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*“Accounted worthy to bear in my body the
marks of the Lord Jesus”:
James Hinton, the Persecution of English
Dissent, & the Woodstock Riot*

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Persecution is integral to Christian discipleship, a key principle that Christ urged his followers to never forget: “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20, NIV). Even in times when Christianity has had legal protection, persecution is ever present in the form of such things as ostracism and name-calling, and even outbreaks of violence. The following essay considers the case of English Dissent at the close of the long eighteenth century when Dissenters were technically protected by the law, but when violence against them exploded from time to time. The experience of the Baptist pastor James Hinton (1761–1823) in the Woodstock Riot is not only illustrative of this violence, but also a good reminder of how Christians are to face the world’s hatred.

English Dissent and the French Revolution

The 1790s were not an easy time for English Dissenters. Although they had been granted freedom of worship and freedom to evangelize within registered church buildings a century earlier by the 1689 Act of Toleration, they still labored under various legal restrictions that effectively made them second-class citizens in England. Prominent among these restrictions were the Corporation and Test Acts, passed respectively in 1661 and 1673, which required holders of civil and military office to have taken the Lord’s Supper in an Anglican church in the year before taking office. In 1787, 1789, and 1790 there were three distinct attempts by the Dissenters to secure the parliamentary repeal of these legal statutes, all of which were unsuccessful, the one in 1789 failing only by twenty votes.

Now, the failure of these attempts was partly due to the way that Dissent had become linked in the public mind to the anarchic upheaval of the French Revolution. A naïve enthusiasm for the French Revolution was definitely present in the public discourse of orthodox English Dissenters from

1789 to 1791 and that in part because of their own century-long experience of civil and legal discrimination. For instance, the Norwich Calvinistic Baptist minister, Mark Wilks (1748–1819), began a sermon on July 14, 1791—the second anniversary of the storming of the Bastille—with the provocative statement, “Jesus Christ was a Revolutionist.” He went on to inform his congregation that the French Revolution “is of God and that no power exists or can exist, by which it can be overthrown.”¹ Robert Hall, Jr. (1764–1831), the most famous Calvinistic Baptist preacher in the early nineteenth century, was equally enthralled by what was taking place in France. In a famous tract that went through a number of pirated editions, *Christianity Consistent with a Love of Freedom* (1791), Hall stated:

Events have taken place of late, and revolutions have been effected, which, had they been foretold a very few years ago, would have been viewed as visionary and extravagant; and their influence is yet far from being spent. . . . The empire of darkness and of despotism has been smitten with a stroke which has sounded through the universe.

Such sentiments proved to be utterly naïve and uninformed, for right from the start the powerhouse behind the Revolution had been violence. As one of the moderate revolutionaries had remarked, “There must be blood to cement revolution.”² In 1793 and 1794 the Revolution descended into a vortex of unspeakable violence and totalitarian terror. During this period, known to history as the Reign of Terror, at least 300,000 were arrested with some 17,000 people being executed by the guillotine. Many others died in prison or were simply killed without the benefit of a trial. French revolutionary armies also sought to spread the ideals of the Revolution to neighboring nations. What they exported, though, was “unprecedented destruction and warfare”³ to the rest of Europe, and so plunged the continent into a war that lasted until 1815.

It is not surprising that Baptists like Hall thus became increasingly critical of what was taking place in France. In a sermon entitled *Modern Infidelity Considered, with respect to its Influence on Society* (1800), a work that made Hall something of a celebrity in England, Hall spoke of divine revelation having undergone “a total eclipse” in France, “while atheism,

¹Mark Wilks, *The Origin and Stability of the French Revolution* (Norwich, 1791), 5–7, cited Robert Hole, “English sermons and tracts as media of debate on the French Revolution 1789–99” in Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23–24.

²Attributed to Manon Philipon Roland; see Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 859. For this paragraph, I am indebted to Schama’s perspective on the Revolution, especially the summary in *Citizens*, 851–61.

³These words are those of Mark Noll in his discussion of the French Revolution as a turning-point in the history of Christianity. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 251.

performing on a darkened theatre its strange and fearful tragedy, confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank, and sex in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and convulsed all Europe to its centre.”⁴ Hall was now convinced that at the root of the sanguinary violence of the Revolution—what he rightly described as “atrocities ... committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment”—lay the skepticism and rationalism of *les philosophes*, men like Voltaire (1694–1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Denis Diderot (1713–1784).⁵ “Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim,” he told his hearers, “that atheism”—he is referring to the thought of *les philosophes*—“is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious system, equally hostile to every useful restraint and to every virtuous affection; ... its first object is to dethrone God, its next to destroy man.”⁶

The Priestley Riots

English Dissent’s initial show of support for the French Revolution coupled with its expansive growth in the 1790s alarmed many in the state church. Protests against the Corporation and Test Acts were interpreted as expressions of sympathy with the French Revolution. And thus, in reaction to their cries for greater religious toleration, the Dissenters were attacked in print, and occasionally, there were physical displays of violence. The worst of the violence against Dissenters during this era were the Birmingham Priestley Riots, which took place between July 14 and 17, 1791, and saw twenty buildings severely damaged or destroyed.

The riots were sparked by general fears that Birmingham Dissenters were harboring seditious designs against the government and were actually preparing to launch a revolution in England similar to that taking place in France. When Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), the minister of the New Meeting House in Birmingham and known throughout England for his advocacy of Unitarianism and radical politics, celebrated the storming of the Bastille at a dinner party on July 14, 1791, it was the spark that lit the fire. A mob, yelling its loyalty to the monarchy and the Church of England, converged on the New Meeting House and burned it down along with Priestley’s home and laboratory (by avocation he was a scientist). This “Church and King” mob then terrorized Birmingham for the next three days before law and order was restored.⁷

⁴Robert Hall, *Modern Infidelity Considered, with respect to its Influence on Society in Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, 1:47.

⁵Hall, *Modern Infidelity Considered in Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, 1:38.

⁶Hall, *Modern Infidelity Considered in Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, 1:39.

⁷On the Priestley Riots, see R.B. Rose, “The Priestley Riots of 1791,” *Past and Present*, 18 (1960): 68–88; Arthur Sheps, “Public Perception of Joseph Priestley, the Birmingham Dissenters, and the Church-and-King Riots of 1791,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 13, no. 2 (1989): 46–64. See also the experience of James Hinton during these riots in John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of the late Rev. James Hinton, M. A.* (Oxford: Bartlett and Hinton/London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1824), 362–63.

The Birmingham Calvinistic Baptist minister Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) was away in Bristol and Plymouth on holiday with his family when the riots took place. They received a letter from his wife’s step-mother Elizabeth a few days after the riots had been quelled telling them that Birmingham was “a scene of confusion and devastation.”⁸ Elizabeth told them that their home had been ransacked but thankfully it had not been damaged. Some friends, anticipating problems, had been able to remove some of their furniture to safety before the mob appeared. When the Pearces arrived back in Birmingham, they found that only Samuel’s books and papers had been, as he put it, “deranged.”⁹ But one of the deacons of his church, John Harwood, who lived in the nearby village of Moseley, suffered the entire loss of his home. It had been completely burned to the ground by “the merciless rage of an incensed and cruel mob.”¹⁰ The attack on Pearce’s house may well have been due to a sermon that he had preached in February 1790 criticizing the Corporation and Test Acts as “oppressive, unjust, and profane.”¹¹ When Pearce had it published, he was nervy enough to have printed under the title on the front cover of the sermon a portion of the Anglian Litany that prayed for “all that are oppressed” and that asked God to forgive the “enemies, persecutors, and slanderers” of God’s people, and “to turn their hearts” back to the Lord.

One of the long-term results of the Priestley Riots was random violence in other parts of the country against Dissenters. The Baptist Meeting House in Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, for example, was torched and destroyed on December 25, 1792, by a “Church and King” mob hostile to Dissenters. A local rowdy by the name of Butlin had made threats about destroying meeting-houses in a pub and this may well have prompted the destruction of the Guilsborough chapel. It says much for Samuel Pearce’s courage that when the chapel was rebuilt in 1794 and Pearce was asked to preach a sermon on the occasion of the opening of the chapel, he chose to speak from Psalm 76:10, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”¹²

James Hinton’s Early Years

Equally distressing was the ferocious mobbing of the Oxford Baptist minister James Hinton when he was preaching in a private home in the

⁸Elizabeth Hopkins, Letter to Samuel Pearce, 21 July 1791, Samuel Pearce Mss., FPC D55, Angus Library, Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford.

⁹Samuel Pearce, Letter [to William Summers], 30 September 1791, in Andrew Fuller and W.H. Pearce, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce, A. M.* (London: G. Wightman, 1831), 19.

¹⁰Hopkins, Letter to Samuel Pearce, 21 July 1791, Samuel Pearce Mss.

¹¹Samuel Pearce, *The oppressive, unjust, and profane Nature, and Tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, exposed* (Birmingham: J. Thompson, 1790).

¹²For these details, see F.A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, From 1792 to 1842* (London: Ward & Co./G. and J. Dyer, 1842), I:52–53.

town of Woodstock, Oxfordshire, on May 18, 1794.¹³ Along with his friends Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), Hinton was “one of those Baptist leaders who, at the end of the eighteenth century, secured the revival of Baptist life in Britain.”¹⁴

Hinton had been raised in a solid Christian home. His father, Thomas Hinton (d.1787), was known to be a committed Christian in the town of Buckingham, Buckinghamshire, where he lived, and a man who had to endure petty acts of persecution throughout his life. One Saturday night, for example, the door knockers from quite a number of neighboring houses in Buckingham were wrenched off their doors and somehow thrown into the front hall of his house. The people must have been told where they could retrieve their door knockers with the result that Hinton was bothered throughout that Lord’s day—which he was in the habit of keeping as a day of rest—having to answer his door and find which door knocker belonged to whom.¹⁵ Thomas Hinton’s godly response to such attacks made a deep impression on his son James Hinton, who was converted in the mid-1770s. In the son’s words, after severe mental wrestling with “deistical objections” to the Christian Faith, particularly with regard to divine sovereignty, God brought him to the place where he saw “something of the beauty and suitability of Christ as a Saviour for me, and enabled me to plead for his mercy, only on the ground of his satisfaction and death.”¹⁶

In Hinton’s early Christian experience, he derived much benefit from frequently hearing the preaching of the Anglican Evangelical Thomas Scott (1747–1821) in a barn near Tingewick, not far from Buckingham.¹⁷ From 1778 to 1783, Hinton served as an apprentice candle-maker in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, a town historically known for its four B’s: boots, beer, brushes, and Baptists!¹⁸ It was during this time as an apprentice that he developed, in the words of his son, John Howard Hinton (1791–1873), a remarkable “facility for meditating on divine things.”¹⁹ And it was also during his time at Chesham, he became convinced of believer’s baptism by immersion. He was baptized on May 21, 1781, and joined the Baptist church

¹³For biographical details about Hinton, see especially Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*; Philip Hayden, “The Baptists in Oxford 1656–1819,” *The Baptist Quarterly*, 29 (1981–1982): 130–32; Raymond Brown, “‘Fear God and honour the King’: James Hinton and the Tatham Pamphlet Controversy,” in Rosie Chadwick, ed., *A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ: Essays on the History and Life of New Road Baptist Church, Oxford* (Oxford: New Road Baptist Church, 2003), 107–35; and Tim Grass, “Walking together in unity and peace and the fear of God: the Challenge of Maintaining Ecumenical Ideals, 1780–1860,” in Chadwick, ed., *Protestant Catholic Church*, 148–54.

¹⁴J.H.Y. Briggs, “Hinton, John Howard” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27:299.

¹⁵Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 7–8.

¹⁶Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 8–16. The quotations are from page 12.

¹⁷Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 14.

¹⁸George Pigginn, *Tales of Old Chesham* (Beverly: Highgate Publications [Beverly], 1993), 21.

¹⁹Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 14.

in Chesham, whose origins dated back to the middle of the previous century.

The deacons of the Chesham church soon suggested that Hinton consider training for pastoral ministry, but it took Hinton nearly two years to agree. His father wrote a letter to Benjamin Beddome (1718–1795), the well-known pastor of the Baptist cause at Bourton-on-the-Water, to ask the principal of Bristol Baptist Academy, namely, Caleb Evans (1737–1791), for financial help for his son. When Evans wrote back with “characteristic kindness, and ... assurance of considerable aid,” Hinton’s path was set.²⁰ In 1784 he began a three-year course of study at Bristol Baptist Academy, from 1784 to the spring of 1787. He treasured his years at Bristol, and was deeply convinced, in the words of his son and biographer that “though learning alone was worthless, it was of unspeakable value in association with piety.”²¹ The inestimable importance of holiness in this regard is evident in the following extract from a letter written to one of his sons who was studying for the ministry:

My dear Son,

I have been waiting a fortnight in expectation of a letter from you ... Do write me a few lines. Tell me, does the Spirit of grace rest upon you? Are you walking closely with God, and making some advance in his good ways? Is the state of your mind, and the conduct of your life, such as may be held up for a pattern of fidelity and good works? Does your heart glow with love to Christ and to immortal souls? The devoted spirit, the heavenly mindedness, the victory over sin, the holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, the delight in our Master’s work, which must characterize the minister whom God will approve—these are things not to be learned in human schools; and these mark the call of the Holy Spirit.²²

Called to Oxford

On June 1, 1787, Hinton went as a probationary minister to the open-communion, open-membership Baptist congregation in Oxford, now New Road Baptist Church in Bonn Square near the Westgate Centre. A Baptist congregation in Oxford had existed since at least 1653,²³ but by the close of the seventeenth century it was entering a state of decline, which lasted for much of the following century. Their church building was gutted during the

²⁰Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 18–19.

²¹Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 60. See also James Hinton, *The Union of Piety and Literature* (London, 1809).

²²Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 60–61.

²³For the history of the congregation in the seventeenth century, see Roger Hayden, “Through grace they are preserved’: Oxford Baptists, 1640–1715” in Chadwick, ed., *Protestant Catholic Church*, 9–33.

Meeting-house riots of 1715, when upwards of fifty Nonconformists chapels were either destroyed or damaged by mobs hostile to Dissenters throughout England.²⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century the church was without a pastor and in “a period of melancholy declension, during which assemblies for worship” rarely took place according to Hinton.²⁵ The cause was basically kept alive between the early 1740s and 1780 by a few men and women meeting for prayer on Sunday mornings and reading together sermons by John Owen (1616–1683) and other Puritan divines, though they did have preachers sometimes ride over from the Baptist cause at Bourton-on-the-Water.²⁶ Finally, in 1780 Daniel Turner (1710–1798), the pastor of the Baptist work in Abingdon, played a key role in helping re-establish the church on a the basis of a new covenant.²⁷ Two pastors, George Dyer (1755–1841), who later embraced Unitarianism, and Edward Prowitt, whose ministry at Oxford was terminated in 1786 by heterodox views, preceded Hinton.²⁸

The year after Prowitt’s resigning the pastorate, the Oxford Baptists approached Caleb Evans for a recommendation as to a possible successor to Prowitt. Evans strongly suggested Joseph Kinghorn (1766–1832), who would later have a very distinguished ministry in Norwich and who was a fellow student and good friend of Hinton. But some in the Oxford congregation, having heard both Kinghorn and Hinton speak, considered Kinghorn “too deep ... for them,” while Hinton seemed a “better speaker” and had a more “affable temper.”²⁹ They thus called Hinton to supply the pulpit for six months, after which the church formally called him to be their pastor in January of 1788.³⁰ Not long after his call to Oxford, Hinton wrote to Evans and Kinghorn that the great thing he lacked in the church was “an intimate friend.” Hinton went on to tell Evans and Kinghorn: “I love my people, but they are too busy on weekdays, and too pious on Sundays to form earthly friendships!”³¹ One cannot read the final clause of this remark without detecting a note of sarcasm.

²⁴J.H.Y. Briggs, “Oxford and the Meeting-House Riots of 1715,” in Chadwick, ed., *Protestant Catholic Church*, 35–64.

²⁵James Hinton, *An Historical Sketch of Eighteen Baptist Churches, included in the Oxford Association, with Appropriate Reflections* (Oxford: I.T. Hinton, 1821), 6. See also Daniel Turner, *Charity the Bond of Perfection* (Oxford, 1780), iv.

²⁶Turner, *Charity the Bond of Perfection*, iv; Hinton, *Historical Sketch of Eighteen Baptist Churches*, 6.

²⁷See Paul S. Fiddes, “Receiving One Another: the History and Theology of the Church Covenant, 1780,” in Chadwick, ed., *Protestant Catholic Church*, 65–105.

²⁸On Dyer, see Ernest A. Payne, “The Baptist Connections of George Dyer,” *The Baptist Quarterly*, 10 (1940–1941): 260–67, and Fiddes, “Receiving One Another,” 93–96; on Prowitt, see Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 104, and Hayden, “Baptists in Oxford 1656–1819,” 130.

²⁹Joseph Kinghorn, Letter to David and Elizabeth Kinghorn, 2 April 1787, in Martin Hood Wilkin, *Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich* (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1855), 108–09.

³⁰Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 18–24.

³¹James Hinton, Letter to Joseph Kinghorn and Caleb Evans, 27 March 1788, 3-page letter, privately owned.

Such a situation made Hinton all the more appreciative of close friendships with men like Samuel Pearce, whom Hinton had first met at Bristol.³² In a letter that Pearce wrote to Hinton in the autumn of 1796, he told his Oxford friend:

I embrace this opportunity to assure you of the sincere and heartfelt joy which the kind expressions of your friendship afford me, and of the reciprocal affection which my heart bears towards you. I am thankful for the providence which led me to an acquaintance with you: there are few with whom I feel such a congeniality of soul. O! it is the hope of heaven and its blest society, that best reconciles me to the distance at which we are now placed, and the consequent impossibility of frequent interviews.³³

After Hinton's death, it was said of him that "it was impossible to be in his company and be dull."³⁴ Hinton was clearly an extrovert, who was energized by friends and company, for as his son noted, Hinton's "mind was strongly excited by society."³⁵ These qualities surely endeared him to Pearce. It should be noted that, from Hinton's perspective, Pearce was a model of holiness. Thus, writing to his son, he urged him to think about "Pearce and [Philip] Doddridge ... neither of them men of genius, but of great goodness, and diligence."³⁶

Hinton was married in April of 1790 to Ann Taylor (1765–1832), a woman he once described as a "truly excellent companion."³⁷ Just over ten years after they were married, Hinton had the pleasure of baptizing Ann as a believer. As he noted in his diary:

Her attendance on this ordinance, I rejoice to say, is a voluntary tribute to the dictates of conscience and the honour of Christ; and in this view I think highly indeed of her conduct. She had no motive of a domestic kind, for the affection of her husband was entirely hers; and his approbation too, as long as she saw not the command of Christ full and clear to direct her personal obedience. I bless God that not the least disaffection ... existed on account of this difference of opinion: and am particularly thankful, that I have never spoken one word that could induce her to think I should be more happy if she were a Baptist. The Lord has

³²Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 95–96, 291. On Pearce, see Michael A.G. Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua, 2012).

³³Cited Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 96.

³⁴Cited Brown, "Fear God and honour the King," 129n3.

³⁵Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 94.

³⁶Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 62.

³⁷Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 50–51. The quotation is from page 51 and was written on the eleventh anniversary of their marriage.

been her only teacher, and the throne of grace her only place of converse on this subject ...³⁸

Ministry and Controversy

With next to no evangelical witness in Oxford, Hinton's early ministry in the town was, in the words of the Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey (1773–1834), in “one of the most difficult situations in which a Nonconformist minister in England could have been placed.”³⁹ When Hinton was ordained in June of 1788, there were but twenty-five members, though the congregation included another hundred or so hearers.⁴⁰ Students at the University sought to disrupt the worship services from time to time and members of the congregation experienced significant difficulty in finding work in the town or sometimes found their businesses boycotted.⁴¹ Hinton, however, was a gentle, caring pastor and thoughtful in his preaching. When Hinton preached on Sunday evenings, the majority of his congregation were increasingly not members of the church, but various Oxford residents along with a sizeable number of university students, some of whom came merely to ridicule the preacher and his preaching. Hinton, however, made a point of so constructing his evening sermons that while their wording gave no opportunity for mockery, they did not lack in pungency and power to smite the conscience. A good number of those who thus came to mock went away humbled, having come to respect Hinton, even though they did not respect his Baptist convictions. And there were some who were even converted. By the close of his ministry, the church's membership had grown to 270 and on a typical Sunday morning the congregation numbered around 800. A new building had been erected in 1798 (the core of the present church building), and further substantial enlargements made in 1819, four years before Hinton's death.⁴²

Four years after his appointment as pastor of the New Road congregation, though, Hinton found himself embroiled in a pamphlet controversy with Edward Tatham (1749–1834), the Rector of Lincoln College, who had an extremely negative view of Dissenters.⁴³ In 1789, Tatham had given vent

³⁸Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 74.

³⁹Joseph Ivimey, *The Excellence and Utility of an Evangelical Ministry, as Exercised by Protestant Dissenters* (London: John Offor, 1823), A2.

⁴⁰Christina Colvin, “Protestant Nonconformity and Other Christian Bodies” in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, The City of Oxford*, ed. Alan Crossley and C.R. Elrington (London: Victoria County History, 1979), 418.

⁴¹Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford, 1948), 12. Cf. also the remarks of Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 107–08, 129–32.

⁴²Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 126–28, 132; Colvin, “Protestant Nonconformity and Other Christian Bodies,” 418; “New Road Baptist Church Oxford: History,” <http://newroad.org.uk/history/>, accessed 11 November 2018; Ivimey, *Excellence and Utility of an Evangelical Ministry*, 21.

⁴³For this controversy, see especially Brown, “Fear God and honour the King,” 107–35.

to his animus in the Bampton lectures, which were given annually before the university community. Tatham described Dissenting ministers as

that formal and pompous class of men, ... who maintain, upon all occasions, the utmost solemnity of profession, and, on all subjects, the profoundest affectation of learning; whilst “the smell of Greek” has scarcely “passed upon their garments”;—Instead of wasting their time in breeding civil mutiny and fomenting dissension in the state, if these superficial and ostensible, but industrious, men would make the Greek grammar the subject of their labours, the nation might be more free from faction for fifteen years to come.⁴⁴

Three years later, in 1792, Tatham followed up these acerbic remarks with an entire sermon devoted to an attack upon English Dissent, and in particular, Hinton and his Oxford congregation.

Basing his sermon on 1 John 4:1—an apostolic call to exercise doctrinal vigilance—Tatham contrasted the Anglican ministers trained at the state-supported divinity schools in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge with the “ignorant ... teachers of every [other] denomination, ... Methodists and Enthusiasts, ... Anabaptists and Dissenters.” Such men were “self-taught without the power, and self-ordained without even the appearance, of learning ... Blind leaders of the blind.” The Lincoln College Rector was adamant that these men were “artful and treacherous impostors” who were not only undermining the Church by their false doctrine but were also laboring to teach the English to despise the monarchy and so overturn the government and destroy the country in civil war “accompanied with horrors at which,” he said, “our blood runs cold.”⁴⁵ Tatham’s patent dislike of Dissenters was rooted in a simplistic equation of rejection of Anglicanism with disloyalty to the British state.⁴⁶ Tatham was able to arrange to preach this sermon at five different parish churches in Oxford between November 18 and December 16, and the sermon proved to be so popular that it went through eight printings before the year’s close.

Though a man whose temperament eschewed controversy, Hinton was convinced that something needed to be said in response to Tatham’s scurrilous remarks. Hinton’s *A Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford, Addressed to the Inhabitants* went through four editions, and more than adequately answered the Tatham’s charges. Hinton emphasized that Dissenters like himself were well “aware that learning is an excellent assistant in the ministry, though it cannot supersede the authority of Scripture.”⁴⁷ He also rehearsed

⁴⁴Edward Tatham, *The Chart and Sale of Truth, by which to find the Cause of Error* (Oxford, 1790), II, 116–17, note n.

⁴⁵Edward Tatham, *A Sermon Suitable to the Times* (London, 1792), 11, 13–15.

⁴⁶Brown, “Fear God and honour the King,” 109.

⁴⁷James Hinton, *A Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford, Addressed to the Inhabitants*,

his own academic pedigree. He had “passed through the usual studies preparatory to the ministry in the Academy at Bristol” where he had studied under “worthy and well-known tutors,” men like Caleb Evans and Robert Hall; and he had then been properly ordained with Evans, Samuel Stennett (1727–1795) of London and Daniel Turner (1710–1798) of Abingdon officiating at the ordination service.⁴⁸ It bears noting that six years later, when France seemed to be poised for an invasion of England in the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802), Hinton published a small booklet in which he argued that their situation was one that could brook no neutrality. “Let us not desert our post,” he urged his readers, “sully the glory of our ancestors, and willfully consign our sons to the disgraceful slavery of France.”⁴⁹ To be sure, Hinton indicated, he prayed for peace; yet he was also convinced that a defensive war was not only just, but benevolent, for “it originates not in a desire to injure an enemy, but in a strong and virtuous impulse to protect our friends.”⁵⁰ It was warmly commended by none other than Edward Tatham.⁵¹

The Woodstock Riot

Hinton was also involved in preaching in a number of towns and villages near Oxford, including Wheatley, Watlington, Littlemore, Oddington, and, the subject of the rest of this essay, Woodstock.⁵² It was in the spring of 1794 that several inhabitants of Woodstock, who had heard Hinton preach in Oxford, asked him if he would be able to come to the town. They wanted him to speak to them in the home of Thomas Boulton in Oxford Street opposite the Marlborough Arms Inn.⁵³ It was arranged that Hinton would

4th ed. (London, 1792), 12.

⁴⁸Hinton, *Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford*, 16–17. After describing briefly this course of study and his ordination, Hinton took the opportunity to express his regret that because he was not a member of any of the University colleges, he was “doomed to ‘behold magnificent libraries’ without the liberty of access to them” (Idem, 21).

⁴⁹James Hinton, *Brief Thoughts on the Importance of Defending our Country, Respectfully Addressed to the Inhabitants of Oxford and its Neighbourhood* (Oxford: R. Slatter, 1798), 3–4.

⁵⁰Hinton, *Brief Thoughts on the Importance of Defending our Country*, 11. See also his fascinating account of his visit to the battlefield of Waterloo exactly a month after that momentous battle in June, 1815: “A Visit to the Field of Battle at Waterloo,” *The Baptist Magazine*, 7 (1815): 356–60.

⁵¹Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 364–365; Brown, “Fear God and honour the King,” 127–29.

⁵²Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 251–85; Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, Oxford, 13–15.

⁵³For the full account of the Woodstock Riot, see Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 255–63. What follows is primarily based upon an unpublished narrative of the event drawn up by Hinton in 1795 as “a section in the history of persecution for conscience sake” and as a way of removing misunderstanding about the nature of his own ministry (Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 265–66). The same was also essentially published as “A Narrative of the Riotous Proceedings at Woodstock, Oxfordshire, on May 18, 1794,” *The Protestant Dissenter’s Magazine*, 2 (1795): 252–56. For a very brief account, see Alan Crossley with Christina Colvin and S.C. Townley, “Woodstock: Protestant nonconformity,” in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 12, Wootton Hundred (South) Including Woodstock*, ed. Alan Crossley and C.R.

come to the town on the evening of Sunday, May 18. He decided to get a lay of the land, as it were, the previous Monday, when he found the Boultons nervous due to threats having been made to break the windows of their home if they entertained Hinton. To set them at ease, Hinton went to see Henry Metcalfe (d.1807), the town's mayor and a whitesmith and polished-steel worker by profession, to make sure that there would be no disturbance the following Sunday when he preached. Metcalfe assured him that there would be no problems at all.

The following Sunday, Hinton travelled the eight miles or so from Oxford with five friends—he and John Bartlett (d.1823), one of his deacons, rode on horses, while Hugh Barnard, Thomas Brock, Jeremiah Hooper York, and John King walked. After taking tea at the Marlborough Arms Inn, they crossed the road to the Boultons's house to begin the service at 6:15 in the evening. There were about thirty adults and twenty or so children present—a huge number to fit into the house. Hinton led in prayer and a hymn, and then began to speak on Matthew 16:26, “For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.” He had no sooner begun, though, than a mob of some three to four hundred people descended on the home. At least a quarter of the mob were Irish recruits from a British regiment stationed nearby with a number of their serjeants acting as ringleaders. Some of the rioters tried to barge their way into the house, with whom Hinton attempted to reason, telling them they were breaking the law. Hinton appeared to have some success with some of them, but others continued their rowdy behavior to the point that Hinton thought it best to conclude the service. Hinton thought that this would satisfy the mob, but he was wrong.

He and his friends crossed the road to the Marlborough Arms Inn, where they were going to stay the night. As Hinton and his friends walked across the road, the mob swarmed around them, screaming and cursing them, and calling Hinton a “Jacobin rascal.” Clearly in the mind of some of the mob, the Oxford Baptists had ties with French revolutionaries, and hence the justification for their violence.⁵⁴ They got to the safety of the hotel and Hinton sent a note to the mayor asking him to bring out the village constables to suppress the mob. But the mayor's answer gave Hinton little hope that he would do anything to alleviate the situation. When the owners of the hotel, fearful of the damage that the mob would do to the hotel, urged Hinton and his friends to leave, he and Bartlett went out the back to get their horses, while their other friends set out from the front door.

The mob immediately set upon the four friends on foot. The soldiers suggested the four men enlist in the army, and when this failed to get a response, they unleashed a torrent of violence. Thomas Brock was beaten to the ground and he realized that if he did not strike back in self-defence, he

Elrington (London: Victoria County History, 1990), 415.

⁵⁴As Hinton later noted, “The cry of ‘Jacobin’ was evidently put into the mouths of a misguided rabble at Woodstock, to serve a wicked purpose” (Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 273).

would be killed. Though wounded numerous times, he was able to escape the fury of the mob. Hugh Barnard, though, was an older man and was not able to get free from the rioters. Hinton later recorded in disturbing detail what happened to him:

By the force of many bludgeons striking at once, he was brought to the ground at least ten or twelve times successively, the mob just giving him time to rise, in order to have the brutal pleasure of knocking him down again. Deaf to all his entreaties for mercy, they at last threw him into a ditch, and while lying there one of them (he believes a serjeant) gave him several dreadful kicks on the ribs, and then called off the men.⁵⁵

Jeremiah York was also brutally beaten, but being young, was able to flee. Only John King managed to escape without injury.

Meanwhile Hinton and Bartlett, being mounted on horses, could have ridden off easily, but they were determined not to leave their friends to the mercy of the mob. When they came around to the front of the hotel, they saw a considerable amount of blood on the cobblestones of the street and, Hinton later recalled in his written account of the riot, it was then that he became truly alarmed. Standing over the bloodied stones, according to Hinton's account, was

a middle aged man, an inhabitant of Woodstock, swearing with all the fury of a demon. He first addressed me. "D[amn] you," said he, pointing to the blood on the ground, "this is Jacobin blood, and yours shall go next." "I hope my friends," said I, "they have not shed any one's blood." "I tell you", said he, again swearing, "it is Jacobin blood, and yours will go next." He repeated these words with additional ill language, to Mr. Bartlett, while multitudes all around him were uttering similar imprecations. At this instant a handful of dirt struck me on the left side of my head; I saw the man who threw it, who appeared to be a corporal: and at the same time ... [a] recruit who had followed us from the inn began most violently to beat the horses on which we rode. I attempted to run back, but in a moment we were surrounded; every way of escape seemed closed, and all attempts equally perilous. The mob had now left pursuing our companions, and stones came thick upon us from all quarters. A stroke from a bludgeon totally disabled my right hand. I could however hold up my arm, which I did, and thus prevented repeated and violent blows (it is impossible to say how many) from reaching my head; but my arm was miserably bruised from my shoulder to my wrist.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 260–61.

⁵⁶Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 258–59.

At this point Hinton determined to ride to the mayor's home to obtain protection for himself and his friends. One of the mob offered to help get him there, but secretly intended to take him in a different direction to a nearby pond where he was to be killed by the rioters. John Bartlett yelled out to Hinton, "Where are you going?" "To the mayor's," Hinton replied. "Then you will never come back alive," Bartlett sagely told him. "Place yourself by my side," Bartlett instructed his pastor,⁵⁷ and, as Hinton later wrote:

Having no alternative but death, we set ourselves to press through the mob towards Oxford. For this purpose we placed our horses abreast, and spurred them sharply; when, as though conscious of their situation, they reared and galloped with great force, but without in the least degree separating from each other, so that the rioters were compelled to fall back on each side of the road, and open a way for our advance. Every one who could come near struck us with a bludgeon, or a stone, as we passed, and each of us was violently bruised on the side open to their assault; but one side of each being sheltered by the position of the other, we were enabled to maintain our seats and effect our escape.⁵⁸

When Hinton and Bartlett had gotten free from the mob, they found Hugh Barnard covered in wounds and blood. He could hardly speak, but he urged his pastor and Bartlett to make good their escape. But Bartlett told him, "I will not leave you, if they kill you they shall kill me too. Come, be cheerful; 'tis a good cause, and we will die together." Hinton and Bartlett put Barnard between their horses and placed his arms across the horses in front of their saddles, and in this way were able to rescue their friend. About three-quarters of a mile outside of the town on the road to Oxford, the mob turned back, and after riding another three-quarters of a mile they stopped to wait for their three other friends, all of whom but King had been severely wounded.

Though Hinton later sought to prosecute the rioters, it was without success. His son suspected that the temper of the times, in which the government was deeply fearful of a revolution in England similar to what had transpired in France, was partially responsible for this miscarriage of justice. Hinton's son also suspected that a highly-placed local magistrate was behind the appearance of the Irish soldiery. The regiment to which they belonged was soon dispatched to the continent, where, according to Hinton's son, it was largely decimated in a battle. Ultimately, though, Hinton's real desire was not so much for the vengeance of prosecution, but for the protection of his Oxford congregation and fellow Baptists in Woodstock, as well as other Dissenters in the British Isles. His heart, that of a true Christian pastor, is

⁵⁷For this detail, see Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 277, note *.

⁵⁸Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 259.

best revealed by what he wrote in his diary when got home to Oxford the evening of May 18:

A dreadful riot at Woodstock this day: myself, and four companions, much wounded by the mob, with difficulty escaped with our lives. Blessed be God, who did not leave us in the hands of the enemy! May the blood of a good man, shed this day in the streets of that unhappy town, not cry to heaven for vengeance! Rather let us pray, "Father forgive them: lay not this sin to their charge!" May the great God so ordain, that this persecution may be the commencement of much good to the numerous inhabitants of Woodstock! My mind is very happy, thinking it an honour that I am accounted worthy to bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus, and to suffer for his name.⁵⁹

"The Study of History"

In the aftermath of the Woodstock Riot, numerous individuals in Oxford who had once been friendly to Hinton would have nothing to do with him and shunned his company. They obviously thought that the Baptists were somehow at fault for the riot. Others even went so far as to curse Hinton to his face in the street and tell him that they wished he had been killed in the riot.⁶⁰ But Hinton was not to be deterred. He continued to defend village preaching, identical to what was attempted at Woodstock, since what he called "the great commission of Christ to his ministers is still in force, 'Go preach the gospel to every creature'."⁶¹ Moreover, Hinton believed he not only had a dominical command, but also divine example, for "to preach ... in any convenient place, to any person, and to all who would hear him, was surely no disgrace to our divine Master."⁶² Given such a mindset, it is not surprising that Hinton was closely associated with Andrew Fuller and John Ryland in their leadership of the Baptist Missionary Society.⁶³

⁵⁹Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 261.

⁶⁰Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 266–67.

⁶¹Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 267.

⁶²Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 269.

⁶³Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 312–20. See also "An Abridgment of Mr. Hinton's Missionary Sermon preached at Spa-Fields Chapel, June 21, 1815," *The Baptist Magazine*, 7 (1815): 406–13, in which Hinton registered his deep admiration of the way that Fuller's "ardour of soul approaching to sacred enthusiasm" was "combined with a coolness and prudence which could weigh a multiplicity of jarring circumstances in the nicest balance" and that could inspire "our hearts with love" ("Abridgment of Mr. Hinton's Missionary Sermon," 411). Preached only three days after the Battle of Waterloo, Hinton's sermon made free use of martial imagery to drive home to himself and his hearers their responsibility to continue Fuller's missionary labors: "Fuller fell—gloriously fell in the arms of victory. He fell, giving directions to his fellow-soldiers to continue the conflict; assuring them that they also should share his triumph. How great is our responsibility who received the charge from his hands!" ("Abridgment of Mr. Hinton's Missionary Sermon," 412).

When persecution is discussed today, the experience of the English Baptists at the close of the eighteenth century is not normally cited. Other eras, like that of the pre-Constantinian church or Nazi Germany, with their organized state violence against the followers of Christ are more dramatic and more news-worthy, as it were. But the English Baptist experience of the eighteenth century and that of Hinton in particular bears remembering, for it may well become typical of the Western church in the days to come.

Seven years or so after the Woodstock Riot Hinton observed in an ordination sermon that “[t]he study of history usually fills the benevolent mind with distress.”⁶⁴ Doubtless at the time of this remark he was thinking of the wars spread throughout Europe by revolutionary France.⁶⁵ But, he went on, the study of history also displayed patterns of Christian devotion and “holy joy” that should be deeply encouraging to every true believer.⁶⁶ He probably never thought of his own graceful grit and gumption during the Woodstock Riot being such an example for those who have come later. But it is.⁶⁷

⁶⁴James Hinton, *The Duties incumbent on a Christian Church*, in James Hinton and John Ryland, *The Difficulties and Supports of a Gospel Ministry; and The Duties incumbent on a Christian Church* (Bristol: Harris and Bryan, 1801), 33.

⁶⁵Cf. his statement eight years later in his *Union of Piety and Literature*, 5: “The world, at the present moment, displays many scenes of distress. Not a few of the nations are filled with deeds of wrong and outrage, which embitter ‘every day’s report’ ...”.

⁶⁶Hinton, *Duties incumbent on a Christian Church*, 33–35.

⁶⁷As Stevens and Bottoms put it, Hinton’s experience “deserves to be better known” (*Baptists of New Road, Oxford*, 15). Hinton had the joy of seeing a church begun to be planted in Woodstock in 1819. See Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, 278–79; “Ordinations, etc.,” *The Baptist Magazine*, 19 (1827): 234.