

Singing the Living Tradition  
A Sermon to ASUC, Sunday, November 26, 2000

“At length...all things were got ready and provided. A small ship (the Speedwell) was bought and fitted in Holland, which was intended as to serve to help to transport them, so to stay in the country and attend upon fishing and such other affairs as might be for the good and benefit of the colony when they came there.

Another was hired at London (the Mayflower)...

And the time being come that they must depart, they were accompanied with most of their brethren out of the city (of Leyden), unto a town sundry miles off called Delftshaven, where the ship lay ready to receive them.

So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.” (Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plant.*, 47)

You remember the story. That the people we call The Pilgrims were harried out of their homeland by King James I. They -- like many so-called Non-conformists, or dissidents -- who found refuge in the Low Lands under the benevolence of William the Silent for a dozen years.

But life in the Netherlands was hard -- especially for English emigres who found that the only occupations open to them there were in the low-paying handicrafts. The hard work had hastened the aging of their group -- adults and children alike.

And it was especially for fear for their children -- not only that they were losing their Englishness but that they were being corrupted by the very tolerance of the Dutch in their hospitality -- the Dutch who did not “keep the Sabbath” as the more stringent Calvinists did -- the Dutch, after attending church, spent the rest of the day in feasting and merry-making -- a practice that the English found “most obnoxious” (Morison, 25)

They were further spurred to act -- not only by the fact that as their members aged that they would be less able to act with alacrity -- but that the Twelve Year Truce between the Dutch and the Spanish was due to end and war was expected to resume.

But while certain “looseness” as the English perceived it proved anathema, other influences were most welcome.

Under the leadership of Henry Ainsworth, noted scholar, who had fled England for Holland in 1593, the English Separatists gained strength in their delineation of the power of the congregation - - the incipience of Congregational polity as we know it.

Ainsworth is notable for another contribution, the Ainsworth Psalter. The worship of the Pilgrims was principally didactic, resting on the power of the Preaching of the Word.

“Nevertheless, (the Pilgrims) were good psalm singers -- a broadly approved use of music in Puritan worship. But music for them was fairly limited to this one form. A

Lining out psalms -- placing in meter -- common, long, notations at the bottom of the page in STLT. How Rick and I were able to find alternative words to the Invocation -- checking the metrical index at the back of the book.

The actual tunes (where instruments or trained singers were scant resources) were passed on by recollection and tradition. Here in this country, tradition of shaped notes to help people read pitch - relative pitch -- again, without benefit of trained musicologists.

“Although records indicate that Puritans enjoyed instrumental music and other forms of vocal music in private, they believed that Scripture prohibited such pleasures in worship. Church organs and choirs were silenced in the Puritan reformation.

Following the example of John Calvin in Geneva, the Puritans limited their texts to psalms that they marked in meter -- set beats -- lined out. Perhaps even rhymed -- and then set to simple musical tunes. No harmonies, single melody line, one note to each syllable, sung in unison without accompaniment.

Because of metrical rhythm, this was easy for the congregation to master, and where the people's illiteracy made psalm books of little use, the preceptor would sing out the psalm for repetition line by line. Eventually the “lining out” of the psalms became the standard practice.

Throughout much of the 17th century, psalms were sung without benefit of printed music. The Bay Psalm Book -- first book published in America (1640) contained the versified texts, but had no accompanying musical settings -- tunes largely a matter of memory.

Some few simple tunes sung -- usually producing “mutilated, tortured, and twisted” versions -- psalm singing became a disorderly noise.

Purists resisted published books of music to correct the situation: “If we once begin to sing by rule, the next thing will be to pray by rule, preach by rule, and comes papacy.” (Von Rohr, 167) Even that the relatively few “approved” tunes, were actually the same as those used by the Church of Rome. Mather said no, for the congregational melodies -- as with Henry Ainsworth's psalter, incorporated French Huguenot and Dutch psalmody.

But, even if this were true, it would not matter, “for our tunes, too, are used there.” (167) *The Congregational Way* - Marion Starkey, Religion in America Series, G.C. New York: Doubleday, 1966

124-5: Congregational singing had fallen into strange ways in New England. Bay psalm book published 1640, it had no notes. It became the duty of the deacon to set the tune -- to line out the psalm verse by verse, the people following his lead. All singing was a capella and male. Women might sign at their own devotions, in their sequestered praying companies, but in meeting they kept the silence enjoined upon them by Paul (look up)

“The result, according to auditors with some musical knowledge, was awful. Each man became a soloist, vigorously raising his voice without reference to tune or tempo, indulging in quavers and crotchets according to his own fancy and without regard to his neighbor. Glorious pandemonium -- and a relief from the parson’s droning preaching’s -- each singer coming raggedly to his separate conclusion.”

Church Music, Russel Squire. St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1962.

Metrical settings -- standard numbered patterns at the bottom of the page -- to “sing” the psalms -- tunes popular ditties -- soon forgotten. Guillaume Franc compiled a Psalter published by Calvin at Geneva in 1542. Another by Louis Bourgeois at Lyons.

In England, Psalms into English verse. 1562 - The Whole Book of Psalmes by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, imprinted by John Day. Following year, music harmonized for four parts -- melodies by Thomas Tallis and other, -- probably first hymn tunes collection in England

Bay Psalm Book -- 1640 worshipers sang the words to the tunes as they remembered them, handed down from generation to generation. If “One Hundredth” Doxology was sung by one hundred assembled people, km there would sound at once -- it has been said -- one hundred different tunes. Pilgrims brought the Ainsworth Psalter pub in amsterday 1612. Dffered from Bay Psalm included tunes learned from the Duth while they lived in Holland (19 of the 39 tunes were Dutch. used until 1692 distinguished in that it supported higher standard of music

Metrical versifications sung to limited \$ of tunes.

Sometimes the tunes were practiced but with words other than the Psalm texts (the recitation of which was considered sacrilegious) == stood whenever the tunes or words were heard. hats removed.

Pilgrims 8 years in Holland, produced through the efforts of their minister, Henry Ainsworth the Book of Psalms englished both in prose and metre. Greater variety of meters Long meter: 8888 - eight syllables to each line or common meter 8686. Most tunes written to fit these meters. To provide 39 tune that could be sung to hes paraphrase in other than the conventional forms, Ainsworth supplemented English with Dutch and French melodies.

The Bay Psalm BookL The Whole Booke of Pslmes faithfully translated into English Metre, whereunto is prefixed a discourse declaring not only the lawfullness, but also the necessity of the Heavenly ordinance of singing scripture paslams in the churches of God -- John Eliot, Thomas Weld, Richard Mather, 1640 - firs tsc omplete book published in the colonies. 70 editions last in 1773 133 years. as popular in England as in America. Popularity in America can be explained partly because of the fact that the Puritans discouraged sometimes forcibly the use of any other psalter, partly because its ;publication convinced with prohibition of secular music. From Protestant Worship Music, by Charles Etherington, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1962.

Worship limited to use of paraphrased versions of the psalms, and during the first half of that period the music itself was restricted to a few simple memorized tunes.

Texts largely from the Bay Psalm Book published 1640. Musical notations added in 1690.

The printing of melodies and then harmonies, led to a half-century controversy between those who would sing by rote and those who would -- and could -- sing by note. (230)

Growing dissatisfaction with the text themselves. Other paraphrases written and published -- 1748 re-write by Thomas Prince, minister of Boston's Old South Church. Prince aspired to a closer approximation to the original meaning of the psalms and to a greater poetic sophistication and beauty.

But Prince took an audacious turn -- he appended to his revised version, a collection of hymns that "were not versions of the Scriptures, but pious songs derived from them by Dr. (Isaac) Watts and others.

Watts (as I said earlier in introducing the Doxology -- Latin and Greek roots -- to utter praise: Praise God from whom all blessings flow...") -- his psalms published by Jonathan Edwards in Boston, his less-than orthodox hymns by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia.

Watts' exceptionally literate paraphrases of the psalms gained earliest acceptance -- overtaking the Bay Psalm renditions.

Watts hymns -- based not on the biblical passages -- therefore, uninspired -- began to show up in church by 1750s. Very gradual -- 1761 vote of First Church (combined with First and Second -- the church Marlin served) -- to only incorporate the hymns only as "Our reverend pastors shall think proper.

By the end of the century, the singing of hymns had largely replaced singing of psalms in Congregational churches. Choirs and musical accompaniment.

The first organ offered to a Boston congregation (in 1713) was refused by that congregation -- but accepted by Kings Chapel -- still then an Anglican church -- first Unitarian in 1786.

My intent is not to give a history of hymnody but to point up the concrete working out of the evolution -- the singing of our living tradition.

The Pilgrims' minister, John Robinson, who stayed in Holland when the group was forced to turn back after their boat the Speedwell was believed to be un-seaworthy and he died in 1625 -- never reaching America's shores.

In his parting sermon, there on the quay at Delftshaven, Robinson was quoted as saying, ". In later communication with the Colony, he wrote of the controversies those still in Holland were facing in trying to gain passage -- especially with those of the King's faith -- he wrote: You derogate from the liberty we have in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul would have note to follow him in anything but wherein he follows Christ; must less ought any Christian or church in the world to do it. The French may err, we may err, and other churches may err, and doubtless to in many circumstances. That honour, therefore, belongs only to the infallible Word of God, and pure Testament of Christ, to be propounded and followed as the only rule and pattern for direction herein to all churches and Christians. And it is too great arrogancy for any man or

church to think that he or they have so sounded the Word of God to the bottom, as precisely to set down the church's discipline without error in substance or circumstance, as that no other without blame may digress or differ in anything from the same. ." (Bradford, 172)\_

The Pilgrims' Church stands on The Town Square in Plymouth, only a short distance from the site of the original meeting and worship house. It, too, has undergone many changes in its 380-year history and is now a predominantly humanist congregation with a few of the Pilgrims' Elder William Brewster's descendants still in attendance -- and the site of an annual protest by the descendants of the Indians -- friendly chief Massasoit. A protest against -- not the occasion of Thanksgiving and fellowship -- but that the date -- the fourth Thursday of each November decreed by Pres. FDR -- occasionally coincides or falls close to the actual date -- November 21 (new calendar) on which the Pilgrims anchored in Provincetown Harbor and set foot upon the sandy shore of Cape Cod.

The Pilgrim Society -- founded in 1820 -- to commemorate the bi-centennial of that date -- for which I served in one earlier life iteration as Curator of Manuscripts and Books -- and later as Trustee and Chair of the Finance and Investment Committee -- has likewise changed. It's long-line of Mayflower descendants who have served as Presidents of the Society -- including John Steinway -- then president of Steinway Pianos as I was sharing with Rick yesterday -- John was succeeded in office by the Rev. Dr. Peter J. Gomes -- Minister of Harvard College -- Marlin's professor of preaching at Harvard Divinity School -- and my friend for over 20 years -- as well as the first black/Cape Verdean, Baptist minister -- and self-acknowledged on the steps of Harvard's Memorial Church -- in the face of especially ugly gay-bashing -- I am a Christian who happens to be a homosexual."

Singing the Living Tradition -- we live the wisdom of Pilgrim pastor John Robinson's words: There eyes to the heavens, their dearest count