

“Patiently to Suffer for Christ’s Sake”: Hercules Collins as an Exemplar of Baptists During the Great Persecution (1660- 1688)¹

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In 1682, in a work provocatively titled, *Some Reasons for Separation From the Communion of the Church of England*, London Baptist pastor Hercules Collins declared to the state church, “If you do persecute us for our Conscience, I hope God will give us that Grace which may inable us patiently to suffer for Christ’s sake.”² Apparently God granted this desire for John Piggott, in his funeral sermon for Collins, affirmed that he “continued faithful to the last. He was not shock’d by the Fury of Persecutors, tho he suffer’d Imprisonment for the Name of Christ.”³ In fact, Collins was imprisoned at

least twice for his principled commitment to the idea of a believer's church during the period labeled in a recent work by Raymond Brown as a "Period of Repression" for English nonconformity.⁴ During this period all Dissenters, including the Baptists, were persecuted.⁵ As a result a rich body of literature was produced that reflects a vibrant spirituality of persecution and suffering for the sake of the gospel. As Brown has observed, new forms of communication were opened up to those imprisoned for the gospel: "The writing of books, pamphlets, and collections of letters for distribution in printed form extended the ministry of those who had preached earlier at the cost of their freedom but were now 'silenced' prisoners."⁶ One such prisoner who made use of his time in prison to expand his ministry was Hercules Collins.⁷ His prison writings are characterized by confidence in the sovereign providence of God, thankfulness for both physical and spiritual blessings, reflection upon the sufficiency of Christ, and a certain expectation of a future deliverance and reward.

Historical Background

Although Charles II had promised religious toleration when he returned to the throne following the Commonwealth Protectorate of the Cromwells, hopes for such were short-lived among the dissenters. One thing is certain, as Richard L. Greaves has observed in his treatment of dissent in the years 1660–1663: "The return of the monarch in 1660 brought no cessation of revolutionary thinking or acting."⁸ It is unknown for certain whether Charles II actually had any intention of keeping his promise of religious liberty. Tim Harris, in a recent study of Charles II, argues that the king was caught in the middle of a "no-win situation" where he was forced "to rule over a divided people"—some of whom desired more toleration and some of whom desired less.⁹ Michael R. Watts believes that Charles II had a "real desire for religious toleration."¹⁰ His subsequent actions would seem to call this assessment into question. Between 1661 and 1665 Parliament passed a series of laws known as the Clarendon Code which were designed to enforce conformity to the worship of the Church of England. The Corporation Act of 1661 required that a person had to have received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Church of England within the past year to be eligible for election to any government office. Eligible persons were also required to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to the king of England. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 resulted in the ejection of approximately two thousand Puritan ministers from their pulpits since it required complete subscription to *The Book of Common Prayer*. Most Puritan ministers resigned rather than conform to

these demands. The Conventicle Act of 1664 forbade the assembling of five or more persons for religious worship other than in the Church of England. This, in essence, outlawed dissenting churches. The Five-Mile Act of 1665 forbade any nonconforming preacher or teacher to come within five miles of a city where he had previously served as a minister or any incorporated town. Each of these acts were aimed at stamping out both dissenters and Catholics. Baptists were particularly hit hard by these laws since they made their conscientious worship of God illegal.¹¹

In May of 1670 a second Conventicle Act was enacted by Parliament to replace the recently expired Act of 1664. In this version of the law fines were reduced for worshippers to five shillings for the first offense and ten shillings for each subsequent offense. The fines for the preachers and owners of the meeting places, however, were increased to twenty pounds for the first offense and forty pounds for subsequent offences. To secure these funds the personal property of the guilty parties could be seized and sold, and if that did not satisfy the debt the attenders of the conventicle could be forced to pay the fines.¹² Motivation was provided to ensure that the Act would be enforced. Informers would be paid a full one-third of the fines collected and magistrates who failed to enforce the law could be fined one hundred pounds.¹³ Initially, nonconformists continued to meet in large numbers in London.¹⁴ Soon, however, the Lord Mayor began to crack down by calling out trained bands to search out and suppress the illegal meetings. Sir Samuel Stirling, Lord Mayor of London in 1670, defended his use of force before Parliament in a case heard on November 21, 1671.¹⁵ Stirling argued that his action was necessary to secure the peace in a time of great danger since on one Sunday in London there were “at least 12,000 people assembled at the several meeting places contrary to the act.”¹⁶ Ironically, this crackdown by the government during this period resulted in driving more people to meeting in secret. This, in turn, had the effect of increasing suspicion by the government.¹⁷ In response, the government widely employed its system of espionage developed during the British Civil Wars.¹⁸ Several well-known London Puritan ministers were arrested in the weeks following the passage of the second Conventicle Act including Thomas Manton, Richard Baxter, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, along with Particular Baptists such as William Kiffin, Hanserd Knollys and Edward Harrison.¹⁹ Hercules Collins was also among those arrested at this time.

Collins’ First Imprisonment

Collins was arrested with thirteen others, including Tobias Wells²⁰ and

Richard Blunt²¹ in June of 1670, for assembling unlawfully “at a conventicle & other misdemeanours.”²² This was apparently a Baptist meeting, given that out of the fourteen total names, three of the four names that remain legible on the document are the names of known Baptists. Collins was sent to the Nova Prisons,²³ but apparently was held for less than two months since there is no record of him at the next court date on August 29, 1670.²⁴ During this brief experience with persecution, however, Collins would learn many valuable lessons. Nearly three decades later, Collins would declare that “Believers are taught in the School of Affliction, that something is to be learned there, which is not ordinarily learned by other ways.”²⁵ During these times of trials, truths read in books or heard in sermons are learned more thoroughly because “they have learned that by the Rod which they never learn’d before.”²⁶ In his funeral sermon for Collins, Piggott reminded his auditors of how exemplary their pastor had submitted to his trials, which would have included this first imprisonment, and how he “was always learning from the Discipline of the Rod.”²⁷ Collins was clearly undaunted by the early challenges which he experienced as a young man. His ministry over the next two decades would be marked by his faithful endurance of persecution.

Collins’ Second Imprisonment

In October of 1677, John Owen voiced his own expectation of a coming period of persecution in a sermon on Psalm 90:11: “I am persuaded, Brethren, the day is coming, the day is now at hand, wherein you will stand in need of all the Experiences that ever you had of the Presence of God with you, and his Protection of you.”²⁸ Indeed, in 1677 the Lord Mayor of London had received instructions to crackdown on illegal conventicles.²⁹ By 1681 this effort to suppress the illegal religious gatherings of dissenters intensified.³⁰ Spies and informers were regularly employed by the government and given large sums of money for the discovery of dissenting congregations.³¹ A group of thugs known as the “Hilton Gang” repeatedly “harassed ... the Baptists in Gravel Lane.”³² During this period, which encompassed the larger part of the first half of Collins’ ministry in Wapping, the congregation had to meet in secret for fear of persecution. Thomas Crosby recorded that during this period “seven justices, (among whom were Sir *William Smith*, and justice *Bury* and *Brown*) came in their coaches, with a *posse* of people to break up the meeting, pulpit, pews and windows” of Collins’ meeting house.³³ Around this same time, on November 8, 1682, Collins’ own home was apparently broken into and his possessions seized to pay some alleged fine.³⁴ Four months later, on March 10, 1683, Collins was indicted for his

failure to attend the local parish church.³⁵ The court record indicates that Collins failed to appear in court on that day to answer for the charges. Just over two months later, however, Roger Morrice, the Puritan chronicler of London happenings in the late-seventeenth century, recorded that a “Mr. Collins Junior the Anabaptist” was taken during a Lord’s Day meeting and committed to prison.³⁶ The official charges filed against Collins were for his violation of the Five Mile Act (1665), or Oxford Act.³⁷ He would remain imprisoned for over a year in the Newgate Prison.³⁸

Ironically, it might have been the 1682 volume, in which Collins argued for separatism from the Church of England and in which he expressed his willingness to suffer for his convictions, which may have made Collins a target for persecution in 1683. In this work, which was framed in terms of a hypothetical conversation between a Conformist and a Non-Conformist, Collins asserted the historic Baptist distinctive of religious liberty by stating that “none should be compelled to worship God by a temporal Sword, but such as come willingly, and none can worship God to acceptance but such.”³⁹ For this principle, which preserves the idea of freedom of worship, Baptists like Hercules Collins were willing to risk their health, safety, and freedom.

Within a year of having published *Some Reasons for Separation*, Collins was arrested and by the next year imprisoned for exercising his stand for religious liberty. The official charge against him was “for not going to church, chapel, or any other usual place of common prayer.”⁴⁰ In other words, he was arrested for not attending the parish church. According to Tim Harris, during the 1680s nearly 4,000 different dissenters were arrested for attending conventicles in and around London, including several leading Baptists such as Thomas Plant, Hanserd Knollys, and Vavasor Powell.⁴¹ To illustrate how pervasive the persecution of dissenters was in this period, even the publisher George Larkin, who published Collins’ *A Voice from Prison* and a man known for his publication of dissenting literature,⁴² was arrested in April of 1684 “for Printing a seditious Paper, called, *Shall I, Shall I, No, No.*” For his crime, Larkin was “sentenced to pay a Fine of 20 l. stand in the Pillory, and find Sureties for his Good Behaviour a Twelve Month.”⁴³ Likewise, the Irish Baptist Thomas Delaune was imprisoned for his publication of *A Plea for the Nonconformists* in November of 1683.⁴⁴ According to a handwritten note in the margin of the first page of his *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Thomas Delaune*, Delaune, along with his wife and two young children, died in the Newgate Prison fifteen months later, probably in February of 1685.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the challenges of the period, this time

bore rich fruit for it was while Collins was in the infamous Newgate Prison that he penned two of the most devotional of his twelve writings: *A Voice from the Prison* and *Counsel for the Living, Occasioned from the Dead*.⁴⁶

Counsel for the Living

Though there is no indication of which was published first, the first work to be considered in this essay is *Counsel for the Living, Occasioned from the Dead*. This work, whose primary audience was Collins' fellow prisoners, was a discourse on Job 3:17-18. This discourse was written as a response to the deaths of two of Collins' fellow prisoners at Newgate: Francis Bampfield⁴⁷ and Zachariah Ralphson.⁴⁸ Both apparently died in early 1684 while Collins was also imprisoned.⁴⁹ The scriptural text that formed the basis for the address states regarding the eternal state, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor" (AV). Collins summarized these verses as consisting of three components: "first the Subjects; which are *Oppressors and Oppressed*: Secondly, The Predicate, *They shall Rest*: Thirdly, the *Receptacle*, or place of Rest, that's the *Grave*."⁵⁰ Collins focused on two aspects of "counsel" from Job 3:17-18, namely the future judgment of the persecutors and the corresponding relief of the persecuted. Collins believed that both of the ideas present in these verses were pertinent for his times. First, the persecuted needed to be encouraged by the fact that one day the persecutors would be stopped and they would experience relief, if not in this life, then in the life to come. Second, persecutors needed to realize that they would one day be judged for their mistreatment of the people of God. Collins' primary purpose in this discourse, however, was to provide comfort to persecuted Christians. This is seen in that at the end of the book he exhorts his readers to follow the apostle Paul's advice at the close of his discourse on the resurrection of saints in 1 Thessalonians 4 to "Comfort one another with these words." Collins concluded his *Counsel for the Living* by exhorting his readers with these words: "While Sin, Satan, and an Unkind World is Discomforting you, do you in a lively Hope of the Resurrection of the Body, the coming of Christ, your Meeting of him, and continuing with him, cheer up and Comfort one another with these things."⁵¹

Before turning to offer comfort for the persecuted, Collins first indicted their persecutors as godless men. Collins characterized the persecutors of Christians as wicked men who "are troublers of the *Church*." As such they are "Strangers to Gospel Principles, to a Gospel Spirit, and Gospel Teachings."⁵² Collins concluded that "a persecuting spirit is not of a Gospel-com-

plexion.”⁵³ Judgment is coming for these evil-doers who “shall be made to confess their wickedness in not setting Gods People at liberty to Worship him; they shall fall into mischief, and be silent in darkness, and turned into Hell, with Nations which forget *God*.”⁵⁴ Note that the “liberty to Worship him” seems to be the main issue at stake for Collins. Further, Collins excoriated the persecutors elsewhere for arresting elderly men, “Men of three-score, fourscore Years of Age, hurried to Prison for nothing else but for worshipping their *God*.”⁵⁵ This seems to have especially raised the ire of Collins since Bampfield, one of the men whose death occasioned this sermon, was almost seventy when arrested for what would prove to be the final time.⁵⁶

Saints, however, would be given rest. “The time is coming,” Collins asserted, when “God hath promised we shall no more hear the voice of the Oppressor.”⁵⁷ The saints “shall know no more Apprehendings . . . nor hear no more of, Take him Jaylor, keep him until he be cleared by due course of Law; we shall have no more Bolts nor Bars then on us, no more looking for the Keeper then, nor speaking to Friends through Iron-grates.”⁵⁸ The “rest” referred to in Job 3:17-18 was a “Rest in Sleep, being then out of all sense of care, trouble, pain, and all manner of distraction, so in like manner shall we be in the Grave.”⁵⁹ This was the rest that Bampfield and Ralphson had attained. However, this was not the only relief from persecution that Collins anticipated. His belief in the sovereign providence of God caused him to declare, “We shall none of us stay a night beyond God’s determination.”⁶⁰ Therefore, prisoners could be content with their circumstances “though limited to one Room, which was our Kitchin, our Cellar, our Lodging-Room, our Parlour.”⁶¹ Like the apostle Paul, these persecuted believers had learned to be content in “every State.”⁶² These prisoners believed “that place is best” where their Father had willed them to be.⁶³ Having their daily bread they confessed that “God is as good in Prison as out.”⁶⁴ Collins therefore exhorted his readers that God’s promises were not just to be read, but their truths trusted and experienced. “Beloved, it is one thing to Read the Promises, another thing to trust upon God by them, and experience the truth of them.”⁶⁵ These prisoners had experienced the promised presence and blessing of God in the prison cell and Collins wanted to exhort other persecuted Christians to trust in the promises of their loving Father. Collins reminded his readers that,

God’s Providential Dealings with his people in this world, is like Chequer-work, there is the dark, as well as the light side of Providence, the most Refin’d and best State and Condition of the best Saints are mixed here; if

we have some peace, we have some trouble; if we have large Comforts one day, we may expect a great degree of trouble another; least we should be exalted above measure, we must have a thorn in the flesh now and then.⁶⁶

Trusting God's providence, Collins could confidently declare, "let men and Devils do their worst, God will in his own time loose the Prisoners."⁶⁷

Not only were Collins and his fellow-persecuted brothers content with their situation because of God's providence, they were also deeply thankful for God's physical and spiritual blessings while jailed. Collins called these blessings "Prison-comforts."⁶⁸ They blessed God for his grace that enabled them to have "as much peace and satisfaction" in their one-room prison cell as when they had complete liberty to stroll through their houses, gardens, and the homes of friends.⁶⁹ They were also thankful for God's daily physical provision for them. "Blessed be God we have bread for the day; as the day so our strength has been."⁷⁰ These prisoners, however, were most grateful for their spiritual blessings. Chief among these blessings was the presence of Christ. Of his persecuted brothers Collins could write, "How much of the Presence of Christ have they had to inable them to bear the Cross quietly, patiently, contentedly."⁷¹ These saints also rejoiced that though they were bound by physical shackles, they had been set free from the bondage of sin and death. "Again, let us bless God, though we are in the Prison of man, yet that we are delivered from the Spiritual prison of Sin and Satan, into the glorious liberty of the Children of God, and out of the Kingdom of darkness into the glorious light of the Gospel."⁷² They realized that "the darkness of a Material Prison is nothing to the darkness of a Spiritual one." In this spiritual freedom believers "may have Liberty in Bonds, light in Darkness, Peace in Trouble."⁷³ It was the spiritual blessings that enabled the suffering servants of Christ to endure their trials. Collins explained how he and his fellow prisoners had personally experienced the soul-strengthening power of spiritual fellowship with God the Father. "Communion with God by the Spirit is a good Cordial to keep up the heart from fainting in this valley of tears, until we come to our Mount of Joy, where there is no limits of Joy and Blessedness."⁷⁴

A Voice from the Prison

A second work that Hercules Collins published from his prison cell was *A Voice from the Prison*. This work was an extended meditation on Revelation 3:11, where Christ admonishes the church of Philadelphia with the words, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (KJV). Collins addressed this sermon "To the Church of God, for-

merly Meeting in Old-Gravel-Lane Wapping, and all who were Strangers and Foreigners, but now Fellow Citizens with the Saints, and of the Household of God." Collins drew from at least 213 passages of Scripture in his sermon, to encourage his congregation to stand firm in the face of persecution.⁷⁵ Collins urged his besieged flock to not abandon the cause of Christ. "*Hold fast what thou hast*, when Satan would pull thy souls good from thee; when Relations, Husband, Wife, Children call upon you, and perswade you because of danger to cease from the work of the Lord, then hold fast."⁷⁶ Collins offered as a motivation for holding fast to Christ and his work that the one who stood fast would hear Christ profess to the Father on the day of judgment the words,

These are they which have continued with me in my Temptation; therefore I appoint unto you a Kingdom; therefore, because you owned me in an Evil Day.

These are the Men, Woman, People, which spoke of my Testimonies before Kings, and was not ashamed when many Cried, Crucify him and his Cause; these are the souls which came forth and declared they were on the Lords Side: These are they, Father, whose Love to me many Waters nor Floods could not quench nor drown; these are they that chose me on my own termes, with the Cross as well as the Crown; these have made Choice of me with Reproaches, Imprisonments, with Fines, Confiscation of Goods, Banishment, loss of Limbs, Life, and all, they have born all, indured all for my sake, in the greatest affliction, they kept from wavering, and the more they endured and lost for my sake, the more they loved me.⁷⁷

Just as Collins had encouraged persecuted believers in his *Counsel for the Living* not to give in because of the future rest which awaited them, so too in *A Voice from the Prison* he exhorted them to live in view of their future appearance before God's judgment seat.

Collins also drew comfort from God's sovereign providence during his imprisonment. He began his written address to his "Dearly Beloved" church by expressing his confidence that God was providentially at work in his suffering for the advancement of the gospel.

Forasmuch as I am present depriv'd by my Bonds, of the Liberty of Preaching; I bless God I have the Advantage of Printing, being ready to serve the Interest of Christ in all Conditions to my poor Ability; and doubt not, but God and Interest are Served by my Confinement, as by Liberty: and am not without hopes that I shall preach as loudly, and as

effectually by Imprisonment for Christ, as ever I did at Liberty; that all those who observe Gods Providential Dealings, will be able to say with me hereafter, as Holy *Paul* once said in his Bonds at *Rome*; What hath befallen me, hath tended to the furtherance of the Gospel.⁷⁸

Like the apostle Paul in *Philippians 1*, Collins' belief in the providence of God caused him to have confidence that God would bring good out of his imprisonment. One of the goods that Collins believed could come out of the sufferings of the Baptists was that some of their adversaries might be convinced of the truth when they saw by how the Baptists patiently endured when persecuted. He argued that since "Actions are more Influential then words, and more Demonstrative of the Truth and Reality of a Person or Cause" and "as a man shall be better believed for his good works, then good words," suffering patiently would convince their persecutors.⁷⁹ Collins therefore encouraged his congregation,

so if we would Manifest our Integrity under a Profession, nothing will do it better then your Suffering, . . . if by God called unto it; for, as a Tree is known by his fruit, so is a Christian by a Patient Wearing Christs Cross, this will and hath Convinced an Adversary, when a bare Profession will not.⁸⁰

In a similar manner, in *Counsel for the Living*, Collins had maintained that God could "make people grow so much the more as their afflictions abound" for "thinking people will conclude they must be the Lords, that suffer patiently under such apparent wrong."⁸¹ Therefore, Collins encouraged his fellow believers to "see how our Churches fill, come let us go on, we have good success, we shall bring them all home at last."⁸² This proved to be true for Collins and his congregation: by the time of his death in 1702, as Michael Haykin has observed, Collins "was probably preaching to a congregation of roughly 700 people, which would have made his congregation one of the largest Calvinistic Baptist works in the city."⁸³

Collins also exhorted his readers to persevere for God has promised to reward the overcomers. He then draws on all the promises made by Christ in *Revelation 2* and *3* to those who persevere through persecution. The overcomers shall "eat of the Tree in the midst of the Paradice of God"; they shall "not be hurt of the Second Death" and shall "have the hidden Manna"; "the white Stone, and a New name" will be theirs; they shall "have power over the nations, and rule them with a Rod of Iron"; and they shall be "clothed in white Rayment." Their "name shall not be blotted out of the Book of Life,

but made a Pillar in the Temple of God, and he shall go out no more.” Finally, those who overcome “shall sit with Christ on his Throne, as he overcame and sat down with the Father on his Throne.”⁸⁴ These shall receive “a Crown not of Gold, but Glory, not fading but eternal.”⁸⁵

Collins knew that his readers would be able to “hold fast” if they were fully satisfied with Christ. As he put it in typical pithy Puritan fashion: “It is the Christ-finding Soul which is the Life-finding Soul.”⁸⁶ Collins explained that when it is said in Scripture, “Christ is all, and in all,” this means that, for the believer, “he is all, because all good is Comprehended in him, he is all in all; all in the Fullness of all, for if we have all Earthly Injoyments, and have not him, we have nothing comparatively.”⁸⁷ However to have Christ was to “have all Equivalently and comprehensively.”⁸⁸ Therefore, Collins warned that it was important to “hold fast this Christ.” The world, he declared, would try to sink believer if he or she held it too closely to his or her heart. So then, he urged his readers: “Cast away all, shake off all, rather then lose a Christ.”⁸⁹ Thus, “will a Believing Soul suffer the Loss of all, so he may win Christ; none but Christ, saith an illuminated Believer.”⁹⁰ Collins seemed to speak on behalf of the “illuminated Believer” as he thus extolled how this view of the sufficiency of Christ enabled the Christian to endure hardships in this life:

There are many good Objects in Heaven and Earth besides thee, there are Angels in Heaven, and Saints on Earth: But, what are these to thee? Heaven without thy Presence, would be no Heaven to me; a Pallace with thee, a Crown without thee, cannot satisfie me; but with thee I can be content, though in a poor Cottage with thee I am at Liberty in Bonds; Peace and Trouble; if I have thy Smiles, I can bear the worlds frowns; if I have Spiritual Liberty in my Soul, that I can ascend to thee by Faith, and have Communion with thee, thou shalt chuse my Portion for me in this World.⁹¹

Some, however, were apparently being tempted to abandon the all-sufficient Christ for a respite from persecution. Collins warned that “without enduring to the End, all your Profession, your many years Prayers, all your Tears will be lost.”⁹² Those who turned aside “mayst never more be called to be a witness for Christ.” In fact, “some have thought God hath not Lov’d them, because he hath not Exercised them this way.”⁹³ Elsewhere in this prison epistle, Collins soberly charged those who had been enabled by God’s grace to persevere not to boast in their state: “To all such as have not fallen in the Storm, who have kept their garments from Defiling, let God have the glory; thou standest by

Faith, which God is Author of, be not High-minded but fear; glory not secretly, Rejoice not in thy Brothers fall.”⁹⁴ For those who had fallen, Collins offers a word of hope. “The Lord hath promised he will not let his Anger fall upon you, ... therefore, Return, Return, ... that we may look upon thee with Joy and Delight, as the Angels in Heaven do rejoice at the Returning of a Soul to God.”⁹⁵ Collins further exhorted his readers who had gone back on their profession to return to the arms of a merciful God: “Return to thy God from whom thou hast revolted, who stands with open Arms to receive you; return to the Church again, whom thou hast made sad by thy departing from the Truth, and humble thy self to God and them, and they will cheerfully receive thee into their fellowship.”⁹⁶

Collins was sure that only those believers who had been mortifying sin daily in their lives would be enabled to endure persecution. “Let not that Man think to wear the Cross of Persecution, that doth not first wear the Cross of Mortification.”⁹⁷ Collins further developed this concept.

We should inure our selves to wear the Publick Cross, by wearing it first more privately in our Houses, in our Families, in our Shops and Trades: For let not that Person think he will ever be able to part with his Houses, Lands, Liberties, for the Lord Jesus Christ, that cannot first part with a secret lust: But if we have Grace enough, to wear daily the Cross of Mortification of the old Man; you need not fear but he that giveth Grace to do the greater, will give Grace to doe the lesser; for I look upon the subduing of Corruption, a greater thing then enduring Persecution; though neither can be done as it ought, without help from Heaven.⁹⁸

Those who, by the grace of God, were regularly putting to death their sins would experience an easier path in enduring physical persecution. Thus, Collins was encouraging personal holiness as the best means to prepare for persecution for the cause of Christ. Without this spiritual practice, professing believers would not be able to withstand the temptation to deny Christ in the face of persecution.

Ever the true pastor, Collins closed what amounted to a sermon from prison with a series of prayers to God. First, Collins prayed that God would purge the church of its impurities which he saw as a cause for their persecution. “God is contending with us: Let us all Banish and Expel the Achan out of our Hearts, out of our Churches, and shew our selves Zealous against Sin.”⁹⁹ Then, Collins asked God that his dear Son’s kingdom might come. “We should be willing to be Footstools, so Christ thereby might get upon

his Throne.”¹⁰⁰

Third, Collins prayed for “a universal spreading of the Gospel” in order that “a greater degree of Knowledge and Holiness will be in the World then ever.”¹⁰¹ This is a fascinating request, as it is often said that the seventeenth-century Puritans and Baptists were not missions-minded. For example, David Bebbington, the preeminent historian of Evangelicalism, argues that the emphasis on evangelism and missions is a post-Enlightenment development. He claims, “In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was rare to find a Protestant divine commending the spread of the gospel beyond the bounds of Christendom.”¹⁰² Although Bebbington acknowledges some “unusual” exceptions,¹⁰³ he believes that because the seventeenth-century Calvinists lacked assurance they were paralyzed by self-introspection that hindered an evangelistic focus.¹⁰⁴ Michael Haykin, in an article in a book interacting with Bebbington’s influential work, has questioned whether missionary zeal was as rare in the seventeenth century as Bebbington had indicated.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, Collins was not devoid of a missionary passion, but was he merely an isolated exception? One example will suffice to demonstrate that Collins’ prayer for a spread of the gospel was not unique. In a hymn composed by a contemporary of Collins, the seventeenth-century London Baptist pastor Benjamin Keach, one finds a remarkable plea for the nations.¹⁰⁶ Keach voices a desire for the gospel to shine to France, “dark *Spain*,” Italy, Asia, Africa, Egypt, Assyria, China, East India, those “Who live in wild *America*,” and “poor *Israel*.”¹⁰⁷ This prayer, which was published over one hundred years prior to the launch of the modern missionary movement, demonstrates that there is more continuity between Puritanism and Evangelicalism than is acknowledged by Bebbington.

Finally, Collins prayed for deliverance from the persecution. “We have no might, but our Eyes are upon thee. ... Appear in thy strength, that the Kingdoms of the World may know that thou art God; and that there is none besides thee.”¹⁰⁸ But till then, Collins concluded, “let our Faith and Patience be lengthned out, to the coming of the Lord; till Time swallowed up in Eternity; Finite, in Infinite, Hope, in Vision; and Faith in Fruition; when God shall be the matter of our Happiness; when Fulness shall be the measure of our Happiness, and Eternity the Duration.”¹⁰⁹

The Rise of Toleration

Richard L. Greaves notes that the rate of persecution began to decline in 1686, with the number of Quakers prosecuted dropping from 209 in 1685 to eighty-three in 1686.¹¹⁰ Although there were exceptions to this general trend, by the end of 1686 nonconformists could conduct public meetings after having ap-

plied for licenses.¹¹¹ In April of 1687, James II issued a Declaration of Indulgence which suspended both the penal laws and the Test Acts.¹¹² Certainly the Wapping congregation felt more secure around this time since by June of 1687 they were attempting to raise one hundred pounds to complete an already begun “new meeting house.”¹¹³ By the next month they had agreed to add a seven-by-eight-foot brick porch on the north side of the meeting house that was still under construction.¹¹⁴ Two weeks later the church scheduled their first meeting in the new building to be held on August 7, 1687.¹¹⁵ The novelty of the new building coupled with the lessened risk of persecution must have resulted in much larger crowds than initially anticipated when the building was built. Less than two months after the church began meeting in their new facility an effort was made to raise additional funds “towards the building of Gallerys & a withdrawinge roome.”¹¹⁶ The building must have eventually proven to be sufficient as the later pastor and author of the church’s three-hundred anniversary history Ernest Kevan observed that the church “worshipped in this sanctuary for forty-three years.”¹¹⁷ It is important to note that all this activity came before official toleration was granted.

Official toleration, however, would come only with the so-called Glorious Revolution that is linked with the accession of William of Orange (r. 1688–1702) and his wife Mary II (r. 1688–1692) to the throne of England in 1688 and the subsequent Act of Toleration passed by Parliament in 1689. This act would officially end religious persecution by the state.¹¹⁸ After the Act of Toleration, dissenters began to exercise their new-found freedom to assemble publicly to great avail. In 1689, the Baptists gathered in London for their first national assembly. This group of “divers Pastors, Messengers and Ministring Brethren of the Baptized Churches” met in London from September 3-12, 1689, and claimed to represent “more than one hundred Congregations of the same Faith with Themselves.”¹¹⁹ The common faith which distinguished this group of churches is specified on the cover page as “the Doctrine of Personal Election, and final Perseverance.”¹²⁰ This group would further identify themselves in their first meeting by adopting what would become known as the Second London Confession of Faith. Collins’ name was included among the signatures of thirty-seven ministers and messengers of the Assembly who had allowed their names to be affixed “In the name and behalf of the whole Assembly.”¹²¹ Collins would remain at the Wapping Church until his death on October 4, 1702. As Piggott said in his funeral sermon five days later, Collins was “faithful to the last.”¹²²

- ¹ Portions of this article have appeared in "Baptists and 1662: The Persecution of John Norcott and Hercules Collins," which was published in *Founders Journal* 89 (Summer 2012): 34-43; and *The Andrew Fuller Center Review* 3 (Summer 2012): 17-26. Used with permission.
- ² Hercules Collins, *Some Reasons for Separation from the Communion of the Church of England, and the Unreasonableness of Persecution upon that Account* (London: John How, 1682), 20.
- ³ John Piggott, *Eleven Sermons Preach'd Upon Special Occasions* (London: John Darby, 1714), 235.
- ⁴ Raymond Brown, *Spirituality in Adversity: English Nonconformity in a Period of Repression, 1660-1689* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2012). In his chapter on the period in *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, B. R. White declared the same years to be the "Era of the Great Persecution" for Baptists. B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 95-133.
- ⁵ In addition to Brown's more recent study, see Gerald R. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1688* (Cambridge: University Press, 1957); and Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 221-262.
- ⁶ Brown, *Spirituality in Adversity*, 335.
- ⁷ Collins served as the third pastor of the Wapping Church first pastored by John Spilbury. Collins' ministry in the church began in 1677. For more information on the significance of Collins, see Garry Stephen Weaver, Jr., "Hercules Collins: Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).
- ⁸ Richard L. Greaves, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Radical Underground in Britain, 1660-1663* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.
- ⁹ Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms, 1660-1685* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 55-56.
- ¹⁰ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 221-222.
- ¹¹ For a fuller description of these Acts and their impact upon Baptists, see Ernest A. Payne and Norman S. Moon, *Baptists and 1662* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1962). A more recent study is Paul S. Fiddes, "Baptists and 1662: the Effect of the Act of Uniformity on Baptists and its Ecumenical Significance for Baptists today," *Eccelesiology* 9, no. 2 (2013): 183-204. Also, see Harris, *Restoration*, 52-53.
- ¹² Watts, *The Dissenters*, 226-227.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 227.
- ¹⁴ Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 268.
- ¹⁵ *The Parliamentary Diary of Sir Edward Dering 1670-1673* (ed. Basil Duke Henning; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 4-7.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. For a discussion of the disputed number of conventicles in London in 1676, see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 314-315.
- ¹⁷ For a brief discussion of this development, see Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10-11.
- ¹⁸ Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage*, 18.
- ¹⁹ Austin Walker, *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2004), 119.
- ²⁰ Tobias Wells, or Toby Willes, was the pastor of the Bridgewater Church in Somerset, England. He was active in the Western Association of Particular Baptists and signed the 1653 Somerset Confession of Faith. He would attend both the 1689 and 1692 meetings of the General Assembly of Baptists in London, signing the Second London Confession of Faith in 1689.
- ²¹ Richard Blunt is an enigmatic figure in Baptist history. He figures prominently in the so-called Kiffin Manuscript that provides much of the details of the beginnings of Particular Baptists in England in the 1640s. For a detailed analysis of the evidence, see Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2006), 75-110. Blunt's presence at this conventicle nearly thirty years after his historic involvement in the re-introduction of immersion in England is significant in demonstrating the young Collins' connections with the previous generation of Baptist leaders.
- ²² Sessions of the Peace Rolls for 27 June 1670 - MJ/SR/1389.
- ²³ New Prison. This prison, which was often used to prevent overcrowding at the Newgate Prison, was definitely in use in 1670 while the Newgate Prison was being rebuilt after the London fire of 1665. The new Newgate Prison was opened in 1672. Tim Hitchcock, Sharon Howard, and Robert Shoemaker, "Prisons and Lockups," *London Lives, 1690-1800*, <http://www.londonlives.org>, version, 1.1 (accessed May 30, 2012).
- ²⁴ Sessions of the Peace Book for 27 June 1670 - MJ SB/B/0026.
- ²⁵ Collins, *Three Books* (London, 1696), 37.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 237.
- ²⁸ Cited in Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 347.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 406.
- ³¹ Ernest F. Kevan, *London's Oldest Baptist Church: Wapping 1633-Walthamstow 1933* (London: Kingsgate Press,

1933), 43.

³² Mark Goldie, "The Hilton Gang: Terrorising Dissent in 1680s London," *History Today* 47 (1998), 28. This gang of over 40, including at least 15 women, were responsible for breaking up more than forty meeting houses. See also, John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), 173.

³³ Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London, 1740), 3:103. Also see Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1814), 2:448–449.

³⁴ Roger Morrice wrote in his journal on November 16, 1682 that "Mr. Collins an Annabaptists goods were distrained on on Wednesday last They broke his doore and entred in at it." *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice 1677–1691*, vol. 2, *The Reign of Charles II 1677–1685* (ed., John Spurr; Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2007), 332. In his recent study on the persecution of dissenters, Raymond Brown identifies this Collins as Hercules. Brown, *Spirituality in Adversity*, 57n73.

³⁵ *Middlesex County Records*, vol. 4, *Indictments, Recognizances, Coroners' Inquisitions-Post-Mortem, Orders, Memoranda and Certificates of Convictions of Conventiclers*, temp. 19 Charles II. to 4 James II (London: Middlesex County Records Society, 1892), 208–209.

³⁶ *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice*, 369. This would have occurred on May 27, 1683. John Spurr, the volume editor, indicates in a footnote that this was William Collins, pastor of the Petty France Church. *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice*, 369 n. 3. No rationale is given. It is known that the Petty France congregation was disturbed in their worship on March 18, 1683. *Petty France Church Minute Book*, 20. However, there is an entry in the *Petty France Church Minute Book* for May 27, 1683 indicating that they had by this date already been deprived of their meeting place in Petty France with no mention of their pastor being arrested. *Petty France Church Minute Book*, 21. On the other hand, the Wapping Church's last entry for 1683 in their minute book is on May 23rd (the Wednesday before the alleged incident) and there is not another entry until August 26, 1684 shortly after Hercules Collins would have been released from prison. *WCB*, 23 May 1683 and 26 August 1684. Given the above data, it is the assumption of this author that the Collins referred to by Morrice was Hercules, not William.

³⁷ Referred to as such in *Wapping Church Book*, September 14, 1684.

³⁸ For a description of the horrors of the Newgate Prison during the seventeenth century, see Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Piety of Hercules Collins (1646/7–1702)," in *Devoted to the Service of the Temple: Piety, Persecution, and Ministry in the Writings of Hercules Collins* (eds., Michael A. G. Haykin and Steve Weaver; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 14. For a fuller history of the prison, see Kelly Grovier, *The Gaol: The Story of Newgate—London's Most Notorious Prison* (London: John Murray, 2008).

³⁹ Collins, *Some Reasons for Separation*, 20.

⁴⁰ *Middlesex County Records*, 4:208–209.

⁴¹ Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 66.

⁴² For example, Larkin published the first edition of John Bunyan's autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* in 1666. He would go on to publish six other works by Bunyan in 1688 and 1689.

⁴³ April 1684, trial of George Larkin (t16840409–37), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>, version 7.0 (accessed July 20, 2012).

⁴⁴ Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (London, 1739), 2:366–379.

⁴⁵ Thomas Delaune, *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Thomas Delaune, For Writing, Printing and Publishing a late Book, Called, A Plea for the Nonconformists, With some modest Reflections thereon* (London, 1684), 1. See also Watts, *The Dissenters*, 254.

⁴⁶ Hercules Collins, *A Voice from the Prison. Or, Meditations on Revelations III.XI. Tending To the Establishment of Gods Little Flock, In an Hour of Temptation* (London, 1684); and Hercules Collins, *Counsel for the Living, Occasioned from the Dead: Or, A Discourse on Job III. 17,18. Arising from the Deaths of Mr. Fran. Bampfield and Mr. Zach. Ralphson* (London: George Larkin, 1684).

⁴⁷ For biographical details on Bampfield, see Richard L. Greaves, "Making the Laws of Christ His Only Rule": Francis Bampfield, Sabbatarian Reformer," in *Saints and Rebels: Seven Nonconformists in Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 179–210.

⁴⁸ Ralphson was the alias of Jeremiah Marsden. For biographical details on Ralphson, see R. L. Greaves, "Marsden, (alias Ralphson), Jeremiah (1624–1684)," in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals* (eds., Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller; Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1984), 2:214–215.

⁴⁹ Keith Durso dates the death of Bampfield as February 16, 1684. See Keith Durso, *No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s–1700s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 105. For a transcript of the proceedings of the trials of Ralphson and Bampfield, see *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>, version 7.0 (accessed May 20, 2010), January 1684, trials of Zachariah Ralphson (t16840116–18) and Francis Bampfield (t16840116–20).

⁵⁰ Collins, *Counsel for the Living*, 1–2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

- ⁵² Ibid., 6-7.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 8.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 9.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.
- ⁵⁶ Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Piety of Hercules Collins," 15.
- ⁵⁷ Collins, *Counsel for the Living*, 21.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 23.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 25.
- ⁶² Ibid., 26. Collins is citing Philippians 4:11.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 25.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 25.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid., 26-27.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 27-28.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 28.
- ⁷⁵ Durso, *No Armor for the Back*, 169.
- ⁷⁶ Collins, *A Voice from the Prison*, 4.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 1.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Collins, *Counsel for the Living*, 26.
- ⁸² Collins, *A Voice from the Prison*, 23.
- ⁸³ Haykin, "The Piety of Hercules Collins," 22.
- ⁸⁴ Collins, *A Voice from the Prison*, 6.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 8.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 18.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 18-19.
- ⁹² Ibid., 3.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 28.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 26.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 30.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 40.
- ¹⁰³ Bebbington cites Richard Baxter as "unusual among the Puritans in expressing an eagerness for the conversion of the nations." Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ See Ibid., 42-50.
- ¹⁰⁵ Haykin cites multiple examples demonstrating that Bebbington's case is overstated. Michael A. G. Haykin, "Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (eds., Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 52-53.
- ¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Keach, *War with the Devil: Or the Young Man's Conflict with the Powers of Darkness*, 3rd ed. (London: Benjamin Harris, 1675), 124-128.

- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 126-128.
- ¹⁰⁸ Collins, *A Voice from the Prison*, 34.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 549.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 549-550.
- ¹¹² Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England*, 188.
- ¹¹³ *Wapping Church Book*, 14 June 1687. According to Murdina MacDonald, the new meeting house was registered with the Chancellor of London on February 8, 1690. Murdina MacDonald, "London Calvinistic Baptists 1689-1727: Tensions Within a Dissenting Community Under Toleration" (D.Phil. thesis, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, 1982), 316.
- ¹¹⁴ *Wapping Church Book*, 11 July 1687.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1687.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 September 1687.
- ¹¹⁷ Kevan, *London's Oldest Baptist Church*, 48.
- ¹¹⁸ For a brief summary of the impact of the Act of Toleration, see James E. Bradley, "Toleration, Nonconformity, and the Unity of the Spirit: Popular Religion in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Church, Word, and Spirit: Historical and Theological Essays in Honor of Geoffrey W. Bromiley* (eds., James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 183-185.
- ¹¹⁹ *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the General Assembly Of divers Pastors, Messengers and Ministering Brethren of the Baptized Churches, met together in London, from Septemb. 3. To 12. 1689, from divers parts of England and Wales: Owning the Doctrine of Personal Election, and final Perseverance* (London, 1689), 1.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹²¹ *A Confession of Faith, Put forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Countrey* (3rd ed.; London: S. Bridge, 1699), back cover; Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 239.
- ¹²² Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, 235.