



JOHN FOXE AND HIS BOOK OF MARTYRS 1526 - 1587

In every century there are examples of courageous Christians who were willing to lose their lives rather than deny their faith. One history-making book gathered many stories of martyrdoms and through its pages has inspired Christians for generations. In 1563 Englishman John Foxe published his *Acts and Monuments* to give a universal history of God's work at building His church. Often called *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the history has become a Christian classic. There was a time when the Bible and Foxe's work were the only two books many Christians ever read.

Foxe went to Oxford to study theology. He read extensively in the Greek and Latin church fathers and compared them with the Roman church of his day. His studies led him to adopt Reformation views. Because he could no longer accept the theology of the Roman Church, Foxe lost his position at Oxford and could not be ordained into the priesthood.

He married and spent much of his life in poverty. Besides tutoring, Foxe wrote a number of Latin tracts urging reform. He also began work on a history that would be a justification of the Reformation and would show history as a cosmic struggle between Christ and anti-Christ, good and evil, truth and error. When it was published in 1554, never before had Europeans heard the specific stories of those who had suffered persecution under the church for their faith.

In 1563 his history was published in English because he believed the common people needed to know of God's working in history. Foxe believed Christian history was a continuation of the Old Testament history and the early church's story found in Acts, and ordinary Christians needed to know of the unfolding of God's plan for the principles revealed in Scripture. He received no royalty for his writings.

In addition to his writing, Foxe preached regularly. His 1570 sermon "Of Christ Crucified," preached at Paul's Cross, was printed and well read in his day. In it he pled for mercy for others and encouraged waiting for the Second Advent when the Righteous Judge would bring true punishment. He did not believe the death penalty should be given for a person's religious belief.

John Foxe died on April 18, 1587, but his Book of Martyrs continued in print and still inspires readers today.