

**BAPTIST DISSENT IN SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY ENGLAND**

**BY**

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Baptist Dissent in Seventeenth Century England

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A Research Paper  
Presented To  
The Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
James Roger Duvall  
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by James Roger Duvall entitled "Baptist Dissent in Seventeenth Century England." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Thomas R. Dulan  
Major Professor

Accepted for the  
Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## Baptist Dissent in Seventeenth Century England

Baptists played an important role in the English struggle for freedom of worship. This paper will emphasize the reasons for dissent and the effects of that dissent among early English Baptists. Social and doctrinal issues and some prominent leaders who brought about the dissent will be discussed.

In the Prospectus of the Hanserd Knollys Society it was stated that:

To the Baptists belong the honor of first asserting in this land, and of establishing on the immutable basis of just argument and scripture rule, the right of every man to worship God as conscience dictates, in submission only to divine command. <sup>1</sup>

We shall see that the entreaties of these Baptists were, in the main, despised and unheeded. Within a few decades the voice of conscience spoke in contending armies and a great civil war. Many men became martyrs for the sake of conscience and "freedom of soul." As we view them from our times of religious liberty, we should be extremely grateful for their courageous, self-denying efforts as the pioneers who planted the seed that we might enjoy the fruit.

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<sup>1</sup>Edward B. Underhill, ed., Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1966, rpt.), p. v.

## Baptist Backgrounds

The early English Baptists are often associated with the Brownists-Separatists. One writer says they were of plebeian origins and arrived at their conception of the true church from a close study of Biblical texts, along with some mixture of Anabaptist influence. These ideas were expressed nearly a generation before the Stuarts came with their divine-right theory. During their years on the continent they lived remote from the current of events in England, and had been disciplined in the theory and practice of primitive congregationalism.<sup>2</sup> The autonomy of the congregation was a concept that appealed to those of a vigorous nature.

Evans, quoting Johann Mosheim, a Lutheran historian says:

The true origin of that sect which acquired the denomination of Anabaptists by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who come over to their communion...is hid in the remote depths of antiquity, and is of consequence extremely difficult to be ascertained.<sup>3</sup>

Franklin H. Littell says the watershed for interpreting the Anabaptist movement is whether it took its start

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<sup>2</sup>Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Harvest Book edition, 1954), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>B. Evans, The Early English Baptists, I, (London: J. Heaton & Son, 1862), p. 1.

at Wittenberg or Zurich.<sup>4</sup> Littell follows Ernst Troeltsch in saying the nature of the Anabaptist congregation and the structure of Anabaptist thought grew out of an idea of Christian discipleship very distant in standpoint from the teaching and practice of the Reformers.<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, religion with the vast majority of the English people was a mere form. The multiple ceremonies of the church hardly left a trace of the New Testament pattern. Though Henry VIII had officially broken from Rome, there was no great change in the ecclesiastical machinery and clerical control of the church. However, there was developing a sizeable group of nonconforming clergy who took it upon themselves to defy the official doctrine and practice of the Anglican church.

When James I came to the throne, he felt that he could handle the problem. He held an ecclesiastical conference at Hampton Court. His solution to the problem was to make all nonconformists "conform themselves, or else I will harry them out of the land."<sup>6</sup> This, along with similar actions, caused many to label James "the wisest fool in Christendom."

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<sup>4</sup>Franklin H. Littell, The Origin of Sectarian Protestantism, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964), p. 155.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>6</sup>D. Harris Willson, James VI and James I, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), p. 207.



## Leaders and Distinctives of Early English Baptists

Two chief factors that led to dissent at that time were the corruption of the clergy and tyranny of the church, along with the new knowledge of the Bible which gave men what they believed to be a divine standard by which they could judge the ecclesiastical system and people of their day.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest leaders of the Baptists were referred to as General Baptists because they held to a view that Christ's atonement was for all mankind. This was also known as Arminianism. The Particular Baptists were Calvinistic and believed the atonement was limited (or particular) to only those whom God intended to save. In time Particular Baptists eclipsed the General Baptists in strength, especially in and around London. They had good leadership and wealth. The Seventh-Day Baptists were another group that developed; they were so named for their worship on Saturday, the old Jewish Sabbath. However, they never gained much prominence.

Like most great movements, the early Baptists in England had courageous individual leaders who were willing to suffer for their cause. The dissenters began to express themselves by writing out statements of their faith and practice. The first Confession of Faith of modern times to demand freedom of conscience and separation of church and

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<sup>7</sup>W. B. Selbie, Nonconformity - Its Origin and Progress, London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1912), p. 22.



state was believed to be written in 1612 and was called "Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, Containing a Confession of Faith of Certain English People, living in Amsterdam." The primary author is believed to be Thomas Helwys. Article 84 stated:

That 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, or 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).<sup>8</sup>

Such a statement certainly was radical for the times.

Thomas Helwys was descended from a good family whose ancestral home was near Nottingham. He was educated at Gray's Inn in London, which then gave a general education as well as legal training. After three years in London, he returned to his home town, married and settled down as a country gentleman.

His home was a place for all the clergy with Puritan leanings to call. He and his wife came to know John Smyth and joined his Separatist church in Gainsborough. Smyth was a Cambridge graduate and a formerly ordained Anglican minister who broke from the Church of England and pastored an independent group for a short time in England. He took a band of exiles with him to Holland and pastored several different

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<sup>8</sup>William L. Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions of Faith, (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1969), p. 140.

groups there until his death in 1612.<sup>9</sup> When persecution of dissenters came, Helwys fled along with many others to Holland and left his wife and children behind, no doubt thinking they would be left alone. But church authorities had her put in prison in York.<sup>10</sup>

While in Amsterdam, Helwys and his followers came in contact with some Dutch Mennonites. In a letter to these brethren, Helwys referred to his group as "the true Christian English Church."<sup>11</sup> He included in the letter what he called "A Short Confession of Faith." In Article 35, it stated that worldly authority was a necessary ordinance of God. It went on to acknowledge that they were bound by the Word of God to "fear, honor and show obedience to the magistrates in all cases not contrary to the Word of the Lord,"<sup>12</sup>

Helwys and his group in Amsterdam became convinced that their flight from persecution was a mistake, reasoning that "thousands of ignorant souls in our own country were perishing for lack of instruction."<sup>13</sup> They returned to London in 1612, knowing the risks they were taking. They founded the first Baptist church on English soil at

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<sup>9</sup>Evans, I, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>10</sup>A. C. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists, (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1947), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup>Lumpkin, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>13</sup>Underwood, loc. cit.

Spitalfields, outside the wall of London in 1612. The church was led and officered by laymen, as Helwys was never ordained. It was soon deprived of its leaders by imprisonment, but it still managed to hold together.

Shortly after returning to England, Helwys wrote The Mystery of Iniquity, which advocated religious liberty for all faiths. One copy had inscribed on the flyleaf to King James I the author's position:

The king is a mortal man, and not God,  
therefore hath no power over the mortal souls  
of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for  
them, and to set spiritual lords over them. 14

He was soon in prison. While there it is believed that he wrote the following "Baptist Petition to the Parliament," probably in 1614:

To the Right Honorable Assembly of the Commons-  
house of Parliament:

A most humble supplication of divers poor  
prisoners, and many others of the king's majesty's  
loyal subjects ready to testify it by the oath  
of allegiance in all sincerity, whose grievances  
are lamentable, only for cause of conscience;

Most humbly showing: That whereas in the  
Parliament holden in the seventh year of the  
king's majesty's reign that now is, it was enacted  
that all persons whatsoever above the age of eighteen  
years not coming to church, etc., should take the  
oath of allegiance; and for the refusal thereof,  
should be committed to prison without bail.

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14J. Glenwood Clayton, "Thomas Helwys: A Baptist Founding Father," Baptist History and Heritage, VIII (January, 1973), p. 9.



By which statute the popish recusantes upon taking the oath are daily delivered from imprisonments: and divers of us also are set at liberty when we fall under the hands of the Reverend judges and justices, but when we fall under the hands of the bishops we can have no benefit by the said oath, for they say it belongeth only to popish recusantes, and not to others; but kept have we been by them many years in lingering imprisonments, divided from wives, children, servants and callings, not any other causes but only for conscience toward God, to the utter undoing of us, our wives and children.

Our most humble supplication therefore to this high and honorable assembly is, that in commiseration of the distressed estate of us, our poor wives and children it may be enacted in express words that other of the king's majesty's faithful subjects, as well as popish recusantes may be freed from imprisonments upon taking the said oath.

And we shall still (as we do day and night) pray the God of heaven may be in your honorable assembly, for by Him do princes decree justice.

By his majesty's faithful subjects  
most falsely called  
Anabaptists.<sup>15</sup>

Helwys was open in expressing his religious views on various subjects. His views of the ordinances were stated in his "Declaration of Faith." He said in Article 14 that baptism was the "outward manifestation of dying unto sin, and walking in newness of life... And therefore in no wise appertaineth to infants."<sup>16</sup> He viewed the

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<sup>15</sup>Champlin Burrage, The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research 1550-1641, II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), pp. 215-216.

<sup>16</sup>Lumpkin, op. cit., p. 120.

Lord's Supper as an outward sign of spiritual communion between Christ and the faithful believers to declare Christ's death until He returns.<sup>17</sup> Helwys' view of the church was that the local congregation was autonomous. He said, "no church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other."<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Helwys was indeed one of the "Founding Fathers" of the Baptists in early England. His deep convictions and strongly stated opinions set the precedent for the many who followed his footsteps. The very ideas of Baptists made them contentious. They differed with the established religion on the plan of salvation and attendant doctrines such as close communion, baptism and the laying on of hands. They carried on disputes among themselves over these matters and also engaged in debates with theologians outside their ranks. But the issues which most often brought them into political conflict were their views on church and state and their opposition to tithes.<sup>19</sup>

Another great leader of English Baptists was William Kiffin. He was born in 1616, a short time after Thomas Helwys and his congregation of Baptists returned to England from Holland. He became a Baptist early in his life, first joining an independent church in about 1634.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas P. Dixon, "The Contribution of the English Baptists to Education 1666-1820" (PhD Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1975), pp. 18-19.

This was the church of which Henry Jacob had been pastor, and which then was under the pastoral leadership of John Lathrop. Henry Jessey was later pastor of the same church. From this independent congregation, the first "Calvinistic Baptist" church was formed with John Spilsbury as pastor.<sup>20</sup>

Kiffin became a nonconforming Baptist after much prayer and inquiry. He stated:

I used all endeavors by conversing with all such as were able, and also by diligently searching the Scriptures, with earnest desires to God that I might be directed in a right way of worship; and after some time concluded that the safest way was to follow the footsteps of the flock, namely that order laid down by Christ and His apostles, and practiced by the primitive Christians in their time; which I found to be, that after conversion they were baptized; added to the church, and continued in the apostles' bread and prayers, according to which I bound myself to be conformable.<sup>21</sup>

He wrote while pastoring an apologetic pamphlet, "A Brief Remonstrance of the Reasons and Grounds of those People Commonly Called Anabaptists, for their Separation..." He began by asking, "What warrant have you either to be a member, much less a minister of any such separate congregation?" This is followed by a lengthy defense of Baptist doctrine and practice.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>David C. Woolley, "Revelancy of Baptist History," Baptist History and Heritage, I (October, 1966), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Evans, I, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>22</sup>Gordon Kingsley, "Opposition to Early Baptists," Baptist History and Heritage, IV (January, 1969), p. 3.



While serving as pastor, Kiffin became a successful merchant of woolen goods and was recognized as one of the wealthiest men in England. At one time the king called on him to lend him forty thousand pounds. Mr. Kiffin told the king he could not possibly let him have that much money, but he would give him ten thousand pounds if his majesty would honor him by accepting the gift. The king accepted the gift. Kiffin later told the story and said his liberality had saved him thirty thousand pounds.<sup>23</sup>

Kiffin and John Spilsbury were probably most responsible for the London Confession of Faith of 1644. It was moderately Calvinistic; the doctrine of election was balanced by the statement that the gospel is to be preached to all men.<sup>24</sup> This Confession was signed by men from seven churches and included Mr. Kiffin.<sup>25</sup> In the introduction, the writers referred to themselves as the "poor, despised churches of God in London." They went on to say, "we are frequently termed to be (that) black brand of heretics and sowers of division..."<sup>26</sup>

Article 47 of the "London Confession" shows the continued importance of congregational autonomy, but

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<sup>23</sup>Woolley, loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Lumpkin, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>25</sup>John T. Christian, A History of the Baptists, I (Texarkana: Bogard Press, 1922), p. 281.

<sup>26</sup>Lumpkin, op. cit., p. 154.

they did emphasize the importance of cooperation among others of like faith as much as possible.

Although the particular congregations be distinct and several bodies, every one a compact and knit city in itself; yet are they all to walk by one and the same rule and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.<sup>27</sup>

Kiffin, or at least a document known as the "Kiffin Manuscript," has been variously credited or discredited by historians in a baptism controversy that has raged for years. Crosby says that Kiffin sent a Mr. Richard Blount to the Netherlands so that he might receive scriptural baptism at the hands of certain Baptist brethern and return to England and scripturally baptize the English.<sup>28</sup> However, Evans, Christian and others say the manuscript is not authentic.<sup>29</sup>

Another leader of renown among the Baptists was John Bunyan. He was born in 1628 in Elstow, the section of England that sent many families to America because of religious difficulties.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-169.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Crosby, The History of the English Baptists, I (1738; rpt. Lafayette, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1978), pp. 101-102.

<sup>29</sup>Evans, op. cit., II, p. 78.; Christian, op. cit., p. 261.

In 1653, at about the age of twenty-five Bunyan joined the congregation in Bedford. He was baptized by the pastor, John Gifford, in the Ouse River. Bunyan remained a Baptist in his personal convictions throughout his life, but he did not hold to an exclusive Baptist ecclesiology. He allowed nonimmersed believers to hold membership in the Bedford church after he became its pastor in 1671. He wrote a tract "Differences in Judgment About Water-Baptism, no Bar to Communion" in 1673. He accepted believer's baptism by immersion as God's ordinance but refused to make "an idol of it."<sup>30</sup>

Bunyan's statement about his entering the ministry is so subdued that it did not indicate in any way the great dissenter he would become. He said:

When some of them occasionally went in the country to teach, they asked me to go with them. I did, and spoke sometimes, and began occasionally to speak in a more public way also. And these others also received the Word with rejoicing and said that their souls were edified.

The church continued to feel that I should preach, and so after solemn prayer to the Lord, with fasting, I was ordained to regular public preaching of the Word among those who believed and also to those who had not yet received the faith. About this time, I began to feel in my

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<sup>30</sup>L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, Baptists and the Bible, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 82.



heart a great desire to preach.<sup>31</sup>

After he began preaching, Bunyan kept at his trade as a brazier for about five years. His right to preach was questioned by the clergy from Bedford.<sup>32</sup> He continued to preach, but with the restoration of Charles II difficulties began to mount. In October, 1660, the magistrates of Bedfordshire made an order in the Quarterly Sessions held at Bedford for the restoration of the Book of Common Prayer in public worship. Bunyan opposed attempts to force the Prayer Book on congregations. In November, he set out to hold a service in a farmhouse at Lower Samsell, about thirteen miles from Bedford. A neighboring magistrate got a warrant for his arrest should he attempt to preach. The congregation heard of this and tried to keep him from preaching, but he felt that if God wished for him to be the first to take a firm stand for the preaching of the gospel, he could not turn and run. He said, "I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed for this. Come, be of good cheer, let us not be daunted; our cause is good, we need not be ashamed."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, (1666; rpt. Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), pp. 93-94.

<sup>32</sup>Marcus L. Loane, Makers of Religious Freedom in the Seventeenth Century, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1961), p. 124.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

Bunyan was arrested. Magistrate Francis Wingate refused to allow bail unless Bunyan would promise to give up preaching. Bunyan replied that he would not be silent for the sake of freedom. He was kept imprisoned until the next Quarterly Session and then was charged with not attending church, but instead had attended non-Anglican meetings. Bunyan made it clear that he would not attend church where the Prayer Book was in use. He was to be kept incarcerated for three more months. When Charles II was crowned in 1660, many prisoners were released.<sup>34</sup> But a recommendation had to be made by the local authorities and Bunyan was denied release. Thus began the twelve year term of John Bunyan as a jailed, religious dissident. He worked with his hands, making hundreds of long lace tags which his family sold for their necessities. He counseled with Christian friends and read and studied his Bible. He arrived at a remarkable knowledge of Scripture and wrote many books that made him famous. His Grace Abounding and Pilgrim's Progress are classics in our day.

In 1672, Charles II changed his policy toward the nonconformists and issued the Declaration of Indulgence. Bunyan, along with many other religious offenders, was released. However, when Parliament annuled Charles'

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<sup>34</sup>David Ogg, England in the Reign of Charles II, I, (London: Clarendon Press, 2d ed., 1955), passim.

"Declaration," Bunyan was again imprisoned for another year.

Thomas Helwys, William Kiffin and John Bunyan were indomitable; these unyielding, unconquerable men are a legacy to all freedom lovers today.

The confessions of faith that were written are not only important as formal statements of belief, they are important also because the people who formulated and signed them were committed to the principles which they embodied. They were not written to be filed away as an infrequent frame-of-reference, but were intended for direction and guidance in their daily lives.

From "A Confession of the Faith of Several Churches of Christ in the County of Somerset, and of Some Churches in the Counties near Adjacent" written in 1656, it is clear that the churches felt they had a mandate from the New Testament. Two of their articles seem explicit on this matter:

Article 29. That the Lord Jesus Christ being the foundation and corner stone of the gospel church whereon His apostles built (Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3), He gave them power and abilities to propagate, to plant, to rule and order (Matt. 28:19,20; Luke 10:16), for the benefit of that His body, by which ministry He did show forth the exceeding riches of His grace, by His kindness towards it in the ages to come (Eph. 2:7), which is according to His promise (Matt. 28:20).

Article 30. That this foundation and ministration aforesaid, is a sure guide, rule and direction, in the darkest time of the anti-Christian apostasy, or spiritual Babylonish captivity, to direct, inform, and restore



us in our just freedom and liberty, to the right worship and order belonging to the church of Jesus Christ (I Tim. 3:14,15; II Tim. 3:15-17; John 17:20; Isa. 59:21; Rev. 2:24; Isa 40:21).<sup>35</sup>

The matter of liberty of conscience kept recurring in the confessions of faith. By 1660, the General Baptists declared strongly their belief that persecution for religious convictions was "contrary to the mind of Christ." They opposed compulsory tithes and stated that free offerings ought to be contributed for the maintenance of their ministers. Article 24 of their Confession of Faith said:

That it is the will and mind of God (in these gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own consciences in matters of religion, or worship, without the least opposition, or persecution, as simply upon that account; and that for any in authority otherwise to act, we confidently believe is expressly contrary to the mind of Christ, who requires that whatsoever men would that others should do unto them, they should even so do unto others. Matt. 7.12...<sup>36</sup>

### Persecution

Baptists were derided for their views on baptism; their alleged connection with continental Anabaptists; their lack of learning; their alleged immorality; and other faults both real and imagined. Because they worshipped in homes,

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<sup>35</sup>Lumpkin, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-233.

barns and sometimes in the woods, and often baptized at night many of their enemies brought various charges against them. The worst of Munster<sup>37</sup> was often associated with them.

As early as 1626, Thomas Brewer, the zealous pastor of a Baptist church at Ashford in Kent was arrested for preaching in and about that area. The church had been there for about a year when this happened.<sup>38</sup>

The congregation of John Lathrop was confronted by authorities as they worshipped on a Sunday, April 29, 1632. Forty-two members were arrested. The length of the imprisonment is not known, but some did have certain privileges to leave occasionally as was necessary.<sup>39</sup>

A counterfeit Anabaptist Catechism was printed in 1645 in which their enemies charged that initiation into the Baptist sect included a pledge to "forsake all the learned and renounce the wise..." Their ministers were said to make their living by begging house to house

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<sup>37</sup>Munster was a city in Westphalia which a radical group of Anabaptists sought to make into the "New Jerusalem" and establish the Kingdom of God upon earth in the 1530s. It represented religious excesses.

<sup>38</sup>Evans, op. cit., II, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup>W. R. Estep, Jr., "Anabaptists and the Rise of English Baptists," The Quarterly Review, (January - March, 1969). p. 59.

among the congregation.<sup>40</sup>

Though many early Baptist leaders were well educated, there were some who had little theological education. A critic, seeking to degrade Baptist ministers in general, described a Baptist preacher's sermon in the following manner:

Thus, when these extraordinary qualified theologians are mounted in their thrones, a popish priest can hardly outdo him in strange postures, as in lifting up the pureness of the whitest whiteness of his eyes; then mark how he displays his arms as if he were swimming; also the terrible assault and battery that the poor cushion endures, the hawking, hemmings, hummings, coughings, spittings (with other parenthesis while there is more matter a pumping) besides the terrible thundering voice against our church liturgy, although they do know that they lie...<sup>41</sup>

That this was not a fair evaluation of Baptist worship services is shown by a letter written in 1609 explaining the details of worship. The services were lengthy and dealt primarily with Bible exposition. There was no singing and they put great value on spontaneity and audience participation. A letter written by Hughe and Ann Bromhead to friends said:

The order of the worship and government of our church is: 1) We begin with a prayer, after read some one or two chapters of the Bible, give the sense thereof, and confer upon the same; that done we lay aside our books, and after a solemn prayer made by the speaker,

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<sup>40</sup>Kingsley, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



he propoundeth some text out of the Scripture;  
 he prophecieth out of the same, by the space  
 of one hour, or three quarters of an hour.

The letter went on:

The morning exercise begins at eight of  
 the clock and continueth unto twelve of the  
 clock, the like course of exercise is observed  
 in the afternoon from two of the clock unto  
 five or six of the clock.<sup>42</sup>

During the Interregum, Baptists enjoyed a great  
 measure of toleration and favoritism. Cromwell chose many  
 of them to help rule the land by appointing them to  
 important government offices where they could exert great  
 influence over the affairs of state. This was short-  
 lived, however, for when the Stuarts returned to power,  
 the government dramatically changed from toleration to  
 persecution again. Baptists were no longer socially  
 acceptable, but were ostracised. Many were blamed for the  
 excesses of the Interregum.<sup>43</sup>

The persecution of those whom the crown feared  
 and distrusted continued for many years. "DeLaune's Pleas  
 for the Non-Conformists" was written in 1683 by Thomas  
 DeLaune while he was imprisoned at Newgate. It is a fifty-  
 four page pamphlet accompanied at its later printing by

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<sup>42</sup>Leon McBeth, "Baptist Beginnings," Baptist  
 History and Heritage, XV (October, 1980), p. 39.

<sup>43</sup>Dixon, op. cit., p. 34.

"A Narrative of the Trial and Suffering of Thomas DeLaune..." This article is a defense of the Baptist position of separation of church and state. The details of his persecution are graphically given.<sup>44</sup> This continued persecution eventually brought on a public reaction and the Act of Toleration in 1689.

### Conclusion

One of the difficulties in studying the Baptists of seventeenth century England is that as a sect, much of the evidence was recorded in legal documents such as records of the Court of High Commission, search warrants and prison records.<sup>45</sup> Also many of the things written about them were from their enemies.

The attitudes of intolerance toward Baptists and other dissenters that we have presented were the generally accepted views of that day. Leaders in the Anglican church and government were no more cruel, no more sadistic or no more prompted by evil motives than others living then. State-controlled religion was accepted and defended with civil authority as the right thing to do. Persecution of nonconformists seemed natural.

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<sup>44</sup>Thomas DeLaune, "DeLaune's Plea of the Non-Conformists," (London, 1704), pp. 1-54.

<sup>45</sup>Burrage, op. cit., p. 311.

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Many Baptists during that time refused to believe and accept the government's prescribed religious principles and stood true to their consciences and deep convictions, even to the point of severe personal suffering. Though many considered the insistence of the Baptists for freedom of worship and the separation of the church from governmental control to be heretical at that time, it has proved to be a great blessing for us.



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