

English Particular Baptist Singing and  
Congregational Worship Practices  
to 1700

## I. Introduction

The nature of church worship has long engendered controversy. In the era of the Reformation, the question molded the restructuring of Protestant Christendom and precipitated heated clashes. England, as elsewhere, fought battles over worship, as high Anglicanism and the Puritans fought in the State church from the break with Rome under Henry VIII until, essentially, modern times. English Baptists debated these matters along with other religious denominations; controversy over singing in general, and, if singing was appropriate, whether only inspired matter, such as the book of Psalms, was appropriate for congregational worship, or hymns which did more than paraphrase Scripture were also appropriate, were matters of dispute. The examination of these discussions in history, and their resolution, provide insights which churches of modern days would do well to consider, both to learn the views of their fathers on worship issues and to investigate the soundness of the Scriptural buttresses they supplied for their positions.

## II. English Baptist Origins

It appears that the gospel reached England in the apostolic age, although accounts of its arrival conflict.<sup>1</sup> In A. D. 180 Lucius, having been converted, and was the first king to receive baptism.<sup>2</sup> While theological presuppositions doubtlessly affect views of the evidence, immersion of believers seems to have been universally received among Christians in the island at the time. These pre-Reformation "Baptists" continued to flourish independently of control from Rome for centuries. The famous St. Patrick appears to have practiced the immersion of saints upon a profession of faith, taught a memorial view of the Lord's supper, and ordained one or more bishops in every church. Only in 597, when Pope Gregory sent Austin or Augustine to Britain, were many of the

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<sup>1</sup> For one that seems quite reasonable, and would get the gospel to England c. A. D. 58-63, see "Britain's First Christian," pgs. 247-250, *After the Flood*, Bill Cooper, Chichester, England: New Wine Press, 1995. Cf. *The History of the Welsh Baptists, from the Year Sixty-Three to the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy*, J. Davis, Pittsburgh: D.M. Hogan, 1835.

<sup>2</sup> See, i. e., pg. 176-188, *A History of the Baptists, vol. 1*, John T. Christian, Texarkana, AR: Bogard Press, 1922.

British Baptists either put to death or brought into conformity with the Catholic system. However, historical data point to the conclusion<sup>3</sup> that obscure bodies of believers holding to Baptist principles continued in Britain from that time into the Reformation era, just as in Europe, through groups like the Waldenses, Baptist doctrines and principles had a continual stream of witnesses through the centuries from the time that Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cardinal Hosius, for example, a delegate of the Council of Trent, stated in A. D. 1560 that “[i]f the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness... which a man of any sect shows in suffering, then the opinion and persuasion of no sect can be truer and surer than that of the Anabaptists since there have been none for these twelve hundred years past, that have been more generally punished or that have more cheerfully and steadfastly undergone, and even offered themselves to the most cruel sort of punishment than these people” (Hosius, *Letters Apud Opera*, cited on pgs 85-86, Christian, *History*.) Hosius dated the Anabaptists to the third century. Many other non-Baptist and anti-Baptist authors of the Reformation testify to the pre-Reformation origin of the denomination; see pgs. 69-96, Christian, *History*. Some of the many history texts which document Baptist succession from the first century to the present, as well as the persecution of the true churches by Roman Catholicism, include: Cloud, David, *Rome and the Bible: Tracing the History of the Roman Catholic Church and its Persecution of the Bible and of Bible Believers*, 2nd. ed., Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1997; Hammett, Douglas, *The History of Baptists*, Emmaus, PA: Lehigh Valley Baptist Church, n. d.; Hunt, Dave, *A Woman Rides the Beast: The Roman Catholic Church and the Last Days*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994; Orchard, G. H., *A Concise History of Baptists*, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1996 (reprint); Overbey, Edward H., *A Brief History of the Baptists*, Emmaus, PA: Challenge Press, 1974; Pugh, Curtis A., *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Bloomfield, NM: The Historic Baptist, 1994; Sargent, Robert J., *Landmarks of Church History*, 2 vol., Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d.; and Williamson, Thomas, *The Waldenses were Independent Baptists: An Examination of the Doctrines of this Medieval Sect*, Bloomfield, NM: The Historic Baptist, 1996. The existence of successionist opinion among English Baptists in the 1600’s appears from the reprint of *A Vindication of the Continued Succession of the Primitive Church of Jesus Christ (now scandalously termed Anabaptists) from the Apostles unto this Present Time*, authored by John Spittlehouse & John More and printed in 1652, found in Appendix II, pgs. 157-188, of *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Curtis Pugh. Actual succession has been the traditional position of American Baptists; this is demonstrated in *Old Landmarkism: What is it?* J. R. Graves, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1880 (reprint ed.). The Baptist church at Hill Cliffe in Chester County, England probably existed long before the Reformation; evidence for use of its meeting place appears to date to A. D. 1357. See pg. 31, *History of the Baptist Church at Hill Cliffe*, James Kenworthy, Gallatin, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1987 (reprint, 1st ed. 1882).

<sup>4</sup> There are also theological reasons why a consistent Baptist who holds to their traditional ecclesiological distinctives would expect historical support for church succession. The argument runs as follows: Since the church is a local, visible assembly of immersed believers, not a universal visible or invisible body, and Christ gave His church the authority to baptize, then no one without connection to an already constituted assembly has divine authority to baptize. This means that if a day had come when no true churches existed, the authority to baptize would have been lost forever, for it could not be exercised apart from church authority, regardless of the sincerity of those who wished to practice the ordinance or in any way disputing the legitimacy of their conversion and salvation (the equation of membership in the “universal church” with salvation appears to have developed in connection with the heresy of baptismal regeneration, and was thus rejected by historic Baptists, who argued that a man needed to be born from above before he could join the church.). The church would then have ceased to exist. However, Scripture does not allow such an event; it testifies that true churches would continue to exist to the end of the age. Therefore a continuity of gospel preaching congregations practicing believer’s immersion has existed from

The existence of Baptists in England during the reign of Henry VIII and his successors, who apparently had connections with continental groups, including gatherings in and about London, is evidenced from the various records which record their persecutions and martyrdoms.<sup>5</sup> English Baptists certainly predated the time of John Smyth. It does not appear that the church associated with Smyth and Helweys started any other churches, nor that the General Baptists descended from it, although conflicting historical testimony concerning its origin exists.<sup>6</sup> The Particular Baptist churches which came to public light through their confession of faith of 1644 are also generally of unknown origin—seven congregations apparently existed in London at the time, and over forty in the country as a whole, very few of which have a known historical pedigree. The Particular Baptists had no apparent connection with the General Baptists; indeed, until the years of the Baptist Union, both parties generally did not accept the others' baptism, largely because of the conflict between their Arminian and Calvinistic soteriologies. Furthermore, other Baptist churches of the time did not wish to fly under either the General or Particular banner, but remained entirely independent. In 1645 the prominent Particular Baptist William Kiffin asserted that congregations according to their rule existed well before the

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the day of Christ to today." This argument also provides a double necessity for Baptist rejection of baptisms of bodies that separated from Catholicism; while not denying the existence of regenerate persons within other Christian societies, even if Protestants such groups practiced believer's immersion, they would have no divine authority in their ordinances, for, having separated from the Roman Catholic communion, which was not a church at all, the founders of the Protestant groups were themselves unbaptized, and had no authority from a true church to immerse anyone; even if they were correct in their meaning and mode, the lack of connection with already constituted assemblies would make their administrations invalid (This argument for the invalidity of Protestant ordinances because of their Catholic origin is made at length in *The Protestant Trilemma*, J. R. Graves, reprinted by Landmark Independent Baptist Church/ P. O. Box 847/ Archer, FL 32618-0847). An extensive discussion of ecclesiology from a historic Baptist viewpoint is found in Sargent, Robert J., *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 4, Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, 1990, pgs. 481-596. A study of the word *ekklesia* in the NT, along with relevant background information in classical Greek and the LXX, which demonstrates that the word in the Greek Testament refers solely to a local, visible body, never to a universal church, is available in the pamphlet "Ecclesia," B. H. Carroll. Emmaus, PA: Challenge Press, n. d., elec. acc. <http://sites.google.com/site/thross7>. "The Great Commission In Scripture and History," Thomas Ross, <http://sites.google.com/site/thross7>, presents a theological case for historical succession as part of its exegesis of the Great Commission. Note that all modern Baptists do not hold to a local-only ecclesiology, nor the historiography which it implies; through the influence of Protestantism, some in the past and many Baptists in the present accept some sort of universal church. The history of the influence of universal ecclesiology and English-separatist views of Baptist history versus local ecclesiology and successionist historical sentiment among American Baptists appears in *The Battle for Baptist History*, I. K. Cross, Texarkana, AR: Bogard Press, n. d.

<sup>5</sup> See, e. g., pgs. 189-221, Christian, *History*.

<sup>6</sup> pgs. 222-248, *ibid*.

start of the Reformation.<sup>7</sup> However, the practices of worship among the Baptists before Smyth and Spilsbury in the early 1600's is cloaked in obscurity. The Continental Anabaptists wrote and sang hymns of their own composition in addition to paraphrasing the psalms,<sup>8</sup> and in this practice they followed many termed orthodox in the ancient church period.<sup>9</sup> However, the severe persecution that frequently drove them into hiding makes it hard to generalize about their practices, much less gage any influence they might have had upon those practicing believers' immersion in Britain. The Waldenses also sang both psalms and hymns.<sup>10</sup>

### III. Particular Baptist Congregational Worship

While historical records penetrate the shadows surrounding Calvinistic Baptist worship in the 1630's, and so make some analysis of their practices more possible than in earlier times, much remains obscure, as it does with early general Baptists. The independency of the churches makes it uncertain, and, indeed, unlikely that the sort of uniformity possible within hierarchical

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<sup>7</sup> "It is well known by many, and especially to ourselves, that our congregations as they now are, were erected and framed according to the rule of Christ before we heard of any Reformation, even at the time when Episcopacy was at the height of its vanishing glory." (pg. 254-255, *Christian History*; cf. pgs. 249-282).

<sup>8</sup> e. g., "Hymns and Hymn Writers Among The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century," A. J. Ramaker, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 3 (April 1929) 93-121. The first known German Mennonite hymnbook appeared in 1565 or 1566 (pgs. xxix-xxx, Hosteler, Lester, *Handbook to the Mennonite Hymnary*, Newton, Kansas: General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America Board of Publications, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> For example, a heretic was condemned for, among other things, putting "a stop to [songs] addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ, on the ground that they are modern and the compositions of modern men," while he trained "women to sing hymns to himself in the middle of the church" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII:30:9-10). Obviously the assemblies agreeing with this condemnation did not practice exclusive psalmody, but sang uninspired hymns to Christ in church, and thought it was a sin to not do so.

<sup>10</sup> In "The Status and Outlook of the Cause of Psalmody," (in *The Psalms in Worship*, ed. John McNaughter, Edmonton, AB Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1992 (reprint of 1907 ed.), R. G. Ferguson states that the Waldenses sang "Psalms amid the mountains of Piedmont, and, until recent date, [continued] singing them *almost* [emphasis added] exclusively." (pg. 551). This testimony that the Waldenses did not practice exclusive Psalmody, from an author strongly arguing for the exclusive position within an apologetic for the practice, is a far stronger admission than a like statement from an advocate of hymns. They do not seem to be the only "rebaptizing" dissenting group that sung hymns; Augustine lamented that "the Donatists reproach us with our grave chanting of the divine songs of the prophets in our churches, while they inflame their passions in their revels by the singing of psalms of human composition" (*Ep. Ad. Januarius*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series Vol. I, pg. 315, cit. in Bushell, Michael, *The Songs of Zion*, Pittsburg, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1980, pg. 124). The Montanists apparently sung hymns as well (pg. 127, *ibid.*).

denominations appeared— notices about the practice of a particular assembly, while indicating a likely trajectory in Baptist practice at the time, provide no infallible certainty. Furthermore, great care must accompany attempts to distinguish between the singing of the psalms of David and of Christian hymns, since men often employed the words “psalm” and “hymn” interchangeably; to sing a psalm of David was to sing a hymn, and to put to music a poem with a Scriptural theme composed by a congregation’s pastor was to sing a psalm.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the general practices of early Particular Baptist worship may be outlined.

A large number of early Particulars generally did not practice congregational singing at all; this is apparent from Francis Cornwell’s 1646 *Some Reasons Against Stinted Form of Praising God in Psalms*, a treatise which has been lost, but its contents clear from the title. It presumably took a position similar to that of Edward Drapes, who wrote in 1649:

[T]he gift of singing Psalmes is not a composition of Davids Psalmes into meter, through a naturall faculty, which Psalmes the Priest or the clarke names; and all the people must sing together... such a practice hath no more bottom than organs or choisters... [t]he melody of Psalmes is not in the ear, but in the heart to the Lord. Eph 5:19. To sing Psalmes in the Gospel is, a speciall gift given to some particular member in the church, whereby he doth blesse, praise, or magnify the Lord, through the mighty operation of the spirit. Ep. 5:18, 19. which is to be performed, I say by one alone, at one time to the edification one of another... that all should sing together is denied by Paul, who saith “how is it brethern when yee come together every one of you hath a Psalm” they must speak orderly one after another[.]<sup>12</sup>

This view was similar to the dominant General Baptist view of the time; singing, while appropriate for the church, was an action practiced by an individual member of an assembly as a spiritual gift, while the rest listened, not something

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<sup>11</sup> Setting aside the exegetical question of the Biblical definition of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in Ephesians 5:19 for the purposes of the historical examination in this paper, the term “psalm” will be employed to refer to the psalms of David, and “hymn” will refer to compositions that are not simply Scripture put to meter, in accord with the common modern meaning assigned the words.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Drapes, *Gospel-Glory Proclaimed Before the Sonnes of Men, in the Visible and Invisible Worship of God* (London, 1649), chapter IX, pg.163, cited on pg. 21, *The History of Baptist Hymnody in England from 1612 to 1800*, Robert H. Young, Doctor of Musical Arts Diss., June 1959, University of Southern California. Thomas Collier, who served as pastor in several Baptist churches, took a similar view in his *The Right Constitution and True Subjects of the Visible Church of Christ* (London, 1654), and repeated this sentiment twenty years later in his *The Body of Divinity, or a Confession of Faith* (London, 1674), pg. 474 ; see pgs. 24-25, Young, *History*.

communally executed by an entire congregation at the same time. Singing "is performed in the Church, First, In speaking to the Lord to his praise, is in this for one to speak, and that so, as that the rest may say, Amen. 1 Cor 14.15, 16."<sup>13</sup> Objection to the transposition of the psalms to meter was also common.

However, sentiments against congregational song did not represent a Particular Baptist consensus. Inferential evidence for Particular Baptist singing goes back as far as the historical record remains clear. By 1653, pastor William Kaye wrote "[t]hat as Independent churches cast off infant-sprinkling, so churches of Christ under baptism will return (as some for the present are) into singing. And yet I finde, that those that are not under the present practice, dare not deny their title to the ordinance of singing."<sup>14</sup> A few congregations among some Baptist groups apparently sang the psalms as written the Authorized Version.<sup>15</sup> Hanserd Knollys, a respected Baptist leader, wrote in 1663<sup>16</sup> in favor of singing hymns and spiritual songs as well as psalms as an ordinance of God's worship, and he continued to advocate the ordinance when controversy among the Particular Baptists was at its height in the 1690's.<sup>17</sup> John Skinner, a minister of this period in Weston-under-Peniard in Herfordshire, stated in the preface to his book on baptism that his congregation "refuse[s] not singing of Psalms to the honour of God."<sup>18</sup> Vavasor Powell, a former Anglican minister who joined the Baptists in 1655, wrote five years later in a volume criticizing *The Book of Common Prayer* that "If by a Hymn be understood one of the psalmes of Scripture, why might not Christ and his Disciples use it, by singing (the Psalmes being in

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<sup>13</sup> *Several Resolutions and Answers of Quaries, Sent in from Several Congregations, at Several General Meetings of Messengers from the Said Congregations in the County of Somerset and the Counties Near Adjacent* (MSS in Birstol Baptist College Library, Bristol), cited in pg. 26, Young, *History*.

<sup>14</sup> William Kaye, *Baptism Without Bason or Plain Scripture—Proof Against Infant-Baptism* (London, 1653), pg. 29, cited on pg. 23, Young, *History of Baptist Hymnody*.

<sup>15</sup> pg. 317, *Bye-Paths in Baptist History*, J. J. Goadby, Watertown, WI: Baptist Heritage Publications, 1987 (orig. pub. 1871, London).

<sup>16</sup> Knollys advocated singing and a non-exclusive psalmody position in the foreword to Katherine Sutton's 1663 *A Christian Womans Experiences of the glorious working of God's free grace*. pg. 50, Haykin, Michael A. G., *The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910*, vol. 1, Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> In 1691 Knollys wrote two books, *An Answer to I.[saac] M.[arlow] "A brief discourse concerning singing in the public worship of God in the Gospel-Church,"* which is still extant, and *A small piece in defense of Singing ye Praises of God*, which is not (pg. 51, Haykin, *Particular Baptists*). Marlow, in his response to Knollys, judged that his statements were to be charitably judged as arising "through the failure of Knolly's intellects, he being then between ninety-two and ninety-three years of age." Since he had advocated the practice publicly nearly thirty years earlier as well, this appears to have been convenient subterfuge to sidestep his declarations. pg. 333, Goadby, *Byepaths*.

<sup>18</sup> John Skynner, *Corruption Corrected* (n. p., 1655), "Preface," on pg. 26, Young, *History*.

Meeter)... and went on to say that some understood a hymn to be an extemporaneous song, and others simply praising God.<sup>19</sup> A year later he advocated "...using carefully and conscientiously all the Ordinances of Christ, as preaching, hearing, and expounding Scriptures, keeping up publick, family, and private prayers, prophesying and singing of Psalms, Hymnes, and Spiritual Songs in the Churches."<sup>20</sup> Powell also published the book of Jeremiah in verse. A sheriff, complaining about the Baptist church in Broadmead, Bristol in 1671, remarked "that he could hear them sing Psalms from their meeting-place at his house in Hallier's Lane."<sup>21</sup> This church had probably been practicing congregational singing for years, possibly ever since its establishment.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it employed congregational psalmody as a means of escaping persecution; a particular psalm was selected before their meetings, and in the event of "trouble," namely, the sudden arrival of informers or the mayor and his officers, "all ye people began to sing a Psalme," and in this manner their peersecutors were prevented many times from pouncing upon any one of the company as the ringleader; furthermore, since the singing of psalms was not contrary to the liturgy of the church of England, officers were confounded in their efforts to find grounds for their arrest.<sup>23</sup> The records of the Broadmead church also detail discussions of unified worship with another Baptist church, "Mr. Gifford's people," and two other groups of dissenters. Most of Gifford's church was willing to sing Psalms with the rest, but a few "scrupled to sing in metre as they were translated, although all of them did hold that singing of Psalms," and

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<sup>19</sup> from Vavasor Powell, *Common Prayer Book No Divine Service*, (London, 1660), p. 13, in Young, *History*, pg. 27. In the context the quotation from Powell to singing psalms refers specifically to the Lord and His first century disciples, when "the Church of the Jewes [still] stood." However, the apparently legitimate inference was if the first century Christians did it, it was lawful as well for their successors in the seventeenth century.

<sup>20</sup> Vavasor Powell, *The Bird in the Cage Chirping Four Distinct Notes to His Consorts Abroad* (London, 1661) in pg. 27, Young, *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> quoted from Edward Terrill, *The Records of a Church of Christ, Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, 1640-1687* (ed. Edward B. Underhill; London, 1847), cited in Goadby, *Bye-Paths*, pg. 319. Terrill's volume provides many insights into Baptist practice of this period.

<sup>22</sup> There appear to be no specific mentions of singing in the records of the Broadmead church from 1640 to 1670, but by 1671 they were doing so regularly in their meetings, and there are no apparent indications that they had just commenced the practice. see pg. 96-97, *The English Hymn*, Louis F. Benson, Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915.

<sup>23</sup> see pgs. 319-322, Goadby, *Bypaths*, citing Terrill. He records in detail how this turned out on one particular rather humorous incident when the church foiled "the mayor and his officers, and the bishop, with divers of his crew and men" in this manner the first Lord's day after their minister, Mr. Hardcastle, had just been released from his second imprisonment.



entertained scruples about metrical versions and united singing.<sup>24</sup> While mention of the singing of "psalms" appear in numerous places in the records of the Broadmead church, they also sang hymns in the assembly.<sup>25</sup>

In 1680, Hercules Collins published, at the end of his *Orthodox Catechism*,<sup>26</sup> a twelve page appendix in which he argued strongly that singing vocally and audibly is an ordinance of God, and praising God is a moral duty, with which singing is also linked. He then rebutted objections of those who opposed his view. His rebuttals evince the apparently universal opposition, which seems to have continued into the post-Reformation era,<sup>27</sup> among the singing Baptists to

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<sup>24</sup> pg. 319, Goadby, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Terrill, *Records*, pg. 389-390 record a hymn "the church sang, being select together at their monthly day, upon the fifth day of the ninth month, anno 1678; upon the discovery of the then popish plot to destroy the king, and to set up popery in the land. And also upon the remembrance of this church's then condition, being destitute, without a pastor, brother Hardcastle deceasing a month before. This hymn composed, and brought into the congregation, for its edification, by brother Edward Terrill." The hymn took the form of a ballad, the propaganda-type hymn having become popular in Cromwell's time to celebrate political and military victories. see pg. 30-31, Young, *History*.

<sup>26</sup> Hercules Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism: Being the Sum of Christian Religion, Contained in the Law and Gospel* (London, 1680); see pgs. 32-34, Young, *History*.

<sup>27</sup> In 1857 Baptist pastor and professor Francis Wayland wrote: "within the last fifty years, we have, in various particulars, conformed to our brethren of other denominations... Baptists formerly were universally opposed to the introduction of musical instruments into the house of God" (pgs. 148-149, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, Francis Wayland, Watertown, WI: Baptist Heritage Press, 1988 (orig. pub. Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., New York, 1857). Wayland was an American Baptist, but his comments doubtlessly reflected English practice as well; cf. the argument of English Baptist Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) against the use of instruments in church worship, pg. 515-521, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, Andrew Fuller, vol. 3., Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845 (reprint). "Charles H. Spurgeon," states Girardeau in his book against instruments in public worship, "not only proclaims with power the pure doctrines of God's Word, but retains and upholds an apostolic simplicity of worship. The great congregation which is blessed with the privilege of listening to his instructions has no organ 'to assist' them in singing their praises to their God and Saviour. They find their vocal organs sufficient. Their tongues and voices express the gratitude of their hearts." (pg. 176, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, John L. Girardeau, Edmonton, AB Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, n. d. reprint of 1888 ed.) Spurgeon's own words evidence both his preference that instruments not be used and his moderation in opposition to them; commenting on Psalm 33:2, "Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings," he wrote, "*Praise the Lord with harp*. Men need all the help they can get to stir them up to praise. This is the lesson to be gathered from the use of musical instruments under the old dispensation. Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days, when Jesus gives us spiritual manhood, we can make melody without strings and pipes. We who do not believe these things to be expedient in worship, lest they should mar its simplicity, do not affirm them to be unlawful, and if any George Herbert or Martin Luther can worship God better by the aid of well tunes instruments, who shall gainsay their right? We do not need them, they would hinder than help our praise, but if others are otherwise minded, are they not living in gospel liberty? *Sing unto him*. This is the sweetest and best of music. No instrument like the human voice. As a help to singing the instrument is alone to be tolerated, for keys and strings do not praise the Lord. *With the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings*. The Lord must have a full octave, for all notes are his, and all music belongs to him. Where several pieces of music are mentioned, we are taught to praise God with all the powers which we possess" (*The Treasury of David*, C. H. Spurgeon. 7 vols. 1889. Reprint (3 vols.).

musical instruments,<sup>28</sup> and appear to allow for the singing of hymns in addition to the psalms.<sup>29</sup>

The influential Particular Baptists John Bunyan<sup>30</sup> and Benjamin Keach published works in favor of singing in the 1680's; Keach advocated it in his *Tropes and Figures* of 1682 and his *Gold Refined* of 1689.<sup>31</sup> His church had sung a hymn after the Lord's supper since the early 1670's—he also printed some of his own hymns in 1676 in his *War with the powers of darkness* (4th ed.),<sup>32</sup> and three hundred of them as *Spiritual Melody* in 1691. The church also began to sing on public days of thanksgiving, but this practice lasted only for a short while before it was terminated. By 1692 Keach's flock was singing after every church meeting on Sunday.<sup>33</sup> He asserted that "above twenty Baptized congregations in this

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Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975). Spurgeon continues in his comment on Psalm 33:2 to reference the following writers on instrumental music: "Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize. *Thomas Aquinas*. It was only permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off from idols; but now instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal. *Chrysostom*. The use of singing with instrumental music was not received in the Christian churches as it was among the Jews in their infant state, but only the use of plain song. *Justin Martyr*," and then, in his "hints to the village preacher" section, suggests the following: "Instrumental music. Is it lawful? Is it expedient? If so, its uses, limits, and laws. A sermon to improve congregational music."

<sup>28</sup> "Object. If singing be with the voice, why not with Lute, Harp, Organs, and other instruments? Ans. In the New Testament the voice and heart are still only God's instruments. The voice is still required, because 'tis the immediate interpreter of the heart; and thos artificial instruments are laid aside from God's worship, yet not the natural ones." (cit. pg. 32, Young, *ibid.*)

<sup>29</sup> "Obj. But what Psalms must we sing? David's or a composure of our own from the holy Scriptures? Ans. As for singing the holy Psalms of holy David, as they are in meeter; as long as they retain the sence and meaning of the reading Psalms, which I think they generally do, I have nothing against the thing, or those which shall do it. But yet also I do think, that we are at our liberty to compose other parts of portions of God's Word to that end; provided our hymns are founded directly on God's Word, ... and as prayer and preaching must correspond with the sacred Record, so must singing; and as we count them the best prayers and sermons, that are fullest of Scripture, so those hymns that are founded on the sacred Scriptures, can no more be denied to be of the Spirit, than a man's preaching or prayer, which is full of the Word of God." (see pgs. 80-84, Collins, *Orthodox Catechism*, cit. pg. 33, Young, *ibid.*) Collins was also possibly the first to advocate that singing was a "public duty" (pg. 332, Goadby, *Byepaths*).

<sup>30</sup> "To sing to God, is the highest worship we are capable to perform in Heaven; and 'tis much if sinners on earth, without grace, should be capable of performing it, according to His Institution, acceptably. I pray God it be done by all those that now adays get into churches, in spirit, and with understanding." (pgs. 152, 156, *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized*, John Bunyan, London, 1688, cit. pg. 34, Young, *History*.)

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Keach, *Tropes and Figures*, (London, 1682), book IV, pg. 678 & his *Gold Refined, or, Baptism in its Primitive Purity* (London, 1689), pg. 156; cit. pg. 34, Young, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> pg. 100, Benson, Louis F., *The English Hymn*, Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Those who objected to the practice soon after seceded and established a church at Maze Pond. They continued to avoid singing until the death of their second minister, Edward Wallen; Abraham West, in 1739, made it a condition of his accepting the pastoral office, that singing should be introduced into public worship. The transition to singing in a Particular Baptist church formed specifically against it is

nation" were doing likewise in 1691;<sup>34</sup> Thomas Whinnel assessed the number at almost thirty.<sup>35</sup>

In the Particular Baptist General Assembly in 1689, Keach sought to bring the matter of singing up for debate, but he was not allowed to do so,<sup>36</sup> presumably out of a desire to maintain peace and harmony among the churches—a desire which, however, was certainly not fulfilled, for the 1690's witnessed a raging debate among them. Isaac Marlow became the champion of the anti-singing party. Marlow's contrasted his views with those of Keach and those with him:

The question between us and our brethren is not, whether any such thing as vocal melodious singing is exhorted unto in the New Testament, for this we freely own; but the controversie lyes herein, viz.: (1) Whether the saints were moved to the exercise of it in the Apostle's time, only as an extraordinary spiritual gift, depending on divine inspiration as some other gifts did; or, that it was appointed as a constant gospel ordinance in the church in an ordinary administration also. (2) In what external manner it was thus exercised; whether, *in a prestinted form of words, made in artificial rhimes*; or, as the Spirit, by His more immediate dictates, gave them utterance. And (3) Who was it that sang? Whether the minister sang alone; or with him a promiscuous assembly of professors, and profane men and women, with united voices together.<sup>37</sup>

Marlow fired the first shot of the battle in his 1690 *Discourse Concerning Singing*, to which Keach replied in his *Breach Repaired in God's Worship; or, Singing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, proved to be a holy ordinance of Jesus Christ*.<sup>38</sup> Marlow followed with *The Truth Soberly Defended* in 1692. Here he assails Keach's work, and that of another proponent of congregational song, Joseph Wright, author of

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indicative of the trend of the overwhelming majority of their churches by that time. pg. 334, Goadby, *Byepaths*.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Keach, *An Answer to Mr. Marlow's Appendix* (London, 1691) pg. 3, cit. in Young, *History*, pg. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Whinnel, *A Sober Reply to Mr. Robert Steed's Epistle Concerning Singing* (London, 1691), pg. 6, cit. in pg. 37, Young, *History*.

<sup>36</sup> Keach, pg. 4, *ibid.*, & Isaac Marlow, *Truth Cleared: Or a Brief Narrative of the Rise, Occasion, and Management of the Present Controversy Concerning Singing in the Worship of God*, (London, 1691), pg. 4, cit. in Young, *History*, pg. 36.

<sup>37</sup> pg. 335, *Byepaths*, Goadby. This particular statement of Marlow's view appeared in his book *Controversy of Singing brought to an end*, which gave the debate a fresh impetus.

<sup>38</sup> The controversy among the Particular Baptists is examined in more detail in Goadby, *Byepaths*, pgs. 331-347, and in Young, *History*, pgs. 36-47; cf. pgs 15-23, Arnold, Richard, *The English Hymn: Studies in a Genre*, New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995. For a wider view of clashes on singing and its contents, see pgs. 179-198, *Te Deum: The Church and Music*, Paul Westermeyer, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.

*Folly Detected.* After this, the Particular Baptist General Assembly sought to quell the conflict by appointing seven brethren to examine certain pamphlets and report on them, offenders promising to abide by their decision. Various pamphleteers were reproached for their "uncharitable, unsavoury censures, reflections, and reproaches," although Marlow appears to have been meted stronger chastisement than the pro-singing side. One of the pamphlets the assembly besought the churches to neither "buy, sell, give, or disperse, was Marlow's *Truth Soberly Defended*. It appears that after this decision many Particular Baptist churches began to sing in their public assemblies that had not previously done so. The controversy was not over, however; Richard Allen, a minister regarded as a General Baptist in sentiment although his chief friends were among the Particulars, sympathizing with Keach,<sup>39</sup> published *An Essay to Prove Singing of Psalms with Conjoint Voices, a Christian Duty*. Marlow replied to him as well, assailed the publication *A Sober Reply to Mr. R. Steed's Epistles*, attacked Thomas Whinnel, who had written two tracts in 1691-92 in support of Keach's position and armed his defense with seventeen signatures, most of whom were pastors, and blasted sundry others. One "E. H." also affirmed the importance of singing in 1696, the year Marlow published his last book, in his *Scripture Proof for Singing of Scripture Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. Or, an Answer to several Queries and Objections frequently made use of to stumble and turn aside young Christians from their duty to God in singing Psalms gathered out of Scripture Truth. To which is added, the Testimony of some Learned Men to Prove that Scripture Psalms are intended by all those three words, Psalms, Hymns, and Songs, used by the Apostles— Eph 5:19, Col 3:16*. A distinctive feature of this work is its argument, not for singing alone, but for singing only the book of Psalms or other passages of Scripture. It was prefaced by "an Epistle" signed by Nathaniel Mather and Edward Chauncey, where they stated that "[a]s to his opinion, that nothing should be sung in public worship but Scripture Psalms, and Hymns, and

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<sup>39</sup> This was unusual. The General Baptists generally took a much firmer anti-congregational song stand than the Particular Baptists throughout the seventeenth century. John Smyth had taken an inspired-singing position similar to that of Marlow later which essentially squelched singing entirely. The General Baptist denominational Assemblies of 1678 and 1689 strongly opposed congregational song, and the 1733 Assembly noted that "very few" practiced it, although the strong and even incredulous disapproval of forty-four years earlier had softened. (pgs. 7-18, 44, Young, *History*, pgs 347-349 Goadby, *Byepaths*.) Congregational singing only found a secure home among the General Baptists through the influence of the Methodist revival.

Spiritual Songs, thereby excluding the hymns of human composure, by a private gift, which some sing in their solemn assemblies, we do freely concur with him; and heartily wish that those who practice otherwise would a little better consider what they do."<sup>40</sup> The quotation both establishes the existence of Particular Baptist sentiment in favor of a Scripture-only position very close to exclusive Psalmody in the 1690's and the fact that others held and practiced the contrary view this early; before the rise of Isaac Watts's hymns in 1707 the Particular Baptists this pamphlet thought should "a little better consider" were singing "hymns of human composure" in their meetings.

A goodly number of other volleys were fired from both the singing and anti-singing camps; however, as the decade passed the advocates of congregational song were strongly in the ascendancy. Marlow came to lament that "so many of our London elders and ministers are blemished with such rotten notions" and "the infection" of "set-form singing" had spread so greatly that by 1696 but few churches in the metropolis did not have either their elders or ministers in favor of it. Indeed, when "the better principled are removed by death, these men will step into their places; and then, with their removal, and the wearing away of the ancient members,— what may we expect?"<sup>41</sup> The victory for congregational song, which Marlow rhetorically lamented, subsequently came to pass— by the early 1700's the practice became essentially universal among Particular Baptist churches.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, church leadership in general led the way in favor of singing; opposition was partly a result of the force of habit among normal church members, rather than a strong ideological commitment to the position espoused by Marlow. Keach found numerous ministerial advocates to help him in his cause, while Marlow, although he did rally some support, generally had to carry his own battle.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, he was

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<sup>40</sup> pg. 339, Goadby, *Byepaths*.

<sup>41</sup> pg. 337, 339, *Byepaths*, Goadby.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, a few decades later in 1760-1800 is "what has been called 'the golden age' of [Baptist] hymnody... The controversies over the legitimacy of congregational singing had virtually ceased, and many of the most prolific hymn-writers Baptists ever produced were active: Daniel Turner, Anne Steele, Benjamin Beddome, Samuel Stennett, Robert Robinson, Samuel Medley, John Fawcett, and Benjamin Francis" (pg. 128, "Sing Side by Side": John Rippon and Baptist Hymnody, Ken R. Manley, in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, eds. William H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes, & John H. Y. Briggs, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> In the voluminous controversy, only two tracts composed by others appear to aid Marlow's cause. pg. 43, Young, *History*.

not a Particular Baptist pastor<sup>44</sup>— indeed, an account in 1697 declares him to be, at that time, "no member of the Baptized churches in and about this city, or elsewhere,"<sup>45</sup> but does state he distributed some of his books at the meeting place of Pastor Collins' church. It is possible that his voluminous pen makes his influence appear greater than its reality. Finally, as the Particular Baptists grew towards a unified position in favor of congregational song, both advocates of a Scripture-song only position which approximated exclusive Psalmody and singers of both psalms and hymns appeared among them. Neither in the seventeenth century, or in later times, did a strong exclusive Psalmody movement develop among Baptists;<sup>46</sup> most congregations sang both hymns and psalm portions.

#### IV. Conclusion

The practices of congregational worship of the English Baptists before the seventeenth century is very mysterious. The rise to prominence of the Particular Baptist movement in the 1630's provides more room for historical analysis, although the data do not detail everything; conclusions about general practices through the remainder of the century remain somewhat inferential. Nevertheless, it appears that Particular Baptists were divided in their youth on the legitimacy of congregational singing; it had its advocates as far back as history can reasonably discover, but the early opposition was strong. As favor

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<sup>44</sup> His name does not appear among the ministers listed in the Particular Baptist *Proceedings of the General Assembly* of 1692. pg. 42, *ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Hercules Collins and Others, *A Just Vindication of Mr. William Collins, and of Several Other Elders and Ministers, from the Unjust Reflection of Mr. Isaac Marlow* (London, 1697), pg. 2, cit. in pg. 42, *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> John Gill, in "Of Singing Psalms in Public Worship," (in his *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989 (reprint of the London 1839 ed., pgs. 957-964; orig. pub. 1769-1770), argues that the "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" of Ephesians and Colossians all refer to inspired compositions, but even he was not entirely against congregational hymnody, although he did not think it necessary (pg. 99, Benson, *The English Hymn*, Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915). The famous church Gill pastored, which Charles Spurgeon later led, still sings both hymns and psalm paraphrases (cf. pgs. 99-102, *Worship in the Melting Pot*, Peter Masters (London, England: Wakeman Trust, 2002.)). Hymn singers still felt it important that their songs be grounded in Scripture; for example, Baptist Benjamin Wallin (1711-1782) in his *Evangelical Songs and Hymns* of 1750 even annotated every stanza and virtually every line with copious references to Scripture, believing that "Care should be taken that they [the hymns] be perfectly agreeable to the Holy Testaments" (pg. 47, Arnold, *The English Hymn*). He followed, in this method of annotation, Baptist Joseph Stennett (1663-1713), who had acted similarly in his hymnal, although considerably less profusely.

for singing grew over time, both advocates for singing Scripture-songs alone, and partisans for both psalms and hymns, put their views in print, although a strong contention for a position within the penumbra of exclusive Psalmody never developed. In the 1700's, congregational singing among Particular Baptists continued to increase in popularity, until it became essentially universal, in accord with modern Baptist practice.

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