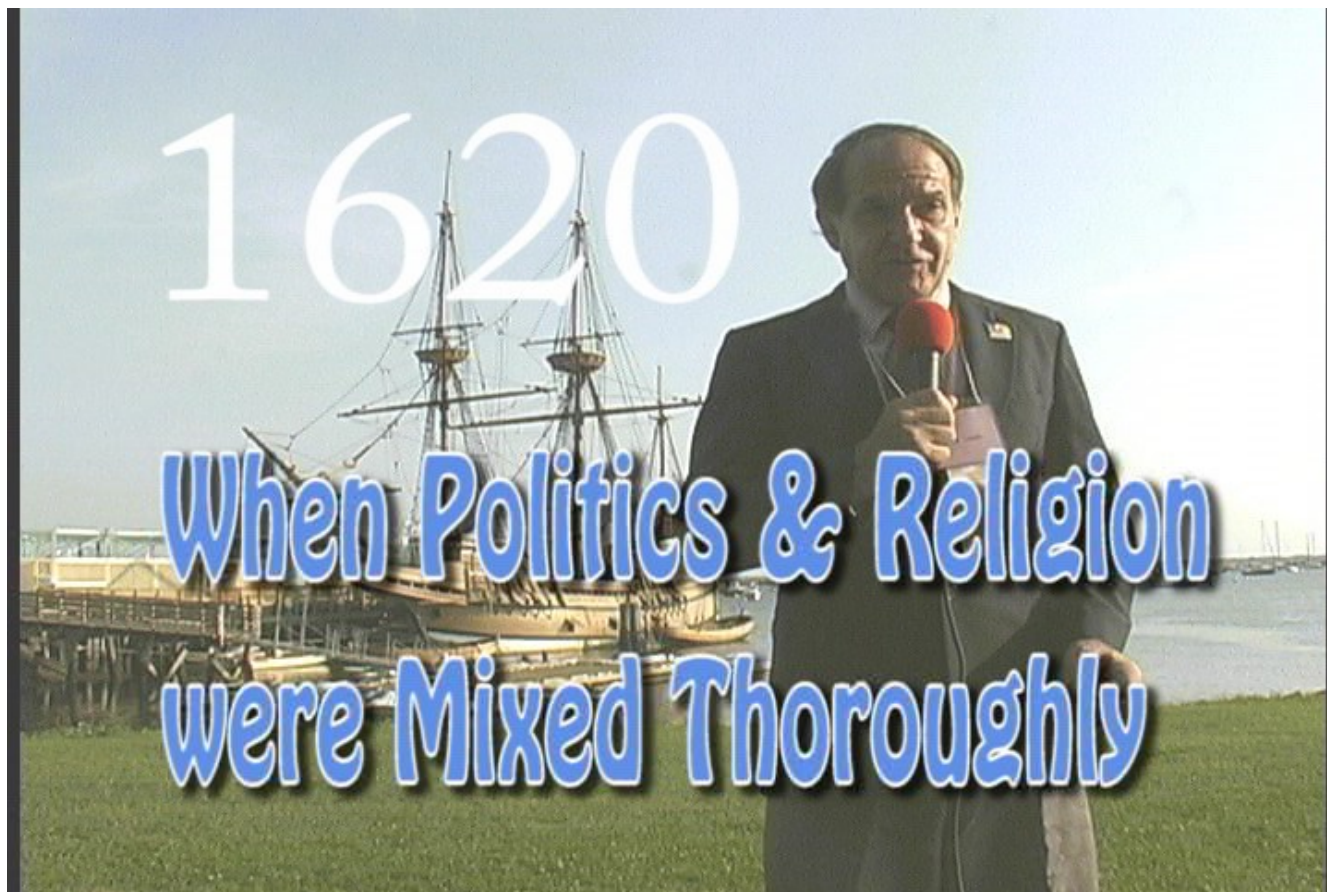


This is a transcript of my documentary, “1620 – When Politics and Religion were Mixed Thoroughly”. The movie may be viewed free at www.Saltshaker.us, left column. You may order a DVD of it for any donation. Dave Leach, Family Music Center, 4110 SW 9th, Des Moines IA 50315, 515/244-3711; Music@Saltshaker.US



Introduction – video of Dave Leach standing in front of the Mayflower 2:

“Never mix politics and religion”, we are advised.

Is that always sound advice? Is the result always that bad?

Well, of course the result will depend on the religion you are pouring into the mixing bowl.

[Title: A Presentation of Lowbudget Productions]

But before you judge whether it is always a bad idea, you might want to know about one time when politics and religion were mixed thoroughly.

[Title: 1620/When Politics and Religion were Mixed Thoroughly]

It was not just any ordinary religion.

It was Christianity, but it was no ordinary Christianity.

It was a sect of Christianity...

[Title: Dave Leach, Elder/Iowa Society of Mayflower Descendants]

...with a level of individual liberty not seen in the world for many centuries, and which lost its majority status even in the community which mixed them...

[Title: www.Saltshaker.US]

...only a generation or two after the mixing.

The year was 1620.

The mixing was done in the cabin of this ship. The Mayflower. (Not literally this ship; this is the Mayflower 2, built in 1957. The ship had just crossed the Atlantic ocean. Many of the signers, within a few months, would die of cold, hunger, and disease, while living on this ship, waiting for cabins to be built on land by men rowing this small boat alongside the ship a mile and a half to land every morning to go to work.

The ship wasn't docked here, you see, but a mile and a half out. There was no dock. Just an anchor. In fact, most of the land you see here now wasn't here then, but has been filled in since. The shore then was a quarter to a half mile further inland than the shore you see today.

A few yards from us is a shelter for Plimoth Rock, the first solid ground in America upon which many of the Pilgrims set foot.

I came to Plimoth, Massachusetts, to learn more about the birth of what we in America, today, call "freedom".

[Title: Produced 2009 by Lowbudget Productions/an outreach of The Partnership Machine, Inc. Producer Dave Leach; Camera Dave Leach; Editor Dave Leach; Scripts Dave Leach; Musical Score Dave Leach; Musician Dave Leach; Co-narrators Kitty Coon, Regina Dinwiddie; Lighting – God (mostly); Fundraising – God; Talent – God; Freedom – God; For more information, www.Saltshaker.US / The Holy Bible]

In this town one finds the world's experts on exactly what happened in the Mayflower cabin that cold December of 1620. The Pilgrims signed a document which we call the Mayflower Compact.

Exactly how significant was this compact?

DVD Chapter 2: Mayflower Compact's Uniqueness

[Title: Rev. Jeanne Linderman, Elder General, General Society of Mayflower Descendants, Associate Priest, Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Andrew, Wilmington, Delaware]

Linderman: That was a totally new, really, idea for the English, ...but it was a pretty bold step for them, to declare. And so the men signed their names to it. And signed with their sworn honor – you know, that's part of that signing of the Compact.

[Title: The Triennial Convention of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants/Plymouth, Massachusetts, 2008]

Leach: And one of the things you recently have been teaching about...

[Title: Debra Miller, author "The Mayflower and Me", www.Sail1610.org]

...is the Mayflower Compact. Tell us about it. What, is it significant? Is there anything different, unique about that?

Miller: Most of us believe, and I believe very strongly, that it is the foundation stone of our Constitution. I feel it was the beginning of democracy in our country.

(Switches to Bradford) Leach: Tell me about the Mayflower compact. What was different about it?

Bradford: What was different about it was that...

[Title: Allyn Bradford portrays Governor William Bradford Allyn's 12th Generation Ancestor alynb@aol.com]

...they were setting up their own laws. And they were choosing their own leaders. Now that didn't happen in England. And it would have been considered high treason to have done something like that.

It was very radical. Very radical. It was a very different way to have church. As well as a state.

DVD Chapter 3: Self Government

Leach: The Mayflower Compact: what did it do that no previous document had done?

[Title: Ken Callison, Captain General, Society of Mayflower Descendants; Past Governor, Iowa Chapter]

Callison: It's the first written document for self government in the New World.

*[Title: **self-govern-ment** (-guv 'ərn mənt) n. government of a group by the action of its own members, as in electing representatives to make its laws]*

Callison: That's the basis for our Constitution. The Declaration of Independence. And many states' constitutions. It was people banding together to form a government: one vote, one person. It really framed our American lifestyle.

[Title: Glenn Cheney, author: "Thanksgiving" glenncheney@comcast.net]

Leach: Glenn Cheney, the author of this book. (Video has shown stacks of his books at the General Society of Mayflower Descendants convention in September, 2008.)

Cheney: Hello, everyone. Hello, Des Moines.

Leach: Tell me what you know about the significance of that Mayflower Compact.

Cheney: Mayflower Compact was a very interesting document. It's been called a precursor of the United States Constitution. But that really isn't true.

[[Insert – Dave Leach leaning on an old Victrola. To my left, on the Victrola, a Mayflower ship model made of shells, and a pillow embroidered with the Mayflower. Farther left, on shelves, several books about the Pilgrims. On the wall, to my left, a list of all the Mayflower passengers printed on canvas. On the wall on my right, a certificate from the General society of Mayflower Descendants documenting that I am descended from Mayflower passenger Richard Warren.]]

[[Leach: What do you mean? I WANT it to be true! I WANT the Mayflower compact to be the seed that grew into the Constitution! Who is this guy, to mess with what I want? Maybe I should let him explain. (I am joking about my own prejudice that the Mayflower Compact is extremely significant. Later I joke about the contrast between my own prejudice and the prejudice of Buddy Tripp that the Compact is really not very significant at all.)]]

Cheney: It wasn't specific about how they would govern themselves. It simply said that they would obey the king, and in some unstated way they would work together to decide what had to be decided. In other words the king couldn't come in and say OK build a school there, collect some taxes for that, they just decided that they would reach agreements. There was nothing about mayors or any kind of government structure.

...Everyone agreed that they were going to stick together, they were going to honor their debts, they were still going to continue to be subjects of the King.

Interestingly enough, in that they were actually fleeing this king, but they did agree that they were still going to be servants, or not servants, what's the word, subjects of the king. What's interesting is that they made a DECISION to be subjects of the king. That may be the most significant part about the compact. People in England didn't DECIDE to be subjects. They were subjects of the king, period. And if they weren't, they were bloody well hanged. And these people actually agreed, and made a decision to obey the king, which was significant. They thought for themselves. That's really why they were the Separatists, the religious contingent on the boat. They couldn't stand to be told what to do by the hierarchy of the Church of England. They had wanted to make their own decisions.

[[Leach Insert: You just heard Cheney say the Mayflower Compact was not truly a precursor of the Constitution because it contained no details of government structure, right after you heard Ken Callison say it WAS the basis for our Constitution. But let's listen to Callison's statement again. He doesn't exactly say it is the Mayflower Compact which is the basis for our Constitution. Listen to what he says IS the basis:]]

Callison: It's the first written document for self government in the New World.

*[Title: **self-govern-ment** (-guv 'ərn mənt) n. government of a group by the action of its own members, as in electing representatives to make its laws]*

Callison: That's the basis for our Constitution. The Declaration of Independence. And many states' constitutions. It was people banding together to form a government: one vote, one person. It really framed our American lifestyle.

[[Leach insert: Self Government is the basis of our Constitution. Not that the details of our

Constitution are foreseen in that simple 200 word document. But that simple document enshrined self government, without which we would never have had the Declaration of Independence, or a Constitution, or the freedoms we enjoy today. Self government does not impose itself upon anyone who had no say in it. Self government gives every person not only a say, but an equal say. One man, one vote. No single man, no group of men, have any more power than anyone else – except to the extent that some are too apathetic to cast their vote, or to cast it intelligently.]]

Bradford: That's another thing the Pilgrims did. They set up the kind of town that is governed ultimately by the people. And their vote is what counted. On whatever issue it happened to be. And they still operate the same way. It's a town meeting, held in Plimoth. And there are town meetings held in many towns. Still.

DVD Chapter 4: Dissent: England already *had* elections.

Leach: There's a huge difference, isn't there, in the level of democracy enjoyed by the Pilgrims, as opposed to enjoyed by the commoners back in England?

[Title: Buddy Tripp "interprets" John Billington at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Massachusetts]

Tripp: No. No. The mayor of London is elected. ...So it's not uncommon that people elect their local leaders.

Leach: So you don't think the mayflower Compact was a huge milestone in...

Tripp: No.

Leach: ...our freedom. I can speak only for myself. I can't speak for the museum.

[[Ed: How did HE get in here? (Warily, pushes resume button)]]

Tripp: My own opinion is no. Buddy: Had Sir Fernando Georges come over, he would be the royal governor. He *is* the royal governor; he just doesn't come here. So, sir Fernando Georges comes here, Bradford has no power. No power. John Winthrop comes here, Bradford has no power. He has local power, the way a mayor might be.

Leach: Hmm. So the freedom which they enjoyed, free from the crown, was...

Tripp: Did not occur until 1776.

Ed: Well, it was defacto, even though it was not official.

Tripp: It wasn't. That's why we had a war. [In 1776.]

Ed: Well I'm talking about for the first generation or two of Pilgrims. They had defacto freedom from the crown, not because of...

Tripp: No.

Ed: ...not because of law but because the king happened to be absent.

Tripp: No. That's just not true.

[[Leach insert: (Furiously pushes "stop" buttons, appears to see monitor and stop pressing buttons, seeing that the Tripp video has stopped.) That man is so NEGATIVE! A regular Nattering nabob of negativity!

(Not in movie: I hope it is clear from my comic demeanor that I am joking, less about Tripp's cynicism about the Compact compared with all the other historians I interviewed, than about my own lack of objectivity – I may be more optimistic about the significance of the Compact than any of the historians I talked with.)

[[He won't even admit that the absence of the royal governor gave the Pilgrims the EXPERIENCE of governing themselves, if not the legal right. But you know, I have to tell you something about this man. At the Plimoth Plantation Museum, he is called an "interpreter", playing the role of John Billington. And Billington was a trouble maker too! Governor Bradford's wife didn't even think he could read!

Mrs Bradford (as interpreted at Plimoth Plantation): I don't know that Billington can read.

John Billington (as interpreted by Buddy Tripp, in period costume, at Plimoth Plantation): I cannot read myself, but...

[[Leach: (NODS)The Pilgrims only put up with him for 10 years before they hung him. Had he really murdered his neighbor, that would be one thing. But some historians think he wasn't even guilty; they hung him because he was always causing trouble. Now let me see if I can be more careful and keep him out of this otherwise uplifting discussion.

(Not in movie: Here again, my comic demeanor should be the clue that I am joking about my own prejudice, as if it were so deep that I could actually sympathize with a false murder conviction of John Billington as a desirable way to rid the community of a "troublemaker", whose only "trouble" is to say politically incorrect things!)

[[Leach: But first mayhap I should address Buddy's contention that Pilgrim elections were nothing new. Well, if you are satisfied that Stalin was elected, then you would be satisfied that the mayor of London was, in those days, elected. The only people allowed to vote were the heads of trade unions. It was like Stalin elected by the Politburo. And by the way, it wasn't a secret ballot, so if you didn't vote the way the king preferred, you would face his wrath. And by the way, there wasn't necessarily more than one candidate to vote for. During this same time, Parliament consisted of a House of Lords and a House of Commons. The House of Lords obviously weren't elected by The People. The House of Commons was elected, but only about 3% of the population was qualified to vote! In order to vote, you had to own property worth at least 40 schillings. Now, the upside of that is if you owned property worth that much in several districts, you had several votes! Not that England was all that bad! Compared with the rest of the World, England was a beacon of liberty! But what the Pilgrims created for us was different than anything they had seen.]]

Ed: They did have nonchurch members sign, didn't they?

Callison: Yes.

Ed: Which was different than the Puritans, and different than England.

Callison: Yes. And see there was ...a lot of people are familiar with the book, Saints and Sinners, Saints and Strangers, excuse me. And the strangers were those that weren't members of the religious group.

[[Leach insert: Callison's Freudian Slip introduces the most remarkable, the most daring, the most unthinkable thing the Pilgrims did. The members of the Separatist congregation did not refer to nonmembers as "sinners" but by the more endearing term "strangers". The Bible uses the word "stranger" to mean someone not a member of whatever group is discussed, without any connotation of negativity or inferiority. If the subject is the duties of priests, "stranger" means someone not a priest. *[Title: Lev 22:10 There shall no stranger eat of the holy thing [which only priests eat]...]* If the subject is citizens, "stranger" means an immigrant. *[Title: Exodus 12:49 One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.]* But the Bible is full of compassion for outsiders. Look at this verse, which guarantees the same rights for immigrants as for natural born citizens. Or this verse, *[Title: Mat 25:43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in:...46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment:]* which threatens eternal judgment for NOT taking in immigrants. This very terminology helps explain why the Separatist church was so willing to give equal rights to others, in an age when every other church in the world seemed to be persecuting nonmembers.]]

DVD Chapter 5: Every Pilgrim Voted.

Leach: Now the Mayflower Compact, who signed it? Was it all the men?

Bradford: All the men.

Leach: Not just the freemen? Servants too?

Bradford: I think it was all the men. Because they wanted to include everybody.

Leach: So it was the servants and...

Bradford: What they called Freemen.

Leach: ...the nonchurch members also?

Bradford: Yup. Everybody.

Leach: So that's the thing that was kind of different than any time before in the last thousand years.

Bradford: Really. I mean that was a new invention. Here in America. It just hadn't happened before. Suddenly, there was the birth of a Democracy.

Leach: Where it was one man, one vote, basically.

Bradford: Yup. Unfortunately, women were left out, but let's face it: women didn't get the vote until 1920.

Leach. Yeah.

DVD Chapter 6: Even Unbelievers!

Linderman: And, the thing is, perhaps a couple of boys were left off, but all of the men, the day before they disembarked, signed this one paragraph statement, that they would agree to govern themselves and abide by the decisions that their APPOINTED leaders would make. And that was available for every man on board to sign. Of course, the women and children were not included in that....

And there was *no test of faith*. This was a very important difference. Because when the Puritans arrived, about 10 years later, and well provisioned, and really able to come in and be good colonists, they required that anyone who was to have a vote in civil affairs had to not only be a *member* of the Puritan congregation, but to have given evidence of a conversion experience. Now if the Pilgrim colony had required that, not only their faithful group from Leyden, but from the "Strangers" who were part of the company, it never would have happened! They would have disenfranchised more than half of their number before they even got on shore!

So that's an important distinction. And I think it's been a valuable part of the Pilgrim heritage, that they allowed people of differing opinions to vote, and have a voice.

DVD Chapter 7: Separatists offered equal votes, knowing they would be outvoted!

[[Leach Insert: Let's look again at *Saints and Strangers*, the book Ken Callison mentioned, to see what Jeanne Linderman meant when she said...

Linderman: They would have disenfranchised more than half of their number before they even got on shore!

[[Leach: In Appendix A we learn how few members of the Pilgrim church – the Separatists – were on that first voyage of the Mayflower - 17 men, 10 women, 14 children. 41 of the 102 passengers. While the number of Strangers was 17 men, 9 women, 14 children, the number of Hired hands was 5 men, and the number of indentured servants was 11 men, 1 woman, 6 children! The Saints numbered only 41 of 102 passengers, and their voting men numbered only 17 out of 50! In other words, the Separatists were glad to give an equal vote to everybody, even knowing their church would always be outvoted! I wonder how many Christians today would be glad to extend rights like that? P. 132 of this book says they even hired a military commander, a very important leader of their community, who never did join their church! Miles Standish! We do not know what faith he professed, if any. I don't know about you, but that makes me want to know *what kind of theology drove that kind of openness?*]]

Information not included: P. 132, *Saints and Strangers*: Standish's "name is conspicuously absent from its records and rolls. Nowhere is he listed among the communicants. This is all the more startling because Plymouth early adopted the theocratic

principle that no one could be a citizen, let alone a magistrate or officer shaping and executing policy, who was not a member of the church and a communicant in good standing. Why this signal exception? can it be that the Pilgrims needed him and appreciated his success in organizing the defense of the colony, and for that reason were willing to overlook his religious scruples?” Although this book written by a popular author was a great step forward for Pilgrim history in its day, research since then has identified many errors in it. One is the idea that the Pilgrims denied voting and citizenship to nonchurch members, when it was only the Puritans that did that. Another may be the statement, right after this excerpt, that although we don’t know Standish’s church preference, his family back in England was Catholic. I have talked to Standish descendants from Illinois who insist his family was solidly Church of England, as proved by the fact that their land was connected with the Church of England; but even they admit that this is “hard to prove”.

Leach: And not only did they allow non church members to vote, and to sign that founding document, they also allowed non-freemen, right? Servants? The servants also signed? and voted?

Linderman: Yes. I think that there were a couple of the very young boys that didn’t sign it, but the servant boys that were probably old enough did sign.

Leach: And also women! They let vote if they were Heads of Household. Is that right? Like Warren? Elizabeth Warren?

Linderman: Later they did that. But for the Mayflower Compact, it was only men on board. You mentioned Elizabeth Warren. She came in 1623. And of course was one of the longest lived women in the colony in Plimoth. Far outlived her husband, Richard Warren. Because he died about 1627. *[Title: The first Pilgrim female head of household, 7 years later, voted!]* But they did allow single women who were heads of household to vote, but that was in the years that followed as they lived out their community.

Callison: The Pilgrims were more free than the Puritans. People don’t realize that the Pilgrims even had female votes. If the husband had died, then the woman was head of household, the woman could vote! Which was about 300 years before we legalized it here in [across] the United States.

Almost included, because it is accurate in a sense, but not entirely, and I didn’t know how to use it without causing confusion. It is like saying that because the federal government is in debt, that we individual Americans are indentured servants: Miller: Well, you have to remember: we were – when I say “we”, Pilgrims, because I am a descendant of over 10 of them – we were indentured servants ourselves for 7 years to the merchant adventurers that financed us to come over. Not that that was something that we agreed to in the beginning. It was something that was brought upon us right before we were sailing. And it was a matter of, if we wanted to go over there, we really didn’t have a choice xxxx so we were indentured servants ourselves for 7 years to the people that financed us.

Ed: Even the governor was an indentured servant.

Miller: That is absolutely correct.

[[Leach insert: Notice the Separatists extended to everybody the Freedom they found in the Bible, without asking anyone to first join their church, or agree with their doctrines, or even know they had any. This is another foundation stone they gave us, upon which our Freedoms rest to this day. Our nation offers the blessings of freedom to everyone, (other than undocumented immigrants and the unborn), without asking anyone to even know if Freedom rests on any Biblical foundation.

DVD Chapter 8: Freedom: a Navigator’s Accident?

[[But I shouldn’t read any significance into the Mayflower Compact that isn’t there. Having all the men sign a document of self government, a thing not done for over a thousand years, was probably just an accident. It probably had nothing to do with philosophy, or theology, or the Bible, or anything conscious or deliberate. It was probably just a navigator’s accident, that’s it. They were blown off course, forcing them to throw together some kind of agreement which they never would have created if they had more time to think about it. That’s it: the freedoms we enjoy today were just a navigator’s accident. The Bible had nothing – I repeat, nothing – to do with it!]]

Miller: And the reason for the Mayflower Compact being written is that where they had landed, it was not governed by nobody. [sic] It was not owned by anybody. *[Title: actually, yes, the area the Pilgrims settled had been abandoned even by natives.]* So they knew that they needed to do

something, that they could work together in peace and harmony and be productive at the same time.

Bradford: But they did it because they wanted to hold the community together. You see when they got to Plimoth, they were actually off course. They had meant to go up the Hudson River. But it was too hard to make that trip. So they wound up in Provincetown. And of course went to Plimoth after that. But people on board were among them indentured servants, which meant you had to work for 7 years and then you get your freedom. And you don't have to pay your trip over. But they were saying, you know, we don't have a patent, [authorization from the King of England to settle in a particular area], and so when we get off this ship, we're just going to be on our own. And that's why we had a Mayflower Compact. So that it would hold the unity together. And all the males that were on board signed it. Including the indentured servants. And who signed, the agreement was, that they would abide by the laws of that community.

Cheney: What's interesting about it is that they decided to write the compact when they decided not to settle in Virginia, which is where they were supposed to be settling. They decided to settle north of Virginia, in the Cape Cod area. And some people thought that since they weren't going to settle where they were supposed to, maybe they didn't have to obey the king any more. Maybe they didn't have to pay their debts to certain investors in England. And it Nobody was quite sure whether they had to stick together. It was quite unclear. And there were some people talking somewhat mutinously about we don't know exactly what, but it was decided that they would write, they didn't call it a Compact, they called it an agreement of association.

[[Leach insert: So that settles it, then. Just as the Human Soul evolved from an accidental discharge of static electricity upon some poor unsuspecting protein molecule who was just minding his own business, in a scum pond somewhere, the freedoms we enjoy today are merely the accidental discharge of a navigator's peg into the wrong hole. (Video of the navigator's peg board on the Mayflower 2.) End of story. But hark! Another opinion wafts across the waters!]]

DVD Chapter 9: Self Government's roots

Linderman: *[Title: Rev. Jeanne Linderman – Elder General, Mayflower Society – Associate Priest, Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Andrew, Wilmington DE]* “One of the letters that their Pastor back in Leyden sent, John Robinson, told them that they should arrange, before they got on shore, to have a body politic. *[Title: The idea for the Mayflower Compact came from the Pilgrim's Pastor before they sailed.]*

So that people could be prepared how they were going to govern themselves.

That was a totally new, idea, really, for the English, who were used to swearing allegiance to the king.

[[Gadzooks! Is there no way to know? Are we to be yanked about by conflicting opinions? Are we not to know the origin of Freedom? Was it truly an accident, a navigator's error, or was Freedom inspired, rather, by some sort of pioneering theology based somewhere in the Bible?

[[Why, we can know! The answer is found in this book which is the history of Plymouth Plantation, by governor William Bradford. He covers the period from 1608, 12 years before the Mayflower sailed, to 1650, 30 years after. We find that on July 27th, 1620, months before the Mayflower even sailed, Pastor John Robinson wrote to his flock what kind of Compact they ought to write. Notice three details he specifies, when I read it, which were in fact included in the compact, and yet which were unthinkable in any previous government or church, but for which he found precedent in the Bible: First, he writes that no one was to have any more status than any other; no servants or masters, no lesser status for non church members. A concept right out of Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Compare that with Rom 2:14-15. Here's a paraphrase: Those who have never heard God's commandments, yet live by them, prove God has written them in their hearts.

[[Second, Robinson writes that they were to all *elect* their leaders! The Separatists were already

in the habit of electing their own church leaders, following in the wake of Calvin whose Institutes made a strong case that all church leaders in the bible were elected. Of course, a congregation electing its own leaders was still unthinkable in the Church of England. Third, Pastor Robinson writes that the only governor they had any plans to recognize was the one they elected! Here are Robinson's words:

[[“Lastly, whereas ye are to become a body politic, administering among yourselves civil government, and are furnished with persons of no special eminence above the rest, from whom you will elect some to the office of government, let your wisdom and godliness appear, not only in choosing such persons as will entirely love and promote the common good, but also in yielding them all due honour and obedience in their lawful administrations; not beholding in them the ordinarieness of their persons, but God's ordinance for your good;.... And this duty you can the more willingly perform, because you are at present to have only those for your governors as you yourselves shall choose.” (p. 55-56)

[[Now let's turn a few pages further in this book, page 75, and find out what the basis is for the story that a navigator's error was the reason for the signing of the Compact: “First I will turn back a little, and begin with a compact or deed drawn up by them before they went ashore to settle, constituting the first foundation of their government. This was occasioned partly – PARTLY – by the discontented and mutinous speeches that some of the strangers among them had let fall: that when they got ashore they would use their liberty that none had power to command them, the patent procured being for Virginia, and not New England, which belonged to another company, with which the Virginia company had nothing to do. And, further, it was believed by some of the leading men among the settlers that such a deed, drawn up by themselves, considering their present condition, would be as effective as any patent, and in some respects more so.”

[[Here it gives the form of the deed. “In the name of God, amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of the dread sovereign, the Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, king, defender of the faith, etcetera, having undertaken for the Glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do, by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and of one another, covenant and bind ourselves into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and the furtherance of the ends aforesaid, and by virtue hereof, to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general use of the colony, under which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof, we have here underscribed our names at Cape Cod, 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord King James of England, France and Ireland, the 18th, and of Scotland the 54th, AD 1620.”

(Not mentioned in the movie: it was bold to promise that new laws would be “just and equal”. Especially “equal”, since people under English law were anything but equal under the law! Notice also the escape clause to their obedience to the King: they would render only what obedience is “due”, not just simplistically obey “all” the King commands! Christians should understand the similar caveat in Jesus' advice to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's”, since Caesar has, since humanity began, had a bad habit of demanding more than is his!)

[[After the Compact was signed, he goes on and says that “...In these arduous and difficult beginnings, discontent and murmuring arose amongst some, and mutinous speech and bearing in others; but they were soon quelled and overcome by the wisdom, patience, and just and equal administration of things by the Governor and the better part, who held faithfully together in the main.”

[[So yes, a navigator's error partly inspired the Mayflower Compact, but the Religious pilgrims – the “Saints”, as they called themselves – the “Separatists”, as others called them – had already prepared the essential details of the Compact before they even sailed. But if that is so, how can it be said that the Compact was even “partly” inspired by the navigator's error? Here is what common sense suggests to me: the Separatists certainly needed no accidents to persuade them to follow Pastor

Robinson's advice. But remember they were only 40% of the passengers. The other 60% may not have seen the wisdom of signing a Compact like that, which some may have perceived as vaguely treasonous, until after they heard mutinous speeches which threatened to drive them scattered across the bleak December wilderness.]]

DVD Chapter 10: Freedom's Roots

Leach: Was it greater freedom than was enjoyed in England?

Callison: Yes and no. Most of [Title: ...the later colonists...] them that came [to other colonies] were constrained by some zealots on the Christian side. There was a lot greater freedom in Pilgrim society than there was in the Puritan society. They came 10 years later.

And I go back to Dr. Kober's statement that to me is so outstanding, that North America was founded on search for God, while South America was founded on search for Gold. And that's why we have a lot less trouble up here, as far as South American countries have revolutions every time they turn around. And really the only thing we've had here since our American Revolution is the Civil War.

Miller: In my classrooms I have them compare the similarities and the differences between the Magna Carta [1215 AD], the Mayflower Compact, and the Constitution. And one of the things that the students and children come up with is that in all three of them, it does mention "under God", or they talk about God, that they're doing this with His permission, if you will.

Leach: Do you see any significance [connection] between the birth of freedom at that time, and the fact that not until a generation before, and even a couple of generations after there was no longer, a theology that free? Where church leaders were selected by the people,...

Bradford: Yes.

Leach: ...and where all the people had freedom of religious expression through the "Prophecy" services? [Title: (More about "Prophecy" services later.)]

Bradford. Yes. It was very radical. It was a very different way to have church. As well as the state.

DVD Chapter 11: Dissent: Freedom wasn't real; it wasn't legally recognized

Leach: So you don't think the Mayflower Compact was a huge milestone in...

Tripp: No.

Leach: ...our freedom.

Tripp: I can speak only for myself. I can't speak for the Museum.

Leach: Well I'm talking about for the first generation or two of Pilgrims. They had defacto freedom from the crown, not because of...

Tripp: No.

Leach: ...not because of law but because the king happened to be absent.

Tripp: No. That's just not true. Because our colony is brought under the jurisdiction of Mass. Bay Colony. Plimoth, as a separate entity, while it remains a town, ceases to exist as a separate government. You know, are they still electing a governor? Or are they calling him a mayor? Probably, but no different than we enjoy today. [Meaning, the city of Plymouth, Massachusetts, is not an independent nation but is subject to state laws enacted in Boston.] We have to follow Massachusetts Commonwealth law.

[[Leach insert: (Picture shakes, static noise. Then picture reduces in size as my thumb and middle finger grab it from its place and pull away from camera, as the voice gets high and squeaky, and hold it by me, while saying "so negative!" and then pushing it off to my right.)

[[Billington says the Pilgrims never experienced actual freedom because their freedom was

never legally recognized. I submit that there is *never a direct* correlation between actual freedom and legal recognition of it. Wherever there are laws on the books which are not enforced, we have actual freedom from them, without legal recognition of it. In fact, the King had even agreed to give the Pilgrims actual freedom of religion, without officially recognizing that he would. Here is the account, from Bradford's diary, page 25:

[[“Some of the principal officers of the Virginia company did not doubt that they could obtain the King's grant of liberty of religion, confirmed under his broad seal. But it proved a harder piece of work than they expected. And though many means were used to accomplish it, it proved impossible. They succeeded, however, in sounding His Majesty's mind, and found that he would connive at them, and not molest them, provided they behaved peaceably. But to allow or tolerate their claim to religious freedom by his public authority, under his seal, was found to be impossible.”

[[Billington also says the Pilgrims were never free because later they were swallowed up by the Puritan government. Just like the city of Plymouth, today, may have its local government, but it is subject to the state laws emanating from the state capital in Boston. All this may make a few years of freedom seem insignificant, certainly not worth filming a documentary about, except for one thing:...

DVD Chapter 12: Prophecy: where Freedom of Speech was forged

[[... the freedom forged in this short lived crucible is the freedom we enjoy today. The crucible itself was surely smashed, swallowed up, and stomped out within a century. But it wasn't the Puritan's theocracy which spread across our nation, and from our nation across the world. It wasn't the Church of England established in Jamestown which dictates our religious expression today. It was this unique theology of the Pilgrims, that Christians ought to allow liberty of conscience to all men, which found its reflection in our First Amendment.

[[This was no grudging tolerance of sinners so far beneath them. This was no sop thrown to the rabble to quiet them. This was intellectual curiosity so sincere and fresh that they gave all men not just a vote, but a voice; and they even created an institution to prove how sincerely they wanted to hear from everyone, and not just those they agreed with. It was called a “Prophecy Service”, and it was held every Sabbath afternoon, after the lunch break following the morning service.]]

Bradford: So they chose their own leader. They chose Governor Carver, who was older, who was governor for 2 years, but then he died. So William Bradford was chosen to be the governor by vote. And he stayed in that office for some 36 years. The elections were annual. They could have elected somebody else. They trusted him. He did the work well. They stayed with him for, as I say, quite a long time. And made it what it became: the beginning of a democracy. Which later hadn't sin for once in other places. [sic] Because other colonists came. They set up their colonies. The same way that the Pilgrims did. And had Town meetings and these were scattered all through New England. And those Town Meetings were how they governed. The people had a voice in things.

Ed: Like in New Hampshire today?

Bradford: Oh yeah. In New Hampshire. In every village green. You're going to see a meeting house. And it's still there. And many of them are still used for town meetings. That's how they made their decisions and everything else. Now this went on for 150 years.

CONNECTION: PROPHECYING, TO TOWN MEETING

Ed: Can you describe the format of a Town Meeting for someone who's never heard of such a thing?

Bradford: Well a town meeting is just a Democratic kind of meeting. Where everybody can get up and say whatever they think. And then people vote on whatever's been said. Whether to build that highway, or set up a school, or whatever.

Ed: See in Iowa we don't have anything like that. The nearest I know is New Hampshire. I heard there are such things. But is it anything like a platform discussion where they have...in Iowa we have the Polk county Republicans come together once every two years and have a lot of discussion, except we don't have any binding laws that we pass.

Bradford: Similar kind of thing. Trying to get a voice that's heard. Coming from the people. Rather than just the people who have been elected and can make all the decisions. So it's similar. I really think the spark of Democracy was ignited at Plimoth. And then eventually developed into a federal government. And that's what we have now.

Ed: Do you know what the Prophesying Services were like?

Bradford: The what services?

Ed: The Prophesying Services on Sabbath afternoons.

Bradford: Well, Sunday afternoon?

ed: Yes.

Bradford: Oh yes. That was a time when they had an open meeting. It wasn't 'church'. And anyone could talk.

Ed: How about the nonchurch members? [I meant, could nonchurch members talk. He answered, nonchurch members weren't required to attend.]

Bradford: Well, it was open. You didn't have to come. And you didn't have to be a member.

Ed: So the morning service was required but not the afternoon service?

Bradford: That's right. Not the afternoon.

Ed: Oh.

Bradford: And they could say whatever they wanted. Whatever they were thinking about anything.

Ed: Really?

Bradford: Yeah. And mostly it had to do with interpretation of Scripture and that kind of thing, and some application to everyday tasks, or everyday concerns, or whatever. And yeah, it was a way of, again, giving voice to the people. And Bradford took part in it as well. And it's just part of Sunday. Sunday was really a Holy day. And it was a different day. Than any other day of the week. It was all day long. Kind of a devotional thing. And they all took part in it. That was what was done.

Ed: Tell me about your church.

[Title: Dorothy Bradford "interpreter" at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Mass.]

Mrs Bradford: Well, what do you want to know? Master Brewster is our ruling elder. [We] have no minister.

Ed: What about the people who are not members in your colony?

Mrs Bradford: Folks who remain in the Church of England a number of years. Well what about them? They need to be better informed of things. Some of them are very sympathetic to our feelings of reform. I wish they saw reform. They see not fit to leave the church for whatever reason. We pray for them.

ALL CAN PROPHECY

Ed: Why do you not allow them to prophesy?

Mrs B: (To Kempton) Members of the church not allowed to prophesy at service.

Juliana Kempton: I don't think any of them really care to. Some of them are...

[Title: Juliana Kempton "interpreter" at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Mass.]

Mrs B Many of them can't read.

X: I don't know that they are ... someone tell you that they would not be allowed?

Ed: Master Billington complained that ...said with some air of complaint that no one asked him to prophesy.

X: Oh, well it's not a matter of not allowing. I don't think. Although, were he to speak to Master Brewster about it I don't know what the response would be.

Mrs B: I don't know that Billington can read. And oft times when men are prophesying they are reading from the Scripture. There's certainly more to it than that. They might be explaining it, or questioning it, or elaborating, but they oft times are reading from the Scripture, not just reciting, or....

PROPHESYING DESCRIBED

Ed: Would you explain the process? I came from a very strange church where no one is allowed to speak other than one man. And so the idea of other people prophesying is a strange idea. Can you explain how it works?

Mrs B: Well, chiefly in the afternoon, after we break for dinner, we all gather again, oft times in the first floor of our fortress where we gather as a church and hold our services. Well, I think you should probably speak to a man more on this! You know, being that we don't ... women don't speak in service! But certainly if you wish to discuss about Scripture, or a specific passage that has come to vex you, or mayhap come to new light in your mind in your heart, to bring that forth, there will be some discussion, questions asked. It's quite different than...it's not done in other churches.

Kempton: It's not done in the English church either. The minister is the only man to speak.

PROCEDURE

Ed: So if someone wants to bring forth such an idea, or share such an idea, they just stand, and is recognized?

X: un hm.

Mrs B: They just speak up, really. I'd like to speak now. And you'd recognized by pastor.

X: Some of them may speak to Master Brewster about it before the time. But I don't know if all of them do. I'm not certain of that.

Mrs B: But everyone can be heard. If you wish to be. And then on Thursdays there's a lesson. The chiefer men, well anyone really is invited but often times its the chiefer men who come have a lesson at Master Brewster's house. Oft times Scripture, mayhap elaborating on what has been preached upon at service, or mayhaps as a lesson before that sermon is preached upon at Sabbath.

THE FUTURE

Leach: Do you have any idea how long this practice will exist?

(I knew better than to ask this. The Interpreters' role is the Pilgrim they interpret, in 1627. To ask them about something in 1628 is "the future" to the Pilgrims in 1627, so the Interpreters will profess they don't know. But my question tumbled out before I could stop myself; I knew they knew, and I wanted so much to know.)

Mrs. Bradford: How can you know the future?

Kemp: We have no pastor any more. We'd like to have a minister here. So neither is there good ground for scripture in it. But if there were some divines [pastors] and argument in Scripture against it.

(Notice that the Kemp interpreter is trying to hint at an answer to my question, while remaining within her assigned role. So she suggests that the future of prophesying, beyond 1627, will rest on whether the practice is well grounded in Scripture. At the time I totally missed her heroic effort to help me, and chased the rabbit trail of how seriously the Pilgrims even wanted a minister. Although I appreciate her kind intent, the notion that Prophecyng Services died out because Scriptural arguments were successful against them is a logical theory not based in reality. I have not encountered a serious argument against them, though I have talked to hundreds of pastors about it, who, though having no Scriptural reason not to follow 1 Corinthians 14, nevertheless will not. When nations, churches, or individuals fall away from God, they do not require a sound theological reason to do so!)

Leach: Oh. You mean against having a preacher you mean?

Kemp: No, against prophesying. That was your question, was it not? About how long it might continue? It might be if there is good ground for it.

Leach: Even the idea of having a minister, is that a unanimous desire among colonists?

Kemp: I would think so. We can't see why anyone would

Mrs B: We can't enjoy any of the sacraments. Our children are not baptized.

Kemp: We haven't had the Lord's Supper since we've been here, and we used to have it every Sunday. And baptizing as often as there were children to baptize.

[Title: Francis Cooke "interpreter" at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Mass.]

Leach: How about the prophecying service? Do you participate there?

Cooke: I have. It's, a, I mean I'll, we should participate. I mean it's a different sort of service, wherein a man might speak, if his conscience moveth him to do so. It's not, a, and that part is not rightly required by law. So a man who has gone to the forenoon exercise hath done his duty by the law. Yet I find it quite inspiring. (Mumbling) But for your part, I don't mean to say you'll be required to stay for the whole day of it. Yet you would be welcome to it, I think.

(What a tease! How I would love to attend a real "prophecying service"! But Plimoth Plantation does not reenact those services, that I know of; certainly they didn't while I was there! For good reason, I suspect: unless the service is scripted, it would take spiritual maturity to carry such a discussion, which today's Interpreters may not have! They did reenact the morning service, with a traditional sermon, omitting the Pilgrim practice of allowing "gifted" members to then comment or expand on the sermon before the service was dismissed for lunch! But the Cooke Interpreter answered as Cooke himself very well might have.)

DVD Chapter 13: Free to Disagree, Correct, be Frank

Linderman: Are there Christian churches today that do the Prophecying in the manner of the Pilgrims? Now it was a typical Sunday for people in the Pilgrim community was to gather at 8:00 for worship, which we did last week, and then after a lengthy sermon, of probably two hours, maybe more, spent together in the morning, then they break for lunch, you know; everybody would bring a basket lunch. And then in the afternoon they would prophesy. Now the first thing is, was only the men were prophecying. Because they went by that Biblical injunction that women should be quiet in churches and speak only to their husbands.

[Title: Linderman alludes to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. More later, about what this passage really says.]

Leach: Let me ask you in the case where there was a woman who was the head of household, was the woman then allowed to...

Linderman: I mean, we can't move this ahead too quickly! And as far as I know, speaking in church was [only for] the adult male. And how old you had to be an adult male, I don't know. But I'm sure at least 18 years or more. So they would spend all afternoon.

Any of us who have been in any kind of close group, or "encounter group", which were popular a number of years ago, or a "support group", that we have many of today, would inherit this dynamic of being very truthful with one another.

And being corrected! Meaning if you said something that wasn't quite right, people would disagree with you publicly, and it would get hashed out within the congregation.

Now this is still going on in our Christian churches today, but not in quite the same formal sense. I made a little joke on Sunday morning saying that, well, we were going to get together for an afternoon meeting, that our opening ceremonies would start at 2:00, and that perhaps we would be prophecying to one another. But not at all in the way it would have been done in Plimoth.

In Plimoth it would have been a very severe examination of conscience. And shared in front of – you know that would take a lot of courage, to stand up in front of your closest friends and neighbors, and confess what you'd done wrong. *Or tell somebody else what they'd done wrong.* But that kind of truth-telling and search for wisdom was really the focus of this prophecying.

And in ways we still do that in our churches. Now you know the Quaker service will be silent except when someone feels the Spirit is pushing them to get up and talk. And they will. It's also true

that the Spirit will encourage someone else in the room to get up and tell the first guy that he's talked too long. Or that he's off base, or whatever.

(Not in the movie: the Quaker church in Des Moines is very liberal, and will not put their name with any effort that allows criticism of sodomy. Their services do indeed consist of waiting for people to stand up and speak, but I wonder how much freedom they have to appeal to the highest principles they know – if that is the Bible, before the “Spirit” in another will stand up and resist?)

So that tradition of truth-telling and truth-sharing is a part of our Pilgrim heritage. But I think it's found in a number of churches. I think Charismatic churches in our day and age have been doing that kind of Prophecying.

(Not in the movie: I have spent time in a number of Charismatic churches and the closest I have seen to anything like that is when someone can interrupt the part of the service before the sermon by standing up and “speaking in tongues” (which outsiders would perceive as babbling), followed by another who stands up and “interprets”, which is a statement of encouragement and sometimes warning, attributed to God. There is no freedom whatsoever to say a single word, in such an outburst, which comes from only your own understanding, which you are not sure is miraculously inspired by God. There is no freedom to reason together, or to correct anybody.)

But I would interpret Prophecying in the sense of telling the truth as you understand it. And making what you believe known to your fellow members. And that was not an easy thing to do.

But in the early days of the Plimoth church, that privilege was for the men. If a woman had an opinion, she had to get her husband to say so in the prophecying. So I'm glad we're not quite that strict any more!

Leach: So you say women *could* speak, with their husbands' consent?

Linderman: In other words, if I had a strong opinion of something, I would tell my husband over breakfast, that he ought to make the point, you see. And if he agreed with me, he would. But I would not have been allowed to speak publicly, in the church or anyplace else. And women who did speak quite publicly, not necessarily in a church service, but those are the ones that were often accused of being witches. Because women weren't supposed to behave in that way. So I think I would have been very short-lived.

(Actually, while Salem, the Puritan town, executed 19 women for witchcraft during one dark summer of 1692, while 40,000 were executed in England, Plimoth convicted not one! Only two women were accused, and they were accused by another woman. Dinah Sylvester. For Dinah's nonsense, she was whipped and fined 5 pounds, and that was the end of witchcraft trials among the Pilgrims! p. 320, Saints and Strangers. Page 472 says the nonsense started with a Papal Bull in 1484. James I added to the nonsense with his “Daemonologie” in 1599 – the year of my Geneva Bible edition. The first New England execution was in 1648 in Boston. Two were hanged in Connecticut in 1650. The Pilgrims were hardly free of superstitions, but apparently their equal respect for all, in their laws, saved them.)

But there is this thread that comes all the way down through many churches. There seems to be always a recognized need to be able to share openly with the people in your faith community. But we do it in different ways.

Leach: Like for example, if you've been studying a passage and you're really inspired by it, and you're bursting to share, I don't know of a church in Des Moines where you can do that. The pastor's got his sermon notes all prepared. The Sunday School's got their class literature that's been figured out for the last 12 weeks. But it sounds like in a Prophecying Service that would be the natural –

Linderman: It would be natural, but you can imagine if you did that in your congregation today and you don't think it would be welcome, then you know it takes a lot of courage to speak up! But they gave permission! At least to the men. To speak truthfully. And to correct each other. So **it was really an “Encounter Group” of a very intense nature.**

But almost that's what they needed to be able to do in order to survive in a totally new environment that was not particularly friendly.

And when you read of the terrible loss of life in their first year which would have destroyed a lot of groups, but didn't finally destroy them, **part of their strength came from being able to be witnesses to the truth, and being willing to be corrected if somebody else didn't agree with them.**

[[Leach insert: Indeed, Pastor Robinson expected respectful disputes as part of the process of Prophecyng. "[In our prophecyng service we are] briefly to speak a word of exhortation as God enableth, and...questions also about things delivered [preached], and with them, **EVEN DISPUTATIONS**, ...as there is occasion, being part, or appurtenances of that exercise. *Acts xvii 2 and xviii 4. (Book 3, Chapter 8, "On the Exercise of Prophecy", Argument Tenth.)*

(Not in movie: Johnson's Dictionary, the first English dictionary, defines "appurtenances" as "that which appertains to something else." Something that "appertains", "depends on" something else. In other words, Prophecyng depends, for its very existence, upon the existence of freedom to dispute.)

[[Here he lists the benefits of such discussion. We could more easily ignore his list, if he didn't follow it with Scriptures showing that very same kind of animated discourse was the habit of Jesus, Paul, and Apollos.

[[**"We all prophesy to each other so] that things doubtful arising in teaching may be cleared, things obscure opened, things erroneous convinced [refuted]; and lastly, that as by the beating together of two stones fire appeareth, so may the light of the truth more clearly shine by disputations, questions, and answers modestly had and made, and as becomes the church of saints, and work of God.**† Luke ii. 40; iv. 31, 32; Acts xvii. 2; xviii. 24, 26, 28."]

(Not in movie: here are the passages Robinson cites:

*(Luke 2:46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them **questions**: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished [astonished] at his understanding and answers.*

(Luke 4:31 And came down into Capernaum a city of Galilee, and there taught them on the Sabbath days. 32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with authority.

*(Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days **disputed with them by the scriptures,***

*(Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, came to Ephesus, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures....26 And he began to **speak boldly** in the Synagogue. Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly....28 For **mightily he confuted publicly the Jews, with great vehemency, showing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was that Christ.**)*

Leach: And it's true that democracy makes nations strong. For example, our nation, here, seems to be stronger, militarily, than the whole rest of the world. And yet that doesn't create any necessity that people must be free. And in fact, over the centuries, people and civilizations would rather just die out than think of such a thing as letting low people have the rights of high people! But they *chose* to be free.

Linderman: Well, and I would say about the Pilgrim community, the Leyden congregation, they were self-chosen. Now that's the other thing. I don't think you just walked in and joined their church. I think you had to be examined pretty closely before they would admit you. They had to do that, because they were being spied on all the time. And they knew that if they let someone in who was a spy, they would all end up in jail before the next week was out. So they had to be very selective. And I think this prophecyng was another mechanism for keeping everybody on their toes and accurate in their pronunciations.

[Title: Interesting point. 1 Cor 14:24-25 explains that "if all prophesy," and a stranger comes, "the secrets of his heart will be made manifest", and he will see that God is in you – but a side effect is that this would expose spies. However, this motive is not listed in Robinson's Bible study on Prophecyng.]

DVD Chapter 14: Dissent: they only did what they had to

Tripp's Case for Minimizing Anything the Pilgrims did

Leach: Well, I would sure like to know what the theological discussions were about prophesying back then. I know Corinthians 14 is where we *[Title: Buddy Tripp "interprets" John Billington at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Mass.]* where I find the term being used as part of a church service. And there it says let 2 or 3 prophets – let prophets go 2 and 3 and let the other judge, as if to describe a modern panel discussion. But even with these restrictions, even if they would not hear a heretick, who is a heretick in their opinion, still it seems to me that there was this window, of religious freedom, freedom of religious expression, which did not exist very much before the Pilgrims, and which did not exist for, was not the majority opinion, very much after the landing, and that during this brief window of time was founded our first successful and stable government in this new world. And which just happens to be, have, be founded on the same kind of people having, people selecting their leaders, and having freedom of political expression.

Tripp: Is there a question there?

Leach: Yeah. What do you think?

Tripp: Ah, ah, I think it's difficult to assign too much importance on a brief period of time. *[Title: A Case for Minimizing Pilgrim Freedom]* I think things are important to us about this period of time because they have been. I don't know that there is that much importance assigned to it at the time. *[Title: The Pilgrims didn't think their sacrifices, risks, or plans were for anything significant?]* I think it's easy for us to look back in hindsight and say this is what all this stuff meant.

Leach: I would agree with you that I would not expect the people at the time to have expected that convergence to have endured for 400 years.

Tripp: Yeah. I don't know that it has. I mean I think, we tend to put a sense of importance on things. I'm always hesitant to do that as a historian 'cause much of what we try to do here is show people that what they believe about this time period and about these people, and the events of their time – we've come to give it a sense of importance that I don't particularly think exists. *[Title: Historians have a duty to resist our natural impulse to...see importance in historical events?]*

Leach: The logical connection that jumps out to me is that had the Pilgrims accepted these "Popish Rags" (*Separatist Pastor John Robinson's name for the vestments, or priestly robes, worn by Church of England priests*), as they were called, the hierarchy of the Church [of England], that was beyond the approval of the members, and had they still been inclined to burn hereticks at the stake, I don't see how they possibly could have – I don't see how civil freedom could possibly have occurred to them.

Tripp: You mean in a Revolutionary War sense? Apart from the Crown?

Leach: Yeah. But because of the fact that they had accustomed themselves to this freedom in their theology, it seemed natural for it to occur to them to say "oh, let's set up our civil government that way too."

Tripp: I don't think so because I don't think the idea that – I think particularly once they came and once other people started coming, they are a very small little group in Holland. And they have to, out of necessity, and desire, remain tightly knit. They are strangers in a strange land. And we know ourselves. We only trust ourselves. *[Title: Their faith didn't drive their freedom, whose cost made their numbers small, but their small numbers drove their freedom?]* And then they come here. And they are suddenly thrust amongst a much divergent sort of attitude, you know. They know the attitude. It's Church of England people. And it's Puritan people. So it's not that they're unfamiliar with it. *[Title: B – but the Separatists advertized to bring non-Separatists with them!]* But then as more and more people come, I mean, the bottom line is what happens is, we stop having peace with the natives. *[Title: Pilgrims had peace with the natives for 55 years. They warred one year – with Native allies – and*

enjoyed their final 16 years in peace.] Because there's many, many, many more of us coming. And we do take their land. And then their, I mean our community here ceases to be. They spread out. Immediately. Immediately. Myles Standish goes to Ducksberry. *[Title: Myles Standish was not a Separatist.]* And lives over there. Peter Browne goes to found Eastham on Cape Cod. *[Title: Peter Browne was not a Separatist.]* They disperse. There is a diaspora of these people. And Bradford sees this happening. And I think that's when he decides, "I'm done with being governor." 'Cause he's governor for a long time. Winslow becomes governor. And he's governor again. As, after, the reason we portray 1627 is that's the lynch pin. After that, things change dramatically. Mr. Fuller goes up to Mass. Bay and I think up to what's now Salem and get's some contagious disease and brings it back and kills a third of the population. In 1630. My character (*John Billington*) is hung for murder.

Leach: Oh?

Tripp: Yeah! (Laughing) John Billington shoots a man. For trespassing on his property. And is hung for it. The first Englishman hung in the New World.

Leach: When did that happen?

Tripp: 1630.

Leach: Wow.

Tripp: 3 years after... "yesterday". (*At Plimoth Plantation, "interpreters" play the role of a day in 1627, and play that day over and over again, all season long, for decades. Tripp says "yesterday" because it was the day before that I filmed him, in character, as he "interpreted" at Plimoth Plantation.*)

Leach: Wow.

Tripp: Yeah. (Both laugh) So all these things are awkward to portray, you know. Because people always want to tell you your future. "

(66 minutes to this point. The remaining 36 minutes is presented by Dave Leach, Regina Dinwiddie, and Kitty Coon, with brief musical interludes)

DVD Chapter 15: Pilgrim Freedom: Are We As Free?

Let's review what we've learned so far, as we view film of the Mayflower II.

The Separatists gave every man a vote and a voice, and every woman head of household a vote, in a world in which electorates were a fraction of the population,

The Separatists created the first model in over a thousand years of self government in which government did not impose itself on anyone who had no say in it.

The Separatists' Pastor published over a thousand pages defending Pilgrim practices from the Bible – pages we may read today.

The Separatists gave even their theological opponents a vote and a voice: a voice even to criticize and correct both church and state, without punishment.

The Separatists even *encouraged* robust Freedom of Speech by instituting Sunday afternoon "Prophecying" services, from which are descended Town Meetings which persist today in that corner of the United States.

The Separatists did not, like some Christian denominations today, marginalize and dehumanize unbelievers in their doctrines, carefully pre-screening every idea allowed on the podium for anything slightly nonconformist or "controversial".

The Separatists not only declined to torture outsiders, they treated them as respectfully as insiders.

The Separatists were not forced to give outsiders a break because outsiders were the majority. That had never before forced any government to refrain from imposing its rule over the voiceless.

The Separatists were not tricked into being outnumbered. They *planned* to take with them more than their own number.

The Separatists shared Freedom as freely as we do today: without requiring that anyone agree with, or even know about, Freedom's philosophical or theological foundations.

The Separatists tolerated dissent, sensibly. Not like today's theological conservatives who care so much about error that they censor it. Not like today's theological liberals who care so little about error that they give it full voice and only censor criticism of it. They created a forum that welcomed all voices to speak openly, where error could be corrected through respectful discussion.

It is time for an important question: is all this history entertaining, at most? Is it but a curiosity from the past?

Or was there, in that Pilgrim model, any freedom we have lost, worth regaining today? Could it be that the theology which *created* our freedom still has the power to *restore and preserve* our freedom?

Music break

The Separatists mixed politics and religion, thoroughly, a thing which we today profess never should be done.

The Separatists invited all to express the highest principles they knew, in those forums in which they decided whether to criminalize good, or evil.

The Separatists understood that public discussion of what is good enough to be *protected* by law, and evil enough to be *punished* by law, needs freedom to appeal to the highest principles which citizens know.

Would America today benefit from such freedom?

Music Break

DVD Chapter 16: Censorship Today

In our public forums, we champion political positions without tolerating evidence from the scriptures of any religion. We will hear only lesser reasons for positions than the ones which actually persuade voters.

Meanwhile, in our churches, we commonly censor all information that appears "political". We hear occasional sermons about evils in which government has gotten involved, but most churches will censor anyone who tries to organize fellow church members to do something about them.

Does the Freedom modeled by the Separatists offer us anything?

Does it matter *where* Pastor Robinson, William Brewster, and the other Separatists found Freedom? *They* thought they found it in the Bible. But did they? Does it matter?

What if Robinson and Brewster were inspired to create Democracy from the Greeks? After all, if you look up "democracy" in an encyclopedia you will read that the first democracy was in Greece in about 500 AD.

But if you will read some of the details of Grecian so-called Democracy, you won't be jealous. Only about 12% of the population was qualified to vote. The rest were slaves! And only 2% *showed up* to vote! And the only thing they voted for was their military general. For all the rest of the public offices, they cast lots! Their so called Democracy by Lottery was so pathetic that the people retained the right to banish leaders who really bombed, and often Tyrants would arise to take over government, with popular support!

I hope we can rule out the Pilgrim's model Freedom as just a carbon copy of Greek government!

Pastor Robinson and Elder Brewster didn't think they were creating anything new. They thought they were just reading how to do it in the Bible. But were they? Is the Bible really the blueprint for Freedom they took it for? Or was Freedom just an accident of individual interpretation of a book from which anyone can prove anything?

Surely, we hear today, it matters not whether you read the Bible or the Koran, because neither of them have a clear enough message to shape anyone's heart! They are but contradictory blank pages upon which every reader will create his own Gospel!

Or is it possible that the Bible really does have a few clear messages, and one of them is Freedom – not just in Heaven, but on Earth?

Music Break

DVD Chapter 17: Why it matters *where* Pilgrims found Freedom

Dave: Were I to end this film right now, it would have more respect in many circles. As long as all we say is that a bunch of Pilgrims 400 years ago stumbled upon Freedom by imagining its outlines in an ambiguous book, the way children imagine angels dancing across the sky when they watch clouds, viewers can smile and say "isn't that quaint?" But if I go on to document that what the Pilgrims *thought* they saw in the Bible really *is* in the Bible, then American aversion to appealing to the highest principles we know kicks in. *Christians* want to see what denomination put out the film, so they can know if they agree with it, and *unbelievers* already *know* they don't agree with it, if it's in the Bible.

Regina: Unfortunately, there are three important reasons it matters whether the freedoms the Separatists saw in the Bible were really there.

Kitty: First, if the Bible really is the source of our freedoms, *knowing* it is will encourage us to consult it as a guide to greater freedom and how to keep it.

Second, if Americans can be persuaded that there exist, in at least some religions, information of value in shaping our nation, we may be moved to once again allow the highest principles we know, in those forums in which Americans decide whether to criminalize good or evil.

Third, should Bible believers discover that any part of the Pilgrim model was no mere human invention but was commanded by God, they may conclude it is still commanded by God, and may be motivated to obey God.

Regina: For this reason it seems relevant to briefly review the Scriptural evidence that the very freedoms which Separatist Pastor John Robinson resurrected are unequivocally embedded in the Pages of God.

Let's read about the world's first government in which every man had a voice and a vote. It wasn't Greece in 500 AD, where the lottery was the voice and only 1/8 of the men, not being slaves, could vote.

Dave: It was 700 years before that.

It was in the Arabian desert between Egypt and Palestine.

Inspired by his father in law, Moses coordinated elections across Israel of 78,600 judges. Israel's government is simplistically called a "theocracy", but even God would not enact laws for Israel until after the people had elected Him. [Title: *Exodus 19:8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.... Also Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 7, Deut 5:27-28, Jos 24:22.*]

This vote was no rubber stamp but a real vote, because God had expressed genuine reluctance to assume jurisdiction over the people until they voted.

The election of human judges is stated in Deuteronomy 1:13. *[Title: Deuteronomy 1:13 Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.]* It was the people who took candidates from among themselves, and Moses confirmed them, the way a Supreme Court judge today confirms a President after the people elect him. The candidates were “known” by the people, a word meaning an intimate working relationship.

Josephus supports this interpretation.

[Title: Antiquities of the Jews, Book 3, Chapter 4, Section 1. “[the leaders were] such as the whole multitude have tried, and do approve of, as being good and righteous men”.] (Read italics, while title displays it)

These judges were called captains of hundreds and thousands. Even while kings reigned, 400 years later, much of the government was by elected captains of hundreds and thousands.

In fact, the system of hundreds and thousands continued long after Israel was scattered. A dictionary used by lawyers defines the same kind of “hundreds” as the form of Saxon government in England.

[Title: “...each county...comprised...hundreds, each hundred containing ten...groups of ten families...had its own court...its most remarkable feature was the corporate responsibility of the whole for the crimes or defaults of the individual members.” Black’s Law Dictionary, 4th edition]

Regina: Remnants of the system continued for centuries after the Saxons were defeated. So English masses had experienced a voice in their government long before 1215 AD when the Magna Carta was signed, thanks to the Freedoms pioneered by Moses in 1200 BC.

Kitty: Just as the *Old Testament* featured leaders elected by all the people, the New Testament featured *church* leaders elected by all in their congregations. A footnote to Josephus’ account of the origin of the “hundreds” was added by the translator of Josephus’ works in 1828. *[Title, read: Footnote: This manner of electing the judges and officers of the Israelites by the testimonies [campaign endorsements] and suffrages [votes] of the people, before they were ordained by God, or by Moses, deserves to be carefully noted, because it was the pattern of the like manner of the choice and ordination of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, in the Christian church.]*

Regina: Further evidence is found in Acts 14:23, and the *note* on that verse in the Geneva Bible – which is the Bible the Pilgrims used.

[Title: Acts 14:23 “...they had ordained them elders in every church...” Geneva note: The apostles...chose and placed [pastors] by the voice of the congregation.] When the Bible says elders were ordained, Geneva translators explain that the apostles confirmed the choice made by each congregation.

Moses from 1200 BC, the Christian Churches from 30 AD, the Pilgrims in 1620 AD: it **appears** that a Republic was God’s pattern from the beginning. It **appears** that the only time in world history that all the people had a voice in their government was when men modeled their laws after God’s. Coincidence?

Music Break

DVD Chapter 18. Biblical Freedom Never Excluded Women

◁ Pilgrims gave more than historians say - the Bible gives more than theologians say

Dave: It is widely assumed that women had no voice in God’s public policy. But how can that be, when one of the 12 legitimate judges, during Israel’s period of judges, was a woman? How can anyone assume she was some kind of exception? Isn’t it more reasonable to assume about 8% of the

lower 80,000 judges were women too? [Title: Israel's 12 rightful judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah & Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair Jephtha, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Bedan, Samson. Usurper: Abimelech.]

If God's system did not bar women from *top* leadership, how could it possibly bar women from a voice in electing leaders? Of course women had a voice in God's model government!

In fact, reason suggests that since it is easier for men to give women *lower* leadership positions than the *highest* leadership positions, the number of women in lower leadership positions may have been *greater* than 8%. After all, women today fill 8 of 50 governorships, 24% of statewide offices, 17% of the U.S. Senate, and 17% of Congress. But we have never had a female president. 8% of Israel's top leaders were women, but 0% of U.S. top leaders. Maybe we don't respect women more than God does, after all. [Title: Women in U.S. office: 16% of governors, 24% of statewide offices, 17% of U.S. Senators, and 17% of Congressmen, 0% of U.S. Presidents.]

Regina: Separatist Pastor John Robinson knew about *Deborah*. He wrote about the number of female prophets throughout the Bible. He wrote about the woman who trained the preacher. He knew there were enough female prophets speaking in New Testament churches to create a dress code for them in 1 Corinthians 12:5.

But he really struggled to fit these puzzle pieces together with a couple of verses in 1 Corinthians 14 that appear to tell women to [Title: 1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but [they are commanded] to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.] be quiet in church and if they are curious about anything, to ask their husbands at home.

Kitty: To this day, conservative Bible commentators are all over the map in how to fit all these pieces together. There are almost as many opinions on exactly what these verses tell women not to do, as there are commentators. In fact, confusion over these verses, perhaps as much as any other passages in the Bible, has caused large numbers of Christians to back away from trusting the Bible as more enlightened than any human culture, and absolutely relevant to public policy conversations today. Separatist Pastor John Robinson did his best to fit God's puzzle pieces about female prophets, with the piece telling women to keep quiet, but his solution seems a bit desperate. [Start following title] He decided the verse telling women to keep quiet referred only to women speaking without an "extraordinary", "miraculous" inspiration from God. But an inspired woman should "speak without restraint." In other words, Robinson's theology made room for inspired women to do what we today would call "preaching".

[Title: *Paul...in restraining women, ...shows his meaning to be of ordinary not extraordinary prophesying, for women immediately, and extraordinarily, and miraculously inspired, might speak without restraint. Exod. xv. 20; Judges iv. 4; Luke ii. 36; Acts xxi. 9. (On Prophesying or Preaching, The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, with a Memoir and Annotations by Robert Ashton, 3 vols (London: John Snow, 1851). Vol. 2. About page 151.)*]

Dave: Why then were the Pilgrim experts I interviewed unanimous in saying women never spoke during their prophesying services?

Because Robinson's theology about women speaking, as close as he came to a sensible solution, was simply unworkable in practice. He stumbled over the fact that 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of the "Gift" of prophecy which is given to only a *few*, but chapter 14 appeals to *everyone* to "prophecy". In trying to imagine an objective line between "ordinary" prophecy that anyone might utter, and the "Gift" given to but a *few*, Robinson guessed that the "Gift" of prophecy must be some divinely inspired, miraculous utterance; in other words, infallible.

Regina: Saints and Strangers reports the humorous, though unfortunate, result:

Dave: [Title (read): *"Nor did the church fill the office of Prophet, doubtless because of the antics at Amsterdam of "Prophets" Thomas Cocky and Jacob Johnson, ...who did not always provide*

the enlightenment so confidently expected of them. They spent most of their time in acrimonious debate, formally charging each other with telling lies, which left the brethren bewildered and quite at a loss to know whose was the true revelation.” (p. 85)

Dave: In other words, Robinson thought the scrutiny needed to *recognize* a Prophet was no longer needed after that Prophet was recognized, since he spoke infallibly! This unfortunate detail of Robinson’s theology led, in practice, to preventing *anyone*, either man *or* woman, from being recognized as an official Prophet. For men, this was not a great inconvenience. But for women, being recognized as an inspired Prophetess was the only hope of sharing the Gospel during fellowship.

I think the error of Robinson and several others is to assume that *any* Holy Spirit Gift makes *any* man infallible in *any* area. God’s greatest human heroes are seen being corrected by sometimes the least of humans. As a musician, I know there are no infallible musicians. Some are recognized as “*gifted*” to a degree *few* are, but *all* are encouraged to *sing along*. “Gifts” don’t have to be *magical*. If you are unusually *good* at something, If you are “Endowed by nature with any power or faculty; furnished with any particular talent”, you are “gifted” [Gifted: “Endowed by nature with any power or faculty; furnished with any particular talent.” Webster, 1828.]

Regina: Actually women were never *literally* silent in church. Just as in conservative churches today who never tape women’s mouths shut as they enter the door, but let them sing, read announcements, read Scripture, teach Sunday School, etc., seeing no contradiction between that and their belief that women should be silent in church, Robinson listed several exceptions to the command that women be silent. He reasoned that the commandment was not to refrain “simply from speaking”, but from “taking authority over the man.” Here is Robinson’s reasoning, and his list of exceptions:

[Title: And for women, they are debarred [“excluded”] by their sex, as from ordinary prophesying, so from any other dealing wherein they take authority over the man, 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35; 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12, yet not simply from speaking: they make profession of faith, or confession of sin, say amen to the church's prayers, sing psalms vocally, accuse a brother of sin, witness an accusation, // or defend themselves being accused, yea, in a case extraordinary, namely where no man will, I see not but // a woman may reprove the church, rather than suffer it to go on in apparent wickedness, and communicate with it therein. (Supposed Mischiefs of Authority being solely in the Church. The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, with a Memoir and Annotations by Robert Ashton, 3 vols (London: John Snow, 1851). Vol. 2. About page 133.)]

[Title: 1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but [they are commanded] to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.] Commentators aren’t agreed what “law” is alluded to here. Most think it is [Title: Genesis 3:16. ... thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.] Genesis 3:16. But this says nothing about women being silent. What if her husband DESIRES his wife to speak in church? Only two commentors I found suggest Numbers 30.

[Title: Num 30:7 And [if] her husband heard [his wife’s vow] and held his peace [when] he heard it: then her vows shall stand, ... 8 But if her husband disallowed her [when] he heard it; then he shall make her vow...of none effect... 9 But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced...shall stand....]

Now if this is the “law” whose principle Paul means to apply to women talking in church, all Paul means is that a wife can speak freely as long as her husband doesn’t mind. But if her husband disagrees, they should not argue in public. It makes everyone feel ashamed or embarrassed, when husbands and wives argue in public. *[Title: 1 Corinthians 14:35 ...for it is a shame [embarrassing] for women [or “wives” in Greek] to speak [autonomously] in the church.]* They should work out their differences at home so they can speak with “one voice”.

[Title: Num 30:7 And [if] her husband heard [his wife’s vow] and held his peace [when] he heard it: then her vows shall stand, ... 8 But if her husband disallowed her [when] he heard it; then he

shall make her vow...of none effect... 9 But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced...shall stand....] Notice this doesn't even apply to single women. The Bible gives no church or government leader any more authority over any woman not his wife or daughter, than over men.

But this theory leaves me to explain that opening phrase:

[Title: 1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; ...]

The Greek word does not mean literal silence, but the respect that inspires one to speak little and carefully. *[Title: Ecclesiastes 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: ... therefore let thy words be few.]* Ecclesiastes gives this advice to men as well as women.

The second phrase *[Title: 1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted [entrusted] unto them to [rule on when] speak; but [they are commanded] to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.]* means, in Greek, “it is not entrusted to them to decide when to speak”. As the rest of the sentence explains, God entrusts this decision to husbands. It is my assumption that the only time husbands would *want* to silence their wives is if they begin contradicting one another, embarrassing others. And that therefore, all Paul is saying here is that the Prophecy Service should not turn into a forum for husbands and wives to argue with one another.

My heart is broken for the centuries of confusion over these passages, which undermines faith in the Bible as a consistently reliable guide to the best possible public policy for any nation.

Pastor John Robinson, Elder Brewster, and the Separatists who honored them, gave us much. They deciphered God's road map to Freedom, in a world where it was unthinkable to allow freedom to more than a few. They left us *very good directions*, which generations from then to now have mostly followed. But not *infallible* directions. Where their directions seem questionable, it makes sense to look at the map *they* looked at.

Music Break

DVD Chapter 19: Where the Separatists got “prophecying”

NonChristians certainly don't need Scripture to persuade them to help recreate the robust verbal dialog that shaped America. Hopefully you will join us simply because it is a good idea which once worked and will work again. A system which offers you freedom and opportunity, without any requirement that you agree with – or even know about – the theology that preserves it.

But before *Christians* will get on board, they need to know not only that the Pilgrims did it, but that God *says* to do it. Fortunately the “Prophecying” services were so embedded in Separatist theology, that not only did Pastor Robinson publish scores of pages about it, but he summarized it in their catechism.

[Title: Q. 29. Who are to open and apply the Scriptures in the church? A. 1. [Besides leaders, laymen] in the exercise of prophecy.]

[Question 30: “How is that exercise proved in the Scriptures?”

[Title: A. 1, By the examples in the Jewish Church, where men, though in no office, [not ordained], either in temple or synagogue, had liberty publicly to use their gifts. Luke ii. 42, 46, 47; iv. 16—18; Acts viii. 4, xi. 19—21, xiii. 14—16, xviii. 24—26.]

[Title: 2. By the commandments of Christ and his apostles. Luke ix. 1, x. 1; Rom. xii. 6—8; 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11; 1 Cor. xiv. 1.]

[Title: 3. By the prohibiting of women, not extraordinarily inspired, to teach in the church: herein liberty being given unto men (their husbands or others). 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12; 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.]

[Title: 4. By the excellent ends which, by this means, are to be obtained: as 1. The glory of God in the manifestation of his manifold graces, 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. 2.

[Title: That the gifts of the Spirit in men be not quenched, 1 Thess. v. 19. 3. For the fitting and trial of men for the ministry, 1 Tim. iii. 2, 4.] I must add that debating your ideological opponent in a fair forum does more to prepare you to defend your positions than years of academic study. It's like the difference between reading a book about how to fly an airplane, and flying an airplane.

[Title: For the preserving pure of the doctrine of the church, which is more endangered if some one or two alone may only be heard and speak, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.] I must add that any pastor can slide farther, the less he allows anyone to publicly correct him. Not only that, but where discussion is limited, a layman can sit in church for years without the pastor knowing what errors stifle his heart.

[Title: 5. For debating and satisfying of doubts, if any do arise. 6. For the edifying of the church, and conversion of others, Acts ii. 42; Luke iv. 22, 23.]

Here is where "prophecy" is defined. Robinson takes his definition right out of 1 Corinthians 14:3.

[Title: Q. 31. Who is a prophet in this sense? A. He that hath a gift of the Spirit to speak unto edification, exhortation, and comfort. 1 Cor. xiv. 4, 24, 25.]

[Title: Q. 32. What is the order of this exercise? A. That it be performed after the public ministry by the teachers, and under their direction and moderation, whose duty it is, ...]

[Title: ...if anything be obscure, to open it; if doubtful, to clear it; if unsound, to refuse it; if unprofitable to supply what is wanting as they are able. 1 Cor. xiv. 3, 37; Acts xiii. 15.]

Music Break

DVD Chapter 20: Come, let us reason together! Like the Pilgrims did

As Rev. Jeanne Linderman said, the prophesying services had many benefits on many levels. But I want to close with the benefit to America.

Voters have the power to change politics. But not if all they do is vote. Voters need to vote intelligently. But all is lost if they educate only themselves, and not each other. Voters have much to learn from each other about issues, but if all voters understand is issues and not which candidates support which issues, what is gained? And what is gained if voters wait until the only two choices are equally bad? Voters need to go out early and find those really good candidates who have no chance while voters remain disengaged, and help them. Early, when a little help makes a big difference.

All these things happened naturally when neighbors met regularly across denominational lines, in meetings called "prophesying services" or "town meetings", to discuss issues of community concern, where they were free to appeal to the highest principles they knew.

Their understanding of issues was razor sharp. They understood issues far better than voters today whose information comes from 30 second TV commercials. Or from news reporters laboring under 500 word limits and bias too thick to give more than lip service to opposing views. The forums attracted the most informed newsmakers in the community who were glad to educate each other.

Their understanding of candidates was intimate. They had conversations every week with the brightest bulbs in the community. They knew who thought clearly, and who cared about more than their own self esteem. And they knew early, when it mattered.

America is not yet boxed in as tightly as Israel was, when the Egyptian army was on one side, anxious to slaughter them all, and the Red Sea was on the other side, ready to drown them all. But God protected them on both sides. God held back the Egyptians on one side, and the Red Sea on the other side, long enough for Israel to pass through the Red Sea without drowning, so that the Red Sea drowned only the Egyptians.

God offers America a way today, also. To the extent American neighbors begin reasoning with one another again, the political calamities and scandals of today will soon be the memories of yesterday. But to the extent not even Christians will follow this path out from between the frying pan and the fire which God offers, well, maybe they will still go to Heaven, but America could still go down.

I hope that's not what Christians want. I hope that's not what Americans want. That's not what God wants.

Close: credits, video of Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts