

**SMYTH MONOLOGUE**  
**(Soul Freedom)**  
**By Richard Atkins**  
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My name is John Smyth. It is a common name, but the spelling is a little different than you are used to. It is spelled S ó M ó Y ó T ó H. That was the way people spelled it in 1570, when I was born.

In my youth, I was fortunate to be living during the time of our beloved queen Elizabeth ó and **not** her older sister Mary, the one people call òBloody Mary,ö because of all the Protestant people she had executed. Mary had tried to turn England back to the Catholic Church, but without much success.

The place where progressive Protestants were educated in my time was Cambridge University, and I graduated from that university when I was 20 years old. I started my life as an Anglican priest, and I continued teaching at Cambridge for ten years. Then, I was influenced to take on Puritan views, and this cost me my position. I moved north to Lincoln and became the city lecturer for two years. In those two years, I became convinced that baptizing babies was not scriptural, and that caused me to be dismissed from that place as well.

Since I was living near Gainsborough, I joined a congregation of Separatists there and became their pastor. My lifelong quest was for soul freedom, and this ideal of free spiritual growth wherever the Lord might lead was spelled out in our church covenant:

*We have joined ourselves by a covenant of the Lord into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all His ways, made known or to be made known unto us.*

When our church got too large for us to hold our secret meetings, we decided to split and start another meeting six miles away in Scrooby. But persecution finally drove us from England. The Gainsborough group left for Amsterdam in 1607, and the Scrooby church went a little more than a year later. Meeting separately, the two bodies developed different doctrines, and we were not able to be reconciled in Holland.

The Scrooby congregation moved to Leyden, and then they boarded a ship called the Mayflower and sailed as pilgrims to American in 1620. Over in the New World, they started calling themselves Congregationalists.

My group from Gainsborough tried to remain open to change. Claiming soul freedom, we were feeling our way into a deeper faith, and we wanted to allow ònew light to break forth from the Holy Word.ö Since I knew that the Dutch Mennonites disliked infant baptism, as I did, I started meeting with them. They convinced me to act on my convictions. So, in 1609, I led my church to renounce their old baptism and to reform their church based solely on a statement of faith and a new act of *believer's* baptism. I started this new system by pouring water on my own head and then baptizing the other members of my congregation in the same way.

The name "Baptist" was not known at that time, and we decided to call ourselves "the Ancient Brethren." Some people began to mock me and call me a "Self-Baptist" for having baptized myself, and that made me doubt the validity of what I had done. I became convinced that the Mennonites were an authentic Christian church, and so I sought membership with them. Many of my followers came into that church with me. I died soon after that in 1612.

The year before my death, a remnant group retained their assurance of the validity of their baptism, and these returned to England to set up the first Baptist churches in that country. They were led by my associate " Thomas Helwys.

You may think it remarkable that I moved from Anglican to Puritan to Separatist to Baptist to Mennonite positions in only five years, but that was where my soul freedom led me as God opened to me new light. My best wish for you is that you would follow Him wherever He might lead you, as well.

**Bunyan Monologue**  
**(Bible Freedom)**  
**By Richard Atkins**  
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Hello, my name is John Bunyan. You may have never heard of me, but I imagine you have heard of this book I hold in my hand. It is called *Pilgrim's Progress*. I wrote it while I was in prison in the city of Bedford, England, in 1677. And why, you may ask, was I in jail? For my Baptist faith, for Bible freedom, and for preaching at times and places not acceptable to the Church of England.

It was the Bible that made me who I am, and those who know how little education I have, recognize that my ability to write books and religious tracts came from studying the Holy Scripture. So, you see, Bible freedom was very important to me and to all of my fellow Baptists.

I started life in Elstow, England, which is a little village just a few miles north of Bedford and Bedford is about fifty miles north of London. My parents were poor, and after I got some education in the local schools, I took up the trade of tinker that is, I went around from door to door and asked the good women if they had any pots and kettles to mend or scissors to sharpen. To fix a hole in a pot, a tinker puts in a little slug of metal and pounds it down to seal the bottom. People could not afford to throw away a pot when it sprung a leak in those days.

When I was a teenage lad, I was pretty wild. I had a profane tongue, and I would play tricks on people and play games on Sunday, even though I knew it was wrong. One of the worst things I did was to sneak into the church bell tower and ring the bell. People would come running thinking there was a fire or a murder or some other calamity.

The English Civil War started when I was 14, and I joined the army when I was 17. The war was a revolt against King Charles the First, and it ended with the king having his head chopped off. And fighting in the people's army were many men who had picked up the name Baptist or Anabaptist because they did not believe in baptizing babies. They would baptize people all over again when they reached the age to accept Christ for themselves. I heard these good men preach and talk in the army camps and was moved by what they said, but I did not want to give up my worldly ways. During the war, a friend of mine took my place during a siege and was killed when I should have been. That made me get more serious about life, but I was still a sinner.

When I got out of the army, I married a poor orphan girl, whose main belongings were two Christian books. Since that was all we had to read, I studied them a lot. After a while I started going to the Baptist Meeting house in Bedford, and then when I was 25 years old I immersed there. My wife kept on going to the Anglican Church and insisted on having my four children baptized by the priest.

Two years after I had joined the church I had my real conversion. Then I started really reading the Bible and every holy book I could get my hands on, and a year later I started preaching. I was

not an ordained pastor, but I could still draw pretty good crowds. I liked to make up stories and poems that would stick in the minds of the people. Here is a rhyme I made up in one of my sermons:

*An egg is not a chicken by falling from a hen,  
Nor is a man a Christian till he is born again.*

When I was 32, the monarchy was restored in England. The dead king's son had been in exile while Oliver Cromwell ruled England without a crown. Those had been good times when Baptists were tolerated. But when Cromwell died and Charles the Second came to the throne, he put a stop to all preaching outside the Church of England. That's what landed me in jail. I stayed there for 12 years, where I practically memorized the Bible, until the king was forced to grant some freedom.

When I came out of prison, I became pastor of the Bedford church. Since I went about organizing other churches the people started calling me "Bishop Bunyan."

Then just like old Pharaoh whose heart was hardened, the king had a change of mind and I was back in jail again. That time was just for six months, but that gave me long enough to write this book I was showing you. It was immediately successful and sold all over England. Some folks said it was next in popularity to the Bible itself. I wrote a few other books, but this was the one that folks still remember me by.

Now, by all means, you should read your Bible. But if you want another guidebook to help you on the pilgrimage of life, I would suggest that you get my book as well. You can still get copies of my book, and it still has the power to change your life, if you'll let it. The language is a little old fashioned, but the message is fresh and clear.

**Hutchinson Monologue  
(Individual Freedom)  
By Richard Atkins  
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My name is Anne Hutchinson. I am not a Baptist, but I helped Baptist in America develop one of their main doctrines, that of soul freedom. How did I do this, you may ask? Well, I will tell you that I was a teacher and a very influential supporter of Roger Williams.

I was born Anne Marbury in Lincolnshire, England, in 1600. It's the same place where John Smyth preached before he became a Baptist. I married my husband, William Hutchinson, in 1634, and we sailed to America and landed in Boston, Massachusetts.

My beliefs were questioned by the leaders in Boston, and I was not admitted to the church at first. Then I organized meetings for the women in the town, and my ability as a teacher became known. After a while, some men started coming to my classes, and later even ministers and magistrates came to learn from me. I discussed recent sermons and gave my own views on them. One of the members of my Monday Bible school class was a bright young preacher, about my same age, by the name of Roger Williams. His views on freedom of conscience and religious tolerance were like mine, and he took my teachings to heart, and went on to establish the first really free territory in America, the Rhode Island colony. My sister Catherine was a Baptist, and she urged Roger to act upon his Baptist convictions, even though he was not a Baptist at that time. Even then, "freedom of conscience" was being recognized as a Baptist hallmark.

I felt that I had a special inspiration, a "peculiar indwelling of the Holy Ghost," and I taught that many ministers in the colony were only preaching under a "covenant of works," not a "covenant of grace." In fact, the Puritan religion said little about faith and mainly consisted of enforcing strict living according to the church covenant rules.

What I was really doing was voicing a protest against the legalism of the Puritans and questioning their authority. This was the serious matter of church freedom, which says no leader in the church can give orders about what everybody has to believe. I was opposed to any clergyman taking away my individual freedom to think for myself. As a result, the whole colony became divided into two factions. I was supported by the majority of the Boston church, but opposed by the country magistrates. Because I resisted authority and because I taught that faith alone was necessary for salvation, I was called an "antinomian," which had the meaning of being a lawless person.

Finally I was brought to trial and banished from the colony. I took some of my followers to Aquidneck in Rhode Island in 1638, because I knew that I was welcome in the territory established by Roger Williams. Four years later, when my husband died, I moved to Long Island and was killed by Indians there in 1643.

Some of my students and followers became Baptist because of my insistence upon salvation by grace and freedom of conscience, but others became Quakers, because I believed that a person should follow his "inner light," disregard outward ordinances, and live under a "covenant of grace" even without the authority or support of Scripture.

My insistence upon individual freedom and a religion that was inward and mystical was a threat to the authority of the Puritans. And, I will make no apology for the trouble I caused the old stuffed shirts in Boston. They needed to know that their coming to America for religious freedom did not allow them to take it away from others whose theology differed from their own.

**Williams Monologue  
(Religious Freedom)  
By Richard Atkins  
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I am Roger Williams. Most Americans know me, because I founded the state of Rhode Island. What most people do not know is that I also started the first Baptist church in this country. Both of these events were tied together, so let me explain how they came about.

I was born in England in 1599. After I graduated in law from Cambridge University, I was ordained as a priest in the Church of England. I met some Puritan teachers at Cambridge and soon accepted their strong dislike of the liturgy and hierarchy of the Church, so much so that I left England and sailed for America in 1631. This was just a year after the Puritans had planted the city of Boston.

Three months after landing on these shores, I moved to Salem with my wife, Mary, and became a church teacher there. I did not like the dictatorial rulership in the Puritan community, so we moved on that summer to Plymouth, to try to fit in with the folks known as the Pilgrims. I was able to remain there for 2 years until I offended the overlords in Boston by saying that they had no jurisdiction over the minds of men.

I insisted that neither church nor state should persecute the heretic or the atheist. I insisted that everyone – even Jews, Turks, and anti-Christians might be peaceable and quiet subjects, loving and helpful neighbors, fair and just dealers, true and loyal to the civil government. I want to give much credit for my ideas on religious liberty to a person who greatly influenced my thinking, namely, Mistress Anne Hutchinson, whose Monday school class I attended. Mistress Hutchinson was to undergo some of the same ostracism that I received from the authorities.

For the expression of these opinions, I was brought to trial in 1635 and ordered to get out of Massachusetts. When the authorities came to arrest me, I left my home and family in the dead of winter and went to live with some Indians I had befriended. The following summer, four other men joined me, and together we founded the town of Providence Plantations. We established friendly relations with the local Indians and bought land from them upon which to settle.

An Indian war broke out the next year, and I was able to make an alliance that saved the lives of the people who had driven me out. They expressed appreciation for what I did for them, but they refused to welcome me back into their communities.

My new settlement had a high ideal of allowing freedom of conscience to all who joined us. This brought in many settlers, and some of these were Baptists. After discussing religious ideas with them, I was baptized in 1639, and led the group in founding the first Baptist church in America.

Like another Baptist leader before me, John Smyth, I kept my heart open for God to fill it with more light and truth. I soon left the Baptist fellowship and became a "seeker" or an "independent." In the years that followed, I went to England and secured a charter for the towns of Providence, Newport, and Portsmouth. These became the principle cities of the colony of Rhode Island.

The 1663 charter of the Rhode Island colony stated that: "no person within said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences of opinion in matters of religion; but that all and any persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concernment throughout the tract of land hereafter mentioned."

I hope that Baptists will appreciate the hardships I endured for the ideal of religious tolerance, and I pray that this principle is never lost or compromised in this great land of America.