

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Defending the Separation of Church and State

When the Baptist experiment in Rhode Island was begun, few other colonies were inclined to follow. The Puritans in New England, for example, were fearful that the loss of a state church would result in moral anarchy and theological chaos.

"...we dare not render homage to any earthly power which I and (other Baptists) are fully convinced belongs only to God." -- *Isaac Backus*, 1774

"Baptists wanted freedom from a state-enforced religion because they thought that the freedom of the human spirit was worth saving." -- *Walter Shurden*

"The chief impediment to religious liberty in our generation is the renewed effort to make of the United States a theocracy rather than the constitutional democracy the founders set in place."
-- *Edwin Gaustad*, Baptist historian



Obadiah Holmes fled England in 1639 to escape persecution. He became a Baptist preacher in New England. In 1651, he was arrested in Lynn, Massachusetts. Holmes refused to pay a fine for practicing his faith and was publicly whipped in Boston Common with 39 lashes. He cried out, "You have struck me with roses!"

