

# Conscience, Taxes, Coercion

Isaac Backus and the Adventist Tradition  
of Separation between Church and State

By Leigh Johnsen

Seventh-day Adventists tend to be fond of their uniqueness. Often they stress the differences between themselves and other Christians, and at times they overlook evidence that early Adventist pioneers carried beliefs and values from other churches into the new movement. From the Methodists, for example, they inherited an administrative structure marked at the top by a General Conference, and from the Seventh Day Baptists veneration for a common Sabbath. Similarly, there is evidence that Baptist influences in general played a role in the development of Adventist sensitivity over matters of church and state.

In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White pays special tribute to Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, a Baptist at one point in his life, and an icon of American church-state relations. She describes him as “a faithful minister, a man of rare gifts, of unbending integrity and true benevolence.” To her, Williams was “an earnest seeker for truth” whose passion for protecting conscience rose out of a quest for new “light from God’s word.” Ultimately, she wrote, the founding principles of Rhode Island “became the cornerstones of the American Republic.”<sup>1</sup>

*The Great Controversy* does not explain how those principles became national cornerstones, but Baptists have long known that a key figure in the process was a New England Baptist named Isaac Backus. Backus rediscovered Williams, absorbed his thought, and turned the results into centerpieces of a Baptist initiative for separation of church and state that flourished in late eighteenth-century America. In league with other political forces, the Baptist impulse culminated in ratification of the First Amendment.<sup>2</sup>

To American Adventists, the experience of Backus is important as a reminder that their legacy of religious freedom is grounded in the Gospels, was hammered out amid conflict over religious taxes, and is linked to veneration for conscience as a divine gift.

## The New Light

Backus was born on January 9, 1723/24, in Norwich, Connecticut, the fourth child in a family of eleven offspring. His father was Samuel Backus, a representative on a number of occasions in Connecticut’s General Assembly, and his ancestors included an original proprietor of Windham and a justice of the peace. Backus’s mother, Elizabeth Tracy Backus, was related by blood to



Edward Winslow, an early governor of New Plymouth Colony. By marriage, the extended Backus network had links to some of New England's most noted families.

As pillars of their community, members of the Backus family were familiar with the workings of Connecticut's established religion, or Standing Order. In each of New England's colonies except Rhode Island religious establishments worked hand in glove with civil officials, enjoying special privileges intended to perpetuate the congregational system founded by Puritan forebears. Throughout most of early eighteenth-century New England civil law restricted preaching to orthodox Calvinist preachers, local parishes could hire only qualified college graduates as pastors, and only Protestants could hold office.

Most notable, perhaps, was the power of the Standing Order to levy taxes on all citizens for the support of its own ministers, regardless of the taxpayers' own religious preferences. By the time Backus came of age, Baptists, Quakers, and Anglicans could request certificates of exemption, but issuance fell to the discretion of town officials understandably reluctant to reduce tax rolls and often insensitive to taxpayers not of their own persuasion.

In 1718, two years after their marriage, Backus's mother and father publicly sealed their connection to Connecticut's established religion by becoming members of Norwich's parish church under the watchful eye of Benjamin Lord, a graduate of Yale College. They joined not as full-fledged communicants, however, but through the common and controversial arrangement of halfway membership.

Unlike full membership, which New England's Calvinist forebears considered suitable only for the elect, halfway membership offered a lesser degree of affiliation for those not certain of their own salvation. Halfway members were barred from communion and could not vote in church affairs. However, they could have their children baptized, and under this provision Backus and his siblings entered the Norwich parish church.<sup>3</sup>

Backus spent the next seventeen years under the spiritual care of Lord and his congregation, attending church on Sundays, learning the catechism, preparing for the time when he, too, would experience evidence of God's saving grace and receive assurance of his own suitability as one of the elect. Such at least was the theory. In reality, Backus's early years in the Norwich

parish church failed to trigger that certainty. Later, as an adult, Backus remembered those years as a period during which he lived "a Car[e]less and Secure life. . . . I did never think that I was Converted," he recalled, "but flattered my Self with this that I would turn by and by."<sup>4</sup>

Backus received the spiritual assurance he sought at the height of the First Great Awakening, shortly after renowned itinerants Benjamin Pomeroy, James Davenport, and Eleazer Wheelock passed through Norwich. Backus had recently lost his father to a measles epidemic, and his bereaved mother was languishing in the depths of depression. On August 24, 1741, while mowing in a field, seventeen-year-old Backus experienced conversion.

[I]n that Critical moment God who caused the light to Shine out of Darkness, Shined into my heart with such A discover of that glorious Righteousness

Which fully Satisfies the Law that I had Broken; and of the Infinite fullness that there Is in Christ to Satisfie the wants of just Such a helpless Creature as I was and these Blessing Were held forth So freely to my Soul—That my Whole Heart was attracted and Drawn away after God and Swallowed up with Admiration in viewing his Divine glories.<sup>5</sup>

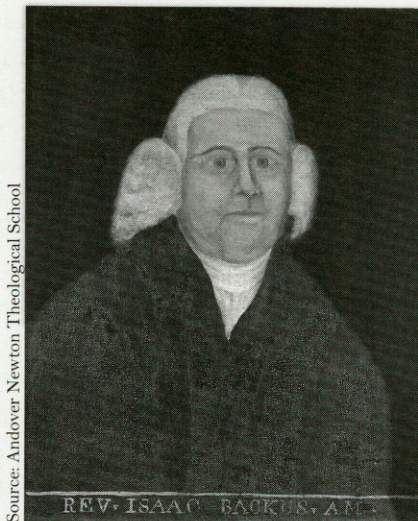
Backus's experience marked a personal turning point. Not only did it qualify him to join the Norwich parish church as a full member, which he did in July 1742, it also provided the motivation and rationale for his

rejection of New England's religious establishment.

## Dissent and the Holy Spirit

Backus took his first formal step toward outright dissent on June 16, 1746, when he and his recently converted mother joined other New Lights to gather their own congregation separate from the parish church. Soon they settled in a meeting house at Bean Hill, on the outskirts of town.

Their grievances against the established parish



Source: Andover Newton Theological School





church were many: Lord and other Old Lights failed to value the workings of the Holy Spirit; they stifled displays of emotion in meetings; they were too formal in speech and dress; they exalted formal education over spiritual calling. However, the major concern of the Separates was Lord's practice of admitting into fellowship members who, according to the new converts, had not experienced God's saving grace and thus stood in violation of ideals envisioned by New England's Puritan founders.

Estrangement between Backus and the religious establishment intensified after September 1746, when the diffident young man found his tongue and the Bean Hill Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, authorized him as a preacher. Later, Backus remembered his call in terms reminiscent of his conversion experience: "The Lord gave me to See that the gifts that he had given me, did belong to the Church and that while I neglected to improve them—I robbed the Church of their Right."<sup>6</sup>

Backus's call did nothing to endear him to religious authorities. Not only did the Bean Hill congregation's gathering lack legitimacy, according to the authorities, its members were also apparently willing to thumb their noses at Connecticut law that required ministers to have orthodox college educations. Soon after, the Holy Spirit also led Backus to defy legislation that forbade New Light itinerancy, and the young man set out on a brief preaching tour with Jedidiah Hide, pastor of the Bean Hill Church, that took them to Preston, Stonington, and Westerly.

Backus understood that imprisonment often awaited those who preached without leave from religious authorities, but he continued. In October, he embarked on a two-month preaching tour with a New Light school teacher named John Fuller, and after briefly returning to Norwich, set out again with Jedidiah Hide. The two men traveled across Rhode Island into Massachusetts. Backus itinerated in southern and southeastern New England throughout the winter of 1746-47.

Early in December 1747, he accompanied New Light pastor Joseph Snow Jr., on a trip to southeastern Massachusetts, and on the northwest border between Bridgewater and Middleborough they visited Titicut parish, which was destined to become Backus's home for the next half century.

In 1747, Titicut was a hotbed of New Light activity, crisscrossed over and over in recent years by itinerant preachers. In 1743, residents had successfully petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for a parish and pastor of their own, and many were clearly receptive to the New Light message when Backus and Snow

arrived. To Backus, Titicut was, in fact, "a Large field all white to harvest," one in which God himself had assigned Backus a special role.<sup>7</sup>

Backus and Snow preached ten days and triggered a local revival. Impressed, the parish committee took the extraordinary step of considering Backus as a candidate for pastor of Titicut's established parish church. It abruptly changed heart, however, after he questioned its worthiness as an instrument of unregenerate humans to evaluate the legitimacy of his divine calling. On February 16, 1748, after another month of preaching, Backus and sixteen other New Lights followed the urgings of the Holy Spirit and the example of the Bean Hill Church to gather their own Separate congregation, again in violation of New England tradition and civil law.

The Titicut gathering, part of a mushrooming movement of Separates, or Strict Congregationalists, was the penultimate stage of Backus's journey to dissent. As with other Separates, the gathering forced Backus and his congregation to confront a system of taxation that placed them on the legal periphery and implicitly made them outsiders. Not only did their congregations lack legal standing, members could not even apply for exemption, which was restricted to Anglicans, Baptists, and Quakers. Many Titicut Separates refused to comply, only to see their property sold at auction or face imprisonment.

By the spring of 1749, Backus and other Massachusetts Separates were chafing at the injustice, and at a special conference in May they decided to appeal for relief. Backus spearheaded efforts, gathering signatures for a petition presented to the Massachusetts General Court in June, but hopes for a speedy resolution were dashed after the proposal died in the upper house.

The Titicut gathering marked another milestone, as well. Afterward, Backus joined ranks with other Separates forced to grapple with the theological implications of restricting church membership only to those who had experienced conversion experiences. What, then, of children baptized as infants, obviously before they could understand the significance of the event? Some Separates continued to support infant baptism, in accordance with New England's Puritan tradition, whereas others criticized it as an unscriptural human invention.

Further complications arose from disagreement over whether the two factions should practice communion with each other. Repeated, unsuccessful efforts to resolve these dilemmas, most notably at the Stonington Conference of 1754, ultimately doomed the fledgling Separate movement to failure. In the case of Backus, the search for solutions also gave rise to agonizing reflection that ended with outright rejection of the Standing Order.



## The Bond Woman

Backus explained his decision in *The Bond Woman and the Free* (1756), a booklet based on Galatians 4:31, which focused on well-known claims by New England's founding Puritans to be the successors of Old Testament Israel, to stand in a special covenant relationship with Jehovah as God's chosen people.<sup>8</sup> According to Backus, the kernel of that arrangement was a decision by God to grant humans salvation in return for obedience to the Mosaic law. Those who participated

conversion outwardly through baptism. In short, the gift of salvation gave Backus and likeminded New Lights a divine mandate to follow their own convictions individually and together, just as their reading of Scripture gave them compelling reasons to reject New England's religious establishment.

Publication of *The Bond Woman and The Free* marked a decision by Backus to join the Separate Baptists, at that time a small group distinguished from older Baptists mainly by strict adherence to Calvinist theology. In January 1756, other members of Titicut's Separate

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were, in effect, in "bondage" to the law, and the ritual of circumcision signified participation in the arrangement. To New England's Puritans, infant baptism served the same function: as an updated sign integral to their covenant with God.

Backus saw matters differently, however. According to *The Bond Woman and the Free*, Christ had fulfilled the requirements of the law; his crucifixion marked the end of the Old Testament covenant. Thus, not only were infant baptisms meaningless in eighteenth-century New England, in Backus's view the entire church-state system modeled on ancient Israel and still thoroughly entrenched all around was outdated and lacked divine legitimacy.

The arrangement that Backus envisioned instead dovetailed neatly with his own experience as a New Light. According to *The Bond Woman and the Free*, salvation no longer came through the agency of individuals or institutions. Instead, a sovereign God bestowed the gift of salvation directly on selected individuals through acts of grace. Those who received it understood they had been "born again," as did Backus, and could claim an array of freedoms: freedom "from the condemnation of the law," freedom "from the power of sin and Satan," freedom to approach "God through Jesus Christ," and freedom "to talk in holiness all their days" (144).

Furthermore, they had exclusive right to "the liberty of Christ's house," as shown when Titicut's saints gathered their own congregation, and the right to signify

congregation followed his lead, disbanded, and gathered again as Middleborough's First Baptist Church.

## The Grievance Committee

Thanks partly to Backus, the number of Separate Baptists grew rapidly. In the southwest corner of Middleborough another Separate regathering took place in 1757, giving birth to the town's Second Baptist Church. Other New Lights to the southeast founded the Third Baptist Church in 1761. By 1770, the total number of Separate Baptist congregations in Massachusetts had swelled to thirty-two, and in Connecticut they had expanded sevenfold.<sup>9</sup>

Rapid growth continued into the 1780s and 1790s, when the number of Separate Baptist congregations in New England more than doubled. In 1795, the estimated number of members throughout New England had grown to 21,000, which did not include approximately 42,000 more who attended services regularly but had not sought membership in full.<sup>10</sup>

The Standing Order had reason for concern as New England's Separate Baptists expanded and matured, and friction between the two denominations intensified during the Revolutionary era. At issue was the taxation system, which often forced Separate Baptists to support a religious system not of their own choosing. In theory, colonial law gave Baptists the right to claim



exemption, but local officials often drew a fine line between Baptist congregations that existed before the Awakening and upstart Separate Baptist churches gathered afterward.

Exemption was more likely if Separate Baptists could prove affiliation with Old Baptists, but the two groups were not in fellowship and the chances for cooperation were slender. As a result, jailings, seizures of property, and auctions were common among Separate Baptists during the 1760s. In 1768, matters worsened after the Massachusetts General Court passed legislation that targeted Separate Baptists in the town of Ashfield and required all of its residents to provide financial support for the Standing Order. If other towns followed course, the slender hope of exemption among other Separate Baptists in the colony would also be threatened.

Backus's rise to prominence placed him at the center of efforts among New England's Separate Baptists to secure relief. In the fall of 1769, a newly formed coalition of Baptist congregations known as the Warren Baptist Association appointed a special committee to gather evidence of its members' grievances, petition the General Courts of Massachusetts and Connecticut for redress, and if necessary appeal to the King. Among the committee's members was Backus, who served with John Davis and Samuel Stillman, both of Boston, and Hezekiah Smith, a pastor from Haverhill, Massachusetts.

The Grievance Committee collected scores of letters and affidavits, and using this evidence petitioned the Massachusetts General Court in 1769 and 1770. The Ashfield Law remained in place, however, although the legislature eventually agreed to revise exemption laws in 1770 in ways slightly more favorable to religious dissenters. Despite the risk of annoying revolutionaries at home, Backus and his colleagues finally bypassed the Massachusetts General Court and, with help from Baptists in England, presented their grievance directly to the King, who disallowed the Ashfield Law in July 1771.

Abuses went on, however, much to the chagrin of Backus. All too often local tax collectors either ignored or mishandled certificates of exemption. Backus had recently aired his frustrations in *A Seasonable Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (1770) and *A Letter to a Gentleman in the Massachusetts General Assembly* (1771), and in 1773 he decided that relief from religious taxes would never come under existing Massachusetts law.

In May, the Grievance Committee under his chairmanship recommended shifts in tactics and strategy. The committee urged members of the Warren Baptist Association to refuse submission of certificates or

payment of taxes, to engage in demonstrations of massive civil disobedience, just as patriots throughout the colonies were defying British authorities in pursuit of political rights. The resulting cases would overburden the legal system, authorities would recognize the errors of their ways, and Separate Baptists would pressure the Standing Order to recognize their own full right to religious liberty.

## An Appeal

Backus explained the rationale behind this decision in *An Appeal to the Public*, an eighteen-page booklet authorized by the Warren Baptist Association. His argument rests less on logic and political theory than on the Bible as seen through the lens of traditional Baptist views and the thinking of Roger Williams, whose writings Backus had recently started to read.<sup>11</sup>

Baptists had long stressed the importance of shielding matters of the spirit from those of the government. According to Backus, God had appointed "two kinds of government, . . . distinct in their nature," which "ought never to be confounded." One "is called civil and the other ecclesiastical government" (312). Over the past thirty years Backus had become thoroughly familiar with some of the most pressing dangers caused by government interference in religious matters: unregenerate members, clergy valued more for their education than spiritual calling, and infants admitted into fellowship in violation of divine instruction. In short, comingling of church and state endangered the sanctity of the church.

Backus also noted another danger that left him particularly indignant: the potential of the state to flex its coercive power in pursuit of religious objectives. Not only was force in matters of religion grounded in the "old Jewish constitution and ordinances" (315)—an arrangement invalidated at the crucifixion—it also violated the letter and spirit of the New Covenant initiated by Christ. "'Tis well known that this glorious Head made no use of secular force in the first setting up of the Gospel-Church," Backus pointed out (315).

Instead, Christ had proclaimed the nature of his "Kingdom" as "*not of this world*," and had commanded "his servants . . . not [to] *fight* or defend him with the *sword*" (315). To Backus, each denial of exemption, every seizure, auction, and imprisonment must have been a searing reminder that the Standing Order, by using force, had arrayed itself in defiance of Holy Writ and the example of Christ.

The justification that Backus offered for confronting



the Standing Order may seem strange in a modern context shaped by the First Amendment. The issue was not simply free exercise of religion or existence of a religious establishment. *An Appeal to the Public* linked both dimensions inseparably. New England's Standing Order violated Backus's conscience by forcing him to support a religious system that lacked biblical legitimacy and the Holy Spirit's blessing—and this struck at the core of his spiritual being.

grievances. According to Backus, the Massachusetts delegates responded by denying the legitimacy of Separate Baptist complaints, accusing them of seeking martyrdom, and complaining that they sought only to avoid taxes. Not so, Backus heatedly responded: "It is absolutely a point of conscience with me; for I cannot give in the certificates they require without implicitly acknowledging that power in man which I believe belongs only to God." According to Backus,

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For half a century, conscience and the Holy Spirit had played prominent parts in Backus's life: prompting his conversion, calling him to the ministry, leading him to Titicut, guiding him to reject the Standing Order. For Backus, opposition to the Standing Order was not simply a theoretical exercise. Freedom of conscience was a God-given right. By presuming to coerce support of erroneous religion, the Standing Order had arrayed itself against God and threatened to interfere with the unfettered working of the Holy Spirit.

Backus had a divine obligation to oppose the Standing Order not only to protect his own conscience, but also to provide conditions conducive to the Spirit-generated awakening for which he and other New Lights constantly hoped.

### Revolution

*An Appeal to the People* summarized some of the best Separate Baptist thinking on church-state relations at that time, but defenders of the Standing Order saw matters differently. In October 1774, Backus, James Manning, and Chileab Smith of Ashfield took their case at the request of the Warren Baptist Association to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Joining them in Carpenter's Hall on the fourteenth were a large group of local Baptist leaders, two prominent Philadelphia Quakers, and a handful of elected congressional delegates that included Thomas Cushing, Samuel and John Adams, and Robert Treat Paine, all of Massachusetts.

The conference started with Manning reading a speech, then presenting a memorial of Separate Baptist

his appeal to conscience left Cushing speechless, but it failed to sway other Massachusetts delegates and he went home emptyhanded.<sup>12</sup>

The Separate Baptist campaign of civil disobedience continued as war broke out between Britain and the colonies. At times, neighbors responded to Baptists with hostility, even to the point of rioting, but there was also a hint of change, a suggestion that they would not always be treated as sectarian outsiders. In April 1775, Backus responded to the Battles of Lexington and Concord by coming out publicly against the King and Parliament and in favor of independence. Other Separate Baptists followed suit, and in time they were fighting shoulder to shoulder with neighbors as comrades-in-arm, not only against Britain, but also in the struggle to reshape domestic government.

In 1778, for example, Backus and his coreligionists campaigned against a proposed constitution for Massachusetts that, among other shortcomings, would have perpetuated religious taxes. This time, however, a chorus of other critics joined in with reasons of their own, and together the opponents prevailed. Barriers seemed to weaken further in May 1779, when the Massachusetts General Assembly took the unprecedented step of inviting Separate Baptist minister Samuel Stillman to deliver its annual election sermon, which Stillman used as an opportunity to explain the Separate Baptist position on matters of church and state.

Four months later, in September 1779,





another state constitutional convention convened in Boston, and Separate Baptists ventured further into the political process. Among the convention's 293 delegates were six Baptists. Backus himself served on an official committee from Middleborough that issued instructions to its representatives, and Separate Baptists from other towns held similar positions. Backus kept tabs on the convention, lobbied its delegates, and wrote letters and newspaper articles.

At the request of Baptist delegate Noah Alden, Backus also offered a proposed bill of rights whose second article guaranteed freedom of religion and ruled out force in such matters: "As God is the only worthy object of all religious worship, and nothing can be true religion but a voluntary obedience unto his revealed will, of which each rational soul has an equal right to judge for itself; every person has an unalienable right to act in all religious affairs according to the full persuasion of his own mind."<sup>13</sup>

Alden chaired the committee charged with drafting clauses on ecclesiastical matters, and Backus undoubtedly hoped that his proposal would make its way into the new constitution. But Alden was the only Separate Baptist on the committee and only one of three who favored doing away with the religious establishment. Instead, by a vote of four to three, the committee recommended an alternative that threatened to deprive dissenters of any opportunity to avoid religious taxes.

According to Article Three, "every denomination of Christians demeaning themselves peaceably" was to be "equally under the protection of the law: and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law." However, at the same time, the article also effectively abolished the possibility of exemption and authorized civil authorities to levy taxes in behalf of all denominations. In effect, Congregationalists, Anglicans, Baptists, and Quakers would all belong to the religious establishment, and all would be supported by religious taxes—despite the potential of violating individual consciences.<sup>14</sup>

In the end, Article Three won ratification during the autumn of 1780. The number of Separate Baptists was still too small, its political power too little, and the chasm between it and its critics too great. Backus and his coreligionists clearly understood the seriousness of their situation, especially after state legislators ignored another petition against religious taxes that they submitted at the end of the year. However, they were determined, as Backus explained in *Truth Is Great and Will Prevail* (1781), and they arrived at one final plan. If only they could convince the courts that Article Three's guarantee

of religious equality was inconsistent with the authority it also granted to tax citizens against their consciences, then perhaps it would be declared unconstitutional.

In March 1782, the Warren Association supported the case of Separate Baptist Elijah Balkcom, who tested the constitutionality of Article Three in a suit against assessors from his hometown of Attleborough, and he prevailed. Backus rejoiced in *A Door Opened for Equal Christian Liberty* (1783), but his celebration proved premature. In 1784, a similar case named after Gershom Cutter, another Separate Baptist plaintiff, arose in Cambridge and made its way to the Supreme Judicial Court, which upheld the constitutionality of Article Three in October 1785.

## A Shared Identity

*Cutter v. Frost* brought a devastating conclusion to more than twenty years of agitation by Massachusetts Separate Baptists and left them with legal arrangements similar to the hated certificate system. Not until 1833—well after Backus's death—was the religious establishment in Massachusetts overthrown. Still, through their struggles the Separate Baptists had reached out to coreligionists, created an intercolonial network, and gained a measure of legitimacy, all of which also enhanced the stature of Backus.

By the late 1700s, Backus had become a senior Baptist statesman. Perhaps in acknowledgment, neighbors in Middleborough chose him in 1788 to represent them in the state convention called to vote on ratification of the federal constitution. Backus cast his ballot in favor and lobbied others to do so, as well, but by then his days of intensive political action were over. Instead, he spent most of his time during the late eighteenth century defending orthodox Calvinism, advancing Baptist education, spreading the gospel, and writing.

By far, his most notable work during these years was a three-volume history of New England's Baptists. Backus's history afforded Separate Baptists a sense of pride and went far to explain his view of church-state relations. Thanks to a developed distribution system, this and other publications of his were read widely, thus promoting a common identity grounded in separation of church and state that Baptists throughout the country shared as they embarked on the struggle to ratify the First Amendment.

Time eventually took its toll on Backus. Over the years he had gained considerable weight, and according to his diary, had experienced "a soreness and swelling" in his "private parts" since at least November 1793.<sup>15</sup> His



condition worsened in March 1806, when he suffered a stroke. Another, more serious stroke followed at the end of April, leaving him paralyzed and speechless. Backus lived through the summer and autumn, and died at the age of eighty-one on November 20, 1806.

## The Legacy

Backus has been hailed as a champion of religious freedom similar in stature to Thomas Jefferson.<sup>16</sup> However, unlike Jefferson, who viewed such matters from a secular perspective, Backus had a thoroughly religious outlook. Thus, he carries a message of special significance to believers of all kinds—not only to American Adventists, but also to other Christians.

Separation of church and state in the United States is not the invention of modern secularists or anti-Catholic bigotry, as some have recently suggested.<sup>17</sup> Instead, it was purchased dearly amid conflicts among Protestants dating from colonial times, is grounded in the Gospels, and was enshrined in the U.S. Constitution largely in response to a political coalition in which Christians played a prominent role. If *The Great Controversy* can be taken as an accurate guide, early Adventists placed themselves squarely in that tradition.

The experience of Backus carries another message, as well. This one calls for consistency in matters of conscience. If forced conversions, Sunday laws, and religious intolerance in the workplace threaten freedom of conscience, so, too, does tax-generated funding for religious programs. No matter how worthy the cause, money taken from citizens for religious causes under threat of prosecution unavoidably forces some to support beliefs with which they, often under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, cannot agree.

In the end, Backus leaves American Adventists with what may be a costly challenge. Whether or not they heed his messages, honor his legacy, and reclaim a birthright based in Scripture and the histories of their country and denomination remains to be seen.

## Notes and References

1. *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), 293-95.

2. On the connection between Williams and Backus, see Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 203-5. As with other modern students of Backus and the Separate Baptists, I am heavily indebted to the scholarship of William G. McLoughlin, particularly *The Diary of Isaac Backus* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), edited in three volumes; *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); *Isaac Backus on*

*Church, State and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968); and *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). Other sources of relevance include Backus's own *History of New England With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, ed. David Weston, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Newton, Mass.: Backus Historical Society, 1871); Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus, A.M.* (1858; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1972); Leigh Johnsen, "Toward Pluralism: Society and Religion in Middleborough, Massachusetts, 1741-1807" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Riverside, 1984); Thomas B. Maston, *Isaac Backus Pioneer of Religious Liberty* (Rochester, N.Y.: American Baptist Historical Society, 1962); and Milton V. Brackman, "Isaac Backus: A Pioneer Champion of Religious Liberty" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1959).

3. Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 261-78.

4. Backus, *Diary*, 1:3.

5. Backus, "Some Particular Account," in Backus, *Diary*, 3:152-5.

6. Backus, *Diary*, 1:4.

7. *Ibid.*, 1:12-13.

8. I have relied on an edited version of this booklet in McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 129-65.

9. McLoughlin, *Backus*, 100.

10. McLoughlin, *Dissent*, 1:438.

11. The version of *An Appeal* quoted below is printed in McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 389-96. On Williams, see Backus, *Diary*, 3:868.

12. Backus, *Diary*, 2:914, 916-17; Backus, "A Journey to Philadelphia, 1774," Backus Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University.

13. The original of Backus's, "A declaration of the Rights, of the Inhabitants of the State of Massachusetts-bay, in New England," can be found in the Backus Collection at Andover Newton Theological School, with copies reprinted in Backus, *Diary*, 3:1605-7; and McLoughlin, *Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 487-89.

14. McLoughlin, *Backus*, 145-48; McLoughlin, *Dissent*, 1:602-4.

15. Backus, *Diary*, 3:1362.

16. McLoughlin, *Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism*, 1.

17. See, most notably, the prolific writings of David Barton, and, more recently, Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

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Leigh Johnsen is the associate editor of *Spectrum*. He holds a doctorate in the history of early American Christianity and has edited *The Papers of Isaac Backus, 1639-1806* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, forthcoming), from which this article has been adapted.

