, while game, whether four footed or winged, and pastry, were prohibited. Married folk were not allowed to give one another presents at the wedding, or for six months afterwards. ... No book might be printed without a special permit. ... Although for hundreds of years the names of Claude and Amade had been popular, they were not prohibited because they did not occur in the Bible. ... Forbidden as a crime of crimes was any criticism of Calvin’s dictatorship; and the town crier, preceded by drummers, solemnly warned the burghers that ‘there must be no discussion of public affairs except in the presence of the Town Council’” (Zweig, *The Right to Heresy*, pp. 221-225).

Capital punishment was applied for many reasons. During the first five years of Calvin’s rule in the small town of Geneva, 13 people were hanged, 10 decapitated, and 35 burned. Seventy-six were cruelly driven from their houses. The prisons were so crowded that the head jailer “informed the magistrates he could not find accommodation for any more prisoners” (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 227).

People were put into prison for smiling while attending a baptism and sleeping during a sermon and playing skittles or cards and talking about business matters after a church service. They were forced to do various forms of penance for skating or praising a translation of the Bible not approved by Calvin.

A man who protested Calvin's doctrine of predestination was "mercilessly flogged at all the crossways of the city and then expelled" (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 230).

2. On October 27, 1553, the Geneva government burned to death Michael Servetus for heresy.

Michael Servetus, a physician and a self-taught theologian, held Unitarian views and was definitely a false teacher, but the New Testament nowhere instructs the churches to kill or imprison false teachers. (Servetus also rejected the doctrine of infant baptism.)

As undergraduates Servetus and Calvin had met in Paris, and later, after Servetus adopted anti-Trinitarian doctrine, he wrote to Calvin in Geneva and tried to proselytize him into Unitarianism. At the end of this correspondence Calvin wrote to his fellow reformer William Farel and said:

"Servetus wrote to me lately, and beside his letter sent me a great volume full of his ravings, maintaining with incredible presumption in the letter that I shall there find things stupendous and unheard of till now. He declares himself ready to come hither if I wish him to; but I shall not pledge my faith to him; FOR IF HE DID

COME HERE, I WOULD SEE TO IT, IN SO FAR AS I HAVE AUTHORITY IN THIS CITY, THAT THE SHOULD NOT LEAVE IT ALIVE" (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 263).

Servetus was first condemned as a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church in France for his anti-Trinitarian doctrine in April 1553, but he escaped from prison and avoided the stake for the moment. It was left for the Protestants to burn him.

On August 13 of the same year Servetus arrived in Geneva. No one knows why he would visit Geneva after being so harshly treated by Calvin in letters, but he did and he even attended a church service at the city cathedral where Calvin was preaching. Recognizing him, Calvin ordered him arrested, and the foreign stranger was welcomed into Reformed Geneva by being placed in chains in a prison cell. He was charged with 23 points of heresy and condemned. When early in the trial it appeared that the Town Council was merely going to order Servetus deported, Calvin visited the Council personally for the first time and asked for permission to attend the proceedings. "From the moment when Calvin autocratically thrust himself in between the accused and the judges, Servetus's cause was lost. ... Calvin had got his way and wrote joyfully to a friend: 'I hope he will be condemned to death'" (*The Right to Heresy*, pp. 276, 277).

For two months Servetus was kept in prison.

"[He] was kept like a condemned murderer in a cold and damp cell, with irons on hands and feet. His

clothes hung in rags upon his freezing body; he was not provided with a change of linen. The most primitive demands of hygiene were disregarded. In his bitter need, Servetus petitioned the Council for more humane treatment, writing: 'Fleas are devouring me; my shoes are torn to pieces; I have nothing clean to wear.' ... [He] was left to languish in his cell as a mangy dog might have been left to die upon a dunghill" (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 281).

Calvin wrote to the other four Reformed synods of Switzerland--Zurich, Basle, Berne, and Schaffhausen--and all agreed that Servetus should be condemned as a heretic. None of them warned Calvin that Servetus should not be put to death. Zurich wrote: "We leave it to your wisdom to decide how this man should be punished."

On October 27 Servetus was taken out of prison in his befouled rags and taken to the place of punishment. "His beard tangled, his visage dirty and wasted, his chains rattling, he tottered as he walked, and his ashen tint was ghastly on that clear autumn day."

He crawled on his knees to the assembled authorities and begged to be decapitated before his body was burned, but they refused unless he would recant, which he would not do. He said that if he was wrong and if he had sinned, "it had been unwittingly; for he had always been impelled by the one thought of promoting the divine honour."

As he was taken to the stake he said: "O God, save my soul, O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me."

He begged those present to pray with him and for him.

Chains attached to a stake were put around Servetus' body and wood was piled around. A copy of the book he had written against Trinitarianism was placed between the chains and the stake, and the faggots were lighted.

“When the flames rose around him, Servetus uttered so dreadful a cry that many of the onlookers turned their eyes away from the pitiful sight. Soon the smoke interposed a veil in front of the writhing body, but the yells of agony grew louder and louder, until at length came an imploring scream: ‘Jesus, Son of the everlasting God, have pity on me!’ The struggle with death lasted half an hour” (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 292).

Servetus' death sentence was supported not only by Calvin, but also by Philip Melanchthon in Germany and by other Protestant leaders who were consulted about the case.

3. Other men were put to death for “heresy” under Calvin’s tenure and later when Geneva was still under control of Reformed doctrine.

“Jacques Gruet was racked and then executed for calling Calvin a hypocrite” (*The Right to Heresy*, p. 230). “So entirely was he in favour of persecuting measures, that he wrote a treatise in defence of them, maintaining the lawfulness of putting heretics to death; and he reduced these rigid theories to practice, in his conduct towards Castellio, Jerom Bolsee, and Servetus, whose fates are too generally known to require being here repeated. At

the council of Geneva, 1632, Nicholas Anthoine was condemned to be first hanged and then burned for opposing the doctrine of the Trinity...” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, p. xxviii).

4. In the days of King Edward VI of England, Calvin wrote a letter to Lord Protector Somerset and urged him to put Anabaptists to death:

“These altogether deserve to be well punished by the sword, seeing that they do conspire against God, who had set him in his royal seat” (John Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. 1, chap. 15).

Historian John Christian observes that Calvin “was responsible in a large measure for the demon of hate and fierce hostility which the Baptists of England had to encounter.”

The Calvinists in Holland

The Calvinists in Holland persecuted the Arminians.

“If we pass over into Holland, we shall also find that the reformers there, were, most of them, in the principles and measures of persecution. ... the most outrageous quarrel of all was that between the Calvinists and Arminians. ... The moment the two parties had thus got a dogma to dispute upon, the controversy became irreconcilable, and was conducted with the most outrageous violence. The ministers of the predestinarian party would enter into no treaty; the remonstrants [non-Calvinists] were the objects of their furious zeal, whom they denominated, mamalukes, devils and plagues; animating the magistrates to destroy them; and when the time of the new elections drew near, they prayed to God for such men as would be zealous, even to blood, though it were to cost the whole trade of their cities. At length, a synod being assembled, acted in the usual manner; they laid down the principles of faith with confidence, condemned the doctrine of the remonstrants; deprived their antagonists of all their offices; and concluded by humbly beseeching God and their high mightinesses, to put their decrees into execution, and to ratify the doctrine they had expressed. The states obliged them in this Christian and charitable request, for as soon as the synod was concluded, Barnwelt, a friend of the remonstrants and their opinions, was beheaded, and Grotius condemned to perpetual imprisonment; and because the dissenting ministers would not promise wholly, and always to abstain from the exercise of their religious functions, the states passed a resolution for banishing them, on pain, if they did not submit to it, of being treated as disturbers of the public peace” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, pp. xxviii, xxix).

Lutherans

Lutherans in Germany were persecutors.

Martin Luther

It is important to understand that Martin Luther changed his position in many important ways. In the early days of his reformation, for example, Luther taught that the proper mode of baptism is immersion.

He changed in regard to baptism. In his German New Testament, he translated baptize as “dip,” which is a good translation in that the term means to put into the water and take out of the water. The term “immersion,” on the other hand, does not have the connotation of taking out of the water.

In 1518, he taught not only that the word “baptize” means to immerse but that the significance of the ordinance points to immersion. “That also the signification of baptism demands, for it signifies that the old man and sinful birth from the flesh and blood shall be completely drowned through the grace of God. Therefore, a man should sufficiently perform the signification and a right perfect sign. The sign rests, in this, that a man plunge a person in water in the name of the Father, etc., but does not leave him therein but lifts him out again; therefore it is called being lifted out of the font or depths. And so must all of both of these things be the sign; the dipping and the lifting out. Thirdly, the signification is a saving death of the sins and of the

resurrection of the grace of God. The baptism is a bath of the new birth. Also a drowning of the sins in the baptism” (Luther, *Opera Lutheri*, I. 319. Folio edition).

Luther sounds like a Baptist here, but at the same time, he defended the unscriptural practice of baptizing infants; and he soon gave up the debate on baptism and became an enemy of the Anabaptists.

Luther also changed in regard to persecution and bloodshed. Early on in his reformation career, Luther did not support the death sentence against false teachers, though he supported their persecution short of death and their banishment. “Though naturally of a very warm and violent temper, he was averse to punishing heretics with death. He says in his writings, I am very averse to the shedding of blood, even in case of such as deserve it; I dread it the more, because, as the Papists and Jews, under this pretence, have destroyed holy prophets and innocent men, so I am afraid the same would happen amongst ourselves, if, in one single instance, it should be allowed to be lawful to put seducers to death. I can, therefore, by no means consent that false teachers should be destroyed. But as to all other punishments, he seems to think they may, lawfully, be employed: for after the above passage, he adds, it is sufficient that they be banished. Agreeably to these principles, he persuaded the electors of Saxony not to tolerate, in their dominions, the followers of Zuinglius, in their opinion of the sacrament; nor to enter into any terms of union with them, for their common defence against the attempts of the catholics to destroy them. ... He also wrote to Albert, Duke of Prussia, to

persuade him to banish them from his territories” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, pp. xxvii, xxviii).

Luther changed dramatically later on. He supported the utter destruction of the revolting peasants.

“But when the peasants of Germany tried to apply this ‘liberty’ to themselves by overthrowing the tyrannical lords and gaining their independence, Luther raged against them: ‘The peasants would not listen; they would not let anyone tell them anything; their ears must be unbuttoned with bullets, till their heads jump off their shoulders. ... On the obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants, let no one have mercy, but let everyone, as he is able, hew, stab, slay, lay about him as though among mad dogs, . . . so that peace and safety may be maintained... etc.’ [Martin Luther, *Werke*, Erlangen edition, vol. 24, p. 294; vol.15, p. 276; passim.] Luther’s writing on the peasant wars are full of such expressions as the above. When he was in later years reproached for such violent language, and for inciting territorial lords to merciless slaughter (they killed over 100,000 peasants), he answered defiantly: ‘It was I, Martin Luther, who slew all the peasants in the insurrection, for I commanded them to be slaughtered. All their blood is upon my shoulders. But I cast it on our Lord God who commanded me to speak in this way.’[Martin Luther, *Werke*, Erlangen edition, vol. 59, p. 284] (William McGrath, *Anabaptists: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, http://www.pbministries.org/History/William%20R.%20McGrath/the_anabaptists_part1.htm).

Luther also turned against the anabaptists he had once sympathized with. “Sadder yet, Luther reacted with equal violence to the Anabaptists who tried to apply the principle of ‘liberty’ to themselves. Though he knew there were both nonresistant, harmless Anabaptists as

well as a radical fringe of social revolutionaries, he condemned all together--favoring a policy of extermination” (William McGrath, *Anabaptists: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, http://www.pbministries.org/History/William%20R.%20McGrath/the_anabaptists_part1.htm).

Other Lutheran Persecutions

In 1529, the imposing **DIET OF SPEIRS** (Speyer) pronounced the death sentence upon all Anabaptists. This council was composed of both Roman Catholic and Protestant princes and heads of state. They hated each other and did not get along even in this Diet, but they hated the Anabaptists even more!

The proclamation of the Diet greatly accelerated the program of extermination already in progress.

“Four hundred special police were hired to hunt down Anabaptists and execute them on the spot. The group proved too small and was increased to one thousand. ... thousands of Anabaptists fell victim to one of the most widely spread persecutions in Christian history. ... Burning faggots and smoldering stakes marked their trek across Europe” (Halley).

In 1538, the Lutheran Elector of Hesse in Germany wrote to King Henry VIII of England and urged him to persecute the Anabaptists. He testified: “There are no rulers in Germany, whether they be Papists or professor of the doctrines of the Gospel [Protestants], that do suffer these men if they do come into their hands. All men punish them quickly. We use a just moderation, which

God requireth of all good rulers. If any do stubbornly defend the ungodly and wicked errors of that sect, yielding nothing to such as can and do teach them truly, these are kept a good space in prison, and sometimes sore punished there; yet in such sort are they handled, that death is long deferred, for hope of amendment; and as long as any hope is, favour is showed to life. If there be no hope left, then the obstinate are put to death” (Evans, *The Early English Baptists*, chapter 2). That was Protestant “moderation”!

“Seckendorf also tells us, that the Lutheran lawyers of Wittenburg, condemned to death one Pestelius, for being a Zuinglian, though this was disapproved by the elector of Saxony. Several of the Anabaptists were also put to death, by the Lutherans, for their obstinacy in propagating their errors” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, p. xxviii).

Urbanus Rhegius

Urbanus Rhegius was a Lutheran leader in Augsburg who persecuted Baptists.

He published a book against the Baptists in 1528. The illustration on the title page demonstrated the hatred of the Lutherans against this sect. It shows a river running into a large ocean-like expanse of water. The Baptists are depicted tumbling into the water and then being carried out to sea into a flaming fire. Thus, the waters of believer’s baptism are described as the pathway to Hell. This was a standard Protestant position in that day.

Rhegius was the chief instigator of persecutions in the Protestant city of Augsburg. Historian Philip Schaff, who was a Lutheran himself and certainly was not prejudiced against Protestants, said, “Rhegius stirred up the magistrates against them” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VI. 578).

Hans Koch and Leonard Meyster were put to death in 1524.

Rhegius caused Baptist Pastor Hans Denk to be driven out of the city in 1527.

He caused Pastor Langenmantel to be arrested and banished in October of that year.

Leonard Snyder was put to death in 1527.

Many died in prison, including Hans Hut, whose dead body was burned in the public square in Augsburg.

Baptist pastor Seebold was put to death in April 1528, and 12 more were killed later that year.

Many were tortured and branded. One had his tongue cut out for speaking against infant baptism.

Oslander

The Lutheran reformer Oslander in Nuremberg, Germany, persecuted and threatened death to Anabaptists in his area.

Hans Denk, who later pastored the large Baptist church in Strasburg, was appointed principal of the Lutheran St. Sebald's school in Nuremberg. At that time, Denk was just beginning to come to the formation of his Anabaptist views and he soon came into conflict with the Protestants.

In January 1525, Denk was banished from the city by Osiander and was warned that if he ever again came within 10 miles of it, he would be put to death.

Denk moved to Augsburg, was baptized by the Anabaptist preacher Hubmaier, and became the pastor of a strong Baptist church in that city numbering 1,100.

Eventually, the aforementioned Lutheran leader Urbanus Rhegius persecuted Denk out of Augsburg.

Martin Bucer

Another well-known Lutheran leader was Martin Bucer (1491-1551). He was influential in Augsburg, Germany, and sought to have the city council persecute the Anabaptists.

Bucer was constantly frustrated with the city Council because they hesitated to persecute the Anabaptists as fiercely as he desired, calling this "the sin of the Senate."

In the case of Pilgram Marbeck and others, he was successful.

Marbeck was a noted civil engineer who had been forced to flee Catholic-controlled Tyrol because of persecution.

He arrived in Augsburg in 1530 and preached boldly not only against Rome's errors but also against those of the Protestant Reformers.

When he published two books defending his views in 1531, the city council forbade their distribution and summoned him to give account.

Bucer was there and opposed him, and on December 18, the council banished the Anabaptist preacher in the midst of winter, Bucer supporting the cruel decree.

In 1529, the Protestant-influenced council in Augsburg imprisoned Anabaptist preachers Jacob Kantz and Reublin in dank cells in the tower.

Kantz had called the Reformers "unskilled carpenters, who tear down much, but are unable to put anything together." It was a true sentiment from a Baptist point of view, but the Protestants didn't care much for it.

While in prison, the Baptists wrote in defense of believer's baptism as a symbolic expression of internal faith in Christ. They said that "faith confessed is wine, and baptism is the sign hung out to show that wine is within."

In 1534, the city Council drove all of the Baptists from the city with only eight days warning.

The next year, the Protestant city council proclaimed that all infants must be baptized or the parents would be punished, and no one was to give any shelter or assistance to Anabaptists.

In 1538, not having gotten rid of all of the hated Anabaptists, the council of Protestant Augsburg proclaimed that those who returned to the city the first time would lose a finger, be branded in the cheek, or put in the neck-iron. If they returned again, they would be drowned. With a straight face, the proclamation added, “We do this, not to make men believe as we do. It is not a matter of faith, but to prevent division in the Church.” Well, the division had to do strictly with matters of faith!

The Church of England

The Church of England (Anglican Church) was also a terrible persecutor.

The Anglican Church was formed in 1534 by King Henry VIII, and from then until almost the end of the 17th century Baptists and others who refused to submit to the national church were persecuted.

Under Henry VIII

Consider the persecution of Baptists in the days of King Henry VIII after his split with Rome.

Henry came to the throne in 1509 and three times during his reign he denounced Anabaptists through official proclamations. This is conclusive proof, by the way, that there were Baptists in England at this early time.

In 1534 Henry broke with Rome and formed the Church of England.

In 1535, twenty-eight Hollanders were arrested and fourteen were burned to death, at least one of them a woman. The historian Stowe says they denied that Christ was both God and man, but it is not possible at this time to know exactly what they believed with certainty beyond what their enemy charged upon them. Latimer, who was chaplain under Henry and who later was burned himself by Queen Mary, described their death and said

they went to the stake “without any fear in the world, cheerfully.”

According to Foxe, quoting the registers of London, nineteen other Anabaptists were put to death in various parts of the realm in 1535.

In October 1538, the king appointed Thomas Cranmer, the new Archbishop of Canterbury (following the death of Warham), to head a commission to prosecute Baptists wherever they were found. He commanded that the books of the Baptists were to be confiscated and burned. “Even our reformers who had seen the flames which the catholics had kindled against their brethren, yet lighted fires themselves to consume those who differed with them. Cranmer’s hands were stained with the blood of several. John Lambert and Ann Askew will ever bear witness to his destroying zeal” (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, p. xxix).

In 1539, two more Anabaptists were burned.

Anne Askew was imprisoned, tortured, and finally burned to death in July 1546. She was put to death at the hands of the Church of England after it had separated from Rome.

After the 24-year-old woman was condemned to die and was imprisoned in the London Tower to await execution, her persecutors attempted to get her to inform on other believers. They also hoped to gain information against Queen Catherine herself, the wife of Henry VIII. When

Anne refused to give them any information, they put the frail woman upon the rack and commanded Sir Anthony Knyvet, Lieutenant of the Tower, to instruct his jailer to torture her. He did so, but not very strenuously, being mindful of her feminine nature. Not being satisfied with the racking given to her by the Lieutenant, Thomas Wriothesley, chancellor of England, and Master Rich, the Solicitor-General, angrily took control of the rack with their own hands and treated the godly woman with an inhuman viciousness. So intent were they on gaining the names of any high-placed ladies who believed in the grace of Jesus Christ, they cruelly tortured her, pulling her bones and joints out of place, so much so that she was unable to walk after that and had to be carried to her execution in a chair. All the while, she did not cry out and bore their wicked torments with the patient grace given to her of the Lord, refusing to turn any of her friends over to the tormenters. She finally swooned from the pain, and Sir Knyvet took her up in his arms and laid her on the floor. When she awoke and while she was still lying on the hard stone floor, Wriothesley remained by her for two hours longer attempting to talk her into recanting her religious views.

In her written testimony, the brave Christian woman gave a glorious witness to her faith in Jesus Christ and in His blood and grace alone for salvation, and she stated that her sole authority was the Bible. Though her father, husband, and son had abandoned her because of her faith, and though she was hated by the rulers of her own country, we can be sure that this humble Christian lady was not abandoned by her Heavenly Father. “When my

father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up” (Psalm 27:10).

Anne and three other dissenters against the Church of England were brought to the place of execution on July 16, 1546. When they were chained to a stake, they were offered a pardon if they would sign a recantation. They refused even to look at the paper containing the pardon and stated that they had not come to that place to deny their Lord. At that, the fire was lit and Anne and her friends in Christ were burned to death by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Other Baptists suffered during the reign of Henry VIII, the father of the Church of England.

Under Edward VI

Upon the death of Henry in 1547, his young son Edward VI reigned for six years.

Edward stopped the persecution against Protestants and even granted pardon to criminals; but the persecution of Baptists continued. At least two Baptists were burned at the stake during Edward’s reign.

Even so, the number of Baptists rapidly increased. Bishop John Hooper wrote in 1549 to complain about the “Anabaptist flock” in London that “give me much trouble.” It is obvious by other statements of the church authorities that at that time there was an organized Baptist church that kept the ordinances. We have already

seen Baptists in London during the reign of Henry. There were also Baptist churches in the district of Kent in the first half of the 1500s. In June of 1550 Bishop Hooper wrote, “That district is troubled with the frenzy of the Anabaptists more than any other part of the kingdom” (Ellis, *Original Letters*, I. 87).

Humphrey Middleton was one of the Baptists that were kept imprisoned for years during Edward’s reign. This brutal tactic was supported by the Protestant reformer Thomas Cranmer.

“When Cranmer pronounced his harsh sentence [against Middleton], the intrepid Baptist replied, “Reverend sir, pass what sentence you think fit upon us. But that you may not say that you were not forewarned, I testify that your turn may be next.” It was only a few years later that the Protestant Cranmer, who had supported the imprisonment and burning of the Baptists, was himself burned by the Catholic Mary (Evans, *Early English Baptists*, volume 1; Foxe, *Martyrs*).

In May 1549, **Joan Boucher** was arrested. She was an Anabaptist from Kent, probably a member of a small congregation in the town of Eythorne. She was a lady of wealth and had frequented the royal court during the days of Henry VIII and Edward. She was also an intimate friend of the godly Anne Askew who was burned during the reign of Henry VIII, and, like Anne, loved the Tyndale New Testament and distributed copies of it to others at great danger to herself. She carried copies of this prohibited book under her clothing on her visits to the court and elsewhere. She also visited prisoners and

used her wealth to relieve those who were suffering for their faith.

Upon her arrest, Joan was charged with “holding that Christ was not incarnate of the Virgin Mary,” but the charge was not true. She held an eccentric and erroneous belief that Mary had two seeds, one natural and one spiritual, and that Christ was the spiritual seed. In reading the accounts of the trial, it is difficult to know exactly what she meant, but this much is clear: she plainly testified that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born and that she accepted Christ as both man and God and as the virgin-born Son of God. Thus, if she believed some strange thing about Mary’s seed, it was certainly not a greater heresy than infant baptism and baptismal regeneration and the sinlessness of Mary, all of which were held by those who condemned Joan.

The Church of England had Joan of Kent burned to death on May 2, 1550.

The other Baptist who suffered martyrdom under Edward VI was **George van Pare** (or Parris), a surgeon from Germany. It is a sad blot upon an otherwise good name that the Bible translator Miles Coverdale sat as a judge at Pare’s trial. Pare was burned alive in April 1551. “He suffered with great constancy of mind, and kissed the stake and faggots that were to burn him” (Burnet, *History of the Reformation*, II).

Another example of Protestant persecutors in England is John Hooper. He was a leader in the Church of England

during the reign of Edward, and in 1549, he wrote to Protestant leader Henry Bullinger in Geneva to complain about the “Anabaptist flock” in London that “give me much trouble” (Ellis, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, I. 65). The Protestant Hooper, who persecuted Baptists, was later burned by the Catholic Queen Mary.

Another example is Nicholas Ridley, who was burned by Mary on October 17, 1555 (at the same time as Latimer). Like Thomas Cranmer, Ridley was involved in the death sentence of Joan Boucher (Joan of Kent) during the reign of Edward VI. After Joan was arrested in 1548, Ridley attempted to get her to renounce her doctrine. She was an Anabaptist from Kent, probably a member of a small congregation in the town of Eythorne. She was an intimate friend of the godly Anne Askew who was burned during the reign of Henry VIII. Joan was charged with “holding that Christ was not incarnate of the Virgin Mary,” but the charge was not true. The Church of England had Joan of Kent burned to death on April 30, 1549. Ridley was also involved with the burning of George Van Pare in 1551. This Anabaptist’s death sentence was signed by Ridley, Cranmer, and Coverdale.

Protestant John Philpot, who was burned by Mary on December 18, 1555, was also in favor of Joan of Kent’s burning. Philpot testified, “As for Joan of Kent, she was a vain woman (I knew her well), and a heretic indeed, well worthy to be burnt...” (Philpot’s *Work’s*, Parker Society, p. 55). So also said the Catholic Queen Mary about the Protestant Philpot.

Another example of this sad business is John Rogers. He, too, supported the burning of Anabaptist Joan Boucher. The historian John Foxe, who, to his credit, was opposed to the burning and who tried to save the woman from this trial, begged his friend Rogers to help him. Rogers refused, saying that she ought to be burned and spoke of death by burning as a light thing. Foxe seized the hand of Rogers and replied, “Well, it may so happen that you yourself will have your hands full of this mild burning” (Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, 1890). We wonder if Rogers thought about that statement, when a few years later he was led out to a pile of faggots and burned before his wife and 11 children under the Catholic Queen Mary.

Hugh Latimer was another of the famous Protestant reformers who supported the persecution and burning of Baptists during the reign of Edward. Latimer was burned by the Roman Catholic Queen Mary on October 17, 1555, but prior to this he dipped his own hands in the blood of the saints. He was bishop of London under Edward VI, and though he was reputed to be a kind man, that kindness didn’t extend to the Anabaptists. In one of his sermons preached before King Edward, Latimer called the Anabaptists “poisoned heretics” and referred to their burnings, callously remarking, “Well, let them go” (Cranmer’s *Sermons*, Parker Society, vol. v).

Concerning their own martyrs, the Protestants certainly have not evidenced the attitude of Cranmer, “Well, let them go” — in other words, good riddance. By no means

have they had this attitude. The Protestant historians, such as Foxe and Wylie and a thousand others, have raised great memorials to the memory of their own martyrs, but these same historians have generally raised nothing but reproach upon the memory of the Baptists.

Under Elizabeth I

Queen Elizabeth I followed the Roman Catholic Queen Mary and established the Church of England on a more Protestant footing.

Though Elizabeth gave freedom to Protestants and treated the Catholics leniently (even though they continually plotted against her throne and even her life), she treated the Baptists severely.

Baptists had increased in England and were scattered in many parts of the country. Langley, in his *English Baptists before 1602*, mentions churches in nine counties that trace their origin to the days between 1576 and 1600. These had grown up from the native preaching that had been going on for a long time. They also began to emigrate from Holland, from France, and other places hoping that a Protestant Queen in England would grant them more liberty than existed in their home countries.

Encouraged by the bishops of the Church of England, within months of coming to the throne, Elizabeth issued a proclamation that Anabaptists should be located and transported out of England, and if they did not leave,

they would be punished. She said the Anabaptists were “infected with dangerous opinions.”

On February 4, 1559, the High Commission Court was established by Parliament. The Queen issued an injunction against the preaching of any doctrine contrary to the Church of England.

She forbade the printing of any “heretical” book. She also set up “royal visitations” whereby representatives of the Crown were to go throughout the country in circuit with the power to search out all heretics.

By the end of 1559, the Act for the Uniformity of Religion was put into effect. It made the doctrine and practice of the Church of England the law of the land.

In June 1575, two Dutch Anabaptists were burned to death at Smithfield. Eleven had originally been condemned to burn after a trial in the consistory of St. Paul’s Cathedral, but nine were banished instead.

One of those who were burned was **HENDRICK TERWOOKT**. He was a young man, about 25, who had been married only a few weeks. He had fled to England to escape persecution in Fleming, thinking the Protestant Queen Elizabeth would be merciful.

The other man, **JAN PIETERS**, was an older man with a wife and nine children dependent on his labors. His first wife had been martyred in Flanders, and his current wife

was the widow of a martyr. Now she was made a widow of a martyr the second time.

The death warrants for these two men by the Protestant Queen were almost exactly the same as those issued by the Catholic Queen Mary.

“The queen would not relent. On the 15th of July she signed the warrant for the execution of two of them, commanding the sheriffs of London to burn them alive in Smithfield. A copy of the warrant is now before me. There is also before me a copy of the warrant for the burning of Archbishop Cranmer in Queen Mary’s days. These warrants are substantially alike. In fact, they are almost couched in the same language, word for word. Mary, the Papist, dooming to death the Protestant, and Elizabeth, the Protestant, ordering the execution of the Baptist, advance the same pretensions and adopt the same forms of speech. Both of these call their victims ‘heretics.’ Both assume to be ‘zealous for justice.’ Both are ‘defenders of the Catholic faith.’ Both declare their determination to ‘maintain and defend the holy church, her rights and liberties.’ Both avow their resolve to ‘root out and extirpate heresies and errors.’ Both assert that the heretics named in the warrants had been convicted and condemned ‘according to the laws and customs of the realm.’ Both charge the sheriffs to take their prisoners to a ‘public and open place,’ and there to ‘commit them to the fire,’ in the presence of the people, and to cause them to be ‘really consumed’ in the said fire. Both warn the sheriffs that they fail therein at their peril” (John Cramp, *Baptist History*, 1852).

The queen had no excuse for claiming that these men were dangerous to her throne. They had submitted to her the following statement of faith:

"We believe and confess that magistrates are set and ordained of God, to punish the evil and protect the good; which magistracy we desire from our hearts to obey, as it is written in 1 Peter 2:13, 'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.' 'For he beareth not the sword in vain' (Romans 13:4). And Paul teaches us that we should offer up for all 'prayers, and intercessions, and giving of thanks; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires that all men should be saved' (1 Tim. 2:1-4). He further teaches us 'to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be ready to every good work' (Titus 3:1). Therefore we pray your majesty kindly to understand aright our meaning; which is, that we do not despise the eminent, noble, and gracious queen, and her wise councils, but esteem them as worthy of all honor, to whom we desire to be obedient in all things that we may. For we confess with Paul, as above, that she is God's servant, and that if we resist this power, we resist the ordinance of God; for 'rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.' Therefore we confess to be due unto her, and are ready to give, tribute, custom, honor, and fear, as Christ himself has taught us, saying, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's' (Matt. 22:21). Since, therefore, she is a servant of God, we will kindly pray her majesty that it would please her to show pity to us poor prisoners, even as our Father in heaven is pitiful (Luke 6:36). We likewise do not approve of those who resist the magistrates; but confess and declare with our whole heart that we must be obedient and subject unto them, as we have here set down" (Von Braght, *Martyr's Mirror*, p. 929).

In 1593 two puritan ministers, Copping and Thacker, were hanged for nonconformity (J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions*, 1810, p. xxx).

About the time of the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Elizabeth appointed John Whitgift as Archbishop of Canterbury. In his zeal to bring all men into conformity with the Church of England, he filled the prisons with Baptists. "...eventually, some fifty-two were held for long periods in the 'most noisome and vile dungeons', without 'beds, or so much as straw to lie upon.'" In his sermons, Whitgift called Anabaptists "wayward and conceited persons." Some fled the country, but many remained and were persecuted.

The persecution largely drove the Baptists out of sight during Elizabeth's reign, but we know they continued to exist. The historian Strype describes a church in London in 1588 with "anabaptistical" views. He says they met together regularly on Sunday, preached the Word of God, took up offerings, sent assistance to their persecuted brethren in prison, did not regard the Church of England as a true church, rejected infant baptism, and held that the government should not meddle in religious beliefs.

Under James I

When Elizabeth died in 1603, James I (1566-1625) ascended the throne of England. He was the king who authorized the translation of that masterpiece of English Scripture, the King James Bible, which appeared in 1611.

He also persecuted Baptists with a passion. They were imprisoned, their goods confiscated, and one was burned.

The last man burned alive in England for his religion was **EDWARD WIGHTMAN**, a Baptist, in Smithfield on April 11, 1612, under James I. (A month earlier, Bartholomew Legate had also been burned. It is said that he was an Arian, meaning that he denied the deity of Christ.) A wide variety of “heresies” were charged against Wightman but as Thomas Crosby, author of *The History of the English Baptists* (1738) observes: “Many of the heresies they charge upon him are so foolish and inconsistent, that it very much discredits what they say. If he really held such opinions, he must either be an idiot or a madman, and ought rather to have had their prayers and assistance, than be put to such a cruel death” (Crosby, I, p. 108). Three of the articles upon which Wightman was burned are these: ‘That the baptizing of infants is an abominable custom: That the Lord’s-Supper and Baptism are not to be celebrated as they are now practised in the church of England: That Christianity is not wholly professed and preached in the church of England, but only in part.’ On these three articles I take my stand with the old Baptist martyr! It is an interesting fact that both the first and the last martyr burned in England for religion were Baptists. “The first who was put to this cruel death in England was William Sawtre, supposed upon very probable grounds to have denied infant-baptism; and this man, the last who was honoured with this kind of martyrdom, was expressly condemned for that opinion: so that this sect had the honour both of leading the way, and bringing up the rear of all the martyrs who were burnt alive in England” (Crosby, I, p. 109).

Others died during the reign of James I, but not by burning. They died in prison. This was not because of the kindness of the king, but because of the outcry of the people against burnings. Historian Thomas Fuller notes, “King James politiciely preferred that heretics hereafter, though condemned, should silently and privately waste themselves away in the prison, rather than to grace them, and amuse others, with the solemnity of a public execution, which in popular judgment usurped the honor of a persecution” (Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*). Thomas Crosby agrees: “King James chose therefore for the future only to seize their estates, and waste away their lives privately in nasty prisons, rather than honour them with such a publick martyrdom, which would unavoidably go under the name of persecution” (*The History of the English Baptists*, I, p. 110).

In 1610, the Baptists petitioned the House of Lords for release from prison where they were lying for conscience sake.

Approaching the assembly in a kindly and humble manner, the Baptist petition contains these touching words: “A most humble supplication of divers poor prisoners, and many others the King’s native loyal subjects ready to testify it by the oath of allegiance in all sincerity, whose grievances are lamentable, only for cause of conscience.”

The petition is preserved in the Library of the House of Lords and is marked “read and rejected.”

At least six of the men involved in the translation of the King James Bible participated in persecution against Baptists and other separatists in the 1590s.

Richard Bancroft, who drew up the instructions for the translation, had worked closely with Archbishop of Canterbury Whitgift “rooting out the Separatist congregations in London” (Adam Nicholson, *God’s Secretaries*, p. 86). Bancroft was aggressive in this activity, sending spies to search out the separatists. When Bancroft took over as Archbishop of Canterbury in Whitgift’s place, he continued the work of persecution against all “nonconformists.”

Lancelot Andrewes, sad to say, was involved in this sorry business. He was in charge of the interrogation of the separatists under Bancroft, and went down into the “noisome cells” himself in an attempt to find some heresy against the victims of the Anglican inquisition. He interrogated Henry Barrow, a leading separatist, in March 1590 in Fleet Prison.

Barlow began by emphasizing that his sole standard was the Bible, that “the Book of God should peaceably decide all our controversy.” He testified, “I willingly submit my whole faith to be tried and judged by the word of God.”

Andrewes responded that Christians should allow “the church” to interpret the Scripture and that they should not demand the right of private interpretation, should not, as he put it, have a “private spirit.”

Barrow complained about being imprisoned for three years and that “the loneliness of it, the sheer sensory deprivation, the nastiness of the conditions, had sunk him deep into depression” (Nicholson, p. 91).

Andrewes’ response to this pitiful plea is to his disgrace: “For close imprisonment, you are most happy. The solitary and contemplative life I hold the most blessed life. It is the life I would choose.”

Barrow understood how foolish this statement was and replied: “You speak philosophically, but not Christianly. So sweet is the harmony of God’s grace unto me in the congregation, and the conversation of the saints at all times, as I think myself as a sparrow on the house top when I am exiled thereby. But could you be content also, Mr. Andrewes, to be kept from exercise and air so long together? These are also necessary to a natural body.”

Andrewes had indeed answered philosophically and not Christianly. It is not Christianly to persecute those who believe differently, to toss them into prison cells and to burn them.

Barrows was put to death on April 6, 1593, after six years of imprisonment, and Andrewes talked to him again on the eve of his death. Barrows was condemned “for denying the authority of bishops, for denying the holiness of the English Church and its liturgy and denying the authority over it of the queen.”

Henry Savile was involved in these interrogations. He questioned Daniel Studley in Fleet Prison.

Thomas Sparkes interrogated the 18-year-old Roger Waters, who was kept in prison for a year “in chains in the worst of the stinking pits of Newgate gaol, known as the Limbo” (Nicholson, *God’s Secretaries*, p. 88).

Thomas Ravis took Bancroft’s place as bishop of London and continued in his persecuting footsteps. “No sooner had he taken his seat in London, than he stretched forth his hand to vex the non-conforming Puritans. Among others he cited before him that holy and blessed man, Richard Rogers, for nearly fifty years the faithful minister of Weathersfield, than whom, it is said, ‘the Lord honored none more in the conversion of souls.’ In the presence of this venerable man, who, for his close walking with God, was styled the Enoch of his day, Bishop Ravis protested, ‘By the help of Jesus, I will not leave one preacher in diocese, who doth not subscribe and conform.’ The poor prelate was doomed to be disappointed; as he died, before his task was well begun, on the 14th of December, 1609” (Alexander McClure, *The Translators Revived*, 1855).

George Abbot, who became Archbishop of Canterbury, was a persecutor. “He would not hesitate, later in his career, to use torture against miscreants, nor to execute Separatists” (Nicholson, p. 157).

In 1615, the Baptists petitioned King James for freedom of religion. They stated their doctrine plainly and proved

from Scripture that it is not the will of Christ that Christians persecute those who have different beliefs. This, too, was rejected.

Joseph Ivimey observes that the Baptists “suffered severely from 1590 to 1630.” Following is a description written by a Baptist prisoner:

“Our miseries are long and lingering imprisonments for many years in divers counties of England, in which many have died and left behind them widows and many small children; taking away our goods, and others the like, of which we can make good probation; not for any disloyalty to your majesty, nor hurt to any mortal man, our adversaries themselves being judges; but only because we dare not assent unto, and practice in the worship of God, such things as we have not faith in, because it is sin against the Most High” (from a tract “A Most Humble Supplication of many of the king’s majesty’s loyal subjects, ready to testify all civil obedience, by the oath of allegiance or otherwise, and that of conscience; who are persecuted (only for differing in religion), contrary to divine and human testimonies,” cited by John Cramp, *Baptist History*).

1626-1689

The Anglican Church continued to persecute those who tried to worship independently until almost the end of the 17th century.

Many Baptist preachers had long prison terms in 17th-century England.

Francis Bampfield died in prison after spending the last nine years of his life in bonds.

John Miller was confined ten years.

Henry Forty spent twelve years in prison.

John Bunyan wrote his famous *Pilgrim's Progress* while languishing in prison for 12 long years, unable to care for his wife and beloved blind daughter.

Joseph Wright lay in Maidstone jail for twenty years.

George Fownes died in Gloucester jail.

Samuel Howe died in prison in 1640 and was buried beside a roadway because the Church of England refused to allow him to be buried in a cemetery.

Thomas Delaune and his family died in the wretched Newgate Prison.

Delaune grew up in a Roman Catholic family in Ireland, had a good education, and was led to Christ by a Baptist preacher. He moved to London and became a schoolmaster and was a member of a Baptist church.

Benjamin Calamy, a chaplain to the king, published a sermon challenging nonconformists to write out their doctrine and disagreement with the Church of England. Delaune answered the challenge and wrote his "Plea for the Nonconformists." When the book was being printed, it was seized by a king's messenger and Delaune was imprisoned.

From prison he wrote to Calamy and asked him to intervene in his behalf, but he refused to help or even to answer Delaune's letter.

In January 1684, Delaune was fined 100 marks, to be imprisoned until the fine was paid, to find security for one year afterwards, and his book to be burned. Because he now had no job, he could not pay his fine and he and his family were reduced to poverty. His wife and two small children had to live with him in the prison for lack of a livelihood, and the unhealthy conditions took their lives one after the other.

The attitude of many within the Church of England toward "dissident" Christians in that day is illustrated by the publication in 1644 of *THE DIPPERS DIPT, OR THE ANABAPTISTS DUNCKED AND PLUNGED OVER HEAD AND EARS, AT A DISPUTATION IN SOUTHWARK* (London: Printed for Nicholas Bourn, and Richard Royston in Ivy-Lane).

This rabidly anti-Baptist work was written by Daniel Featley, an Anglican minister. Featley called for the physical destruction of anabaptists and other "schismatics." Consider a choice excerpt:

"Now of all Heretics and Schismatics the Anabaptist in three regards ought to be most carefully looked unto, and severely punished, if not utterly exterminated and banished out of the Church and Kingdom" (*The Dippers Dipt*, p. 4).

Featley described the Anabaptists in Vienna being tied together in chains and drowned in the river. He then observes callously, “Here you see the hand of God in punishing these sectaries some way answerable to their sin....” Featley likened the Baptists to Polygamists and Jesuits, concluding that “in anabaptist you have many Heretics, and in this one sect as it were one stock, many erroneous and schismatical positions, and practices ingrafted...” Featley tells many lies against the Baptists, such as describing their baptismal practice as “a kind of spell” and claiming that they taught that marriage can be broken for many causes.

Bible believers were viciously persecuted during the reigns of **KING CHARLES II** (1660-1685) and **KING JAMES II** (1685-1688).

The “Act of Uniformity” in 1662 subjected many to beatings and imprisonment.

The first Conventicle Act in 1664 forbade all religious assemblies that did not conform to the Church of England. Penalties were severe fines and imprisonment and for a third offence, banishment to the American colonies for seven years.

The Five-Mile Act in 1665 forbade non-conformist preachers to go within five miles of any city or town that had a Church of England congregation. It also forbade them to teach in any public or private school. The penalty for each offense was a severe fine that was beyond the means of most to pay.

The second Conventicle Act in 1670 was worse yet.

In addition to imprisonment and other torments, it called for harsh fines not only on all non-conformist worshippers and preachers, but upon the owners of any buildings used for non-conformist meetings.

The fines were paid by the sale of the believers' possessions, which were often sold for a pittance of their real value. Since a third of the price of the fine went to the informer, many were motivated to report on the separatists.

Many were impoverished. Fathers languishing in prison could do nothing to assist their destitute families.

Between 1660 and 1689, some 70,000 men and women suffered under religious persecution in England; 8,000 perished; and tens of millions of dollars were paid in fines.

The long arm of the Anglican Church also brought persecution to Bible believers in America before her independence. The Virginia colony was Anglican, and in 1643, the governor unleashed persecution against dissenters. Many were whipped, branded, incarcerated, fined, and driven out of the colony.

Finally, in 1689 the Toleration Act was passed in England, which greatly reduced the pressure on all dissenters, giving them liberty of conscience and making

it an offence to disturb anyone else's worship. Thus it was not until 155 years after its establishment that the Church of England stopped persecuting.

Persecution in America

The Protestants who settled in America, though fleeing religious persecution, themselves persecuted Baptists and Quakers and others who differed from them until the time of the American independence and the formation of the United States Constitution. We will give two examples of this.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts was founded by the colony of Pilgrims in Plymouth in 1620 and by the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630.

The Pilgrims were separatists who had been forced to flee the persecution of the Church of England. They had spent a brief time in the Netherlands, then traveled by ship to America. While in the Netherlands, they enjoyed some measure of religious liberty, but they did not grant the same to others. They practiced infant baptism and denounced Anabaptists.

The Puritans were Anglicans who desired some reformation of the Church of England but who did not separate from it. They brought from England the false concept of a state church and a persecuting spirit.

Following are some examples of the Protestant persecutions in the early history of Massachusetts before the formation of the American union:

ROGER WILLIAMS was banished from Massachusetts in 1635.

A learned and zealous man who could read the Bible in Greek and Hebrew, Williams had arrived in America from England with his new wife in February 1631.

He was an ordained Anglican minister, and at the time he came to America, he still held to infant baptism.

While living in Plymouth, Williams preached to the native Indians. He learned their language and made many friends among them, including two of their chiefs.

In August 1634, he was appointed the pastor of the Anglican congregation in Salem.

But on October 9, 1635, he was banished from the colony for preaching “new and dangerous opinions.” He was given six weeks to leave, and in January, he was forced into the wilderness in the midst of a brutal New England winter.

The Indians helped him, and in June, he traveled by canoe up a river to Rhode Island and established the settlement of Providence.

Others joined him from Massachusetts and this place became a bastion of religious liberty. Their stated purpose was “to hold forth a lively experiment, that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with full liberty in religious concernments.”

In March 1639, Roger Williams was publicly immersed in baptism, and the first Baptist church of Rhode Island was formed. This is commonly considered the oldest Baptist church in America.

In March 1644, Williams obtained a charter from the king of England to establish Rhode Island.

Williams wrote “The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience,” in which he boldly defended liberty of conscience.

Though slanders have been heaped upon Roger Williams by various historians, many learned Baptist writers (as well as others) have set the record straight. See the histories of Thomas Armitage and David Benedict, for example. These are in the *Fundamental Baptist CD-ROM Library*, available from Way of Life Literature.

In 1643, Lady Deborah Moody, who owned a 400-acre farm in the town of Swampscott, was forced to move to Long Island, New York, to live among the Dutch in order to escape persecution in Massachusetts. Her “crime” was that she denied infant baptism.

The first law against the Baptists in America was made in Massachusetts in November 1644. The law threatened severe punishments against Anabaptists. That year, Thomas Painter was whipped for denying infant baptism.

In February 1646, William Witter and John Wood of Lynn were publicly rebuked and fined for denying infant baptism. John Spur was fined in July 1651 for the same “crime.”

In 1651, some Baptists were arrested and one was brutally whipped in Massachusetts.

The names of those arrested were John Clark, Obadiah Holmes, and John Crandal.

They were from a Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island, and were visiting in the home of the aforementioned William Witter, an elderly Christian brother in Lynn, Massachusetts. At the time, there were no Baptist churches in Massachusetts.

On Sunday, they conducted a religious service in Witter’s home; and while Mr. Clark was preaching on the text of Revelation 3:10, two constables burst into the house, arrested them, and took them to the prison in Boston.

Holmes was beaten with 30 strokes of a three-corded whip. In a letter to a Baptist church in England, Holmes recounted the Lord’s mercy in strengthening him during this trial:

“...for in truth, as the strokes fell upon me, I had such a spiritual manifestation of God’s presence, as the like thereof I never had nor felt, nor can with fleshly tongue express, and the outward pain was so removed from me, that indeed I am not able to declare it to you, it was so easy to me, that I could well bear it, yea, and in a manner, felt it not, although it was grievous, as the spectators said, the man striking with

all his strength (yea, spitting in his hands three times, as many affirmed) with a three corded whip, giving me therewith thirty strokes. When he had loosed me from the post, having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I told the magistrates, you have struck me as with roses...”

Though he testified that he did not suffer from the actual beating, he did suffer much from its effects. The beating was so vicious on his back, sides, and stomach that Holmes could not lie down for many days afterwards.

About this time, two other Baptists, John Hazel and John Spur, were imprisoned because they encouraged and comforted Holmes after he was whipped.

After the first Baptist church was finally formed in Massachusetts in about 1656, the members “spent most of their time in courts and prisons; they were often fined, and some of them were banished.” The pastor of this church, Thomas Gould, was imprisoned for his faith. When this church later built a meetinghouse, the civil authorities, in 1680, nailed the doors shut and ordered them not to meet.

A second Baptist church was not formed in Massachusetts until 1749. This was in the town of Sturbridge and many of the members were imprisoned, fined, and had their property confiscated.

Another Baptist church formed in 1761 in the town of Ashfield was treated in the same manner. Many of the

church members had all of their land and orchards confiscated.

3. This persecution continued against many other Baptist churches that were established in those days and did not end until Massachusetts became a colony of the United States and formed their state constitution in 1780. Through the efforts of the Baptists and other lovers of religious liberty, this contained a Bill of Rights guaranteeing freedom of faith.

Virginia

The first settlers to Virginia were mostly from England, and they established Anglican churches.

By the acts of 1623, 1643, and 1661, all citizens were required to follow that religion and doctrine.

Acts of the Virginia assembly of 1659, 1662, and 1663, required that all children be baptized and prohibited the assembling of Quakers and other dissidents.

The Anglican ministers were supported by the taxes of the citizens.

Following are some examples of the Protestant persecutions in Virginia:

On June 4, 1768, several Baptists were arrested in Spottsylvania and imprisoned. Among these were John

Waller, Lewis Craig, and James Childs. They spent almost six weeks in prison.

In December 1770, William Webber and Joseph Anthony were arrested and cast into prison for preaching in Chesterfield, Virginia. They remained in prison until March 1771.

Webber was again arrested in August while he was preaching in Middlesex. Also arrested then were John Waller, James Greenwood, Robert Ware, and Thomas Waford. Waller, Greenwood, Ware, and Webber were kept in prison for a month.

Thomas Waford was severely beaten with a whip and carried scars to his grave.

In August 1772, James Greenwood and William Loveall were arrested and imprisoned in the county of King and Queen for 16 days.

On March 13, 1774, all of the Baptist preachers in Piscataway were arrested and sent to prison. These were John Waller, John Shackleford, and Robert Ware.

Altogether some 30 Baptist preachers spent time in prison in Virginia, some as many as four different times.

These persecutions continued until Virginia was brought into the new union of the United States.

In spite of this, the Baptist churches grew rapidly in Virginia during those days. The first was formed in 1767 and the second in 1769. Within four years, there were about 50 churches.

Conclusion

The persecution of Baptists by the Protestants reminds me of the Lord's parable about the man who was forgiven of a debt. He owed his master 10,000 talents of silver, which is a huge amount of money, but when he could not pay and begged his master to have mercy on him, the master freely forgave him the entire debt. Yet that same man turned around and persecuted another man who owed him a very, very small debt (Mat. 18:23-35).

Likewise, the Protestants earnestly sought religious liberty from the Roman Catholics. When they obtained it, they refused to grant the same to the Baptists, though the latter pleaded with them humbly and quoted the Scriptures in a most sensible and godly fashion.

For example, when Hans Muller was brought before the Protestant city council at Zurich for his denial of infant baptism, he pleaded after this fashion:

“Do not lay a burden on my conscience, for faith is a gift freely from God, and is not a common property. The mystery of God lies hidden, like the treasure in the field, which no one can find, but he to whom the Spirit shows it. So I beg you, ye servants of God, let my faith stand free” (John Christian, *A History of the Baptists*).

Muller's plea was ignored, as were those of tens of thousands of other Baptists of that day.

Upon the authority of the Lord's parable and the tenor of the entire New Testament Scriptures, we can be sure that

the Lord did not look lightly upon this great sin and that He does not excuse it as many Protestant historians have done.

Many plead “the ignorance of the times,” but the persecuting Protestants of those times had the Bible and professed it as their sole authority for faith and practice. They therefore had no excuse for not knowing the will of the Lord.

The times were very dark, but the Baptists, with the same Bible in hand, saw a greater light, and that light was the New Testament faith unvarnished by human tradition, and that faith gives no authority to persecute those who do not believe as we do. We can preach against error. We can discipline church members who sin. We can reject heretics. But we cannot lay hands on them and force them to believe as we do.

That is the characteristic of a wolf, not a sheep.

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Protestant Persecution of Baptists

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