Woodcut photos from John Foxe’s 1596 Book of Martyrs.

Second only to the Bible and Book of Common Prayer, John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, known as the *Book of Martyrs*, was the most influential book published in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The most complex and best-illustrated English book of its time, it recounted in detail the experiences of hundreds of people who were burnt alive for their religious beliefs.

**John Foxe (1516-1587)**

*Actes and Monuments*

Mary Tudor's attempt to restore the Roman Catholic Church in England during her five-year reign (1553-1558) may have enjoyed widespread sympathy in some parts of the country but was doomed by her early death and the accession of her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth. Though Elizabeth's return to Protestantism showed little of the intense zeal of her brother Edward's reign (1547-1553), reformers under her, many of whom returned from Marian exile, were highly successful in shaping a lasting picture of "Bloody Mary" and her Church, a picture which played an important part in making and keeping England a Protestant nation.

John Foxe was born at Boston in Lincolnshire, England, in 1516, and was educated at Magdalen School and College, Oxford. He joined the more extreme Reformers early in life and under Edward VI acted as tutor to the children of the recently beheaded Earl of Surrey. In Mary's reign he fled to Germany and joined the exiles at Frankfort. In the controversy which arose there he took sides with Knox and the extremists and after the break up of the Frankfort colony he went to Basle where poverty compelled him to take service with the Protestant printer Oporinus. In 1559 he returned to England and entered the ministry; he was helped by his old pupil the Duke of Norfolk and was mainly occupied with his martyrology. He still belonged to the extremists and objected to the surplice. His opinions interfered with his prospects, but he was not an ambitious man. Though violent and dishonest in controversy, he was personally of a kind and charitable temper. Besides his "Acts and Monuments" he published a number of sermons, translations, and controversial attacks on Catholicism. He died in 1587.

The book now known as "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" was the most important and popular of these Elizabethan accounts. It profoundly shaped the history and meaning of English Protestantism—and indeed provoked its Catholic adversaries like Giovanni Baptista Cavalleri and Richard Verstegan to produce their own "martyr books" in response. Though much less well known today than it once was, Foxe’s book was one of the key texts through which popular Protestantism in England recognized itself and its heritage. The popular name is at once accurate and misleading: it tells us a great deal about the ways the book came to be circulated and used, yet it also conceals some important things, in particular the collaborative character of the book's production, and its larger intellectual intentions in displaying the English Church.

Deriving from two earlier Latin prototypes published outside England, the first English version of the book was published by its author, John Foxe, in 1563. He titled it *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days, touching Matters of the*
Church, a title which, with various elaborations, persisted through the nine editions of the work until 1684. Based on Foxe's own research and collection of eye-witness accounts, the book painted a set of vivid pictures of the attack on the reformed Church and its faithful under Mary, supplementing its stirring prose with an astonishing series of woodcuts specially commissioned by its printer, John Day, who became in effect Foxe's collaborator during both their lives.

Almost immediately Foxe’s martyrology became a key official text of the Elizabethan propaganda war against Rome; to this end Foxe went so far as to recuperate the religiously pragmatic Henry VIII. Copies of the book were ordered placed in every cathedral in England and were to be found in many private houses, both ecclesiastical and lay. The details of Foxe's more stirring narratives—for example the deaths of Cranmer, Bilney, Latimer and Ridley—were very widely known. Because of the book’s popularity, Foxe’s villains, such as the fat, sadistic Bishop Bonner, took on the lineaments of popular stereotype. Enterprising writers produced several abbreviated versions of Foxe's book, suitable for more ordinary use than the huge tomes of the main edition. One poet, John Taylor, even managed to squeeze his Foxe into mnemonic rhyming couplets cut down to fit a single printer's sheet and produced as a tiny 64mo text, which was also called The booke of martyrs.

Though the Marian persecution was thus clearly the center of the book from the first, the second and greatly expanded edition of 1570 made a larger sense of recent events by attaching them to a vast narrative portraying the Christian Church as a persecuted Church from the very beginning. The book became therefore much more than a list of local deaths; it was an attempt at a universal history of the shape of Christianity itself, with England the most recent example of the perennial sufferings of Christ's faithful at the hands of the ungodly. Accordingly, without at all relinquishing its contemporary polemic function, the 1570 edition was titled The...Ecclesiastical History, conteyning the Actes and Monuments of Martyrs... , in effect a justification of the English Church on historical and theological grounds.

Even before leaving England in 1554 Foxe had begun the story of the persecutions of the Reformers. The result was the publication of a little Latin work dealing mainly with Wyclifism. While at Basle he was supplied by Grindal with reports of the persecution in England and in 1559 he published a large Latin folio of 740 pages which began with Wyclif and ended with Cranmer. After his return to England he began to translate this book and to add to it the results of fresh information. The "Acts and Monuments" were finally published in 1563 but came almost immediately to be known as the "Book of Martyrs". The criticism which the work called forth led to the publication of a "corrected" edition in 1570. Two more (1576 and 1583) came out during his life and five (1596, 1610, 1632, 1641, 1684) within the next hundred years.

Foxe continued to revise and expand his work throughout his life, adding new sources as he found them or as new events succeeded, visiting Day's print shop every Monday to consult on production. In the first four editions produced during Foxe’s lifetime, the work became in an important sense a corporate cultural enterprise, central to the ongoing message of English Protestantism. After Foxe's death in 1587 it continued to
grow under the hands of his successors. Foxe's prose was supplemented by new researches, and Day's dramatic woodcuts were carefully re-used for each edition until they had to be recut for that of 1641, which also included a biography of Foxe himself.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs 1563 edition title page.
I have collected many of Foxe’s old woodcut photos of the martyrs thought out history, and I am delighted to share them with you now. In addition, there are a few woodcuts from other books recording the death of God’s children in history.
Four burned at S. Edmundsbury.
The Picture of xxij. godly and s arquivo full Christians, apprehended about Colchester, prifoned together in one band, and so with three leaders at the mof, brought up to London.

Ye shall be led before Princes and rulers for my names sake.

Math. 10.
The right Picture and true Counterfeit of Bonet, and his cruelty, in scourging of Gods Sainctes, in his Orchard at Fulham.
The martyrdom of three men and three women at Colchester, burned in the forenoon, besides 4 other burned at after noon.
A Lamentable Spectacle of three women, with a sely infant draffing out of the Mothers Wombe, being first taken out of the fire, and cast in agayne, and so all burned together in the Isle of Catterley. 1554. July 18.
The cruel burning of 5. Martyrs in Smithfield.
The burnyng of sixe godly Martyrs in one fire.
The burning of six Martyrs at Canterbury.
The burning of 3 Martyrs at Lewes.
The burnynge of xij. perstone at Stratford the Bowe neare
London, whereof the two women went in among them
to the flake vnuyed.
The cruel burning of a woman at Exeter.
The Martyrdom of a blinde man, and
a lame man, at Stratford the Bowe.
The burnyng of the Archbishop of Canterbury Doctor Thomas Cranmer, in the Turneditch at Oxford, with his hand first thrust into the fire, wherewith he subscribed before.
The cruell burning of George Marsh, Martyr.
The description of the burning of M. John Bradford
Preacher, and John Leafe a Prentise.
The burnyng of John Kurde Martyr, at Northhampton.
A table describing the burning of Bishop Ridley and Father Latimer at Oxford, D. Smith there preaching at the time of their martyrdom.
The burning of M. John Rogers, Vicar of S. Pulchers, and Reader of Paules in London.
The order and manner of burning M. Martin Bucers and Paulus Phagius bones, and also their books, with a solemn general procession, at Cambridge. Acton, 1535. February 4th.

Now M. Bucers and Paulus Phagius bodies were put into two new Coffins, and in bound to a flag.
The burning of Margaret Thurston, and Agnes Bongeour, at Colchester.
The burning of Master Laurence Saunders at Coventry.
The burning of Raulins, Martyr.
The burning of Rose Allins hand, by Edmund Tyrrell, as she was going to fetch drinke for her Mother, lying sick in her beside.
The burning of Thomas Tomkins hand by Bishop Bonet, who not long after burnt also his body.
The burning of the blessed Martyr,
Thomas Tomkyns.
The burning of William Hunter Martyr.
Certayne Bishops talking with Maister Bradford in prison.
The cruel burning of John Laurence
Marst.
The cruell burnyng of Maister Farrar, Martyr.
A true description of the racking and cruel handeling of Cutberc Simson in the Tower.
The description of Doctour Cranmer, howe he was plucked downe from the stage, by Friers and Papists, forthe true Confession of his Faith.
John Hus Burned at the Stake July 6th, 1415.
Jerome of Prague, John Huss’s companion burned almost one year later.
The Martyrdom of Doctor Taylour, burned at Hadley for the testimony of the Gospel. February 9, Anno 1555.
The martirdome of maister John Philpot Archdeacon, with the manner of his kneeling, and praying at the stake.
The picture describing the straight handling of the cloase prisonners in Lollardes Tower.
The Description of a Popish Priest, who when he had taken away the glory and office of Christ, fell downe sodenly, and dyed.
The maner of the Popish Spaniardes, in carying Nicholas Burton a blessed Martyr of Christ, after most spitefull sort, to the burning.
THE BURNING OF LORD COBHAM.
Spanish Inquisition
Wycliffe bones was dug up, and burned some 40 years after his death.
Here is a photocopy of Tyndale’s letter he wrote while in prison waiting for his death. In addition, the English translation of it.
"I believe, right worshipful, that you are not ignorant of what has been determined concerning me [by the Council of Brabant], therefore I entreat your Lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here [in Vilvoorde] during the winter, you will request the Procure to be kind enough to send me from my goods, which he has in his possession, a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from cold in the head, being afflicted with a perpetual catarrh, which is considerably increased in the cell. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin; also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings: my overcoat has been worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will be kind enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth for the putting on above; he also has warmer caps for wearing at night. I wish also his permission to have a candle in the evening, for it is wearsome to sit alone in the dark. "But above all, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procure that he may "kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study. And in return, may you obtain your dearest wish, provided always it be consistent with the salvation of your soul. But if any other resolutions have been come to concerning me, before the conclusion of the winter, I shall be patient, abiding the will of God to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose spirit, I pray, may ever direct your heart. Amen."

W. Tindalbus

I hope you have enjoyed the presentation. It is a very sad reminder recorded in history of the terrible ordeals God's children have endured. In God's Holy writ, we are told that in the last days of earth's history. It will the worst time since the beginning of time...