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The Baptist Contribution to Early English Hymnody

THERE seems to be something in Baptist principles which inhibits poetic inspiration. Baptists have produced no great poet. Rash people have sometimes claimed John Milton, who agreed with us about believer's baptism but was never a member of a Baptist church, and disagreed with us about so much else that we cannot really count him. The genius of John Bunyan deserted him when it came to writing verse: he wrote reams of it, but it is nearly all sorry doggerel. Nor have we produced a great hymn-writer, though a number of us have written useful compositions which have taken their modest place in hymnody.¹ In the new *Baptist Hymn Book* forty-five Baptist authors and translators are included, though we did not consciously give extra marks to any merely because they were Baptists. Indeed most have found a place in the books of other denominations.

Nevertheless in this field of English hymnody, as in so many others, Baptists have been notable pioneers and have opened the way for successors who have often surpassed them. Baptist historians, and indeed some of other faiths, have too often made exaggerated claims as to the Baptist contribution here, but the sober truth is sufficiently impressive. A Baptist was probably the first to write hymns for children. Probably the first woman hymn writer, and certainly the earliest of any importance and distinction, were Baptists. Baptists did valuable pioneering work in hymn book editing and a Baptist was one of the first two serious students of hymnology. And it was a Baptist church which led the way in this country in introducing hymn-singing into the regular worship of a congregation. It is with the controversy that arose over this last most note-worthy development that I am now mainly concerned, but I shall first say enough to justify the other claims I have made.

According to the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*² the first known writer of hymns for children was Abraham Cheare, minister of a Baptist church in Plymouth, who suffered long terms

¹ H. S. Burrage in his *Baptist Hymn Writers* (Portland, Maine, 1888) lists 900, ninety-four of them from the British Isles. Very few are represented in present-day collections.

² Article on Hymns by T. G. Crippen, Vol. 7.

of imprisonment for his beliefs. In 1673, perhaps posthumously, for authorities differ as to the date of his death, was published his *Seasonable Lessons and Instructions to Youth*, which is said to have included hymns. I have not been able to see the book myself and I hesitate a little, because it is often stated that both Keach in his *Child's Instructor* and Bunyan in his *Country Rhymes for Children* wrote children's hymns,³ but when the books themselves are examined one finds verses indeed but no hymns in any proper sense of the word. Yet Cheare apparently influenced Bunyan's famous book, and it in turn certainly helped to inspire the epoch-making *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* by Isaac Watts, in which the border-line between verses and hymns is definitely crossed.

The first woman hymn writer whom I have been able to trace is Anna Trapnell, a Fifth Monarchist Baptist given to ecstatic utterances, who published in 1654 a volume of "prayers and spiritual songs," under the title *The Cry of a Stone*. Whitley (op. cit. p. 186) says that "the first hymnbook published for congregational use was by Katherine Sutton, recommended by Hanserd Knollys in 1663." I have not seen either of these, but I suspect, with all deference to Whitley, that they were both collections of solos sung in Baptist meetings by the writers and not really congregational hymns. For John Smyth and most of his followers objected to congregational singing but held that an individual might sing in church if so moved by the Spirit. The word "hymn" is, in fact, very ambiguous and this adds greatly to the difficulty of disentangling the history. The permission given by Elizabeth I for the singing of a "hymn" at the beginning of Common Prayer was really a concession to those who wanted metrical as distinct from chanted Psalms. To Spenser and Milton a hymn meant a religious ode, and in the 16th and 17th centuries the word was often used in the general sense of a devotional poem. It was only gradually that it acquired our modern sense.

I return from this little digression to another woman "hymn" writer, Mrs. Anne (Williams) Dutton, 1692-1705, from all accounts a most eccentric creature. Egotistical in the extreme and given to dressing in the most ostentatious way, she "aspired," in Whitley's words, "to be the Countess of Huntingdon of the (Baptist) denomination," or, as we might put it, its female Pope. Brought up in Castle Hill Independent Church, Northampton, where at a later date Doddridge was minister, she became a member of College Lane Baptist Church. Her second husband, originally a prosperous draper, became minister of the Baptist Church at Great Gransden in Huntingdonshire. She is credited with having written fifty books, including an autobiography. Our immediate con-

³ e.g., *History of British Baptists*, Whitley, p. 186.

cern is that among the books was a collection of sixty-one hymns, published in 1734.⁴

Mrs. Dutton bequeathed her Bible to Anne Steele, 1716-78, and in her we meet the first woman to make a real and lasting contribution to hymnody.⁵ A member of the Baptist church at Broughton in Hampshire where her father was lay pastor, she published in 1760 a volume of *Poems*, mostly hymns, under the name of Theodosia. They became extensively used in nonconformist collections in Britain and America and several were included in Anglican books also. Though some are morbid or conventional they reach a high general level. Similar in style to those of Watts and Doddridge, they can bear the comparison. Two at least still find a place in modern hymn books, "Father of mercies, in Thy word" and "Father, whate'er of earthly bliss." Hers is a name to be remembered with honour.

Not least to her credit is her share in inspiring the compilation of one of the earliest books to contain the hymns of several writers, most of the previous ones being the work of one author.⁶ This volume, published in 1769, was edited by two Baptist ministers, John Ash of Pershore and Dr. Caleb Evans of Bristol College. Among its 312 hymns are 62 by Anne Steele, with many by Watts, Wesley, Beddome, Addison, Stennett, Doddridge and others. It is an admirable selection. This Bristol hymn book, as it came to be called, is notable for its courageous challenge to the monarchic rule of Watts.

But the churches were not yet ready to break away from his domination, though the Bristol book had a wide circulation. In 1787 another Baptist editor, vigorously disclaiming any desire to supplant Watts, issued *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors, intended to be an Appendix to Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns*, and normally bound up with them for congregational use. This had a resounding success both here and in America. Dr. Benson, the distinguished hymnologist (*op. cit.* p. 144) writes that Rippon's "judgment and taste, his command of originals and his editorial discretion, were such as to secure to himself a permanent place in the history of hymn singing." Through Ash, Evans and Rippon, Baptists made a notable contribution to the development of the modern English hymn book on both sides of the Atlantic.

A Baptist did outstanding service in another field also. The

⁴ Some account of this extraordinary woman can be read in Wheeler Robinson's *Life and Faith of the Baptists*. See also Whitley, *op. cit.*, p. 214, and Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 213.

⁵ An account of Anne Steele may be found in *Great Baptist Women*, ed. A. S. Clement.

⁶ E.R.E. mentions one published in 1694, *A Collection of Divine Hymns on Several Occasions, Suited to our Common Tunes*, stated to contain hymns from seven authors, including Baxter and Mason.

first important student of hymnology in this country was James Montgomery, the Moravian, who was also one of our greatest hymn writers. But an honourable place must be given to his contemporary, the little-known Daniel Sedgwick, a member of the Baptist Providence Chapel off the Commercial Road in East London. He was in business as a second-hand bookseller and specialised in collecting hymns. In 1852 he began to publish reprints of hymns of the 17th and 18th centuries and though poorly educated became something of an expert. Sir Roundell Palmer, afterwards Lord Selborne, pays tribute in the preface to his fine anthology, *The Book of Praises*, 1862, to the help he had had from Sedgwick, who, he says, had "attained to a knowledge of (the literature of hymns) probably not possessed by any other Englishman." He was also consulted at every step by C. H. Spurgeon in preparing *Our Own Hymnbook* and by the compilers of *Ancient and Modern*.

My present concern is with the share of Baptists in introducing hymn singing into the regular worship of English congregations. In this they took a leading part, but not without a vigorous and sometimes even bitter controversy in the denomination. Foremost among the protagonists was Benjamin Keach, 1640-1704, whose name deserves to be held in honour not only among Baptists but by the Church at large. Of his life and record in general I say little here, partly because I have recently published a booklet about him.⁷ He occupied a very prominent, perhaps dominant, position among the Particular Baptists in the generation living at the time of "the glorious revolution" of 1688. In his earlier life he had suffered severe persecution for his principles. He did great work as minister of a flourishing church in Southwark and was a leader in many aspects of denominational life, including ministerial training and sustentation, and church extension. His numerous books had a wide circulation and in the judgment of his contemporaries he rivalled Bunyan as a writer of allegories. It is unfortunate that his real contribution to English hymnody has been so often exaggerated, even by distinguished writers. I suspect there has been some copying of judgments from one book to another without independent examination of the facts. Someone has said: "History repeats itself and historians repeat one another." Keach has been given "the honour for the composition of the first modern hymn"⁸ which is grotesquely undeserved. Even if the sentence was meant to read "hymn book" it would still be untrue. An expert on hymnology says he "published the first English Church hymns," an indefensible statement.⁹ An authority on Baptist his-

⁷ *Benjamin Keach, Pioneer of Congregational Hymn Singing*, Carey-Kingsgate Press, 1961.

⁸ Horton Davies, *The English Free Churches*, p. 120.

⁹ Routley, *Hymns and Human Life*, p. 148.

tory¹⁰ attributes to him "the first hymn book in use." As a general statement this is far from true. If the word "English" were inserted the claim would be arguable, though almost certainly unjustifiable. Attempts have even been made to transfer to him the title of "father of English hymnody," which Lord Selborne, deservedly bestowed on Isaac Watts. Many hymns were written and published before Keach, some of them still in our current books, and, as we shall see, several hymn books were "in use" before his own appeared in 1691.

What can be claimed for him, and it is a great deal, is that he was the first to introduce the regular singing of hymns into the normal worship of an English congregation. This he achieved only gradually, with great tact, and against considerable opposition. In 1673 he got his congregation to sing a hymn at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper, alleging the precedent of the "hymn" sung by our Lord and the disciples—which was almost certainly a Psalm. Six years later the church agreed to sing a hymn on "public thanksgiving days," and fourteen years after that, every Sunday; the whole operation thus taking twenty years. "If I am not mistaken," wrote Crosby, a deacon of the Church and Keach's son-in-law, "(this) was the first church of the Baptists that thus practised this holy ordinance." Though it was arranged to sing the hymn at the close of the service, so that those who disapproved could leave before it, twenty-two members resigned and joined another church where hymns were forbidden.

It will be well to review the situation before considering the arguments for and against, strange to our modern outlook. Congregational singing, as distinct from choral, was both an instrument and a result of the Reformation. Hus and his followers had a hymn book in 1501 and Luther published one in 1524. Anabaptist books are known from 1564. All these were in use long before Keach was born. Calvin believed in congregational singing as strongly as Luther, but only of the Psalms and not of "human composites." Since Calvin's influence was dominant in the English Reformed churches only metrical Psalms, in many different versions, were used in church and meeting-house in this country, though some of the dissenting groups objected even to them. The early versions prided themselves upon being literal. When men began to select and paraphrase in order to make the Psalms more relevant to contemporary life, as John Patrick did in 1679, a step was taken towards the hymn as we know it.

The 16th and 17th centuries also saw much devotional poetry from which later editors have made hymns, though the writers mostly wrote for private reading with no thought of public wor-

¹⁰ *Baptist Quarterly*, X, 1941, pp. 369ff.

ship. Among them are such great names as those of Donne, John Austin, George Herbert, Crashaw, Ken and Crossman. But as early as 1623 George Wither produced an actual hymn book, furnished with tunes and intended for use in church. Even with the backing of the king he failed to get it adopted. Two later attempts, both earlier than Keach's book, met with some success, though definite evidence is hard to find. William Barton, who had already issued an influential version of the Psalms, published his first volume of hymns in 1659, when vicar of St. Martin's, Leicester. They were used in some nonconformist churches, including the Independent Church in Southampton attended by the parents of Isaac Watts. K. L. Parry says that if Watts was the father then Barton was the grandfather of English hymnody. Barton's book was known to Keach, who quotes from its preface in *The Breach Repaired*, his great polemic for hymn singing, of which we shall hear more in a moment.

Then in 1674 another Anglican, John Mason, published *Songs of Praise*, apparently for use in his own congregation. It sold twenty editions and Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* says it was used in public worship in the later 17th century, mostly by nonconformists. Several volumes of hymns from Baptist sources were published in the middle of the century and some of them are said to have been "sung in the congregation," though as already indicated this probably means as solos. Vavator Powel advocated hymn singing in Wales before the Restoration and a volume of his hymns was published after his death. Several Baptists towards the end of the century composed hymns to be read out line by line and sung after the sermon in their own churches, among them the celebrated Joseph Stennett, 1663-1713, who published a collection for use after the Lord's Supper in 1697, later than Keach's first book, followed by a collection of hymns for baptismal services.

This rapid survey makes it clear that Keach was certainly not the first to write hymns or to publish a hymn book actually used in public worship. He published *Spiritual Melody* in 1691, with a sequel, *Spiritual Songs* in 1696, containing between them 400 hymns, all his own writing. As a prose writer Keach is far from negligible, but his hymns and other verses are just terrible. If the dissidents had left on the ground that nothing on earth would induce them to sing *his* hymns, I should wholeheartedly sympathise, having read his two volumes through and sampled his other effusions. I can only endorse Spurgeon's judgment that the less said about Keach's verses the better, and I leave it at that, especially as I have given quotations in my booklet. His hymns are best forgotten, but for his long campaign to establish hymn singing in our churches he deserves our cordial thanks. To that campaign I now turn.

Prominent among the opponents of hymn singing was Thomas Grantham, 1634-92, an influential General Baptist layman of Lincolnshire and later of Norwich. In his *Christianismus Primitivus*, 1678, he complained that the Church was suffering in many ways by "the encroachment of humane Innovations." It is a large volume, covering a great deal of ground, on what we might now call apologetics and ethics, and only a small part deals with hymn singing. It reveals wide reading and real learning, though much of it is taken up with futile argumentation. Among the undesirable innovations is reckoned "the Custom which many have taken up to sing David's Psalms or their own composures in a mixed multitude of voices." "This new device of Singing what is put into Men's Mouths by a Reader" is "foreign to the sincerity and simplicity of this holy service" of worship and might even, he fears, open the way for "Forms of Prayer." "Alas, what a groundless practice have we here? The Holy Scripture is a stranger to it, none of the Apostles used to do thus that we read of: Nor is there any Reason that any man's Verses should be introduced in the Church as a part of the Service of God, or that all should be tyed to one Man's Words, Measures and Tones in so great an Ordinance." He writes vigorously but temperately. "I would not be understood to censure them that differ from me in understanding or practice in this particular, who have a pious mind in setting forth God's Praises in some of the modes here opposed." I shall quote him further, though the controversy took place among the Particular Baptists and not among the Generals to whom Grantham belonged.

For the General Baptists almost all agreed with Grantham. They disapproved of "promiscuous singing" of believers with unbelievers, and thought the use of "set forms" for singing or for any other purpose unspiritual. So their General Assembly was disturbed when it was reported to them in 1689 that some of their churches were actually using metrical Psalms by Barton, "which," they declared, "appeared so strangely foreign to evangelical worship that it was not conceived anywise safe for the churches to admit such carnal formalities," though it was permissible for one worshipper to sing by himself to lead the praises of the congregation just as one might lead its prayers.

Among the Particular Baptists there was not the same unanimity of opinion and a sharp debate took place.¹¹ Robert Steed, minister

¹¹ The only lengthy discussion on the controversy known to me is a chapter in J. J. Goadby's *Byepaths in Baptist History*. I have found this helpful, but my own account is independent and based upon a first-hand study of the writings of Grantham, Keach, Crosby and other contemporary writers, for access to which I am indebted to Dr. Williams's Library and the libraries of the Baptist Union, the Baptist Historical Society and Regent's Park College.

of the Bagnio Church, Southwark, to which the malcontents from Keach's church joined themselves, declared in *An Epistle Concerning Singing*, 1691, that set hymns were as bad as set prayers if not worse. The whole thing was a human invention not a divine institution. Isaac Marlow, a leading layman, wrote at least three books against the practice. On the other side were the great Hanserd Knollys, and Hercules Collins of Wapping, who is said to have been the first among the Particular Baptists to urge that singing was "a public duty." John Bunyan wrote in favour in his *Solomon's Temple Spiritualised*, 1688, but though he set his pilgrims singing on many occasions he could not persuade his own church in Bedford to follow their example. It was not until after his death that hymns were accepted there.

Keach had advocated hymn singing in two earlier volumes but his main statement of the case is to be found in *The Breach Repaired in God's Worship, or Singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs proved to be an Holy Ordinance of Jesus Christ. With an Answer to All Objections*, 1691. It was written in reply to Marlow's *Discourse Concerning Singing* of the previous year. Keach's book impresses the reader with its ability, cogency and good temper. It is forcefully written but there is no trace in it, any more than in Grantham's of that personal abuse of opponents which was all too common in pamphlets of that time. The furthest he goes is to describe Marlow's arguments as preposterous and nonsensical, as indeed they were. Keach appeals to Biblical precedents in a way that few of us would do nowadays, but in this he is only a man of his own generation. Granted his presuppositions his case is presented logically and persuasively. Some of his arguments are foolish but they are mostly provoked by the still more foolish contentions of Marlow and company. Marlow twists and turns and contradicts himself in the most amazing fashion. I am reminded of the story of the man who was charged with assault and battery. He presented his defence in a series of alternative submissions. He didn't really hit the man at all; it was only a friendly push. Alternatively, the other fellow was a black-guard and thoroughly deserved the good beating up he gave him. But alternatively, he was not there at all and had a complete alibi for the time when it was supposed to have happened.

Marlow starts by maintaining that when the New Testament speaks about singing it really means a "mental singing," "melody in the heart." "What can be more plain," he writes, "than that Singing and other Gifts of the Holy Spirit have their Essence in our Spirits, wherein we are capable of worshipping God without Verbal or Vocal Instruments of the Body." So Keach is obliged to begin with a chapter in which he reasonably declares that

"Singing is a Duty performed always with the Voice, and can't be done without the Tongue. The Essence of Singing (if that word may be admitted) lies no more in our Spirits than the Essence of Preaching." How can a man make "a joyful noise" without using his voice? "Truly," concludes Keach at the end of quite a long chapter, "I am almost ashamed I have this occasion to speak and to be so large upon it; but knowing what I have met withal from some poor, weak and doubting Christians who stumble at Noonday about the very Act of Singing, not knowing what it is . . . I have thought good to begin here."

Then he gets down to business. "My first Argument shall be taken from the Antiquity of the Practice, 'tis as ancient as this world: the World and singing of the Praise of God came even in together, or very near each other, when the Morning Stars sung together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38). Secondly, as the Angels sang at God's laying the Foundation of the first Creation, so also they sang at the beginning or bringing in of the second Creation . . . even at the Birth of Christ they sang 'Glory to God on High'. There are more Precepts that injoin all Men to sing the Praises of God in the Old Testament than there are for them to pray unto him: which seems to be done as if it were on purpose to silence those Men's Spirits (whom the Holy Ghost might foresee would in some Age or another oppose this Sacred Ordinance)."

Besides, singing is natural to man. "We see all Men and Women more or less are naturally as apt and ready to sing as to speak. Now was this tunable and musical Tongue, or that Faculty of Singing, not given to us and to all Mortals, think you, to sing forth the Praises of our Creator?" You might as well argue, retorted his opponents, that God approved of dancing, which would be a *reductio ad absurdum* indeed; for dancing, laughing, shouting, whistling are as much faculties as singing. In any case, Robert Steed pointed out, some people cannot sing, not having "tunable voices," and women are forbidden by the apostle to open their mouths in church.

No doubt, admitted the opponents of hymns, there is singing in the Old Testament, but that was under the Law and it is done away under the dispensation of grace. The Old Testament precedents are dismissed by Grantham as a concession to the "gross hearts of the Jews . . . and in no-ways transmitted to the Church of Christ by any part of Christ's doctrine in the New Testament." But surely, argued Keach, there are many precedents for singing in the New Testament also; such as Zacharias, Simeon, Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary, and our Lord Himself with His disciples. Indeed when Paul and Silas sang in prison God showed how pleased He

was by working a miracle in response.¹² Besides, he urges, the fact that there was the singing of praise to God at the Red Sea (Exodus 15, 1) before the giving of the Law proves that it is not part of the Law but belongs to God's natural worship.

But, asserted his opponents, if your argument holds good you are committed to the use of musical instruments in church, for they are certainly associated in the Old Testament. Hymns and music must stand together, and, said Grantham, "sith those musical instruments are laid aside, sure all Poetical Singing ceased with them." Here was a nasty problem. Keach and his fellows heartily agreed that the use of musical instruments in worship was unthinkable, yet the Old Testament facts could not be denied. His reply is unconvincing, even though he calls in the new world to redress the shakiness of the old. "Singing with instruments we say, with Reverend Mr. Cotton¹³ was typical and so a Ceremonial Point of Worship and therefore ceased, but Singing, saith he, with Heart and Voice, is a Moral Worship, such as is written in the Hearts of all Men by Nature . . . and so continueth in the New Testament." Alternatively, he argues, singing with instruments was "only an external Solemnity of Worship fitted to the Sense of Children under Age (such as the Israelites were under the Old Testament." (Gal. 4, 1-3.)

Admitting that the apostles and others in the New Testament did sing, says Marlow, shifting his ground again, they are no real precedent for us since they had "an Extraordinary Gift" of the Holy Spirit. True, replied Keach, but so they had in everything. "From hence it will follow There is none now can, or ought to, Preach, Pray, Interpret, etc., or dispense any one Ordinance of the Gospel."¹⁴ Certainly, as Keach shows by numerous quotations from the Fathers, the early Church continued to sing. And it was clearly prophesied in the Old Testament that they would do so. For example, Psalm 96 in calling upon all the earth to praise the Lord must be referring to the time when the Gentiles had been

¹² Oddly enough Keach makes no reference, so far as I have noticed, to what seems the most obvious precedent, where the assembled Christians "lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, 'Lord, thou art God which hast made heaven and earth and the sea'." (*Acts* iv. 24). This suggests to me the use of a familiar hymn in public worship. Some commentators think it means only that one man offered prayer to which all responded by saying Amen—a rather far-fetched explanation.

¹³ Rev. John Cotton published in Massachusetts, about 1640, *Singing of Psalms a Gospel Ordinance* from which Keach was probably quoting. Cotton insists that "singing of Psalms with a lively voyce is an holy duty of God's worship. Women should not take part in this" (1 *Cor.* xv. 34) and "spiritual songs" which were not versions of Scripture might be sung privately, but not in public worship.

¹⁴ Grantham agreed with Keach that no argument could be drawn from the exceptional spiritual endowment of the apostles.

converted through missionary work of the Church. So also, as Paul points out in Romans 10, 15, when Isaiah (52, 7f) says, "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing," he must refer to "the Times of the Gospel and to Gospel Ministers." Further, the fact that we shall sing in heaven, as the Book of Revelation demonstrates, conclusively proves that singing is "in the highest state of Grace" and not only under the Law.

But the opponents of congregational singing are not crushed yet. Grantham declared that when Paul referred to church meetings at which "everyone of you hath a Psalm, etc." (I Cor. 14, 26) he meant "something further than to be able to read or sing them out of a Book or as set forth by another." And he could not be referring to the Psalms of David which *everybody* had. "He that hath a Psalm is required to sing a Psalm in the Church *and none else*, like as he that hath a Doctrine . . . The Church is to attend on him or to what he holds forth in the way of Psalmody that they may be taught and admonished by him, or have their hearts exhilarated or drawn up to praise the Lord in Conjunction of their Spirits with his, and so be said to sing with him that singeth, as they may be said to pray with him that prayeth." The apostle did not mean that the Psalm should be "sung promiscuously of the whole congregation."¹⁵

Nor did the opponents of hymns admit that the "singing at the Last Supper" proved anything. We are not told, they said, what the hymn was or who sang it. "There is nothing to justify such a confused singing as many use in these days," and it should be noted that when Paul gave instructions to the church at Corinth as to the conduct of the Lord's Supper he did not mention a hymn. "Might they not be said to sing together though none sung but Christ only, and his disciples at the close say Amen, as in Prayer. Men are said to pray when there is but one that is the Mouth." "If the Disciples did not joyn in singing that Hymn," Keach replies, "but only by silent Consent, then they might as well be said to have taken the Bread and blessed it . . . for all this Christ did with their silent Consent. But what our Saviour did alone is expressly recorded as done by himself . . . But observe, this of Singing or Hymning is laid down in the plural Number, when they had sung an Hymn."

The many Biblical references to singing and making a joyful noise, said Keach, could not possibly refer to one man singing. Take, for example, the passage in Exodus (32, 17f) when Moses came down from the mount and exclaimed, "the noise of them

¹⁵ So far Grantham was probably right: Paul is here referring to an ecstatic outburst on the part of an individual.

that sing do I hear." "Certainly one Man's Voice could not have made such a Noise, nothing can be more clear but that they sung with united Voices together." Yes, his opponents retorted, but they were praising the golden calf not God. "Tis no matter to whom they sung," said Keach, with perhaps a touch of irritation, "it was their Sin and horrid Wickedness to give that Divine Worship and Praise to a molten Image that belonged to God only, but there is no question but they sung now to this false god as they had done to the true God of Heaven and Earth."

As for objecting to singing "precomposed hymns" you might equally object to any prepared sermon, "and I am satisfied," declared Keach, "I have equally in them both the like assistance of the Spirit. Our sermons are no more made for us in God's Word than our Hymns are," Keach argues cogently against those who were prepared to sing nothing but the Psalms of David. Apart from the fact that other passages of the Bible are suitable for singing and were so used by the early Church, such as the Magnificat, "Hymns may be plainer than Psalms and more suitable to Gospel occasions. As we are not tied up by the Lord in Preaching to do no more than barely read the Scripture or quote one Scripture after another . . . but may use other Words to edify the Church provided they agree with and are congruous to the Word of Christ . . . so when that which we sing is taken out of God's Word or in Scripture, absolutely congruous, truly and exactly agreeing thereunto, it may as truly be called the Word of Christ as our Sermons are."

His opponents urged that if there had to be singing at least it should be by church members only. Promiscuous singing of believers and unbelievers together was unspiritual. "If it be unlawful," replied Keach, "to let them sing with us, tis unlawful to let them in their Hearts joyn in Prayer with us. Must not the Children have their Bread because Strangers will get some of it? Besides in the church of Corinth, when singing was brought in among them . . . the Apostle speaks of Unbelievers coming into their Assemblies: and tis one Reason he gives why they should take heed to prevent confusion." It is in any case the duty of all men to praise God and it cannot be unlawful to join with them in doing their duty. Such an attitude would also mean an end of evangelism. "Tis evident the Church is not bound to worship God alone in the Administration of the Gospel, and not suffer the People to come among them, unless she intends to become no Church in a short time, for how shall she increase or have Children born in her? Is not hearing the Word of God preached and Publick Prayer as Sacred Ordinances of the Gospel—Worship as Singing?"

Marlow objects that he cannot find in the New Testament any command to sing in public assemblies, either before or after the

sermon. "You must take heed," begs Keach, "and avoid needless Questions and Contentions. We have no Command to Pray in our Publick Assemblies either before or after Sermon . . . Must we not use the Practice therefore?"

The argument in the denomination seems to have been so hot that a special committee in its report to the Particular Baptist Assembly in 1692 rebuked both sides and urged charity and mutual forbearance. They begged that all the books should be withdrawn and no more of the kind written. Keach's book certainly does not deserve such a censure. Marlow's is more violent and no doubt others that I have not seen. I can only assume that angry words had been spoken. Keach was notoriously hot-tempered, as he often penitently confessed, and perhaps in public speech had gone far beyond his book. On the merits of the issue the Assembly did not pronounce. Public controversy apparently ceased for a time at least and each congregation took its own course, with the result that the singers rapidly gained ground. Even the church in which the disgruntled minority from Keach's congregation had taken refuge had to fall into line when a new minister whom they called refused to come unless they agreed to sing hymns!

Marlow, however, was not subdued either by Keach's book or by the rebuke of the Assembly. His volume *The Truth Soberly Defended* in 1692 may indeed have been issued before the Assembly met, but he had not that excuse for another in 1696, curiously called *The Controversy of Singing Brought to an End*, which in fact started it all over again! His summary statement of the issue as he then saw it is worth quoting, if only because it shows that he had given up some of his earlier positions. "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 Apostles' 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 [i.e., prescribed] 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."

Marlow complains that "the infection" of "such rotten notions" about singing had spread so far by 1696 that there were few London churches free from it. He realised that he was fighting a losing battle, though the General Baptists, still under Grantham's influence, held out longer than the Particulars. But forty-

four years after their earlier condemnation of the whole business, in 1733, when the Northamptonshire Association complained that some of their churches were singing psalms and hymns the General Baptist Assembly declared that the teaching of Scripture was not clear and that they did not wish to pronounce any judgment on the issue.

It is perhaps safe to say that by the end of the 18th century the use of hymns had become a generally recognised part of public worship among Baptists and Independents. It took the Anglicans another half-century to get so far.

HUGH MARTIN