

SMYTH MONOLOGUE
(Soul Freedom)
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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 öBloody 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 önew 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.