

These things took place in the morning, and the king’s order to burn Brady came that afternoon. He was immediately taken to Smithfield, the place where felons and other transgressors of the king’s laws were executed. Brady was put into an empty barrel and bound with iron chains to a stake. Dried wood was then piled around him. As he was thus standing, it happened that the king’s eldest son, who would succeed to the throne as Henry VI, was there, and tried to find some way to save his life. In the meantime, a priest brought a consecrated eucharist in a solemn procession, showed it to the condemned man, and demanded to know what he believed about it. Brady said that he knew it was hallowed bread, but not Christ’s body. At those words they put fire to him.

When the innocent soul felt the fire, he cried, “Mercy!” Most likely he was calling upon the Lord, but his cry was so horrible sounding that when the prince heard it he commanded the fire to be quenched, and asked Brady if he would forsake his heresy promising to give him all he needed to live – a yearly allowance out of the king’s treasury, enough to support him.

But this valiant champion of Christ paid no attention to these words refusing all offers made to him, for he was determined to suffer any kind of torment, no matter how painful it was, rather than acknowledge so great idolatry and wickedness. The prince demanded the fires to be lit again. Brady held steadfast and persevered invincibly to the end.□

SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE MARTYRED 1418

SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE was another of the early English martyrs slain for the truth of the Gospel. The archbishop of Canterbury and his bishops began to move against Sir John, a stately and distinguished Christian gentleman. Sir John was a firm believer in Reformed doctrine, and also a personal friend of King Henry IV. He was accused of commissioning others to preach who were not licensed by the bishops, and of encouraging false teachings against the sacraments of the church, images, pilgrimages, and the pope. Before the bishops could charge him, however, they knew they had to enlist the

aid of the king. The king listened to them politely, and then told them to deal with Sir John with respect, and restore him to the church through gentleness. He also offered to reason with Sir John on their behalf. Soon after, he sent for Sir John and admonished him to return to his mother the holy church, and, like an obedient child, acknowledge that he deserved punishment because he had been wrong. Sir John replied:

Most worthy king, you know I am always prompt and willing to obey, because I know that you are a Christian king and the appointed minister of God, and that you bear the sword with which to punish the evil doers and protect the virtuous. Next to my eternal God, I owe you my obedience, and I am ready, as I have always been, to submit all that I have of money or properties to fulfill whatever you command me in the Lord. But, concerning the pope and his clergy, I owe them neither attendance nor service, since I know by the Scriptures that he is the antichrist, the son of perdition, the open adversary of God, and the abomination of Daniel standing in the holy place.

When the king heard this, he made no answer and left the room. The archbishop again approached the king about Sir John, and was given authority to charge him, examine him, and punish him in accordance with their devilish decrees: *The Laws of the Holy Church*. But when Sir John did not appear before them as he was told to, the archbishop condemned him for contemptuous resistance of authority. Then when he was told that Sir John mocked him; distained everything he did; viewed with contempt the church’s powers, a bishop’s dignity, and the order of the priesthood; he raged openly and excommunicated him.

In response, Sir John Oldcastle wrote out his personal confession of faith and took it to his friend, Henry IV, whom he expected would gladly receive it. Instead, the king refused it and commanded it to be delivered to the archbishop and his council of bishops who would judge him. When Sir John appeared before the council, and in the king’s presence, he asked that a hundred knights be assembled to hear his case and judge him, for he knew they would clear him of all heresies. To clear himself, he even offered to fight to the death any man who disagreed with his faith, according to the *Law of Arms*. Finally, he gently stated that he would not refuse any manner of correction that was according to the Word of God, but would obey it

meekly. When he finished, the king took him into his private chambers, where Sir John first told him that he had appealed to the pope, and then showed him what he had written. At this, the king angrily told him to wait for the decision of the pope, and if it was that he was to submit to the archbishop, then Sir John should do it, and he should not appeal again. All of this Sir John refused, and the king commanded him to be arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Because of Sir John Oldcastle’s great popularity and esteem, the archbishop proceeded slowly with his trial over several months, but the judgment had already been predetermined, and Sir John’s condemnation for heresy and sentence of death by hanging and burning surprised no one. In his defense, Sir John had written this:

As for images, I understand that they are not a matter of faith, but were intended to represent and bring to mind the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the martyrdom and good living of other saints. But whoever gives to dead images the worship that belongs to God, or puts hope and trust in getting help from them as he should to God alone, or has greater affection toward them than toward God, he is committing the great sin of idol worship.

Also, I know this fully, that every person on this earth is a pilgrim toward bliss or toward pain, and he who does not know the holy commandments of God and keep them in his life here, even though he may go on pilgrimages to all the world and die doing so, he shall be damned; but he who knows the holy commandments of God and keeps them, he shall be saved, even though he never in his life went on a pilgrimage, as people do now, to Canterbury, to Rome, or to any other place.

On the day appointed for his execution, Sir John was brought out of the Tower of London with his hands tied behind him. He smiled cheerfully at those around him. Then he was laid upon a frame as if he were a heinous traitor to the crown, and dragged to St. Gile’s field. When they reached the place of execution and he was taken off the frame, Sir John knelt down and asked God to forgive his enemies. Then he stood up and exhorted the people who had come there to follow the laws of God written in the Scriptures, and to beware of teachers whose conversation and living are contrary to Christ. Then chains were tied around his stomach, and he was lifted into the air, and a fire was started under him. As the fire consumed him, he

praised God until he could praise Him no more. Throughout the crowd who watched him, there was great weeping and grief, for a godly and good man had died. The year was 1418.

The priests blasphemed and cursed, requiring the people not to pray for him, but to judge him damned in hell, for he died not in obedience to their pope.

Thus resteth this valiant Christian knight, Sir John Oldcastle, under the altar of God, which is Jesus Christ, among that godly company, who, in the kingdom of patience, suffered great tribulation with the death of their bodies, for His faithful word.□

JOHN BROWNE MARTYRED 1517

JOHN BROWNE ran into trouble with the Catholic Church by sitting too close to a priest on a public barge. “Do you know who I am? You’re sitting on my clothing!” the priest declared. “No sir, I don’t know who you are,” replied Browne. “I’m a priest.” “Oh. Are you a parson? a vicar? or a lady’s chaplain?” “No. I’m a soul priest,” the man replied. “That’s wonderful!” Browne exclaimed. “But where do you find this soul when you go to mass?” “I don’t know.” “Ah. And when the mass is done, where do you leave this soul?” Browne asked. “I don’t know.” “But if you don’t know where to find or leave this soul, how can you save it?” “Get out of here!” the priest yelled. “You’re a heretic, and I’ll get even with you!”

As soon as he left the barge, this priest went directly to Archbishop Warham. Three days later John Browne was taken from his home and imprisoned in Canterbury, where he remained for some time, without his family even knowing where he was.

The night before he was to be burned as a heretic, Browne was locked in the stocks at Ashford, Kent, where he lived. He was found by his wife, who stayed by his side all night listening to his story. Brown showed her his feet, which had been burned to the bones with hot coals by bishops Warham and Fisher, “to make me deny my Lord, which I will never do. Please, Elizabeth,” Browne continued, “do as you have done in the past and bring the children up virtu-

ously in the fear of God.” The next day Browne was burned at the stake. His last words were, “Into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord of Truth.” ☐



JOHN LAMBERT was born and brought up in Norfolk, studied at Cambridge University, became proficient in Latin and Greek, and then left England because of the violence of the times and went to Europe and joined William Tyndale and John Frith (godly men who were both burned at the stake by the Catholics – Frith, two years later in 1533, and Tyndale, five years later in 1536). During that time he served as chaplain to the British living in Antwerp, Belgium. After a little over a year, Lambert was captured in 1532 and brought to London to answer forty-five charges before Warham, the archbishop of Canterbury, but the archbishop died in August of that year, and Lambert was set free.

He returned to London and there worked teaching children Greek and Latin. Then, in 1538, he heard a sermon preached on the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, after which he expressed his disagreements by way of a discussion with the minister. Others became involved; and eventually what had started as a private conversation was rapidly becoming a public matter. The archbishop sent for Lambert and forced him to defend his beliefs openly; the whole thing turning into a continual debate. They put Lambert in prison. He then appealed to London’s bishops and even to King Henry VIII himself. At this time Henry was personally judging every case where heresy was involved.

Finally, Lambert was brought from prison under guard to be judged by Henry, with all the nobles and bishops in attendance. The look on the king’s face, his cruel expression with his brows drawn severely together, plainly declared that his mind was filled with indignation. Given permission to speak, Lambert said that he was glad the king was willing to hear religious controversies, especially since he was a king with such judgment and knowledge. At this the king an-

grily interrupted Lambert, and said, “I did not come here to listen to my own praises! Get to the matter!”

Taken aback by the king’s harsh words, Lambert was silent. “Why are you just standing there?” Henry demanded. “In the sacrament of the altar, do you say it’s Christ’s body or not?” “I agree with St. Augustine. It is the body of Christ in certain ways” Lambert answered. “Don’t answer me from St. Augustine or anyone else. What do you say?” Henry was addressing Lambert in Latin. “Then I deny it’s the body of Christ.”

“Mark well!” King Henry said. “For now you shall be condemned by Christ’s own words, ‘This is my body.’” Then the king had the bishops attempt with many words and Scriptures to prove the error of Lambert’s assertions and thus to change his mind. It would take too long to repeat the arguments of every bishop, and there is no reason to do so, since there was no power in any of them, for they were all contrary to the true word of God.

Lambert was overwhelmed. Besieged by taunts and threats from men of power, amazed at the majesty of the place and the king’s presence, and exhausted from standing for five hours, he lapsed into silence.

At last, when the day was passed and torches were being lit, the king, wanting to end the session, turned to Lambert once more, and said, “What do you say now, after all the instruction of these learned men? Are you satisfied? Will you live or die? What do you say? Take your choice.” Lambert answered, “I yield and submit myself wholly into your hands.” “Commit yourself into God’s hands, not mine,” was the reply. “I commend my soul into God’s hands,” said Lambert, “but my body I yield to your clemency.” Then said the king, “If you commit yourself to my judgment, you must die, for I will not be a patron to heretics.”

The sentence of condemnation was then read against Lambert, and he was immediately taken to Smithfield for burning. As with all such executions, many of London’s citizens gathered to watch. Of all those burned at Smithfield, none were so cruelly and mercilessly handled as this blessed martyr. After his legs had burned to stumps, his tormentors withdrew most of the fire from him so that only a small fire burned beneath him, and then two of them stood on

each side and pierced his upper body with the sharp steel spikes of their halberds, and held him up so that he could not fall into the fire.

Lambert hung helplessly that way as many of the people groaned and cried with pity. Then the fat in his fingertips caught fire, and he lifted up his hands toward heaven, and cried to the people, “None but Christ! none but Christ!” At this his tormentors let him down again from their halberds, and he fell forward into the flames and there gave up his life for Christ.☐

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11)

These stories are actual and historical accounts of a Christian suffering taken from the famous *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. Born in 1516, John Foxe of England, professor of Oxford University, wrote his book to document the persecution against Christ’s Church by pagans and by those who called themselves Christians but were not. It’s a book about God’s grace and Christian faithfulness. First published in English in 1563, Foxe’s book has endured for over four-hundred years as a memorial to the martyrs, and a legacy of inspiration and courage to the true Church of Jesus Christ.

Before he died in 1587, Foxe had the joy of seeing four large editions of his book published. The Council of Bishops ordered it placed in every cathedral church in England, and like the Bible, it was often chained to the pulpit.

Eventually there came a time, not only in England, but all over the English-speaking world, when a home wasn’t considered to be Christian unless it openly displayed a Bible and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. Years later, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, published in 1678, had the honor of being included with those two books as basic and essential Christian reading.☐



“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:6)



JOHN BRADY was among the earliest of the English martyrs to be legally burned at the stake. A few words about the passing of this law:

During the reign of King Edward 11 (1327-1377), the church in England was corrupted with errors and superstition. The light of the Gospel of Christ had been virtually extinguished by the darkness of man’s doctrines, burdensome ceremonies, and gross idolatry. At the same time, Reformers had become so many that the Roman Catholic clergy was annoyed, and though the clergy molested them in underhanded ways, they had no authority to put them to death.

After Henry IV usurped the English throne in 1399, the Reformers were subject to increasing persecution. Soon after, the Catholics prevailed upon the king to introduce a bill into parliament to condemn the Reformers who remained obstinate in their reform beliefs, and turn them over to the secular authorities for burning as heretics. Despite strong resistance in the House of Commons, the statute *De haeretico comburendo* (On the Burning of the Heretic) was passed by Parliament in 1401, and was immediately put into effect. It was the first time in Britain that a law was passed to burn people for their religious beliefs.

On March 1, 1410, during the reign of Henry IV, a tailor named John Brady was questioned by Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, about whether the actual body and blood of Christ was in the consecrated sacrament. Brady replied that it was impossible for any priest to speak words and make wine and bread the body of Christ. When the archbishop saw that Brady would not change his belief, and considered that he had started convincing others to believe the same, he condemned Brady as a public heretic and turned him over to the secular powers.