

**ONE NATION**

**American Heritage**

**UNDER GOD**

**Religious Freedom**

**1776 - 1976**

**BMAA**



# ONE NATION UNDER GOD

## American Heritage and Religious Freedom

Philip R. Bryan, B. D., M. A., Ph.D.

### My Country, 'Tis of Thee

SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Source unknown  
From *Thesaurus Musicus*, 1744



1. My coun - try, of thee, Sweet land of lib - er - ty,  
2. My na - tive try, thee, Land of the no - ble free,  
3. Let mu - sic the breeze, And ring from all the trees  
4. Our fa - Thee, Au - thor of lib - er - ty,

**SWEET  
LAND  
of  
LIBERTY**



Of  
Thy  
Sweet  
To



pil - grims free - dom ring!  
tem - ple like that a - bove.  
breathe par - take the sound pro - long.  
ho - ly light Great God, our King!

Sweet Land of Liberty



## **Program I**

### **SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY**

#### **Reporter I:**

"My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing."

So begins the familiar song which we all learned at an early age. When we sing that famous hymn, we are praising our country for the freedom which we enjoy, a freedom which has become an example for all the world to see and follow. We are also praising the "Great God, our King" as "Author of liberty."

#### **The Bicentennial Celebration**

**Reporter II:** For several months people all across our great country have been talking and studying about certain events of two-hundred years ago which led to the formation of the United States of America. This year marks our two-hundredth birthday as a country; 1976 is our bicentennial year! Our governmental and civic leaders have been wise in encouraging us to have a part in the bicentennial celebration. People of all ages tend to forget the past. The bicentennial celebration has been planned to make Americans aware of their great heritage. A heritage is what has been handed down to men by their forefathers. The great principles of freedom which we all share were purchased and passed on to us at prices which were often very dear. Whenever we tend to take those principles for granted, we are running the risk of losing them. There is the necessity for our refreshing our memories about the crucial events of the past. We need to recall that we are indeed "One Nation Under God."

**Reporter III:** Beginning this Sunday and continuing for the next seven weeks, we will be focusing upon significant facts concerning our common heritage as Americans, especially concerning our religious liberty. These programs are intended to show historically how our religious freedom was won and to pinpoint specifically the significant roles that some of our Baptist forefathers played in the early days of our republic. Hopefully, the lessons will supplement and complement what we have learned in school, have read in newspapers, and have seen on television.

#### **A Famous Song of Liberty**

**Reporter IV:** Most of us are unaware of the key places that Baptists have filled since colonial days. How many know that the author of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" was a Baptist minister?

Samuel Francis Smith was born in Boston, Massachusetts, October 21, 1808, less than fifty years after the American Revolution. Educated at Harvard College, Smith was a classmate of Oliver Wendell Holmes who later became famous as an author. After his graduation from Harvard in 1829, Smith began theological training at Andover Theological Seminary (Newton Centre, Massachusetts), completing his studies in 1832. Dr. Smith, a very able writer, served for a number of years as editor of the **Baptist Missionary Magazine**, the **Christian Review**, and the **American Baptist Missionary Union**. After Smith's ordination in February, 1832, he served as pastor of the Baptist Church in Waterville, Maine, for eight years before moving to Newton Centre, Massachusetts, where he was pastor for twelve and one-half years.

**Reporter I:** Samuel Smith is best known for his authorship of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." He wrote that patriotic hymn on February 2, 1832, but it was not sung publicly until the following summer. "My Country 'Tis of Thee" was first sung on July 4, 1832, at Park Street (Baptist) Church, Boston, Massachusetts. Ironically, the freedom which the hymn praises was not completely won in the state of Massachusetts until 1833! In a later program there will be further discussion about that date.

### **The Essence of the Bicentennial Celebration**

**Reporter II:** "My Country 'Tis of Thee" sets forth exactly the essence of what the American Bicentennial Celebration is all about! Note carefully the stanzas:

My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing:  
Land where my fathers died!  
Land of the pilgrim's pride!  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring!

The **first stanza** describes America as a "sweet land of liberty" and a "land of the pilgrim's pride." Because of the "land where my fathers died," the hymn shouts the wish that "freedom (should) ring forth" "from every mountain side."

**Reporter III:** *The second stanza* emphasizes the sweet thought that in America "free" men are "noble." One does not have to be a **king** or **prince** in order to be **noble** or **royal** in America! The true American loves the name of his country, as well as its rocks, rills, woods, and hills!

My native country, thee,  
Land of the noble free,  
Thy name I love;  
I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills;  
My heart with rapture thrills,  
Like that above.

The stanza closes on a note of heavenly rapture.

**Reporter IV:** The **third stanza** is a ringing call for the trees, people, and rocks to "swell (or fill) the breeze" with "sweet freedom's song."

Let music swell the breeze,  
And ring from all the trees  
Sweet freedom's song:  
Let mortal tongues awake;  
Let all that breathe partake;  
Let rocks their silence break  
The sound prolong.

If freedom is to endure, everyone must prolong the sound of that "sweet...song."

**Reporter I:** The **last stanza** is addressed to God as "Author of liberty." It is a prayer that His protection will always be upon our country and that freedom will always grace our land with the brightness of its sunshine:

Our Fathers' God, to thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To thee we sing;  
Long may our land be bright  
With freedom's holy light;  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King.

Let us all bow our heads in thanksgiving to God for our glorious heritage of liberty, for He has given it to us. (Have prayer.) Now, please stand and sing together "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

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**Reporter II:** Next week we will begin a religious heritage study. The first program will be about a British Baptist who wrote to the king of England the earliest English plea for religious freedom. His plea was later fulfilled in America.





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**EARLY  
ENGLISH  
BAPTIST  
APPEALED  
for  
RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM**



Helwys Message Read to the King



## **Program II**

### **EARLY ENGLISH BAPTIST APPEALED FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM Religious Persecution in Seventeenth-Century England**

**Reporter I:** Good morning. Welcome to the second part in our bicentennial series. Today we will discuss some "Early English Baptist Appeals for Religious Freedom." Since the beginning of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Church of England (i.e., Episcopal), with the king as its head, was the official church in England. Not everyone, of course, was pleased with that arrangement. In the early days of the seventeenth century, English Christianity fell roughly into three groups: (1) people satisfied with and loyal to the Church of England, (2) Puritans within the Church of England who wanted to "purify" or further "reform" it, and (3) dissenters (or separatists) who wanted to worship God separate from the state church, according to the dictates of their own consciences. Baptists were in the "nonconformist" group. Early in his reign, King James I made it clear that he intended to continue the religious policy that he had inherited from Queen Elizabeth. He continued to make all people attend the state church services, enforcing uniformity in doctrine and practice. In 1604 approximately three hundred Puritan ministers were removed from their pastorates. Many separatists were persecuted by church authorities for not attending public worship.

#### **General Baptist Churches**

**Reporter II:** Because of religious persecution many separatists fled to Holland. One Baptist congregation was connected rather closely, in Amsterdam, both with Dutch Anabaptists and with an English Congregational church which later emigrated to America, settling in Plymouth Colony, in 1620. The latter became famous as the Pilgrim church of John Robinson, William Bradford, and William Brewster! Early in 1610, that Baptist church "split." The majority group, led by John Smyth, wanted to join the Waterlander Mennonites. The remaining eight or ten members, led by Thomas Helwys, parted company with Smyth. In late 1611 or early 1612 the Helwys faction returned to England. They had decided that it would be better to share imprisonment and martyrdom. That group of Baptists eventually became called "General Baptists" as opposed to "Particular Baptists" who were more Calvinistic in their theology. Modern-day Missionary Baptists apparently have more in common with Particular Baptists, although historical proof is lacking to decide their precise relationship with those groups.

#### **Thomas Helwys and His "Booke of Ye Mistry of Iniquity"**

**Reporter III:** King James was quite shocked one day, in 1612, when he received a book entitled **The Mistry of Iniquity**. The book, written by Helwys, was sent by special messenger from Helwys himself. In the book the king read a vigorous plea for freedom of conscience. Helwys refuted the generally accepted principle that the king was the authority in England on matters of religion as well as civil rule. An inscription on the flyleaf of the book was especially offensive to the king.

**Reporter IV:** (NOTE: "Ye" is "the." "Y" gets the sound of our "th." That will be true throughout the series except where "ye" is clearly the plural of "you.")

Thomas Helwys wrote:

Heare O King, and dispise not ye counsell of ye poore, and let their complaints come before thee.

The King is a mortall man, and not God therefore hath no power over ye immortall soules of his subjects, to make lawes and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them.

If the King have authority to make spirituall Lords and lawes, then he is an immortall God, and not a mortall man.

O King, be not seduced by deceivers to sin so against God, whome thou oughtest to obey, nor against thy poore subjects who ought and will obey thee in all things with body life and goods, or else let their lives be taken from ye earth. God Save ye King Tho: Helwys

**Reporter I:** Helwys' book was the first demand made in England for universal religious liberty - for freedom of conscience for all! That 200-page document was not a plea for religious freedom for Baptists only - or even for Christians - but for people of all religions!

**Reporter II:** Thomas Helwys wrote:

Our lord the King is but an earthly King, and he hath not authority as a King but in earthly causes, and if the King's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane lawes made by the King, our lord the King can require no more: for men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judg between God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.

**Reporter III:** King James answered Thomas Helwys by having him arrested and thrown into Newgate prison. He seized and burned all of the copies of the book upon which he could lay hands. A few copies have survived. As far as we know, Helwys spent the remainder of his life in prison, dying some time before 1616.

### John Murton

**Reporter IV:** The more that King James and his bishops tried to suppress the dissenters in his realm, the greater grew the pressure generated by their eagerness for religious freedom. John Murton, who had returned to England with Thomas Helwys, in 1612, became pastor of the General Baptist Church, at Spittalfield, after Helwys was arrested. In 1615 Murton entered the arena of the literary struggle for religious freedom. His discussion was entitled **Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned**. Like Helwys before, Murton sent a copy of his work to the king. As a result, Murton was also imprisoned.

**Reporter I:** John Murton wrote:

No man ought to be persecuted for his religion, be it true or false, (just) so they testify their faithful allegiance to the king...What authority can any



mortal man require more, than of body, goods, life, and all that appertaineth to the outward man? The heart God requireth.

### **General and Particular Baptist Doctrinal Statements**

**Reporter II:** Not only did English Baptists write books calling for freedom of religion, but they also felt obligated to include their position in their **doctrinal statements** or confessions of faith. In those documents, our Baptist forefathers summarized what they considered to be the most important things that they believed. These confessions clearly advocated religious freedom.

**Reporter III: Article 84 of the General Baptist Confession of 1612** stated: The magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James iv.12).

**Reporter IV: The Particular Baptist Confession of 1644 (xviii)** stated that a civill Magistracie is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evill doers, and for the praise of them that doe well; and that in all lawful things commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord: and that we are to make supplication and prayer for kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty.

Article LI continued: If God with-hold the Magistrates allowance and furtherance herein; yet we must notwithstanding proceed together in Christian communion, not daring to give place to suspend our patience, but to walk in obedience to Christ in the profession and holding forth this faith before mentioned, even in the midst of all trial and afflictions, not accounting our goods, lands, wives, children, fathers, mothers, brethren, sisters, yea, and our own lives dear unto us, so we may finish our course with joy; remembering always we ought to obey God rather than men....

**Reporter I:** The last article of the Confession (LII) concluded ...thus wee desire to give unto God that which is God's, and unto **Cesar** that which is Cesar's, and unto all men that which belongeth unto them, endeavoring ourselves to have alwayes a cleare conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.

That statement clearly sets forth the Christian responsibility toward God and toward the state.

### **Conclusion**

**Reporter II:** The first real fulfillment of those early pleas for religious freedom was achieved, not in England, but in America. Significantly, Baptists became the real leaders in achieving freedom. Next week we will see how an English colony founded by Baptists, was the first place to grant real religious freedom. So new was that concept, that it was called "a lively experiment!"



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LIVELY  
EXPERIMENT  
in  
RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM



Roger Williams Preached to the Narragansett Indians



### **Program III**

## **A "LIVELY EXPERIMENT" IN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**Reporter I:** Good morning! Welcome to the third segment of our bicentennial programs which have the purpose of setting forth major facts concerning our American heritage and religious freedom. Although seventeenth-century Baptist witness to religious freedom made a permanent contribution to English life and culture, it was in America that the witness was to triumph. The story of early Baptists in America is really the story of Baptist efforts in behalf of religious liberty. Early American effort toward religious freedom is really a Baptist story.

**Roger Williams (1603-1683)**

**Reporter II:** One of the most important people in the story of the quest for American religious freedom was Roger Williams. Williams, who for a time at least was a Baptist, has been called the architect of American church-state relations. As America's most vocal and influential prophet of liberty in the colonial period and founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams sought to establish a religious and Scriptural basis for religious liberty, as well as the separation of church and state.

**Reporter III:** Inspired by the writings of John Murton who had been a prisoner in Newgate because of his religious convictions, Williams maintained that the authority of the state is "not religious, Christian, etc., but natural, human, (and) civil." As such, the state is "improper" when it proscribes conscience or religious matters.

**Reporter IV:** Roger Williams said,

All lawful magistrates in the world, both before the coming of Christ Jesus and since, are but derivatives and agents...serving for the good of the whole....No civil state or country can be truly called Christian, although true Christians be in it."

**Reporter I:** Williams' views have become deeply imbedded in Baptist thought on church-state relations. He believed that church and state should be separate for at least three reasons: (1) so that the church can indeed be the church, (2) so that God will be God, and (3) so that Christians can be Christians. The state should never assume the role of God as Lord of conscience. Genuine faith always is free and voluntary.

**Reporter II:** Such views led Williams to conclude that (1) compulsory and tax-supported religion is un-Christian, (2) Israel should not be used as a model state for Christians, and (3) a democratic state requires equality of all persons and groups before the law.

Perry Miller, a famous historian of American colonial history, has evaluated Williams' contributions as follows: "For the subsequent history of what became the United States, Roger Williams possesses one indubitable importance, that he stands at the beginning of it...as a figure...(who) was always there to remind Americans that no other conclusion than absolute religious freedom was feasible in this society."

**Reporter III:** Rhode Island, the first home of Baptists in the New World, was the first modern state to guarantee full religious liberty and the separation of church and state. As Earnest Sutherland Bates, a noted authority on the history of religious freedom, has observed, Rhode Island became "the one spot in America where a man could think his own thoughts, worship God in his own way, and enjoy an equal share in the government." Williams truly put into deeds in his colony of Providence Plantations what he preached and taught with words. His most famous book, dealing with freedom of religion, is called **The Bloody Tenet**.

### John Clarke (1609-1676)

**Reporter IV:** Historians of colonial history are still debating whether Roger Williams or John Clarke established the first Baptist Church in America — Williams at Providence or Clarke at Newport. Associational Baptists especially have been critical of Williams' baptism and the way that he organized his church. Indeed, if Williams were really a Baptist, he did not remain one for long. He later chose to call himself a "Seeker."

**Reporter I:** John Clarke, however, was clearly a Baptist. His church has continued from its organization in the seventeenth century until today. Although Williams has been the more famous of the two men, Clarke was truly an outstanding man. Generally credited with being the "Father of American Baptists," Clarke was one of the dominant exponents of religious liberty and the separation of church and state in colonial America.

**Reporter II:** Louis F. Asher, perhaps today's most knowledgeable historical authority on John Clarke, has applauded him and his life for at least ten reasons. Asher has noted that Clarke was a shining light among early Americans because of his various roles as (1) physician (in Rhode Island and England), (2) minister (a Baptist church organizer, missionary, theologian, and pastor), (3) pioneer and colonizer (he led the colonists from Massachusetts who colonized the Rhode Island towns of Portsmouth and Newport and served on committees in 1639 and 1642 to obtain official recognition from England).

**Reporter III:** Similarly, Clarke was outstanding as (4) a statesman (he wrote the "Portsmouth Compact" of 1638, based on Biblical guidelines; served as Rhode Island Commissioner in 1648; and served three terms as Deputy-Governor of Rhode Island). Clarke was also (5) an attorney-at-law, (6) a patriot, (7) philanthropist, (8) philosopher, and (9) scholar.

**Reporter IV:** As (10) an author he wrote *Ill Newes from New England* (1651), in which he described the religious intolerance and persecution leading to the establishment of Rhode Island and gave an excellent defense of his Baptist beliefs. As a Hebrew and Greek scholar, John Clarke also compiled a Biblical concordance. Many historians believe that King Charles II virtually incorporated Clarke's writings into the charter which he granted in 1663.

### A Lively Experiment

**Reporter I:** In 1641, the Rhode Islanders officially affirmed their government as a "Democracie." In March of that year they adopted a document which clearly set forth religious freedom. They agreed:

It is ordered and unanimously agreed upon, that the Government which this Bodie Politick doth attend unto in this Land, and the Jurisdiction thereof, in favour of our Prince is a DEMOCRACIE, or Popular Government; that is to say, It is in the Powre of the Body of Freemen orderly assembled, or the major part of them, to make or constitute Just Lawes. It was further ordered, by the authority of this present Courte, that none bee accounted a Delinquent for Doctrine: Provided, it be not directly repugnant to ye Government or Lawes established.

**Reporter II:** In July, 1651, Dr. John Clarke, Elder Obadiah Holmes, and Deacon John Crandall visited one of their members who lived in Lynn, Massachusetts. The member, William Witter, was elderly and blind. As a result, Clarke and his companions were arrested (see lesson VII for further information). Consequently, Clarke wrote a paper setting forth his religious views. One of the statements of that document is very pertinent to the present report. Clarke set forth very clearly his position on religious freedom. Very ably he showed that people should not, nor cannot, be "bullied" into accepting religious doctrine.



**Reporter III:** Clarke said, "I Testifie that no such believer, or Servant of Christ Jesus hath any liberty, much less Authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow servant, nor yet with outward force, or arme of flesh, to constrain, or restrain his Conscience, no nor yet his outward man for Conscience sake, or worship of his God, where injury is not offered to the person, name or estate of others, (for) every (one)...shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and must give an account of himself to God, and therefore (he) ought to be fully persuaded in his own mind, for what he undertakes, because...what is not of Faith is Sin."

**Reporter IV:** So different was that underlying philosophy which led to the establishment of the Colony of Rhode Island, that John Clarke used a descriptive phrase which King Charles subsequently incorporated into the charter which he granted in 1663. On February 5, 1661, Clarke sent the King a petition in behalf of his countrymen.

**Reporter I:** Significantly, Clarke wrote, "Wherefore your Petitioners Humbly pray your Majestys favorable aspict towards them who have still in their removes and in the rest of their actings made it manifest that they as the true natives of England have firmly adhered in their alligiance and loyalty to His Sovereignty thereof although by strangers with many faire profus against us and again allured therefrom and have it much on their hearts (if they may be permitted) TO HOLD FORTH A LIVELY EXPERIMENT THAT A FLOURISHING CIVILL STATE MAY STAND yea, AND BEST BE MAINTAYNED, and that among English spirits WITH A FULL LIBERTIE IN RELIGIOUS CONCERNMENTS and that true pyety rightly grounded upon Gospell principles will give the best and greatest security to your Sovereignty and will lay in the hearts of men the strongest obligations to true Loyalty..."

**Reporter II:** Many of those words are carved in marble over the portico on the south facade of the Rhode Island State House in Providence. They were incorporated in the state charter when it was finally received. They have become revered in the state of Rhode Island. Finally, in 1663, "a charter was officially granted to the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. It was the most liberal patent (i.e., official recognition) ever granted by a monarch up to that time, and its provisions and guarantees were so effective that it endowed Rhode Island with the necessary security to progress as an autonomous colony. Its provisions and definiteness were such that the charter remained in force for 180 years. It made provision for colonial boundaries; it provided for military organization and the prosecution of war; it secured the New England coastal fishing privileges; it made arrangements for government which, in many respects, was similar to that which remained in force in the colony until the National Constitution was adopted in 1843." (L. F. Asher).

### Conclusion

**Reporter III:** So, with the establishment of the Rhode Island Colony and the granting of the charter in 1663, there began a major aspect of our story of American Heritage and Religious Freedom.

Next week we will reveal how an early Baptist preacher was influential in getting American churches "converted" to the concept of freedom of religion.



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The  
CONVERSION  
of  
AMERICAN  
CHURCHES  
to  
FREEDOM  
of  
RELIGION



An Itinerant Preacher Studying While on Horseback



## **Program IV**

### **THE CONVERSION OF AMERICAN CHURCHES TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

#### **A Look at Church-State Relations in the Colonies**

**Reporter I:** Welcome to the fourth part in a series on American Bicentennial studies. During this eight-part series of programs we are reviewing "American Heritage and Religious Freedom." We are emphasizing that we are truly "One Nation Under God."

Deeply rooted in American historical lore is the belief that the colonists came to America in search of religious liberty. To the contrary, most of the religiously-motivated colonists had no intention of **tolerating** any religion other than their own much less granting full religious freedom. Religious liberty with separation of church and state as a logical companion was the product of a long, gradual growth **within** the colonies.

**Reporter II:** Colonial religion was expressed in two major forms, which we might call "churchly" and "sectarian." New England Puritans were most representative of the churchly type. Antinomians, Baptists, and Quakers were examples of the sectarians. Most of the religious thought of the colonial period was drawn toward those two poles.

**Reporter III:** One of the most important developments in American history was the gradual conversion of the "established churches" (i.e., the "churchly") to the religious thinking and church-state views of the minority sectarians. An "established church" is one which is the official church of a country. Normally, all citizens of a country which has an "established church" are considered members of that church, and church expenses are provided for through government taxation.

**Reporter IV:** Historically, three different types of church-state relations have existed. (1) The type in which the state controls the church is called "Erastian." The Church of England (i.e., Anglican) establishments in the southern colonies, especially in Virginia, followed a modified Erastian pattern.

**Reporter I:** (2) The Congregational Church (i.e., Puritan) establishments in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, followed a "theocratic" pattern. In the theocratic form of church-state relations the church controls the state, following the example of Old Testament Israel. Some of the worst religious persecutions have occurred within the framework of the theocratic pattern!

**Reporter II:** (3) The third major pattern of church-state relations has been called "separatist." According to that arrangement, church and state are divided logically and actually. Separatist principles were applied in Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Rhode Island, however, was actually the only colony in which full separation and freedom of religion prevailed.

**Reporter III:** Congregationalism was the stronger of the two establishment churches. It had a more profound influence upon American life. The Anglican Church establishments were handicapped by their distance from the ecclesiastical authorities in England. Significantly, a **large segment of the colonial population did not belong to any church!**

#### **A Need for Conversion**

**Reporter IV:** Governmental establishment of democracy, logically accompanied by church-state separation and freedom of the soul, required the "conversion" of the churches. Since the leading American churches of the eighteenth century were not open to a full-fledged democracy with complete religious freedom, the necessary evangelization required a mighty man. In the hour of need, God appointed a man for that task - a Baptist preacher named Isaac Backus.

## A Baptist Champion of Religious Freedom

**Reporter I:** In 1691 a new charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony granted toleration to Baptists and other dissenters, but it did not exempt them from taxation for the support of the state church (i.e., Congregational). Many Baptists refused to pay the tax. They said that a tax imposed for the support of an established church was an infringement upon their religious freedom. Consequently, Baptists often had their property seized and sold for payment of taxes.

**Reporter II:** Indeed, the laws were changed in 1728, 1747, 1753, and 1772. Massachusetts still had an established church, however, and dissenting churches like Baptists remained in an inferior position and legally were obliged to support financially the state church. Admittedly, exceptions to the taxation were permitted, but Baptists believed that the action necessary for such exemptions was humiliating.

**Reporter III:** Local communities, moreover, often subjected Baptists to other mistreatment. Mobs broke up Baptist meetings and sometimes beat their preachers. In 1769 many churches in their annual letters to the Warren Baptist Association of New England "mentioned grievous oppressions and persecutions from the Standing order (i.e., established church)."

**Reporter IV:** In 1774 the Warren Association sent as its agents Elder Isaac Backus (1724-1806) and several other Baptist leaders, including President Manning of Rhode Island College, to Philadelphia to the meeting of the First Continental Congress. Those Baptists were sent to meet with the Massachusetts delegates to the Congress and thereby secure for them an opportunity to present their grievances before the Continental Congress. Naturally, the Baptist request embarrassed their Massachusetts "brethren" from the established church. Samuel and John Adams especially were provoked. They denied that there were any real restrictions in Massachusetts upon religious minorities.

**Reporter I:** Throughout the American Revolution, Isaac Backus led New England Baptists in their battle for full religious liberty. Baptist support of the revolutionary cause was in view of religious as well as political freedom. In fact, Baptist equated the two: there is no true political freedom separate and apart from religious freedom.

**Reporter II:** Isaac Backus was a prolific writer and itinerant preacher. Probably his most notable writing in support of religious liberty was a pamphlet of fifty-nine pages entitled **An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty, Against the Oppressions of the Present Day** (1773). New England historian William G. McLoughlin called the pamphlet "pietistic America's declaration of spiritual independence." Echoing Roger Williams and John Clarke, Backus gave a positive estimate of the need for civil government. "It is dangerous, however," he said, "to imagine that there is any thing in the nature of true government that interferes with true and full liberty."

**Reporter III:** Listen to the very heart of Backus' argument.

"...It appears to us that the true difference and exact limits between ecclesiastical and civil government is this: That the church is armed with **light and truth**, to pull down the strong holds of iniquity, and to gain souls to Christ, and into His church, to be governed by His rules therein; and again to exclude such from their communion, who will not be so governed; while the state is armed with the sword to guard the peace, and the civil rights of all persons and societies, and to punish those who violate the same. And where these two kinds of government, and the weapons which belong to them, are well distinguished, and improved according to the true nature and end of their institution, the effects are happy, and they do not at all interfere with each other; but where they have been confounded together, no tongue nor pen can fully describe the mischiefs that have ensued."

**Reporter IV:** Backus based much of his argument upon the concern of the colonists that they were being taxed by the British government without representation. His whole argument for religious freedom focused on that point. He asked very pointedly "whether our **civil** legislatures are in truth our representative in **religious** affairs, or not. You do not deny the right of the British parliament to impose taxes within her own realm; only complain that she extends her taxing power beyond her proper limits. And have we not as good right to say you do the **same thing?**"

**Reporter I:** Backus lived to see many victories for the cause of religious liberty, but his death in 1806 preceded its consummation. Full religious liberty was not won in Massachusetts until 1833, a year after Samuel Francis Smith had written "My Country 'Tis of Thee"!

### Conclusion

**Reporter II:** The evangelistic role of Isaac Backus in the conversion of American churches to belief in full freedom of religion cannot be over-estimated. **The American Dictionary of Biography** recorded, "In the realm of ecclesiastical polity in the second half of the eighteenth century, his was perhaps the keenest mind in America.... Though many others joined in protest against civil control of religion and there were other leaders in the effort to secure separation of church and state, no individual in America since Roger Williams stands out so pre-eminently as the champion of religious liberty as does Isaac Backus."

John M. Mecklin, an authority in the development of religious dissent in America, agreed: "John Cotton, Cotton Mather, John Wise, and even Jonathan Edwards, belonged to their day and age, but Isaac Backus belongs to every age and to all men who love liberty. Backus alone deserves to be called the worthy successor of Roger Williams and John Clarke in the long, long struggle for religious liberty."

**Reporter III:** Finally, a Baptist authority on the subject, Joseph Martin Dawson, has observed: "...It is fairly well established that he (i.e., Backus), more than any other, became responsible for the Americanization of the churches. He was religious liberty incarnate, vocal, and articulate."

Next week we will see just what role Baptists played in the American Revolution itself.

