

iii) The meeting that sparked a division

- 1) At a business meeting on March 1, 1691, a vote was cast to have hymn singing included in every service. Despite Keach's decision to move the hymn to the end of the service to allow those who opposed the practice to leave before the singing, it provoked furious opposition.
 - a) While a large majority of church members voted to have a hymn sung at the conclusion of the service every Sunday.
 - b) In the end, twenty-two (22) members left the church and joined a congregation that Keach's friend Hanserd Knolly's had pastored for many years, a congregation that was opposed to hymn singing.
- 2) A Church split
 - a) Soon after the group of members leaving Keach's church, they founded a new work that met at Maze Pond "where the leaders drew up articles of faith that condemned congregational singing in a terse sentence, calling it 'a gross error equal with common nationall Sett forme Prayer.' The Maze Pond church maintained its opposition to hymn-singing until 1736." ¹
 - b) The minority that had held contrary views from Pastor Keach in his own congregation had done so quietly for nearly twenty (20) years. However, all they needed was a voice, that

¹ <https://founders.org/2017/12/08/the-first-worship-war-among-baptists-and-the-reformation-of-congregational-singing/>

voice was found in one Isaac Marlow.²

- i. Isaac Marlow was a wealthy jeweler
 - ii. A member of the Mile End Green Baptist Church
- c) Other Particular Baptist congregations in the London area also held conviction against congregational hymn singing, among these were congregations pastored by William Kiffin, Robert Steed (the co-pastor of Hanserd Knollys).
- d) The well-to-do businessman, Marlow, proved to be an insatiable opponent of Keach in the fight over hymn singing.
- i. Marlow published more than eleven (11) books and tracts during the course of the controversy.
 - ii. This controversy encompassed six (6) years.
 - iii. His most pivotal work was his 1690 polemic *A Brief Discourse Concerning Singing*, the main arguments which we will consider later.
 - iv. Some historians have said that while the debate was an internal one among the Particular Baptists, the language that the factions employed demonstrates that the issue generated heat reminiscent of that which

² <https://founders.org/2017/12/08/the-first-worship-war-among-baptists-and-the-reformation-of-congregational-singing/>

emanated from the fires of the Reformation at its outset with Luther. Marlow claimed that he was labeled with some of the following names: “Ridiculous Scribbler,” “Brasen-Forehead,” and perhaps, the most offensive, “Quaker,” to name a few.³

iv) Marlow’s Offense

- 1) Michael Haykin points out in his book *Kiffin, Knollys & Keach: Rediscovering English Baptist Heritage, 1997*, Marlow could give it as good as he got it.
 - a) Marlow is said to have stated that his opponent(s) as “a coterie of book burning papists” who were seeking to undermine the Reformation by endorsing a practice that had no scriptural foundation.
 - b) So hot the rhetoric got, that a committee reporting to the Particular Baptist Assembly in 1692 rebuked both sides and urged charity and mutual forbearance.
- 2) The controversy tore at the Particular Baptist Community in London.
 - a) Hanserd Knollys and William Kiffin found themselves on opposing sides.
 - b) Keach had a number of noted allies, including Hercules Collins and Vavasor Powell.

³ <https://founders.org/2017/12/08/the-first-worship-war-among-baptists-and-the-reformation-of-congregational-singing/>

- v) What was at Risk?
 - 1) Both sides claimed Scriptural support for their argument
 - 2) Both sides for the most part agreed on the same doctrines (minus this one point).
 - 3) However, both combatants in this fight saw themselves as asserting a more pure form of the regulative principle and therein lay the problem.
 - a) The hymn singing controversy, while certainly involved the clashing of two personalities, was its heart about interpretation of scripture.
 - b) Each side understood the Bible's teaching of congregational singing differently.
 - c) However, in the end it was Keach that emerged victorious. Why?
 - i. Because Keach made the more consistently Biblical case based upon the regulative principle.
 - ii. In so doing, Keach gave to Baptists a theology of congregational singing that is still practiced today.

e. The War for Singing

- i) The Arguments
 - 1) Though Hercules Collins would write in defense of Benjamin Keach and his position, Robert Steed would do so on behalf of Isaac Marlow's view. While Collins and Steed were involved in the controversy, it was Keach and Marlow that led the charge in this "war for singing."
 - 2) The books referenced –
 - a) Keach's *The Breach Repaired in God's Worship...*

- b) Marlow's *A Brief Discourse Concerning Singing in the Public Worship of God in the Gospel Church*.
 - c) Quotes will come mainly from *The Breach Repaired*, and *A Brief Discourse*.
- 3) Isaac Marlow's Arguments
- a) Michael Haykin points out that Marlow and his followers advanced five (5) main arguments, many of which were pragmatic or employed a "literalistic," (and often spiritualized) interpretation.
 - i. Marlow maintained that the use of pre-written hymns and songs produce a deadening effect of formalism within the congregation similar to the reading from a prayer book, a practice which quenches the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. He also was convinced that examples of singing in the New Testament involved the exercise of an extraordinary special spiritual gift.
 - iii. Since these gifts had ceased after the canonization of scripture, the examples of singing found in the NT did not serve as a valid precedent for congregational singing.
 - iv. Further, Marlow insisted that singing compromised the purity of the church because it well might include the

hosannas of unregenerate individuals and women, the latter which, according to 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, are to keep silence in the church.

- v. Finally, Marlow posited that public singing in the early church involved only a single voice and did not include the congregation.
- b) Marlow argued, "Such singing of the Psalms of David is nowhere instituted, ordained or practiced, either by Christ or his Holy apostles; there is no instance can be given in the New Testament that any of David's Psalms were ever sung by any persons or churches, or that Christ or his Holy Apostles when ever they had occasion to translate any one text out of the Hebrew into the Greek Tongue, did ever turn them into Metre; and therefore finding no Institution nor Example, we have no Warrant for the Singing of them."
- 4) Marlow's Practice
 - a) Marlow used Scripture differently than Keach.
 - i. He synthesized the Old and New Testaments differently than Keach. He failed to take into their historical-redemptive significance and often spiritualized teaching on worship from the entire Bible to fit his argument.

- ii. He handled the OT by asserting that there was no singing instituted before David's time. Regarding the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, Marlow viewed it not as a song that was sung (and a practice to be emulated) but as merely one of the "divers manners" in which God chose to speak during the OT times. He lumped this occurrence with "Dreams, Visions, Words, etc."
- iii. Marlow also held that the Psalms of David sung in temple-worship "were suitable to all the rest of the Levitical ceremonial, and external instituted Worship of God in the Old-Testament Church" and destined to pass away.
- iv. Marlow dismissed singing as a "carnal" and temporal ordinance, a practice that, if allowed into the congregation, would be equivalent to re-instituting the Levitical system of worship.
- v. The NT in Marlow's view also forbade the corporate use of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs because they were instituted neither by precept nor example.

- vi. While Keach supported his case in favour of congregational singing with texts such as Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19-20, Marlow argued that, in each case the “admonishing one another in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual songs” of which Paul writes is singing that is merely inward, inaudible and spiritual – not vocal and verbal.
- vii. NOTE: In response to Marlow’s above opinion, Keach responded with asserting that Marlow’s views were akin to Quakerism.
- viii. Marlow also made the case that to use “pre-composed” hymns would be to use in the worship of God not directly taken from scripture.
- ix. One obvious problem with Marlow’s rejection of singing words not taken directly from scripture is that of preaching, which is, by nature preplanned and made for the occasion.
- x. One of Marlow’s grossest assertions was his argument found in his work, *An Epistle to Benjamin Keach*, in it he argues erroneously that the Greek word used in the New Testament for “hymn” simply means to articulate

“common praises or thanksgiving in prayer.” Marlow argues that “when they had sung a hymn” in Matthew 26:30, was mistranslated by English translators and could be more faithfully rendered “when they had given thanks.” As Keach points out, it appears Marlow resorted to even “perverse” ends in seeking to show that Scripture militates (fights) against the singing of hymns.

- 5) Keach’s rebuttal
 - a) Keach did not build his case primarily upon pragmatic arguments. He turned to scripture to demonstrate that the angelic hosts in heaven sing praises to God, as have done the saints of God throughout history.
 - b) Keach was able to cite explicit commands in the NT that urge this practice upon believers: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13.
 - c) Keach also pointed out that if singing in the NT was based on an “extraordinary” gift of the Spirit, the same was true of many other areas of the life of the Apostolic Church. “The Apostles had an extraordinary Spirit, nay, an infallible Spirit, in *Preaching, in Praying, in Prophesying, in Interpreting* the Scripture.” But, in line with fellow

Baptist like Hanserd Knollys, Keach was of the opinion that these extraordinary gifts “are all ceased, since none have these miraculous Gifts now.” If the logic of those opposed to congregational singing were thus followed, “there’s none now can, or ought to *Preach, Pray, Interpret.*” (see page 94 of *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*)

- d) To the argument that “all women ought not to sing in the Church because *they* not suffered to speak in the Church” Keach replied by pointing out that there were certain occasions when it was quite permissible for women to speak in the assembly of God’s people. (see page 95 in *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach*)
- e) Lastly, Keach’s method of replying to the argument, that singing in the NT was a solo affair, was to show simply that was “performed with united voices” in the New Testament, as it had been done in the Old. For instance, the commands to sing in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are clearly directed “not to any select Christian, but to the whole Church.”