



Why
— We Are —
BAPTISTS
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Baptist Distinctives

- Believer's Baptism
- Regenerate Church Membership
- Congregational Church Governance
- Separation of Church and State

Religious Liberty

“The idea of religious freedom and disestablishment is one of the most revolutionary ideas in world history. Virtually every state in history allied with a religion or, when they banned conventional religion, invented new ones (like communism). The Baptist doctrine of religious freedom amounts to a claim that every state in history got it wrong. It would be breathtaking in its audacity, except for subsequent history in which religious freedom spread worldwide and vindicated the belief that states and churches relate best when they are institutionally and jurisdictionally separate.”

- Thomas Kidd, Andrew T. Walker, Paul D. Miller, *Baptist Political Theology*

The History of Religious Liberty



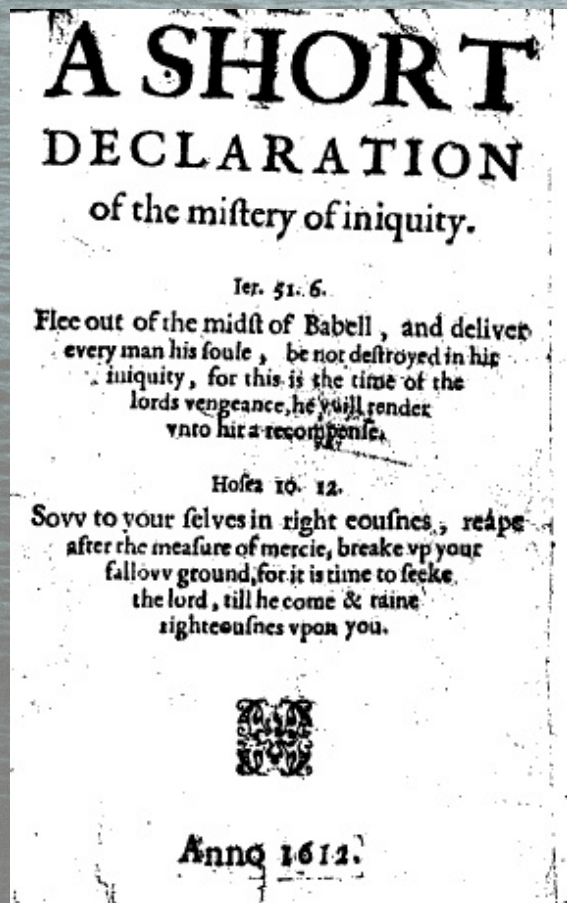
- Thomas Helwys (1575-1616), along with John Smyth, become the first English Baptists.
- Originally Separatists from the Church of England, both men eventually relocated to Holland, where they came to Baptist convictions regarding believer's baptism.

The History of Religious Liberty



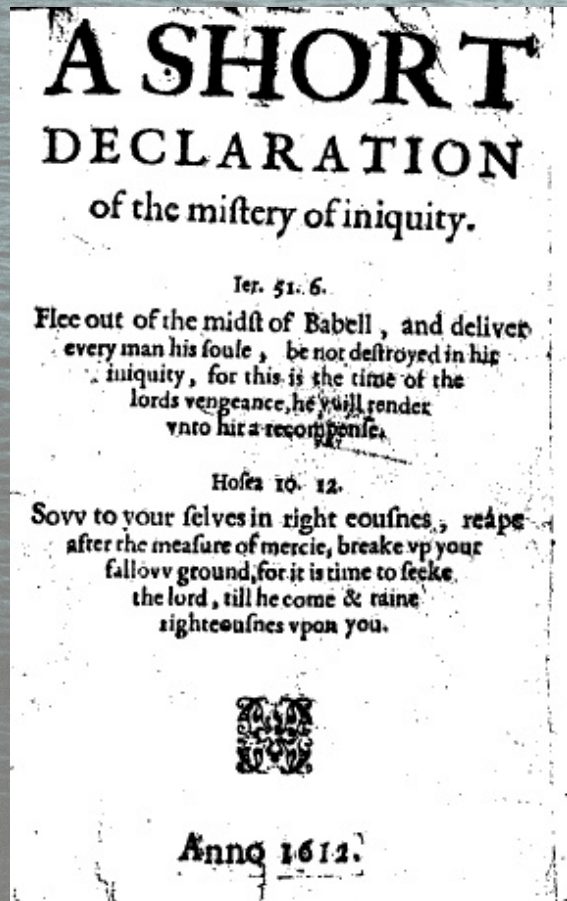
- In 1612, Helwys and Smyth part ways and Helwys returns to England with his congregation.
- Upon his return, Helwys publishes a short book: *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*

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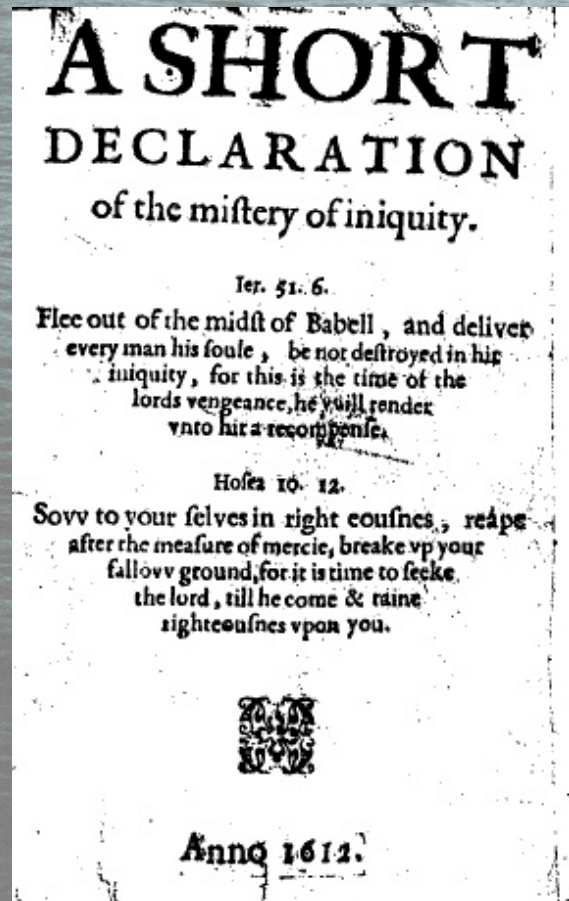
“For we do freely profess that our lord the king has no more power over their consciences than over ours, and that is none at all. For our lord the king is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a king but in earthly causes. And if the king’s people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all human laws made by the king, our lord the king can require no more. For men’s religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. This is made evident to our lord the king by the scriptures.”

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“The king is a mortal man & not God, therefore hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws & ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them. If the king have authority to make spiritual lords & laws, then he is an immortal God and not a mortal man.”

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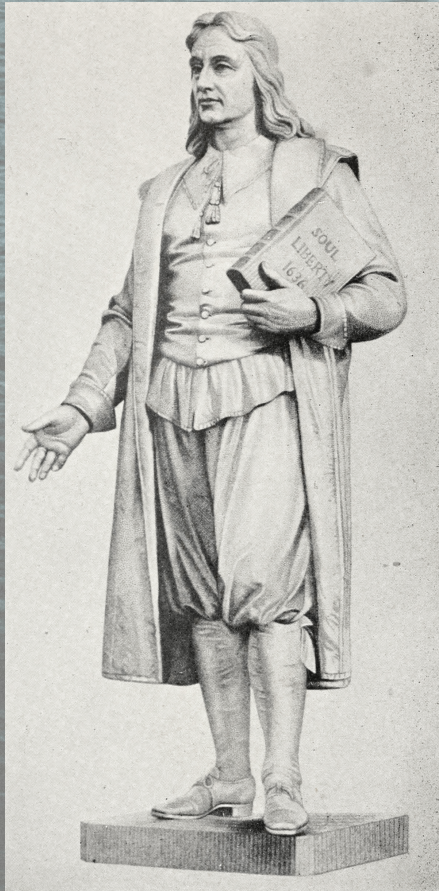
“What is notable about this remark is that very few in his world or era upheld such a radical idea of religious liberty. But, for Helwys, it was derived from his conviction that ‘an earthly sword is ordained of God only for an earthly power, and a spiritual sword for a spiritual power.’” - Michael Haykin, *Baptist Political Theology*

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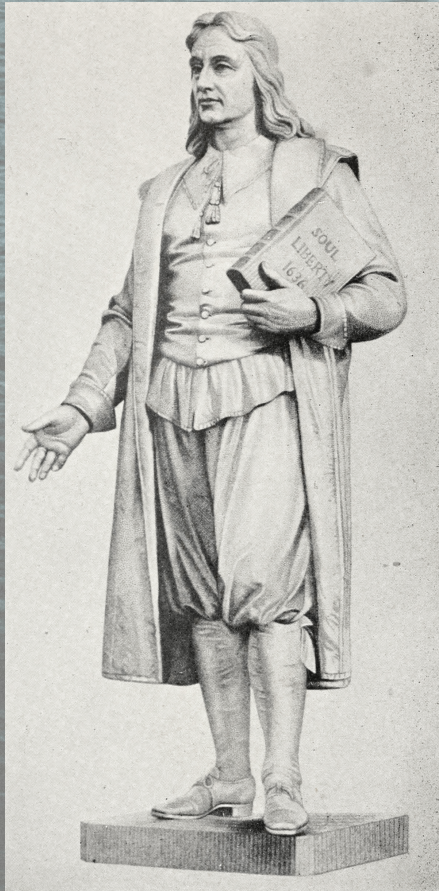
- In response, King James I had Helwys imprisoned and executed.
- King James' son, King Charles who ascended to throne in 1625, was much more brutal in responding to Puritans and Separatists (including Baptists)
- So, many sought to flee where they could worship without persecution.

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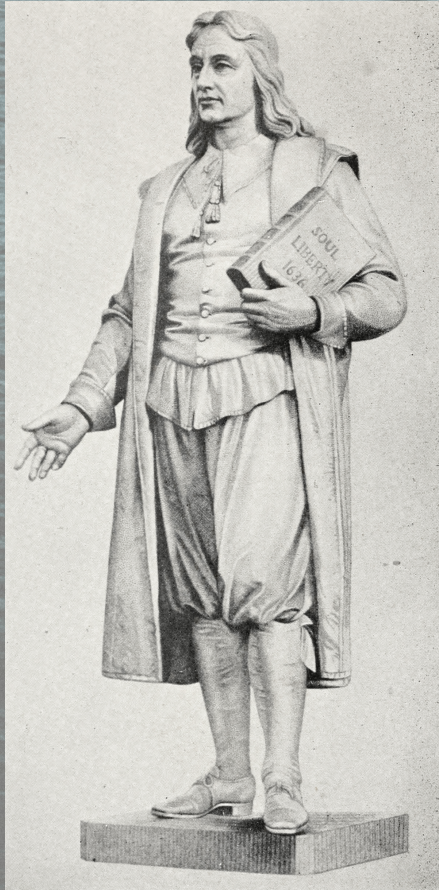
- In 1630, Roger Williams, a minister with Puritan sympathies, fled to New England and landed in Massachusetts where he was offered a ministerial position at the prestigious Boston church.

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- But Williams refused the offer because he was a Separatist, not just a Puritan, and believed the church in Boston had not adequately broken ties with the Church of England.
- Along with other controversial views, Williams objected to the conflation of religious and political authority. This led to Williams being banished from Massachusetts in 1636.
- So, Williams fled and purchased land from Native Americans, founding the town of Providence, Rhode Island—a place known to be a safe place for religious dissenters.

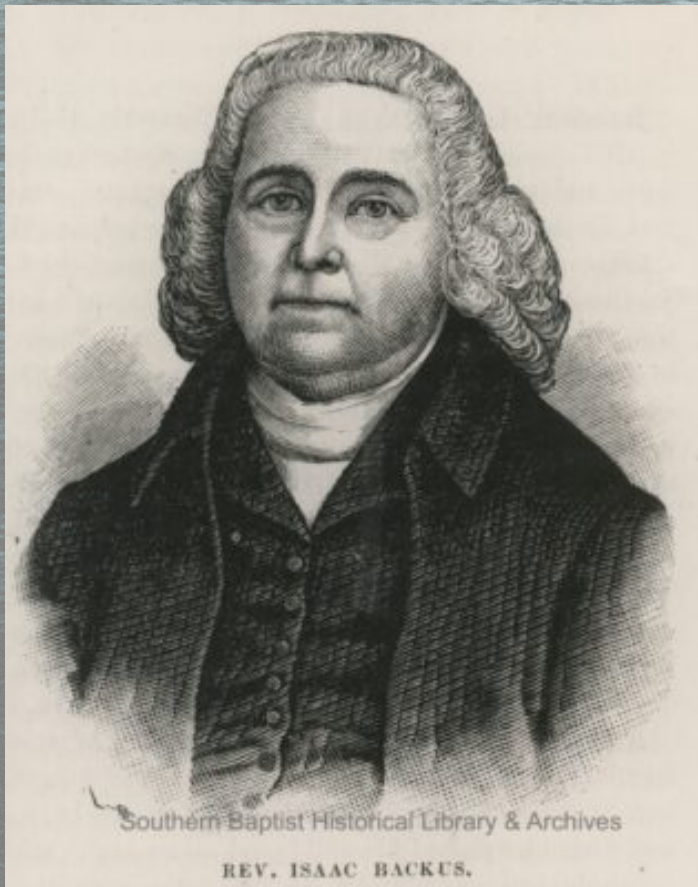
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- So other nonconformists, like the Quakers, arrived in droves to Rhode Island. The Quakers were a rigorous test to Williams commitment to religious liberty.

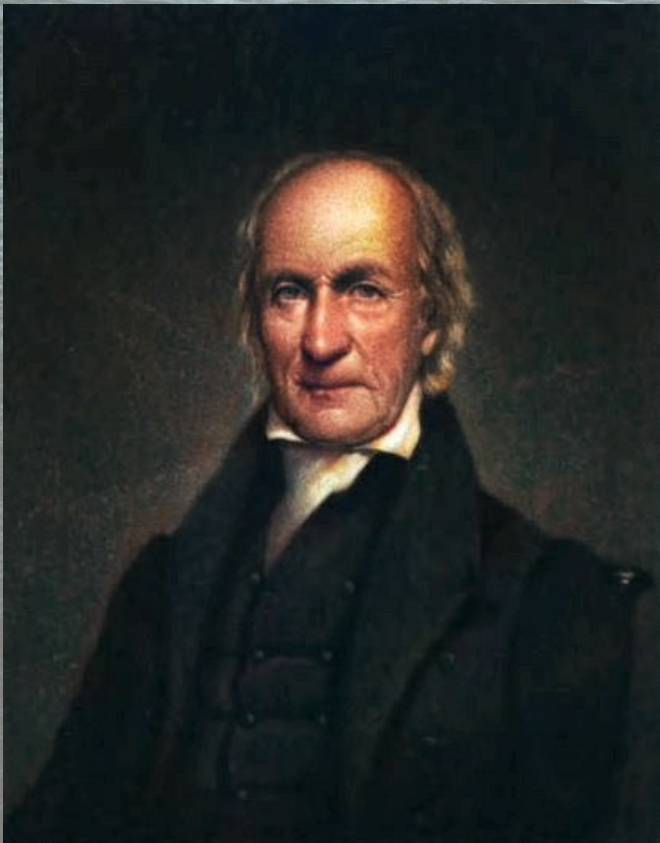
- Yet Williams maintained his commitment to religious liberty and (over a century before Thomas Jefferson) argued that God “intended a hedge or wall of separation between the Garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.”

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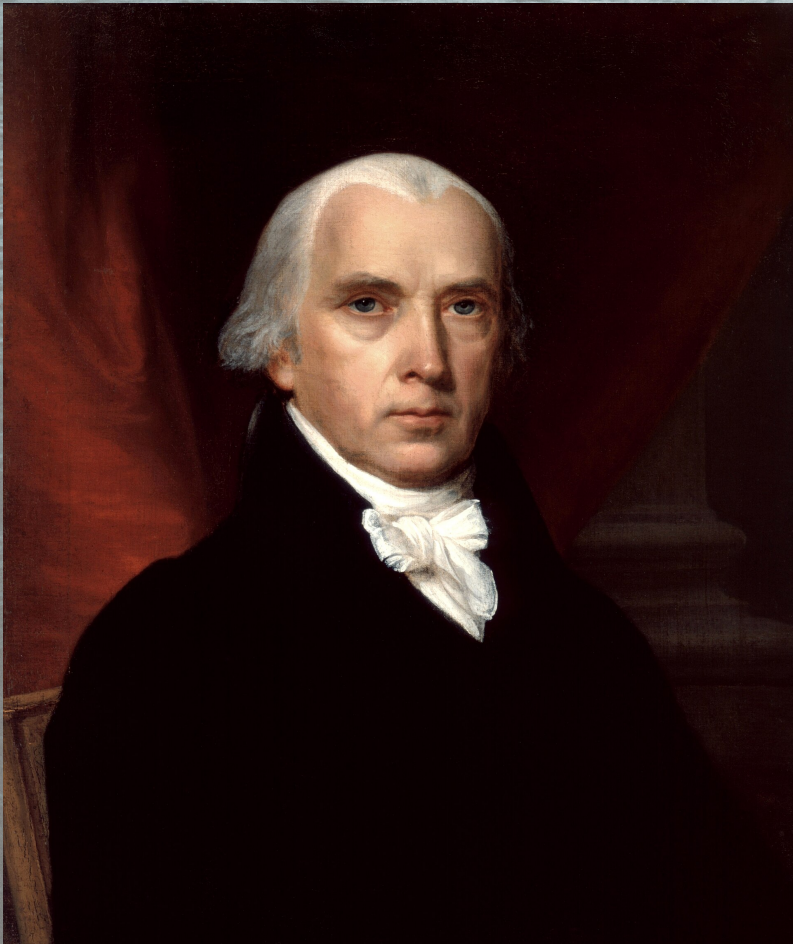
- “Since religion is ever a matter between God and individuals, how can any man become a member of a religious society without his own consent?”

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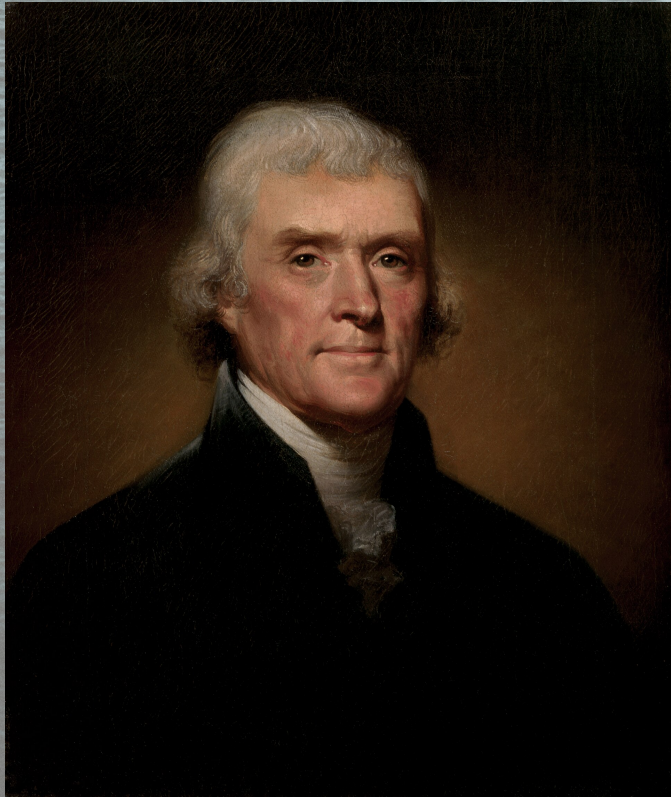
- “Whenever men fly to the law or sword to protect their system of religion, and force it upon others, it is evident that they have something in their system that will not beat the light, and stand upon the basis of truth.”

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- During the 1788-89 election for Congress, Leland met with James Madison and agreed to support him *if* he promised to ratify religious freedom in the Bill of Rights.

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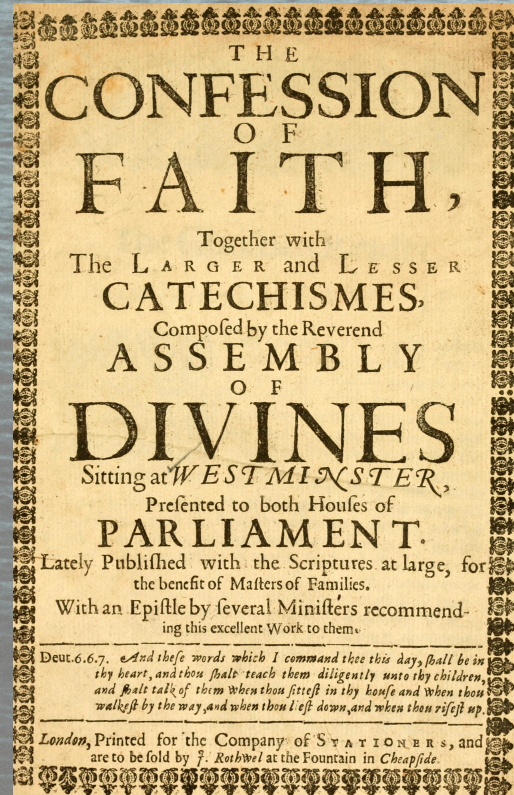
- After returning to Connecticut, John Leland maintained a correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson wrote to Leland's Danbury Baptist association with his famous letter where he stated that "there should be a wall of separation between church and state."

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- John Leland's mammoth cheese wheel, offered as a token of congratulations to Thomas Jefferson, delivered in 1802
- Leland is invited to preach before Congress

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- American Presbyterians alter the Westminster Confession in 1788 to align with religious freedom
- Chapter 23, article 3, is entirely rewritten